

Leadership development through appreciative inquiry : complexity thinking in the
non-government (NGO) sector

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ABSTRACT

“much of what we know about leadership is today redundant because it is literally designed for a different operating model, a different context, a different time”

(Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, p. 4).

This thesis describes a project that was designed with a focus on exploring ways to enhance leadership capacity in non-government organisations operating in Christchurch, New Zealand. It included 20 CEOs, directors and managers from organisations that cover a range of settings, including education, recreation, and residential and community therapeutic support; all working with adolescents.

The project involved the creation of a peer-supported professional learning community that operated for 14 months; the design and facilitation of which was informed by the Appreciative Inquiry principles of positive focus and collaboration. At the completion of the research project in February 2010, the leaders decided to continue their collective processes as a self-managing and sustaining professional network that has grown and in 2014 is still flourishing under the title LYNGO (Leaders of Youth focussed NGOs).

Two compelling findings emerged from this research project. The first of these relates to efficacy of a complexity thinking framework to inform the actions of these leaders. The leaders in this project described the complexity thinking framework as the most relevant, resonant and dynamic approach that they encountered throughout the research project. As such this thesis explores this complexity thinking informed leadership in detail as the leaders participating in this project believed it offers an opportune alternative to more traditional forms of positional leadership and organisational approaches. This exploration is more than simply a rationale for complexity thinking but an iterative in-depth exploration of ‘complexity leadership in action’ which in Chapter 6 elaborates on detailed leadership tools and frameworks for creating the conditions for self-organisation and emergence.

The second compelling finding relates to efficacy of Appreciative Inquiry as an emergent research and development process for leadership learning. In particular the adoption of two key principles; positive focus and inclusivity were beneficial in guiding the responsive leadership learning process that resulted in a professional learning community that exhibited high engagement and sustainability. Additionally, the findings suggest that complexity thinking not only acts as a contemporary framework for adaptive leadership of organisations as stated above; but that complexity thinking has much to offer as a framework for understanding leadership development processes through the application of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)-based principles. A consideration of the components associated with complexity thinking has promise for innovation and creativity in the development of leaders and also in the creation of networks of learning.

This thesis concludes by suggesting that leaders focus on creating hybrid organisations, ones which leverage the strengths (and minimise the limitations) of self-organising complexity-informed organisational processes, while at the same time retaining many of the strengths of more traditional organisational management structures. This approach is applied anecdotally to the place where this study was situated: the post-earthquake recovery of Christchurch, New Zealand.

Key words: complexity; change leadership; self-organisation; emergence; complex adaptive systems; adaptive leadership; organisational capacity; professional learning communities; appreciative inquiry; positive focus; collaboration.

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I wish to thank the managers of all the Christchurch-based adolescent NGOs who participated in our project. Each of these leaders has given their consent to be identified by name in this study. I have done this both to signal the quality, experience and expertise of the leaders involved, and also to acknowledge each of them for their leadership in this NGO sector in Canterbury.

Organisations include:

- Waipuna Youth and Community Services (Trevor Batin and Paddy Pawson)
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- Youthline (Tina Mackie)
- Te Ora Hou Otautahi (Jono Campbell)
- YMCA CHCH (Josie Ogden)
- Youth Cultural Development (Anni Watkin)
- Spreydon Youth Community and Baptist Church (Duane Major)
- Canterbury Youth Workers Collective (John Harrington)

- STOP (Don Mortensen and Maureen Lorimer)
- Agape Trust (Steve Reid)
- Vivante (Anna Russell)
- Community Colleges NZ (Doug Reid)
- He Waka Tapu Trust (Daryl Gregory)
- Bluelight Canterbury Youth Development Programme (Dr Mike Field)
- START Inc. (Maggy Tai Rakena)
- World Vision – South Island (Graeme Newton)
- Spreydon Baptist Church (Murray Robertson)

Other leaders outside Canterbury:

- Te Ora Hou Whangarei (Lou Davis)
- Outward Bound NZ (Steve Hall)
- Praxis NZ, Ola Fou Pacific (Lloyd Martin)
- Sir Edmund Hilary Outdoor Pursuits Centre (John Maxwell)

DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment is made. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The results from this thesis have however been published by the author and in some cases with the supervisors in the following international and New Zealand journals;

Jansen, C. (2011). Creating a professional learning community: Embedding AI in a complexity thinking framework. *International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry*, 13(2), 69-74.

Jansen, C., Cammock, P. & Conner, L. (2011). Leadership for emergence: Exploring organisations through a living system lens. *Leading and Managing*, 17(1), 59-74.

Jansen, C., Conner, L. & Cammock, P. (2010). Leaders building professional learning communities: Appreciative inquiry in action. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 25(2), 41-54.

Jansen, C., Cammock, P. & Conner, L. (2010). Schools as Learning Communities? - Leadership through Appreciative Inquiry. *The John Ben Shepperd Journal of Practical Leadership, University of Texas of the Permian Basin*, 5 (1), 121-144.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION—SITUATING THIS STUDY

1.1 Chapter outline

Framing questions: Why does this project focus on NGO leaders? Why did I choose these research questions?

This chapter sets the scene by giving an overview of the research project and outlining the structure of the information included in this thesis. It begins by exploring my belief that NGO leadership may have a unique contribution to re-thinking leadership roles in organisations and networks. It then highlights my awareness of the need for innovation in leadership development processes towards ones that full engage professionals and build leadership capacity well suited to today's complex world. This leads to an explanation of the approach I intended to take with this research, the reason for selecting this particular participant group and an explanation for the choice of research methodology including a discussion of the research questions. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis and the content of each chapter.

1.2 Rationale for this project

1.2.1 Initial curiosity and intuition

The idea informing this research project began when a colleague lent me a book in 2005. I had been aware for some time of Jim Collins' (2005) book titled *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, and the book given to me was Collins' newly published *Good to Great in the Social Sectors*. In these books, Collins describes the extensive research project he and his team of researchers undertook at the University of Colorado. The study profiled leaders of companies in the 'for-profit' sector and 'not-for-profit' sector who had been consistently successful over the long term. In the second book, Collins outlined the unique context that leaders in this sector operate in and suggested that leadership researchers and practitioners in general can learn a lot from the leadership practised in the not-for-profit sector:

We must reject the idea – well intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become 'more like a business'. Indeed tomorrow's great leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around (J. Collins, 2005, p. 10).

Intuitively, this thinking made sense to me. It had been my experience when working in the past as a manager and director in this sector, also known as the non-government organisation (NGO) sector and hereafter referred to as such, that my manager colleagues and I were very committed to and curious about optimising our leadership but often had limited engagement with current leadership models developed in other sectors. This situation was perhaps due to time constraints and lack of access to information. However, I also knew that there were some fantastic leaders in the sector. Collins' idea that the NGO sector has much to offer the field of leadership therefore resonated with me.

There is an irony in all of this: social sector organisations increasingly look to business for leadership models and talent, yet I suspect we will find more true leadership in the social sectors than the business sectors. Leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to. Level 5 leadership, combined with legislative skill, will become even more important to the next generation of business executives, and they could do well to learn from the social sectors ... indeed tomorrow's great leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around. (J. Collins, 2005, p. 10)

I was very aware of the fluid and unpredictable context (client needs, projects plans, funding sources, staffing) in which these leaders operate. I also knew that, among other limitations, these leaders lacked the ability to pay staff what they could earn elsewhere, which means that leaders in this sector have to maximise the influence of leadership attributes, such as engendering moral purpose and alignment of individual and organisational core values.

I was therefore interested to explore the leadership present in the NGO sector to ascertain the qualities of these leaders, their values, beliefs and moral purpose, and the factors that influence their leadership. I also sensed that their actions in such a context and based on a unique value stratum would be intriguing and perhaps provide useful insights for leaders in other fields, as Collins suggests. However, this was just my hunch, but a hunch worth making the focus of the research project documented in this thesis.

1.2.2 An gap and an opportunity

In addition to this hunch that NGO leadership was perhaps a 'hidden gem' I was also aware that I wanted to utilize the research opportunity to contribute significantly to both the research literature but also to make a significant difference in the everyday lives of the participants I would be asking to commit to the project.

In contemplating the scope of the research questions and methodology I became more and more compelled to move beyond a research project that would observe an existing phenomena and then perhaps make recommendations as to future possibilities. I wanted to participate in creating these future possibilities now. My supervisors also encouraged me strongly in this direction –asking me “what contribution did I hope this project would make and to whom?”

In this regard I was acutely aware that both my own experience of leadership development programmes as well as many of my colleagues was suggesting that many current leadership development practices were moderately effective, but lacked the really compelling processes that were required for individuals of significant professional experience to be fully engaged in and therefore deeply impactful.

These concerns are also reflected in the literature on leadership development and are expanded on in Chapter 3. Gardner (1990) is the most scathing when he states; “In the mid-21st century, people will look back on our present leadership development practices as primitive” (p. xix). Rabin (2013) found that leaders only attributed around 10% of their development to coursework and training, concluding that there is growing doubt that the prevalent focus of stand-alone leadership training workshops has a significant impact on leaders' behaviour and strategies.

Petrie (2011) in *Future trends in leadership development* discussed the doubts he and his colleagues had about the processes they had been using to develop leaders concluding that they were “insufficient for the challenges of an increasingly complex and uncertain world” (p. 5). Similarly Hailey’s (2006) research explored the challenges of designing leadership development programmes appropriate for NGOs and found that one of the challenges for those involved in such capacity-building work lies in designing interventions that enable NGO leaders to thrive in, not just cope with, the complex environment in which most of them operate. Authors were unanimous in stating that the content-heavy training being used to develop leaders no longer has currency for the 21st century and should be abandoned. This suggests a need to experiment with new leadership development approaches that “combine diverse ideas in new ways and [to] share these with others” (Petrie, 2011, p. 7).

1.2.3 Seizing the opportunity

The growing call for innovation in leadership-development processes fuelled my rationale for contributing to this pressing need via an innovative research project. Jackson (2012) states that “New Zealand can provide a singularly valuable laboratory in which to observe and practise leadership and to experiment with new leadership models and philosophies” with a focus on “tackling seemingly intractable problems in the spirit of discovery” (p. 19).

New Zealand has the potential to become a ‘global testing ground’ for the new leadership practices, models and processes that the world desperately needs in order to effectively respond to the natural and man-made challenges that we increasingly face. (Jackson, 2012, p. 16)

Jackson suggests that leadership innovation should focus on “five high-yield issues that are attracting considerable interest from some of the more progressive leadership thinkers in the world” (p. 27). These prime areas for experimentation are: 1) Creating leadership practices fit for the age of complexity, 2) Fostering a willingness to tackle ‘wicked’ problems, 3) Seeking to develop leadership not just leaders, 4) Promoting intergroup, place-based leadership and 5) Celebrating leadership not just leaders (Jackson, 2012). Jackson went on to suggest that the key to this innovation will be “forging a durable two-way connection between the research undertaken, the practices introduced into leadership development programmes and other sectorial and organisational initiatives” (Jackson, 2012, p. 27).

Consequently, I decided that through this PhD thesis I would design and evaluate a leadership development process that would aim to both explore the leadership of a cohort of NGO leaders while also experimenting with a unique cocktail of leadership development processes with a view to creating a highly engaged leadership development experience. I believed that this would be a potentially powerful means to bridge the critical gap between research and practice that Jackson highlighted.

This decision began the process that is documented in the following chapters and led to the research questions that frame this inquiry (Section 1.3.3), and to the adoption of an Appreciative Inquiry informed approach to the design and implementation of the process (Section 1.3.2). In particular I determined to go further than “actively testing leadership methods through research and development” (Jackson, 2012, p. 21) but rather adopt a

knowledge creation approach with regards to leadership and leadership development. Significantly – this involved inviting participants to not only give their consent to ‘be studied’ but also invited them to become collaborators, co-designers and co-researchers in the emerging process. As expanded on extensively in this thesis – this shift in traditional roles in research was hugely significant in both the depth and quality of the content discussed, but also allowed significant innovation in the leadership development process itself. For example, through the collaborative prototyping of such approaches in the context of real world issues and enlisting practitioner leaders as co-creators and co-researchers in such a process I believed we would increase the odds of creating processes and applications that are fit for purpose and eminently effective in such adaptive settings.

1.3 The Christchurch NGO Leadership Project

1.3.1 Background

This research project was initiated in 2008 with the intention of exploring ways to enhance the leadership capacity of adolescent-focused non-government organisations (NGOs) operating in Christchurch, New Zealand, through the creation of a professional learning community (PLC) (Stoll, 2011; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007).

This professional learning community (PLC) included the directors and managers of organisations that ranged in size from 20 to 80 people and covered a range of settings, including education, recreation, and residential and community therapeutic support. All of these organisations were working with adolescents, and all of the managers were leading NGOs with at least 10 staff and had at least five years of experience in a leadership role.

As part of this thesis I designed and facilitated this leadership learning process as well as simultaneously documenting its development and efficacy. I deliberately accessed known networks and relationships to facilitate connections with others as part of a process known as snowball sampling (Babbie, 2004), thereby allowing managers to recommend people they knew who fitted the criteria above. The PLC operated for 14 months and included 20 CEOs, directors and managers of organisations from a range of settings that included the following:

- Alternative education providers;
- Residential treatment centres;
- Whanau-based Māori youth development organisations;
- Counselling and therapy providers with specific focuses;
- Youth justice programmes;
- community development organisations; and
- Recreation providers and trainers.

Throughout the leadership project, the managers explored their leadership beliefs and values and how they expressed these in their roles. The process involved a peer-supported professional learning community that was informed by the principles of appreciative inquiry and enabled the participants to co-create the various learning processes.

The focus on gathering the majority of adolescent-focussed NGO leaders in one city and the use of appreciative inquiry processes are unique aspects of the leadership project. The project explores in detail the leadership of 20 participants, and was co-designed with the participants to specifically harness and evaluate the leadership development processes that were most effective in facilitating the growth individual and collective leadership capacity of these leaders. For the sake to clarity, from this point onwards in the thesis I will be using the term ‘leaders’ when referring to the participants who are managers, CEO’s etc

1.3.2 Adoption of appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) was the choice of research methodology for several reasons. Firstly, AI is a change process that has been used successfully in a wide range of settings, including the NGO and community sectors. As such, it provided a promising process that the managers could use to develop learning communities within their own organisations (Reed, 2004). It also involved a continuous learning process, rather than one-off workshops, that managers could engage with over a period of time. It furthermore allowed this process to be customised to the particular needs of the group with an opportunity for the participants to be act as co-designers and co-researchers in the emerging process (See Section 1.2.3 above)

Secondly, the philosophical underpinnings of AI aligned well with the aims and focus of the project with respect to the managers’ personal and professional learning. The ‘accentuation of the positive’ characteristic of AI aligns well with a strengths-focused orientation as part of the Positive Psychology movement, which has a growing influence in research and practice across the human service sectors, including the fields of health and counselling (Seligman, 2004). For example, the *Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa* (Affairs, 2002) is a seminal document for all individuals and organisations working with young people in New Zealand. One of the strategy’s central tenets is the adoption of ‘strength-based approaches’.

Lastly, the AI process had the potential to bypass the deficit focus and problem saturation emphases that tend to be the reality for many of NGO, given the wide-ranging needs of their diverse clients and the tight funding environments in which they operate.

Chapter 3 provides extensive background description and commentary on appreciative inquiry, while Chapter 4 explains how this method of investigation was used in this project.

1.3.3 Research questions

As discussed in Section 1.2.3 I was interested in exploring the leadership present in the NGO sector to ascertain the qualities of these leaders, their values, beliefs and moral purpose, and the factors that influence their leadership. I was also interested in designing and evaluating a leadership development process that would aim to both explore the leadership of a cohort of NGO leaders while also experimenting with a unique cocktail of leadership development processes with a view to creating a highly engaged leadership development experience. Thus the project was framed by two research questions:

- 1) What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?
- 2) What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury?

The first question focuses on documenting the leadership of the participants. The second question pertains to the efficacy of the appreciative inquiry process in benefiting and developing these leaders.

1.3.4 Structure of the project

As the researcher, I took the role of project coordinator and facilitated the learning and research process (see Chapter 4: Methodology). An initial one-day focus group for the participants held in November 2008 involved scene setting followed by ‘appreciative interviews’ in which pairs of managers interviewed each other for an hour about their leadership pathways, a peak leadership experience and the values and beliefs underpinning their experiences. Each pair collated their ideas and shared them with the full group.

The managers then decided how best to conduct an inquiry about their leadership in action over the next eight months. The range of strategies devised included:

- Leadership learning sets (groups of three to four leaders meeting regularly);
- Communicating through email/conference calls and face-to-face meetings;
- An online web-based forum site;
- Input from leadership consultants; and
- Access to and distribution of relevant literature.

These strategies were scheduled throughout 2009, and participants had input into all aspects of the project, namely:

- The design of the interview questions;
- Selection of participants;
- Direction of discussions;
- Choice of input from books and speakers;
- Analysis of data;
- Ongoing modification of methodology; and even
- Presentation of results.

In keeping with the collaborative nature of this action research project, the original initiatives of the project were evaluated with the participants as the study progressed and were progressively adapted to fit their needs. This adaptation process is outlined in Chapters 4 and 7. All decisions were informed by the intention of maximising the effectiveness of the NGO leadership group as a professional learning community. The development of this shared space, in which all the participants had input into the direction, process and outcomes of the project, was also a vital aspect of the collaborative nature of the project. This inclusiveness of the participants also had the potential to generate ‘rich data’ and enhance participants’ motivation through their ‘buy in’ of the process (Perry, 2011).

At the end of the research project in March 2010, the leaders who participated in it decided to continue their collective processes as a self-managing and sustaining professional network.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in two sections:

- Section 1: Literature Reviews and Methodology (Chapters 2 to 4)
- Section 2: Results, Discussion and Conclusions (Chapters 5 to 8).

Each of the chapters is summarised below:

Chapter 2: Literature review: Shifting leadership paradigms and complexity thinking

Framing Question: How and why is leadership changing? How has complexity thinking influenced leadership practice?

This chapter begins by exploring the drivers for shifts in thinking regarding traditional leadership roles and then suggests that NGO leadership may have a unique contribution to this re-thinking process. The rest of the chapter then explores the field of complexity thinking and its application in organisational development. This has included considerations of a “living systems lens”, organisational design and social architecture, conscious learning and intention, and adaptation/change. It then focuses on implications for leaders including the need to stimulate change and adaptation, foster collective intelligence and build capacity through enabling others.

Complexity thinking is focussed on in this literature review because these frameworks were the ones that the leaders in this study connected with most powerfully when reviewing the leadership literature. Use of this paradigm enabled leaders to identify a multitude of connections to their settings and the way they themselves lead and so provided them a refreshing contrast to more traditional management based leadership models. Consequently, exploration of complexity-informed leadership thus became a major part of the leadership professional learning community learning experience. How the leaders embraced these ideas is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 8 then takes these ideas further by considering the possibilities for creating a hybrid organisation

Chapter 3: Literature review: Leadership development processes

Framing questions: What processes are most effective in developing leaders? What contribution can appreciative inquiry make to these processes?

This chapter begins with a brief review of leadership-development processes and summarises critique of the current emphasis on large-scale, short time-frame workshops and training events. Emerging shifts in leadership development approaches, including contextualised work-centred learning, ownership and personalisation, collective leadership capacity and finally measured efficacy and sustainability are then explored. A discussion of specific recommendations for the development of NGO leaders is followed by an exploration of the potential contribution of concepts such as learning organisations, professional learning communities and communities of practice.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is then introduced as a learning process that has the potential to address the aforementioned critique. This section of the chapter backgrounds the development of AI, presents the key ideas and assumptions underpinning this development, and examines AI's links to the field of positive psychology. The application of AI to organisational development and leadership development is explained, as are AI research processes and protocols. This section of the chapter leads into Chapter 4, which covers why and how AI was adopted as the research methodology for this project.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Framing questions: Why was appreciative inquiry chosen as the research approach and what are its underlying frameworks? How was the research project implemented and how were the results analysed?

This chapter focuses on the application of appreciative inquiry (AI) research methodology in this study. The rationale for using AI, its links to action research, and the guiding principles of such a design are also discussed. Formulation of the AI research protocol is then explained. Noted in particular is the fact that this protocol was created by adopting a broad AI framework focused on two key themes—positive focus and inclusivity. These themes influenced the research design, including the selection of participants, the timeline and phases of the project, the data sources and collection techniques designed, and the data analysis and interpretation process.

A description of the flexibility and responsiveness of this research protocol follows. These attributes enabled the research process to morph in response to the participating leaders' feedback during the 14-months of the inquiry process. The final part of the chapter details ethical and research considerations and issues specific to the developed research methodology. A brief account is given of the effort to ensure the credibility of the large amount and varied types of data collected during the study data and to triangulate the multiple sources of data, rather than rely on single threads of data, in order to secure the trustworthiness of this information.

Chapter 5: Leadership beliefs, values and influences

Framing question: What motivates and influences these NGO leaders?

This first of three results and discussion chapters begins by exploring the NGO context or 'third sector' in which these leaders are involved. The chapter then focuses on the findings relating to the first part of Research Question 1:

What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?

The similarities and differences between the leaders in regard to their personal moral purpose and organisational vision are discussed, as are their core values. Next, the factors and drivers that have influenced the leadership of these leaders are documented and discussed. These include significant life circumstances, people and places. Finally, the journeys of these

leaders as they moved into their leadership roles are described and discussed under the themes of calling, alignment and flow.

Chapter 6: Leadership actions in a complexity framework

Framing question: In what ways does complexity thinking provide a leadership framework for these leaders?

This chapter relates to the wide range of leadership actions that the participants reflected on during this research project. This exploration relates to the second part of Research Question 1: *What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?*

The exploration considers in particular complexity thinking as a framework for guiding leadership of organisations. The leaders who participated in this research project ‘discovered’ the complexity-informed approach to leadership part way through the inquiry process as it resonated strongly with them. They wanted to look in depth at how this approach might help them make sense of their own leadership experiences.

The first section of this chapter begins with examples of ‘self-organisation’ (a key phenomenon in complexity thinking) that have occurred in the NGO sector in Christchurch both before and after the earthquake sequence. It then turn to considerations relating to the changing role of the leader in organisations, focusing in on ideas such as process versus position, influence and power, and leaders as catalysts.

The second section explores specific actions the participating leaders took to promote self-organisation. Their experiences and suggestions included: engaging in proactive mentoring of individuals, fostering interaction and shared learning; distributing power and decentralising control; and exploring and articulating shared values and vision. These four themes are then expanded upon in Chapter 8.

Chapter 7: Leadership learning processes

Framing questions: How did the learning process adapt during the project and what were the key factors in this? What were the benefits to the participants?

This chapter outlines the effectiveness of the learning processes for the leaders that emerged out of the appreciative inquiry (AI) framework during the project. It links directly to the project’s second research question, which required exploration of how and why the appreciative inquiry process was effective in developing the participating leaders’ professional learning community.

What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury?

The first part of this chapter documents and discusses the perceived benefits of creating a professional learning community through AI. The second part of the chapter unpacks the key design components that were developed and implemented throughout the project. These included. The last part of the chapter builds on the exploration of complexity thinking in Chapters 2 and 6 by suggesting that this form of thinking can also provide a framework for

designing innovative and networked leadership learning processes. The transition of this doctoral project into the leaders' LYNGO network, still ongoing four years after completion of the project, is a significant emergent outcome of the project.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and wider implications

Framing questions: What are the distinctive findings of this thesis? What do these findings suggest for areas of further innovation?

This final chapter explores the conclusions drawn from the findings and the future directions that these imply. It begins with a summary of the three areas of key findings from Chapters 5 to 7. The findings on complexity-based leadership in Chapter 6 constituted the most transformative aspect of the study, and these are elaborated on in this current chapter. As outlined in Chapter 2, complexity-based approaches are at the forefront of innovation in the leadership field not only because they provide a framework for addressing pervasive and 'adaptive' challenges but also because they accommodate the unpredictable and rapidly changing nature of our global context. The wealth of participant data in Chapter 6 gives ample evidence of the pragmatic applications of such a complexity lens for leaders.

The next section of Chapter 8 focusses on extending this application of complexity thinking in organisations. It explores the possibility of creating organisations that are 'hybrids', wherein the strengths of both the self-organising complex adaptive system and a well-structured and efficient bureaucracy are adopted. A number of guiding principles for developing such a hybrid approach are then discussed in detail.

The final part of the chapter explores the application of complexity thinking hybrids to two brief case studies from the post-disaster earthquake recovery landscape of Christchurch city. These case studies reinforce and validate the complexity-based hybrid findings from this doctoral project involving NGO leaders. They also present a strong argument in favour of applying complexity concepts when rethinking the design of organisations, systems and learning processes—all issues of paramount importance on the recovery agenda of the city of Christchurch.

SECTION 1: LITERATURE REVIEWS AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 2: SHIFTING LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS AND COMPLEXITY THINKING

2.1 Chapter outline

Framing question: How and why is leadership changing? How has complexity thinking influenced leadership practice?

This chapter begins by exploring the drivers for shifts in thinking regarding traditional leadership roles and then suggests that NGO leadership may have a unique contribution to this re-thinking process. The rest of the chapter then explores the field of complexity thinking and its application in organisational development. This has included considerations of a “living systems lens”, organisational design and social architecture, conscious learning and intention, and adaptation/change. It then focuses on implications for leaders including the need to stimulate change and adaptation, foster collective intelligence and build capacity through enabling others.

Complexity thinking is focussed on in this literature review because these frameworks were the ones that the leaders in this study connected with most powerfully when reviewing the leadership literature. Use of this paradigm enabled leaders to identify a multitude of connections to their settings and the way they themselves lead and so provided them a refreshing contrast to more traditional management based leadership models. Consequently, exploration of complexity-informed leadership thus became a major part of the leadership professional learning community learning experience. How the leaders embraced these ideas is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 8 then takes these ideas further by considering the possibilities for creating a hybrid organisation.

2.2 Shifting leadership paradigms

2.2.1 Change is changing: 21st-century challenges and opportunities

In an era where change arrives without warning and threatens to eradicate entire companies and industries overnight, organisations can survive only by engaging the eyes, ears, minds and emotions of all individuals and by encouraging them to act on their knowledge and beliefs. The new living system model will thrive and persist as it bears more closely to what we are as humans. (Petzinger, 1999, p. 18)

These are rapidly changing times, characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability. The current landscape includes rapid advances in technology, the ability to connect and network worldwide, the need to innovate, and unprecedented opportunity to influence others in many spheres. This landscape also features significant concerns: climate change, political instability, terrorism and worldwide financial recession. According to Degenhardt and Duignan (2010), “[The] Earth is changing, life is changing, society is changing, adolescents and their families are changing ... change is no longer incremental, developing along predictable lines; it is [therefore] difficult to find the patterns in the exponential, multi-dimensional change that is occurring on many fronts simultaneously” (p. 11).

All organisations in the business, government and non-government sectors are impacted by this changing landscape. A common theme in any analysis of leadership and organisational performance in the 21st century begins by outlining the rapidly changing global context in which leaders operate (Bakema, Baum, & Mannix, 2002; Marion, 2008). Petrie (2011) argues in his white paper, *Future Trends in Leadership Development*, that the “greatest challenge for future leaders is the pace of change and the complexity of the challenges faced” (p. 7). We are, he says, encountering “perpetual white-water” (p. 8).

Having reported on data collected from interviews with many major consultancies and tertiary institutions working alongside CEOs in a wide range of sectors, Petrie (2011) suggests that the common themes emerging from all these sources relate to the context in which they operate. For Petrie, this context is characterised by:

- Volatility (change happens rapidly and on a large scale);
- Uncertainty (the future cannot be predicted with any precision);
- Complexity (challenges are complicated by many factors, and there are few single causes and solutions); and
- Ambiguity (there is little clarity on what events mean and what effect they may have. (Petrie, p. 8)

Petrie says that many factors contribute to this complexity. Among them are information overload, the interconnectedness of systems, dissolving of traditional organisational boundaries, disruptive technologies, shifting generational values, and expectations and increased globalization (p. 8).

Society is also transitioning from an industrial society to a knowledge society (Gilbert, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005). This new age is about an economy where knowledge is the core commodity, and the rapid production of knowledge and innovation is critical to organisational survival (Boisot, 1998). This new global context features speed, complexity and lack of control, factors that exert pressure on organisations to change and adapt so that they can adequately engage with and thrive in this shifting landscape. These ‘change forces’ are often paralysing, destabilising and/or debilitating for the individuals caught up in them (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003). As Fullan (1993) emphasises, leaders increasingly need to be aware of initiative overload and change fatigue.

The extent of complexity facing leaders today is therefore immense, but underlying much of the discussion of it is the implication that leaders need to be able to respond effectively to it. “The current pace of cultural evolution demands that companies be capable of rapid change, able to transform ideas into products at once unthinkable brief spans of time” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 132). However, an IBM study cited in (Petrie, 2011, p. 8) and based on interviews with 1,500 CEOs, suggests that “our organisations are not equipped to cope with this complexity” Wheatley (2006) concurs, stating that too many organisations of all types are filled with people who are exhausted, cynical and burnt out.

Wheatley’s assertions are borne out by global engagement surveys, one of which covered over 32,000 employees across a range of industries in 29 countries. The study, conducted in 2012 and known as the Towers Watson Global Workforce Study, found that only 35% of the workers surveyed were ‘highly engaged’, while 26% were ‘completely disengaged’ (2012).

Paton, Mordaunt, and Cornforth (2007) claim that preventing disengagement requires leaders capable of making sense of and dealing with complex, fast-changing and ambiguous situations that require not only rational management approaches but also new ways of thinking.

In summary, leaders and organisations in the 21st century are facing an exponential rate of change and an increasing lack of competence to navigate the complexities of this new environment. However, extensive studies suggest that up to 70 to 80 % of change initiatives fail to embed the changes that they set out to achieve (Kotter, 1996; Nilikant & Ramnarayan, 2006). This failure potentially creates a ‘catch 22’ situation for leaders, where organisations are faced with a rapidly changing context that necessitates adaptation, but do not have a clear and proven process by which to lead these changes.

2.2.2 Technical problems versus adaptive challenges

Not only is the leadership context changing, so too are the issues and problems facing leaders. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) differentiate between technical problems, which can be solved with knowledge and procedures already at hand as opposed to adaptive challenges that require learning innovation and new patterns of behaviour. Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin (2010) state that “adaptive problems are embedded in social complexity, require behaviour change and are rife with unintended consequences” (p. 8).

According to some researchers, contemporary leadership is tested by adaptive challenges (typical of the knowledge era) rather than technical problems (more characteristic of the industrial age) (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). Such problems are “not amenable to authoritative flat or standard operating procedures but require exploration, new discoveries and adjustments” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 188) and are sometimes also described as ‘wicked problems’ (Jackson, 2012)

Addressing adaptive challenges requires human behaviour change across a system but that behaviour is often notoriously embedded. Otherwise known as intractable problems or wicked problems, these long-term embedded issues are generally very resistant to change strategies (Pascale et al., 2010). The change failure rates mentioned Section 1.4.1 are likely to relate to pervasive change-resistant issues and therefore require rethinking the approaches and solutions for each unique context.

Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) stress that organisations faced with “adaptive challenge[s] ... must throw out the old notion about how an organisation should be led, organised and run” (p. 14) because the problems “which human organisations deal with are simply too complex to be effectively coordinated by top-down managers. Managers and leaders are just as incapable of coordinating the complexities of human environments as queen bees are of bee environments” (p. *xiii*). Effective leadership of change in contexts involving adaptive challenges thus relies on taking into account such matters as shifts in organisational culture (beliefs, values and behaviours) and staff engagement. Responding to challenges typically demands a leap in capability, especially when solutions are unknown or unproven: “nimbleness and agility are essential, and tapping the full potential of the organisation as a

living system becomes the imperative” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 14). Such a response, does not equate with *management*, which “is the application of proven solutions to known problems’ but rather with *leadership development*, which “infers to situations where groups need to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 188).

2.2.3 A critique of industrial age thinking and leadership frameworks

Principles identified more than two hundred years ago, during an earlier scientific renaissance, have had a wide influence on how managers think today. Newton’s laws of motion and thermodynamics were literally lifted equation by equation and applied to the emerging field of economics. When they were extended into the realm of enterprise, these applications shaped the practice of management and today’s deep seated beliefs about change. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 1)

Classic (Newtonian) mechanics is the science of how bodies move in the universe. As Watkins and Mohr (2001) explain, from a Newtonian perspective the universe is a vast machine that, like a clock, has interacting parts. Newton’s work, they continue, and the work of his predecessors (notably, Galileo, Locke, Descartes) “led to the scientific paradigm that has dominated our view of what is real for several centuries” (p. 4). A substantial proportion of the organisational design and leadership frameworks adopted over the last century have likewise been directly informed by the ‘machine’ paradigm.

Fredrick Taylor’s early theories of ‘scientific management’ came out of that paradigm, applying the image of a machine to a human system. When studies of the importance of human behaviour in organisations began to be developed by social scientists in the 1940s (Lewin, Benne, Bradford and Lippett), . . . it was assumed that human behaviour was governed by the same principles as the material world; cause and effect, natural hierarchy, force exerted to cause movement and individuals as separate and isolated parts. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 5)

Wheatley (2006) claims that we all live and work “in organisations designed by Newtonian images of the universe” (p. 8). Here, our management practice relies on separating the more complex into the less complex (i.e., parts). We believe that influence relies on one individual exerting some form of force on another, and we keep trying to undertake complex planning, all the while considering the world to be a predictable place. We furthermore keep looking for better ways of objectively looking at the world. “These are the base from which we design and manage organisations and from which we do research in all social sciences”(p. 8).

Because of this mechanistic thinking, leadership models of the last century have largely been products of top–down bureaucratic paradigms (Chapman, 2002). Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) point out that although these models are very effective in economies based on physical production, the same cannot be said for economies that are more knowledge-based in orientation (Uhl-Bien & Marion, p. 185). Contemporary researchers and scientists in many different disciplines are therefore questioning whether people can adequately explain how the world works using this ‘machine’ metaphor.

Use of the ‘machine’ model or paradigm relies on understanding its parts. The assumption is that once we comprehend the working of each piece, we can understand the whole (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). We can dissect the constituent parts literally or representationally

(as we have done with business functions and academic disciplines) and then put them back together without any significant loss of machine functionality. However, the changing and complex nature of today's organisational contexts means that hard questions have to be asked about the relevance and utility of such a paradigm. As Dess and Picken (2000) put it the "monolithic top-down fragmented structures that dominated the manufacturing sector of Western civilisation until the 1970's" are rapidly being superseded by 'a new manner of organisation' (p. 19).

The traditional tools and techniques of management are designed, in large measure, to ensure organisational stability, operational efficiency, and predictable performance. Formal planning processes, centralised decision making, hierarchical organisation structures, standardised procedures, and numbers orientated control systems are still the rule in most organisations. As important as these structures are to organisational efficiency, they tend to limit flexibility and create impediments to innovation, creativity and change. (Dess & Picken, 2000, p. 19)

In short, the demands of this changing (21st century) environment present a complex set of challenges for organisations and their leaders, and require of them a radical shift in focus and emphasis.

2.2.4 A critique of heroic leadership

As stated above, much of leadership theory remains grounded in a bureaucratic framework more appropriate for the Industrial Age (Gronn, 2008). Traditional leadership thought was articulated many decades ago by Chester Barnard (1938) who among many other things proposed that "the role of leadership is to align unstructured organisational forces (individual preferences, goals and strategies, work habits, social behaviour, activities) with formal organisational goals" (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 13). The legacy of this premise is readily observable in transformational leadership and other approaches to leadership study and practice that focus on leaders imparting their vision on their organisations and ensuring that all members of staff are aligned to these organisational goals.

This organisational model tends to assume that leadership is centred in personalities and based on authority and that leaders make decisions, solve problems, coordinate, motivate, focus effort, manage conflict, influence, align effort with formal goals, and create change.

Macro level theories such as those that address 'upper echelon' leadership are further premised in the bureaucratic notions that likewise mute uncontrolled behaviours; other models advocate for a charismatic visionary approach that is said to cascade down from the CEO to lower levels. (Yukl, 2005, p. 191)

In similar vein, Hamel (2007) in his book *Future of Management* describes what he calls the innovation stack, which includes four levels of scale (p. 32). These levels, starting from the most profound, are:

- Management innovation, which includes organisational processes, leadership roles and communication and decision-making protocols;
- Strategic innovation, which references initiatives and programmes;
- Product or service innovation, that is, a new offering to the market); and
- Operational innovation, which focuses on systems processes and protocols. (p. 99)

The top level of innovation and one that is seldom seen is management innovation. At this level, organisations completely rethink where leadership is situated within their organisation

and then redesign organisational structure and leadership roles to accentuate this shift. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) strongly suggest the need to move away from “infatuation with heroic leadership” towards fostering “distributed intelligence throughout the organisation”, which they see as leadership’s key role (p. xx). This approach emphasises the importance of collective intelligence, a topic expanded on in Chapter 2.

2.2.5 Organisational and leadership paradigm shifts

This time of unprecedented and unpredictable change is also a time of questioning. Within the context of workplace leadership, organisations and leaders wonder how they can respond effectively to complex situations, remain true to their core values and support the wellbeing of their staff without entering a state of chaos and confusion (Petzinger, 1999). Watkins and Mohr (2001, p. 2) claim that the “uncertainty and soul searching engendered by the ‘fallout of the scientific revolution’ has led to executives asking, ‘How do we make practical sense of all this? How do we get the change and performance we need?’” For Pascale and colleagues (2010), useful answers to these questions rely on acceptance that much of what we know about leadership is today redundant because “it is literally designed for a different operating model, a different context, a different time” (p. 4). The rapidity of change, new insights from the life sciences and the inadequacy of the machine model “have created a critical mass for a revolution in management thinking”.

Literature suggests two major changes to how leadership is viewed (Jackson, 2012). The first concerns where (or with whom) leadership is situated. The notion that leadership is associated exclusively in certain senior positions, central to an earlier paradigm, is now under heavy critique. Leadership viewed as an action or an act of taking initiative is emerging as an alternative paradigm. This form of leadership can be enacted from anywhere within an organisation and from anyone who takes the initiative in any particular situation. In other words, there is a shift in emphasis from ‘leaders’ to the *act* of ‘leadership’ (Gronn, 2008).

The second area of paradigm shift is in the qualities of leadership associated with this emerging role. Whereas in the aforementioned earlier paradigm leadership was associated with creating vision, aligning teams and charismatically championing change, the role of the leader in this new paradigm is one of enabling collective leadership with the purpose of developing organisational capability that has the qualities of agility, responsiveness, learning, flexibility and self-organisation (Jansen, Cammock, & Conner, 2011).

A focus on resilient organisational capacity is also crucial. Organisational capacity refers to the collective capability that an organisation has to bring about effective change (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000). Hopkins and Jackson (2003) state that as capacity develops within an organisation, the result is greater confidence to work in creative and resourceful ways and the development of a “flexible system that is open to innovative ideas” (p. 91). Organisational leaders, argue Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008), must “loosen up their organisation—stimulating innovation, creativity and responsiveness, and learn to manage continuous adaptation to change—without losing strategic focus or spinning out of control” (p. 20).

Shifting the focus so that it is on speed and adaptability rather than on efficiency and control is essential (Jones, 2000). In the knowledge age, organisations need to exhibit speed, flexibility and adaptability, with “the absolute rate of learning and innovation and the practice of its development becoming critical to their competitive advantage” (Jennings & Haughton, 2000). Other authors suggest that in the post-industrial era, success lies more in an organisation’s social assets, its corporate IQ and its learning capacity than in its physical assets (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2008).

In the industrial age the challenge was to coordinate the physical assets produced by employees, optimising production and physical flow of products. In the new economy the challenge is to create an environment in which knowledge accumulates and is shared at a low cost, to cultivate, protect and use difficult to imitate knowledge assets, enabling intellectual assets through distributed intelligence and cellular networks rather than relying on the limited intelligence of a few brains at the top. (Snyder, 1988, p. 67)

2.3 Leadership in the NGO sector

2.3.1 The relevance of the NGO sector

It is against this backdrop of a global shift in leadership thinking and practice that my exploration of leadership in the NGO sector is situated. Earlier in Chapter 1, I mentioned that I embarked on this project with the hunch that contrary to the view that NGO leadership “has a lot to learn”, NGO leaders have developed a way of thinking about and enacting leadership that could offer much in the wider leadership context.

NGOs have always operated in an uncertain and rapidly changing environment. Two reasons why can be ventured. First, the funding environment characteristic of NGOs requires them to adapt rapidly as funding streams fluctuate, often on an annual basis. Second, the issues that NGOs typically address often create an engagement process with clients and their highly diverse needs that are highly complex.

In this section of the chapter, I provide a very brief overview of leadership models and frameworks relevant to the NGO sector. I begin by focusing in on the NGO sector and its characteristics, considering in particular the fluid roles of the people engaged in it and its place in wider society. A brief overview of the distinctive features of leadership in this sector both globally and in New Zealand follows. A specific consideration at this point is capacity building. Next, I touch on some leadership studies whose focus is similar to that of this thesis and which set the scene for exploration of the beliefs, values and actions of the group of NGO leaders who participated in my study.

2.3.2 NGOs: The ‘third’ sector

Organisations can be divided into three major sectors: government (public), business (for profits) and non-government (NGOs). Many of these NGOs fall into the legal definition of not-for-profit, community-based, social service, charitable organisations (Morris, 2006, p. 30). Lyons (2001) draws attention to an important distinction with respect to charities: that between public-serving and member-serving, where community welfare agencies are seen as the former and the latter are represented by examples such as trade union and business

associations and sporting and social clubs. Public-serving NGOs are created for one of two reasons:

- 3) A religious church community identifying a cause through its vision and commitment and uniting people to work for the cause within a religious framework;
- 4) An individual or group of people driven to meet the needs of an identified community where a cause is defined in social justice and human rights terms without associated religious connotations or affiliations. (Morris, 2006, p. 11)

Charity-based employees, volunteers and NGOs hold a shared understanding of common philosophical frameworks and values; their commitment is not to generate profits for individual shareholders but to return all surplus monies to the community. While charities and many community organisations operate alongside the commercial, economically driven marketplace, they have certain differences that mark them out as separate (Lyons, 2001). This research project falls into the category of public-serving NGOs, and within that category focuses on NGOs working primarily with adolescents.

2.3.3 Fluid roles in the NGO sector

In their account of the changing status of the non-profit sector, Paton, Mordaunt and Cornforth (2007) discuss moves in the late 1970s to use knowledge and experience from the private sector to make the delivery of public services more efficient and effective. This development also affected the non-profit sector, as governments envisaged organisations in this sector taking a greater role in delivering public services. Today, non-profit associations constitute a major force in the U.S. economy, spending over \$US75 billion annually and employing nearly a million individuals (Sherlock & Nathan, 2007). “We are entering the “golden age” of non-profits, an era in which non-profit organisations will grow in numbers on an international scale, take on more and more critical problems, and achieve more and more success in addressing the issues of the day” (Wether Jr & Berman, 2001, p. 215) This ‘professionalization’ of the non-profit sector has affected many of its domains, including the fund-raising context, which has become increasingly competitive, moving from gaining grants to tightly defined tenders and contracts. Another impact, this time in the United Kingdom, has been the promotion of management development of this sector, with in excess of 20 college and university NME (non-profit management education) programmes being offered as of 2007 (Paton et al., 2007).

The literature reports a growing reaction to imposition of this market-oriented model of management on the public sphere. One relatively early concern was that if NGOs proceeded with the comprehensive assumption of for-profit business characteristics, the sector would be “unaware that it was muting and dimming its voice, giving away other characteristics, such as its sense of spirituality, its sustainable networks, its relationship building capability, its inherent moral causes and expectations for behaviour, the female organisational ethic of caring, the sense of chaos, loyalty, belonging and family” (Morris, 2006, p. 24).

2.3.4 Distinctive characteristics of NGO leadership

For Morris (2006), the critical characteristic differences separating human service charities operating as NGOs from government and business enterprises relate to leadership, spirituality, ethics and values. The growing recognition that leaders have to be capable of making sense of and dealing with complex, fast changing, and ambiguous situations that involve not just rational management processes but also new ways of thinking and engaging with the 'emotional' life of organisations draws on leadership characteristics by no means unfamiliar to the not-for-profit sector (Paton et al., 2007).

In his exploration of connections between leaders, leadership and organisational values, Morris (2006) considers the term 'vocation', another traditional characteristic of not-for-profit organisations. The notion of vocation, associated with individuals who work to secure the welfare of others (usually at little or no financial advantage to themselves), is re-emerging as people search for more humane and meaningful ways to understand and practise their work lives (Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004).

The current search for leadership considered more capable of bringing about transformational change has begun emphasizing, if not championing, the distinctive values of the not-for-profit sector in general and NGOs in particular (Paton et al., 2007). Silverman and Taliento's (2005, 2006) articles; *What Business Execs don't know but should about Nonprofits* documents their study of 11 executives who had played leadership roles in both for-profits and non-profits. The authors were intent on exploring the critical differences between the two sectors. The differences they found included greater contextual complexity, especially with regards to stakeholder engagement, lesser deference to authority from staff, challenges in measuring performance with social metrics, and sustainability of resources, amongst others (Silverman & Taliento, 2005, p. 3).

As I mentioned in Section 1.2, Collins (2005) has strongly critiqued the idea that the primary path to 'greatness' in the social sectors is one that leads to becoming 'more like a business':

There is an irony in all of this; social sector organisations increasingly look to business for leadership models and talent, yet I suspect we will find more true leadership in the social sectors than the business sectors ... the next generation of business executives ... could do well to learn from the social sectors ... indeed tomorrow's great leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around. (J. Collins, 2005, p. 10)

2.3.5 Extent of NGO-based leadership studies

As described earlier, countries such as the UK offer an increasing number of non-profit management education (NME) programmes (Paton et al., 2007). An array of academic and practitioner journals, websites and blogs also have NME as their focus. One such is the *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* journal, which is a collaborative project between the Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Case Western Reserve University in the United States and the Centre for Voluntary Organisations at the London School of Economics and Political Science in the United Kingdom.

Despite study of leadership in the non-government sector being reasonably extensive internationally, Australasian studies in this area are less common. One of these studies, conducted by Morris (2006), explored leadership in Australian charitable NGOs and involved 48 interviews over eight organisations. Morris's primary interest was the extent of integration between individual and organisational beliefs. The limited number of Australasian studies means that the full complexity and intricacies of leadership in the NGO sector in New Zealand has not been explored in depth. This thesis therefore seeks to make a unique contribution to exploring the shifting paradigms in leadership thinking as they relate to NGO leaders in the New Zealand context. It does this by designing and implementing a research process that serves not only explore to such leadership, but also to document what processes appear to have the most benefit and potential in developing these leaders.

2.4 Complexity thinking

2.4.1 Exploring an alternative: complexity-informed leadership

The intensely complex contexts that leaders are facing globally (and even more so in post-quake Christchurch) demand that organisations are adaptive, innovative, flexible, agile, responsive, creative, resilient and self-organising (Jansen et al., 2011). As elaborated above, this demand requires leadership of a different sort from that based on a 'well-oiled machine', which has been the predominant paradigm in most management training to this point in history. As stated earlier, in a new paradigm where self-organisation is encouraged, leadership will be less about the position of leaders and more about the "action of leadership. There is a new scientific renaissance in the making – it will usher in new industries, alter how businesses compete, and change how companies are managed" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 1).

Commentators today increasingly deem exploration of alternatives to traditional thinking dominated by Industrial Age models as imperative for leadership researchers and practitioners. One such emerging paradigm draws from complexity science to develop an overarching framework for the study of complexity-based leadership. Known by some commentators as the 'new sciences', complexity thinking offers a powerful alternative to the linear and reductionist approaches to leadership that have dominated the sciences for half a millennium (Davis & Sumara, 2006). It "holds promise for leadership and social systems" (p. 2) because it is a paradigm that focuses on facilitating learning and harnessing the creative and adaptive capacity of complex systems.

The complexity paradigm addresses 21st-century organisations, requiring them to turn things 'upside down' and look at events differently. At its heart is the notion of "many critical minds struggling autonomously but interdependently' to resolve problems" (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 13). Additionally ; "The organisational environment of the 21st century possesses drama and unpredictability and complexity science is quite comfortable in that world" (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 2). However, the framework and practices associated with this type of paradigmatic shift are not always superior to traditional approaches. Much

depends, according to (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 8), on the nature of the challenge faced and the extent of change sought.

In this thesis, I am likewise mindful that the strengths of the more traditional machine-based paradigm still have cogency. Efficiency, optimisation and replicability are all useful attributes for any organisation faced with a technical challenge where a predetermined and proven solution is evident and needs to be implemented. However, when it comes to adaptive challenges, where the context is uncertain and solutions only become evident through experimentation, I agree that responses to those challenges that are based on complexity thinking may well be highly effective. Throughout this thesis, then, I critically engage with the debate around shifts in leadership and organisational mind-set and paradigms. In the following chapter, complexity thinking is explored in depth, due to the research participants' strong identification with it during their exploration of leadership literature in the early stage of the research project (see later in this chapter). For the managers in this study, complexity thinking had particular resonance and relevance as a tool for re-thinking their roles as leaders and followers.

2.4.2 Definition

Complexity thinking relates to “the study of the dynamic behaviours of complexly interacting, interdependent and adaptive agents under conditions of internal and external pressure”(Marion, 2008, p. 3). Self-organising behaviour is common in the natural world and is characterised by a collective of independent agents that self-organise in a dynamic manner in order to create emergence—a patterned higher-order response to a threat or opportunity (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Wheatley, 2006; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996). Biologists exploring the group behaviour of many species (fish, ants, bees, birds) noted that while the collective behaviour of these species was not predictable, neither was it chaotic. For example, starlings that flock in groups of thousands do not behave chaotically; there is a pattern to their flocking such that individuals operate in unison and do not collide with one another (see Figure 1). Studies of ecosystems as a whole show that they also change dynamically in response to external influences, and that while these changes are not necessarily predictable, they are not without pattern (Wheatley, 2006). This type of interaction is described as a complex adaptive system and the process of collective self-organisation is known as emergence (Malcolm, 2013).

Complexity theory/science is young and evolving . . . Nonetheless, complexity thinking has captured the attention of many researchers whose studies reach across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Some of the questions that draw in complexity thinking include: “How do social collectives work?”, “Is the sum of whole more than sum of the parts? How can this be orchestrated? What does this mean for classrooms, schools, organisations, communities?” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. x)

Davis and Sumara (2006) suggest that each of these phenomena points towards a system that learns and that “complexity science has focused on the observation and description of self-organising, self-maintaining, adaptive—this is for our purposes—*learning systems*” (p. 79).

Figure 1: Starlings flocking in response to the presence of a predator



Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XH-groCeKbE>

2.4.3 Background of the ‘new sciences’

Studies of complexity contribute to and draw upon other fields of knowledge (Capra, 1996; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Morgan, 1997a): “Originated in physics, chemistry, cybernetics, information science and systems theory, its interpretations and insights have increasingly been brought to bear in a broad range of social areas, including studies of family research, health, psychology, economics, business management and politics” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 3). Some of the language associated with complexity accordingly includes chaos, chaos theory, complexity theory, self-organisation, emergence, complex adaptive systems, living systems, learning systems, complexity science and complexity thinking (Lichtenstein, 2007).

In 1927 a group of scientists met in Denmark to discuss revolutionary new discoveries in physics, most notably quantum physics. The conference engendered much debate not only amongst the scientific community but also the general public. Since that time, “terms such as quantum physics, chaos theory, self-organising systems and complexity theory have become common in our vocabulary” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 6).

The Santa Fe Institute in California was set up in 1984 with the dedicated purpose of studying complexity theory—the creating of order at the edge of chaos, and the study of complex systems that cannot be reduced to simple parts (Marshall & Zohar, 1997). The theory embraces the “emergent whole”. The whole “cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts”, change is unpredictable, non-linear and discontinuous but often leads to “surprising new forms” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 7). According to Waldrop (1992), complexity thinking, also known as complexity science, “grapples with the mysteries of life itself” (p.

220). Pushed ever onwards by the flowing together of discoveries and developments pertaining to three streams of inquiry—the life, social and hard sciences—it “has revealed exciting insights into life and has opened up new avenues for management” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 220).

Wheatley (2006) explains that complexity thinking involves moving towards holism, wherein understanding takes place from a systems perspective and attention is primarily paid to the relationships existing across parts of the whole that are seemingly discrete (p. 8). Watkins and Mohr (2001) claim that viewing systems in this way leads us into “an entirely new landscape of connections, or phenomena that cannot be reduced to simple cause and effect, and of the constant flux of dynamics processes” (p. 7).

The new sciences give us radically different ways of making sense of our world. The most exciting ramification for the field of organisational change and transformation is the realisation that organisations as living systems do not have to look continually for which part is causing a problem or which project is not living up to some set of criteria. The ‘new’ science embraces the magnificent complexity of our world while assuring us that built into the very fabric of the universe are processes and potentials enough to help us and all of our organisations move towards our highest and most desired visions. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 7)

2.4.4 Links to systems thinking and chaos theory

Complexity and chaos are frequently used interchangeably, even though they have almost nothing in common. The world is not chaotic, it is complex. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 6)

Physicist and information scientist Warren Weaver (1948) identified three broad categories of phenomena that are of interest to modern science – simple, complicated and complex. His schema was extended by Snowden and Boone (2007) to a framework they call the Cynefin framework (based on the Welsh word Cynefin meaning habitat or place) referring to the experiential context within which all systems are embedded and interdependent with. This framework has four categories of systems, the three just mentioned and the fourth being chaotic behaviour (see Figure 2).

The simple system has very few parts, which are connected in simple linear ways. Interactions among the parts are predictable cause-and-effect ones. This predictability makes for ‘obvious’ decisions because we are dealing with ‘knowns’. An analogy is baking a cake: adherence to a simple recipe creates a readily reproducible result. Snowden and Boone (2007) characterise the strategy for influencing simple systems as “sense, categorise, respond: S-C-R” (2007, p. 4).

The second type of system—the complicated system—has many components, but the relationships across them remain fixed and clearly defined (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 11). They also have numerous yet predictable cause-and-effect interactions, thus requiring decision-making grounded in expert knowledge. Like the simple system, we are still dealing with “knowns” – just many more of them. An analogy is performing heart surgery or maintaining an aeroplane. The strategy for influencing complicated systems, according to Snowden and Boone (2007), can be stated as “sense, analyse, respond: S-A-R” (p. 4).

Figure 2: The Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007)



Complex systems also have many components. However, interactions among them are neither fixed nor clearly defined. They “are subject to ongoing co-adaptions, creating new patterns of order” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 11). In other words, complex systems have multiple connected but unpredictable interactions. Although the parts of the system interact in unique and unpredictable ways, there is an underlying pattern and, in a sense, order to the interaction. In these systems, decisions are uncertain, and solutions are only apparent in retrospect. Here we deal with unknowns but these unknowns are connected. Snowden and Boone (2007) summarise the strategy for influencing complex systems as “probe, sense, respond: P-S-R” (p. 4).

Finally, chaotic systems have multiple components that can rapidly move from very simple patterns to chaotic, unpredictable ones “as demonstrated by fractals, weather patterns and the stock market” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 7). Such systems are therefore characterised by multiple disconnected interactions where decisions need to be made quickly in order to dampen stress and transition into simple or complex systems. Snowden and Boone (2007) summarise the strategy for influencing chaotic systems as “act, sense, respond: A-S-R” (p. 4). Because both complex and chaotic systems challenge the possibility of long-term prediction, long-term planning needs to be considered in ways that differ from the traditional (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

The two systems most pertinent to organisations are the complicated and complex. The field of systems thinking centres predominantly on complicated systems, that is, situations where predictable and linear dynamics apply, with clear causes and effects. Systems thinking is based on the premise that everything is connected, with causal loops and feedback influencing behaviour in ways that can be mapped and explained (Chapman, 2002; Senge, 2002). However, in contrast to this, complex systems are concerned with non-linear effects

and are built on the assumption that people cannot proactively control what will happen (Maani & Cavana, 2008). “Systems thinking involves mapping the journey from A to B; complexity thinking assumes that the landscape itself changes as we are on the journey because of the way we journey on it—like walking on a trampoline” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 104). The premise underlying the Cynefin framework is that we need to know what kind of system and process are being dealt with in order to consider the strategies that are useful in each case.

2.4.5 Complex adaptive systems (CAS)

Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are the basic unit of analysis in complexity science (Chapman, 2002). As described in Section 2.2.1, starlings flocking in response to the presence of a predator are characterised by a collective of independent agents that self-organise in a dynamic manner in order to create emergence—the patterned higher-order response to a threat or opportunity. The conditions that create the opportunity for self-organisation to occur are discussed in the next section.

The complex adaptive system is formally defined as a system of independent agents that can act in parallel, develop ‘models’ as to how things work in their environment and, most importantly, refine those models through learning and adaptation (Waldrop, 1992). Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) describe CAS as “neural-like networks of interacting interdependent agents who are bonded in a cooperative dynamic by a common goal, outlook, need, and so on” (p. 187). Such systems, the two authors continue, are changeable structures with many overlapping hierarchies. Furthermore, like the individuals making up these structures, CAS link up with one another in a “dynamic, interactive network”.

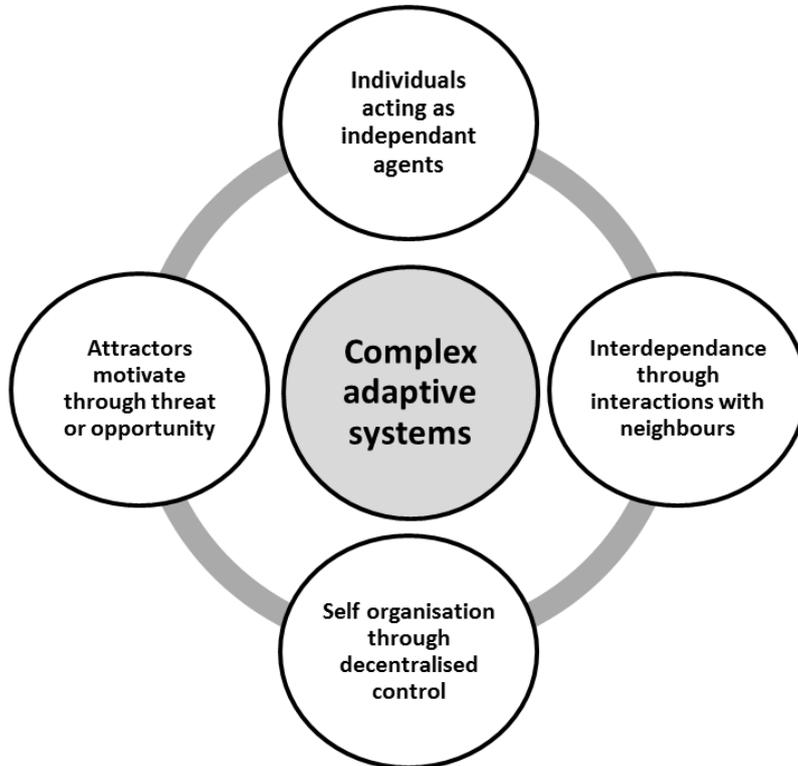
CAS tend to emerge naturally in social systems. They have the ability to solve problems creatively and to learn and adapt quickly (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). A relatively recent leadership paradigm, known as complexity leadership theory, endeavours to draw on the dynamic capabilities of CAS. Researchers engaged with complexity leadership theory work to identify and explore the strategies and behaviours that facilitate creativity, learning and adaptability within organisations. They also seek to determine how “CAS dynamics can be enabled within the contexts of hierarchical coordination (ie: bureaucracy)” (p. 187).

2.4.6 Complex dynamics

The concept of complexity dynamics describes the interaction of agents within a complex system. Such systems have the ability to spontaneously generate new structures, which means they do not need an external agent to precipitate that state. The outcomes they generate are generally unpredictable “because they are driven by random dynamics and complex interactions” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, p. 5). Complexity theory examines the patterns of the dynamic mechanisms that emerge from the adaptive interactions of many agents; “Interactive behaviours and outcomes feedback on one another in convoluted fashion, with effects becoming causes and with influence often wielded through extended chains of effect” (Marion, 2008, p. 5). However; complex interactions do not necessarily mean complex rules.

Emergence often arises from agents in systems using simple rules iteratively and/or recursively in their interactions with one another. It is this iterative and recursive nature of the interactions that makes the interactions *as a whole* complex, prompting writers such as Cohen and Stewart (1994) to refer to them as “indescribably complex” (p. 6).

Figure 3: Characteristics and conditions of complex adaptive systems



2.5 Characteristics and conditions of complex adaptive systems

This section focuses on the key characteristics, also known as mechanisms, of complex adaptive systems. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) describe these mechanisms as “universally available emergent patterns of behaviour that enable a dynamic mix of variables (agents) and causal chains”. These mechanisms lie behind what the two authors call the “black box” of complexity dynamics (p. 7). Each of the following characteristics (or mechanisms) is necessary in order for self-organisation and emergence to occur (Malcolm, 2013). (see Figure 3 above).

2.5.1 Individuals acting as independent agents

In a complex adaptive system, all individuals within it are independent agents that have the freedom (agency) to act in ways that they themselves can determine (Johnson, 2001). In contrast to a complicated system such as a large machine (e.g., car, aeroplane), which has many parts, the parts in a complex adaptive system do not have fixed roles but are able to initiate and create their own varying roles (Jansen et al., 2011).

Plsek’s (2001) analogy of bricks and birds is useful here. Plsek suggests that we can liken our agents in a system as either ‘bricks’ or ‘birds’. If, Plsek says, we were to pick up a brick and throw it towards a target; we could generally predict where the brick would land. We

could also repeat the action without difficulty. However, if we were to pick up a bird and throw it towards a target, how likely is it that the bird would reach the target? We could always clip the bird's wings and thus gain accuracy and predictability, but what would be lost in terms of innovation and adaptability? In short, the brick perspective brings predictability, repeatability and perhaps efficiency, whereas the bird perspective promotes diversity, responsiveness to change, adaptation and innovation (Jansen et al., 2011).

2.5.2 Interdependence through interactions with neighbours

A situation where agents act independently is likely to lead to chaos and confusion. However, in a complex adaptive system, individuals' actions are interconnected, which means that one agent's actions influence the context for other agents. In such a system, most information exchange occurs among close neighbours (Hargreaves, 2005), making a system's coherence dependent mostly on individuals' immediate interdependencies rather than on centralised control.

In the earlier example of flocking birds, these short-range relationships can be discerned in terms of the distances between adjacent birds. When a bird (and it can be any bird) makes some change to its flight, that change affects the flight of the birds adjacent to it. They, in turn, influence the birds alongside them, until the whole flock is flying in a pattern either subtly or markedly different from the flock's previous pattern (Jansen et al., 2011).

Therefore, because an individual agent's actions are interconnected, the actions of one person or agent are highly likely to influence the context or environment of another or others. Consequently, although there is independence, there is also interconnectedness.

2.5.3 Self-organisation through decentralised control

Control in a complex adaptive system is likewise based on networks of specific short-range relationships. The freedom of individual agents to choose what to do and think in association with opportunity to contribute ideas about their own organisations enables continually emergent behaviour, or constant adaptation and learning. An essential precondition for the emergence of this self-organising behaviour is agency; the system must have the ability to make its own decisions and responses (Lichtenstein, 2007). Self-organisation is thus "the tendency for certain systems to operate far from equilibrium and then shift to a new state where constituent elements generate unlikely combinations. Emergence is the outcome of this, a new state or condition" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 113).

Self-organisation is achieved through networks of connected relationships, and this dynamic behaviour is perpetuated by cyclic feedback loops; the result is dynamic complexity that generates new ideas and ways of operating. In organisations, networks create the interactions and relationships required for sharing learning and enable the "cross fertilizing processes of improvement rather than imposing standardised leadership templates on everyone" (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 184).

2.5.4 Motivation as an outcome of threat or opportunity (attractors)

Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are influenced by external changes or ‘disturbances’ that provide impetus or purpose (motivation) for the emergence of new ideas and patterns. In the natural world, ecosystems evolve constantly in response to threats to their survival and also to opportunities for growth. In the literature, these stimuli to change and adapt within the context of complex adaptive systems are often described as “attractors”. These attractors do not occur in isolation but arise from the interaction between an organism and its environment (Pascale et al., 2000). Organisations should therefore see these influences not as problematic but as an impetus for the emergence of new ideas and operations. In human systems, as (2000) eloquently put it, “... emergence needs a ripe issue” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 130)

Because self-organisation in CAS occurs in response to a perceived threat or an opportunity, we can say that self-organisation is an externally motivated process. However, an engaging vision or opportunity can also act as a motivator (an internal motivator). However, it needs to be one that is not externally devised or imposed. Rather, it needs to be one that resonates with the members of the organisation.

It is instead derived from an organisation’s latent appetites, which are already present but awaiting articulation. It isn’t something a leader ‘gives’ or ‘does’ to followers. It is emergent. The attractor comes into existence because it resonates from sympathetic chords in the environment, the times, the organisation’s members, and a leader who can express the challenge in a way that invites others into the dance that is being choreographed as it is performed. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 133)

2.6 Self-organisation and emergence

As already indicated, self-organising behaviour is common in the natural world and is characterised by a collective of independent agents that self-organise in a dynamic manner in order to create emergence, which, to repeat the definition, is a patterned higher-order response to a threat or opportunity (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Wheatley, 2006; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996). Self-organisation refers to a bottom–up process where there are no clear leaders among the components of a system; the leadership role is dynamic and distributed among the agents. Emergence of a complex system can take place when independent agents interact for a common purpose or interest.

2.6.1 Occasioning emergence

Emergence in a complex adaptive system can be either spontaneous or enabled by the provision of certain conditions (Lichtenstein, 2007). Occasioning emergence refers to the second of these, that is, emergence prompted by the conditions that are provided. As mentioned earlier, in contrast to complicated systems, which also have multiple parts that interact with one another in predictable and structured ways, as with an engine, the multiple parts or agents in a complex system interact in an ongoing generative, unpredictable and self-determined fashion. Therefore, emergence occurring in a complex system occurs because of the ongoing interactions of agents, and because of that complexity we can never fully anticipate the outcome(s) of emergence (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Hence, we cannot force of

script emergence into existence, nor can we fully anticipate outcomes. What we can do, however, is guide the type of emergence and outcomes we seek through the subtle provision of appropriate conditions.

2.6.2 Enabling constraints

As described in Section 2.5, the following four aspects are necessary pre-conditions for self-organisation or emergence to occur:

- Independent agents;
- Interactions with neighbours;
- Decentralised control; and
- Motivated by threat or opportunity (attractors).

Emergence can also be enabled by the careful provision of enabling constraints (Davis & Sumara, 2006). The oxymoron ‘enabling constraints’ relates to the presence of two seemingly opposing conditions which work in tandem to provide a balance of structure and flexibility. Structure gives a system stability while flexibility enables the system to change in response to its interactions with other systems and external stimuli. This concept is also often described through another oxymoron— ‘bounded freedom’ (Howcroft & Wilson, 2003). Davis and Sumara (2006) identify the following examples of enabling constraints:

- Coherence versus randomness;
- Internal redundancy versus internal diversity; and
- Neighbour-based interactions and decentralization.

Setting up an enabling constraint such as this can help us to nudge emergence in the directions we value. However, while these conditions can be planned and focused, outcomes cannot be fully determined, as they are the result of the emergent behaviour of the system.

Simply stated, these conditions are ‘not too loose, not too tight’, thus allowing sufficient space for innovation but without degenerating into chaos. The analogy of two open hands held apart as if gently holding an object suggests an open space where creativity can occur yet is framed by the hands themselves that might represent the frame within which this is fostered. These hands are neither clasped (too tight) nor behind one’s back (too loose); an optimum space is required in order for emergence to occur. While these conditions can be planned and focused, outcomes cannot be fully determined as they are result of the collective emergent behaviour of the individual within the system. (Jansen, 2011, p. 73)

Because these conditions are neither ‘too loose’ nor ‘too tight’, they allow sufficient space for innovation without degeneration into chaos.

Coherence and randomness

The first enabling constraint occurs as a result of providing sufficient coherence and randomness in the structure of the project: “These are the structural conditions that help to determine the balance between sources of coherence that allow a collective to maintain a focus of purpose/identity and sources of disruption and randomness that compel the collective to constantly adjust and adapt” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 147).

Coherence is the feature of the system that relates to the capacity of its agents to make sense of the system in which they live or operate. Randomness is the feature of the system

that relates to the unpredictability and uncertainty affecting the system from both inside and outside it. Sufficient coherence and randomness in a system cannot be measured but only sensed: in simple terms, what is required is enough structure with sufficient freedom for flexibility (Jansen, 2011).

Diversity and redundancy

For Davis and Sumara (2006), internal redundancy refers to the ways in which agents in a system are similar or share aspects in common. These commonalities must be in place if shared interactions are to occur (p. 139). Internal diversity refers to the ways in which agents differ in all regards. According to Jansen (2011), the tension between these two polarities is where the creative opportunity lies (p. 73). In essence, a complex system requires a balance of diversity and redundancy in order for emergence to occur.

Neighbour-based interactions and decentralised control

In a complex adaptive system, most of the information is predominantly exchanged among close neighbours. A system's coherence therefore tends to depend on an agent's immediate interdependencies, rather than on centralised control. As referenced in Section 2.4.2 in the example of flocking birds, the short-range (neighbourly) relationships influence the distance between the birds. Any bird can initiate a change, but that change will affect all other birds in the system. Control in a complex adaptive system accordingly is based on networks of specific relationships. In organisations, networks create the interactions and relationships required for sharing learning and enable 'the cross-fertilizing processes of improvement rather than imposing standardised leadership templates on everyone' (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 184).

2.7 Organisational applications of complexity thinking

Complexity thinking within the context of organisations provides a lens through which we can view how humans in those organisations exhibit some of the characteristics of CAS and determine their potential to self-organise towards a common goal (Stacey, 1995). The following sections explore these characteristics in more depth and relates each of them to organisations and leadership (see Figure 4 on the following page).

However, before looking at these characteristics one by one, we need to remember that human systems have some key differences from living systems. For example, humans have consciousness and insight to a greater extent than other species. Humans can wield the power of human intention and, in theory, are capable of recognising danger (or opportunity) in advance and mobilising to take appropriate action (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). Additionally self-organisation by nature of the term itself is not led. However, in human organisations, complexity thinking maintains that leaders can influence the self-organising of staff (and, from there, emergence) by providing certain conditions within the organisational environment and setting in motion certain interaction patterns. "Swarm theory would seem to suggest that complexity finds leadership unimportant, but human systems are quite a bit

different than ant colonies—humans are intelligent, volitional, capable of anticipating, and so on ... so the complexity dynamic is more sophisticated in human systems” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. *xii*).

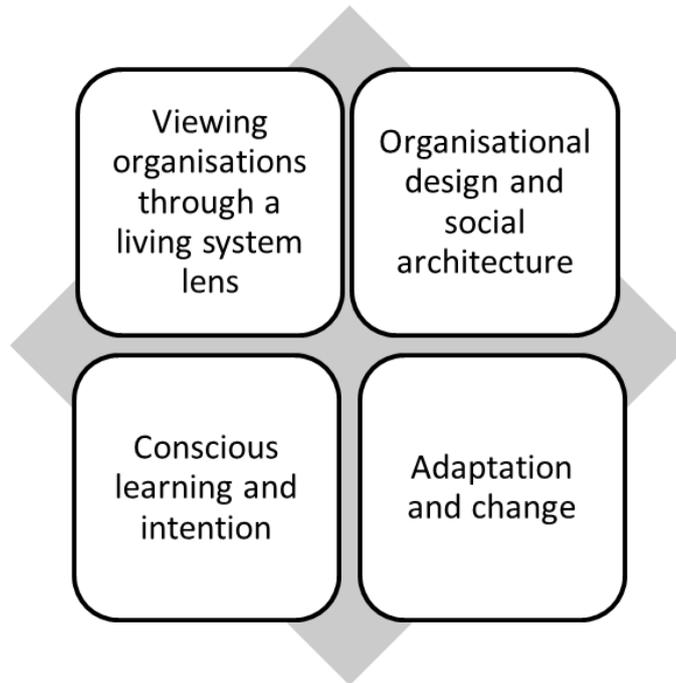


Figure 4: Organisational applications of complexity thinking

2.7.1 Viewing organisations through a ‘living systems lens’

Since the 1990s, literature pertaining to leadership within organisations has begun to embrace the idea that organisations should not be viewed simply as rational and linear-based structures (Section 1.4.3). Instead, they suggest that organisations are more akin to complex living entities that mimic biological systems with the ability to adapt in response to uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Wheatley, 2006). “Businesses, it turns out, can learn a great deal from nature” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 3). In this section, I therefore use the metaphor of a living systems lens to consider the implications of complexity thinking on leadership practice. This metaphor is also the one referred to in the subtitle of this thesis.

The notion of viewing organisations through a living systems lens grew out of the concept of complex adaptive systems described above (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). These models emphasise organisational systems made up of groups of independent agents that collectively respond to external pressures by self-organising and innovating, effectively emerging in new adaptive patterns (Davis et al., 2008). They also emphasize the need for participants to constantly learn and adapt in response to ongoing change (Pascale et al., 2000; Senge, 2002). Hence, natural systems have the potential to guide us towards processes with the potential to enhance self-organisation and emergence in organisations.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the traditional techniques of management are designed, in large measure, to ensure organisational stability, operational efficiency and

predictable performance (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). This thinking is largely based on the assumption that organisations are like machines (Morgan, 1997b) and that good management is something that is orderly, rational and systematic. “Formal planning processes, centralised decision making, hierarchical organisation structures, standardised procedures, and numbers orientated control systems are still the rule in most organisations. As important as these structures are to organisational efficiency, they tend to limit flexibility and create impediments to innovation, creativity and change” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 19).

As discussed extensively in Chapter 1, traditional models such as these have come under increasing critique. Hamel (2007), for one, considers that the hierarchical form of management is no longer useful. He likens this form to the combustion engine, which he sees as a technology that has all but finished evolving. This situation, he says, is not good because what ultimately limits an organisation’s “is not its operating model, nor its business model, but its management model” (p. xi). The type of management model being critiqued here is one that emphasises hierarchy, centralised power and the skills of the all-knowing “heroic leader” (Mintzberg, 2009, p. 105).

A living system lens offers a perspective that is complementary to the more traditional formal models (Section 2.2.3). It does not seek to replace the perspectives gained from ‘tried and true’ organisational and leadership thinking—merely to add an alternative perspective, one that is particularly relevant in contexts of uncertainty and change, such as we are experiencing in these opening decades of the 21st century (Stacey, 1995).

The lessons of nature and the specific principles of living systems do not constitute a miracle drug that cures all ills. But when an organisation needs to fundamentally re-invent itself and sustain high levels of responsiveness and agility, the insights of living systems allow us to see more deeply into the challenge and provide more promising avenues for success. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 35)

The living systems lens is therefore merely a framework—a way of thinking that has the potential to enable fresh and innovative practice. It aligns with Uhl-Bien and Marion’s (2008) assertion that we should enable collective intelligence and informal dynamics in human organisations rather than suppress them: “complexity dynamics, with their emergent outcomes, such as adaptability, innovation and learning, provide that enabling factor” (p. xiii). Watkins and Mohr (2001) agree, arguing that complexity thinking has the potential to liberate the potential of people and organisations. Indeed, they claim, and note that they were writing at the very beginning of this century, that complexity thinking is challenging the machine model as a suitable management platform for the information age.

Such thinking also has benefit for leadership scholars according to Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) because it helps them understand the relevance of complexity principles to leadership thinking, consider richer research models for studying leadership and provide research-backed ideas on how to improve leadership within organisations. Some authors do not see the living system as a metaphor. Instead, they consider that the human interaction inherent in all organisations *is* a living system and that leaders must work to optimise these living characteristics. “Let us be clear—‘living system’ isn’t a metaphor for how human institutions

operate. It's the way it is" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 6). In the next three sections, I expand on the living system metaphor in order to explore the characteristics of CAS that are relevant to organisations.

2.7.2 Organisational design and social architecture

In *Starfish and the Spider*, Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) create the metaphor of centralised systems which they call 'spiders' and decentralised open systems which they call 'starfish'.

With a spider what you see is pretty much what you get . . . A body is a body, a head's a head, a leg's a leg . . . but starfish are very different, the starfish doesn't have a head. . . its central body isn't even in charge. In fact the major organs are replicated throughout each and every arm. If you cut a starfish in half you'll be in for a surprise – the animal won't die and pretty soon you will have two starfish to deal with. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 35)

Spiders operate as hierarchies whereas starfish operate as networks. The authors suggest that the open and decentralised structure of the starfish has multiple benefits for organisations. This next explores the qualities of decentralisation, open systems and circular structure.

Decentralisation

Living systems are decentralised and have no formal leadership: distributed leadership is the norm and hierarchy is not evident. These systems exhibit less clear divisions of roles and instead operate according to shared responsibility and ownership.

In a decentralised society there's no clear leader, no hierarchy, no headquarters. If and when the leader does emerge that person has little power over the others. The best that person can do to influence people is to lead by example . . . this is an open system where everyone is entitled to make his or her own decisions. This doesn't mean that a decentralised system is the same as anarchy— there are rules and norms but these aren't enforced by one person. Rather the power is distributed among all people. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 20)

Because power is shared, decisions are made collectively; they are 'bottom-up' and emergent. Interdependence is the key way of operating. This dynamic is achieved through a high level of communication and interaction, resulting in norms and guidelines that are used to guide collective decisions. Pascale and colleagues' (2000) claim that self-organisation and emergence "flourish" when both rules and structure are simple (p. 131) should not be construed as organisations functioning in similarly simple and pedestrian ways.

Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) point out that such organisations are highly creative, nimble and innovative because the behaviour of the agents within them is flexible and negotiated, leading to the ability to quickly respond, so allowing the organisation to mutate and successfully adapt to change and threat. These two authors also return to the notion of viewing through a lens to clarify the value and strength of decentralised organisations. "If we are used to seeing the world through a centralised lens, decentralised organisations don't make much sense . . . we are used to seeing things in a particular way: organisations with structures, rules, hierarchies, and of course a president" (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 34). One of the examples that these authors give in support of their claim relates to the Spanish colonisation of the Americas by Europeans. During this time, one tribe, the Apache, were highly resilient to attack because of their decentralised structure, with no positional leader

who could be captured. Instead, the Apache operated a system of informal leaders who perpetuated the tribe's identity and culture. The traits of their decentralised society—flexibility, shared power, ambiguity—would have destroyed a centralised society. When attacked, the authors argue, “a decentralised organisation tends to become even more open and decentralised” (p. 21).

Open systems

A decentralised system is also known as an open system in which intelligence and memory is distributed. Scientists studying the human brain initially considered it to be primitive and disorganised, when in actual fact it, according to Watkins and Mohr (2001), is structured and flexible, which is what allows it to be resilient. In a similar vein, the structure and flexibility of open systems are the characteristics that enable it to respond to change and challenge and so evolve. Maani (2008), pondering the facility of organisations to respond to disruption, asks, “How do we design our organisations so that we don't need to reorganise them every time a change comes along” (p. 45). He suggests we need to decide who we are and how we operate, and then allow freedom and space for all staff to create innovative solutions.

Another benefit of open system structures is that they match more closely with an emergent global worldview of interdependency, communication, networks, collectives and content sharing (Pink, 2006). Breakspear, Sheahan and Thoubon (2009) state that because Generation Y employees are most motivated by work with meaning and autonomy, organisations can lift engagement and commitment across all staff by leveraging these open system characteristics (p. 19). However open systems do pose risks. The distributed intelligence and decision-making can create ambiguity and confusion—even anarchy and chaos. This level of distributed intelligence is also a difficult change of mindset for many individuals within organisations, especially when all they have experienced is the structure and formality of standard bureaucracies.

Circular structure

One of the foundations of a decentralised organisation is a circular structure. This describes the pattern of interactions, relationships and accountability with such an organisation.

Because circles don't have hierarchy and structures it's hard to maintain rules within them . . . no one really has the power to enforce them. But circles aren't lawless. Instead of rules they depend on norms. The norms in fact become the back bone of the circle. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 90)

These norms are created and negotiated within the groups and are also self-monitored and maintained. As a result of this self-enforcement norms can be even more powerful than rules. “It's about what you have signed up for and what you have created” (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 90). This level of interaction, dialogue and negotiation often leads to a sense of belonging, closeness, and a sense of ownership merges.

As the norms of a circle develop, and as members spend more time together, something fascinating happens: they begin to trust one another . . . They own the experience and develop a sense of responsibility and belonging. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 90)

This dynamic of decentralised control, open structure and circular interaction can be described as the social architecture of an organisation which will be explored in the following sections.

2.7.3 Conscious learning and intention

Humans have consciousness and potentially insight to a greater extent than other species. “Humans can ‘lift themselves by their anticipatory bootstraps’. . . they are capable of intellectually grasping a threat before it materialises and through the exercise of intention, responding before it is too late” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 34). However, in the words of Winston Churchill “Mankind will occasionally stumble over the truth, but usually we pick ourselves up and carry on” (p. 29).

Looking at massive decline of fortune 500 companies – all of them would have wanted to survive and were probably aware of the threats around them . . . however a significant percentage of organisations failed to mobilise the level of response needed to sustain themselves. (p. 35)

The required response is one of adaptation and is activated by “unleashing their organisation’s distributed intelligence”(p. 37).

Collective intelligence

Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) suggest that the key role of leadership is to “foster distributed intelligence throughout the organisation”(p. xx). A complex adaptive or ‘open system’ doesn’t have central intelligence – the intelligence is spread throughout the system”. Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) explain that collective intelligence is vital in that it allows an organisation to access a much wider range of stimuli, information and feedback because information and knowledge naturally filter in at the edges (of an organisation) because they are closer to where the action is.

It’s not that open systems (CAS) necessarily make better decisions – it’s just that they are able to respond more quickly because each member has access to knowledge and ability to make direct use of it. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 39)

Pascale et al. (2000) describe the outcomes for organisations that have enabled their collective intelligence.

Employees were assuming more responsibility for sales floor success, experiencing an increased sense of power, and identifying more authentically with the corporations aspirations and challenges. Employees at all levels were feeling that they could make a difference and their contributions could be valued. (p. 54)

Enabling and harnessing this collective intelligence has many practical logistical implications implying that organisations need a “deep seated buy-in to the ongoing importance of distributed intelligence and the need to cultivate it properly”(Pascale et al., 2000, p. 52).

Collective intelligence is leveraged through network dynamics,

In complex networks – ideas emerge, combine, diverge, become extinct, conflict with one another, adapt, change and increase in complexity. The primary outputs are adaptability, creativity and learning. (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 202)

2.7.4 Adaptation and change

Natural living systems cannot be directed along a predetermined linear path in the same way that the direction or outcomes from emergence cannot be controlled or directed but only prompted. Unforeseeable consequences are inevitable and the challenge is to ‘disturb’ the system in a manner that approximates the desired outcome.

In the face of threat . . . living systems move towards the edge of chaos. This condition evokes higher levels of experimentation . . . fresh new solutions are more likely to be found. When this excitation happens, the components of living systems self-organise and new forms and repertoires emerge from the turmoil. (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008)

However, if properly applied and employed these principles of self-organisation and emergence allow enterprises to thrive and revitalise themselves.

At certain scales (i.e. small) and in some time frames (i.e. short); equilibrium can be a desirable condition. But over long intervals of time and on very large scales, equilibrium can be hazardous. Because the environment in which the organism (organisation) lives is always changing and at times is turbulent. Prolonged equilibrium dulls an organism's senses and saps its ability to arouse itself appropriately in the face of danger. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 21)

Peters and Waterman (1982) outlined the qualities that led to 43 excellent companies' success. These qualities include clear corporate vision, strong values, and a great deal of internal consistency among other elements – otherwise known as organisational fit. However as Pascale et al. (2000, p. 23) point out that “five years later over half of these companies were in trouble, and in 2000, all but five have fallen from grace”. Pascale et al. (2010) are not suggesting that they do not support the importance of organisational fit, however “excessive imposition of fit meant that it was impossible to change any single element of the system without changing every other element” (p. 23). This can lead to an organisation lumbering along with a lack of agility.

Fostering self-organisation

Complex adaptive systems, when disturbed or threatened by some change in its environment, are capable of re-designing themselves in a new, more sophisticated form that is better able to cope with its problems and challenges (Pascale et al., 2000).

Self-organisation relies on the intelligence that exists in every part of a complex adaptive system (in the mind of every employee) and makes it possible to tap this resource and realise its formidable potential. That capacity in turn allows companies to seize opportunities and solve problems as they arise. Self-organisation and emergence are the twin engines of adaptive work. Through these capacities, a company can explore new, previously undiscovered paths to reach a desired destination or new and previously unimaginable destinations. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 120)

Wikipedia defines self-organisation as “. . . a process in which the internal organising of a system, normally an open system increases in complexity without being guided or managed by an outside source” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 204). Through activating the dynamic of self-organisation, high levels of experimentation and innovation can be created.

You can't think your way into a new reality, instead act your way into new way of thinking – need to jump in, disturb things enough to allow for new possibilities, and figure out the rest as it unfolds. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 209)

This dynamic is sometimes described as “Build it while we fly it” (Maurie Abraham, Principal, personal communication). Uhl-Bein et al. (2008, p. 195) suggest that this process can “find solutions that individuals regardless of their authority or expertise could not find alone”.

Top-down versus bottom-up change

Brafman and Beckstrom’s (2006) spider metaphor defines leaders as head, and the organisation as the body. Intelligence is assumed to be centralised near those at the top of the organisation, or those who advise them. Following this is the premise of predictable change.

Traditional change theory assumes cascading intention. Once a course of action is determined, initiative flows from the top-down. When a programme is defined, it is communicated and rolled out through the ranks. Often this includes a veneer of participation to engender buy-in. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 91)

Most managers today realise that people need to be brought on board. But they still go about it in a pre-ordained fashion.

A key assumption of complexity leadership approach is that many aspects of structure have an emergent, bottom-up quality, which means that no one person completely understands or is able to fully predict the outcome of a specific action. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 99)

This raises a challenge for organisations: “The issue is getting leadership researchers and practitioners comfortable with the idea that leaders are not really in control” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. xv). This next section explores the role of leaders and leadership in a complex adaptive system – in particular suggesting that the leader’s role is to facilitate the conditions for self-organisation and emergence to occur.

2.8 Complexity thinking in leadership

2.8.1 Implications for leadership practice

A living systems perspective can provide some guidance as to processes that enhance self-organisation and emergence in organisations (Stacey, 1995). Complexity thinking also introduces an alternative way of thinking about leadership.

Over the past several years, substantial literature has introduced the new science of complexity. This is a broad based inquiry into the common properties of all living things – bee hives and bond traders, ant colonies and enterprises, ecologies and economies, you and me. It has achieved two things. It has evoked wonder and excitement about the living world around us – how life surges and declines, how nature competes, cooperates, and thrives on change. It has wetted some management appetites for a new approach that might help unshackle the potential of people and organisations and has begun to challenge the machine model as a suitable management platform for the information age. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 5)

A key assumption in this thinking is that many such processes have an emergent, bottom-up quality, which means that no one person completely understands or is able to fully predict the outcome of a specific action. “This” says Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008, p. xviii), “raises a question which is quite troubling to leadership researchers; if the leaders are not in control, how do they lead?”.

Such behaviour (swarm) emerges in crisis conditions when enabling leadership fosters bottom-up action and adaptive (emergent) leadership. Agents can similarly respond to unanticipated, fast paced opportunity in business, nongovernmental organisations, schools, and elsewhere when leaders work to foster complex structures in their organisations. (Marion, 2008, p. 11)

The leader's role, when viewed through a living systems lens, is one that enables the conditions in which complex dynamics can occur. Wheatley (2006) argues that complex behaviour tends to have conditions that influence collective behaviour; the leader's role, therefore, is that of determining the combination of factors that guide the collective behaviour. Wheatley also maintains that understanding how the interactions work, can be just as important an element in change processes as understanding the system components themselves. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) offer two roles for leadership: to enable the conditions in which complex mechanisms can emerge; and to promote coordination between the adaptive and administrative structures. They describe the need for leaders to “. . . plan and coordinate the structure within which complexity based emergence can evolve, to protect this creative/adaptive dynamic, and [to] create strategy that includes adaptive organisational flexibility” (p. xix).

Enabling leaders allow things to occur over which they have relatively little direct control. They create the structures, rules, interactions, interdependencies, tension and culture in which complex mechanisms can thrive and unanticipated outcomes can occur and they create mechanisms that weed out poorly adaptive outcomes. (Marion, 2008, p. 11)

This enables individuals to take initiative, it enables interactions and it builds interdependence. Clearly the role of leaders is to enable the conditions in which complex dynamics can occur.

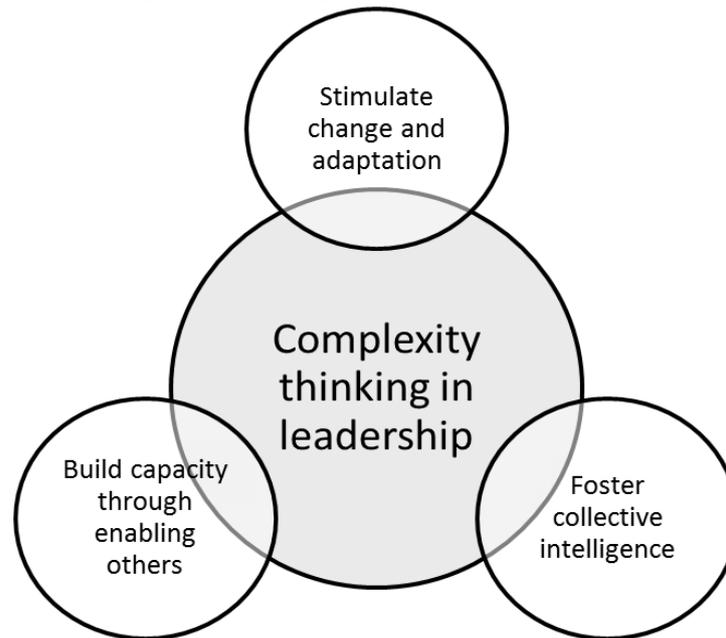
Complexity leadership provides a framework in which certain leader behaviours work to foster complex mechanisms and generate conditions in which agents can respond quickly and effectively to unanticipated conditions (both destructive and beneficial). (Marion, 2008, p. 10)

In each instance the leader's role is a process role, a caretaker of productive conditions and a facilitator of creative processes.

Leaders in top-down organisations want to control what's happening, thereby limiting creativity. Decentralised networks, however provide circles and an empowered membership and typically have a higher tolerance for innovation. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 97)

This role shift requires a very different set of leadership competencies: “A fresh and unorthodox brand of leadership is necessary to initiate and shepherd the adaptive journey” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 73).

In the following sections in this chapter I explore three leadership roles and their requisite actions that have been described and promoted through the literature on complexity based leadership. These are; 1) stimulate change and adaptation, 2) foster collective intelligence and 3) build capacity through enabling others (see Figure 5). These sections provide foregrounding for Chapters 6 and 8 where each of these roles and actions are explored in relation to the leaders in this project.

Figure 5: Complexity thinking in leadership

2.8.2 Stimulate change and adaptation

Identify the adaptive challenge

A crucial first step for a leader is to decide whether self-organisation and emergence are really needed. Earlier in Section 1.4.2 the differentiation was made between adaptive challenges and technical problems. An adaptive challenge facing the organisation cannot be solved with knowledge and procedures already at hand alone as it requires new solutions with a high degree of human behavioural change. In this case adaptive change is required which can be generated through leveraging complex dynamics and self-organisation.

These complex dynamics or self-organisation can occur in all hierarchical levels in an organisation and have different roles in each. “At an upper or strategic level, the focus will be on emergent planning, resource acquisition and strategic relationships with environment. Whereas at an organisational and production level, complex dynamics will be activated to bring innovation to the development of core products and knowledge development” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 205).

Unfreeze by moving an organisation to the edge of chaos

The fourth of the conditions for self-organisation was that of attractor – either opportunities or threats that motivate a system to adapt. Darwin stated that “. . . species do not evolve of their own accord . . . rather they change because of the forces (indeed the threats) imposed on them from the environment” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 26). Therefore a crucial leadership role in creating self-organisation is moving an organisation out of its frozen state. Organisations have routines, procedures and culture that tend to perpetuate the status quo.

The enemy of these mechanisms is the *existing social order*. Like the body’s immune defence system, the social order identifies foreign influences and seeks to neutralise them. Equilibrium enforcers – persistent social norms, corporate values, and orthodox beliefs about the business - often nullify the sought after advantages of diversity (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 32)

Other authors suggest that all organisations have two opposing forces operating within them; forces for stability and forces for change (Nilikant & Ramnarayan, 2006). This maintains the system in status quo and “in order for change to happen, either the forces of change need to be strengthened or the forces of stability need to be weakened” (p. 15). Nilikant and Ramnarayan went on to suggest that weakening the forces of stability is more effective than just strengthening the forces of stability. The leader’s role is therefore to provoke the organisation out of this frozen state, towards what is known as the edge of chaos. “Moving to the edge of chaos creates upheaval, not dissolution. The edge is not the abyss . . . it’s the sweet spot for productive change” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 61).

This concept is also sometimes described as the ‘burning platform’, a powerful enough rationale to provoke the organisation into an adaptive state. The burning platform relates to the willingness of workers on North Sea oil rigs to jump from great heights into the open sea if their oil rig caught fire. This transitional space between the status quo and chaos has been described as “. . . a fertile domain for revitalization, a precondition for transformation to take place and a locus for all sorts of innovative activity” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 65).

As you make sense of this new landscape – (i.e. formulate the adaptive challenge), I have learned that it is important to quickly move the organisation from denial to acceptance of change (disturb equilibrium). Doing this involves two stages; first you must experiment and let chaos reign. Then you must accept some degree of angst, pruning etc, doing away with some established practice and some established people . . . tearing apart before you can put together something new – it’s not fun for a while. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 65)

Enhance attractors

One of the attractors that can be used to foster self-organisation is that of authentic contribution. Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) suggest that “There’s just something rewarding about contributing” (p. 75), and Pink (2006) in his book *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates people* suggests that people are motivated by three key factors – autonomy, mastery and purpose. “Most people given a chance want to make a positive contribution”(Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 91).

The motivation to contribute does not necessarily relate to the organisational vision and values. “If vision and values are created by CEO or senior team then they do not resonate with the experiences of the workforce . . . they lack the imagination and inspirational quality that motivates people to reach beyond themselves. Imposed from above, vision and values are seen almost as satire”(Pascale et al., 2000, p. 74). Hence an attractor imposed on an organisation has no resonance or believability from organisation.

A strange attractor is never milled from new material; it is already in the woodwork. This is what makes it both strange and powerful. It isn’t something a leaders ‘gives’ or ‘does’ to followers. It is emergent. The attractor comes into existence because it resonates from sympathetic chords in the environment, the times, the organisations members, and a leader who can express the challenge in a way that invites others into the dance that is being choreographed as it is performed. (p. 75)

Attractors must be generated in partnership with all those involved in the system.

Amplify threat and dampen response

If an organisations current state is not meeting the need of the context changes around it, then leaders must employ a range of amplifying strategies or devices (Pascale et al., 2000) “The purpose of such a strategy is to amplify survival threats and foster disequilibrium to evoke fresh ideas and innovative responses” (p. 28).

Typically amplification involves making the organisation aware of the threat, that is identifying the adaptive challenge but not stepping in to save the organisation from it. Kotter (1996) describes this as “. . . establishing a sense of urgency” (Kotter, 1996, p. 3). This amplifying can also be achieved by “. . . temporarily overloading the organisation beyond its business as usual carrying capacity or by using deadlines, public scrutiny, and other action forcing events to sustain disequilibrium” (Kotter, 2013, p. 51). Amplifiers and dampers allow navigating close to the edge without going over it.

Disturbing equilibrium through the mobilization of adaptive intention is an unnatural act, especially for executives who have risen through the ranks and have been rewarded for their competence in exercising authority. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 40)

If adaptive intention is required, the social systems must be disturbed in a profound and prolonged fashion – amplifying the threat in order to more to edge of chaos.

Inject adaptive tension

Injecting adaptive tension is similar to amplifying as described above except that is it achieved through increasing diversity within a system. This can be achieved by creating work teams that are required to be interdependent in the context of differences among members in such things as skills, preferences and outlook (Schilling & Steensma, 2001). When couched within a context of interdependency, this diversity pressures members to adapt to the differences.

Organisational level can promote this by building atmosphere where diversity is respected, with considered hire practices, and by structuring work groups to enable interaction of ideas. Enabling leadership also fosters internal tension by enabling an atmosphere that tolerates dissent and divergent perspectives of problems, one in which personnel are charged with resolving their differences and finding solutions to their problems. (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001, p. 132)

Sometimes the leader’s role is to simply hold the existing tension rather than resolve it. Adaptive leaders do not move on an issue too quickly or reach for a quick fix. Heifetz suggests;

- 1) Communicating the urgency of the adaptive challenge (ie the threat of death)
 - 2) Establishing a broad understanding of the circumstances creating the problem, to clarify why traditional solution won’t work (ie sustaining disequilibrium) and
 - 3) Holding the stress in play until the guerrilla leaders come forward with solutions
- (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 40)

This sequence generates anxiety and tension. Pascale suggests that individuals affected “tend to look to figures in authority for answers, and more often than not the leaders take the bait and try to provide answers (drawn from traditional successes repertoire), or divert attention to easier problems, or tread water . . . all the while allowing the initial threat to intensify” (p.

39). In order to avoid this Pascale suggests that leaders must ‘Hold the collective feet to the fire’ by “regulating distress such that the organisation is drawn out of its comfort zone (yet contain stress so that it doesn’t become dysfunctional). Simultaneously leaders will need to manage avoidance mechanisms that inevitably surface (scapegoating, looking to authority for answer)” (p. 40).

2.8.3 Foster collective intelligence

Take a design perspective

Design is the invisible hand that brings life to organisations and organisations to life. Architects design –they don’t engineer. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 98)

“Design for emergence is very different from engineering for convergence” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 199). It involves the leader having an attitude of discovery that requires humility and a quest for learning about the unknown, rather than reassurance based on what is already known. It is also based on a belief that the wisdom to solve problems exists and needs to be discovered within each and every organisation or community. Pascale suggests the following three phrases:

Design, don't engineer
Discover, don't dictate and
Decipher, don't presuppose. (2000, p. 175)

This approach assumes that all members of an organisation have a role to play in the solution and so works to enable the communication and feedback required to activate collective problem solving. This also minimises the risk of resistance from staff which is often more a backlash directed at social engineering rather than innate human resistance to change.

When change is being driven from above and moves along a predetermined path, or when members of living systems are marched lock step in frontal assaults on the fortress of adaptive change, these efforts will most likely fail. But a well-grounded design for emergence provides a very different experience. (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 201)

Leverage social architecture

As mentioned in an earlier section, social architecture refers to the formal and informal interaction patterns that occur in an organisation as a result of the communication mechanisms in the organisation. Collective intelligence is enabled by fostering interaction between diverse parts of a system. From an organisational design perspective level interaction can be fostered through such strategies as open architecture work places, self-selected work groups, electronic work groups and by management induced scheduling or rule structuring (Jaques, 1989).

At a strategic level, maximising the collective intelligence of an organisation has two purposes; it helps the organisation to be both aware and responsive to environmental changes (Boisot, 1998) and it increases staff engagement through fostering authentic ownership of strategic intent (Jansen et al., 2011). The key message from this case study is “the design to unfreeze and align should never be confined to the top eight or ten executives” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 204).

Deploy catalysts

Some authors suggest that leaders wishing to enable complexity dynamics need to see their role as a catalyst. “Behaving like a gardener, not thinking like a mechanic, becomes the mantra of choice” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 14). This role involves facilitation instead of controlling.

Circles don’t form on their own. Put a bunch of people in the same room together and they might talk about the weather in random groups of twos and threes. Add a catalyst and soon they will be sitting around discussing their shared love of skiing or antique lampshades. A catalyst develops an idea, shares it with others and leads by example. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 94)

Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) suggest that the catalysts’ tools are: “Genuine interest in others, loose connections, desire to help, passion, meets people where they are, emotional intelligence, trust, inspiration, tolerance of ambiguity, a hands off approach and a willingness to have their role gradually recede”(p. 109). This pattern of initially catalysing a dynamic and then gradually fading into the background is a common pattern for a catalyst.

In open organisations, the catalyst is the person who initiates a circle and then fades into the background. We see the same pattern with every decentralised organisation – a catalyst gets a decentralised organisation going and then cedes control to the members. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 92)

In letting go of the directive leadership role the catalyst transfers ownership and responsibility to the circle. Brafman and Beckstrom also suggest that “. . . when the catalyst stays around too long and becomes absorbed in their creation, the whole structure becomes more centralised” (p. 94). For leaders of this nature it is important to be adamant about the process but not adamant about the outcome. In summing up the role of a catalyst, Pascale suggests that leaders should “never tell people how to do things, tell them what the objective is . . . and they will surprise you with their ingenuity” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 136).

2.8.4 Build capacity through enabling others

Focus on leadership instead of leaders

In section 1.4.5 the position of a leader was compared with the process of leadership. “A complexity leadership perspective also requires that we distinguish between leadership and leaders” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 188). Leadership theory has largely focussed on leaders; it has not examined the dynamic complex systems and processes that comprise leadership. (Gronn, 2008). Because of this earlier models of leadership have been criticised for being incomplete and impractical. “The problem is focussing on the periphery and content of leadership with disregard for the essential nature of what leadership is – a process” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 188).

Through a complexity thinking lens; “leadership is seen as an emergent, interactive dynamic, while leaders are seen as individuals who act in ways that influence this dynamic and outcomes” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008, p. 188).

We propose that leadership should be seen not only as position and authority but also as an emergent interactive dynamic – a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action

and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behaviour or new modes of operating. (p. 188)

Fostering trust and interdependence

In an open system what matters most is not isn't the CEO but whether the leadership is trusting enough of its members to leave them alone. (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 67)

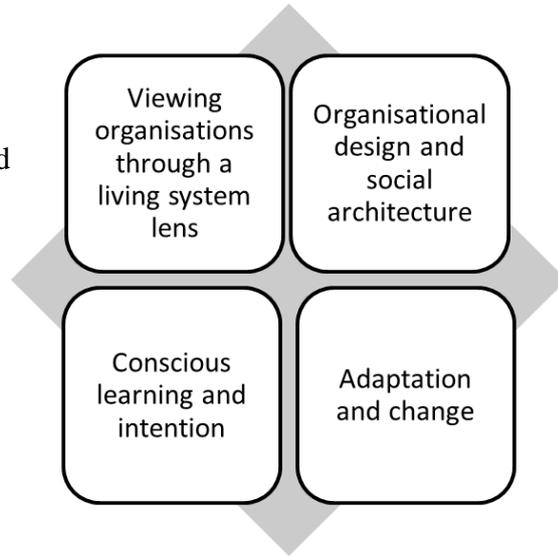
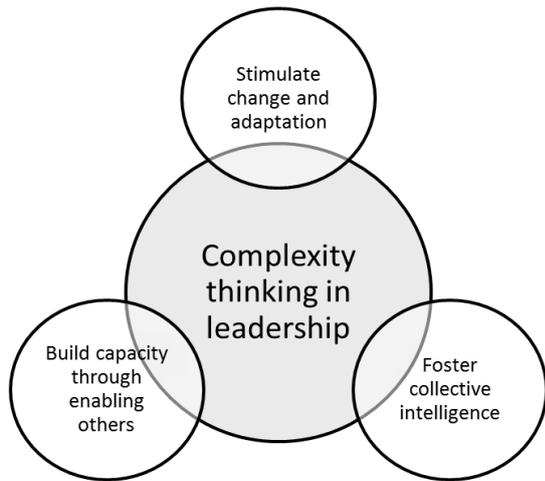
A high trust environment where staff are given the autonomy to self-manage and initiate input into what and how they do their work also promotes self-organisation. "Getting out of their (staff) way and offering what that they are asking for had created a level of trust and community that everyone talked about" (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 68). This autonomy also extends to permitting conflicting constraints to emerge and enabling staff to work through these constraints without interference from formal authorities.

Historically a major function of leadership has been to solve problems, to intervene when dilemmas arise or when individuals differ of task related activities. Such action can stifle interdependence and limit adaptive mechanisms. (McKelvey, 2008, p. 207)

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) suggest that we need to resist creating an atmosphere where workers bring their work problems to management and that we may need to coach administrative leaders circumspection regarding the 'resolution' of problems and task conflicts. This autonomy and expectation to take responsibility for working through issues can allow staff to "... refine or realign their information relative to the information of other colleagues, in ways that contribute to co-evolution of ideas such that new sometimes surprising information can emerge" (Kauffmann, 1993, p. 208).

2.9 A summative comment

This section has explored the field of complexity thinking and applied it to organisational development. This has included considerations of a “living systems lens”, organisational design and social architecture, conscious learning and intention, and adaptation/change.



It then focussed on implications for leaders including the need to stimulate change and adaptation, foster collective intelligence and build capacity through enabling others.

These models were explored and reflected on by the leaders in this project as documented in Chapter 6. Chapter 8 then takes these ideas further by considering the possibilities for creating a hybrid organisation.

In the next chapter we explore the processes used developing leaders and unpack some of the reasons for shifts in approaches which leads to a summary of recommendations.

CHAPTER 3: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

3.1 Chapter outline

Framing questions: What processes are most effective in developing leaders and what contribution can appreciative inquiry make to these processes?

This chapter begins with a brief review of leadership-development processes and summarises critique of the current emphasis on large-scale, short time-frame workshops and training events. Emerging shifts in leadership development approaches, including contextualised work-centred learning, ownership and personalisation, collective leadership capacity and finally measured efficacy and sustainability are then explored. A discussion of specific recommendations for the development of NGO leaders is followed by an exploration of the potential contribution of concepts such as learning organisations, professional learning communities and communities of practice.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is then introduced as a learning process that has the potential to address the aforementioned critique. This section of the chapter backgrounds the development of AI, presents the key ideas and assumptions underpinning this development, and examines AI's links to the field of positive psychology. The application of AI to organisational development and leadership development is explained, as are AI research processes and protocols. This section of the chapter leads into Chapter 4, which covers why and how AI was adopted as the research methodology for this project.

3.2 Leadership development processes

The increasing number of links in the research literature between the efficacy of leaders and the performance of organisations has led to a widespread upsurge in exploring ways to develop leaders within organisations (Robertson, 2005; Stoll, 2011). However, there is growing doubt that the prevalent focus of stand-alone leadership training workshops has a significant impact on leaders' behaviour and strategies (Rabin, 2013). The call for innovation in leadership-development processes is consequently growing louder. Innovation focused on ongoing action and reflection, where greater emphasis is given to the processes embedded in leaders' contexts and where learning is often peer based, is gaining particular attention (Petrie, 2011). I begin this section of the chapter by overviewing the range of leadership development strategies most commonly used to date.

3.2.1 Modes of development

A wide range of leadership development approaches are adopted including workshops, 360 degree feedback, mentoring, coaching, networks, job assignment and action learning. (Pinnington, 2011). This section gives an overview of five such approaches;

Post-graduate study

Many tertiary institutions have a range of qualifications centred on leadership. For example, at the Master's degree level, many business schools offer a Master of Business

Administration (MBA) that invariably has, as a core stream of leadership development. The University of Canterbury (UC) MBA, for instance, includes coursework on change leadership, leading self, and leading others. Some institutions offer Master's degrees with endorsements in educational leadership or health leadership (UC offers both of these). PhD-level qualifications in leadership are also common, with candidates specialising in researching and applying leadership thinking in a range of contexts.

Workshops

Generally, these are several hours to several day sessions that may be one-off stand-alone offerings or part of a series of workshops. Most large organisations have a learning and development function as part of their human resources (HR) services. These functions offer training for staff in a wide range of skills and knowledge relevant to that particular work setting (e.g., sales, technical skills, health and safety). In many cases, the training includes some focus on leadership development.

Workshops are often implemented by leadership consultancies that specialise in particular aspects and applications of leadership (D. Collins & Holton, 2004). These workshops are offered in the public domain and also in customised form within organisations where consultants provide input as part of organisations' respective learning and development functions.

Coaching and mentoring

It is well recognised that much of leaders' development is based on informal (and sometimes formal) reflection on their experiences (Petrie, 2011; Rabin, 2013). A coach or mentor is often adopted to facilitate this reflection process, meeting regularly one on one with the leader to create a dialogue based on reflection and learning (Robertson, 2005). This process typically includes leaders using a 360-degree feedback tool in order to receive information about their leadership from colleagues. The intention of these coaching conversations is to gain insights that can lead to behavioural changes (Walston, 2014). Coaching and mentoring is often provided by external consultants or by leaders' line managers or possibly another staff member attached to the HR department (Brookes, 2007).

Peer group processes

Peer group processes come under several names, including action learning groups, self-managed learning sets and solution-focussed reflecting teams (Cunningham, 1994, 2002). The emphasis in these processes is on bringing together a group of peers who commit to regularly meet one another and collectively reflect on their leadership (Gilligan, 1994). These meetings have a clear structure wherein leaders each articulates a scenario from his or her current practice and then calls on peers to ask him or her questions and provide feedforward as part of the agreed process.

Self-managed learning (SML), developed in the 1970s by Ian Cunningham "as a holistic, learner centred approach to development and learning" (Gilligan, 1994, p. 4), requires SML groups to put aside a pre-defined curriculum and to focus instead on the needs of the learner

and organisation. SML thus stresses the need for individuals to proactively take responsibility for their own learning. The major elements of an SML, according to Gilligan and Boddington (1995), include the following:

- A learning contract, which sets out individual and collective goals and agreed-on processes;
- A learning set, wherein six to seven individuals work in a similar way to that of a project team;
- A learning set advisor (i.e., a group facilitator); and
- Assessment that requires individuals to assess their own progress and learning. (p. 99)

These group processes usually see group members meeting for a day every four to six weeks over the long term, which can range from a minimum of six months to even years. Time frames can thus extend for as long as a group wants to meet. New content is rarely part of meetings; the emphasis is on peer reflection based on the group members' current experiences.

Web-based and blended approaches

The rapid increase in internet use and access to personalised digital devices has been accompanied by a move to support leadership development processes with web-based e-learning opportunities. Often described as blended learning, such programmes offer a combination of classroom-based training with some form of virtual learning, such as e-learning modules, webinars and virtual classroom events (Rabin, 2013). Hailey (2006) says organisations find these approaches attractive because they offer flexibility and cost-efficiency, and are responsive to digitally interconnected participant groups. He warns, however, that they “also commonly have high attrition rates” (p. 24). Successful use of blended approaches depends on regular feedback and intermittent face-to-face contact, as well as access to wider “communities of practice” (Wegner, 2008).

3.2.2 Comprehensive leadership development programmes

Increasingly, comprehensive leadership development programmes (LDPs) are emerging, so called because they comprise various mixes of the above strategies. LDPs such as these have “evolved over time from formal, structured, one-off training courses to more process-based, experiential programmes with an emphasis on personal development and self-directed learning” (Hailey, 2006, p. 18). This trend arose out of recognition that traditional one-off training courses offer little in the way of follow up and have a limited impact on leadership behaviour, whereas more holistic, self-learning programmes spread over time do have these advantages. Such programmes integrate workshops, 360-degree feedback, coaching and (sometimes) peer group processes into a programme, with the constituent elements customised to develop leaders specifically for an organisation's context.

When Petrie (2011), as part of his interviews with 30 major consultancies and tertiary institutions working alongside CEOs in a wide range of sectors, asked what leadership development methods each interviewee's organisation was using, he found the most commonly reported were training, job assignments, action learning, executive coaching, mentoring and 360-degree feedback (p. 10). For Hailey (2006), “... leadership development

isn't about a single training event—it is about a process that incorporates a range of activities” (p. 22). The ones he lists are:

- Coaching and mentoring;
- Self-assessment questionnaires;
- Psychometric testing;
- Journaling and video diarying;
- Cases and simulation exercises;
- Specialist workshops and seminars;
- Learning sets and peer group support; and
- Internships, attachments, secondments, and observation exercises (p. 22).

In general, a combination of HR staff and external consultants design and manage these activities. Universities also offer similar comprehensive LDPs, usually designing and offering them at the behest of a large funder wanting to develop capacity within a particular sector or field. A New Zealand example is the Ministry of Education's investment in three major programmes for school leaders—Aspiring Principals, First-Time Principals, and Experienced Principals (Dempster, Lovett, & Fluckiger, 2011).

3.2.3 Underlying frameworks

Learning organisations

The term 'learning organisation' was coined by Peter Senge in the 1960s. He defines learning organisations as those which continually expand “their ability to create their future” (Senge, 2002, p. 57). Adopting a learning organisation approach requires moving away from the notion that learning and development relies on an event or programme and accepting instead that learning and development is an embedded process involving the entire organisation in continuous improvement. A learning organisation is therefore one centred on continuous learning, where all staff have bought into this approach. Processes that support it are cycles of inquiry, design, trial, feedback and re-design. Such an organisation, according to Senge (2002), is one where

People continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. It's just not possible any longer to figure it out from the top, and have everyone else following the order of the 'grand strategist'. The organisations that will readily excel in the future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of the organisation. (p. 78)

Other authors lend support to this argument. Peck (1991), for example, considers that healthy organizations are those “in which all participants have a voice” (p. 62), while Rudman (1999) defines a learning organisation as one where people have opportunities to share their collective wisdom and build on it. Fullan (1993) succinctly explains the reasoning behind development of such an organisation: “For complex change, you need many people working insightfully on the solution and committing themselves to concentrated action together” (p. 34).

Professional learning communities

The professional learning community is an adaptation of Senge's learning organisation. People within such an organisation collectively learn in order to achieve a particular

performance output; in the case of education, this is generally student achievement. A *professional learning community* (PLC) usually includes all members of an organisation, while a *professional learning group* (PLG) is a small subset of the staff within an organisation.

The notion of professional learning communities (PLCs) is popular in a range of contexts, (Stoll et al., 2005). For example, within schools, an effective PLC is one that promotes and sustains the learning of all professionals in it and thereby achieves its main purpose of enhancing student learning (Stoll et al., 2005). DuFour (2004) describes PLCs as “a powerful collaboration created by a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice” (p. 8). The key aim is to enhance professional learning processes.

Communities of practice

Learning cannot be designed. Ultimately it belongs to the realm of experience and practice. It follows the negotiation of meaning; it moves on its own terms. It slips through the cracks; it creates its own cracks. Learning happens, design or no design. And yet there are few more urgent tasks than to design social architectures that foster learning. (Wegner, 2008, p. 225)

The thinking underpinning the above quote from Wegner (2008) has links with Senge’s work and is also linked to the discussion of social architecture in Section 2.6.2. The particular example of social architecture that contributes to fostering learning in all organisations with which Wegner is most associated is the community of practice, one which has characteristics similar to those of the professional learning community. However, whereas the PLC focuses on a relatively formal plan for whole organisation improvement, the community of practice is an entity that emerges informally as groups of people from both inside and across organisations, professions and even countries pursue shared enterprises over time (Wegner, 2008, p. 225). Although communities of practice tend to form spontaneously, and so “are less structured and more networked in nature than PLCs, they still derive from a conceptual architecture for learning” (Wegner, 2008, p. 231). This implies that their stakeholders can facilitate and shape them to a lesser or greater extent.

3.3 Emerging shifts in leadership development

As touched on in Section 1.2.2 concerns are being expressed that although many current leadership development practices were moderately effective, they lack the really compelling processes that were required for individuals of significant professional experience to be fully engaged in and therefore deeply impacted by. Gardner (1990) is the most scathing when he states; “In the mid-21st century, people will look back on our present leadership development practices as primitive” (p. xix).

The recent research from the Center for Creative Leadership in collaboration with Harvard University referred to earlier was premised on the following question: What will the future of leadership development look like? When reporting on this research, Petrie (2011) explained that its origins stemmed largely from doubts about the methods he and his colleagues had

been using to develop leaders. Despite organisations being “increasingly reliant on HR departments to build a leadership pipeline of managers capable of leading ‘creatively’ through turbulent times”, management teams were finding the leadership-development programs they were attending “insufficient to help them develop the capabilities to face the demands of their current role” (p. 10). In the report, Petrie synthesised the findings of extensive literature reviews and considered these in relation to the interview responses of a range of tertiary-sector individuals (education, business, law, government, psychology) and numerous private consultants who also participated in the study. All of them also reported finding their offerings insufficient for the challenges of “an increasingly complex and uncertain world” (2011, p. 5).

Hailey’s (2006) research explored the challenges of designing leadership development programmes appropriate to NGOs. He found that one of the challenges for those involved in such capacity-building work lies in designing interventions that enable NGO leaders to thrive in, not just cope with, the complex environment in which most of them operate. He considered that a successful LDP should be rooted in the practical experience and strategic reality of those participating:

NGO leaders often face extraordinary challenges both at a personal and organisational level. These challenges are demanding, and distinct from those faced by governments and the for profit sector. NGO leaders are often isolated and unsupported. There is talk of a leadership deficit, because of the shortage of talented leaders and the growth of the non-profit sector generally. As a result there is some urgency in attempts to develop a new generation of leaders, and to provide relevant support to existing and future leaders. Leadership development programmes designed for NGO leaders must as a consequence incorporate best practice and current experience rather than rehashing tired, traditional approaches to leadership development. (Hailey, 2006, p. 21)

The challenge of preparing leaders for an unpredictable and constantly shifting future context such as this has implications for the design of leadership development programmes. According to Petrie (2011), the increasingly complex, adaptive and unpredictable setting that leaders operate in means that LDP processes need to align with this individual and organisational complexity. A large number of the participants that Petrie interviewed (see above) supported his claim. They stated, for example, that the content-heavy training being used to develop leaders for the 21st century no longer has currency and should be abandoned. Organisations therefore need to experiment with new leadership-development approaches that “combine diverse ideas in new ways and [to] share these with others” (p. 7).

As explained in Section 1.2.3 Jackson suggests that leadership innovation should focus on “five high-yield issues that are attracting considerable interest from some of the more progressive leadership thinkers in the world” (p. 27). These prime areas for experimentation are: 1) Creating leadership practices fit for the age of complexity, 2) Fostering a willingness to tackle ‘wicked’ problems, 3) Seeking to develop leadership not just leaders, 4) Promoting intergroup, place-based leadership and 5) Celebrating leadership not just leaders (Jackson, 2012)

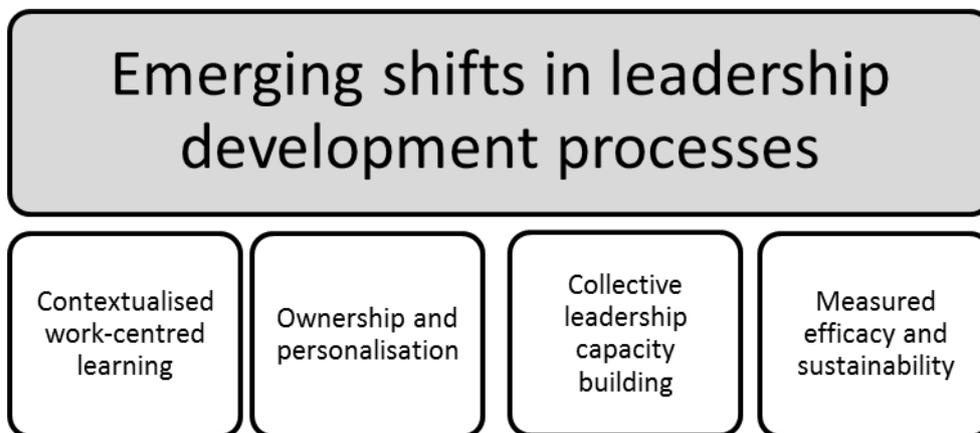
The first of these references the field of complexity leadership (see Chapter 2). Jackson (2012) states that New Zealand is in an ideal position to experiment with enabling leadership processes as found in the field of complexity leadership and asks that researchers address questions such as “Who is responsible for them? How and why do we make them happen? What do we do to encourage and promote them in the community, the organisation and the nation?” (p. 22). This links to the primary finding of this thesis and is elaborated on in detail in Chapter 6: Leadership actions in a complexity framework.

In a 2014 meta-analysis of leadership development entitled “*Advances in leader and leadership development – 25 years review*” highlighted that compared to the relatively long history of leadership research and theory, the systematic study of leadership development has a moderately short history (D. Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). They discuss future research directions to motivate and guide the study of leader and leadership development and state that “the field is replete with opportunities for researchers and theorists” (2014, p. 80).

The following section outlines several possible responses (see Figure 6) to these challenges including;

- Contextualised work-centred learning
- Ownership and personalisation
- Collective leadership capacity building
- Measured efficacy and sustainability

Figure 6: Emerging shifts in leadership development processes



3.3.1 Contextualised work-centred learning

This first identified response requires leadership learning to be centred on the challenges of each leader’s working experience, such that all components of the LDP inform, provoke and support leaders’ inquiry into their own practice. The 70-20-10 which emerged from 30 years of the Center for Creative Leadership’s ‘Lessons from Experience Research’, explored how executives learn, grow and change over the course of their careers (Rabin, 2013, p. 2). The findings of this study concluded that the leaders in the study learnt from three clusters of

experience: challenging assignments (70%), developmental relationships (20%) and coursework and training (10%). This low percentage attributed to course work and training creates some food for thought for those designing leadership development experiences.

Most organisations acknowledge that formal training alone can be limited in impact. Yet they continue to invest most of their training budgets in classroom events and eLearning assets. They struggle with how to systemize and evaluate a learning strategy that also includes workplace experiences and relationships. (Rabin, 2013, p. 2)

The key requirement, therefore, is to scaffold a reflection process around the critical leadership development domains of the workplace and collegial relationships. This can be achieved through a personalised inquiry focus where professional inquiry, critical reflection and action research become the day-to-day model adopted by the leader. According to Rabin (2013), coaching and action research/learning are the mechanisms by which the formal learning opportunities are ‘wrapped’ around each leader’s context. Rabin applauds action learning because it makes clear that learning cannot be separated from work. However, such learning still needs support in the form of direction from others, and it needs to be reflected on. He therefore advises “having a personal or team coach available to surface what ... might be missing, and working with teams that focus on peer learning as well as generating results” (Rabin, 2013, p. 7). Petrie (2011) argues that this change in focus from a learning event or programme to a focus on structured and supported reflective inquiry for individual leaders results in a much stronger focus on innovative leadership development approaches. He also positions it as a clear and effective departure “from reliance on stand-alone workshop based training” (Petrie, p. 11). “The current thinking suggests that leadership development should be seen as an emergent, experiential and bespoke process” (Hailey, 2006, p. 24).

Leadership development should focus on connecting the formal leadership development events to the ‘white-space’ between events (ie work context and everyday lives) (D. Day et al., 2014, p. 79). Perhaps the key to understanding emergent leadership development appears to be conceptualising it as a ‘learning journey’ that begins, for each leader, with identification of an inquiry that is personal to him or her. For leaders, the journey necessarily involves assessment of needs and goals, customized learning processes, real-time observation, feedback and dialogue, measured results, and goals and strategies that are refreshed throughout the learning process.

For the providers (whether internal or external) of leadership development, facilitating the success of these journeys requires ensuring the following. First, the organisation must take an active role in designing and implementing the learning process and making sure that is well bedded in. Second, the organisation must be able to successfully advocate the need for change. And, third, it must have a vested interest in and focus on internal capacity building to ensure the long-term sustainability of the learning approach and its outcomes.

We want to be more than training providers; we want to be the architects of organisations that exhibit high performance. (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2012, p. 2)

Blended learning (a combination of face-to-face and virtual learning) offers a second means of enhancing workplace-based learning. However, Rabin (2013) cautions that “blended

learning solutions often leave the critical 90% of leadership development experiences untouched” (p. 2). He therefore suggests an alternative definition of blended learning that combines *formal* learning with *informal* learning opportunities that are based on the workplace. Such learning, he says, has to go beyond mixing classroom and virtual training methods. He further explains informal learning as a process that firmly ties spontaneous, unstructured learner-driven experiences into the formal learning process. The task of training becomes less central because learning is actually embedded in the work environment; context thus forms a critical part of the learning.

Informal learning is haphazard and triggered by a range of naturally occurring phenomena. But you can support and enhance informal learning significantly. Leaders can engage in critical reflection to surface tacit knowledge. They can become proactive in understanding how they learn best and identifying additional opportunities for informal learning. (Rabin, 2013, p. 3)

3.3.2 Ownership and personalisation

Petrie (2011) is highly critical of traditional workshop-centric LDPs because they require leaders to hand over ownership of their development to others (as in *being sent* on a training programme). He likens workshop attendees to passengers, when they should be the drivers of their own reflective inquiry. Individuals must therefore be given autonomy to develop their own learning. However, just as learner drivers need structure and guidance when learning, leaders need the same support but this comes from a menu of options from which they can choose those that best customise and personalise their learning (Jansen, Conner, & Cammock, 2010). This is supported by Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee (2014, p. 79) who recommend a focus on personalised trajectories of development for leaders

The action-learning process must also be flexible and responsive to emerging learning outcomes that cannot be fully predicted during the design phase (e.g., establishing the menu options) of the process. In addition, feedback loops from both the learners and the external environment need to feed into the ongoing negotiated adaptation of the learning design (Jansen et al., 2010). As Jansen, Conner, and Cammock (2011) point out from their research, this flexibility results not only in robust leadership development and ownership of it but also ensures that changes in leaders’ beliefs and actions are fully contextualised and therefore more relevant, effective and sustainable over the long term (see Section 3.3.3 in this regard).

Petrie (2011) notes the growing demand for executive coaching and suggests that leaders value the principles inherent in coaching experiences primarily because these favour learning customised to each person: the leader, not the coach, chooses what to focus on; the coach guides/facilitates the process and is thus a “thinking partner not an expert” (Petrie, p. 17). This requires the ownership of leadership learning transferring from the organisation to the individual, which means that he or she can customise that learning to his or her development pathway (p. 6).

Huber (2011), having explored the range of strategies and processes that can contribute to leaders being professionally effective and competent, developed a model that emphasises a flow from theory to practice and from knowing to doing. The model also takes into account the importance of interplay among the following aspects:

- *Concrete experiences*: leaders want their development to be centred in practice so that it is relevant and meaningful (Dempster et al., 2011);
- *Courses*: these need to originate both externally and from within the organisation;
- *Self-study*: this refers to consideration of and reflection on a range of materials;
- *Collegial exchange*: this involves interactions among peers engaged in dialogue with one another, or more formal mentoring and coaching partnerships; and
- *Feedback and reflection*: this may be formal, consisting of, for example, performance appraisal and 360-degree tools as well as ongoing individual and peer reflection.

Dempster et al. (2011) support the tenets of this model but also emphasise that its full effectiveness relies on leaders having opportunity to select a customised development programme from a range of options.

The literature on adult learning supports this shift towards personalised LDPs. Robertson (2005), for example, concludes from her wealth of experience coaching leaders that adults are most likely to engage in and internalise learning when their learning process includes links to past experiences, involvement in decisions about learning, critical reflection, dialogue, personalised application, support from significant others, and interface with credible frameworks and models.

Evaluation data also suggest that LDPs are most successful when they allow participants to incorporate their own experiences, integrate an element of personal discovery, set aside time for personal reflection and gain exposure to new ideas and/or trends (Burgoyne & Williams, 2004). A leadership development programme should therefore be seen not as a stand-alone event but as an ongoing process of personal development that is fully integrated with other staff-development strategies (Hailey, 2006, p. 26).

Experience tells us that NGO leaders don't want or need traditional skill-based training programmes with fixed or finite structures. Instead they want flexible, personalised, process-based programmes that are geared to their own needs; programmes that are concerned with the strategic and operational issues they have to cope with on a daily basis. As a result there has been a move away from generic skill based traditional approaches to leadership being more bespoke, process based programmes designed to develop the untapped potential of individual leaders. (Hailey, 2006, p. 32)

LDPs based on these understandings typically offer a modularised mix of inputs that include “coaching, mentoring, personal reflection, diarying, learning sets and peer group support”. They also place strong emphasis on learning that is experiential and personalised (Petrie, 2011, p. 32). In essence, this type of LDP is a workplace *experience*-centric process where leaders initiate their own inquiry and action learning yet can draw on a range of supporting components throughout that process. Chapter 7 of this thesis explains how this focus was addressed during the current project.

3.3.3 Collective leadership capacity building

Another of Jackson's suggestions is to promote inter-group place-based leadership. This shifts the emphasis from improving the quality of leadership within existing teams, to a focus on growing the collective leadership capacity across a sector or region focused on specific issues in common (p. 25). He states that “collaboration and partnerships are often talked about, but rarely practiced in a full and sustainable way” (p. 25). This horizontal

collaborative leadership development (Jackson & Smolovic-Jones, 2012, p. 38) has the potential for developing leadership across an issue rather than an agency or department .

The art of leadership development in a complex environment is to enable a system to learn together. In other words the learning and the work are so closely related as to be inseparable (p. 38)

Day (2000) recommends that scholars and practitioners approach leadership development as a process that transcends but does not replace individual leadership development. This implies the need to broaden the development focus to look at collective leadership, network analysis, collectives and the overlap with organisational design” (D. Day et al., 2014, p. 79)

Jackson and Smolovic-Jones’s (2012) article on *Promoting better public services leadership: An appreciative inquiry* describes a scenario where “emphasis was placed not on individual heroic transformation but on a group of collective minds working together on a problem previously regarded as intractable” (p. 36). This networked and collaborative approach to leadership development connects with the concepts of professional learning communities and communities of practice discussed in Section 3.2.3 above.

3.3.4 Measured efficacy and sustainability

“One of the striking things that arises from a review of the research on leadership development is how little specific evidence there is that LDPs actually lead to enhanced individual performance or have any direct impact on organisational performance” (Hailey, 2006, p. 25).

Not surprisingly, organisations increasingly are demanding rigorous research-based evidence that they are receiving the desired, sustained benefits from their investment in LDPs (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Monitoring and evaluation are intrinsic to such research, however the calculation of return on leadership development investment is not widely attempted. (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010) Riggio and Mumford (2011) emphasize the importance of longitudinal designs and long-lens approaches to the study of leadership. Leadership development represents a dynamic process involving multiple interactions that persist over time. Hence the focus should be on linking process models with relevant outcome variables (D. Day et al., 2014, p. 79).

A highly recognised and utilised tool for evaluating the effectiveness of training programmes is called the Kirkpatrick Model after it was developed in 1959. (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2012). It consists of four levels of measurement, summarised in Figure 7 on the following page.

Levels 1 and 2 of the model measure the quality of the training and the degree to which it results in participants being able to transfer the knowledge and skills they acquire to their actual work. The purpose of Level 1, Reaction, is to build the satisfaction, engagement and relevance that make participants receptive to learning at the next level. Receptivity is generally gauged from participant feedback in ‘real time’, immediately after a training event. Level 2 learning focuses on measuring the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during the programme. Level 3, Behaviour, focuses on critical behaviours and ascertaining the required drivers of these behaviours through on-the-job learning. These behaviours are monitored, reinforced, encouraged and rewarded in order to maximize organisational results.

Level 1: Reaction	To what degree participants react favorably to the learning event
Level 2: Learning	To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills and attitudes based on their participation in the learning event
Level 3: Behavior	To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job
Level 4: Results	To what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of learning event(s) and subsequent reinforcement

Figure 7: The Kirkpatrick Model

The monitoring and evaluation process at this level requires a shift in role for learning and development providers (internal or external), in which they move away from being training deliverers towards being ongoing collaborative partners with leaders. Learning is thought of not in terms of a training event but of a learning package or journey that includes observations, feedback and dialogue.

At Level 4, Results, the impact on the organisation’s outcomes is measured so as to explicitly demonstrate the value of the training. In regard to this level, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2013) advise organisations to consider, right from the start of any learning initiative, the highest level result their organisation is charged with accomplishing: “This could be profitable sales, saving lives or computing data” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, p. 27). They adjure organisations to use this sort of Level 4 result as their target.

Brinkerhoff (2006), cited in Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2010), took this approach when he compared the Level 3 and 4 outcomes for two training models implemented in similar organisations. Model A focussed heavily on traditional workshop-type training while Model B focussed on a learning and development package and journey. Table 3.1 provides a summarised comparison of investment in time and money during the pre-, implemented- and post-programme phases, as well as the outcomes of this investment in terms of skill development and behavioural shifts among the trainees.

Table 3.1: Comparison of change outcomes with investment

	Training Model A	Training Model B
Percentage of total time/money invested in ...		
Pre-training	5	25
Design development and delivery	90	25
Post-training follow up	5	50
Percentage of trainees reporting change outcomes		
Did not try new skills	15	5
Tried new skills and failed to use them effectively	70	10
Achieved sustained new behaviours.	15	85

Clearly, Model B with its focus on needs analysis and ongoing interaction provided a much better ‘return’ on investment than Model A. Brinkerhoff’s findings also confirm the Kirkpatrick’s claim that leadership development programmes need to be ‘backward designed’, that is, starting with the organisation result that is desired and then converting that outcome to behavioural expectations (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010). Under this paradigm, learning (Level 2) is not the goal but rather the means to achieve the required outcome(s).

Leading indicators

Leading indicators are the outcomes of observations and measurements made over the short term. They let organisations know if critical behaviours are on track to create the desired positive impact on the specified outcomes (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2012). Also known as ‘early signs’, they essentially indicate if progress (of the desired kind) is being made. The Kirkpatrick’s point out that the monitoring process underpinning leading indicators is useful for keeping initiatives on track and for fine-tuning them while underway, as well as for reassuring stakeholders and motivating participants. Although leading indicators are specific to organisational settings, they typically relate to speed of innovation implementation, critical incidents, projects completed, employees’ engagement, individual goals, staff turnover and retention, unsolicited referrals, extent of programme participation, donations, and external stakeholder support (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2012, p. 27). Although, according to the Kirkpatrick’s, these leading indicators are always present in organisations; the majority of organisations do not monitor or capture them.

3.4 Appreciative inquiry

3.4.1 Rationale

In this section, I explore one specific approach to leadership development—appreciative inquiry (AI). I begin by giving an overview of AI’s roots in organisational development and its application in leadership development. I then expand on the key principles and practices of this approach. At the end of this section, I link the information in it to the study’s methodology section in Chapter 4, where I expand on the growing application of AI as a research methodology and provide the rationale for choosing it as the methodology for this project. The potential that AI has to respond effectively to the leadership development shifts and recommendations covered earlier in this current chapter comes in for particular consideration with respect to this choice.

3.4.2 Overview

. . . a fundamental pre-condition for all organisational change work, whether focused on process innovation, stakeholder relationships, business strategy, organisational culture, diversity, the capability to adapt and improve, or team effectiveness, is to shift the flow of ‘issue framing dialogues’ in the direction of health rather than pathology in order to shift the flow of dialogue from an analysis of malfunction to a holistic understanding of moments of optimal performance. The choice to focus on moments of optimal performance and our conscious use of inquiry are powerful interventions in and of themselves. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 33)

Appreciative inquiry (AI) grew out of work by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva at Case Western Reserve University in the United States during the 1980s. They originally developed the approach as a conflict-resolution process (Harkness, 2004). AI has since then most commonly been applied as an organisational capacity-building change process, and has also been applied to leadership development, community development and, more recently, as a research methodology.

AI, in its broadest sense, according to Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, and Yaeger (2000), is a systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system when it is most alive, effective and constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms. AI is grounded in several theories and explanations pertaining to the phenomenon of change. Of particular relevance here is the perspective of social constructionism—the idea that we create our individual ‘worlds’ through the conversations we have with one another (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

Harkness (2004) defines AI as “the cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them”(p. 49). She positions it as a process that helps us identify the best of what is happening in the present moment so that we can pursue what is possible in the future. Gergen (1999) claims that this emphasis on appreciation derives from the notion of the ‘appreciative eye’ in art, which maintains that beauty can be found within all works of art (p. 177).

As a process, AI is exploratory in nature and is directed towards positive change built on intentional learning and growth. The purpose of such inquiry is “the creation of generative theory, not so much the mapping or explanations of yesterday’s world, but anticipatory articulations of tomorrow’s possibilities” (Cooperrider et al., 2000, p. 34). For Watkins and Mohr (2001) “The AI process provides human systems with a way of inquiring into the past and present, seeking out these things that are life giving and affirming as a basis for creating images of a generative and creative future” (p. 9)

Reed (2004) also describes AI as a process where people get together to “tell stories of positive development in their work that they can build on” (p. 42). She presents the key features of AI as an engaged rather than a disengaged stance, collaborative inquiry, the sharing of stories and exploration of the past before moving to the future to generate desirable changes in workplaces. Walker and Carr-Stewart (2004) highlight the relevance of this process for leaders.

Those involved in organisational development, leadership development or appreciative research choose to give the positive their attention. They inquire of others about stories that have life giving forces. Having heard these stories, the participants in the inquiry work to locate the themes of these stories and from these stories create shared images of a preferred future, which then leads to designing ways to create that future. (p. 18)

3.4.3 Key principles and assumptions

The principles and assumptions underpinning AI have been thoroughly articulated in the literature (Hammond, 1998, p. 20). AI’s founding principle, positivity, derives from the field of positive psychology, which I briefly describe in the next section. AI’s key assumption

is based on the heliotropic hypothesis, which is that social/human systems evolve towards the most positive images they hold of themselves, towards what gives them life and energy, in much the same way that plants grow in the direction of the sun (Cooperrider et al., 2000). Applied to organisations, this hypothesis posits that organisations move in the direction of the topics they choose to ask questions about; the essential idea is that what we focus on becomes our reality.

AI's positive emphasis is evident in a further eight basic underpinning assumptions, articulated by Hammond (1998):

- In every society, organisation, or group, something works
- What we focus on becomes our reality
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities
- The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past
- It is important to value differences

The language we use creates our reality. (p. 20)

As mentioned above, AI is also grounded in a social constructivist paradigm. In its simplest form, social constructivism assumes that the language we use to describe our world is what creates that world. We therefore experience the world in line with the images we hold of it. The types of questions we ask determine the answers we receive, and transformation occurs from the moment we ask the first question. AI thus draws on the implicit power of language to create positive, inspiring questions that naturally lead individuals to critically view their experiences and to respond to them in powerful and life-changing ways (Harkness, 2004).

At the crux of AI is the choice we make by the first questions we ask. For example, traditionally an organisation wanting to heal the wounds of racism will inquire into instances of racism in the workplace with the idea that once a system is really clear on what racism looks and feels like and what causes it, it can be eliminated. Alternatively, using AI, the organisation can choose to inquire into stories of exceptionally good cross-race working relationships, discover the conditions present at those times, and create images of desirable relationships. AI acts on the theory that the very act of inquiry shifts the system in the direction of the inquiry by evoking anticipatory images created in the dialogue, positive inquiry leads to positive images. (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 29)

Reed (2004) claims that AI requires people to explore ideas about what is valuable in what they do and then to use the insights gained to work out ways to build for the future also highlights AI's links to social constructionism. Rather than focussing on trying to find the 'truth' in the sense of objective fact, AI compels us to socially construct our world in ways that point to useful ways forward. According to Walker and Carr-Stewart (2004), AI has become increasingly rooted in the values of an emerging postmodern paradigm, given that the process relies on people co-commissioning, co-creating and co-mingling meaning and actions in order to co-construct the future (p. 73).

3.4.4 Foundations in the field of positive psychology

Positive psychology has been described as “the science of excellence, flourishing and happiness, the science of optimal human functioning and experience, or equally the science of what makes life worth living” (Russell, 2010, p. 1). Russell states that positive psychology has three central areas of focus: positive emotions, positive individual traits and positive institutions. Its recent roots are widely attributed to the work of psychologist Martin Seligman, well known for his work on learned optimism. Seligman (1991) also recognised the preventative (in the sense of mental health issues) power of building strengths such as hope, perseverance, future-mindedness, interpersonal skills, courage, faith, and optimism (Russell, 2010). He eventually concluded that the field of psychology had focussed on just one of its three missions, namely healing mental illness, and so had neglected the other two—making people’s lives more productive and worthwhile, and realising human potential (Seligman, 2004).

Seligman urged colleagues working in psychology to focus on the science of well-being, not just dysfunction, and many took up his call. Russell (2010) for example, claims that the new branch of psychology that Seligman “fuelled has, over the last decade, produced a wide range of theory and research on subjects such as positive emotion, strengths, talents, virtues, and their purpose and use in human life” (p. 2).

Positive psychology approaches are also based on the heliotropic hypothesis described in Section 3.4.3 wherein social systems, people and organisations evolve towards the most positive images they hold of themselves. Positive psychology is today evident in a wide range of applications and settings, including the placebo effect (Watkins & Mohr, 2001), positive thinking (Cooperrider et al., 2000), the Pygmalion effect (Jesum, 1986; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978), positive deviancy (Pascale et al., 2010) and solution-focussed counselling (Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996).

3.4.5 Appreciative inquiry and organisational development

As indicated in Section 3.4.1, AI has been widely applied as a process facilitating organisational development and change. Hammond articulately describes the application of AI in organisations.

All my work is based on the assumption that everyone wants to feel important and make a contribution. I find that people are generally proud to belong to their organisation. That source of pride is often the most untapped natural resource within an organisation. People want the organisation to do purposeful work and they want to be a recognised part of it. Finding out why people are proud and excited to be there is an enormously wonderful process. This process engages all members of the organisation in a positive and productive manner and manages the continuity of the organisation. That is why when I choose a change model, I choose one that recognises and honours the human spirit. (Hammond, 1998, p. 50)

However, as Watkins and Mohr (2001) stress, AI is not just another organisational design (OD) tool. In the early days of directed organisational development, consultants were the outside experts who proposed courses of action for each organisation they were invited into. With the advent of OD as a discipline, behavioural scientists, who were expert not in

organisational behaviour but in the behaviour of people, introduced the idea that the people within an organisation are the ones best equipped to identify what needs to change and to formulate ways to produce that change.

Watkins and Mohr (2001) claim that AI provides organisations with a philosophy and orientation conducive to change of a kind that markedly reshapes the way in which organisations learn, design and develop, “in much the same way that process consultation reshaped the field of management consulting forty years ago” (p. 21). Change and inquiry are simultaneous activities within the AI process, so AI enables the people within organisations to constantly co-author those organisations’ ongoing stories (Cooperrider et al., 2000, p. 18).

Watkins and Mohr (2001) document consultants turning away from prescribing solutions and instead helping individuals in organisations develop their own solutions to the problems they identify. This approach is now known as ‘process consultation’ because the consultant typically sits in with a change team within an organisation and comments on the team members’ interpersonal and group-level inquiry and change processes. Process consultation can also work at the macro level. In this instance, the consultant provides a client organisation with the processes that enable all members of the organisation to co-create its future.

Because of its grounding in positive psychology, AI has access to positive psychology research tools, which provide organisations with very robust alternative options for pursuing transformational change. Watkins and Mohr (2001) give, as a simple example, inquiry that is based on problem-solving questions vs strengths-based questions. With the former type of question, an organisation might choose to ask: “What’s keeping us from being able to get our innovations to production faster?” With the latter, they might want to know what processes are present when, in “those exceptional moments[,] ... our new development process is working at the speed of light” (Watkins & Mohr, p. 33).

AI’s reliance on history, tradition and facts distinguishes it from other visioning methods in which imagination serves as the primary basis of the vision:

We take what we know and we talk about what could be. We stretch what we are to help us be more than what we have already been successful at. We envision a future that is a collage of the Bests. Because we have derived the future from reality, we know it can happen. We can see it, we know what it feels like, and we move to a collective collaborative view of where we are going. The set of prepositions is a living document which will change as new ideas and circumstances occur. (Hammond, 1998, p. 46)

AI also compels us to look for what works in an organisation. The tangible result of this inquiry is often a series of aspirational statements that describe where the organisation wants to be, based on the high moments of where it has been. Because such statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat the success (Hammond, 1998, p. 6).

3.4.6 The use of appreciative inquiry in leadership development

AI has been applied to leadership development in a range of settings. Its approach fits well with the recent shifts in leadership thinking outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis and the shifts in leadership development outlined in Section 3.3 of this chapter. About a decade ago, Clarke, Egan, Fletcher, and Ryan (2006) at the University of Winchester in the UK undertook a project designed to facilitate continuing professional development of science teachers. The intention behind the project, which the authors titled ‘Creating Case Studies of Practice through Appreciative Inquiry’, was to create a collaborative community of practice where the wider educational community could share and develop the outcomes of classroom research.

Clarke and her colleagues (2006) purposively introduced a non-linear model of action research stemming from their view that growth is frequently unpredictable: “If we create spaces for growth, many possibilities will open, possibilities which by their rich diversity can better suit the contexts where the innovations have to take place” (p. 415). As the researchers anticipated, the energy and enthusiasm liberated among the participating teachers motivated them to explore their worlds in unpredictable ways. However, the commonalities of experience and reflection among the teachers were such that the researchers could marshal these unities into four AI dimensions, which they termed creating space for growth, working with emergent purposes, action research as rhizomatic growth, and collaborative and collective action (Clarke et al., 2006, p. 407). Harkness (2004) found similar outcomes to those of Clarke and her colleagues when she introduced appreciative inquiry principles and practice to Christchurch College of Education (New Zealand) student teachers on teaching practice in early childhood centres.

Walker and Carr-Stewart’s (2004) project, carried out at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, and titled ‘Learning Leadership through Appreciative Inquiry’, saw 164 educational superintendents focussing on work environments and leadership learning perspectives. Among other methods, they used seven four-hour constructionist AI forums (67 participants in seven events). These included paired interviews, which involved the superintendents in face-to-face dialogue about educational leadership, sharing dreams about their most promising future, and offering provocative practices (p. 74). The types of questions the members of the pairs asked each other included the following:

- What do you value most about yourself, your work, your school district, the superintendents’ organisation and education in this province?
- What core factors give life to your work as an educator?
- What do you see going on in your work world that gives you hope?

The key themes that emerged from this part of the project all related, according to Walker and Carr-Stewart (2004), the superintendents’ expressed pleasure in developing teachers, building community capacity, having the privilege of providing leadership teams, having access to strong collegiality, having the freedom to make professional decisions, making a difference, caring for people, serving the needs of others and developing others to their fullest potential. The study stopped short of its AI-based action research potential by not moving

into using the themes as a basis from which to design the ongoing transformative stages of AI.

3.4.7 Appreciative inquiry processes and protocols

Proponents of AI have developed a number of processes and protocols to guide its implementation. However, what needs to be emphasised here is that the main guiding principles of AI—a positive focus and collaboration (as expanded on in Chapter 4)—underlie all of them. Reed (2004, p. 24) describes the typical AI process as evolving through four stages, which she articulates as:

- Discovery: appreciating what gives life to life—the best of ‘what is’;
- Dreaming: envisioning ‘what might be’;
- Designing: determining ‘what should be’; and
- Delivery: innovating and planning ‘what will be’.

Researchers also use the following alternative descriptions, provided by Branson (2004), of the four steps in the AI process:

- Initiate—choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
- Inquire— inquire into stories of life giving forces, locate themes that appear in these stories and select topics for further inquiry
- Imagine—create shared images for a preferred future
- Innovate— find innovative ways to create that future (p. 28)

Individuals engaged in AI adapt these steps to meet the contexts and constraints of their particular settings and to create protocols that guide the ongoing inquiry. Subsequent applications of AI often create even more innovative and context-specific adaptations. This type of emergent process occurred in this current research project and is elaborated on in Section 4.4.1.

The AI implementation protocol that any one individual or organisation creates must suit the purpose for which it is intended. The protocol is, in essence, an action plan that includes the following features. These features also serve as the steps that need to be taken to develop the protocol.

- Selecting the question to explore—organisations or communities must spend sufficient time to ensure that all members of those entities want to address the same matter and that the focus of the inquiry is clear and readily understood by everyone involved;
- Asking appreciative questions—participants identify and draw on their best learning from the past and then envision the best possibilities for the future;
- Collective sense-making—participants together explore the themes emerging from the appreciative interviews that they hold in common;
- Developing shared visions for the future—participants usually state these as if they are present (i.e., as if they were reality in, say, five years’ time) and frame them as provocative propositions or possibility statements;
- Drawing up detailed action plans—participants determine the steps they need to take to accomplish their shared visions.

Interestingly, the last two of these five aspects are similar to more conventional strategic planning protocols, which generally centre on operationalizing visions of the future. However, the key point of difference between strategic planning and AI is that AI begins with an exploration of past successes before projecting forwards to a preferred future (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

Questioning is a vital part of both the process and protocol of AI. Reed (2004), in fact, defines AI in terms of questioning. She states that AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential and that these questions must "evoke a real personal experience and narrative story that helps the participants to identify and draw on their best learning from the past". They must also allow participants "to go beyond the past to envision the best possibilities for the future" (p. 38).

AI questions are thus carefully crafted to evoke an emotional connection and engagement with an actual story from each participant's experiences. Each participant, having identified a story, pairs up with a colleague or peer and the two discuss their stories in turn. Both use a semi-structured interview to guide the process. An example of a statement used to elicit a story might be: "Describe a time when you were part of a team that had a high level of trust and respect among team members." Example questions might then include: "How was trust and respect communicated?" "What made it possible to establish trust in that group?" Hammond (1998) claims that when we ask people appreciative questions, we tap into matters that are very important to them. They will brush aside "politically correct" answers and give instead heartfelt, honest answers because we have asked "soulful questions" (p. 48).

While the range of questions and interview options that can be used during AI are many, AI researchers seem to agree that the most common and generally most powerful structure is to frame AI as a group process with a paired component, where peers interview each other, as just described. Excerpts from the participants' stories and examples are shared with everyone back in a large group. The members of the group then work together to extract common themes from the stories. Preskill and Catsambas (2006) conclude from their experiences with AI that people rarely experience difficulty "distilling the common themes from the stories and examples" (p. 87).

As discussed in Section 3.4.5, these themes are often synthesised into a series of positive statements phrased as if they are already occurring (through future projections), and these 'possibility statements' are grounded in the strengths and practices identified during the previous stages of the AI process. Cooperrider and colleagues (2000) consider that these statements can be framed as "What might be ..." or "What ought to be ..." propositions. The authors actually refer to them as "provocative propositions" because of the powerful images they create. In support of this notion, Walker and Carr-Stewart (2004) found from their study of AI that the processes involved led to identification of "provocative practices", which they deemed instrumental in accomplishing "strategic ambitions" (p. 72).

3.4.8 Broadening the scope from leadership development to research methodology

For the purposes of this doctoral study, I decided to broaden the AI approach by not only implementing AI as a process for developing the leaders involved but also for gathering (in reality creating) data on the efficacy of such a process when constructed over time. In the next chapter, I cover the research methodology used to ‘ground’ AI in this project and explain how I then implemented it in practice.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter outline

Framing questions: Why was appreciative inquiry chosen as the research approach and what underlying frameworks is it based on? How was the research project implemented and how were the results analysed?

This chapter focuses on the application of appreciative inquiry (AI) research methodology in this study. The rationale for using AI, its links to action research, and the guiding principles of such a design are also discussed. Formulation of the AI research protocol is then explained. Noted in particular is the fact that this protocol was created by adopting a broad AI framework focused on two key themes—positive focus and inclusivity. These themes influenced the research design, including the selection of participants, the timeline and phases of the project, the data sources and collection techniques designed, and the data analysis and interpretation process. A description of the flexibility and responsiveness of this research protocol follows. These attributes enabled the research process to morph in response to the participating leaders' feedback during the 14-months of the inquiry process. The final part of the chapter details ethical and research considerations and issues specific to the developed research methodology. A brief account is given of the effort to ensure the credibility of the large amount and varied types of data collected during the study data and to triangulate the multiple sources of data, rather than rely on single threads of data, in order to secure the trustworthiness of this information.

4.2 Research paradigm

This study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach to explore the beliefs, values and actions that characterise leadership in the NGO sector in Canterbury. While the research strategy of appreciative inquiry (AI) has emerged in the literature as a valid research methodology within the field of action research, it has been used in only a small range of leadership research projects (Clarke et al., 2006; Harkness, 2004; Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2004). As far as I am aware, it has not been implemented as a research methodology in New Zealand. Consequently, the research design and protocols for this study were created and fine-tuned throughout its duration. The utility and robustness of this adaptation came in for close ongoing monitoring, the outcomes of which are discussed in Chapter 7.

4.2.1 An interpretive approach

Leadership research from the 1950s to 1980s utilised predominantly quantitative methodologies, through the correlation of various measures (Cammock, Nilikant, & Dakin, 1995). More recently, commentators have called for a greater use of qualitative

methodologies when researching leadership (Gioia & Pitre, 1990) so as to gain in-depth insights into the nuances of leadership.

Cammock et al. (1995) noted, at the time they were writing, that most studies in the management field were located in the functionalist paradigm, that is, characterised by an objectivist view of the organisational world. This view is coloured by the assumption that effectiveness links directly to managers' behaviours and so can be quantifiably measured (p. 444). Although this approach has been highly popular, as indicated by the prevalence of objective output measures in studies of leader effectiveness, various commentators have questioned the sufficiency of its functionalist nature (i.e., as an instrument of social research) for two reasons.

First, the reliance on the subjective perceptions of leaders' colleagues via ratings and observations are likely to be contaminated by observational errors such as halo effect, leniency and bias (Schmidt, Ones, & Hunter, 1992). This concern has led to a focus on more objective measures of effectiveness, such as organisational performance results. It is here, however, that the second concern resides, namely that the objective approach required to gain measureable results can be attributed to a range of factors: "There is an inability to guarantee validity in functionalist studies because of confounding variables – i.e. a manager's performance, effort and ability does impact organisational outputs but so does the environmental context and the efforts of the staff in the organisation" (Cammock et al., 1995, p. 445).

An interpretative approach offers a very different view of inquiry from that of the functionalist approach. According to Cammock and colleagues (1995), the rationale for such an alternative lies in the "highly complex and contingent nature of managerial work" (p. 444). They suggest that a more complete view of social and organisational phenomena can be generated through multi-paradigmatic perspectives.

The interpretive approach to research draws on participants' language in order to ascribe meaning to their experiences. A sharp distinction is drawn between interpretation, which aims for subjective understanding, and functionalist approaches, which seek generalised explanations. An interpretive research process acknowledges the socially constructed realities of the participants (Burr, 1995). It suggests that each person will have a unique response to their experiences and will give unique responses to questions asked about those experiences. Essentially, according to Harkness, responses will be based on participants' individual assumptions, beliefs, values, prior experiences and current context.

A key characteristic of interpretive qualitative research methodologies is that researchers emphasise knowledge construction in order to examine meanings from participants' perspectives, with findings emerging from data analysis (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2004); in other words, the focus is on observing and documenting the processes by which humans together generate meaning (Gergen, 1991). This approach is based on the premise that organisation-based phenomena are socially constructed and sustained through a process of interaction among people (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2004). As such, the effectiveness of an

organisation is not so much an objective fact but an outcome that is socially constructed from, as Cammock et al. (1995, p. 446) put it, “the interactions of a manager in the course of achieving results through other people”.

Researchers employing interpretive approaches argue that the many dialogues and discourses that people have with one another shape their worlds. Through their conversations, people together selectively make sense of past and present experiences and create shared images of what they anticipate in the future: “We recognise that as people create meaning together, so do they sow the seeds of action; meaning and action are intertwined. As we generate meaning together we create the future” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 28).

The data-gathering methods widely used in interpretive studies include a range of qualitative tools, among them semi-structured and unstructured interviews, observations, document analyses, audit trails, member checks and triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Smith, 1992). Bogdan and Bilken (2007) point out that qualitative research procedures favour descriptive data and inductive analysis because this form of research relies on “theoretical assumptions where meaning and processes are crucial in understanding human behaviour” (p. 99) .

This interpretive approach was well suited to my research project because of my interest in exploring the self-reported *lived* experiences of NGO leaders and synthesising their perspectives and insights. The aim was not to find a valid leadership formula with proven transferability of application to other settings but to consider and present the key aspects of these leaders’ experiences so allowing other readers/leaders to reflect on them in the light of their own leadership experiences.

4.3 Research strategy: appreciative inquiry as action research

4.3.1 Defining appreciative inquiry research

During this project, AI was applied in two intertwined ways:

- 1) It acted as a framework for the design of a leadership development process for the NGO leaders participating in the study.
- 2) It served as the research tool adopted to document the impact of this process.

In their discussion of new inquiry-based methodologies such as AI and bricolage, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that these approaches could wholly reconstitute the conception and practice of research. They state that “If we abandon the traditional goal of research as the accumulation of products – static or frozen findings – and then replace it with the generation of communicative process, then a chief aim of research becomes that of establishing productive forms of relationship” (p. 1039).

In her book *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for change*, Reed (2004) describes how AI, which she positions as a form of practice developed for organisational development, can address the criteria governing robust research. She also explains how AI can transform and add to traditional research expectations. AI, she says, is appropriate for developmental situations and can provide a different perspective in terms of how research questions are

asked and answered. Because AI is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, it acknowledges that asking questions influences the individuals or groups involved in the inquiry in some way. The types of questions asked determine the answers received, and transformation occurs from the moment the first question is asked. AI thus draws on the implicit power of language to create positive and powerfully inspiring questions that naturally lead participants to view their experiences and to respond to them in powerful and life-changing ways (Harkness, 2004).

4.3.2 Links to action research

As mentioned above, AI as a research methodology has strong links to the field of action research (Reed, 2004). Action research has a complex history that contains many strands, emphases, nuances and variations. It developed in the 20th century, beginning with social psychologist Kurt Lewin, often referred to as one of the founding fathers of this form of research (Nilikant & Ramnarayan, 2006). He deemed as inadequate research ending up only as books. The task, he said, “is not merely to understand and interpret the world but to change it” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005, p. 226). Lewin pioneered his work in a variety of contexts (housing, employment, youth, community), with the overriding aim of conducting research dedicated to improving the life experiences of disadvantaged groups. (Cohen et al., 2005). The close links between planning and action and between theory and practice that Lewin described have led, according to Cohen and colleagues, to its widespread uptake by both academic and educational communities: it is the “combination of *action* and *research* [that] has contributed to its attraction” (p. 226) emphasis original). Somekh (1995) holds the same view maintaining that the essential facet of action research is its ability to bridge the gap between research and practice, thereby providing a means of overcoming the perceived failure of research to impact upon or improve practice.

Lewin’s original insights related to the importance of ensuring that those people most affected by decision-making are involved in that process. For Lewin, concepts such as participation in decisions and shared ownership of desired actions were the essential ingredients of this process (Adelman, 1993). His own research amply demonstrated that work could become more meaningful for people when they were involved in the participatory decision-making processes of their respective workplaces.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) define action research as “a form of collective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practice, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out” (p. 5). This definition not only emphasises the collective and participatory nature of action research but also confirms its key aim as informing and changing practice through understanding of the particular context in which that practice takes place.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1998, p. 10) argue that to do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically and more rigorously than one does in everyday life. McKernan (1991) describes a range of features of action research, including

the so-called self-reflective spiral, which represents an action research process based upon planning a change, implementing and observing the ensuing processes and consequences of the change, reflecting on those processes and consequences, and either re-planning/re-actioning the change or planning/auctioning a subsequent step or change (p. 17). This process is termed a spiral because it can be repeated any number of times throughout a research project. “The spiralling nature of the action research process means that one cycle of research and action can lead to another. Consequently, when one cycle ends, the project does not; it continues to address the original problem or to tackle a new dimension of the problem” (Cardno, 2003, p. 13).

4.3.3 Similarities and differences between appreciative inquiry and action research

These two research methodologies have many similarities. Reed (2004) considers the most obvious one to be the rejection of the long-held traditional research approach wherein the researcher is disengaged from the world he or she is researching. Both methods also involve similar processes according to Reed. These are:

- Collaborative development and design of research questions across the research setting;
- Iterative data collection and analysis; and
- The results of the analysis feeding back into the setting to stimulate change. (Reed, 2004, p. 64)

This cycle of data collection, analysis, feedback and change, potentially carried out several times, often becomes an integral part of the practice environment.

Another similarity is the crucial concept of engagement: the act of carrying out research has an intended and acknowledged effect in the world being researched. This feature contrasts with other models of research where it would be seen as contamination and therefore to be avoided or greatly minimised (Reed, 2004, p. 64). Both methods also develop a supportive and open relationship between researcher and participants, which allows participants to feel safe when discussing their work and developing strategies for taking that work “forward”.

The cyclical rather than linear model of change that both methodologies share moves research away from being simply an exercise centred on observing events to what Reason and Torbet (2001) call transformational social science where the role of research is also to facilitate change. The action research cycle—plan, act, observe and reflect (Cohen et al., 2005) also bears a strong resemblance to the four Ds of the AI process (discover, dream, design and deliver) (Cooperrider et al., 2000; Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

The main difference between AI and action research is that whereas the former begins with strengths and successes, the latter begins with problem solving, that is, identifying a problem and then working out how to solve it (Reed, 2004). Because of its philosophical basis within positive psychology, as discussed in Section 3.4.4, AI endeavours to find out more about the achievements and strengths of an individual or organisation, and then leverages these findings towards an expanded solution (Jansen et al., 2010). Reed’s (2004) ‘nutshell’ definition of AI encapsulates all of this thinking: “Appreciative inquiry focuses on

supporting people getting together to tell stories of positive development in their work that they can build on” (p. 42).

4.3.4 Considerations when adopting appreciative inquiry research

When considering AI as the research methodology to be used in this study, I first needed to weigh up the benefits and limitations of this approach.

Benefits

AI has credibility as a well-documented action research process that has been used successfully in a number of settings, including the NGO and community sectors (Reed, 2004). It also has the potential to generate rich data and enhance participants’ motivation to engage in the research (Hammond, 1998). It involves a continuous learning process (unlike one-off workshops) that I considered leaders could engage with over a period of time and customise to their particular needs as a learning community.

In addition, I anticipated that the participating leaders would view the nature of their AI focus groups and collaboration process as valuable professional development. AI would also provide them with insight into how they could develop learning communities within their own organisations. Furthermore, I knew from work by Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that AI had the potential to honour the cultural considerations associated with research methodology.

The “accentuation of the positive”, which is integral to AI, aligns well with the strengths-focused orientation of the field of positive psychology (Section 3.4.4), which has had a growing influence on research methods and research-informed practice across the human service sectors (Seligman, 2004). For example, the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa, a New Zealand Government framework for all work with young people in New Zealand, has as a central tenet the adoption of strength-based approaches (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). In related vein, AI had the potential to bypass the deficit focus and problem saturation that tends to be the reality for many NGO leaders, given their wide-ranging clients’ needs and the competitive funding environments they operate in (Morris, 2006; Paton et al., 2007).

Cautions

Reed (2004) addresses the concerns voiced by some researchers/commentators who contend that the strengths-based orientation of AI is potentially naive and idealistic, and that those using this methodology are very likely to ignore or suppress accounts of negative experiences. Walker and Carr-Stewart (2004), for example, caution against tipping the balance from hopefulness to unwarranted optimism. They claim that although “unfettered idealism does not help those in the trenches who know the realities of work lives . . . a healthy dose of stories that relate the examples of things going well can provide the substance for hope and evidence [that] those things not yet seen will come to be” (p. 78). In response to critique such as this, Reed (2004) emphasises AI’s link to the interpretive approach (see Section 4.2.1) and suggests that rather than focusing on trying to find the ‘truth’ in the sense of objective fact, a more useful and pragmatic approach is to look at how people socially

construct their world and, from there, provide a synthesis of this rich description as a tool for other leaders to use (p. 39).

The literature also contains some useful cautions about using AI as a methodology for a research project done in order to gain an academic award or degree (Reed, 2004). These cautions relate to three matters:

- The expectation for the student to work independently not collaboratively;
- The necessity for the research design to be planned in advance and discussed in a research proposal, making it potentially difficult to respond to the input of those participating in the inquiry; and
- The need to focus on abstract theory rather than take a practice based approach. (2004, p. 111)

I thought through these limitations at length in the early stages of this current project. The protocols and procedures set out in the following pages describe the efforts to address all these concerns.

4.4 Appreciative Inquiry research design and stages

In this section, I provide a summary account of the features and stages of the research design process, after which I provide greater detail about various aspects of the process, such as selection of the leaders who participated in it.

4.4.1 Summary overview

Establishing responsive and adaptive methods

AI research is commonly described as being ‘research *with*’ instead of ‘research *on*’ (Reed, 2004). It is designed so that those engaged in it can expect and allow for change in roles and relationships over time. It works to avoid either extreme of research design, that is, planned with precision prior to data collection or left as an unstructured process where the researcher simply responds to what emerges (Reed, 2004). Because AI’s interest is in exploring the previously unexplored, the shape of which cannot be predetermined, it needs to be responsive to particular settings and contexts in which the inquiry takes place.

Within the context of traditional research methods, the collaborative work at the heart of AI presents a challenge. The long-accepted criterion for research has been to carefully control a study so that it conforms to a predetermined plan—a plan that is based on an understanding of previous research, the articulation of research questions and choosing an accepted methodology to gather data that will help provide answers to those questions (Reed, 2004, p. 111).

AI is a fluid process. It involves the art of developing strategies for exploring various views and honouring them by allowing the investigation to proceed as it will. In this sense, the AI research process becomes more about data creation and data synthesis than about data collection (Reed, 2004). Information collected during the investigation is utilised and ‘re-used’ as an intrinsic part of the learning process, rather than taken away to be analysed. It therefore contributes to the developing knowledge of the research participants and to the growth of the professional learning community as a whole. Consequently, planning and

preparing for such a study must include methods for carefully documenting the generative experience (Reed, 2004, p. 134) by collecting feedback from those involved and allowing this feedback to determine the next steps in the inquiry (Jansen et al., 2010).

Adopting a broad AI framework built on positivity and inclusivity

As already noted, the two key broad themes of AI research methodology—a ‘positive focus’ and ‘inclusivity’—are the characteristics that distinguish it from other traditional research processes. The focus on positivity is not just a means of aiding understanding but of also supporting change. This is evident in the nature of the questions asked as part of the research process as these questions frame the discussions and conversations that are generated during the process. As I observed in Section 4.3.4, the strengths of such an approach include the opportunity to redress an emphasis on problems and deficits, as well as to promote support for and the participation of everyone involved in the inquiry. The risk of the positive approach, as also discussed above, is that the picture that emerges from the inquiry will be only a partial one and may not notice or avoid existing problems (Reed, 2004).

The principle of inclusivity means that AI sampling is purposeful and strategic; the aim is to include enough people to provide diverse views across a context. Inclusivity also results in ‘research participants’ becoming ‘research partners’ because their input into the data analysis and project adaptation increases throughout the project’s timeline. The positive aspect of inclusivity and its associated participant input resides primarily in the participants themselves creating ownership of the inquiry process. Ownership leads to a higher degree of commitment and emotional investment in the learning, thus enhancing the possibility of embedded learning and behaviour change emerging as a product of the research process. Inclusivity does risk a lack of clarity not only in the process but also in terms of coherence and continuity, especially if participant involvement is transient (i.e., if participants ‘come and go’).

Honouring an emerging and flexible research process

As articulated in Section 1.6.4, all learning experiences implemented in this project were informed by AI processes (Jansen et al., 2010). As the researcher, I took the role of project coordinator, in essence facilitating the learning and research process. Facilitation in this project means the framing of inquiry conversations, promotion of dialogue and the explicit use of reflective questions to encourage the participants to explore their own views fully. The project was originally framed with the four I-based steps of appreciative inquiry outlined in Section 3.4.7—initiate, inquire, imagine and innovate (Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

In November 2008, I facilitated an initial one-day focus group for the leaders who had agreed to participate in the inquiry. (The process used to ‘select’ these leaders and details about them are provided below in Section 4.4.3.) The focus for the group was the first two AI steps (initiate and inquire). The day began with some initial scene setting followed by ‘appreciative interviews’. These involved leaders in pairs interviewing each other for an hour about their leadership pathways, a peak leadership experience and the values and beliefs that

underpinned those experiences. Each pair summarised the content of their interviews and shared them with the full group.

The leaders then decided how best to conduct an inquiry about their leadership in action over the duration of the project. The range of strategies decided on included:

- Leadership learning sets (groups of three to four leaders meeting regularly);
- Communicating through email/conference calls and face-to-face meetings;
- An online web-based forum site;
- Input from leadership consultants; and
- Distribution and review of relevant literature.

The leaders scheduled these activities to take place throughout 2009. Within two months of their implementation, however, it was clear that while the “Four I’s” provided an effective overall structure, the research and learning processes needed to be less structured and rigid. We realised that the process needed to be flexible and responsive to the participants’ experience in the project. For example, the leaders found that they could not successfully or feasibly integrate all of these strategies into their busy schedules.

Consequently, we chose to reframe the project by retaining a focus on the two broad AI themes of positivity and inclusivity but moving away from the constraints of the 4 I’s. These two themes became the design principles for our whole AI approach. This broad philosophical stance enabled us to customise, with a high degree of responsivity, the added benefit of immense ‘buy in’ to the inquiry from the leaders as they co-constructed their own learning process.

In keeping with the theme of inclusivity, the participants evaluated the study as it progressed. The resultant feedback saw them progressively adapting the inquiry to maximise their learning. Inclusivity was also maximised by participants having ongoing input into all aspects of the project, including:

- The design of interview questions;
- Selection of participants;
- Direction of discussions;
- Choice of input from books and speakers;
- Analysis of data; and
- Ongoing modification of methodology.

The details of this emerging process are explained in the rest of this chapter, and the specific nature of the participants’ responses and resulting adaptation is discussed in Chapter 7. For example, the project time frame changed from 8 to 14 months, and the devised strategies were simplified and merged into a process comprising half-day focus-group sessions held every two months and facilitated by myself as project coordinator/facilitator.

Within these focus groups, 25 leaders experienced a range of processes such as peer interviews, group reflection on relevant research-based literature and input from leadership consultants, followed by collective sense-making and collaborative coding of emerging themes relating to notions of leadership and leadership practice. Data was recorded and

collected by use of dictaphone, video and participant journaling. These experiences allowed the participants to reflect on their own practices and experiences as leaders and to make connections between these reflections and their own organisational settings.

As mentioned above, all research process decisions in this project were informed by the intention to maximise the effectiveness of the NGO director group as a professional learning community. The development of a shared space, in which all the participants had input into the direction, process and outcomes of the project, was also a vital aspect of the collaborative nature of the project. For the participants, this inclusiveness had the potential to generate rich data and enhance their motivation through their 'buy in' of the process.

4.4.2 Setting the timeline and working through the research process stages

This section lays out the steps taken during implementation and execution of the project.

Stage 1: Initiation (July–November 2008)

This first stage involved initiating and bedding in the research project. It proceeded as follows:

- Presentation of my PhD Proposal to the staff and PhD students of the UC Management school where I was enrolled in for this PhD (requirement for PhD proposal)
- Preparation of the research proposal and human ethics application for submission to Human Ethics Committee.
- 'Initiate' phase: I sent out an initial scoping letter (Appendix 1) to elicit interest in the focus of inquiry and gain feedback on research questions and also to gain recommendations on leaders who would meet the criteria for participation in the study (see snowball sampling technique below).
- Invitation for leaders to join study (Appendix 2 and 3)
- Coordination and fine-tuning of AI methodology, sets up focus groups/bookings and confirms logistics of bringing leaders together

Stage 2: First focus group (November 2008)

As mentioned earlier, the first half-day focus group was implemented in November 2008. The structure of this focus group followed the AI model often known as the AI summit meeting:

- Inquire phase: The emphasis for the leaders during this phase was to tell stories of their positive leadership experiences. Pairs of participants interviewed each other using the supplementary questions listed in Appendix 4 of this thesis. Each pair recorded their key themes and then joined a whole-group discussion, during which the participants shared and collated the collective themes emerging from their stories. Taken together, these themes described the positive core of the leaders' leadership and provided images on which the leaders could build for the future.
- Imagine phase: Leaders next decided how they could best provide collaboration and accountability for one another over the eight months they would now spend

working on their selected leadership foci in their own workplaces (as described in Section 4.4.1 above). The options included ongoing face-to-face forums with guest speakers and facilitated reflection, leadership learning sets through email/conference calls or face-to-face meetings, online web-based interaction and input from leadership literature and resources. When each leader was asked to select which of these processes would suit them best, all of them selected, to my surprise, all of them.

I had ongoing liaison with participants as they collaborated on their leadership initiatives and prepared them for the next focus group in February 2009. I also completed some interviews with a wider group of NGO leaders from beyond Christchurch at this stage. Furthermore, during this time, I completed a broad literature review of leadership in profit and not-for-profit sectors. The review included comparisons of leadership literature pertaining to each sector. I distributed a range of this literature fortnightly to each participant to allow for reading and reflection between the focus groups. I also began to set up the external reference group (see Section 4.4.3 for details).

Stage 3: Second focus group (February 2009)

This focus group involved two activities. The first was a structured training session run by a leadership consultant colleague on positive leadership. He also provided a comparison of the notions of leadership and management. Participants then took part in discussion and reflection that was video recorded. During the session, I made available a wide range of leadership texts, which leaders could take away with them, read and then share their reviews of them at the next focus group meeting.

I introduced a one-pager technique (Mayo, Henson, & Smith, 2008b) that leaders could use to collate each participant's reflections on his or her learning/insights during the two focus group activities (this technique is discussed in detail in Section 4.4.3; see Appendix 5-7 for samples). All participant data from conversations, interviews and one-pagers were continually coded, themed and analysed by myself, ready to feed back into the next focus group session (see cyclic process discussed in Chapter 7). Extensive ensued during the session about the feasibility of continuing the wide range of processes that the leaders had opted for during the first focus group session (discussed in Section 4.4.1). The discussion concluded with the decision to reorganise and rationalise the protocols for the project by extending the time frame from 8 months to 14 months and focusing on half-day face-to-face forums every three to four months. The group then negotiated the dates on which focus groups sessions would be held during the rest of the year.

Stage 4: Third and fourth focus groups (July–September 2009)

These two meetings were both half-day sessions, and they followed the same structure:

- Input from an outside leadership 'expert', followed by recorded reflection;
- Participant checking of themed data from previous focus groups (i.e., collated interview and one-pager scripts for each leader to read, reflect on and discuss);

- Book reviews and literature reviews led by volunteers from within the group;
- Critical reflection as a group that included comparing the emerging findings with the wider body of literature; and
- Collating from each individual his or her reflections (one-pager technique) about each activity during the focus group (see Appendix 9 for a sample of these collations).

As noted earlier, all paired interviews in the previous focus groups were audio recorded, while group discussions were video recorded. Each of the interview conversations were then transcribed (by a professional transcriber), and a copy of the transcript given to each member of the pair for checking and editing (member checking) prior to the next focus group. Information gathered from group discussions and ‘one-pagers’ from previous focus groups were also distributed and discussed in subsequent focus groups.

This iterative process of reporting back analysis of the focus group data against leadership literature allowed for cross-checking and validating of the session findings. More particularly, it allowed participants to identify and interpret key points of difference or similarity and to identify key points of distinction regarding leading adolescent-focused NGOs in New Zealand. As sessions progressed, the group became more and more proactive in both sourcing and reading leadership material; they also became confident in critiquing leadership concepts—sifting and sorting sources in terms of those that were most relevant and useful for the NGO sector. I also prompted the leaders through the one-pagers during each focus group in an effort to help them reflect effectively on the impact of this research process on their own leadership principles and practice.

Stage 5: Fifth Focus Group (February 2010)

This final focus group included appreciative interviews in pairs, with preset questions based on their experiences during the leadership project over the previous 14 months (see Appendix 4 for the questions). By the time of this focus group, I had begun a second stage of data collection and analysis. This saw me collating all the sources of data (i.e., focus group transcripts, videos, one-pagers) and coding and analysing them for themes with the assistance of NVivo software. This software is widely used within universities and allows the researcher to code data and then collate it into themes in various stages (this process is described in detail below). I also began comparing the emerging themes from the focus group data with the findings and commentary in the extensive leadership literature.

At this time I also sent out a questionnaire (Appendix 10) to all participants so that they could cross-check the focus group information and freely and honestly express their thoughts about the process. Additionally, at 6-12 months after this focus group I conducted five follow-up interviews with individuals in the project who had expressed an interest in such a conversation. These interviews focussed on the sustained thinking and behavioural shifts that the leaders had noted.

Stage 6: Transition to 'LYNGO' and earthquake readiness

During the fifth focus group, I stated that although we had extended the project from 8 to 14 months, we would have to conclude the research project now because of the enormous volume of data that had been generated. However, the participants said that they did not want to stop meeting as a group and that we should plan to have a conversation to explore possible options.

This next meeting occurred in mid-2010 when we ascertained that there was sufficient interest to create an ongoing network of leaders. This discussion clarified the ongoing foci of meetings as continuing the peer learning, and considering what collective contribution the group could make across the NGO sector. The group also coined and adopted as their name, LYNGO (Leaders of Youth focused NGOs).

Ensuing discussions led to an emerging sense of the group's values and vision (see Appendix 9). They also selected three of their colleagues to take the lead in organising and facilitating the network. Around 12 months went by before LYNGO became a fully self-sustaining learning community; I maintained an advisory role throughout this time.

In September 2010, Christchurch experienced the first of its protracted series of 11,000 earthquakes. The LYNGO network, well positioned to act collectively, increased the intensity of its collaboration in response to the need for a coordinated response to work within the NGO sector. Some of the key meetings that occurred in the next 18 months are as follows:

- Post-September 2010 quake—immediate response to cross-sector needs;
- Post-February 2011 (most devastating) quake—support and connection;
- June and September 2011—coordinate initiatives;
- December 2011—official handover from me to three new facilitators (Mike, Anni and Josie);
- January and April 2012 focus groups—confirmation of self-sustaining network group, LYNGO.

I explore this transition from a research project to a self-sustaining professional network in more detail in Chapter 7 and 8.

4.4.3 A more detailed account of aspects of the research process***Selection of participants***

As stated in Chapter 1, the Christchurch NGO Leadership Project was initiated in 2008. Its target was to enhance leadership capacity in adolescent-focused NGOs operating in Christchurch through the creation of a professional learning community made up of managers in each of these organisations.

My original intention was to study a range of leaders of NGOs across New Zealand and to facilitate AI processes in perhaps two or three main centres. However, I soon realised that a more beneficial (including manageable) approach could be to concentrate the study in Canterbury and to open up the project to all managers of NGOs in the province working with adolescents. The project would therefore have the potential of gaining a saturated sample of

leaders that would allow me to gain a fuller appreciation of the reality of leadership in this sector.

I also realised that my second research question (the potential efficacy of AI as a leadership development process) would be greatly enhanced by including a wider range of participants in a smaller location (i.e., Canterbury) because the project could be framed as developing a professional learning community of leaders, not just a participant sample. This inclusion could also, I thought, contribute to increased collaboration across the sector and perhaps the creation of a sustainable long-term network of leaders in this sector.

I deliberately accessed known leader/manager networks and relationships to facilitate connections with others as part of a process known as snowball sampling (Babbie, 2004). I asked each person and organisation I approached to recommend people they knew who fitted the research criteria (outlined below). Babbie (2004) defines snowball sampling as “a non-probability sampling method often employed in field research whereby each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing” (p. 65). Reed (2004) specifies this method of sampling as a crucial component of AI.

I implemented this sampling method in two stages. First, I posted a letter (given in Appendix 1) to approximately 20 of the managers of Canterbury NGOs working with adolescents. I followed up these letters with phone calls and emails and had a strong response. The organisations I approached ranged in size from 20 to 80 people and covered a range of settings that included:

- Alternative education providers;
- Residential treatment centres;
- Whanau-based Māori youth development organisations;
- Counselling and therapy providers with specific foci;
- Youth justice programmes;
- Community development organisations; and
- Recreation providers and trainers.

In the letter, I broadly defined adolescents as young people between the ages of 13 and 25. The letter was not an invitation to join the project, but simply an invitation to help shape the project before I launched it. I therefore asked the letter recipients for feedback on the proposed research question and invited them to recommend managers and directors who fitted the following profile. (I also asked them to critique the profile criteria.) The participants I sought would therefore:

- Be working in adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury;
- Have five or more years’ experience in a leadership role (not necessarily within the current organisation); and
- Come from an organisation with a minimum of five staff and in existence for a minimum of five years.

I collated the recommendations I received in response to my letter and used this information, along with my professional knowledge of the sector, to finalise a list of leaders to approach

and officially invite onto the project. In essence, I opted for a saturated sample – that is, I invited all leaders in Canterbury who met the above criteria. (A list of the organisations that I approached and the participants brought into the project appears on page 10-11). In early October 2008, I officially invited 25 leaders to join the study. All but two accepted. One of these asked to join the group three months later due to what she had heard from the other leaders, this was at an early enough stage to not adversely affect the group dynamics. The other leader declined because of leaving his leadership position soon after the invitation.

‘Tweaking’ of main research questions

My initial approach to the organisations provided some very insightful information in response to my call for feedback. This commentary allowed me to fine-tune my main research questions. In particular, I strengthened the emphasis on the second research question (relating to determining how well AI suits group leadership development). It became clear to me at this stage that finding out how best to implement this process and adapt it to the needs of the leaders would be just as significant a contribution as the findings about the leaders’ values, beliefs and action (Research Question 1).

At this time I also arranged a phone interview with Professor Jan Reed in the United Kingdom, the author of *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change (2004)*, which had already strongly influenced my thinking about and plan to use AI as the research methodology. She confirmed that other similar research projects she was involved in had also focused equally on the learning process (Q. 2) and the content focus (Q. 1) of the research project itself. We also discussed how this style of research project requires more of participants than a single- phase ethnographic study (i.e., involving a simple interview and analysis process). It was therefore important that the leaders I invited to join the project were fully cognisant of the time commitment. However, the perception of the leaders who accepted the invitation was that the project held many potential benefits for them, including professional development, personal satisfaction, and an increase in individual, organisational and sector capacities. These outweighed the time factor.

Data sources and collection

As mentioned earlier, I used a multi-data source approach that included:

- Paired participant AI interviews during Focus Group 1 (x 25);
- Paired participant AI interviews during Focus Group 5 (x 20);
- Focus groups discussions of the full participant cohort (x 5);
- One-pager participant reflection collations (x 70);
- Follow-up interviews (x 6); and
- Supplementary interviews with NGO leaders outside Canterbury (x 7).

In addition to this large collection of video, audio and transcript material, there were posters created during several focus groups, book reviews undertaken by participants, emails from participants and my notes after each interaction with a participant and the group.

Paired participant AI interviews

During Focus Groups 1 and 5, participants (in pairs) interviewed each other for 30 minutes using a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 4). Each of these conversations was recorded by dictaphone and later transcribed.

Focus group discussions

The extensive discussions based on the material being considered during the focus groups were all recorded by dictaphone and transcribed. They were also recorded on video so that data could be attributed to particular leaders. Focus Group 1 discussion was based on reflections relating to the just-completed AI paired interviews. Focus Group 2 involved participants reading and commenting on the themes and quotes that I had extracted from their AI interviews during Focus Group 1. This method allowed for a collaborative form of member checking where participants' reflections increased in depth as they considered the previous reflections of their peers. This iterative process continued during all subsequent focus groups.

One-pagers

One-pagers are a form of concise writing that can be used in a number of ways in a research process. They are generated when key ideas begin to synthesise and connections are made to other learning (Mayo et al., 2008b). Except for limiting writing to one page, there are no structural rules for producing these missives. They do, however, fulfil a number of functions in the research process, as articulated by Mayo et al. (2008b).

- They are an effective communication tool because they help people clarify and share ideas and so build collective knowledge and understanding.
- They serve as a reflection tool for participants and researchers, thus providing them with opportunity to develop fresh insight and questions.
- They encourage the development of confidence in marshalling thoughts and writing them out with clarity, concision and purpose.
- They are an excellent way to respond to and capture key ideas from professional readings. (p. 241)

One-pagers differ from personal reflective journals in that they are a collaborative exercise. For Roberts, cited in Mayo et al. (2008a) their value resides in their “beginning a collaborative process of enquiry that is open-ended” (p. 11). In this sense, they allow research partners to welcome and absorb critique and to adjust and adapt thinking. Consequently, one-pagers must be underpinned by values of respect and integrity.

The use of one-pagers allowed me to capture the reflective thoughts of the leaders immediately after they had experienced a range of stimuli and input. At the end of each focus group, leaders had time to write individual one-pager reflections based on prompt questions arising out of the topics discussed during the session. Some of these prompt questions related to the content material being presented by an external source, while other questions focused on the process in which they were involved.

Follow-up interviews and supplementary interviews

I conducted several supplementary interviews with some NGO leaders outside of Christchurch to widen the experiences captured in the project. All interviews were recorded by dictaphone and transcribed. Some participants expressed an interest in a final interview as a follow-up of our discussions in the focus groups. As discussed earlier these occurred 6-12 months after the main project was completed.

Research journal and memos

The extensive range of data sources in this project made it essential for me to keep accurate records of the sources of the data as well as my own reflections on the emerging process. I kept a journal for recording all my planning, implementation and reflection on the various stages of the project. I also audio recorded my reflections and produced mind maps and flow charts, periodically transferring these into NVivo data analysis software as described in the next section. I prepared an agenda for each meeting with my research supervisors and wrote detailed minutes of these sessions, which I also forwarded to my supervisors. This process allowed me to retain my train of thought throughout the years of the inquiry. I also audio recorded or wrote down my reflections on discussions with my university colleagues, other doctoral students, and other leaders and consultants.

Data analysis and interpretation

Content analysis

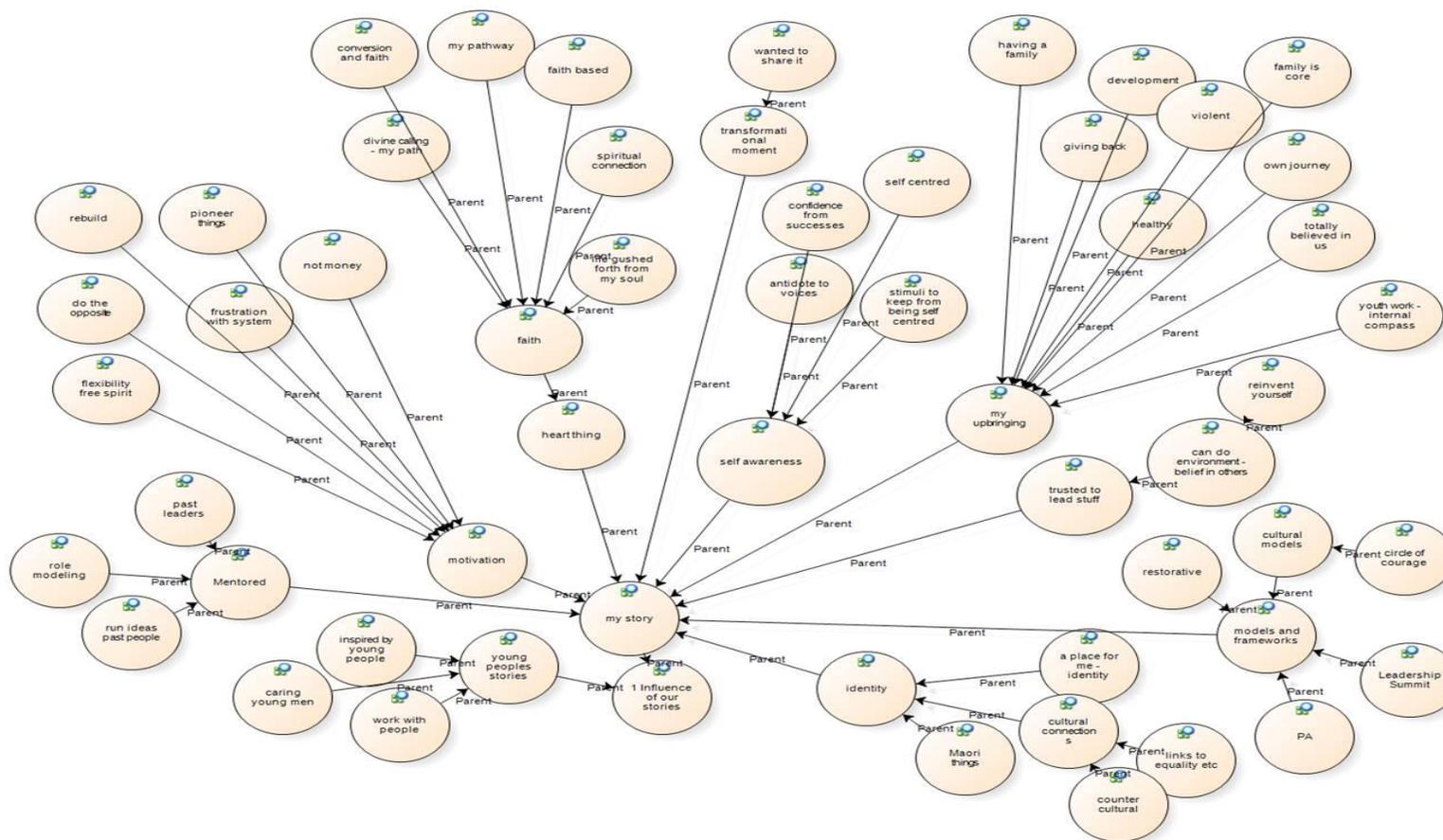
Content analysis was used to guide the ongoing iterative process of discussing, analysing and interpreting the research data generated continuously throughout the project. Content analysis involves use of an open coding technique, in which the researcher notes incidents in the data and applies codes to them as they emerge rather than trying to fit the data to a preconceived theory (Cohen et al., 2005). In other words, the qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), which requires him or her to move constantly between collecting data from all manner of sources, analysing it and then feeding that information back into the process to create more data. Sometimes, this process involves selectively coding the data in an effort to identify relationships between multiple groups of codes and thereby develop clustered concepts (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

Sample data analysis process

Here, I outline one example of the detailed process that I repeated many times over during the 14-months of the research project. Throughout this iterative process, I imported all information (as it was produced) from all data sources into NVivo software. More specifically, I first read each piece of imported data in detail and then coded it using what are known as 'tree nodes' within NVivo. This created the first layer of primary codes or categories. By doing this, I was able to link excerpts of the data to either a new code or category, or link each excerpt to one of the codes I had created in a previous part of the data analysis. I also wrote many memos and drew many mind maps at this stage, as I tried to make sense of the mass of data.

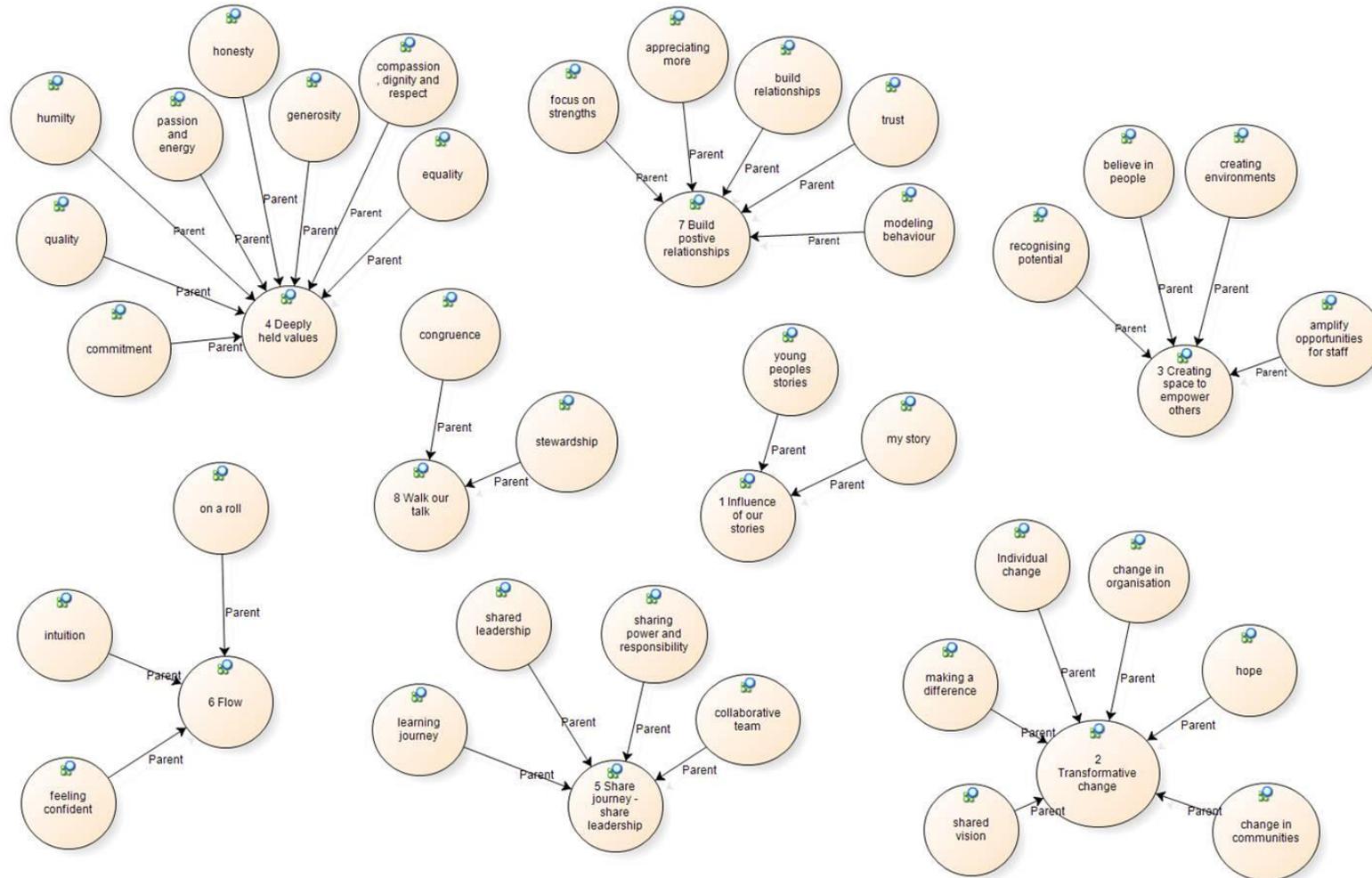
By now, I had over 500 codes at hand, which meant I had to move to an iterative process of aggregating or ‘coding the codes’ into a lower number of sub-themes. As evident in Figure 8, I was then able to summarise from 3 to 12 (sometimes more) codes under one sub-theme. NVivo’s particular usefulness is that it enables the researcher to produce and print out visual overview models such as the one in Figure 8, and to use it to gain, reflect on and modify the main themes emerging over the course of the research. The alignment of this iterative data analysis process with the overall AI process is obvious. Eventually, I got to a point where I had coded and recoded sufficient times to bring to the fore the key themes, separated into two groups—one for each of the two research questions (Figure 9). Using this iterative approach also meant that I was triangulating each of the themes from the multiple data sources.

Figure 8: Model generated from NVivo software depicting primary coding of data grouped into sub-themes and then into main themes, using Nvivo software



Note: My story in the centre of this diagram is the main theme connecting all codes on model.

Figure 9: Model generated from NVivo software depicting sub-themes further aggregated to create main themes



Note: The central theme of ‘my story’ from Figure 4.1 is now just one node under the theme ‘influence of our stories’, which is one of the eight main themes derived from the data.

Collective member checking

Another aspect of the data analysis that added complexity to the process yet produced rich information was an adapted form of collective member checking. This method saw me giving my collated codes and sub-themes (as produced at the time) to the leaders in Focus Groups 3 and 4 to read and to reflect on them relative to their colleagues' data from the AI interviews (discussed in Section 4.4.2. above). This approach was essential in terms of adherence to the AI principle of inclusivity and collaboration because it enabled the leaders to work alongside me as research collaborators analysing the data and identifying the themes. The process was also vital for enabling participants to engage at a deep level with their own stories and those of their peers and so learn from one another throughout the project rather than from 'imposed' insights gathered together in a research report at the end of the project (see Appendix 8 for sample).

As with the other forms of data, such as the interview themes and quotes, I asked the research participants to reflect on the one-pagers as part of the collective, collaborative data analysis and checking process. This additional input added to the cyclic process in terms of external input/stimuli being followed by reflection that became internal input/stimuli and reflection, and so on. It also resulted in another layer of data that again was coded and overlaid on the initial codes and sub-themes. Mind-mapping of these sub-themes again allowed me to see cross-connections in the data that I had not been able to identify earlier.

After each bout of collective member checking, I asked the participants to reflect on the process itself by writing one-pagers about it. This, too, became primary data. As I discuss in Chapter 7, the leaders' continual sharing of stories and reflective thought with one another became a major contributing factor to their engagement with and commitment to this collective learning community of which they were a part.

External reference group

I took the cyclical collective member checking process one step further by setting up an external reference group during the data collection and creation phase. I asked eight work colleagues if they would be interested in meeting three or four times with a view to providing some ongoing reflective thought on the data and themes as they emerged and six agreed to do so. These meetings involved wide-ranging discussion about the primary source material that I sent out to them before each meeting. They also agreed to have their discussions recorded so that their reflections could become primary data. These group meetings were also supplemented by many one-on-one conversations with colleagues and interested others that allowed me to reflect even more deeply on the value of the AI process and the insights being gained from it.

Literature collection, storage and analysis

The iterative process of creating nodes in NVivo also proved very useful when it came to constructing my literature review. This process involved the following steps:

- Sourcing literature, reading it and writing memos on key themes, with these including quotes from the literature itself as well as my reflective thoughts;
- Importing these memos into NVivo as primary source data;
- Coding these memos across a wide range of leadership topics; and
- Printing out these literature codes and iteratively aggregating them down into collective literature themes that correlated with the key themes from analysis of the participant data.

In time, these aggregated themes translated into the content in Chapters 5 to 7 of this thesis.

4.5 Other research-design-based considerations

4.5.1 Ethical issues and ethical approval for the study

The application that I sent to the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee in September 2008 set out how I would ensure my study met the ethical considerations common to most qualitative research. I stated that I would:

- Use both emails and letters to inform potential participants of the purpose and aims of the inquiry along with requirements such as approximate dates of meetings, time inputs and work that might be required during each stage of the inquiry process.
- Ensure that all potential participants would be asked to give (by signing a consent form) informed consent to be involved in the project and to let them know that they could withdraw from the study at any stage.
- Treat all information obtained from participants confidentially. Although interviews and focus groups were recorded, participants were reassured that these recordings would be destroyed at the end of the study.
- Inform participants that research findings would be fed back to participants for member checking. However, this information would be in the form of a summary of the themes of each initial AI interview rather than the full interview transcripts.
- Assuring participants that anonymity would be further secured by only accumulated information being published; no single participant or group would be identified. (However, participants did subsequently agree to have their actual names and organisations acknowledged in the study but not have these attributed to specific quotes in the data.)
- Participants were informed that research findings would be fed back to participants for member checking. This information, however, included only a summary of the themes of each of the initial AI interview rather than the full interview transcript of it.

4.5.2 Limitations specific to the research approach

I also addressed some other risks specific to this project. Using focus groups had the potential to compromise the validity of the data in terms of ‘group think’ or ‘confirmation bias’. In group situations, some people may not speak up if they find their views are contrary to the views of the majority of the group members.

There was also the risk that participants might be tempted to share only confirming information about the effectiveness of the research process because of my vested interest in a successful outcome. Morris (2006) referred to this when reporting on her study of NGOs in Australia. It was possible, she said, in relation to the validity of her findings, “that the researcher’s voice drowned out the participants’ voices” (p. 123). She also thought that limited disclosure might have occurred due to some of the participants already knowing her. However, Morris suggested that this risk was outweighed by the benefits of documenting knowledge about the sector and facilitating the ability of its members to build collaborative research conversations. In addition, Morris used predominantly focus groups facilitated by herself, whereas the peer interview nature of AI avoided this risk as I was not present at the interviews.

The collaborative nature of the AI process means that a lot of data derived from an individual could be disclosed to the wider group. I therefore had to pay strict heed to ensuring confidentiality and paying careful attention to the creation of a positive, supportive and safe peer learning community characterised by mutual trust.

A further, more practical risk was that in allowing participants to become co-researchers, the richness of participants’ stories could be lost as peers reflected on those stories. For example, the use of peer interviews in the AI format during Focus Groups 1 and 5 ran the risk of losing in-depth data because the process required each partner to summarise some aspect about what each person shared.

To manage these potential risks, I put the following procedures in place:

- I recorded each dyad and group discussion so that even though participants created themes from what they heard, I could also transcribe and allocate a theme to each interview and conversation to maintain the fullness and thus the integrity of the data.
- I provided each participant with a copy of the complete transcript of his or her AI interview so that he or she could cross-check for accuracy of detail and meaning (individual member checking).
- During the collective member checking process, I provided the group with only key quotes and themes not full transcripts of each participant’s reflections. This approach allowed me to filter material that would not be appropriate to share with the wider group. I made these decisions in consultation with the relevant participant.
- I gave each participant a follow-up questionnaire so that they could anonymously state their views on the topics raised in the focus groups.
- I set up (as described earlier) an external reference group that regularly met with me throughout the data collection and analysis. The primary purpose of this group was to have its members question my assumptions and provide me with other perspectives on and interpretation of the emerging findings.

4.5.3 Validity and trustworthiness of the data and findings

The issue of authenticity of the data obtained and the conclusions derived from it is as important a consideration for qualitative research as it is for quantitative research (Doherty, 2002; Hill, 2011). Validity in this form of research relates to the appropriateness of the methodology with regards to the intention of the study. This aspect is one I discussed extensively in Chapters 3 and 4.

However, in the type of research I undertook, the issue of ‘trustworthiness’ is the more singular consideration (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). This aspect relates to the credibility of the data collected and evidence of how this collection occurred (Bass, 1990). Qualitative researchers must be able to show that they have fairly represented multiple constructions (Sherlock & Nathan, 2007). Trustworthiness is addressed from two perspectives. The first of these is dependability—the likelihood that *credible* findings will be produced (Perry, 2011). During this project, I strove to ensure credibility through:

- Prolonged engagement and data collection with the participants over more than 14 months;
- Persistent observation over the same period;
- Triangulation of data across multiple sources;
- Member checking during the project; and
- Individual ‘debriefing’ interviews with and surveys of participants after completion of the project.

The second consideration is confirmability—providing evidence of rigour throughout the research process (Perry, 2011). I addressed this by maintaining an accurate audit trail of all interview recordings, transcripts, one-pagers and focus group artefacts. I also kept a research journal, wrote memos and documented (in the form of minutes) my meetings with my supervisors. In addition, the external reference group served to maintain authentic critique of the developing data analysis and findings. The prolonged length of time spent in the project as well as the triangulation of sources mentioned in the previous paragraph also contributed to the project’s confirmability.

SECTION 2: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 5: LEADERSHIP BELIEFS, VALUES AND INFLUENCES

5.1 Chapter outline

Framing question: What motivates and influences these NGO leaders?

This first of three results and discussion chapters begins by exploring the NGO context or ‘third sector’ in which these leaders are involved. The chapter then focuses on the findings relating to the first part of Research Question 1:

What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?

The similarities and differences between the leaders in regard to their personal moral purpose and organisational vision are discussed, as are their core values. Next, the factors and drivers that have influenced the leadership of these leaders are documented and discussed. These include significant life circumstances, people and places. Finally, the journeys of these leaders as they moved into their leadership roles are described and discussed under the themes of calling, alignment and flow.

NOTE: Each of the following three chapters provides direct quotes from the 20 leaders in this project. Each leader is identified with the letter L followed by a unique number. The leaders names are provided at the beginning of the thesis but their quotes are not correlated with their names.

5.2 Characteristics of the NGO context

5.2.1 Comparing the NGO sector and the business sector

As discussed in Chapter 1, the rationale for undertaking this study with this group of leaders was that even though the leadership present in this sector is often underestimated and undervalued, it may exhibit qualities that other leaders and leadership development processes are seeking to develop. The basis for this argument was partly due to the anecdotal experiences of many similar leaders, operating in contexts that seek to influence crucial community and social justice concerns. These organisations tend to operate with limited and unpredictable funding, but with a highly passionate workforce whom the leaders and managers cannot pay what they are worth.

In such a context, I assumed that leaders would have to lead well in order to engage and motivate staff through collective vision and values, to leverage extremely well-developed interpersonal and team-building skills, and to navigate treacherous funding environments. The only other option is failure of their organisations through low performance and staff turnover. In essence, the realities of the NGO sector make for leaders having to develop powerful leadership qualities while standing on a ‘burning platform’ (See Section 2.7.2).

The leaders in this study held a range of views about the quality of leadership prevalent in the NGO sector. Several initially believed that, compared to their business counterparts, NGOs in the main have inferior organisational processes and leadership practices.

Because a lot of NGOs are good-hearted people, there is a lot of the organisation which is not very functional, split between governance and management. And they don't have a good financial background, they don't have good structures in place, and without that you actually can't do the front-end stuff. (L 10)

I think our organisation still has a bit too much of a casual approach for the size of the organisation with 140 staff. We actually should be incredibly well planned and have really good processes in place, and often we're not as good as we could be . . . we need really good systems in place to ensure the staff are aware of what's happening. (L 18)

Contributing to this perceived inferiority was recognition by some leaders that their leadership was based largely on experience in the field rather than grounded in broader, well-tested leadership frameworks.

So I realised I didn't actually have any concept of frameworks in leadership, other than what I'd seen, which was mostly bad leadership. (L 10)

Other leaders, however, were curious to explore the possibility that exemplary leadership, such as in the area of innovation, might well be occurring in the NGO sector, and could offer exemplars that traditional business organisations could use and emulate.

I have been reading this material around change management and transitions from an Australian university. It talks a lot about the innovative thinking that occurs within the NGO sector. Perhaps a leader that can engage a range of volunteers is a lot more skilled than a leader of industry. (L 5)

I had some fair ideas about what I wanted to do, but not actually what makes good leadership. And it was actually reading Collins' book; it actually got me thinking about models, how I've always been dubious about the idea of leadership; the business approach is not quite what I'm meaning, but a more rigorous approach to the NGO sector. (L 10)

The book that Leader 10 refers to is Jim Collins' *Good to Great in the Social Sectors* (2005); see also Section 1.2). He maintains that leadership in this sector has the potential to make a unique contribution to the field of leadership, with understanding gained transferable back to other sectors.

The ability to cut it with the corporate level, on whatever measures they are using.

We won an award at the Canterbury business awards; organisations that perform well in the business sense ... contribution to community, sustainability, internal processes etc. It was great for the credibility of our agency, to stack up with others. Sometimes social service agencies are not always great organisations, and some can be very fluffy and fall over. It's about drawing a line in the sand around credibility for others to see: the ability to cut it on the corporate level, on whatever measures they are using. (L 11)

Some say the path to greatness is to be more like a business, but perhaps actually the business sector might look and say, "Hey, here's an organisation that works very well. Why does it?" (L 4)

Leaders also identified that the values in their organisation made them distinctive from many other organisations, and again held the implication that these were something missing in many traditional business settings.

It's interesting in terms of values. Our bottom line is people and values, a really big point of difference for us compared to other organisations. (L 4)

The following subsections explore some characteristics of the NGO sector that the leaders recognised as benefits, difficulties and sometimes simultaneously both. Each of these, the leaders concluded, had the potential to inform wider leadership and management thinking and practice.

Long-standing in community—intergenerational impact

Many NGO organisations are well embedded in their communities and have a history of working with local people over extended lengths of time.

We're happy since, without sounding like a 'blow hard', ... [name of NGO] has a very good reputation in the community, and I think that is a result of the good people here. Wonderful people, doing a wonderful job in the community, and we are long standing. We've seen groups and organisations come and go, people come and go. (L 20)

Taking this idea one step further, leaders observed that many NGOs have staff that come from the community they are working in, and a number of them employ staff who have been clients of the organisations at an earlier time. They therefore have the advantage of knowing the organisation's operations and values at a 'grassroots' level.

We have four previous clients that are now staff members, and they're working with young people and they're just amazing youth workers. We haven't intentionally led them into a leadership role, but I think it's happened quite naturally, I think it's been their journey. (L 12)

It's been quite an evolving organisation, so everyone has tended to rise up into leadership positions rather than come in from elsewhere, and that's something that's reflected across the country, and most of our leadership is indigenous to that organisation, yeah, so I sort of came up through. (L 5)

This ability to source staff who are themselves members of the community that an organisation is working with has the result of positioning the organisation in a much more developmental position than many government agencies tasked with similar foci. It also offers a credible role model for those that the organisation is seeking to work alongside.

Need to juggle financial and accountability tensions

Leaders spoke about the ever present pressure within their role to raise enough funds to adequately run a sustainable organisation. This need often created a tension between meeting staff and client needs while managing a tight budget. They spoke about the frustration of not being able to pay people what they deserve.

That's the calling. Because quite often we don't have the money, you know, so people with skills and qualifications go elsewhere and get a lot more money. So what do we offer? We can offer you, I don't know, a T-shirt once a year? A sweatshirt? And, you know, a good place to work. Our commitment is to that positive environment; hey we're not perfect, too. We have our rarururu (depressed) days and what not, but I think generally, you know, we do well. And if I hear any sort of unrest or a little bit of backward vibe, I'll jump on it straight away. (L 20)

As best you can, you want to meet needs, but it creates all those problems of what it's going to cost the organisation. A lot of decisions are made that are financially based, but that's a survival mechanism in itself for a non-profit organisation; you have to do that or you go backwards. (L 23)

Some recognised that while this financial pressure is not unique to NGOs, their ability to influence the funding sources is lower than that of their business counterparts.

I think we're no different from the business sector; the same tension does exist, although it's not so explicit. But it is there, and I'm sure that's being managed by [business sector] administrators at a higher level, and so people at the grassroots don't necessarily need to see some of those tensions, but they exist. (L 23)

Leaders also described the unpredictability of their financial setting.

The government paradigm and economic environment we are in; the perception is there is a whole lot of fat out there in the system, government sector and indirectly NGOs. They want us to try and cut back. [The] financial pressure coming right down reduces opportunities for innovation and emergence—unless leader can be very creative in doing that. (L 10)

We have targets for staff re number of clients they work with; all has to add up. I don't want that to become total focus. It's a real balancing act. (L 10)

The associated need to provide the government with compliance and measurement data to provide proof of meeting government policy-based targets created a tension between responding to those demands and realising the services the leaders wanted (saw necessary) to provide their communities. Leaders saw tension as potentially compromising their preferred leadership styles. They also saw government effort to bring neo-liberal economic principles of competition to the NGO sector as a particularly negative aspect in this regard. Government funders, they thought, were trying to gain efficiencies in delivery through competition, while on the other hand promoting collaboration.

Sometimes they [the government] attempt to drive the price down—set up competition between providers. It's irresponsible. They end up blaming institutions for the behaviour of policymakers.

One of our strategic goals is how can we capture information (data) to not just meet compliance but instead be used primarily to guiding the change processes with young people. Politicians like the change stories, and yet the policymakers like the numbers—we need to play both games. (L 5)

Sometimes they attempt to drive the price down—set up competition between providers. It's irresponsible; they end up blaming institutions for behaviour of policymakers. (L 14)

Creativity and innovation

Despite these financial tensions (or perhaps because of them) leaders stated that they had become very creative and resourceful with funding.

In businesses, you are only as good as their last sale. In the NGO sector, we are only as good as our last funding application! We are always only six months away from bankruptcy! Genuine community grassroots people are on a smell of an oily rag, always get through on a wing and a prayer mentality; will do it anyway even if we are not paid. Makes us pretty resourceful and committed. (L 8)

According to the leaders, the financial/accountability tensions meant their role required a large portion of advocacy; the need to actively and creatively negotiate with

We are always only six months away from bankruptcy! That makes us pretty resourceful and committed!

fundes was identified as a growing focus.

This programme was really humming, then six months later MSD [Ministry of Social Development] said we're not going to take your funding away but we are going to change parameters. We don't want a course. We like what you are doing over there, so we think this is the way forward, and we would like you to do more of this. The guys had just got things humming and had to take them out of one mode and put them into a new one. How does what you are asking them to do fit with their strengths? Not necessarily the best people for the job, so we had to give ownership re process of what they would like it to look like, did strengths finders and continually going back to MSD saying this is how it's going to fit, bargaining and negotiating with them, and getting them to admit they didn't really know what it was going to look like allowed us to be drivers. (L 5)

We have high-trust contract with major stakeholder—certainly reporting is a lot less. It's as much about philosophical view of that agency; Health and Corrections are incredibly number crunching, whereas CYFS [Children, Youth and Family Services] and MSD are better. (L 10)

This tension, a recurring theme throughout the project, acted as an explicit catalyst for the leaders to commit and contribute to their growing network and alliance, thus reinforcing its development during the research project. Chapter 7 describes the dynamics of this process, which culminated in the leaders' decision at the end of the project's 14 months to create their so-called LYNGO network, specifically dedicated to building alliances and collaborative projects.

5.3 Moral purpose

Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011, p. 331) suggest that there is a necessity for "leadership studies to develop a more nuanced and grounded understanding of how purposeful leadership discourse occurs in practice" in particular in the intersection of corporate organisational purpose and a wider societal purpose. This section explores how these two areas of purpose overlap for these leaders and also elaborates not only on the diversity of foci but also on how crucial a compelling vision and purpose was to these leaders in terms of their practice. In other words, the leaders in this project all shared 'big dreams' built on the desire to do enhance their clients' welfare, as expressed under the four categories below.

I've got a big end goal. I just want to be using my potential, you know, up and at 'em. Let's apply this skill in many ways, and try to actually break boundaries. (L 8)

A shared vision of purpose within their respective organisations was non-negotiable for the leaders. Everyone in it needed to be heading in the same direction, despite difficulties.

There were good creative tensions in the organisation, but there was still a reference for why we were there, and what we were doing. In a way, there was diversity, and in diversity you have tension. That's a healthy thing for growing; it's a great thing ... to work towards a common purpose. (L 4)

[T]he one thing I want to believe in [is this]: if you envision something, if those people aren't on board, the vision is not going to happen. (L 8)

5.3.1 Making a difference

The sense of doing significant work benefiting others was an essential *raison d'être* behind these NGO leaders' commitment to their work.

I'm working in an organisation where I make a difference, because I did enjoy my work in retail. and then I worked with a businessman in town ... helping him with his various projects. While I enjoyed the actual work, it didn't meet the need for me to know that I was leaving an actual stamp. (L 4)

[There is] the need for me to know that I am leaving an actual stamp.

That I need to be doing something that's making a contribution—is actually making a difference. So I'm not going to go and work for a tobacco company, I'm not going to go and work for a wine company, even if I could do an awesome job of running their productions. I'm only going to

work for something that's going to make a difference, doing something I actually think is valuable and useful and important. (L 12)

Yeah, it's that transfer of the learning that's really neat, and I get good feedback, from kids and parents. Sometimes it's years later when people just come back and say I'd hit a really difficult period in my life, or something, and I remembered back to that, or what we'd talked about up on the ropes, when I was dealing with fear, or taking on new challenges, or coping when things were tough for me, and realised that I could actually apply that to my life right now, and it helped me get through this particular thing, so that's, that sort of thing keeps me going as well. (L 15)

For some leaders, making a contribution also meant being willing to advocate, to make a strong stand about an issue they really believed in.

Trying to create opportunities where you're standing up for something that you thought was really important. I can think of situations where there were people who didn't agree with me, and I had to actually really stand up and be counted, and so if there's one consistent theme through my development in leadership roles, is be willing to do that. (L 19)

For others, it was the opportunity to pioneer new projects, to become, as one put it, a social entrepreneur.

I suppose my leadership is more about pioneering things. I am very determined. Before I set up Te Ora Hou in Christchurch, I got turned down twice because they thought I was the wrong person. But I was so determined, and I believe that's what kept me going. Then I set up Cross-Over Trust, then Rowley Youth Centre, then Canterbury Youth Workers Collective. I love just giving it a go. (L 9)

... and so there was opportunity to rebuild it, restructure and sort of putting down the foundations, and that was what appealed to me, so that's probably where I came in. It was a real passion for me personally, just to see something I'd invested a lot of time in as a volunteer and as a young person, to realise its potential, and to draw around the key group of people who can make that sort of happen. (L 5)

5.3.2 Changing people's lives

Leaders in this project were motivated by leading change—in individuals, in organisations and in communities.

The best part of my work is when you get to teach, to sit around and talk, feel like you're shaping people's lives, that's my big motivator. The worst part of it is all the admin and bullshit that goes with it. Yeah, funding, all that stuff that you have to do so that you can do that good bit. (L 8)

The best part is to feel like you're shaping people's lives. The worst part of it is all the admin and bullshit that goes with it!

I had programmes and strategic plans and that sort of stuff, you know, but I think what gives me true satisfaction as a leader is seeing the impact of the work that we have on people whose life has changed. So that could be something like an awards night where young people get up

and talk about their lives, talk about the difference, or letters from young people addressed to the organisation, and you realise how significant some of the work that you do is. (L 11)

You get that feedback from someone else, you know, from a parent or friend or the person themselves, and they're the things that I find really satisfying. (L 1)

Opportunity to effect change sometimes occurred in unconventional ways.

A couple of the kids turned up, knocked on our door on a Saturday morning and said they'd been on the run, and so we ended up giving them showers and a place to stay; that was the start of it. Taking kids on. Went for about another twelve to fourteen years ... after a while we had kids arriving who just didn't know what to do in a day, and we realised that wasn't very good. So I went back to the local secondary school and said I would help bring back some of their students, and they said, no, they would pay me to keep them away. (L 22)

Or it led to long-term change-based relationships.

There's one particular guy I'm thinking about now, he'd be about thirty-three or thirty-four. Every so often he just pops up; every six months, he'd come and see me. You know, I've had a problem with my wife, or other stuff. We can [then] process some stuff, and then share it with them. (L 10)

For most of the leaders, their 'making a difference' was more than simply helping people, but rather assisting them to develop their potential in ways that enabled them to see what they could do and motivated them to take responsibility for changing their lives in a positive direction.

I guess fundamentally what I'm really interested in, is helping people. The leadership thing is almost secondary to that. I really like helping people. And I like feeling like I'm helping people. You know, issues, social justice and kind of giving back. And I guess I've had a really privileged life, and in some ways that makes me really empathise with people who don't. (L 6)

I guess that on the whole [what it is about for me is] seeing the best in people, watching them reach, you know, I mean it sounds like a cliché, but it truly does describe it, watching them reach their potential, watching them get better. (L 6)

Yeah, that was big, just to be able to look at a group of young people that have all been through hell, a difference in ages, all grown into adults now, and with their families and moving on, hearing their stories, just a sort of ongoing connection and relationship. They would invite us to their wedding, you know. I think that's cool, it sort of shows a relationship. I mean not many people invite their social worker to their birthday, or their school teacher. (L 20)

[I]t's not even the adventure. I mean, I enjoy that side of it, but it's the excitement of seeing people realise their potential. (L 16)

The sense of building clients' hope evident in some of the leaders' stories was also a personally satisfying aspect of changes others' lives for the better.

Always hope, sometimes they just need someone to stand alongside them and show them that there's hope. If no one's ever told them ... and sometimes it's almost as simple as that. I mean quite often it's just around helping motivation, and say hey, there's a different way here, you don't have to do it that way. (L 1)

I think one of my strongest beliefs is that people can change and people can move on from hard times, that there can be healing, there can be forgiveness without forgetfulness. (L 11)

We say to our clients, "We understand that this affects your whole life, and we are going to meet you there, and we're going to help you work with your children's process, and we're not going to give up, until we get there". Now that's about the soul.

Satisfaction also lay in preventing or reducing harm.

. . . I was just making sure that children and young people weren't harmed. (L 11)

I found myself really basically saying, "Look, the work we do is about the spirit of human, the soul is what it's about, and not to have that missing is the very essence." We actually sit down, we look people in the eye, and we say, "We understand that this affects your whole life, and we are going to meet you there, and we're going to help you work with your children's process, and we're not going to give up, until we get there." Now that's about the soul. (L 10)

I guess my passion was creating a safe place for people to talk through their stuff, and create safety around things that are difficult to talk about or disclose. (L 7)

Leaders furthermore shared their commitment to nurturing the stories of the people they worked with and alongside. They expressed satisfaction from being clients' confidantes, so gaining a depth of understanding that better informed their decisions on how best to help.

Something I find immensely rewarding is when you have somebody who in forty years has never told anybody this particular bit, but they tell you, what a privilege! It leaves me thinking, I'd better not drop this. It's like getting a delicate vase almost that you hold and you've got to look after it, you can't just discard it, and you've got to nurture it. It's kind of delicate; it's a real delicate thing. (L 4)

5.3.3 Changing organisations

Another prominent theme was leaders' motivation to grow organisations that thrived, where all staff members were treated well and so had the organisational support they needed to ably support their clients.

It was odd, because on the one hand with our groups it was this whole thing about valuing everybody and whatever they did, but within our own organisation we had this funny power thing. And I wanted to break that down somehow, and lose it, you know. (L 15)

So I think part of that is recognising that, it's like a feeding ground really, a nurturing ground. Everyone can change and grow and learn and develop, whether that's young kids on a programme or whether it's corporate people coming here as part of a corporate training venture, adventure-based learning-type programme, or whether it was a staff member. It's sort of like that. It's not necessarily what you get in terms of salary or wages, but it's what you become [that matters]. (L 23)

In similar vein, leaders expressed passion about running organisations that developed their staff as well as their clients.

I'm working with this team of people to lead the organisation through quite a lot of change at the moment, and what I'm loving is that I don't feel like I'm holding it on my own, or sprinting on my own. It very much feels like a team leadership. What excites me about that is that I don't have to think of everything, and I don't have to fix everything, and people have lots of work created by that, and we can share them. And we agree on a shared vision for what we're trying to achieve, and together we're trying to make that happen and think about how to maximise contribution in staff and bring them along. (L 2)

It was more about people's commitment and sort of a movement, I guess. Not wanting to sound too much like a revolutionary!

But again, it's the potential of the organisation I'm in [that] is really exciting. Because in a business sense, it's really good value for money, and it can have a huge impact. It's really about journey, or connecting with people at a whole range of levels. I really enjoyed that, being part of a community that was seeking to bring about change, and in a transformational way within communities. But not from a top-down deal, but simply by infiltrating, by being part of it, adding a bit of flavour to it, serving, being a part of it.

It was more about people's commitment and sort of a movement, I guess. Not wanting to sound too much like a revolutionary. (L 5)

The leaders agreed that this type of passion resulted in very high engagement by both them and their staff. It also made for an insistence on high standards of excellence in all aspects of organisational life.

I think that people are already saying that our actions reflect our key values, and that's what people are saying. So we're committed, we've got integrity, we move on issues of justice, those sort of things. Our practice reflects good thinking, good practice, good theory. We are continually learning, developing; we're built with humility, all those sorts of things. And we're valued for what we do, more so by the people we work with, rather than the funders. You talk about that idea of family, that extended family within the organisation, that's what I want to create, and that's what I'd like people to come away saying as well: that I felt like a part of something special, and that I felt like I was part of a family ... [That what we did] had some really strong values ... and we had fun along the way. (L 5)

5.3.4 Changing communities

At an even broader level, the leaders in these organisations saw the role of their organisation as making a significant positive impact on the communities they were serving. Leaders were ambitious for their organisations to be effective, influential agencies in their communities.

I would like ... to be probably one of the more influential things shaping young people in this area, and I look at the media, I look at their mates, I look at a number of things that are vying for the role that they might have as shaping young people. Youth group, church, and healthy local communities should be right up there, and you know that's probably a dream ... I'd like to see that done across whole neighbourhoods, a whole healthy neighbourhood cranking, and I'd like to see the youth community being a catalyst—for communities to be able to look at themselves and do that, to gather around its youth and children really well. (L 8)

Well, I got into the work for a variety of reasons, one of them was it's a sense of connection of being involved in a sense of community. Also, one of my big desires is that we become self-sustainable. That we're so fully owned by our community, and they recognise our values are good values, that they want to jump on board and really participate, and take ownership. (L 5)

Some linked this sense of community concern and commitment with a systems approach to community development.

I really believe it's crucial for more people that see that really that's the way to change the world as well, by increasing your circle of influence. And if Susie thinks like that, she's going to tell someone else. And, you know, on and on it goes, just like, that didn't come from me, actually what I told Susie came from my sister, you know ... I really believe in that whole spider web kind of effect, and being part of that in a positive way instead of a negative way. (L 6)

[I want to see] less relying on one organisation, and being able to be seen as a community college, our aim is to pretty much to be a college in the community, and mostly we are, but we still are funded through a narrow base, if you like. So my future would be more [as] a community-based educator. (L 14)

Underling these vivid descriptions of moral purpose is another core theme: the deeply held values that both motivated and guided the leaders.

5.4 Deeply held values

That's one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life, but also I was compelled. I just felt that it just had to be done. I had to connect with those people

This section begins with an extended anecdote from one of the leaders who was not based in Christchurch, but who was the manager of a NGO that ran an outdoors centre in the North Island. I include it because it strongly exemplifies how his core values enabled him to respond to a very difficult situation.

During the period of this study, the centre he was leading experienced a major tragedy in which seven young people and one adult died during an outdoors accident. I was able to interview this leader a few months after the tragedy. His narration was a powerful and moving experience for me. He described the following incident that occurred the morning after the accident. It revolved around having to decide how to interact not only with particular the parents and school of the children who had died, but the wider community both within and outside that school including extremely intense national media scrutiny.

The following morning, gathering and addressing our staff was one of those defining moments for me ... we got everyone together and sat in a circle and just talked about what might happen from here. And what had happened on the night, not in any detail, just thanking people for their efforts, and how they'd responded immediately afterwards, and so just placing some value on what had happened, and just trying to get people expressing some of their immediate feelings.

I guess I was compelled ... yes I was compelled to take a bunch of our staff from here (up to the school in Auckland that had lost the students), and I spoke at the school assembly on Friday morning and then we met with all the families. That's one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. But also I was compelled, I just felt that it just had to be done, I had to connect with those people, and I think some of the staff I took from here too really valued that, you know. Yeah, so, I acted on instinct really, and I know that ruffled the feathers of some of the trustees.

The accident was also something that brought us together ... Big time. It did bring us together, a lot closer. Yeah, but I think that investment earlier on definitely paid off. Yeah, I'm really proud of our collective response, and I think I feel deeply satisfied that I've had a leading role in that, and that was primarily about people being informed, being treated as people, providing people an outlet for dialogue, establishing support networks, and it's very much organisation second, and people in the organisation first. (L 23)

Remaining true to and acting on core values were severely tested for this leader because he had to decide whether to 'front-up' to the victims' families despite being advised not to by his lawyers and board. The fact that his decision fell in favour of the families illustrates the imperative of this leader feeling compelled to be true to his core values, despite possible consequences detrimental to him.

5.4.1 Long-term commitment

An ongoing long-term commitment to a group of people and a mission extending far beyond simply what the leaders were being paid to do imbued many of the leaders' stories.

Essentially, this value was one of being there when needed, and being the familiar face of that need, rather than a line of different faces across time.

The longevity of relationship, having young people who stay engaged, whether it be they come back weekly or they come back daily or we see them month to month; they remain engaged, and then they go away, and everything is fine, and then they come back a year later when everything has turned to custard, and they just need a bit of support to get back up there. (L 7)

There's also a longevity which I think is important. I think to be effective with the work you're doing, you can't come and do it for six months or, you know, two years, and then go and disappear out of it. I think you need to sort of hang around for a while, because change is often really incremental. And if relationships are the key to what we're doing, when you say you come in for six months, you're sort of saying, there's an underlying message you're sort of sending. (L 5)

Being seen to be committed and authentic was a non-negotiable part of this long-term presence.

Whereas if you commit each day, I think that the community around you sees that and values you. (L 12)

This commitment was apparent in the length of 'service' of most of the leaders. Even those who had not been in their roles for a relatively short time wanted to be part of their organisation and/or the NGO sector over the long term.

Longevity and community are important to me. I've been there twenty-eight years now, and you know everybody knows you, you build up your credibility. Because so many kids have got so much out of it, parents value it, so even though within the school system I'm fighting all the time, the support of the kids and the community is much higher. So that keeps it going. (L 14)

5.4.2 Dignity, respect and compassion

Bringing dignity, respect and compassion to young people experiencing difficulties in their lives meant placing a premium value on the mana (Māori term for inner essence) of each person.

They come to us from schools, especially high schools, and we are told that they can't learn, they can't listen, they're naughty and they don't turn up ... but they don't do any of that with us. They just don't ... and I think the key difference is just respect. Simple, really simple, it's as simple as that. (L 14)

But the common ground is the one tapu, [meaning] this is a sacred place, this is the thing like how we treat each other, with respect. (L 12)

This attitude of giving value to a human life was a significant feature of many of the leaders' stories.

Nothing gets me more upset, and I take quick action if I see disrespect shown to a student. Very simple. Just no place for it, ever, ever, and it's just so simple. (L 14)

I suppose for me, core key values would be compassion for people, integrity, respect and dignity; for yourself and others. Yeah, those values seem to be at odds with the school values (laughs). So I'm trying to apply those values basically all the time, and bring them into what I'm doing. (L 19)

Respect and dignity also extended to the leaders interaction with and treatment of their staff.

I do get feedback from staff from time to time. Some want me to take a much more direct role—telling people what to do and give them a rev up. I guess they see me as soft sometimes—a soft touch—because I won’t give them a bollocking. I refuse to do that. There was some criticism that I wasn’t getting stuck into staff. I have been there two and a half years and part of that is the history that the previous management were ex-army—very much if you are not doing what you are supposed to be doing, then you get ridiculed and bawled out, which is not my style. (L 16)

I might have a quiet conversation with a staff member, and others wouldn’t even know I’d done that, so they saw me as weak. In saying that, I did lose my temper with a staff member unfortunately; I should never have done that. I apologised and talked about it [with that person]. (L 16)

I guess they see me as soft sometimes—a soft touch—because I won’t give them a bollocking. I refuse to do that.

Compassion was seen as a corollary of dignity and respect.

Appreciate people for who they are, for the strengths. Isn’t that a cliché—the strengths, the kind of unique experience of life they’ve had, and strengths they have? It made me value people for who they are and not to be judgmental [but] just think about where people have come from. (L 6)

5.4.3 Equity and justice

Linked to this previous set of values is the notion of fairness or justice. Many of the leaders said rectifying the injustices and inequities that they saw in the world around them motivated their work in general and leadership in particular. However, some found their adherence to value at odds with or not shared by other people involved with the NGO. Such situations could mean the leader having to advocate for practice commensurate with that value.

I guess my other values would be equality, dignity of all people. So there’re not good people and bad people, but actually we’re all people. And especially working with young people, [there is the need to recognise] their dignity and value as a person, and [that] regardless of the situation that they are in, there’s hope. (L 4)

I’m quite a stickler for equality ... [For example,] I have a bit of a reputation with my manager about not wanting to pay clinical physiologists more than other counsellors. Sure they have special skills, but in the marketplace they demand a much higher pay rate, and I have lengthy debates around this, because while I recognise and value their particular skills, I don’t value it over somebody with a different training, so I think it’s about equality. (L 11)

So there’re not good people and bad people, but actually we’re all people.

And probably a key point of difference with the new CEO, who obviously has a good value base, he’s a nice guy, and I think he understands the value systems, but he doesn’t feel it. Intellectually he understands it, but I don’t think he feels it in the same way that staff at [name of organisation] are really driven, really committed to other people. (L 1)

5.4.4 Generosity and stewardship

Generosity for the leaders was seen in the sense of giving something back and of paying forward. For some, it was a value that had characterised their lives and which they hoped imbued their organisations.

Often there’s a part of it, what they call generosity, when you’re giving something back, so you’re all involved in giving something, and it’s often involved people that I’ve worked with for a very long time, good friends, people who have shared similar sorts of values. (L 5)

Some of the leaders stated that one aspect of leadership required making good use of what they had been given in order to conduct the work of the NGO.

I think for me the management is a lot around stewardship. So, yeah, I think stewardship is a really good notion actually, in management or leadership. (L 3)

Stewardship meant care of resources on one hand and people, whether client or staff, on the other.

I think stewardship of people and trying to leave the world as a better place and trying to get people into better shape is really important but can sound a bit patronising. We're trying to encourage people to follow their dreams and to aspire to what they want to aspire to, and to encourage that really. And the organisation is trying to leave them in a better shape so you don't, sort of, totally wreck them (laughs), mismanaging or spending all the dollars on an overseas trip sort of thing. And yeah, stewardship around just leading communities, trying to lead them into a better place really. (L 1)

5.4.5 Humility

The value of humility emerged in many of the interviews. Some of the leaders had heard of or read Jim Collin's above-mentioned work on leadership, and so often referred to values characterising the 'Level 5 CEO', of which humility is one. However, several had trouble reconciling the need to remain humble yet advocate ('blow the trumpet' as one put it) on behalf of the organisation.

Jim Collins' book ... [is] about the Level 5 CEO. Humility is one of the things I struggled with; this idea about how to feel proud about the organisation without actually getting too much ego, before getting sort of high and mighty. It's actually quite a difficult balance. How do you actually not blow your own trumpet, but you want to blow the trumpet of the organisation. (L 10)

That's where the Level 5 CEO is, culturally, out of step. When I say out of step, [I mean] doesn't fit into the normal kind of view of the world. The view of the world is 'Look at me, look at me, look at me.' (L 10)

Somewhat like the bosses in the popular TV programme *Undercover Boss*, one leader said being incognito on occasion enabled him to exercise a form of humility that he considered worked to his advantage as a leader. He said he attended camps for the young people in his organisation in the role of cook, without letting any of the participants know that he was also the NGO's CEO.

When I say out of step, I mean doesn't fit into the normal kind of view of the world. The view of the world is 'Look at me, look at me, look at me.'

... all that upside down leadership stuff, that sort of thing, and I've probably begun to fool with it a little bit—one of the advantages of being the boss of the organisation. I turn up now as the cook for bringing students together, and for the total selfish reason it's a really fast way to influence people. They don't expect me to be in that role, so it kind of messes with people's assumptions. (L 22)

Several leaders described their intentional efforts to gradually reduce their own role and status by handing over responsibility to their staff.

It is trying to build in redundancy for me, you know, and maybe that came from our Christian upbringing, too, the idea of serving, you know, but the thing I take from that is it doesn't

actually make you look worse if other people excel. I think I learnt that early on, as a leader, not holding them down. (L 18)

Most of the leaders addressed the challenge to one's ego that is required in order to live out humility, an aspect that covered in more depth in Chapter 6.

And sometimes it's hard because you don't get recognised for it. You know, someone takes off, and you know that you basically made it happen for them. The general public don't know that at all, and it's a bit ouch when the person forgets that. But again, you know, it tests your values, you know, like I don't need to have acknowledgement. What's my goal? Developing other people. (L 18)

5.4.6 Quality and excellence

A sixth value that stood out was excellent standards of performance. The leaders expressed an exacting pride in the quality of their organisations' work.

I like things done really friggin well. Not just for the sake of it, but to actually try and meet the purpose. (L 21)

And I guess part of my role as a leader is about quality in an organisation ... and timeliness, and getting those things to happen. (L 18)

This commitment to quality was seen as a core responsibility of everyone in the organisation, especially in terms of honouring its mission and vision.

We have an organisation of eighty staff, and you've got to have quality management. But underneath it is that basic value system ... I use that in the decisions ... my management use that in decisions ... and my leaders use it; it's very consistent. (L 14)

One leader told of an occasion when this commitment to clients was questioned. His response indicates the level of passionate (and perhaps stubborn) determination he had to meet it nonetheless.

Very occasionally I hear, "Oh yeah, we'll just do a job and get a pay cheque. Good enough is good enough." Well good enough is not good enough; the work we're doing is so important! We had an issue recently where some staff were saying, "Look, we've done as much as we could for this boy, and he was a very hard-to-like kid, he got up everyone's nose," and my message was: "I'm sorry, that's not good enough ... we're finished when the job's done or there is absolutely nothing more that we can do. And we're not at that stage yet." (L 10)

Some of my staff said: "Look, we've done as much as we could for this boy, and he was a very hard-to-like kid, he got up everyone's nose." My message was: "I'm sorry, that's not good enough ... we're finished when the job's done or there is absolutely nothing more that we can do. And we're not at that stage yet."

5.4.7 Honesty and integrity

Another strongly expressed value related to the leaders' desire to be categorically aligned with and to live by their value system. Some described this value as integrity; others as honesty.

[T]he absolute bottom line for me is honesty. (L 14)

Examples of this adherence included ensuring that what the organisation professed to offer clients was exactly what they did experience.

I want the work on the front end to represent what it is we say. People come along here, and we say we can help them. I actually want there to be fit between what we're saying and what we're doing. It's that integrity. (L8)

Another leader described experiences from many years ago that continued to galvanise him towards personal integrity.

I have had experiences that have reinforced my beliefs ... I keep remembering my time in Sudan in 1985, and there was a huge famine—huge, huge, huge! People were coming and dying, from starvation, it was just appalling. And there were merchants, Muslim merchants, with grain, from the States, with 'not for sale' stamped on it, warehousing it, locking it up, having people right at their door and saying, "Oh, the price will go up." And these were people who professed religious values, and respect for other people. That was their profession, their study, and they just weren't doing this, they were killing people by not giving them food. Just amazing! So it makes you think about your own values when you see that sort of thing, very much I did. (L 14)

This personal integrity sums up one of the most distinctive attributes of the NGO leaders that emerged from the data: they did not simply express and articulate values, they lived by them.

Personal integrity is probably a really big part of it. Yeah, in the same way I'd find it very hard to work for a corrupt multinational organisation. (L 10)

Our seven key values in our organisation, they're our DNA. There's no point in having a value unless you articulate that for action. So we consciously talk about how we will articulate those collectively, and how we articulate those individually. (L 5)

This overt commitment to living one's personal values and its congruence with organisational values is the topic of the next section.

5.5 Value congruence

My values and the organisation's values

This section expands on the integrity of values discussed in the previous section.

Many of the leaders described their

organisations as places where their personal values strongly aligned with the lived values of that organisation but also were acknowledged as such. They said the same of the NGO sector in general.

What I absolutely love about the way that in this sector and in my role, the things that I hold dear to me, and what's important to me, and what's important to my family, are actually transferrable to work. I'm not putting on a different cloak of beliefs and values when I step into the office, and go, "Okay, now I need to be this kind of person, because I'm at work." It's, actually, the two roles do mix for me. It's, you know, my children come into work, my husband comes into work. (L 4)

This alignment was so important to the leaders that for many it was what attracted them to work in the NGO sector in the first place.

I feel very comfortable with the mission and the value base of my organisation. It's very congruent with my own, and it's one of the reasons that I choose to work in the organisation. That hasn't always been the case where I've worked in government organisations a lot. But in

It's not like work: "Oh, I've got to go to work." It's life.

this organisation, there is congruence. I'm very supported to do what I'm doing, and that's really exciting and enabling. (L 2)

It's one of the things I was looking for when I went to the organisation. You know that thing when you read a job description, and you think, wow, yeah, but is that really what they're going to let me do? (L 2)

I'm not sure whether it affects you just [as you're] getting older, but I seem less inclined to want to compromise that stuff around values and mission; it needs to be congruent with who I am. (L 3)

Match the way we treat clients and way we treat one another

Some of the leaders emphasised that organisational values must apply not only to staff members' interactions with clients and students but also to their interactions with one another.

There was definitely a power hierarchy before. I remember when I was a lowly little tutor, I was a volunteer first of all, and then I was a tutor and then a senior, and the hierarchy was so conscious, and it was a power thing, and everyone revered the heads of department. (L 13)

I hope that we treat our staff consistently with the way that we would want them to treat the young people they're working with. And model all of the levels off them. (L 21)

As observed in Section 5.3.3, congruence of values applying externally as well as internally is an aspect keenly desired by staff in many organisations. However, staff frequently report not experiencing this congruence authentically in their interactions with their leaders.

5.6 Influences on leadership development

This section focuses on some of the influences on their developing leadership that the identified, and how these, in turn, shaped their reason for entering leadership in the NGO sector as well as their leadership approaches. At the end of this section, I provide some examples of the impressive changes to themselves and their lives that some leaders chose to make in order to be involved in this sector.

5.6.1 Upbringing

Many of the leaders discussed their family of origin when asked about the sources of their leadership values.

I've thought about this a lot over the years. Probably the most important thing is the values that underpin my leadership, and that's come particularly through my father, and he would stand up for similar sorts of values in pre-Nazi Germany. Standing up for the right side, fighting for the rights of individuals, you know, exactly the same things you were talking about—justice, human rights. He used to talk to me a lot about those times when I was growing up with him. (L 19)

[B]ecause I grew up in a Catholic family ... there was a Catholic saying, "The family that prays together stays together," and our family used to always say, "The family that plays together stays together." And we still do that. We still play together. And in terms of the team leadership stuff, I think one of the links for me that's really important is around being able to play together as a team, and have that kind of playfulness. (L 11)

I grew up with a very strong mother, and I'm one of eight boys, so she had a significant impact on me, and she was always one that had us out in the outdoors, probably more for her sanity really. When we'd get under her feet at the weekend, she'd give us a loaf of bread and a pound of butter

and she'd tell us to get off up the Port Hills and come back at dark. Not by dark, actually at dark. I think the seeds were really planted way back then. (L 3)

You remember influences, don't you? I mean my grandfather. I was the only grandchild he took fishing, and he nurtured me and he loved me, and that love and nurturing was pure, and he was a massive influence in my life. And he was a gorgeous grandfather. (L 7)

My mum and dad provided leadership in different ways, and I think that I've probably inherited some of my nurturing qualities from both of my parents, probably my mum. (L 23)

Some of the leaders attributed their leadership development to the 'tough times' that they had experienced. These comments from one of the leaders over time provide an example.

And the judge said it's something that, for him, was very unusual ... When have you ever heard of a judge saying, "You can go to prison for a month, or you can go to a rehabilitation centre for two years, your choice"? You know, the opportunity of going to a rehab centre for two years also gave me a chance to have my daughter with me, whereas in prison she couldn't be with me. (L 7)

I guess part of my leadership still is around not having other people make decisions for me, as this was the most disempowering time of my life, when I had a judge who was making a decision about my future. (L 7)

I'm really grateful for my probation officer, he influenced my self-belief. He was somebody who just placed trust in somebody, namely me, who had been distrusted for a long time because of my behaviour. (L 7)

Others attributed their development prior professional experiences. The first two of the following comments, both from the same leader, but made at different times, show the combined influence of hardship and previous occupational experience.

My background had been in construction and as a soldier. So my experience of working closely with people was being barked at, or yelling and barking at others. And that was my upbringing as well; it was a violent upbringing. There was sexual abuse in my family, alcohol abuse. So my conversion came about when I was in the Army. I was overseas, lying in my hammock, looking out to sea thinking, "Man, this is picture perfect." I was on a beach in Malaysia, golden sands, and I think, "This is fantastic, but why is there yelling and screaming still in my head?" You know? So I'd joined the Army as an escape, to get away. ... However, I'd physically removed myself from the environment but yet it had still come with me. I can only articulate this now, twenty-five, nearly thirty years later. At the time, I didn't articulate, but that was the moment for me. (L 12)

I suppose confidence. I began to realise I could do things. I could achieve things, the echoes of my upbringing—I'm an imbecile, I'll never amount to anything, no-hoper, black sheep. All those voices began to fade into the distance. And from that, I suppose, from that point there, I began to realise, hey, I can do this. And I'd already sabotaged my first career because the support systems were in place from the military perspective, but I was not ready to even go out into the world. And I self-sabotaged, but now I realise I can achieve. (L 12)

For two other leaders, the experience of raising a family on their own had had a significant impact on their leadership.

I've done so much work on myself over the years, and I guess the greatest influence is saying, "I think I'm a really good parent." The first five years of parenting was an absolute disaster; I was a terrible parent, of one. And I've been an amazing parent of the other six of the seven. (L 7)

I think it's being married and having children certainly changes your values and beliefs. I'm a lot less black and white than I used to be. I'm a lot less selfish than what I used to be, um, it's a tough one. I think I became aware of my selfishness when ... [I had] children, and so you are

forever putting other people ahead of yourself, and maybe that reflects back into the workplace as well. (L 4)

5.6.2 Faith, culture and identity

A large number of the leaders attributed their values and actions to their faith in God, which was interesting, given that

And it comes back to prayer. I have these little epiphanies, and they become a blueprint for how I act.

only two of the organisations are overtly Christian organisations.

... a strong faith-based belief, and some of those things really shape what we do, so personally, like, I'm not a big fan of churches and religion, but I really like the model of Jesus, and that really shapes some of the stuff that we do. That's really important, too, for working in a Māori organisation, as well. (L 5)

And it comes back to prayer, I have these little epiphanies and they become a blueprint for how I act. (L 8)

The Bible says, "Now faith is the substance of things, hope for the evidence of things not seen, and without faith it's impossible to please God." So those two there guide me hugely, so I love living in the moment but also out in the future. (L 12)

Others described reconnections with their cultural roots as a crucial factor in their leadership development:

I needed to clear my own space, finding out who I was, and the peace of God and who I was as a Māori as well, and who I am as a New Zealander. And being born and being alive right now, right at this time, in this world, with all of its issues and all of its stuff. You know, there had to be a place for me; I had all these ideas. (L 12)

We had the board of directors come across from Australia a few months ago, and we put a lot of thought into how we would welcome them, and we actually used a sort of Māori-based process, and we had quite a formal Powhiri, and all the staff went out of their way to learn their mihi, and ninety percent of them had never spoken Te Reo at all, including myself. It was a real challenge; to learn a mihi, to learn a process and to respect that, and it was wonderful.

It was a wonderful hospitable moment, because we told them what to expect and also what we expected of them in the relationship, so they had to talk about themselves, where they came from, and it was a really powerful moment. You had these quite high-up-level executives, and what they were used to doing was flying here, giving the presentation from the CEO, which is probably a Powerpoint in strategic planning and outcomes, evaluation performance and research, instead of which we connected. It was really influential, I think, in our relationship, and they talked about it being counter-cultural and, you know, because we met them as equals, we didn't meet them as, sort of, as slaves as it were. All of us, we learnt haka. And all the guys learnt haka, and all the women learnt to sing ... it was just fantastic ... that sort of togetherness. (L 1)

I needed to clear my own space ... you know. There had to be a place for me.

We have our first marae visit coming up in February. We couldn't have done it without him, because I have no idea what to do. But I see that as being a real time for us together, sharing and experiencing together. (L 4)

Leaders also described the importance of a connection with nature and its impact on their own identity as a person and as a leader.

[O]ne that would stand out would be being in a place of stunning beauty, a place called Matukituki valley ... so all of the peaks that I always have are outdoors, so there's been some connection with nature ... sometimes that's been on a spiritual level. Quite often, it's been with groups of young people that I've worked with for a number of years, so there's a huge history

and huge relationship there, and it's not like I'm a teacher of students, it's like we're a group of people exploring, kind of, stuff. (L 19)

Those would be the common elements to it, the people, the long-term work, nature, and magic happening ... however you want to define that. Yeah, there's been something that you don't know it's going to happen, there's all the circumstances come together, and then the magic happens: people collectively; sometimes it's individuals, sometimes it's everything. (L 19)

One of those transformation experiences was an adventure-based course where I went there professionally, but came away with looking at what I was doing in my job, what I was doing in my life, relationships—the works. I couldn't figure out why when I went with people on adventure-based learning stuff, suddenly I knew these people better than my best friends. And it forced me to just look at my life, and where I was going, and what I was doing. And because that had been so powerful for me, I wanted to share that, and find out a lot more about it. (L 18)

5.6.3 Significant others

One of the key influences arising out of the data was role modelling from other leaders. Some of these leaders the participants in the project had heard or read about.

... Christian spiritual leaders, political leaders, military leaders, and Māori and other indigenous leaders. I think Peter Sharples is a wonderful example of leadership. I think he's empathetic and he's knowledgeable ... I think he's wise. I mean, he's a doctorate man, but he doesn't talk; he just talks everyday common language. So everyone can understand him. (L 12)

I'm fascinated with leaders in history. You know, like I love the documentary programmes. I'm fascinated by looking at examples of great leaders across the world ... I was looking at their leadership styles and, you know, seeing why they're leaders, things like that. (L 10)

More often than not, the leaders in this project had been managed by influential leaders who had passed on their leadership values, vision and style through daily role modelling.

He and his partner got killed on a mountain. And I've still got his newspaper clipping, his eulogy, I guess it was. But I remember going to his funeral. All these school kids turned up, and I was about twenty. And, you know, it was full of kids from Linwood High School ... he had an incredibly influential life. (L 19)

I'm lucky, I have a very supportive manager and a very enabling manager, and so I get very good modelling, and I'm supported to do my job. I feel that my manager has confidence in me to do my job, and what that's teaching me is that if I treat my staff that way, I get better out of them. (L 2)

His level of leading other people is just extraordinary, just stunning, and my observation is that people rise to it because he's such an engaging character sort of fellow ... coming out with extraordinary stuff, that they didn't know they could do. And I don't know if he knew that, his words of belief were such, and his whole persona was positive reinforcing. (L 14)

His whole persona was positively reinforcing.

Some of the influential leaders identified were actual mentors for some of the leaders in this project, either in the past or still in the present day.

I've been wonderfully enriched by mostly males over my life. Right from when I was at high school and one of the teachers took me under their wing, and yeah, he was one of my coaches, but he was also interested in me as a person and where I might go. And so that was quite special—a school teacher as a leader who was like a big brother, who I could look up to. I didn't realise quite the influence that that teacher had on my life until I'd become a teacher myself. Since then I've had many mentors, you know. I'm thinking back to a college lecturer who grabbed me one day, early on in my college years, basically told me I was wasting my time and I was cruising too much and I needed to sort it all out, or just not bother coming back on

Monday. That honesty, and then having ongoing dialogue with him, and I've kept in close contact with him personally, he has been a mentor over the years. I've approached him to become a trustee on one of the boards that I was working for; he's had a massive influence. (L 23)

And all of that has happened with incredible support, and guidance from him, and I think he's always pushing me forward and supporting me from behind. I don't feel like he dropped me in the deep end. I do feel like he does make sure that I've got my feet on the ground before I take it on solely. So that's been a helpful model. (L 11)

So often I think, how would they look at things, what would they do in this situation, what have they done, why is that? And I try and pull out those strengths, and sort of how I want to be. There's a whole lot of people like that. I like to go talking to people and find out, and then sort of form views and thoughts and courses of action. (L 5)

Many of the leaders said that their own leadership had been positively influenced by the stories of the young people with whom they worked.

I'm going to work with young people because they open my whole eyes up [to] what young people are like. (L 9)

And I think young people really inspire me; they have a different point of view. I'm not young anymore, and so what's the best way to learn about the world of young people? Ask them, and be really fascinated by the answers. (L 1)

One leader described the experience of being surprised by the wisdom of the young people he was working with—young people who carried labels of 'dysfunction' and yet showed what he found to be surprising insight.

And I thought to myself, gee, that's pretty wise, and in my own self I acknowledged them as wise young men. And I thought if I jumped back to town now, and I said these were wise young men, I'd be laughed off the face of the planet! From that day on, that has changed my practice in a significant sort of way, in that now I honour the wisdom in every young person I see. (L 14)

5.6.4 Being trusted to lead others

An influence on leadership development that came up repeatedly was the experience of being given the responsibility for a significant project that pushed the leader well outside his or her comfort zone.

The next year he got in touch with me and said, "Oh, we'd like you direct this winter adventure camp." I'd never done anything like [this, but] he was backing me, thought I could do it. But then what happened was he said, "Oh, actually, I've got this wedding. I'm not going to be there for the first half." ... I'm sure he'd planned it all the way along like that, but basically he totally threw me in the deep end. (L 24)

It was risky stuff, I had twenty volunteer staff and forty students, and I'm eighteen [years old]. I'd only just learnt the stuff myself, you know, and I remember thinking, "This is way too early." But you know, I was way out of my comfort zone, but it actually went well. He had an image of my ability that I could have. I think it opened up a lot of what I do now. If you're given big shoes, you often grow into them. (L 6)

Through these 'deep-end' experiences, with often minimal supervision, leaders such as the ones just quoted developed skills and then confidence beyond their years. Looking back, they realised how fortunate they had been to be 'pushed' in this way.

I was lucky because I was really trusted by the CEO at the time of the organisation, and she pretty much just let me go for it. I didn't have a lot of, kind of, bureaucracy to kind of fight my way through, or any kind of barriers to just getting on with what I saw was happening, and

doing it ... I used to take vans full of kids to visit the prison every Saturday morning, and, far out, we used to have fun. (L 6)

People being given the opportunity, having somebody out there go, "I see potential there, let's give her a crack." And if that hadn't happened, I perhaps would have gone off on some other tangent, or lost motivation, and all the way along I guess I've always—somebody's always—seen my capacity and gone, "Right, go for it!" (L 6)

I'm sure that when I started there as a nineteen year old, and the guy that was in charge there gave me this place, he trusted me, he gave me opportunities, I had the sense that he believed in me ... and that made me really motivated; I was known for being really conscientious and working really hard at stuff. (L 6)

5.6.5 Becoming a leader by accident

Many leaders described how they had inherited their leadership role because of their history with the organisation and natural succession.

That happens quite a bit in NGOs—
that you sort of stick around and move
up to the top.

My first leadership experience was probably a long time ago, quite by accident really, from being involved in a youth group, as a member, and then staying on and becoming a leader. And that got me really interested in youth work, and then the department I worked with then, back in the old days, the Department of Social Welfare, and then some study at uni[versity]. Yeah, it's interesting how it's all kind of led into the role. But, I think I actually got into it in the first place by accident. (L 1)

This tendency to promote internally can be construed a strength of the NGO sector in terms of perpetuating values and honouring commitment. However, it also has some potential problems in that leaders are often under-trained in leadership; they are effectively a good social worker or a good youth worker and become a manager by default. Counteracting this attribute is a key positive aspect that leaders identified when asked to articulate the value of being involved in this research project (see also Chapter 7).

In the past, the tendency, if the director or manager leaves, then they turn around and go, "Oh, it must be you," or the next longest[-serving] person. Doesn't mean it's the right person, but people have been shoved into positions that, really, they don't have the skills [for]. So they've been the longest, and most faithful, and people expect them to be next. (L 20)

I think I had some basic beliefs in what I could do, and with people, and you know what the operation was about. But in terms of being attracted to the management and leadership side of it, I'd never ever thought of it; I just jumped into it. I saw some challenges and opportunities to make a difference, and slightly different ways of doing things with the staff, and so I just set about doing it, and it felt really right. And it was just an extension, really, of what I was doing. (L 23)

5.7 Calling, alignment and flow

5.7.1 Calling: a change in life and career direction

Cammock (2012) suggests that the concept of calling involves "the discovery of one's unique gift and talents and the recognition of invitations to deploy those gifts and talents in the service of others" (p. 170). Bunderson and Thompson (2009) elaborate on this definition of calling by describing it as work assumes both personal and social significance leading to a sense of purpose or transcendental meaning. They also raise the concern that calling can

sometimes be a “two edged sword” (p. 52) where on one hand calling allows people to see their role as meaningful and significant, while on the other hand are more likely to sacrifice money, time, physical comfort and personal wellbeing for this role. As a result they are more susceptible to potential exploitation by their organisation and also potentially undermining their confidence in their organisation if the organisation's management is not as aligned to this calling.

The concept of ‘calling’ is closely linked to the moral purpose aspect discussed in Section 5.3.

So, out of all our staff, we've got some that would be here regardless of whether there's money because it's about the kaupapa, and others who'd be, like, "Oh, I'll go and get a job somewhere." And so definitely when you move into this paid employment and all the things that goes with it, you've got a huge potential to lose not just the corporate mission but definitely the mission aspect of every individual. You know, back in the [volunteer] days, that was our mission, our calling, and we're here because this is what we've got to be doing, and that's all we're getting out of it. (L 20)

Leaders said many of their staff were motivated by calling-based reasons which went well beyond and compensated for the amount they were being paid.

Some people are really attracted to a salary and, you know, the whole package, and others are more interested in the sort of work they're doing. (L 23)

Over time, and especially over the past decade, the NGO sector has also seen a shift from volunteerism to predominantly paid staff and the impact of this on calling is an interesting consideration.

We've grown from an organisation that was all voluntary to now predominantly paid staff . . . time in lieu and employment contracts, you know, all that sort of stuff that goes with it. (L 20)

A particularly interesting point in regard to calling was evident in leaders' descriptions of leaving other career pathways to pursue the types of vision and purpose characteristic of the

But at the end of the day, it was about connecting with people and having relationships and then helping them figure out what was the best thing for them to do, to become better people.

NGO sector. The following leader's shift was from a law and order occupation.

I guess my university studies made me start studying law, and I got into criminal law and stuff like that. And whilst I was doing that, I ended up getting a job as a coordinator of an organisation that supports the children of prison inmates. Which is the classic sort of, really marginalised people—really

marginalised families, like I didn't know what on earth I was doing really. But at the end of the day, it was about connecting with people and having relationships and then helping them figure out what was the best thing for them to do, to become better people. So I did that, and I got really into that, like, I threw myself into that job.

I remember thinking to myself if I had met these people when I was, say, eighteen, and I had no other experience than my nice cosy little private school, and my cosy little family, I would have been absolutely freaked out and, you know, very judgemental, but because I knew them as human beings, and I knew their story, I just thought, "Man you guys are incredible, what you've come through and what you've, who you are now, based on that background."

Later I joined the Police and had a really negative experience with the police force, and I thought, well, if I'm in the Police, I can change the world; I can fix the problem. Excellent.

Joined the Police, worst decision I ever made in my life, absolutely hideous, well, not the worst, I mean I learnt heaps, but you know, just was not me. The culture is so hierarchical, so about power and control, it just did my head in. (L 6)

Another leader left accountancy behind.

I worked as an accountant, and I worked in Wellington as a research economist, and then I had myself in a crisis, you know, in my life in terms of ... who was I, and where was I going? I ended up exploring all sorts of other options ... I ended up in a Christian community in Australia, which was a growing opportunity, and I went there to be involved in the community, and then, of course, I ended up taking over running the finances, you know; whenever you go to an organisation the finances are a mess (laughs). I met my wife there, and we got married, and I realised I actually had to get a real job, worked there about eighteen months, for five dollars a week, and I arrived back in Christchurch. Accounting didn't have quite the same appeal. I'm not into money, so I actually got an opportunity to work for Social Welfare, a training internship. And in social work, no experience, no training, I worked there, and then I got a scholarship to go to university, and basically worked from there. So, I basically had a significant career change, to social work, you know, in my thirties. (L 10)

And yet another gave up work as a civil engineering consultant.

I've got an engineering consulting background and made a major shift into recreation, then youth work, then counselling. It was a massive change, a bit of painful stuff in the middle there, but really worthwhile, you know—once you get there. I could have earned a lot more money doing that, but this is more rewarding. (L 24)

One leader left the profession of teaching, while yet others made other significant changes in their lives to take up new challenges, even though they sometimes (generally only fleetingly) found themselves questioning the advisability of doing so.

And I said, yes, so I walked away from a teacher's salary, and all of a sudden went on less than the dole (laughs). Lucky we had my wife's income. (L 22)

I took a fifteen K cut, really, on family income to be here. Ah, and in hindsight, you know, sometimes I wonder whether it was worth it. It's put pressure on the family, but fundamentally it's not about the money; it's about the values and the philosophy about this place is what's most important. (L 23)

I went up to a farm they had in Kaikoura. My wife and I were just sitting there, and we started sharing, and we prayed together, and I just thought that this was a path that my life was to follow—working in community, working with people who society had rejected. In a lot of ways society has, and still has, rejected young people. (L 12)

I still look back to that time when they asked me to have this job and I said, "No", and then I went to that place where I considered tapu, a sacred place for me, where I felt that God spoke to me, just by impression. When I thought about it, I really got excited, and all of my life, you know, life gushed forth from my soul. And I talked with my wife about it, and we thought, "Yeah, why don't we do this?" And so that was the end of ninety-one. (L 12)

Life gushed forth from my soul.

A good measure of the leaders' discourse conveyed their sense of fulfilment and alignment with core values that they had found on heeding the call to engage in the work characteristic of the NGO sector.

I've been really blessed ... I followed my heart. And I've found that that is a very powerful way to live. I've often gone without money and wages, that's with a family as well, but having a strong faith has gotten us through. Because I believed that people seeking careers, I mean it's good, I encourage people to seek careers, but I just wanted to, I felt a divine calling ... So that's

I suppose how I got into this whole sector. And then I've just found out that they call it the NGO sector. (L 12)

Some had come to see their role as extending to develop this calling in their work colleagues and peers.

A leader cultivates this calling in others and also role models it too. (L 8)

I go like a bull at a gate; have those life-path conversations with people: "Is this moving you closer to your calling?" (L 8)

I'm pretty passionate about young people, you know. Teaching felt like a bit of a calling for me; like I followed what I was like at sixteen. I wanted to be a schoolteacher, and it took me to my late twenties—it took me a long time to get there. (L 12)

5.7.2 Flow, alignment and engagement

Beyond fulfilment, leaders also suggested that they experienced the phenomenon of flow. In the context of their comments, this generally meant that once they felt a strong degree of alignment with their own perceived abilities and level of confidence, this situation contributed to a strong sense of useful engagement in their role, which furthered their confidence, so creating a virtuous cycle, not only for themselves but also their staff and clients.

I think I've had a lot of peak leadership experiences; I have about twenty ideas a day. And once I started and made that decision to go down this path, all of this ...[good] stuff began to happen. (L 12)

I think why I believe I'm at peak leadership at the moment, and for the last couple or three years ... [has been] around the fact that I feel confident and safe in my position, and [in] empowering other people around me, so they feel that they contribute heaps to the organisation, and they actually feel involved, in terms of their qualities and strengths. (L 12)

The context of how this flow developed or what underpinned it was unique to each leader, especially in terms of what he or she was most passionate about. Leaders' descriptions of what they saw as flow and its effect on others was often redolent of a well-accepted aspect of good leadership: inspiration.

Intuition actually informs a lot of what I do . . . so it seems really important to me that my actions have a natural flow. (L 3)

Team-building stuff. I love the outdoors. One of my favourite, favourite things to do is create a weekend, or a twenty-four-hour adventure that is guaranteed to bring people together, around a mission or a purpose, and at the end of it get them on the same page ... there are times I was just salivating coming up with things like that. (L 8)

I've been really blessed ... I followed my heart. And I've found that that is a very powerful way to live.

I love getting past those blockages, particularly meeting with [school] principals. Even yesterday, I came away from meeting with a principal, and just thought that I was born for that. I was just thinking that moment was a crafting in heaven for me. Every now and then that happens. And the questions come at the brokering phase; it's coming from a million miles an hour, and you feel like a Ninja, like whoa, whoa, whoa, and it's just, like, where did that come from? Do you know what I mean? And at the end of the time, there's about six or seven highly intelligent experienced people that are on board with what you've just described, and are ready to go. And I suppose it's just being able to pull stuff out of your hat, that you didn't know was

there, and just coming out of you. I don't know what it is but I just come away going, "Thank you God." (L 8)

5.8 A summative comment

Overall, the sense of high engagement and ownership that these leaders felt in and about their roles was palpable, and most were confident and excited that they had more to offer; that their development as leaders was ongoing. The following two comments are typical.

To be really honest, I have not hit my potential as a leader. I'm trying. I don't mean to be arrogant, or in saying that humble, I just really feel like I have a lot more ... put me in a good situation, I just know in myself I could do a whole lot more. (L 18)

People need to learn, develop—go live in their work in a dynamic way. Career development is just the same as leadership development—to find out what you are really connected to and what they value and can make a contribution about. I have never come across someone who doesn't respond to that; we all really lap it up. (L 13)

The data in this chapter relating to the leaders values, beliefs and influences shows depth and a rich authenticity. The coherence across the leaders in this aspects is surprising as I expected to see many differences in beliefs and values given how diverse the groups participants were. However perhaps this similarity in beliefs is indicative of the resonance between leaders in the NGO sector who have specifically chosen to take on roles such as these.

The next chapter moves on from these descriptions of moral purpose, values and influences on leadership and looks in detail at the leadership actions that they enacted in their roles. In particular it focusses on the area of complexity informed leadership. The leaders in this project described the complexity thinking framework as the most relevant, resonant and dynamic approach that they encountered throughout the research project. As such this chapter explores this complexity thinking informed leadership in detail as the leaders participating in this project believed it offers an opportune alternative to more traditional forms of positional leadership and organisational approaches.

CHAPTER 6: LEADERSHIP ACTIONS IN A COMPLEXITY FRAMEWORK

6.1 Chapter outline

Framing question: In what ways does complexity thinking provide a leadership framework for these leaders?

This chapter relates to the wide range of leadership actions that the participants reflected on during this research project. This exploration relates to the second part of Research Question 1: *What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?*

The exploration considers in particular complexity thinking as a framework for guiding leadership of organisations. The leaders who participated in this research project ‘discovered’ the complexity-informed approach to leadership part way through the inquiry process as it resonated strongly with them. They wanted to look in depth at how this approach might help them make sense of their own leadership experiences.

The first section of this chapter begins with examples of ‘self-organisation’ (a key phenomenon in complexity thinking) that have occurred in the NGO sector in Christchurch both before and after the earthquake sequence. It then turn to considerations relating to the changing role of the leader in organisations, focusing in on ideas such as process versus position, influence and power, and leaders as catalysts.

The second section explores specific actions the participating leaders took to promote self-organisation. Their experiences and suggestions included: engaging in proactive mentoring of individuals, fostering interaction and shared learning; distributing power and decentralising control; and exploring and articulating shared values and vision. These four themes are then expanded upon in Chapter 8.

6.2 A complexity-thinking framework for leadership

6.2.1 Recognising the relevance of complexity thinking to leadership

As a result of reflecting on their leadership through the multiple lenses described in Chapter 4, the participants in the NGO Leadership Project became increasingly aware of the similarities between their organisational context and leadership processes and what they were reading with respect to complexity thinking, complex adaptive systems, and adaptive leadership (see Chapter 2).

This realisation came as a collective ‘ah-ha’ moment (another way of describing the point at which emergence occurs). This emerging realisation began about half way through the project when the group was exploring a wide range of leadership material. They came across literature on complexity leadership and adaptive leadership, such as that by Brafman and Beckstrom (2006), Capra (1996), Davis and Sumara (2006), Hussain (2010), Johnson (2001), Morgan (1997a), Pascale et al. (2000), and Wheatley (2006). At the same time, I made

connections with colleagues and another doctoral student who were investigating complexity thinking within other contexts.

The project participants and began discussing complexity-thinking frameworks during the focus group session centred on questions such as:

- What is complexity-based behaviour?
- Where else does it occur) (e.g., natural world)
- What are the characteristics of this phenomenon? (e.g., unpredictable but patterned interactions)
- What benefits would self-organisation have in an organisation? (e.g., agility, innovation, engagement)
- What conditions create the opportunity for self-organisation?
- Can leaders initiate self-organisation in their teams? If so, how?

I noticed as ensuing meetings took place that the language and concepts of complexity became progressively more and more prevalent in the conversation of these leaders. For the leaders, part of this connection with complexity thinking was clearly at an intuitive level; the ideas and concepts confirming an innate paradigm that they held. Confirmation of something they intuitively knew was clearly very validating for these leaders, enabling them to realise that their ideas were not from ‘left field’ but were supported in the wider literature.

I see aspects of stuff in business all the time, but it’s not a common HR [Human Resources] view. I was wondering if I am a lone voice in all of this; maybe I just see it because I look for it. These ideas fit totally from my perspective; I intuitively connect with these complexity ideas. (L 13)

When I read the literature on emergence, it is very, very appealing ... the idea of decentralising the power down to the people who are in touch with the needs of the people in the community we are dealing with, and therefore being more likely to see opportunity and being able to respond. (L 4)

I was wondering if I was a lone voice in all of this.

Emergence ideas appeal to me ...being open to be surprised about a way of working that is surprisingly effective within your organisation ... how to notice it and how to apply it across the organisation. (L 10)

6.2.2 The characteristics of self-organisation: examples in the NGO sector

During our ongoing discussions about complexity thinking, the leaders identified many examples of the self-organisation characteristic of complexity (see Section 2.5) already occurring in their organisations and communities.

‘Right services, right time’ is an example of self-organisation locally. A group of NGOs reacted to a sense of ‘drowning’ in the impact of government initiatives that resulted in a huge amount of extra referrals being sent their way. The managers set up a process between themselves to voluntarily manage this extra demand. There was a huge amount of ‘self-organisation’ required to make the ‘fantasy’ work in reality (e.g., how referrals would be collected, received and processed via a joint approach and values). (L 17)

Everywhere you look, you see self-organisation. Young people ... many of the activities they do are self-organised and spontaneous; also events and movements that have emerged, like SYC Touch 1997, the Pool Committee, Addington Community, 24-7YW, LYNGO.¹ (L 8)

My staff came to me with an alternative proposal to a hierarchical management structure. They proposed having three staff job-sharing in a management team. Putting this together is a great example of self-organisation. There was a perceived threat [potentially a new manager] and also an opportunity to step up to a new role. (L 16)

Our LYNGO group—it started with an idea and has taken on a life of its own. (L 2)

Interestingly, in the interviews with some of the leaders 12 months after the completion of the project the leaders also recognised examples of spontaneous self-organisation that occurred in the NGO sector after the February 2010 (most destructive) earthquake.

Post-quake we saw spontaneous leadership focused on looking after primary needs of locals. (L 1)

We had no base to work from. It required sharing responsibility in finding ways to stay connected. We had to listen and act on creative ideas. (L 16)

We had volunteers taking on roles which would normally have been carried out by staff, in an effort to continue planning for a major event. We also had staff working from home in a more unstructured way to keep services going until they could work in premises as a team again. (L 18)

Existing relationships of six people allowed the organising of a youth event two weeks after the February 22nd earthquake. The event was organised in five days. There was entertainment, food and a memorial time for those that had died in the quake. There were six organisers who had their own networks that enabled the organisation to happen. Five thousand people attended. It normally takes six months to organise an event of this magnitude. (L 9)

Several of the leaders acknowledged that although they could intuitively recognise the self-organising creative dynamic of complexity, a number of constraints stifled this dynamic. The first of these was over-regulation and compliance.

I've not seen self-organisation in the last 20 years ... too much regulation stops spontaneity and creativity ... risk adverse ... too much political correctness. (L 15)

Waiting for the protocols, organisations and 'authorities' loses the enthusiasm, drive and passion of the people. Sometimes it is the little people who have the knowledge and skills to make it work, but they are prevented from doing so by those in authority. (L 15)

Others discussed the dilemma of wanting the organisation to stay open to emergent outcomes but their boards and funders required them to have very tight and measurable performance outcomes.

Now I really like it [this model] but there are some real tensions ... one of them is that it's much more difficult to predict outcomes because you don't know exactly where you are going. (L 10)

This leader went on to state that a mechanism that he uses is to appoint someone to foster conditions for experimentation and self-organisation, allowing himself to keep a watchful eye on the business sustainability of the organisation.

¹ LYNGO stands for 'Leaders of Youth Focused NGO'. As discussed in Chapter 4 the participants began this group at the end of the research project.

We set up a practice leader ... part of the role is to hear about that stuff and think about how to disseminate it through training days etc. We're continually reviewing how we do things ... let's meet the numbers but let's not do it in a sausage machine way. (L 10)

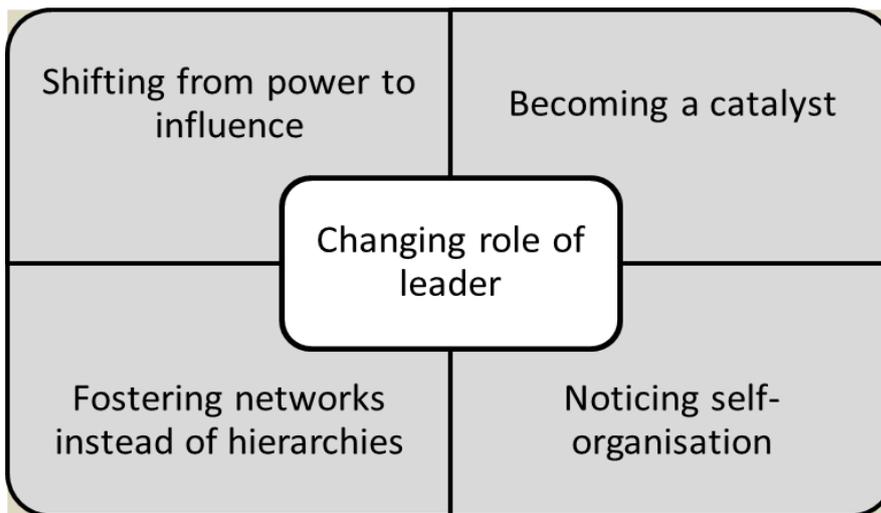
Another tension that the leaders identified was the need to balance flexibility and spontaneity with the imperative to maintain predictable funding and reporting. This became more of an issue as the size of the organisation increased.

[B]e great if we could be grassroots, flexible and organic without having to worry about the money thing, as that is a pain. When we became an institution, we quickly didn't have any of the flexibility ... So how do you stay big and nimble? (L 8)

6.3 The changing role of leader

This section moves further into the participants' consideration of the application of complexity thinking in leadership. It looks at how the role of the leader may shift in order to foster and grow this dynamic. Section 6.4 then documents the specific actions that the leaders in this project took to foster this type of self-organisation.

Figure 10: The changing role of the leader



6.3.1 Shifting from power to influence

The first of these role shifts that the leaders described was that of moving from intent to *control* people's actions to intent to *influence* actions. These descriptions arose during the leaders' discussions on how and why people change and what prompts them to change.

The thing I wrestle with is: How do you get people to change? ... Realising that there's very little that you can force people to do, and that the only time you can really create change is really when you're able to influence, and you're really only able to influence when you can gain respect in other people. So then the question of leadership is how do you earn respect and lead people to choose to do, choose to go, where you're going? (L 12)

Questions such as this led to discussion about the difference between power and authority and their links to influence.

The opposite of power is actually authority because they exist in inverse proportions to each other. If power is defined as the ability to make someone do as you want, and if authority is

your ability to influence someone to do what you want; the more you have of one, the less you have of the other. (L 22)

Much of our society is constructed on power, but most of our human interaction takes place through authoritative relationships. Or, in other words, authority is not such a great word because we think authoritarian, but maybe respect or mana or something like that is more useful. (L 1)

There's very little that you can force people to do, and the only time you can really create change is when you're able to influence.

One leader also linked this influencer role to concepts of service-based leadership, an example of the concept of calling discussed in Section 5.7.

From a Christian point of view, I say, well, you know, Jesus gained authority, not through power but through serving other people, that sort of thing. You have to identify the principle in leadership. (L 12)

6.3.2 Becoming a catalyst

Similarly, the leaders were pleasantly surprised to recognise a shift in emphasis in leadership models, from one of controlling people to one of enabling growth and potential.

When you picked up management training, maybe fifteen years ago, it was all really business focussed, really corporate focussed, and it was really about doing things to people, that's how it felt . . . now there's great stuff, and it really gets you thinking, and it's creative and it's enabling, and it's not about controlling of people. The stuff I'm reading is about enabling people: How do you get the best from people? What is the potential in a person? How do you grow that? (L 2)

They saw this leadership role as more of a catalyst than a director.

Yeah, I think that it's about recognising our role. Sometimes we're just the catalyst, or just to plant the seeds. Or maybe the seed's already there, and I'm to water the seed, I'm to encourage it. Or maybe we are the last part of it, to really help bring them into fruition. (L 12)

They also saw it as relationship between leader and staff based on coaching and mentoring.

Yeah, he needed someone alongside him that was just going to be, well, to believe in him and give him the opportunities. (L 11)

It's about helping people. I work through where they are at, such as coming up with new ideas and realising them ... just through discussion and reflection. (L 4)

6.3.3 Fostering networks instead of hierarchies

Part of this discussion focused on the impact of changed thinking on organisational design. We collectively compared the strengths and weaknesses of a bureaucracy-based hierarchy and a more network-based, fluid structure. A metaphor for each of these polarities was adopted, that of a machine: thus, a mechanistic, pre-determined process versus a dynamically changing unpredictable living ecosystem.

I love that mechanistic versus living thing ... working in a large church [as I do], people think it's a whole lot of cogs, and that's the last thing it is. We're having this very conversation at the moment—the movement will lead and the machinery will follow. (L 8)

The language of 'Starfish and Spider' based on Brafman and Beckstrom's (2006) work on networks and hierarchies also became a key topic during the leadership conversations (see Section 2.6.2).

We can relate to both the starfish and the spider—the spider is setting up an annual plan and systems, while the starfish is creating flexibility to pursue our own direction within a smaller team. (**One-pager**)

SSPA Canterbury [Social Service Providers Aotearoa] has leveraged starfish approaches via its many collective efforts to organise local work (e.g., ‘right services, right time’) and professional development opportunities as well as spider approaches to jointly seek a powerful voice in government on needs in common (e.g., employed new executive officer to pursue organisational strategic plan and goals). (**L 17**)

6.3.4 Noticing self-organisation—‘goo glasses’

One participant, Leader 8, coined the term ‘goo’ and used it as a sustained metaphor for the self-organising creative dynamic. He explained to the group that this metaphor positioned his role within his organisation as one of first noticing and then fostering and accentuating the natural human to human interpersonal dynamic occurring in pockets within it.

*A key concept is goo. Like primordial soup, you can see it moving and growing. It involves people, relationships, culture. You can’t control it, but you can notice it and foster it. It changes and evolves. It’s living and breathing. Goo will happen even in a stale old place. It’s the health of the goo. It might be just two people connecting. We need to notice that and support it; let it grow... [Goo is] fuelled by shared tragedy, triumph, shared values ... Goo fits totally with self-organisation. Like birds flying this way and that. (**L 8**)*

‘Goo glasses’, then, are the figurative actions of standing back and scanning a group of people to look for this ‘goo’, and self-organisation and emergence are equivalent to goo. Leader 8 continued by explaining the practicalities of fostering ‘goo’ in his organisation. The next steps, after fostering, he said are adding strategy followed by programming.

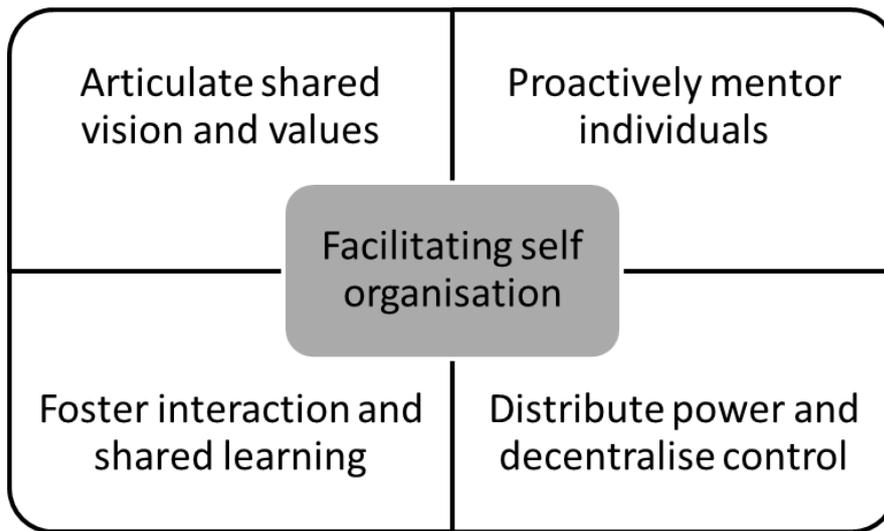
So, get your goo glasses on ... When you walk into a room, put aside the programme, cut out the strategy, see the history, interactions, how wired they are, the group dynamics; look for the living breathing thing and then that’s the stuff that grows

Often we see goo but don’t let it happen because we are too inflexible. That’s where a management role can destroy this.

*We need to make sure our strategy and programme focus on scaffolding the goo—on top of goo, you have a strategy. On top of that, you have a programme; this changes every year ... strategy and programme is then just scaffolding ... [It] needs to be nimble and flexible ... assembled and disassembled regularly. (**L 8**)*

6.4 Facilitating self-organisation: leadership actions

This section hones in on the insights the leaders gained about leadership practices relative to complexity thinking in general and self-organisation in particular. These practices are grouped into four broad themes with multiple sub-themes. Each major theme corresponds directly to one of the four conditions that create self-organisation in complex adaptive systems as described in the earlier literature reviews (see Section 2.4). Each theme synthesises the interview and focus group commentary from the NGO participants and additionally draws on some of the literature the leaders considered.

Figure 11: Overview of leadership actions that facilitate self-organisation

6.5 Proactively mentor individuals

The first condition that creates self-organisation in complex adaptive systems is the requirement for individuals to act as independent agents (see Section 2.4.1). The NGO leaders strongly identified with the need to see each of their staff as independent agents, with the freedom to innovate, interact, and contribute of their own volition. They emphasised the need for proactive mentoring, which involved developing the agency of each of their colleagues.

One of the leaders expressed this approach thus: “[It’s about] creating a space where other people’s dreams are realised, and that’s what I hope to achieve with the team of people that I work with” (L 4). The leaders also emphasised that proactive mentoring requires an intentional focus on ensuring that the development of each person in an organisation is being fostered: “I’ve got a whole series of doors there; that’s what I’m trying to create—all these different doors; then people are kind of choosing to open them, individually and collectively” (L 12).

Others described the approach in terms of “creating a space to empower people” (L 7) or “looking out for others’ development” (L 19). They see the leader’s role as creating a ‘container’ within which to foster the development of their staff. Practically, this might involve finding a way to let them know about what is happening in the organisation, showing appreciation for their contributions, checking in with them, asking them how they are doing and advocating for them

Research on ‘extraordinary performance’, conducted by Cameron (2008) at the University of Michigan, suggests that such development is best achieved in work environments that are highly positive and appreciative. Such organisations, he says, allow staff to ‘play to their strengths’. A key part of the process involves regular personal management interviews that are developmental in nature and whose purpose is to gauge the strengths and work interests of staff and then, from there, create ‘space’ for people to develop strengths in alignment with

the organisation’s vision (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Hopkins and Jackson (2003) likewise argue that the crucial leadership role is that of orchestrating and nurturing spaces for the growth of social capital and emotionally intelligent relationships.

In terms of Plsek’s (2001) bricks and birds analogy, described in Section 2.4.1, proactive mentoring means attending to ‘feeding the bird’, a sentiment shared by one leader “I’ve tried to have a heightened awareness of what is their [employees] passion, what are they really good at, what can they do with ease, that’s not stressful for them. And, then, how can we build on that?” (L 4).

The leaders, picking up on this comment, suggested that proactive mentoring needs to be prefaced by a ‘health check’ of their organisations. This check, with respect to mentoring, requires leaders and other members of the organisation’s management team to debate and answer questions such as these:

- Who are we actively looking out for?
- How can we best come alongside them and ask them how we can support them?
- What do they need?

The leaders also noted that this mentoring needs to be much more regular than a yearly performance appraisal meeting and that it should be intentionally scheduled to avoid it being bypassed by other pressing demands.

6.5.1 Recognise and value people

This aspect begins with an extended anecdote from Leader 18, which powerfully illustrates the importance of leaders valuing their team members.

I remember, particularly for this person, one key breakthrough, and it was amazing the transition that one little comment made. She was a difficult team member, and she would get on the phone to me, or she’d sit in my office and just moan and whinge about all the problems and frustrations that she’d encountered. It was pretty frustrating to listen to, but for me being a leader, it’s important to sit there and absorb it and just be a sounding board for her to get rid of some frustrations ... besides, if she goes elsewhere in the organisation it’s just damaging.

One particular day I didn’t realise that she had joined a management phone conference; none of us had a clue that she was on the line. It was at a time that I was really realising that one of the best things I can do as a leader is to absolutely back my people that I want. I probably talked a minute with the other managers about what a great job Sally [pseudonym] does, how she’s really important, and how I expected them to recognise that. I still didn’t know until about ten minutes later that she was accidentally on the conference call with us; she sort of muttered something, and it was like, “Oh, I think that was Sally.” And I thought, “Oh shit!”

I didn’t have to back her. It was a private conversation. And I think, in reality, you know, I probably would have loved to have bagged her; I was fed up with all the moaning and groaning. But when you actually back someone, you can change a relationship. The impact of that is huge.

Back then, she was at a stage of raising about two hundred thousand dollars per year; now she raises over a million dollars a year. It’s not all because of that, but I know that she was so close to leaving the organisation. There are enough people out there bagging them, and if you employ them and genuinely believe in them, then you’ve got to make sure people know about it. (L 18)

But when you actually back someone, you can change a relationship. The impact of that is huge!

An unwavering demonstrated belief in people was deeply connected to the leaders' values. As several leaders pointed out, the conscious actions and unconscious messages that leaders communicate to their staff are very apparent to individual staff.

My supervisor was very encouraging; totally thinking outside the square and very supportive of me and my development. (L 23)

There was no doubt in my mind that the people that had put their hands up could do it. Behind that sat this really strong belief that they could do it. (L 11)

This focus on carefully facilitating the development each individual in a team was deemed crucial.

Well, if I achieve nothing else in my life, that's my life legacy.

For me, it was a change in thinking from "I lead an organisation" to "I lead forty people". So what about this person? What do they need? (L 4)

Yeah, I've kept all the photos of all the people I've mentored personally on my wall at work. There are about one hundred and fifty or two hundred up there now. And I know where most of them are. I remember sitting on a bus from Nandi to Suva once; it was one of those 'deals with God' sort of thing, and just thinking, "Well, if I achieve nothing else in my life, that's my life legacy." (L 22)

Valuing staff requires leaders to choose to prioritise staff development and to find ways of taking the time to implement this.

It's about having to block out a day in my diary. (L 4)

People are doing so much operational stuff and not looking after staff. Hence, there ... [has been] a very high turnover of staff in the last nine years. And it really comes down to the fact that people are not respected, valued and developed as they should be. (L 18)

Individual leaders offered ideas of how to make this happen.

In my first month there, I systematically took everyone in the organisation for a walk up the road for an hour and talked about their role and what they did, and what their challenges were. I started with my managers, and then the staffing team, then the instruction team seemed to click onto it, and they all wanted an outlet. (L 23)

Although this intentional effort to create space was considered crucial, commentary suggested it is not necessarily a common practice in workplaces. The following comment came from an informal conversation I had with some of Leader 23's staff: "We can't believe we can sit in the director's office and we can talk about things."

Statements such as this and the following indicate just how important it is for staff to have their leaders stopping long enough to notice, acknowledge, and appreciate them and their initiatives—and to *listen* to what they have to say.

It's just massively different, and massively empowering. You know, someone treating them equal in a way

I mean, when someone you perceive to be the big wheel, the supervisor or something like that, actually sits down with you and treats you on a level? You know, when they treat the rookies like they're special? You know it's actually just second nature for them, but from our perspective, it's just massively different, and massively empowering. You know, someone treating them equal in a way. (L 13)

This is a very humble man, and he would never ask for anything . . . so I need to look out for the quiet ones. (L 11)

Being really passionate about what everyone's doing . . . and doing everything I could to appreciate and support their dreams and aspirations for the organisation. (L 6)

One of our volunteer staff, she's just twenty, at a conference that we went to put her hand up for leading a small discussion group. From that she was given a particular task that has influenced the way that our whole national organisation responds to the text support that has just taken off this year. She's an amazing girl, and I knew she could do it, and she learned heaps through that experience. I just felt so proud of her, and I was just about in tears when I said that to her later; yeah. (L 4)

Leader 4's support role with respect to this young team member had been to enlarge her self-belief from the outset.

I think my role in that was encouraging her to go to the conference in the first place, encouraging her to see her role in a bigger picture. I mean, she was a fantastic counsellor, but to see her role as being bigger than that, as well, that she's actually part of this big network of youth workers, and . . . nationally. It's just encouraging her to step out of her narrow view of herself. (L 4)

Another aspect relates to the acknowledgement that team members feel when a leader makes time for them.

6.5.2 Develop people's skills and strengths

Once leaders consider they have practices in place to recognise and value their staff, and once they are assured staff *do* know they are valued, leaders move on to the next stage of proactive mentoring, which entails developing people's abilities. This process rests on knowing staff and their strengths sufficiently well to help them build on their skills and strengths so they can realise their full potential and even move in directions they had not previously considered. Beginning this process involves working hard to identify what each person's strengths and passions are.

I've tried to have a heightened awareness of what is their passion, what are they really good at, what can they do with ease, that's not stressful for them? And, then, how can we build on that. (L 11)

I think it's about understanding the people who are in the organisation—what drives them, what motivates them, what disappoints them. I'm adamant that you get the best out of people by understanding who they are and what they're all about and coming to learn what might fire them up. (L 23)

I'm adamant that you get the best out of people by understanding who they are and what might fire them up!

All leaders said they took this strength-based approach to staff development. This universality was probably because this approach was an expression of core values common to all of them. It was interesting to consider why these leaders seemed pre-disposed towards positive leadership enactments. It is likely that as well as the core value connection, the models of practice used in social service agencies are predominantly based on positive psychology principles (see Section 1.6.2). Hence, development is the product of an alignment between leadership actions and organisational practice.

I'm looking out for employees and developing their strengths and learning edges. (L 14)

Where we are now, is that we attract some awesome people. I recognise those qualities in each and every one of the people there. (L 7)

The leaders stated that this positive focus had to be intentional, and especially so they found themselves having to respond to less than positive behaviours.

[It's about] being more aware of their strengths and their weaknesses ... rather than just getting pissed off with their weaknesses ... [I need]to find ways to actually help them. (L 19)

It's about training your perception to see, to choose what perception you have, and that influences how you see the world and how you experience life ... you take that as a given, but actually you can change it. (L 13)

Some leaders also made connections between this positive focus and its application in the leadership development of themselves and their staff.

Traditional leadership development is about getting ratings on a bunch of competencies and then focusing on the weakest aspect and trying to improve it. Instead, we can focus on enhancing what's already a strength. This can be very powerful in leadership development. (L 13)

This commitment to developing their staff was a distinct feature of the mission of many of the NGO organisations in this study and so, of course, a primary part of their leaders' practice.

I'm serious when I say that we want them to leave in better shape than when they arrived.

So my role with the people that I work with is to make them all that they can be, equipped and marketable, to grow them. (L 15)

If someone comes in, then we invest in them and develop them. I'm serious when I say that we want them to leave in better shape than when they arrived. Obviously, we run a risk because if they become so marketable, heaps of people would love to approach them with offers! (L 20)

I asked her 'Didn't you have a personal development plan?' and she said 'No, never had one', and she'd been there four or five years. I couldn't believe it! (L 20)

I know it's pretty rare what we're talking about. A, to have a workplace where there's no agro. And, B, to have someone who's actually looking out for you. (L 17)

We say we can't pay you as well as other places, but we will definitely develop you. When we advertise, we get so many people apply because they know we are a great organisation to work for. (L 20)

The practicalities associated with this development focus, especially in the larger organisations, have meant that leaders have had to develop and maintain systems that empower other staff to mentor others in their teams in the same way modelled by the leaders.

. . . so the philosophy that we've structurally set up is a small group model. I can't work with all thirty-six staff, you know. I have a relationship with all of them, to different degrees, but I only work with some of them. So I have a small group of team leaders that I look after. And the idea is that each of the team leaders looks after their small group of staff, who in turn look after their group of young people. (L 20)

We have just created a group of team leaders so I can focus on supporting and interacting with these five, who, in turn, interact with their teams. The only dilemma with this has been trying to get a team leader to step up amongst their peers. There's also the need for me to be more structured in when and who I communicate initiatives with to ensure adequate coherence of information. (L 5)

Leaders agreed this investment in staff development led to higher levels of staff engagement.

I do know that when someone invests in their development that they have a sense of contribution, and feel enthused, stimulated, and they want to be there

I do know that when someone invests in their development that they have a sense of contribution, they want to be a part of what's around, and feel enthused, stimulated, and they want to be there. (L 3)

My experience is that if you're with the right support, the right training, the right encouragement and that sense of being part

of something, they will rise to the occasion. You know, sometimes they'll screw up, like everybody does with bits and pieces, but the guts of it is all there, and they do amazing stuff. And when that happens, that's good for everybody. (L 19)

Sometimes the investment process entailed making different opportunities available to staff in anticipation they would take them up or, if not, giving them a nudge in the right direction.

I'm trying to create all these different doors, and then people are choosing to open them. Sometimes they don't even realise they're opening them, and by opening that door their world kind of expands, both individually and collectively. I suppose a lot of it is knowing who you're working with really well and then knowing when to put the door in front of them ... And sometimes it's knowing when to give them a bit of a push through the door as well. (L 2)

Other times it involved supporting their initiative and encouraging them to push boundaries.

I love to try and inspire initiative within my staff. We establish a common ground where we all have to meet, where there's rules and guidelines that we all have to submit to, not just me. But from that common ground you are allowed to have your own dreams, aspirations, visions, ideas, ways of doing things. (L 21)

The leaders discussed their insistence on recruiting the right people. By 'right', they generally meant people who fitted the organisation's values and who also had initiative and creativity.

The key is giving them the conditions to do their job and come up with creative ideas and [then] get out of their way.

The key is hiring the best people you can in the first place, then giving them the conditions to do their job and come up with creative ideas and get out of their way really. (L 16)

I guess is about picking the right people and having them have some kind of capacity for it, but then the next thing is having that kind of support system in place. (L 6)

My default mechanism is to hire people who are intelligent and questioning; those who have the ability to get on with things and don't need me to contact with them on a daily basis. I give them space to fly and [I] trust them. (L 16)

In saying this, they also acknowledged that their staff teams had to have a range of skills. Some staff members, they said, typically needed strengths in systems and routines (a reference back to the machine metaphor) to complement those staff with more innovative and spontaneous qualities.

[We] do need people who can run the machine—secure, constant, reliable and responsible, able to do all tasks. If everyone was like a swallow charging around all over the place, there would be chaos. (L 16)

I give them space to fly and I trust them.

They considered this diversity crucial to avoid unwittingly developing organisational blind spots, not getting things done, or undervaluing the worth of having a variety of personalities.

It comes down to thinking about the machine versus living systems models. If you choose people that want to be in a machine, you end up with an organisation like that ... you can try and create conditions for them to grow, but they feel more safe and secure in a machine environment. Try to get things they aren't comfortable with, and it's stressful for them. (L 16)

Lastly, some of the leaders said that they themselves had been and were being well mentored, while others said that they lacked the support that they needed for their own professional development.

I have an external supervisor, more like a coach consultant. I've had her for years. Also, my co-manager, he's been a strong mentor over the years, supporting and pushing me, saying, "You can do this. You will be okay." I've always had a sense of him being alongside me. (L 11)

I'm mentored by an external supervisor as well as a mentoring group I'm part of. (L 4)

Who mentors me? It's a bit of a gap really. Perhaps this is why I have enjoyed this experience on this project so much. (L 14)

I'm a bit disappointed in lack of mentoring for me ... everyone is stretched, so it's fend for yourself and look after your own development. (L 7)

There is no one looking after me, saying, "Hey, are you looking out for yourself?" (L 6)

6.6 Foster interaction and shared learning

The second condition that allows self-organisation to occur in complex adaptive systems is strong interactions with neighbouring agents (or people) in the system (see Section 2.4.2). The implication of this condition for practice that the leaders identified was the imperative to enhance their staff members' communication, interaction and sharing of ideas so that they would have the right opportunities to self-organise.

Senge (2002) explains that when relationships are activated and enhanced within an organisation, they promote the self-reflective inherent ability of the system to regulate itself, a process that leads to a high level of innovation and self-organisation: "We build organisations where people are continually learning how to learn together ... the organisations that will readily excel in the future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of the organisation" (p. 57). For Peck (1991), "a healthy organisation is one in which all participants have a voice" (p. 62).

The NGO leaders strongly endorsed the importance of sharing learning within their organisations. As one pointed out, leaders do not necessarily have all the answers and so benefit from learning from others. Leaders can, however, she said, play a key role in promoting shared learning: "It's an attitude to learning. I firmly believe that I haven't got it all together. There are some things that I'm quite good at, but learning and reflecting on that, that's something I can model" (L 3). Senge (2002) would endorse her comments, given his claim that having just one person learning on behalf of the whole organisation is no longer sufficient: "It's just not possible any longer to figure it out from the top, and have everyone else following the order of the 'grand strategist'" (p. 99). Leader 3's views also align with Fullan's (1993) argument that complex change relies on "many people working insightfully on the solution and committing

It's just not possible any longer to figure it all out from the top.

themselves to concentrated action together” (p. 34). Reflecting on this thinking, one of the participants described her management team’s efforts to develop a culture for learning within their organisation.

We do quite a lot of work with our staff. What are our expectations for each other? How [do] we articulate that? What are our strengths? We have the conversations where we ask a lot of questions [as well as] reflecting, debriefing, processing, and [then] trying to put that into practice. It requires a high level of integrity and trust. (L 2)

Senge (2002) sees leaders as designers, stewards and teachers responsible for developing and nurturing learning communities, facilitating the conditions receptive to improving the quality of people’s thinking, as well as their capacity for reflection and team learning, and developing their ability to share understandings of complex issues. Wheatley (2006) similarly maintains that “We need leaders to understand that we are best controlled by concepts that invite our participation, not policies and procedures that curtail our contribution” (p. 131). These ideas were captured by one of the leaders when he said, “So, personally, I think I’m on a journey. I don’t have all the answers. I want to be learning. I want to be around people who can teach me and can inspire me” (L 5).

The NGO leaders developed several questions that they thought would be useful for leaders endeavouring to facilitate shared professional learning in their organisations. These included:

- Who are we learning from?
- Who has a voice in our organisation?
- How can we enhance the networks operating in our settings?

6.6.1 Role-model generative listening and learning

A particular focus of the organisational culture, mentioned in the previous section, is that of creating a learning culture. This development, the leaders decided, starts with the attitude the CEO (chief executive officer) and/or other members of the management team exhibit towards learning and receiving feedback.

It’s about role modelling a learning attitude. (L 15)

The leaders acknowledged that this learning stance brings challenges, particularly relating to expectations of themselves as well as sometimes from their teams.

I’m thinking earlier on, being in leadership roles, I probably did feel that pressure of needing to know all the answers and probably did feel some of that kind of, mana, of “Oh, I’m the leader.” But over time, my thinking has definitely changed from that. The staff also sometimes say, “Well, you’re the manager; you should have all the answers.” (L 7)

But once understood and embraced, this learning focus becomes a collective intention to create ongoing opportunities to dialogue and build networks.

I suppose everybody within the organisation feels that they’re on a journey of lifelong learning, and this is a good place to be to achieve that. (L 3)

It’s about talking with people not talking at people. I would now never proceed with my ideas

It’s about talking *with* people, not talking *at* people

without getting everyone else's ideas I don't have to have all the ideas! (L 16)

However, oversight is needed to ensure that each member of the organisation has the opportunity to have a voice.

[B]ut it's making sure that the cooks and the cleaner and the maintenance people all have a voice; that the instruction team here aren't the only key voices. (L 23)

One leader described this collectivism as “listening to leverage collective intelligence”.

Organisations that don't enable collective intelligence then lose their staff to a competitor. The question is: Can the original organisation change? Can they enable their staff? (L 13)

We've got two major new initiatives for 2012. The leadership team has lots of experience, and I absolutely need their brains and ideas of how we go about setting up these things. (L 16)

Leaders also spoke of the need to take time to consult with staff in order to get buy-in to ideas, policies, and practices, and to find the best solution. This approach, they reminded one another, also allowed them to bring forth the creativity of their staff.

I took the draft plan, and I presented that to the staff and got them to look at how we might prioritise and then operationalise it. We got really, really excited. Then I spent hours, days maybe, collating all the feedback, and then forwarded that to the trust board. On one or two accounts, the draft plan changed, but on the whole it didn't. I believe that was one of the more exciting staff days that we've had! (L 10)

The leaders stressed that this consultation must be genuine, rather than an attempt to procure buy-in to a previously decided strategy.

All staff members are genuinely consulted. I don't like the word consultation, as it has connotations of you go along and consult but you actually have an idea already. Instead, I go along with a blank sheet of paper and say, “What do you reckon?” (L 8)

We have just undergone an organization-wide consultation around our mission and values. This has been used to rewrite our five-year strategic plan and rewrite our values. (L 14)

Creating this culture of openness is fostered by leaders consistently demonstrating that they are listening to their staff. If staff members are asked for their opinions but then see that they are not being listened to and/or their ideas are not being acted on, this situation can have worse outcomes than that associated with never asking for their ideas at all.

That in itself was a little bit disillusioning, if they know that things don't change. It's like feedback coming on a staff meeting, and the same feedback comes in week in week out, or month after month, and nothing changes, then eventually staff stop saying stuff. (L 18)

When I go to the tutors to ask them about ideas, it takes a while to warm them up to it. Often this comes with a degree of distrust—perhaps a ‘management says this’ kind of cynicism. (L 14)

Finally, merely having the intent to learn as an organisation is not sufficient. Leaders need to plan carefully about how to build this learning into their organisational systems.

6.6.2 Develop organisational culture

This aspect relates to the ability of a leader to create an organisational culture where staff are engaged and contributing. One of the leaders (L 21) recounted the following extended anecdote, which he described as his most critical leadership lesson.

It made me realise that unless I got these people to come with me, I was wasting my bloody time.

When I first came into this leadership role, I got together a team of senior staff and rewrote all the staff procedure manuals. I started with an idea that we'd perhaps do it in a month. Then I tried to take this to the meeting and

present it to [the staff], and it just ended up in this shit-fight basically ... What about this? You've forgotten about that! Blah, blah, blah. It was a total disaster, and one of the absolute low points of my time here. But it made me realise that unless I got these people to come with me, I was wasting my bloody time.

We ended up having to go back to the drawing board, and eventually we figured out this process which is still here this year; well, it's completely fundamental now. It's called OPG (Operational Policy Groups), where you take a subset of people to work on developing a process, and then anyone who's not present, you give them the right to submit.

Even though it took 12 months longer than I thought, we got a result that actually stuck. We didn't come up with a nice new book that no one used, which is very, very common. We got two things out of it: we got the best answers, these great rules that were user friendly, generally easy to follow, concise, nothing that wasn't a rule, didn't make it in here. So we got a great answer, a great result, and [the second thing was] we got really good buy-in too.

Yeah, that was really an epiphany around the issue for me, and I guess it's characterised my leadership style ever since. I learned that if things are really important, especially in an organisation like this, where we have staff who actually have knowledge, skill, experience and passion, we have to include them in the process. (L 21)

We got a great answer, a great result, and we got really good buy-in

Leaders furthermore agreed on the need to develop organisational culture by building collaborative teams wherein staff complemented one another's strengths.

It's just a real collective process, of we're all in this together, and we're all operating with our own strengths, and have a really good knowledge of other people, of how we operate our own strengths and how they complement one another. (L 15)

Often my role is making sure everyone is on the same waka, rowing in the same direction . . . with that group of people, it can very easily become bitching and moaning; everyone gets grumpy at someone else. A couple of social workers who are wonderful with young people and whanau but don't do notes as well as they should, or you have meeting at nine thirty and they turn up at nine forty-five while others get there at nine twenty-five—it very quickly leads to tension. (L 16)

Leaders also need to create and ensure an environment conducive to growing this positive type of culture.

It's about fostering high trust. (L 3)

It's all about whakawhanaungatanga [Te Reo Maori term for the dynamic of extended family]; all about trusting each other in an organisation like ours. If you can't trust each other, it's all over. (L 12)

Leaders have to work hard, the participants agreed, to make time to build positive relationships within and across the staff team.

Something that's really important to me is respect, that you as a leader are respectful, and that the relationships you generate with people are respectful. So, like, it's not important to me that I kind of love everyone or am best friends with everybody that I work with, but it's really important that we respect each other and that we trust each other. That requires lots of things like honesty, courage and integrity. (L 12)

It's got to be about that trust. The difficulty is as you [the organisation] grow that it gets more and difficult to manage; all it takes is one or two staff members not able to come to a hui, and it not work as well. (L 16)

Robust conversations had to be a regular aspect of organisational practice.

We do quite a lot of work with our staff. We have the conversations about how do we articulate our values? What are our expectations for each other? What are our strengths? Where are our gaps, and how do we rectify those? How do we deal with conflict and resolve that sort of stuff? How do we problem-solve? We're asking those questions, reflecting, debriefing; it requires a high level of integrity and trust, and so there's some things to really work on. (L 5)

Having these conversations over a long period creates further trust and openness to feedback.

The fact is that the journey with the people and community is really important, so I think you've got to go through some of those rugged times together. That gives you credibility. And often, then, people give you the right to take a greater role to speak about things. (L 5)

This culture of dialogue and listening, the leaders concluded, begins to create an organisation that learning focused.

6.6.3 Build in mechanisms for dialogue

Leaders in this project emphasised the need to build into organisational structures mechanisms designed to leverage interaction and communication. Such a mechanism counteracts the tendency for leaders, despite their best intentions, to postpone forums for dialogue, perhaps because of being busy or talk too much. Having set mechanisms for these conversations also allows self-organisation to be activated while still maintaining efficiency by not overdoing the time spent on these forums. Leaders identified time pressure as a key barrier to engaging in these dialogues.

The second step is providing some organisational structure systems, or whatever you want to call it, to enable the staff. I mean there are three hundred staff at the Christchurch organisation, so to enable them to have a say in what the X is and what the Y is about, and how it all operates ... I guess at the moment they come and do the job, then go home.

If they have any frustrations, they don't really get addressed. I don't think there's a great avenue to addressing those things, or helping getting them to be part of fixing it. And I'd like to change that. So I guess there's a number of ideas I've got ... just kind of setting up like, kind of, an organisational culture, along with some really clear kind of systems or infrastructure, or something around them feeling comfortable about problem solving, on a much wider scale than what they do at the moment. (L 6)

Some leaders likened the designing of such a mechanism as redesigning the social architecture—of providing ways to intentionally change the patterns as to whose voices are heard and listened to in an organisation (see Section 2.6.2).

Avoid hierarchies where each level reports to the next but encourage relationships across different organisational groups. Have collective staff meetings which are case based and gather ideas from everyone. Two way conversation across all levels. (One-pager)

Others described the favoured process as vertical communication rather than horizontal, thereby creating innovation teams made up of people who represent different levels of the organisational hierarchy rather than just those on the same seniority level. Kotter (2013) refers to these vertical groupings as 'accelerate teams' in a 'volunteer army', in which members come from a range of levels and divisions within the organisation.

Foster interaction and shared learning, shared values. I love that, and how it gets into the machinery. (L 8)

Other strategies or mechanisms discussed included senior leaders having an open door signalling that all staff could feel comfortable approaching them. On occasion, leaders could also initiate conversations with individual staff or groups of staff in order to hear and respond to feedback.

Well, in that 'Best places to work survey', which was two years ago, our scores were high, but our support staff said some stuff that they weren't happy about. So I sat down with them all, without the other managers, and said, "Hey look, what are the key things that we need to focus on with clarity, what are the keys things that if we did something about, would it make a difference?" (L 21)

Then there were organisation-wide meetings, held not just as events in which management passed on information, but as forums for genuine dialogue amongst everyone present.

All team members have a voice; even the agenda for team meetings is set by all. (L 11)

According to the leaders, their organisations were also using team days at specific times of the year in order to provide dedicated time for collective reflection.

We use team days where all members of the team have time and space to contribute and review clinical practice and the way the service is organised. (L 10)

Every three months, we all get together as staff, to discuss a wide range of things. We also have feedback forms from staff members, which can be anonymous. (L 9)

Some organisations had the practice of setting up teams of volunteers to focus on a particular project for a set period of time.

We use task forces with different groups from the organisation and across the sector. (L 17)

Interestingly, the leaders' reports revealed that only a handful of organisations were using confidential staff surveys. The preference overall was for verbal communication. The leaders recognised confidential surveying as an area ripe for development. Once again, the leaders observed that a discursive learning culture is much harder to maintain as an organisation grows in size.

As we have got bigger, the distance has grown and interconnectedness has reduced. (L 5)

As the leaders observed, this emphasis on creating dialogue and interaction naturally leads into the opportunity to share power and responsibility. It also suggested, they thought, ways to differently group people, alter meeting structures and change communication patterns.

6.7 Distribute power and decentralise control

The third condition that allows self-organisation to occur in complex adaptive systems is decentralised control (see Section 2.4.3). The NGO leaders were particularly interested in Fullan's (1993) claim that "it is not possible to effectively control a complex organisation from the top" (p. 37). In line with this claim, they agreed that fostering decentralised control, which they understood as agents having autonomy to act in a self-determining manner, was a

vital ingredient of an effective organisation. Leadership in this context has a look that differs markedly from that of the traditional manager's role.

I'm not a formal leader, but I have a formal role as a leader in an organisation. That doesn't mean that I'm always at the front, or in control ... [I see] leadership as being a fluid, movable thing, an enabling thing, and, you know, even our clients, all at different times, have the ability to lead and do, and I love to encourage and see that, and it's the same in our staff. (L 2)

The leaders' response to Fullan's claim also resonated in these comments from one of their group colleagues.

One of my key beliefs is that leadership can come and should come from all places in an organisation, so leadership is not necessary in one person, who then sets the direction and sets the tone and makes the decision. I think leadership is a shared experience in an organisation. (L 1)

<p>I think leadership is a shared experience in an organisation</p>

Fullan (1993), along with Kotter (1996, 2013) and other commentators, does not advise an overthrow of the traditional top-down approach to leadership but advocates instead for a balance of top-down direction and bottom-up emergence (p. 37). Overdoing the top-down control, Fullan argues, can stifle creativity and innovation, whereas over-emphasising bottom-up emergence can lead to chaos, or randomness that does not lead anywhere. Both are likely to be counterproductive to the growth of an organisation. Effective leaders delicately balance this tension by creating spaces where members of the organisation can operate according to their strengths: "In an open system what matters most is not the CEO but whether the leadership is trusting enough of its members to leave them alone" (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006, p. 67). The leaders in this project supported these views.

A lot of it is about power, sharing power, and if you've got people who have got enormous vision, desire, and willingness to explore all sorts of possibilities. They are capable of me handing stuff over and saying, "Hey, I'm liking this, go for it" and "What can I do to support you?" (L 6)

My experience is that if you're with the right support, the right training, the right encouragement, and that sense of being part of something, they will rise to the occasion, you know. Sometimes they'll screw up, like everybody does with bits and pieces, but the guts of it is all there, and they do amazing stuff. And when that happens, that's good for everybody. (L 20)

The NGO participants also spent time discussing the relevance of the notion of distributed leadership, which encompasses a multitude of definitions, all emphasising a shift in power and responsibility from one leader in a position of authority to the sharing of this role with some or all of the participants in an organisation (Cope, Kempster, & Parry, 2011; Gronn, 2008; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Spillane, 2005). Oduro (2006) states that distributed leadership is not a leadership style as such. Rather, it is a way of thinking about the roles, delegated responsibilities and processes within an organisation. Cope, Kempster and Parry (2011) suggest that although a distribution of leadership has clear benefits on employee empowerment in creating a culture of participation, that this creates a dilemma for many leaders when they have been successful because they are independent, controlling,

responsive and opportunity driven. (p. 277) They emphasise the need therefore to create and sustain learning networks and relational leadership learning for such leaders.

The questions the leaders considered useful when determining how to bring about shared power and decision-making in their own organisations were these:

- Where and with whom is the leadership situated?
- Who makes the decisions?
- How can the social architecture of our organisations be redesigned to facilitate a variety of ways for gaining input from everyone/everywhere in the organisation?

6.7.1 Foster interdependent leadership roles

The participants generally saw leadership as a shared role rather than in terms of positional leadership. For some, this understanding meant moving away from the formality of more traditional roles.

Flattening out structure which shifts decision making and responsibility to frontline workers, therefore leveraging the strengths of both starfish and spider. (L 8)

Some had seen first-hand that more formal hierarchical roles are largely ineffective in moving an organisation towards its goals and so were motivated not to repeat that kind of structure in their own organisations.

You're really going to get success if everyone's going in the same direction together. Even if the person kind of sits on the top of the hill, as the white knight on the white horse, and tells you exactly what's going to happen, there is a strong possibility that everyone won't want to do it that way, and so you need to work with them, and you need to use staff, all their experience and knowledge, to work out the best way to do it. (L 12)

For the leaders, devolved responsibility also had the advantage of leaving them free of the feeling that they had to have all the answers.

You don't have all the answers as the boss, and you shouldn't even think that you do. (L 17)

Our role ... is to develop each other all by sharing load so we are all leaders and all responsible rather than I need feel pressure to drive everything. (L 15)

Several leaders said they were relieved to have moved their thinking away from the idea that they had to carry all the responsibility as part of their leadership positions to one where they truly shared the load of leadership with their colleagues.

What I'm loving is that I don't feel like I'm holding it on my own, or sprinting on my own. It very much feels like a team leadership, and what excites me about that is that I don't have to think of everything and I don't have to fix everything. We agree on a shared vision for what we're trying to achieve. And together we're trying to make that happen and thinking about how to maximise contributions in staff and bring them along rather than just doing something to people. (L 2)

I have felt like I've been carrying a lot myself, and that's quite difficult and also not particularly wise. I'm very focused at the moment on sitting there and enabling this group of people to lead their staff. I think that's the most effective thing that I could be doing at the moment, and I'm really enjoying that. When I work for those people, what I'm hoping for is that they also are enablers with their staff. (L 2)

Many, however, discussed how challenging this change of role had been and continued to be. The challenges of delegation and letting go of power were particularly relevant in this regard.

I've always held onto a belief that I needed to do clinical work in order to inform my team leadership. I think I probably need to step out of that. (L 11)

I think sometimes as a manager it is too easy to just say, "Oh, I'll do it", or "It's easier if I do it myself." But I could be letting down the organisation by not using this other person who could do it better. I'm letting down that person by not giving them that opportunity to grow and develop, and I'm letting down myself, by trying to do something that may not actually be me making the best use of my time. (L 4)

I have to go look for that support. It's quite hard, 'cause I've had to fight on my own to get where I am right now, so now it's hard for me to let down the walls and the barriers, you know. As much as I know Māori is a supportive community, I know they'll be supportive in my language, in my cultural things, but support me when I've got my own fears and inhibitions and all that, you know, that's hard. That's hard. (L 12)

These leaders found, however, that once they had taken the first step towards sharing their leadership, their fears disappeared.

It's interesting looking back. I have had a very hard year. My father died, and the team hung together while I was away. I had to stop worrying if ethical or therapeutic decisions were being made that I couldn't live with—people's wellbeing is at risk every day. It all worked out fine. I felt proud of them in a very different way. They could hunker down and make good decisions. (L 11)

Leaders did identify that there were exceptions to this collaborative style, and that when these had occurred in their own organisations, staff had been generally respectful of this change in style.

In some instances, the hierarchy is best—discipline issues, big expenditure, external relationship. (L 14)

There are certain times where it's pretty important just to lay it out: "Well, sorry, we're not going to spend any more time on this, this is the way it is. I know some of you may not be happy, but it has to operate." (L 16)

Some also discussed the dilemma of determining and then acting on instances when it would not be appropriate to share power.

Leadership is not necessarily about 'being the boss', but when you carry the responsibility, at times you have to make the decisions and insist on them without necessarily having full buy-in. This can cause a real conflict at times. It's a tension between leadership through relationship and rapport versus leadership through providing direction and sometimes removing others' autonomy. (One-pager)

I don't agree with what you've done, but I know there must be a good reason, and so I'm going to leave it at that.

In remedy of this situation, they agreed that building up relational trust allowed staff to accept occasional executive decisions.

Um, yeah so, the interesting bit is that what happens is that in the times when I've needed to make a decision and I've needed to say, "Hey, this is how it's going to be," or "I need to make a decision quickly on this, and this is what I've decided," it's because people have a sense of that, whenever I can, my default mode is to use process. [So] they kind of go, "Well there must be a good reason why [name of leader] is doing this, so I'm going to accept that." (L 12)

I had an amazing example with someone who came to me about a decision we'd made and said, 'I don't agree with what you've done, but I know there must be a good reason and so I'm going to leave it at that.' And so it was that sense of trust that finally we'd got. (L 8)

6.7.2 Share ownership and responsibility

For the project participants, changing from traditional leadership roles was commensurate with sharing both responsibility and ownership and with team members. The following anecdote from Leader 16 describes a scenario in which he was asked to devolve his decision-making power as CEO on to his leadership team.

We needed to appoint an operations manager (OM), but we couldn't find the right person . . . very crucial position ... this person can make or break an organisation. Our three senior staff members came to me and said we can save you a salary because we can actually do that role if you will let us job share it.

I was sceptical and a bit nervous. They're all passionate and emotional people ... but I was nervous about their ability to work together in a one hundred percent collaborative way. We brainstormed [as to] what are the tasks and roles of the OM and had a very courageous conversation. "You three need to know that I am very nervous about this and it's only going to work if all three of you can be up front and honest and supportive of each other. Also, the only way I will sign off if all three of you take collective responsibility for all three areas."

When I put it [the proposal] to the board, they thought I was mad, and we have some big names in the business world. I put it as trial and report to the board. Over the last six months, they've [the three staff members] done an absolutely fantastic job. They've spent a lot of time together, taken a lot of courage, opening up, giving of themselves to each other. All three of them are absolutely flying, going great guns! (L 16)

They've spent a lot of time together, taken a lot of courage, opening up, giving of themselves to each other. All three of them are absolutely flying, going great guns!

Leaders were enthusiastic about the empowerment that resulted when they were able to share ownership of strategic decisions with staff. They were also aware that with ownership comes responsibility; clearly communicating this dual opportunity was crucial, they said.

That is the same concept, isn't it, of giving people ownership and determination of their own things, and gently helping them, somehow, without controlling, but helping them somehow to recognise the consequences they're bringing on themselves. (L 13)

[T]here's a certain thing about placing opportunities in front of people, and also placing consequences, or allowing consequences to happen. (L 19)

However, several of the leaders said that there were some aspects centred on professionalism that they would not be prepared to compromise within the context of shared leadership.

I suppose the thing that excites me is where people really step up to the challenge of doing the best job, of excellence. The flip side of this is that this is too important work for people to be sloppy. I have no tolerance for people who do sloppy stuff. I'll deal with performance issues, around sloppy behaviour, and I have done. (L 10)

Interestingly, many of the leaders expected their staff to self-lead—to be able to manage themselves and not require extensive supervision or monitoring.

I just knew in the first week of my new role that no-one was doing anything. When I said, "What have you guys got planned," it was like, "Oh, well, you haven't told us" (laughs). It was really bad! I quickly realised that I had to move the responsibility for directing their roles to them, to expect them to set goals, have expectations, create plans and deliver measurable results. It was a big transition for everyone. In the past, they'd turn up to work, and do what they're told, and it was nice and it was easy. Suddenly, they were responsible, which made them feel very uncomfortable, and it also exposed a lot of people who don't do very much at all. It's

one of the first things that I'll be doing when I go into a new role; show me what expectations you've got, sort of thing, show me exactly what you're meant to achieve. And how we're measuring that, and how you're getting on with that, and whatever can help you achieve it. (L 18)

6.7.3 Host collaborative conversations

In order to effectively share leadership within their organisations, leaders need to be prepared, the participants agreed, to have robust, authentic and collaborative conversations with their staff.

I find it interesting that I am now being more strategic in my meetings with my managers and encouraging them to be more strategic. The 'bullshit' that has got in the way in the past is all gone; instead of sweating whether this account should be paid or not . . . that's just a nothing! (L 14)

Often there might be a more open-book conversation, during which staff received all information pertinent to a project's successful implementation.

One programme needed major redevelopment. I sat down with staff and explained that here's the bottom line of what we need to meet, so they can see the tensions I am working with. They went away, and I encouraged them to take responsibility for creating the structure and to map out goals and implement and review them. We sat back at the end of the year; we really achieved our goals, and we had role modelled a developmental process with them. (L 5)

Conversations could also centre on performance, with clear processes of feedback used to provide guidance to each staff member in their leadership roles.

We use a three hundred and sixty degree annual appraisal here, and I administer that, for all forty staff. Yeah, it's absolutely amazing. The feedback that comes out of here is unbelievable. It's honest, it's accurate, but it's gracious; it's bloody awesome. I can hardly even think of an example when someone's used it as a chance to do a bloody drive-by shooting on someone, or ... You know, it's been awesome! (L 21)

The feedback that comes out ... is unbelievable. It's honest, it's accurate, but it's gracious; it's bloody awesome.

A leader, the participants furthermore stated, needs to be confident and humble during these conversations and not be threatened by the honesty that often emerges.

I suppose, as a manager, as opposed to a leader, you have to be able to ask people questions and then not get upset by the reply. If you ask the question, you have to expect the reply so, you know, even if you don't like it. (L 14)

And that's okay; it doesn't worry me. I don't feel I need to be an expert or have the ultimate say in what they do. And, so, I think that's a key thing. (L 3)

6.8 Articulate shared vision and values

The fourth condition allowing self-organisation to occur in complex adaptive systems is the presence of an 'attractor'. As I discussed in the literature review on complexity thinking in Section 2.4.4, an attractor can be either a perceived threat or a shared opportunity.

The first of these two is usually a threat imposed on the organisation from the outside. Here, the leader's role can be one of highlighting for staff the gap between the current reality of the organisation's performance and the performance required to effectively close that gap by addressing the changing external context. However, more commonly, the key attractor in

an organisation is a shared purpose and vision, one that is closely tied to the core values of the organisation, hence enabling staff members to emotionally engage with and ‘rally around’ this collective goal.

The key success ingredient with respect to this second attractor is a shared vision that is *authentically* shared, that is, team members are an essential, valued part of exploring, creating and articulating this vision. This consideration links to the discussion earlier in this chapter on fostering interaction: by facilitating the development of a shared vision, an organisation can achieve a higher level of engagement, contribution and acceptance, and leverage better ideas through the use of the collective intelligence of the organisation.

Sergiovanni (2001), writing on leadership within the context of schools, argues that organisations need to be culturally tight and managerially loose. Teachers, he claims, are motivated more by values and beliefs than by managerial controls. This claim ties in with Wheatley’s (2006) assertion that, in complex adaptive systems, order and design are not externally imposed but emerge as a result of the combination of individual freedom and shared core values. A main outcome of this process is that the members of each component of the system choose to work together to achieve a common purpose, as this comment illustrates.

We constantly have to adapt the programmes we offer based on the shifting and unpredictable funding flows, which can change markedly every year. The trick seems to be staying true to our maia [core values], while allowing the programme to morph and adapt. (L 9)

The following extended anecdote from Leader 14 illustrates clearly how a leader choosing to increase focus on values changed outcomes from what otherwise could have been a disastrous organisational restructuring.

We started a restructure which we’d done elsewhere and frankly it had turned to *shit* with people pissed off.

One situation stands out for me. We lost TEC [Tertiary Education Commission] funding for seventeen spots out of sixty, which meant that two full-time staff had to go in the Dunedin office. We started a restructure [of the kind] ... we’d done elsewhere and, frankly, [it] ... had turned to shit with people pissed off.

This time I thought all the time about what were the leadership implications of this change. The technical details were obvious with [regard to] lawyers and following the rules. But I was really concerned with the rest of the people— all of the staff, the students who may come back or not, and the wider community. The stuff [I’ve learned] from this leadership process [i.e., the research project] was very helpful.

All I kept thinking about was the big picture: What’s the organisation about? What are our values? I set up a consultation process that allowed the organisation in Dunedin to ask themselves these questions, basically enhancing the emotional part of the process. Interestingly enough, the staff in Dunedin drove the process a lot quicker and came back in a month with two staff who had self-selected to leave. They [the Dunedin campus] said, “This is our vision. This is where we want to go. This is what we want to end up with.” These two people said, “Well I am not going to fit into that!” Experienced people they were. They said, “Not me!” They were great, fine with the process, and absolutely accepting of the result. It was all cleaned up by September, they were paid to Christmas, took immediate departure, which was great

What’s great is that the College survived [the challenge] as a whole, with new life, new direction, new vitality.

for the organisation. We also kept in touch. They kept popping in, and we helped with other job applications too.

What's great is that the college survived as a whole, with new life, new direction, new vitality. (L 14)

The questions that the leaders raised in relation to exploring and articulating a shared vision included these:

- In what ways do staff see my leadership values expressed?
- What processes do we have in place to collectively explore, articulate and operate by our deeply held personal and organisational values?

6.8.1 Seek out shared values

Because self-organisation is largely internally motivated, leaders can enhance conditions for this emergence by providing opportunities for those in their organisations to explore and articulate their individual and shared values. The leaders spoke of the importance of their organisational values being intentionally explored on a regular basis in order to allow them to be an authentic guide for organisational behaviour.

Key ideas, core values; we all need to subscribe to these. They're not just something that sits on the wall. Everyone talks about them; we make time for everyone to report back, for people to talk about examples in small groups. (L 10)

Intentional exploration requires staff to be very familiar with and readily able to articulate these values, in strong contrast to values that are perhaps part of a three-yearly strategic planning exercise that is then written into planning documents and set up as laminated posters on the wall.

When we have a day with the team, where everyone has a chance to talk and listen to everyone else, staff members ask questions like, "Is this still a value we want? Are we living it?" (L 21)

It completely comes back to shared values; staff spending time together, getting to know each other's families and being committed at a heart level. It's not a nine to five type job. You don't come in and sit at your computer and go home; you are actually giving of yourself. This makes people more emotional and more committed. But if you are committed to one thing and someone else is committed to something else, it very easily leads to chaos! (L 16)

It's a team of staff who also hold those values, and we're not all the same. We don't all have the same beliefs, and we don't all have exactly the same values, but we are going in the same direction. (L 1)

Practices and understandings such as these produced values that leaders described as 'alive'—as having a daily, positive impact on organisational behaviour.

It's really interesting to look at our shared values. We had fifteen that were inherited from who knows where; we now have only five, and on our values day we creatively expressed these values on canvas. (L 11)

I think one of the key things is keeping our values alive. They need to be current for our team. (L 11)

Well-articulated values, the leaders decided, also allow organisations to recruit new staff who are well aligned to the current staff culture and value set.

Is this still a value we want? Are we living it?

Now we have what we call our fundamentals—our five key values. What this says is, “Hey, if you’re really into these aspects, come and be with us. If you’re not, then maybe this isn’t actually the right place for you, because this is very definitely what we stand for and how we stand for it.” Hence, we use this [approach] extensively in our staff selection. It leads to really good clarity with the people who come on board. (L 21)

One leader described his experience of his organisation’s shared values being explored across a network of like-minded organisations around New Zealand.

We meet regularly with seven other affiliated organisations around NZ; they range from one with five volunteers and another with seventy staff onsite. We all decided that we don’t want to just provide programmes, [so] we came up with seven key values or mauri, and we used these values to inform questions like: Are we still relevant? How do we live these values? How do they fit with what our communities need? Now we have a common language, we are really clear on what we are about. We have visions, but they can always be shifted. We realise that we don’t have to fit into a box. (L 5)

Several leaders realised that their organisations could benefit from a more focused, intentional exploration of their values and vision.

Could do more ... get board and staff together ... go right back to the basics ... how they think about what they do ... how they describe it. (L 10)

It’s about keeping values of how we want clients to experience our services [as] alive in ‘how we are’ with each other as a staff team. This means being honest with our own values. This is tested when under pressure in an environment of shrinking resources. (One-pager)

One of the factors that the project participants thought most crucial to successfully achieving this organisational values alignment was that leaders must role-model the values in all of their behaviour and decision-making.

I’d really like to see that whole vision-holding aspect come from the organisation, not just known, but really shared belief and embedded into people’s ways and thinking, round how they act within the organisation. And how am I behaving as a leader. (L 15)

Taking values and making them real in practice is one of the most difficult tasks. I need to encourage by example and bring forward those that are doing it. (One-pager)

The leaders found doing just this most difficult when other drivers such as financial strain made value-based behaviour challenging. However, in looking back at the extended anecdote from Leader 14 above, it is clear that keeping a value-based approach, even when caught up in the trickiest and riskiest of personnel and employment scenarios, allows negotiation of much better outcomes for individuals and organisations.

Need to get your values clear; they’re key reference points. I need to create space to have conversations around this, otherwise it’s easy to have a subtle shift around losing these. I have to double check myself. Government funds come in and may not align with what we are really about. (L 1)

This connects with the next sub-section, which examines one critical value—humility.

6.8.2 Disempower ego by focusing on humility

During the initial stages of the NGO project, the participants undertook peer interviews based on appreciative inquiry (AI) principles (as discussed in Chapter 4). Each participant was asked to recall a peak period in his or her leadership and then to explore the values and beliefs underpinning that experience. Participants then collectively analysed these interviews

in order to enumerate these values, which the leaders also saw as personal attributes. Those identified included commitment, compassion, dignity, respect, equality, generosity, honesty, integrity, humility, passion and quality. Davies (2006) maintains that effective leaders display strategic wisdom based on a clear value system that can include integrity, social justice, humility, respect, loyalty and a sharp distinction between right and wrong. He argues that defining core values or a set of beliefs is ‘vital’ because this practice provides “a bedrock on which to base critical decisions” (p. 115). Interestingly, the most prevalent value to emerge from the AI interviews was humility.

What I mean by that is that I'm not driven by the need to have my name up in lights, and to be, you know, to enter some NGO management award scheme and win the gold medal. (L 7)

And it's been huge, because she's had a huge amount of praise from the organisation, nationally, as a whole, and she's been able to take that on instead of me jumping in and saying, "Actually, I'm a manager, and so I should actually be getting that credit." Do you know what I mean? (L 4)

This value is evident in Duignan’s (2006) description of the five pillars of effective leadership proposed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in England. The first pillar is “self-confident and self-effacing leadership, a desire to make an impact upon the world without a strong need for personal status” (p. 112).

In his account of an extensive evaluation project aimed at determining the key factors differentiating ‘good’ companies from ‘great’ companies, that is, companies that excel over a sustained period, Collins (2005) states that his research team was surprised to find that “larger than life celebrity leaders who ride in from the outside negatively correlated with taking a company from good to great” (p. 8). Instead, each of the ‘great’ companies had leaders who exhibited a blend of extreme personal humility with intense professional will. He coined the label ‘Level 5 leader’ to denote these leaders. He also noted that people working with these leaders, when describing them, typically used words such as quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, and understated— traits evident in these comments from two of the NGO participants.

I struggle with speaking about myself. Once I get into a vein, I'm okay, but I do struggle with it. I just draw from the Māori proverb that the kumara [sweet potato] doesn't speak of its own sweetness. (L 12)

I'm at a place in my life that the highest qualities for me are things like character, love, strength, a servant heart, servant attitude; those are the greatest things for me, and, really, you've got two cars, ten cars or no cars, none of that matters. (L 12)

I'm at a place in my life that the highest qualities for me are things like character, love, strength, a servant heart ... those are the greatest things for me.

One of the main points that Collins (2005) makes in his book is that “perhaps one of the most damaging trends in recent history is the tendency (especially by boards of directors) to select dazzling, celebrity leaders and to de-select potential Level 5 leaders” (p. 35). He postulates that potential Level 5 leaders are highly prevalent in our society and that in order to identify them we should “look for situations where extraordinary results exist but where no individual steps forth to claim success. You will likely find a potential Level 5 leader at work” (p. 35).

Humility on the part of the positional leaders in an organisation thus seems essential if the organisation is to self-organise and thrive as a complex adaptive system; leaders need to emphasise that leadership is a process that all members of an organisation can contribute to rather than a position held by a select few.

It seems that a distinctive aspect of organisations in the NGO sector is that their core values are the key driver, taking prominence over vision and mission, as well as programme goals. Thus, in contrast with more traditional organisational structures and strategic planning, where vision and mission are foremost, values guide the organisational behaviour so directing staff how to work towards achievement of the organisation’s goals. To put this another way, values and vision tend to be inseparable in the NGO sector because the type of purpose directing them is completely values based, that is, embedded in notions of enhanced, empowered communities and whanau (extended family/community] wellbeing.

NGOs tend to be values driven rather than mission/vision driven; mission might bring you into it and excite you, but values hold you. (L 5)

6.8.3 Gain clarity of focus

Within an organisational setting that is complex and multifaceted both internally and externally, the ability to make decisions regarding priorities for time and resources is crucial.

You need to focus on the most important things.

Yeah, my MBA definitely influenced me, and the key message was this—clarity of focus. You need to focus on the most important things. It took us a little while to fine-tune what those were, but now we know. The big three are safety, quality and culture. (L 21)

I can take you and show you a million jobs that need to be done round here. For each one, we ask those guiding questions: Is it about safety? Is it about quality? Or is it about culture? And, essentially, if it is about those things round here, it’s going to get done. And if it’s not, then it’s probably not that important. (L 21)

For an organisation, how it goes about discovering and articulating just what these ‘most important things’ are organisation is crucial. In traditional contexts, these ‘things’ are often created and articulated by a CEO or leadership team (in fact, much of the leadership literature says that one of the key roles of a leaders is to provide a vision), and the rest of the organisation is expected to engage and comply with them, treating them as touchstones for their behaviour and decision-making. However, the leaders in this study put huge emphasis on investing the time and energy into creating a truly collaborative vision.

We just did a staff survey, and one of the things we asked was, ‘Did the staff feel they knew, participated and engage in where we are going as an organisation and what was important to us?’ Most of the people did! This was because this year with the annual plan, we invested a lot of time and energy in talking with the team leaders, generating some ideas, then in small teams, then all staff meeting together, and then I wrote it up and presented it back to staff. It came through the survey that people ‘got it’! (L 10)

Under this type of scenario, the leaders saw their role as not individually creating the vision and direction for the organisation, but rather as being facilitators of the organisational conversations that

We need to be vision keepers—to pass down the myths and legends.

progressed thinking towards a shared purpose.

I see my role as 'mission director'—to do the shared history telling, and ensure a good process around learning and development. (L 9)

I work hard at listening to hear, and to respect shared values, ideas and opinions. (One-pager)

We need to be vision keepers— to pass down the myths and legends. (L 3)

Another role that the leaders recognised in this regard was the need for them to communicate to their staff the shifting contexts they were operating in, to keep them aware of the gaps between 'where we are and where we need to be'. Staff might therefore need to be made aware of 'threats' to the organisation's efficacy or even survival, such as increasing community needs or a shrinking funding environment.

Sometimes we need to heighten the awareness of staff .. to treat them as thinking people. (One-pager)

I don't want them to worry about money because we are financially sound ... but also not [to be] in dream land . . . [They need] to be realistic because there are going to be NGOs who go under. (L 10)

Engage staff in realism of this without worrying them ... Some organisations put referrals down on floor and basically shame people into taking case loads . . . [The threat conveyed by this is] if we don't take these up, then we will go under. (L 1)

It's a fine line ... part of our annual planning is opening up back room (strategic) environment. (L 10)

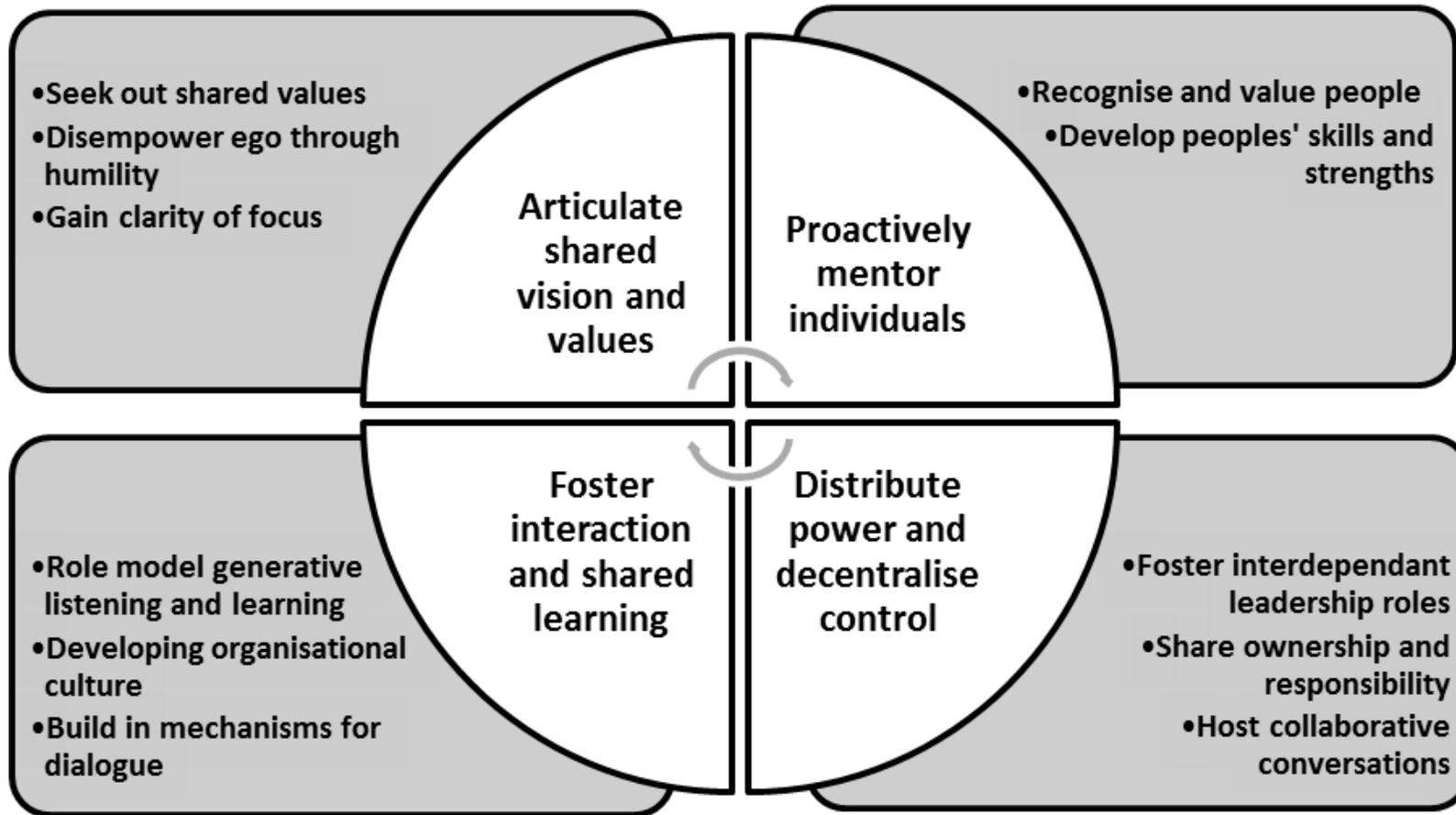
Some leaders stated, however, that making these 'threats' overt could actually be beneficial because of their potential to motivate/generate the self-organisation dynamic that their organisations needed.

We get quite crusty quite quickly when there's nothing on the line ... so that's quite good re tight funding ... But [it] would be great if we didn't have to go cap in hand all the time. (L 8)

Balancing the two aspects of threat and opportunity is a finely tuned leadership attribute. Leaders can sometimes be wise to overtly hold this tension for a period of time in order to provoke change. In the literature in Section 2.7.2, this practice was described as the leader 'holding the feet to the fire', essentially leveraging adversity to motivate people. One leader gave the following example of such a dynamic.

Every team needs adversity. Two teams in rugby super final this year; one had a flood and the other had an earthquake. (L 8)

Figure 12: Leadership actions that facilitate self-organisation



6.9 A summative comment

This chapter has explored the relevance of complexity thinking to the thoughts and actions of the NGO leaders in this study. Initially this focussed in the changing role of the leader and included the themes of 1) shifting from power to influence, 2) becoming a catalyst, 3) fostering networks instead of hierarchies and 4) noticing and enhancing self-organisation

The chapter then focussed on leadership actions that facilitate self-organisation by targeting each of the four enabling conditions for emergence and self-organisation to occur . As seen in Figure 12 above these include 1) proactively mentoring individuals, 2) fostering interaction and shared learning, 3) distributing power and decentralising control, and finally 4) exploring and articulating shared vision and values. The next chapter turns to an exploration of the leaders' learning process during the research project with particular attention is paid to both key enablers as well as the perceived benefits of the process.

CHAPTER 7: LEADERSHIP LEARNING PROCESSES

7.1 Chapter outline

Framing questions: How did the appreciative inquiry learning process adapt during the project and what were the key factors in this? What were the benefits to the participants?

This chapter outlines the effectiveness of the learning processes for the leaders that emerged out of the appreciative inquiry (AI) framework during the project. It links directly to the project's second research question, which required exploration of how and why the appreciative inquiry process was effective in developing the participating leaders' professional learning community.

What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury?

The first part of this chapter documents and discusses the perceived benefits of creating a professional learning community through AI. The second part of the chapter unpacks the key design components that were developed and implemented throughout the project. These included. The last part of the chapter builds on the exploration of complexity thinking in Chapters 2 and 6 by suggesting that this form of thinking can also provide a framework for designing innovative and networked leadership learning processes. The transition of this doctoral project into the leaders' LYNGO network, still ongoing four years after completion of the project, is a significant emergent outcome of the project.

7.2 Benefits of the Canterbury NGO Leadership Project

What we do have is a treasure and taonga that needs to be nurtured. (L 3)

I think you have created a powerful sense of energy with this group, and I really hope it develops beyond the project completion as we discussed yesterday. Congratulations on your leadership. (L 2)

As the Canterbury NGO Leadership Project progressed over its 14 months, it gathered momentum, with the participating leaders showing ever increasing engagement, attendance and connection with the processes, to the point where they clearly had taken on ownership of 'our group'. This claim is strongly supported by the fact that as discussed in Chapter 4, since the completion of the project in February 2010, the group has morphed and transitioned into a self-sustaining leadership network, the members of which continue to communicate regularly and meet every two months.

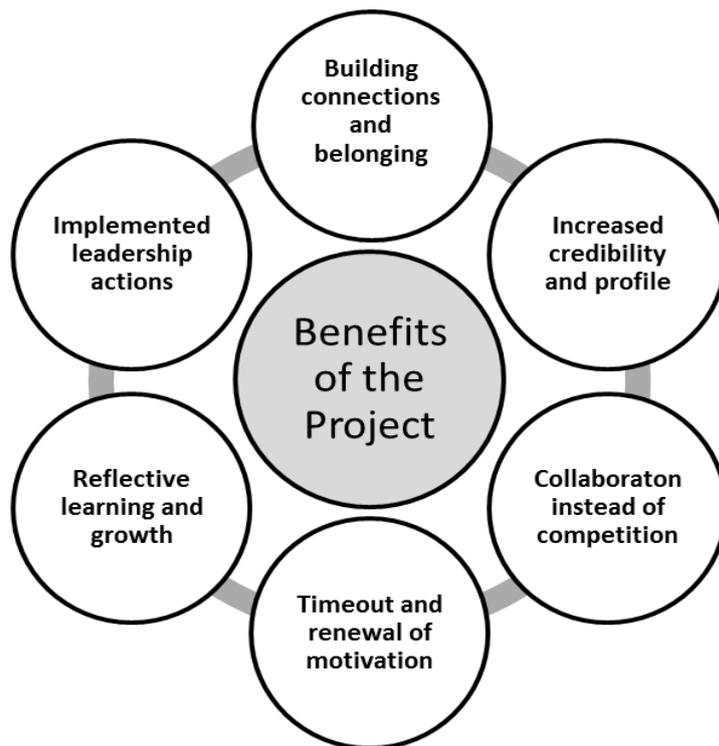
This group has become a learning community, an ongoing learning conversation. If this were to continue, it would probably affect me in similar way. In this group, you can be as passionate as you want and really lose your rag ... our ideas gets mulched and turned into something. This could be an increasingly powerful tool, crap loads better than a course ... this is the way I learn, grounded and pragmatic and full of conversations. (L 7)

There is heaps of potential here ... could cost fifty thousand K to get us there and, ha, ha, now we have done it without money! (L 8)

While the development of this ongoing collaboration is probably the main benefit to emerge from the project, there were many affiliated ones. Those that most clearly emerged from the data are considered in the following subsections (see Figure 13).

In this group, you can be as passionate as you want and really lose your rag ... our ideas gets mulched and turned into something

Figure 13: Benefits of the NGO Leadership Development Project



7.2.1 Building connections and belonging

The leaders very much appreciated the opportunity to be a part of this project, not just for the learning opportunity, but equally for the opportunity to meet and connect with a group of colleagues in similar situations.

Great to meet with other NGO people ... useful to reflect on nature of leadership and sense of self in role. (L 3)

It's not only the personal connections that we have and the way we 'nurture' each other as individuals and as leaders, but the nurturing of our leadership roles and styles and helping us identify, be proud of and develop these. (L 4)

I just want to thank you for allowing me to be part of the group. I hadn't realized until yesterday quite how much of a close knit group it was. (L 20)

Many expressed how affirming and confirming it was to a part of creating this collective with other leaders in the same sector who had the same or similar ideas and who faced the same or similar challenges.

It's increased my confidence ... not being alone ... confirmed what I know ... I am not just a wacko! That's how the AI process has influenced me. (L 3)

The leaders also reported being pleasantly surprised that there were so many other leaders in the sector who thought like them.

I am really feeling quite affirmed in that I am on the right track as a leader in my current role, which is very daunting. It is not commonplace to talk to peers about the 'crux' of the matter in ... positive [terms]. It has been energising! (L 2)

Great opportunity to focus on what is important and reflect about meaning for myself and others in my life and the organisation I am a part of—inspirational! (One-pager)

I am really feeling quite affirmed in that I am on the right track as a leader in my current role, which is very daunting

They found congruence with the thinking and beliefs of other leaders comforting.

High degree of convergence amongst participants about how they like to lead and be led—with honesty, respect, inclusiveness and genuineness. (L 2)

This has been an affirming and confirming collective with other people ... making full sense of a way that is relatively intuitive. This group is like a group of anchors ... can have an impact on the wider society we live amongst. In that sense, it's a way of life ... as opposed to how a work place might be. (L 3)

The leaders furthermore appreciated the clarity brought to their ideas through the synthesis and then further discussion of their shared stories. This iterative synthesis and discussion was a key feature of the research process.

Thank you for this email and summations. I respect the way you have of taking multiple and complex comments and thoughts and narrowing them down to succinct statements. (L 17)

The leaders also reported a sense of congruence in values with their colleagues and identified these values as a major part of their reason for involvement in their current roles.

It was interesting to see how much the idea of values alignment impacted on my decisions to be in the sector and to stay in the sector, my personal values aligning with those of the organisation and the sector as a whole. (L 7)

This matter led to many conversations about the importance of clarifying both personal and organisational values as discussed in Section 6.4.2. Aligning these two factors was seen as a crucial aspect of working effectively in the NGO setting.

At interviews [for staff positions], we have never asked [candidates] about how they fit with our values. We could show our values at induction, and ask them if there is anything you want to add to this, anything you would struggle with. (L 4)

During the early stages of the project, one leader reflected, "I would really like more time to connect with people individually" (L 3). It was not until the second focus group, when this comment was made a second time by the same person, that I realised that we should change the format of the focus groups by decreasing some of the 'content'/informational materials and ideas I had at hand in order to allow more time for conversations and connections. It was quickly becoming apparent to me that this sense of belonging was emerging as an equally important outcome as the content of the conversation themselves.

Another interesting reflection for me, which also had its genesis at this stage, was that I had assumed at the beginning of the project that we could develop an NGO leadership model. However, I realised that this was not possible because leadership actions are contextual and personalised. Instead, we (the group) decided to create a framework that would guide our leadership decisions, as I elaborated on in the two previous chapters. One of the leaders had been thinking along the same line.

I have gained insight on the common themes that exist and would like to see a type of blueprint that would ensure that we can look at organisations to help them with processes to ensure the best chance of success in the NGO sector. (L 11)

7.2.2 Increased credibility and profile

In reflecting back on my rationale for undertaking this study with this group, one of my motivations was to showcase a cohort of leaders who have been largely underestimated in the business sector as a whole. As this project progressed, it also gained in credibility and therefore influenced a range of spheres, including government, other human service agencies and philanthropic funders.

Many thanks for your energy/drive/commitment to putting NGOs on the map ... and great to hear the generation of interest from central government agencies! (One-pager)

In looking around the room, it is an amazing and unique group of people who really do have the opportunity to make a difference. (L 16)

This increasing exposure and credibility led, and is still doing so, to many opportunities for this group to meet and influence strategic and governance direction in the Canterbury community. In the current post-quake environment in Christchurch, this opportunity to influence has become even more pertinent.

I went to the City Council 'Have your say' forum yesterday, in time to hear Peter Townsend from the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce speak. He spoke about building an 'iconic' city versus an ordinary city, and the opportunity we have to recreate not just rebuild Christchurch. The need for iconic, not just ordinary, leaders is imperative; leaders from within the city, not external. Leaders who are willing to make a difference, who operate in different and innovative ways and aren't afraid to take the risks. (L 4)

7.2.3 Collaboration instead of competition

It's amazing to get all those NGO leaders together in one room. It never would have happened in the past ... through collaboration, they have huge potential

Not only the leaders themselves, but also people familiar with yet outside the group, said how surprised and impressed they were that its members had been able to rise above their past differences and come together as a cohesive unit.

Leaders of this capacity have a lot to offer; in working together, what could they achieve? (One-pager)

Nearer the end of the project, the leaders began to express a strong interest in continuing not only to learn together but to work together to achieve collective projects.

We are keen to take a greater involvement in the collaborative ventures and projects, going ahead. (One-pager)

Could we do a project together collaboratively ... [T]here are complicated political reasons why we don't work together more ... [but it would still] be great to do something. (One-pager)

We could create something together. Chew over piece of info and publish it; we can then contribute to others out there. (L 14)

Interestingly, this same leader also expressed hesitation at taking on an advocacy role in the wider sector—a view several other leaders expressed as well.

Has been quite nourishing and quite purposeful, yet I'm not sure we want to be spokespeople for anything (L 14)

When probed, Leader 14 admitted that her hesitation related to the risks of trying to meet the needs of funders while also advocating for important issues. Leaders acknowledged the complex and somewhat disconnected setting that constituted the wider youth services sector in Christchurch, and all agreed that they would like to see more coordination and coherence amongst these agencies in order to show solidarity of purpose and promote clear messages to funders and policymakers.

There are a number of initiatives being discussed, both at a local level and through central government, which could potentially have a number of consequences for social service agencies and the delivery of services in the future. Clearly, the NGO sector needs to be represented at these, and one of the strengths of this group, as I perceive it to be, rests in the ability to advocate and have a presence in these discussions. (One-pager)

The leaders were particularly inspired and motivated by the opportunity to contribute to causes beyond the scope of their particular organisations—to be part of something bigger. This thinking seemed commensurate with the sentiments that many of the leaders expressed about moral purpose and their reasons for being involved in the NGO sector, noted in Chapter 5.

Feels good to be part of exploring with others the things we see as important that ultimately leads to the needs of young people being met. There are important stories that need to be told and explored.

[The project has been a] great opportunity to focus on what is important and reflect about meaning for myself and others in my life and the organisation I am part of. Inspirational! (L 10)

Connects strongly with the desire to make a difference, how we can foster and communicate the culture of today and collaborate on today's understanding. (L 13)

7.2.4 Time out and renewal of motivation

An overwhelmingly prevalent fourth area of benefit was the personal renewal and recharging that occurred through being involved in the project.

I feel energised and challenged. I don't often take the time to stop, think and reflect on what has and is going well in terms of leading the team. (One-pager)

... remain authentic, slow down, take the time ... the great act of kindness in appreciating what each person has brought to the work that day. (One-pager)

I am feeling hugely inspired, wow! I loved the content as well as the, at times, mesmerising delivery of the content. I am feeling a little bit overwhelmed with all the information and thought processes and have lots of wee avenues. I commit to the task of exploring further and travelling down some of the avenues, which I am sure will lead to more thoughts and discoveries and paths. (One-pager)

... inspired, thought-provoking, a gift. **(One-pager)**

Great to hear those peak stories—really fired up!
(One-pager)

Being able to take time out from normal routine to learn, reflect ... being fired up about my place in leadership and our place as a group

One leader explained how vital the group had been for him during his description of the concept of ‘anchor organisation’.

[I] have been talking at work about the concept of an anchor organisation, a place where people can come and feel belonging both physically and also spiritually. To be honest, I feel that this group has that role for me—I feel a sense of connection and feeding here. (L 1)

Others said they had gained a sense of internal strength and direction.

Good to reconnect with bigger themes inside—encouraging, reinforcing and stimulating. (L 13)

Appreciated the character and integrity behind [name of leader] poetry, which helped me access and engage more of me ... very grateful, thank you. (L 15)

Inspired creation of an internal place from which to reflect ... reminded and remembering the importance of my friends and family and their generosity and kindness to me. (L 3)

7.2.5 Reflective learning and growth

The leaders clearly identified the learning focus of the research project as the distinctive difference between their group and the other groups and networks to which they belonged.

I think the style of how we have done this goes beyond the generic 'this is a leadership style or model' type of learning, but we have been able to really explore what the learning means for us in our actual role. (One-pager)

Significantly, many of the leaders described limited opportunities to access leadership

This is different from other professional groups—social service providers, youth workers, collectives, etcetera ... [It’s about] building practice instead of just talking about issues in sector.

training, and hence the learning focus of this group was not only unique for them but also vital in building their individual leadership capacities.

I have not had any training in leadership and am interested to explore this. (L 12)

While the learnings about leadership that emerged in this study are elaborated on in Chapter 6, one example of particular relevance here is the awareness the leaders gained of the differences between leadership and management roles.

Management and leadership are two aspects to my role. The first is all about service delivery: what reports need to be done to ensure this happens, managing finance and infrastructure, etcetera. The second is about people development. Often, the first aspect of this is the squeaky wheel, and therefore gets our attention. I have had a fresh understanding of the importance of the second. Interestingly, my job description is all written around the management aspect of my role, not the leadership aspect. I have a performance appraisal coming up, and one of the challenges for me is how to incorporate feedback around the leadership aspect. (L 18)

Leaders described feeling challenged by what they were learning, which for some of them resulted in a creative tension that led to growth.

I find all the conversations interesting, as I am keen to get a 'fit' for understanding leadership, my role and how to move forward to empower others, and I am also conscious that a 'neat fit' is not always good, as you need to allow new thoughts and ideas to challenge your understanding. That can create a tension. I am looking forward to finding ways to manage that tension for myself, and for staff to keep informed but aware, growing, changing and improving. (L 9)

I found it challenging to think about how I can build these principles in my personal life and into my work and to stay as fired up by this as I am now. (One-pager)

Others described how they had been influenced by the guest speakers, in particular the sessions on 'leadership and calling'.

Also opportunity to hear key speakers with latest stuff—a real privilege! (L 6)

I was intrigued by the talk of the alignment of our internal images with the invitation of the world. Also, the image of the world's hunger and passion meet. I found &&& to be a very good example of what he is talking about in the way that he is obviously passionate about poetry and was able to do this in ways he saw the world and saw his work. (L 1)

Another learning factor was the exposure to the range of leadership literature I distributed regularly during the project. The library of leadership books that I also made available served the same purpose. I asked each of the participants to review the literature they read and to present their thoughts back to their colleagues in subsequent group sessions.

My ideas of leadership have changed. It's nourishment from being exposed to different stuff. . . . having reasons to read a book! (L 14)

Thank you too for another article. Really good! (One-pager)

Gung ho, easy read. So simple and yet so fired up about it ...made absolute sense ... went off to team meeting and shared info from book. (L 11)

7.2.6 Implementing leadership actions

Many of the leaders described specific strategies that they had picked up as a part of the leadership project and then adapted and implemented in their own organisations.

<p>We have changed the format of our performance appraisal forms to include leadership skills—enacting, enabling, envisioning—as well as management skills</p>
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Giving me an opportunity to try new things ... put my thinking out there ... get away from daily grind ... a fresh perspective ... every time we have come and then I've gone back and tried something different at work. (One-pager)

I have started using readings to supplement team discussions and create a learning culture. (L 5)

At our AGM, I was able to talk about management and leadership models, and in our strategic planning to include concepts from 'good to great'. (L 2)

After exploring values in the leadership group, I thought about how to make our organisational values more overt. Our current values that were laminated on the walls had been defined two to three years previously, so I decided to set up an exercise with the team. I invited the team to imagine that if they were going to be leaving, what they would like their team members to be saying about them in their farewell speech. This drew out personal values, and then we decided as a team what would be our team values. (L 6)

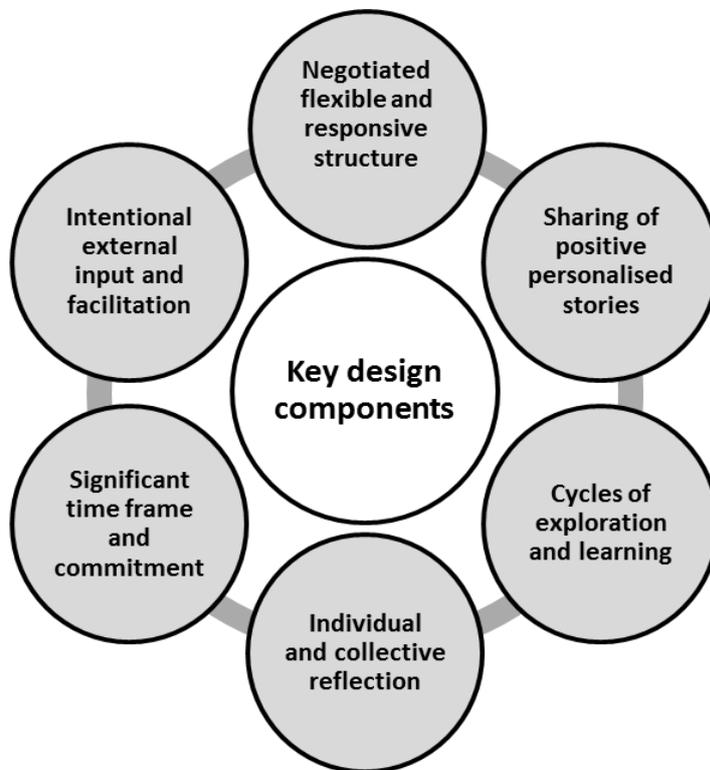
Other leaders were less able to identify discrete actions they had taken as a result of the project, but expressed instead a sense of growing understanding and poise in their leadership.

Hard to attribute input from this group, but certainly it made my behaviour more mature and more leaderly. And that's given our funders confidence (L 20)

7.3 Key design components in creating a learning community

As evident from the previous section, the leaders clearly perceived sound benefits from being involved in the learning community. This next section covers the key design principles that allowed this learning community to form. Working in collaboration with the 25 participants, I undertook further analysis and monitoring of the effectiveness of the inquiry process with regard to developing their group as a professional learning community. This process led us to refine the two guiding principles of appreciative inquiry— focus on the positive and collaboration— into the seven key ‘effectiveness’ components that follow (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Key design components in creating a learning community



7.3.1 Negotiation of a flexible and responsive structure

The project began with a very clear structure, as outlined in the methodology protocols in Chapter 4 (in particular, Section 4.4.3). This initial structure was important because it meant the participants could be clear in their own minds as to why they should participate. That, in turn, made it easier for them to explain and negotiate with staff and boards the time out they needed for this involvement.

We're not just meeting to shoot the fat ... needs to be opportunity for growth and learning in order to prioritise booking out a day together

It's clear we are engaging in a combination of intellectualising and very practical talk about us as leaders. (L 20)

As discussed at length in Chapter 4, one of the first findings when the project was three months 'in' was that although, in the initial focus group, the leaders had all agreed to be involved in leadership learning 'sets' (i.e., groups of three to four peers meeting regularly), all of which had been fully planned at the time, only one of these sets had met, and then just once. In addition, the online web-based forum site established early in the process had only been accessed by a few of the leaders.

Sorry I didn't engage with the website. It was never on the top of my list! (L 6)

At the second focus group (March 2009), the participants unanimously agreed with their colleague who said: "It is difficult for us to prioritise and organise meetings with our peers". In preference to the self-directed and more informal processes of learning sets and web forums, the participants requested "regular day-long focus groups that we can diary in advance". As one participant said, "It's much easier to diary a day out with good notice [to staff of time out]". Another said: "If it doesn't happen on the day, it doesn't happen!"

In response to comments such as these, the group and I collectively agreed that the ongoing inquiry should involve one-day focus groups scheduled and implemented every two to three months throughout the year. The purpose of these sessions was clarified as the creation of a 'think-tank' or 'incubator', where the leaders could explore leadership collectively and critique other leadership perspectives from other sources.

<p>It has been a great initiative, getting people with our collective focus together. It has been great to interact with other leaders I didn't know</p>
--

More power than what we thought there can be in just one-day blocks. (L 4)

This is a most useful process, sharing together of ideas, talking with others, structured set-aside day, compared to online and small groups; that wasn't going to work for me. It's okay to block a day out of my diary: no, I am not going to be the office today! (L 4)

This new approach worked well. The groups were highly successful in terms of participant attendance, motivation and learning outcomes. They quickly developed into rich learning communities that all of them highly valued.

Being able to take time out from 'normal' routine to learn, reflect and be fired up about my place in leadership and our place as a group in leadership. (L 10)

The high level of commitment to these focus groups is perhaps a little surprising given the intensely busy schedules of these managers. As they said themselves, they became quickly highly engaged with their groups and the inquiry process and so were prepared to prioritise these meetings in their diaries: "I am really growing in the process and I want more of it" (L 18). They also appreciated the opportunity to negotiate with me and one another about the scheduling of meetings and what would be discussed. This approach gave them choice, ownership of the process, and so contributed to their willingness to participate.

[I] liked AI. Firstly, it's a conversation, gathering stories and slowly building something ... maybe not that new and pretty intuitive, but so we have a growing conversation and narrative. It's an oral history, it's a living thing, alive, and we have all been a part of that. (L 8)

7.3.2 Authentic sharing of positive, personalised stories

The focus of the AI process on sharing the positive experiences that occurred during the participants' every-day work had a profound effect on the energy and engagement of this group of leaders. Wheatley's (2006) depiction of workplaces stands in contrast to the collaborative energy-producing engagement that group members had with one another.

In all types of organisations, too many are filled with people who are exhausted, cynical and burned-out. I have witnessed the incredible levels of energy and passion that can be evoked when leaders or colleagues take the time to recall people to the meaning of their work. It only takes a simple but powerful question: 'What called you here?', 'What were you dreaming you might accomplish when you first came to work here?' (2006, p. 132)

A distinctive aspect of AI is its use of peer interviews. When the participants were asked at the end of the inquiry what they had found most valuable during it, nearly all of them mentioned the opportunity to interview one another during the first and last focus group meetings.

The one-on-one interview was helpful for me to understand my own leadership; many personal insights have come from our discussions. (L 10)

During the first focus group, the high level of personal engagement was much in evidence as the pairs of leaders returned to the larger group after having interviewed each other and shared their leadership stories. It is likely that this outcome was promoted in part by the interview questions being framed in positive terms and answered as narratives.

I enjoyed listening and contributing to the stories that had brought people to their roles in organisations. (One-pager)

The reflecting back on a peak leadership experience has brought to the forefront the steps taken that led to the times when I have [had] an immense sense of pride in the work the team does. (L 1)

Reed (2004) states that to serve their purpose well, AI questions must have two parts: first, the question must evoke a real personal experience and a narrative story that help the participants identify and draw on their effective learning from the past; second, it must allow the interviewer to go beyond the past to envision the best possibilities for the future. Reed also observes that the art and practice of asking questions according to the AI approach strengthens a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential.

This was the best part for me, reflecting on my own leadership style and approach

According to the leaders participating in the project, the nature of the interview questions helped them access stories that surfaced their passions and core motivations. It is worth repeating here a quote from Hammond (1998) used earlier in this thesis. She said: "When you ask people appreciative questions, you touch something very important to them. They don't give politically correct answers; they give heartfelt answers because we ask soulful questions" (p. 48)

Some leaders also began to make connections beyond their formal leadership roles, by realising that both the AI approach and what they were learning by using it had implications for their wider lives.

A key learning for me was thinking about the times that have been high points in my leadership. I don't think I reflect on these enough. It was very useful today to think beyond the story and the outcome and unpack those experiences and get to the heart of what made them high points. (L 5)

The fact that the participants had opportunity to interview each other, to share ideas and confidences, personalised the process for them and contributed to feelings of trust in colleagues. Creating this initial connection with another leader increased engagement across the members of the group and thus the project as it progressed.

I really valued talking with other leaders, stretching my thinking. (L 13)

Why do I keep coming back? It [the process] is rich in allowing good communication with others in similar roles; [it] clarifies and renews what we know. (L 6)

One of the most interesting conversations was related but external to the exercise, so the environment and context set up this possibility brilliantly. (L 2)

During the final focus group meeting in early 2010, the value of sharing stories through peer interviews was again apparent when the participants and I agreed to have another round of peer interviews. This time, however, the questions focused on each leader's narrative of the changes to his or her leadership thinking and practice over the duration of the project. Again, these interviews were highly engaging, and it was evident that an enormous amount of learning had occurred during the project.

I like the appreciative approach, and I need to do more of that in my life in general.

There were many gems that I could take away and reflect on in my leadership. (L 5)

The AI interviews were the best part for me—that reflective learning process. (L 8)

The personal interview was helpful for me to understand my personal leadership style. Many personal insights came from

these discussions. (L 17)

7.3.3 Cycles of exploration and learning

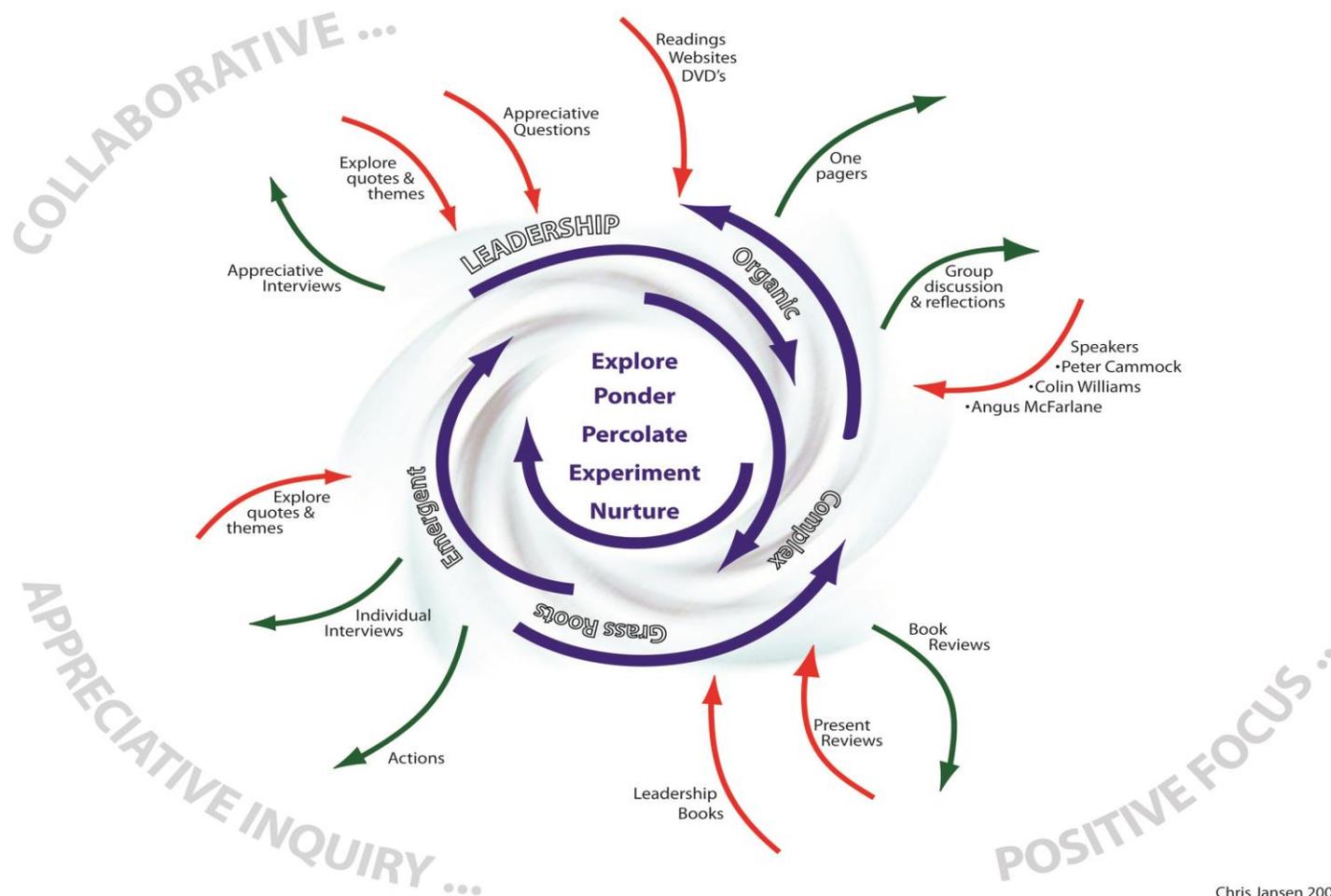
Figure 7.1 below conceptualises the cyclical process of learning that developed throughout the project. The arrows in the centre of the diagram denote the leaders exploring and pondering their leadership roles, and considering how they could experiment with and nurture their leadership. This generative process was not only cumulatively cyclical but also complex, organic and emergent.

The red arrows in Figure 6 indicate inputs into the reflection process, that is, past experiences, book reviews, readings, guest speakers and other leadership material procured through digital media. While the reflection tended to be triggered during the focus group meetings, much of it, along with experimentation, occurred in the intervals between the scheduled meetings. The process also involved a number of stimuli and inputs to be fed into the process, as described below.

The green arrows indicate the outputs or data sources that were created during the focus group sessions and interviews. These included peer interview transcripts, group discussions recorded on paper and video, DVDs, one-pagers and emails. This material, in turn, was fed back into the reflective cycle as inputs, that is, interview coding, book reviews, one-pagers, quotes, at which point they were reflected on once again, thus creating deeper and richer learning and resultant data. And so the cycle continued.

Figure 15: Diagrammatic representation of the cyclical learning process during the Canterbury NGO Leadership Project

Exploring our Leadership



Chris Jansen 2009

One such stimulus, for example, related to the questions based on AI principles that were used during the peer interviews held during the first and last focus group sessions. As mentioned earlier, many common themes were synthesised and then transcribed from session to session and right across all of them. The thematic analysis of the first set of AI interview data yielded eight initial themes:

- Transformative change;
- Creating spaces to empower people;
- Deeply held values;
- Sharing the journey, sharing leadership;
- The influence of our stories—looking back, looking forward;
- Flow – getting in the ‘zone’;
- Building positive relationships; and
- Walking our talk—congruence.

These same sets of interview data were then explored in depth at a subsequent focus group and eventually synthesised down to the material in Chapter 6. The leaders read their own words and the words of their colleagues. The next section of this chapter takes a closer look at this process of collective ‘member checking’.

Another stimuli involved input from a range of consultants in various areas of leadership. Video recordings were made of the group discussions and reflections that followed the consultants’ talks. Most leaders also took advantage at each focus-group meeting of the wide range of leadership literature made available to them by taking away selections of them to read. Several wrote reviews of these books, and presented them for discussion at subsequent meetings.

I found the holistic approach inspiring, interesting and motivating. Very challenging questions! I seem to be so caught up in the doing [during my work] that I don’t stop to reflect on the whys.
(L 5)

7.3.4 Individual and collective reflection

As will be readily apparent by now, reflection on the material fed into the cyclical process was essential to the project’s effectiveness as a vehicle of change for the leaders. Reflection was both collective and individual, and was both structured (facilitated by myself) and unstructured (left to the participants to determine, either individually or with one another).

It’s the creation of a place from which to reflect. We have developed an inspiring, creative, exciting space to share

In order to facilitate and manage the reflection process, I suggested, and had accepted, a means of collecting and capturing the experiences, thoughts, comments and questions from participants relating to these discussions. This technique was the ‘one-pager’ (Mayo et al., 2008a) discussed in the methodology chapter. As a reminder here, however, this process required each person in the group to anonymously write one page about an idea, collection of related ideas, action taken or a discussion point. Other than observing the one-page

restriction, participants could write whatever they wanted to say and however they wanted to say it. I collated all the one-pagers created by the leaders and used them as another stimulus in the collective reflection cycle. In this way, the one-pager became a way to accumulate data about the managers’ thinking, and it created resource material to feed back into the reflective cycle, so contributing to the richness of the reflection process.

Mayo et al. (2008a) found one-pagers an effective communication and reflection tool, especially because it is one that all partners in an AI or action research process can share. The project leaders agreed, offering these types of statement in response to questions about this tool’s utility.

One-pagers have been a useful way to reflect while it’s still at the forefront of my mind. (L 3)

I am enthused [by the one-pagers] to read more, reflect more! (L 6)

Rich conversations, different perspectives showed in each interview; space for discussion and debate. (L 13)

Many of the managers found the discipline of stopping a discussion and immediately writing in one their reflections on that discussion a little awkward at first. However, they soon appreciated the discipline involved and the ability to then read what others had reflected on.

I found the one-pagers hard at times but useful to focus down on my thinking. (L 3)

Some of the managers also began to apply the processes used in this project in their own organisations with the aim of creating or recreating their organisations as learning communities. For example, the focus-group process and reading literature prompted one manager (L 5) to implement some new strategies during her next staff training day. She said that “engaging in a combination of intellectualising and very practical talk about ourselves as leaders” had given her the understandings and tools to introduce AI methods to her staff so that they could discuss and reflect on workplace matters of importance to them. “Taking the time out of work to reflect, to get organised and to develop new ideas—this is exactly what this process has allowed me to do”(L 5).

Another reflection process involved collective member checking as mentioned in Section 7.3.3. above. The paired appreciative interviews were recorded and then coded and themed into eight main themes. I collated participant quotes pertaining to each theme on large posters and pinned them up round the room at the next focus group meeting. The participants, in small groups, moved around each poster, writing notes and discussing what they were reading. I recorded the discussions on Dictaphones, subjected this information to the same process of thematic analysis as previously, and provided the analyses as feedback during the next focus group meeting.

There were some gems; I need to take them away and reflect on them in terms of my leadership.

Participants were particularly thrilled to be able to gain insights into the other interviews that had occurred while they were undertaking their own interview. Many were surprised by the high degree

of congruence across the quotes.

An amazing amount of knowledge and experience spread over these posters. (L 3)

I appreciated the opportunity to view others' quotes and thoughts and build on them in rich conversations. (One-pager)

Extracted quotes were very pertinent and well organised into themes. (One-pager)

Good to record discussions, as they were definitely triggered by the posters ... won't be able to create the environment to get those discussions going again. (One-pager)

After this activity, the whole group agreed that they would like to have had more time for it, and that they would have liked to have read the quotes in advance in order to be better prepared for discussion during the member-checking phase. They also had practical suggestions on how to improve the experience.

Lots of discussion started out of one quote, so 10 minutes wasn't long enough. (One-pager)

Bigger typing please! Needed a bit more time. (One-pager)

[F]elt pressured to think and feedback without having time to think. (One-pager)

A typed sheet with all quotes and allocating five minutes to read before discussion would have been useful. (One-pager)

One participant suggested that more in-depth discussions would also be beneficial, again indicating that more time could be dedicated to this type of reflection:

Would like more meaty discussions ... still working through a lot of stuff in my thinking, and this could be a safe place to air them! (One-pager)

Over the duration of the project, I also audio- and video-recorded, with the participants' permission, their informal interviews and conversations, and collated, synthesised and analysed the resultant data. The iterative process of assembling, analysing, synthesising and reflecting not only this but all information collected throughout the project brought an ever-increasing depth to the quality of the analysis and reflection, and built up successive layers of practice-based information and ideas. These ongoing opportunities for the leaders to collectively critique the mass of information, especially with regard to the applicability of it to their individual settings, reinforced their sense of ownership of the process.

It seems incredibly important that the taonga [treasure] that exists here reflects the way forward not only for the NGO sector but also on the greater planet that we inhabit. (L 8)

Really useful process, fascinating, inspiring, an honour.

7.3.5 Significant time frame and commitment

As noted earlier in this thesis, the project was initially planned to last eight months. However, in line with the group's commitment to negotiate the unfolding inquiry process, this timeframe was extended out to 14 months. This extension was critical in terms of giving the managers sufficient time to develop their learning community collaboratively and for them to effectively explore their leadership ideas and practice.

This group has been like an oasis in the desert for me. I have benefited so much from having this opportunity to meet, to spending this time focused not on my organisation, but on me and what makes me an effective leader. (L 3)

At the end of the project, the leaders and I agreed that 14 months had provided them with enough time to develop strong relationships with one another, thus increasing commitment to

the group. This long-term commitment created a platform (a safe environment) from which the leaders could experiment with new ideas and actions.

The element of safety came from the trust that developed in the group as a result of its members engaging collaboratively and constructively—of forming professional relationships with one another and a professional learning community—over a sustained period of time. I consider, and a good number of the leaders agreed with me, that this level of connection and trust were the key factors producing the ‘glue’ that bound this research group into one that still works together today.

For me it’s been the high level of trust. I know people get it ... I can talk on about some things that are on my mind, and I know it won’t go beyond these walls—kind of peer supervision. (L 6)

Interesting the number of people in our positions who don’t have this kind of support. (L 9)

In this regard, during the last focus-group session for the project in early 2010, the leaders began to plan ways that they could sustain the group now that the formal research project was over. Leader 15 spoke for them all, when she said, at this time, “It would be great to work on a collaborative group project.” The group has, of course, continued to meet since then, with the process being generated and facilitated by the group members. I discuss this important outcome of the project at greater length in Chapter 8.

7.3.6 High-quality external input and intentional facilitation

Quality of facilitation relates to the professionalism combined with people skills required to facilitate the formation of what was initially a very diverse and somewhat fractured group. Professionalism was gained and maintained through carefully considered inputs— sound organisation, oversight and facilitation of the project, good communication and the provision of a high-quality venue, resources and catering.

Value in having it at uni; useful to be able to tell my workplace that I am doing my leadership PD [at a credible place]. (L 11)

Hugely appreciated Chris’s facilitation; well cared for, beautiful food, lovely rooms; also the fact that other people have made that commitment ... core bunch of people coming along regularly plus the others who have come along [e.g., visiting speakers] have added to it with the differences that they bring. (L 11)

Just the fact that the team knew I was coming out here to the uni and talking to other people ... [Made it clear] I was taking it seriously. I am now trying to put [what I have learned] back into the team and allow them to have an experience that is useful. (L 6)

The second aspect under consideration in this subsection is intentional facilitation, the need for someone to ‘make it happen’. That someone was initially me, of course, and was a role I continued to play throughout the project although it became less and less important as the group gained in strength and understanding of the inquiry process.

Good food, nice room, enjoyed the company; slightly hesitant to engage with new people but wanting to have a crack!

One particular advantage of having an external facilitator such as me during the AI process is that I could initiate many conversations not only to encourage everyone’s voice to

be heard and to assist those who for various reasons associated with their leadership role initially had some difficulty getting to grips with the group setting and the AI process. For me, this facilitation involved a blend of persistence, along with good humour and warmth to allow the participants to engage in the initial stages.

Chris has been very persistent. He's working really hard with people like myself who are trying to trim involvement down. (L 3)

Chris, great facilitation style; good balance. (L 6)

Although the group's reliance on me as facilitator diminished over time, some of them were still concerned when, in February 2010, I announced that, after 14 months, I could not continue working with the group within the context of a formal research project. The entire group was adamant that the group should continue in its own right. However, some of the leaders were dubious that they could facilitate themselves without an outside facilitator.

Needs to be facilitated. Would that dynamic change now that project is over? I am not that keen to try to prepare something; enjoy coming along and not knowing what we are going to do today. (L 4)

Reality is things will be different ... this PhD project has been underlying driver, so things might be less focused now. (L 15)

We would be happy to pay someone to, if necessary, to facilitate it, say fifty dollars a session. (L 15)

However, after many conversations and a reasonably lengthy hand-over period (due to the beginning of the earthquakes), it is very pleasing to know that the group the project leaders established after the project's completion is still growing and is self-led, facilitated by three volunteers from within the group itself. I discuss this transition process from a leadership research project run by Canterbury University to the self-sustaining professional learning network called LYNGO (Leaders of Youth-Focused NGOs) in the next section.

7.4 Complexity-informed leadership learning processes

In this section I consider the potential of complexity thinking as more than a framework for the adaptive leadership of organisations. I consider that it can also act as a framework for designing innovative and networked leadership learning processes. In essence, this means a complexity-thinking-based framework capable of *developing* leadership as well as *enacting* leadership, as discussed in Chapter 6.

I did not initially design this project as one informed by complexity. However, in retrospect, it is evident that the participants in the project were interacting as a complex adaptive system. The customized appreciative inquiry framework acted as an enabling constraint (an oxymoron central to complexity thinking as discussed in Section 2.5.2), and thus was effective in 'occasioning' or creating emergence in this professional learning community. This emergence eventually led, as noted in the previous section of this current chapter, to the 'birth' of LYNGO, a sustainable professional learning community that is still thriving in 2014, over three years after the research project ended.

7.4.1 Appreciative inquiry as an enabling constraint

Throughout the project, I was particularly interested in the professional learning community of NGO leaders developing a ‘life of its own’ in order to foster ongoing engagement, reflection and innovation. As discussed in Section 2.5, emergence in a complex adaptive system can either be spontaneous or enabled by the provision of certain conditions. In contrast to ‘complicated’ systems, which also have multiple parts that interact with one another in predictable and structured ways (e.g., an aircraft or an engine), the multiple parts of or agents in a ‘complex system’ interact in an ongoing generative, unpredictable and self-determined fashion. Hence, emergence cannot be scripted or forced into existence, and outcomes cannot be fully anticipated.

Davis and Sumara (2006) describe the conditions for enabling emergence as enabling constraints that provide a fine balance between (1) diversity and redundancy and (2) coherence and randomness. Simply stated, these conditions need to be ‘not too loose, not too tight’ if there is to be sufficient space for innovation without the process degenerating into chaos. In Section 2.5.2, I presented the process of leading an organisation in terms of a sustained metaphor centred on two open hands. I consider it useful to again present it here.

The analogy of two open hands, held apart as if gently holding an object, suggests an open space where creativity can occur yet is framed by the hands themselves that might represent the frame within which this is fostered. These hands are neither clasped (too tight) nor behind one’s back (too loose); an optimum space is required in order for emergence to occur. While these conditions can be planned and focused, outcomes cannot be fully determined, as they are the result of the collective emergent behaviour of the individual within the system (Jansen, 2011, p. 73)

This same metaphor applies to the conditions required to foster emergence in a learning process. While these conditions can be planned and focused, outcomes cannot be fully determined because they, too, are the result of the collective emergent behaviour of the individuals within the system.

In the next section, I consider the application of each of these pairs of conditions. Here, I link them to the intentional conditions that I put in place in this project in order to implement the leadership learning intervention.

7.4.2 Balancing diversity and redundancy

As pointed out in Section 2.5.2, internal redundancy is the manner in which agents in a system are similar or share commonalities. This commonality is, on the one hand, vital if shared interactions are to occur (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 139). On the other hand, internal diversity is the way in which agents differ in all regards, such that diversity acts as a source of creativity (Malcolm, 2013). It is in the tension between these two polarities that the creative opportunities lie.

In the leadership project, one enabling constraint was the selection criteria for participants. *Internal redundancy* was provided by focusing exclusively on adolescent-focused NGO organisations rather than on funders or government organisations. This provided a common context for the organisations involved. It also intentionally focused only on the managers of

each organisation, not on other leaders amongst their staff teams. Managers said that this focus led to a sense of collegiality, connection and support.

Being able to take time out from ‘normal’ routine to learn, reflect and be fired up about my place in leadership and our place as a group in leadership. (One-pager)

Internal diversity was provided by inviting participants from a good number of NGO organisations across a range of settings—education, recreation and residential, and community therapeutic support. The diversity was also visible in the gender and ethnicity mix of the participants. The initial lack of familiarity amongst them gave rise to a creative edge that aided not only the generative process but also the sense that the participants did have a lot to learn from one another.

It has been a great initiative, getting people with our collective focus together. It has been great to interact with other leaders I didn’t know. (L 4)

7.4.3 Balancing coherence and randomness

The second ‘enabling constraint’ occurred as a result of providing sufficient coherence and randomness in the structure of the project, defined here as:

The structural conditions that help to determine the balance between sources of coherence that allow a collective to maintain a focus of purpose/identity and sources of disruption and randomness that compel the collective to constantly adjust and adapt. (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 1147)

Coherence was provided by the appreciative inquiry (AI) themes that the group agreed on at the beginning of the project. This constrained the project to focus on (1) the positive, that is, what was working; and (2) inclusivity and collaboration, that is, all decisions being made through consultation among all participants. These two principles acted as touchstones—non-negotiable parameters within which randomness could come into play.

I found the holistic and positive approach inspiring, interesting and motivating. Very challenging questions! I seem to be so caught up in the doing [during my work] ... that I don’t stop to reflect on the why’s. (L 5)

Randomness resulted from the second theme of AI, namely inclusivity and collaboration, where the original initiatives of the project were evaluated with the participants as the study progressed, and were progressively adapted to fit their needs. This practice resulted, for example, in the initial plan to include online forums and learning sets of three to four people abandoned in favour of half-day focus groups on a regular basis. The practice also allowed a wide range of new materials, literature and topics to enter the process, which fostered a sense of research *with* rather than research *on*, which then led to a sense of freedom and creativity for participants, and ultimately to a sense of collective ownership.

The wonderful thing about our group is that we created it and we own it. It hasn’t been set up by someone else on our behalf which is normally what we experience in this sector

Another aspect of randomness relates to the individual vision and values that each leader articulated during the early stages of the project. This articulation led to coherence in the

sense of the shared moral purpose and direction that emerged as the group members began to get to know one another.

7.4.4 Transitioning from doctoral project to LYNGO network

At the end of the research project in March 2010, the leaders in this project were adamant that although the research project was stopping, their group process was not.

It's just brilliant that this is our group that we have organised instead of someone else coming in and doing it. (L 4)

I think you have created a powerful sense of energy with this group, and I really hope it develops beyond the project completion, as we discussed yesterday. (L 2)

We are keen to take a greater involvement in the collaborative ventures and projects going ahead. (One-pager)

The solidifying of this NGO leadership network beyond the duration of the project is strongly indicative of emergence during the project. Its success, in this regard, highlights the potential of embedding a complexity lens into AI frameworks used to develop professional learning processes. By actively balancing these enabling constraints in this project, the leaders and project facilitators were able to occasion the emergence of a vibrant, dynamic professional learning community. The creation and use of customised AI-based enabling constraints promises a robust means of generating innovation and creativity.

It's the creation of a place from which to reflect. We have developed an inspiring, creative, exciting space to share. (L 16)

The transition from doctoral project to self-sustaining learning group involved not only harnessing the emergence of the group, but negotiating tensions and benefits as the leaders asked themselves at the end of the formal research project, “Do we want to continue?” A key topic of discussion in this regard was formulating the ongoing purpose of the network. Several leaders articulated the tension they were beginning to feel between seeing the potential to have a collective ‘outward’ contribution but also wanting to maintain the flavour of personal growth, which had been what, had engaged them in the first place.

The idea that the group could take on an advocacy role in benefit of the wider NGO sector was also greeted with some disquiet by some leaders.

The unique benefit of this process is that it isn't focused on projects and solving issues, which constitutes the every day for me at work. Instead, it has focused on me as a person and a leader—on my growth and wellbeing.

I'm concerned that if we move to an advocacy type role that we will compromise the very essence of why this group has been so powerful. (L 4)

It has been quite nourishing and quite purposeful yet I'm not sure we want to be spokespeople for anything. (L 14)

When these leaders were asked why they felt this hesitation, they said it related to the risks of trying to meet the needs of funders while also advocating for important issues that might set them offside of those funders. Nonetheless, leaders pointed to the complex and somewhat

disconnected setting that constituted the wider youth services sector in Christchurch, and all agreed that they would like to see more coordination and coherence from which to show solidarity and promote clear messages to funders and policymakers (see Section 7.2.3).

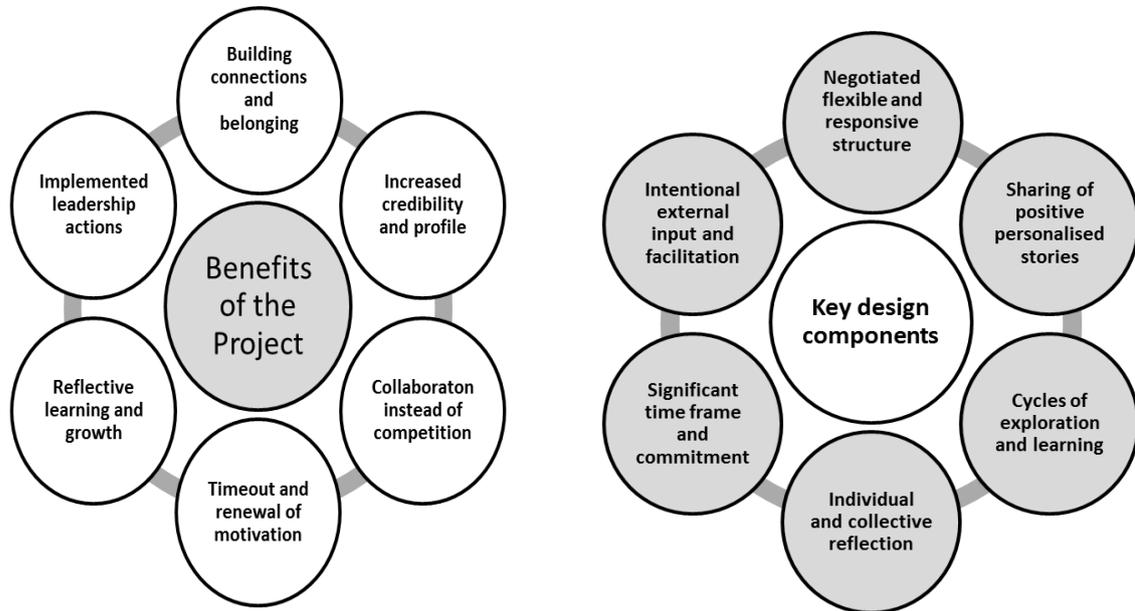
These varied views produced a lengthy series of discussions and negotiations during the transition phase from research project to professional network (LYNGO) in early 2010. Eventually, the group decided to commit to positioning their network as an equal mix of both—continuing the process of leadership reflection and growth, and exploring opportunities to contribute together to enabling the NGO sector better serve the people who are its clients.

This second focus has resulted in the group submitting number of collaborative funding applications that have been successful in brokering new enterprises. Examples include the attendance contract jointly sponsored by Te Ora Hou and 24:7 Youthwork and the Taua Mahi Employment Transition programme jointly sponsored by Canterbury Youth Development Programme and Te Ora Hou.

The LYNGO group started with an idea and has taken on a life of its own. [We now have a] post-quake spontaneous leadership that is looking after the primary needs of locals.

7.5 A summative comment

This chapter has outlined the key benefits emerging from this leadership development process for those involved. It has then explored the key design principles that have allowed this process to be successful.



Finally it has explained the utility of complexity thinking as framework for designing innovative and networked leadership learning processes. Chapter 8 moves on to explore both the guiding principles of designing a hybrid organisations as well as making suggestions for keystone elements that contribute to creating a bespoke learning incubator such as the one that emerged in this project.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND WIDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Chapter Outline

Framing questions: What are the distinctive findings of this thesis? What do these findings suggest for areas of further leadership and organisational innovation?

This final chapter explores the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this doctoral research, the implications of these findings for leadership and organisations, and the directions that these suggest for future research. It begins with a summary of the three areas of key findings from Chapters 5 to 7. Chapter 5 explores the values, vision and influences on the leaders in this project. Chapter 7 outlines the both the benefits of this leadership learning experience to the leaders involved and summarises the key design principles that informed the process, including the efficacy of the core elements of appreciative inquiry as a framework for the emergent design of this experience.

However, the findings regarding complexity-based leadership presented in Chapter 6 denote the most transformative (with respect to leadership) aspect of this study, and so these findings attract particular attention in this current chapter. As outlined in Chapter 2, complexity-based approaches are at the forefront of innovation in the leadership field because they provide a framework for addressing pervasive and ‘adaptive’ challenges as well as accommodating the unpredictable and rapidly changing nature of our global context. Chapter 6 provided a wealth of participant data giving ample evidence of the pragmatic applications of such a complexity lens for leaders.

Chapter 8 extends this application of complexity thinking in organisations by exploring the possibility of creating organisations that are ‘hybrids’, which means adopting the strengths of the self-organising complex adaptive system as well as those of a well-structured and efficient bureaucracy. Five keystones for developing such a hybrid approach are then discussed in detail.

Finally, the application of complexity-thinking hybrids is explored in relation to two brief case studies from the post-disaster earthquake recovery landscape of Christchurch, New Zealand. These case studies reinforce and validate the complexity-based hybrid findings from the doctoral project with leaders from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They also underpin the validity of advocating for the application of complexity concepts when thinking through the design of organisations, systems and learning processes, all of which have paramount relevance for the post-recovery agenda of Christchurch, its environs and, most importantly, its people. The thesis finishes with recommendations of five design principles for responsive learning design that have emerged from this thesis and are currently being implemented in a number of settings across Christchurch as a direct result of this project

8.2 Looking back

This project was directed by two research questions:

- 1) What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?
- 2) What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury?

The first question focuses on documenting the leadership of the participants. The second question pertains to the efficacy of the appreciative inquiry process in benefiting and developing these leaders. In the previous three chapters, I explored, analysed and discussed the data collected during this doctoral project from three different perspectives:

- The distinctive beliefs and values of NGO leaders and the influences on them and their leadership (Chapter 5);
- Complexity thinking as a framework for leadership roles and actions (Chapter 6); and
- Appreciative inquiry (AI) as a framework for designing innovative leadership-learning processes (Chapter 7).

I begin by summarising the key findings from each of these three chapters.

8.2.1 Beliefs and values of and influences on NGO leaders

The first part of Chapter 5 provided a comparison of the NGO and traditional business sectors. The comparison focused on several aspects, including intergenerational impact, juggling financial tensions, and adoption of creativity and innovation. It then explored similarities and differences among the participating leaders in regard to their personal moral purpose and organisational vision, as well as their core values.

The leaders' overall moral purpose emerged as making a substantial difference in terms of helping change people's lives, organisations and communities for the better. The leaders also shared a diverse range of deeply held values and attributes, among them:

- Long-term commitment;
- Dignity, respect and compassion;
- Equity and justice;
- Generosity and stewardship;
- Humility;
- Quality and excellence; and
- Honesty and integrity.

Identification and discussion of the factors and drivers influencing their leadership, such as significant life circumstances, people and places, followed. The chapter ended with a look at the journeys of these leaders as they moved into their leadership roles. These journeys were discussed within the context of the themes of calling, alignment and flow.

8.2.2 Complexity thinking as a framework for leadership roles and actions

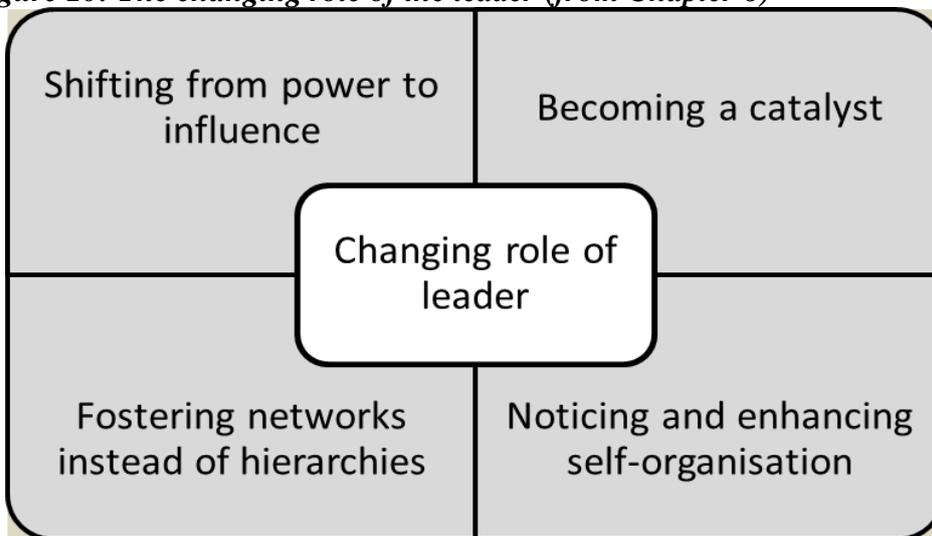
Chapter 6 considered the utility, for the NGO leaders, of adopting complexity thinking as a useful lens from which to examine and make sense of their leadership. I conceptualised this

approach as a ‘living system’ lens, which enables a perspective on leadership that is complementary to the more conventional organisational leadership models.

The leaders and I concluded, based on the findings not only in Chapter 6 but across all phases of this research, that the living lens focus has merit because it enables leaders to consider their practice from a fresh perspective and then identify what they can potentially do to enhance both their individual leadership capacity and collective organisational capacity. This process, in turn, creates conditions for the emergence of creative, adaptive organisations, the members of which are willing to learn with and from one another, have the freedom and confidence to innovate and contribute, and are more resilient and responsive to change.

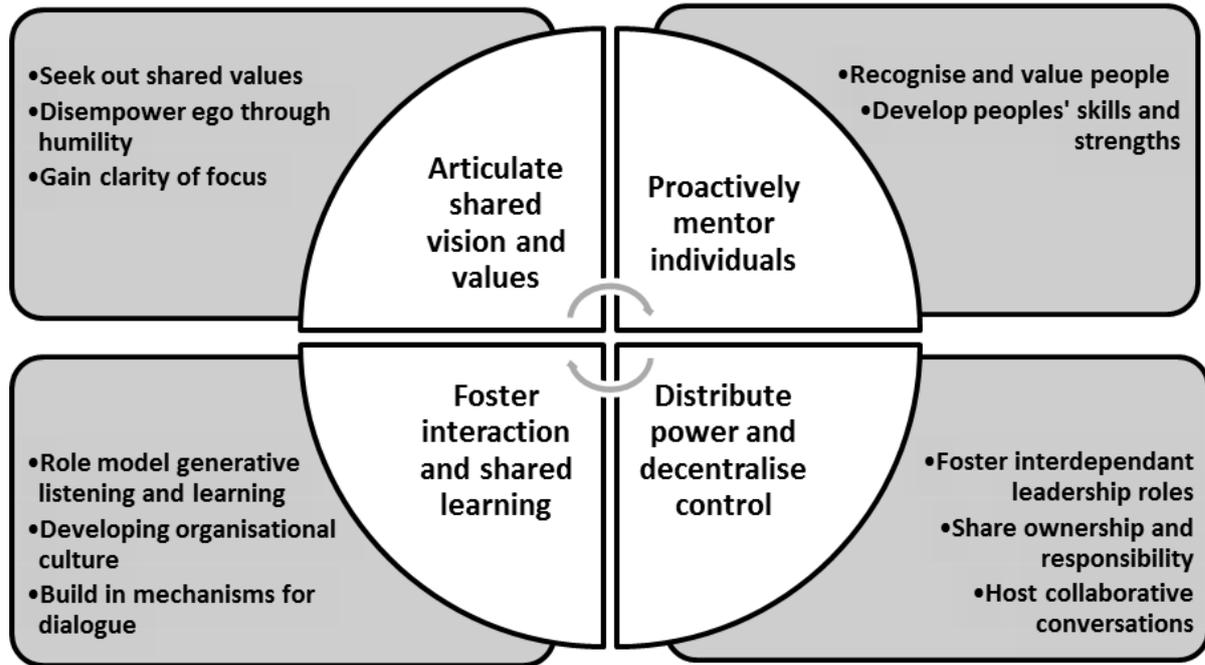
More particularly, the first part of Chapter 6 provided examples of ‘self-organisation’ (a key phenomenon in complexity thinking) occurring in the NGO sector in Christchurch both before and since the earthquake sequence. In doing so, it allowed exploration of the tensions created by a complexity-based approach, such as the need to balance flexibility and spontaneity with accountability to funders. It then explored the changing role of the leader in NGOs, looking to ideas such as process versus position, influence and power, networks rather than hierarchies, and leaders’ role as a catalyst. The chapter then moved on to a discussion of the insights the leaders gained about leadership practices. Each theme-based insight was drawn from syntheses of the interview and focus group commentary from these leaders and also from some of the literature they considered.

Figure 10: The changing role of the leader (from Chapter 6)



The second part of the chapter explored specific actions of leaders in facilitating self-organisation. These emerged from the data as four broad themes with multiple sub-themes. Each major theme corresponded directly to one of the four conditions that create self-organisation in complex adaptive systems, as described in the earlier literature in Section 2.4, namely, independent agents, interactions with neighbouring agents, decentralised control, and the presence of an attractor (a perceived threat and/or shared opportunity).

Figure 12: Leadership actions that facilitate self-organisation (from Chapter 6)



The first of these themes or leadership actions, termed ‘engage in proactive mentoring of individuals’, is grounded in recognising and valuing people’s skills and contributions and from there finding ways to develop those individuals’ potential. The second set of themes/leadership actions identified from the data related to ‘fostering interaction and shared learning’, which includes developing organisational culture(s), role-modelling generative listening and learning, and building in mechanisms for dialogue.

The third area, summarised as ‘distributing power and decentralising control’, included such actions as fostering interdependent leadership roles, sharing ownership and responsibility, and hosting collaborative conversations. The final set of leadership actions, ‘articulating shared vision and values’, involved seeking out shared values, disempowering ego by focusing on humility, and exercising clarity of focus.

8.2.3 Appreciative inquiry as a framework for designing innovative leadership learning processes

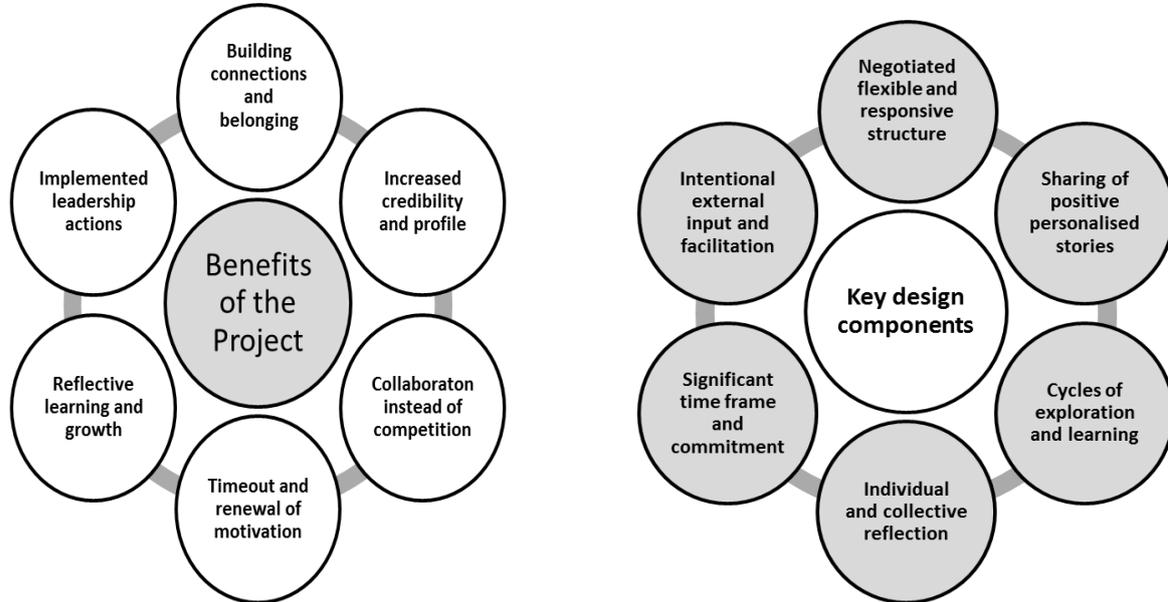
Chapter 7 provided examples of how collaborative professional learning communities can be successfully established, even in the face of highly time-pressured and demanding NGO leadership requirements. It outlined the effectiveness of the learning processes for the leaders that emerged out of the appreciative inquiry (AI) framework during the project, and so linked directly to the project’s second research question, which explored how and why the AI process was effective in developing this leadership professional learning community.

What is the potential contribution of an AI process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury?

The first part of the discussion in this chapter centred on the leaders’ perceived benefits of creating a professional learning community through AI. These benefits were identified as;

building connections and belonging, increased credibility and profile as well as a welcome shift in focus from competition to collaboration. The leaders also valued the time out for renewal of motivation, the opportunity to engage in reflective learning and growth; and the inspiration to implement new leadership actions.

Figures 13 and 14 (from Chapter 7)



The second part unpacked the key design components that were developed and implemented throughout the project. These are outlined in the right hand diagram.

The final part of the chapter built on the exploration of complexity thinking in Chapters 2 and 6. The suggestion made at this point was that complexity thinking could provide a framework for designing innovative and networked leadership-learning processes. This framework, essentially the AI framework used in this project, it was argued, acted as an enabling constraint to facilitate emergence within the participants in this project. Another conclusion was that these enabling constraints require leaders to maintain a fine balance between seemingly opposing conditions—diversity and redundancy and coherence and randomness. Finally, the transition of the doctoral project into the LYNGO network that is still ongoing today, four years after completion of the project, can be positioned as a significant emergent outcome of the processes implicit in the complexity framework.

8.2.4 Too good to be true?

It is interesting to reflect on the overwhelmingly successful outcomes from this project and to wonder if the experience was in fact this positive or was there another untold side to the project? A number of indicators of outstanding outcomes include the engagement of the 20 leaders throughout both the proposed 8 months, and then their wish to extend the process to 14 months. It is also reflected in the over 90% attendance rate at the half day focus groups as well as the engagement with ongoing interaction as a cohort beyond the formal components of the programme. The data in Chapter 5 relating to the leaders values, beliefs and influences shows depth and a rich authenticity. The coherence across the leaders in this aspect is

surprising and perhaps indicative of the similarities between leaders in the NGO sector who have specifically chosen to take on roles such as these. The overwhelming resonance with the complexity leadership literature in Chapter 2 and 6 indicates the high levels of ownership experienced by the participants in this reflection process. Additionally the six categories of significant benefits from the project in Section 7.2 is extensive and far reaching.

However... there were in fact a significant number of issues that arose in the project, any one of which could have derailed the process and interrupted the outcomes noted above. Some of these are discussed below, and it is intriguing to notice on reflection that the reason that these issues were not destructive as they could have been was due to the iterative co-design of the process where participants' experience of various aspects were discussed leading to immediate adaptations to the process, thus self-correcting and addressing the issues. In effect the participants "progressively adapted the inquiry to maximise their learning" and "having ongoing input into all aspects of the project – questions, participants, discussion, input, analysis of data" (Section 4.4.1).

In this way, by the end of the project the whole process was very finely tuned and matched extremely well with the learning needs and preferences of the group. It is therefore not surprising that the participants' engagement and therefore range of impressive outcomes occurred since the process was uniquely customised for them.

For example, in Section 4.4.3, I discuss how one of the potential participants declined to be involved initially based on others that had accepted that they were not comfortable with, however this same leader asked to join the group 3 months later. Additionally, within the first 2 months participants found the initial Appreciative Inquiry process based on the 4D model too constraining and began to disengage. This led to us all to step back and realise the need to be flexible and responsive in the methodology. This eventually resulted in us adopting instead the overarching AI principles of positive focus and inclusivity as our framework instead of the more rigid AI model thereby allowing space for creativity and innovation in methodology (Section 4.4.1). This also related in the same way to the failure of the initial processes that we collectively planned (including leadership learning sets, online forums etc) which sounded good in theory but failed to be implemented. This led to early re-design and re-scheduling – in effect we simplified and merged components to focus on intensive face to face focus groups as our main methodology. Section 7.3.5 describes these experiences under the headings of "Significant timeframe and commitment and 7.3.1 under the heading "Negotiation of a flexible and response structure"

Lastly, another area of tension and was experienced at the end of the project as the participants attempted to transition from the PhD research project to the LYNGO professional network. Section 7.4.4 describes the lengthy debate between the leaders on whether they should continue to focus on an internal focus of personal growth as leaders, or whether they should shift to a more external purpose such as collective outward contribution and advocacy. It was very apparent that the group were willing to take the time to discuss this at length,

eventually deciding to adopt some aspects of both purposes in their ongoing networking together.

8.3 Looking forward

In looking forward (i.e., implications of the findings for leadership/organisational development), I focus on the leaders' reflections on the possibility of creating organisations that are 'hybrids', that is, entities capable of adopting the strengths of both an adaptive and a creative self-organising system as well as the strengths of a well-structured and efficient bureaucracy. I also look in detail at some of the key tensions in attempting to develop a hybrid, and include at this point reflections on this matter from the leaders in this study as well as in hybrid-based frameworks evident within the leadership and organisational development literature. This material melds into Section 8.4, where I consider the application of complexity-thinking-based hybrids in relation to two organisations working within the earthquake recovery landscape of Christchurch city. I finish by detailing a number of design principles for leaders wanting to develop hybrid organisations.

8.3.1 Spanning the best of both worlds: an organisational hybrid

In Chapters 2 and 6, I discussed the potential of a complexity-based approach to leadership of organisations in terms of the benefits of responsiveness, adaptability and change orientation that emerge. However, some weaknesses of this model were also highlighted, notably a lack of congruence, disorganisation and confusion. While the more traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic approach does have the weaknesses of a lack of responsiveness and flexibility, it does have advantages such as clarity of role, direction and efficiency.

This mixture of advantage and disadvantage across the approaches suggests the possibility of creating a hybrid of these two ends of the organisational continuum, a suggestion which gains support from Pascale and colleagues:

Often, businesses face operational and adaptive challenges simultaneously. Even when the organisation at large is in the midst of full blown transformation, there are usually pockets of activity where traditional management practices work best. The trick is to clearly identify the nature of the challenge and then use the right tool for the task" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 38).

This commentary implies that a different operational model might be more or less suitable at any particular time, for any particular part of an organisation or any particular project that is being focused on. Determining, in turn, which is most suitable, requires careful needs analysis of an organisation's context in any given situation. For example, an organisation's need for creativity, learning and adaptability could imply that the main focus needs to be on complex dynamics (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008). Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin (2010) express caution, however, in determining just which model has the best fit at any one time: "Problems occur when organisations try to misapply a traditional solution (*or process*) to an adaptive challenge" (p. 39).

It is thus important to be clear when hybridising frameworks to carefully determine just which are the most suitable for the situation and organisation at hand. The traditional solution

to leadership that Uhl-Bien et al. consider is “grounded in traditional, bureaucratic notions of hierarchy, alignment and control” (p. 187) and emphasises structure and coherence. It is also grounded in administrative-focused leadership, which “structures tasks, engages in planning, builds visions, allocates resources to achieve goals, manages crises and conflicts, and manages organisational strategy” (Yukl, 2005, p. 198).

As stated above, the more traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic approach suffers from a lack of responsiveness and flexibility but does offer advantages such as clarity of role, direction and efficiency. Uhl-Bien et al. (2008) describe adaptive leadership as a generative dynamic that underlies emergent change activities. However, as they explain, the changes are not necessarily predictable. In the language of complexity thinking, this lack of predictability makes for “adaptive, creative learning actions that emerge from interactions of complex adaptive systems as they strive to adjust to tension” (p. 198). According to Uhl-Bien et al., this kind of adaptive activity can take place in boardrooms or in what they term “workgroups of line workers”. Adaptive leadership, then, “is an informal emergence dynamic that occurs among agents” (p. 198).

8.3.2 Leaders’ reflections on creating a hybrid model

When considering how their organisations could be more innovative and flexible, the leaders in this study found the more organic ‘living systems’ model highly appealing. However, they also wondered about the challenges of implementing less structure.

How on earth can you run a large organisation without systems and structures? But you obviously lose a lot by doing this, [that is,] using the machine lens. (L 13)

This comment by Leader 3 led to the discussion on whether it is possible to leverage the best attributes of each model. Leaders commented on this in their one-pagers. The following examples are typical.

It is reaping the strengths of the spider/machine in that it’s efficient ... But we can gain more from the strengths of the starfish; that is, empowering other leaders, encouraging the development of others, letting others experience leadership. How do we balance this? (One-pager)

Life is not about extremes! Using polar opposites like a ‘spider’ and ‘starfish’ may not be ideals, as each has strengths. Why not simply set up a model which uses the strengths of each?

One leader also recognised that a more distributed approach to organisational design offered considerable benefits for succession planning (whether intentional or accidental).

The starfish and spider concept is great ... what happens when you are not around or the top three get hit by a bus? The staff need to operate as guerrilla warfare units—need to be able to act autonomously and have the freedom to decide. (L 5)

Another leader suggested that his organisation had become too flexible and now required a period of more structure.

I had a sabbatical last year for three months ... the organisation ran really well, but some people seemed to have lost the reason for why we do things. It [all] needed a bit of tightening up. (L 14)

Leaders furthermore emphasised the need to move from an ‘either/or’ thinking model to a ‘both/and’ approach. Thus, instead of asking if they wanted their organisations to operate as a starfish or a spider, leaders should be asking: “What characteristics of both a starfish and a spider do we want to adopt?”

8.3.3 Leadership principles for creating an organisational hybrid

At the time of writing this thesis, Christchurch was well into the initial stages of a renewal process of unprecedented scale in New Zealand. Since the first quake of September 2010, and despite the more than 11,000 quakes in its aftermath, there has been ample anecdotal evidence of informal self-organising behaviour of the type explored in this thesis. The intensely complex contexts that leaders are facing in the city (and globally, of course) demand organisations that are adaptive, innovative, flexible, agile, responsive, creative, resilient and self-organising (Jansen, 2011).

In an era where change arrives without warning and threatens to eradicate entire companies and industries overnight, organisations can survive only by engaging the eyes, ears, minds and emotions of all individuals and by encouraging them to act on their knowledge and beliefs. The new living system model will thrive and persist as it bears more closely to what we are as humans. (Petzinger, 1999, p. 18)

I love the potential of whipping our organisation into shape and at the same time being really nimble.

As elaborated throughout this thesis, such contexts require leadership of a sort that differs from the 'well-oiled machine' that has been the predominant paradigm in most management training until relatively recently. A paradigm that encourages 'self-organisation' renders leadership less about the 'position of leaders' and more about the 'action of leadership'. An

increasing number of theorists, researchers and commentators consider that complexity thinking offers a powerful alternative to the linear and reductionist approaches to leadership that have dominated the sciences for half a millennium (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

However, Pascale et al. (2000) remind us that the framework and practices associated with a leadership and organisational paradigm shift are not always superior to traditional approaches: “Hence a lot depends on the challenge faced and the magnitude of the change sought”. The mass of data obtained from the participating leaders during the research phase of my thesis indicates that the strengths of the traditional machine-based paradigm, most especially efficiency, optimisation and replication, remain useful attributes for organisations faced with a technical challenge and where a predetermined and proven solution is therefore evident and needs to be implemented. Nonetheless, when it comes to adaptive challenges, where the context is uncertain and solutions only become evident through experimentation, the leaders participating in my doctoral research agreed that complexity thinking could well provide a unique and valuable contribution.

This ‘duality thinking’ is what led (in this thesis) to support for the proposition, already evident in the literature, that both administrative and adaptive leadership approaches can interact to the benefit of organisations, but sometimes also to their detriment. For example

Hock (1999) is his book *Birth of the Chaordic Age* advocated for a new organisational form that he called ‘chaordic’; or simultaneously chaotic and orderly.

Leaders wanting to facilitate a hybrid that maximises benefits and minimises risks therefore have two roles. The first is to catalyse the conditions in which adaptive leadership can thrive. The second is to effectively manage the entanglement between these two extremes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2008). The next sub-sections expand on five keystones that leaders can take into account when facilitating and negotiating the challenges of an organisational hybrid.

- Consider the technical and adaptive context
- Shift from ‘either/or’ thinking to ‘both/and’ thinking
- Create space by embedding emergent mechanisms into organisational structures
- Build a bespoke learning incubator
- Navigate and negotiate pathways for adoption of innovation

Consider the technical and adaptive context

As discussed in Chapter 1, not only is today’s leadership context changing, the types of issues and problems are also changing. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) differentiate between technical problems, which can be solved with knowledge and procedures already at hand, as opposed to adaptive challenges, which require learning innovation and new patterns of behaviour. For leaders,

adaptive challenges (typical of the knowledge era), as opposed to technical problems (more characteristic of the industrial age), are “not amenable to authoritative flat or standard operating procedures but require exploration, new discoveries and adjustments” (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008, p. 188). Pascale et al. (2010) state that “adaptive problems are embedded in social complexity, require behaviour change and are rife with unintended consequences” (p. 8).

Adaptive challenges thus require human behaviour change across a system and hence are notoriously embedded. Otherwise known as intractable problems or wicked problems, these long-term embedded issues are generally very resistant to change strategies (Pascale et al., 2010). Predictably, the change failure rates mentioned in Section 1.4.1 are likely to relate to adaptive challenges predicated on pervasive issues that are resistant to change. Resolution of these challenges therefore requires a rethinking of approaches to solutions with each new context encountered.

Effective leadership of change in the domain of adaptive challenges relies on ably developing shifts in organisational culture (beliefs, values and behaviours) and ensuring staff engagement: “Management is the application of proven solutions to known problems, whereas leadership development infers to situations where groups need to learn their way out of problems that could not have been predicted” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 188). As Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) point out, the problems that organisations face these days can no longer be effectively overcome by top-down management approaches. They claim that managers and leaders can no more co-ordinate “the complexities of human environments” than queen bees can co-ordinate bee environments (p. xiii). Others argue that leaders of organisations facing

adaptive challenges “must throw out the old notion about how an organisation should be led, organised and run” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 8).

Shift from ‘either/or’ thinking to ‘both/and’ thinking.

Leadership contexts often appear as seemingly opposed polarities that need to be resolved; thus, competition or collaboration, action or reflection, top-down directives or collaborative decision-making, innovating or managing risk, change or stability, and so on. Polarities such as these are also known as tensions, dilemmas, paradoxes, contradictions, competing values, unsolvable problems and interdependent values (Gaskin, 2012).

The traditional stance of organisations and leaders faced with polarities is to resolve them by selecting one aspect ‘or’ the other. Shifting away from this either/or thinking and moving instead towards both/and thinking is central to effectively facilitating the hybrid approach. But just how do you coordinate this shift if you are a leader? Some valuable notions in answer of this question include the following:

- All values come in pairs, and these pairs are interdependent.
- Actively working towards the upsides of both values in a polarity creates a virtuous cycle leading to a higher purpose.
- Over-emphasising one value over time to the neglect of its pair makes prominent the downsides of the chosen value and, eventually, the downsides of the other value as well.
- Being stuck with the downsides of both values creates a vicious cycle leading to a deeper fear.
- There are two truths in every polarity, and neither is the whole truth. (Gaskin, 2012)

What these notions mean with respect to leadership is that instead of resorting to solving the problem by choosing one option, leaders manage the polarities by effectively saying yes to both. “To succeed in an increasingly interconnected world, creative leaders avoid choosing between unacceptable alternatives. Instead, they use the power inherent in these dualities to invent new assumptions and create new models geared to an ever-changing world” (Lombardo & Ruddy, 2011). Accordingly, the role of leaders wanting to create an organisational hybrid would be to avoid choosing one option when encountering a mutually exclusive polarity such as a bureaucratic approach or an adaptive approach. Instead, they would need to look not only at the downsides of the bureaucratic approach and the upsides of the adaptive approach, but also the upsides of the bureaucratic approach and the downsides of the adaptive approach.

Such leaders need to grasp the understanding that managing polarity is not just about balance but about weaving back and forth between both options, of not being seduced by the simplicity of either/or thinking but instead of holding the tension by saying yes to both extremes in order to generate fresh thinking and innovation.

In summary, the task of such leaders is to:

- Validate both options by valuing and holding the tension rather than trying to resolve it;
- Avoid representing one end of the tension; and
- Foster creativity, innovation and experimentation; in order to

- Create a hybrid that is the ‘best of both worlds’.

The advantages of managing polarities in this way is that leaders get less caught up in power struggles, are more able to lower resistance to change, and have a greater ability to productively engage with allies and opponents in co-creating robust decisions.

Create space by embedding emergent mechanisms into organisational structures

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the actions (summarised in Section 8.2.2 above) leaders can take to foster the complexity conditions that allow self-organisation or emergence to occur. Enabling the conditions in which complex dynamics can occur (Section 2.7.1) positions the leader’s role as a process orientated one. He or she becomes a caretaker of productive conditions and a facilitator of creative processes.

Various pundits maintain that ‘space’ must be negotiated and created within the bureaucratic structures of an organisation before this emergence can be fostered. Kotter (2013), for one, emphasises that creating such a space does not mean removing the existing structures because these have their strengths. Instead, organisations can leverage the strengths of complex adaptive systems by setting up a parallel operating system within the structures.

Kotter (2013) describes this system as a volunteer army that is project based, flexible and short term in focus (three to six months). The volunteer army is populated by people who have a formal role in the organisational hierarchy but who volunteer to contribute their time and energy into a strategic project beyond their formal roles. These project teams, moreover, are cross-functional, and the skills strengths and collective intelligence of their diverse members are such that they generate innovative approaches to devising solutions and making decisions. These approaches are then transferred over to the portfolios of particular parts of the organisational bureaucracy to be adopted and embedded, thereby allowing the overall organisation to leverage the strengths of both the clarity of role, direction and efficiency of the bureaucracy and the responsiveness, adaptability and change orientation of the complex adaptive system.

In line with Kotter, the leaders who participated in my doctoral research agreed that the processes which foster self-organisation and emergence could and should be embedded into the structures or design of their organisations.

And I guess the second step is providing some organisational structure systems, or whatever you want to call it, to enable the staff. I mean there are 300 staff at the Christchurch one, so [the aim is] to enable them to have a say in what the [organisation] is, and what the [organisation] is about and how it all operates. I guess at the moment they come and do the job, they go home. But if they have any frustrations, I don’t think there’s a great avenue to addressing those things, or helping getting them to be part of fixing it. I think all they can do really is complain, and hope someone does something about it. And I’d like to change that. (L 6)

O’Reilly and Tushman (2004) also suggest that leaders set up ‘ambidextrous’ organisations, with clearly distinct organisational units that operate in

Lots of people get excited about emergence. The real art is getting some of it into the machinery — timetables, reporting, mechanisms; otherwise, it’s just another philosophical idea

diverse ways and are tightly integrated at the senior executive level through a clear and compelling vision. Leaders in the doctoral project typically described this process in terms of flexible and open planning.

It involves building in mechanisms around communication that is aligned with values. It involves sitting in the present and looking for creative ideas, to have a go, and if they fly, great. If not, no worries. It's the permission to make small changes. (L 13)

In Section 2.6.2 of this thesis, I discussed the term 'social architecture', which refers to the formal and informal interaction patterns that occur in an organisation as a result of the communication mechanisms in it. Collective intelligence is enabled by fostering interaction between and across the diverse parts of a system. From an organisational design perspective, interaction can be fostered through such strategies as open architecture workplaces, self-selected workgroups, electronic workgroups and management-induced scheduling or rule structuring (Jaques, 1989). The NGO leaders' suggestions for building such emergent mechanisms for dialogue into organisational structures were elaborated in Section 6.6.3.

Navigate and negotiate pathways for adoption of innovation

The final design principle requires leaders to facilitate the process whereby the creative outcomes of the learning phases are integrated into the formal system. Because formal systems are rarely structured to foster internal dissemination of innovation, they tend to inhibit the uptake of new ideas. Marion (2008) argues that determining just where power lies and is manifested in an organisation is therefore needed in order to determine how to overcome an inhibition or further harness that power if it is already facilitative in nature. In similar vein, Dougherty and Hardy (1996) argue, "Unless innovation has an explicit organisational-wide power basis, there is no generative force, no energy, for developing new products continuously and weaving them into on-going functioning" (p. 1146).

Some authors suggest that leaders wanting to enable complexity dynamics need to see their role as a catalyst. Pascale and colleagues (2000), for example, claim that such leaders need to behave like gardeners and not think like mechanics; they should facilitate, not control. This, they say, should be "the mantra of choice" (p. 14). Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) describe the process no less colourfully:

Circles don't form on their own. Put a bunch of people in the same room together and they might talk about the weather in random groups of twos and threes. Add a catalyst and soon they will be sitting around discussing their shared love of skiing or antique lampshades. A catalyst develops an idea, shares it with others and leads by example. (Brafman & Beckstrom, p. 94)

The two authors also list what they consider to be the catalyst's tools: "Genuine interest in others, loose connections, desire to help, passion, meets people where they are, emotional intelligence, trust, inspiration, tolerance of ambiguity, a hands off approach and a willingness to have their role gradually recede" (Brafman & Beckstrom, p. 99). Brafman and Beckstrom see this pattern of initially catalysing a dynamic and then gradually fading into the background as the appropriate one for catalysts. By letting go of directive leadership, the catalyst transfers ownership and responsibility to the circle. Brafman and Beckstrom state

that if catalysts “stays around too long”, they can become absorbed in their creation to the extent that the whole structure of the organisation becomes more centralised (p. 94).

In summary, then, catalyst-type leaders need to be adamant about the process, not the outcome. Pascale et al. (2000) state this adage somewhat differently. They maintain that leaders should never tell people how to do things. Instead, they should tell them what the objective is. Do this, the authors argue, “and they [people] will surprise you with their ingenuity” (p. 136).

8.4 Emergence in the rebuild of Christchurch

The two case studies considered in this part of Chapter 8 (sub-sections 8.5.2 and 8.5.3) reinforce and validate the findings relating to a complexity-based hybrid model that the NGO leaders who participated in the doctoral project decided was the way ahead for their organisations and, by implication, their leadership. Their strong advocacy for applying complexity concepts when thinking about how best to design or redesign organisations, systems and learning processes has cogency for Christchurch city’s post-earthquake recovery agenda.

8.4.1 Self-organisation post-quake

It has been fascinating to observe the interactions that have emerged in communities during and since Christchurch earthquake events, especially in regards to the topic of this thesis—self-organisation and emergence. Christchurch has seen countless examples of these processes. The first is the FARMY Army, a group of over 500 farmers, who drove their tractors into Christchurch and spontaneously responded to needs as they found them. Then there was (or is, as it is still very much ‘alive’) the Student Volunteer Army, made up of over 3,000 tertiary students and colleagues, who initiated and implemented major liquefaction-clearing operations around the city on multiple occasions.

These mobilisations were initiated without any formal organisational directive; they were, in fact, instigated by passionate individuals, who then leveraged social media platforms to recruit huge numbers of volunteers from both the student body and the wider New Zealand population.

Smaller but no less important mobilisations have been seen throughout Christchurch’s communities, with people taking in neighbours, friends and even strangers who had lost homes or had badly damaged ones, setting up informal welfare centres, and sharing water, food, vehicles and toileting facilities. Other individuals and community-based groups have created fresh produce collectives, time banks, volunteer-manned building projects for elderly without insurance, innovative children’s events, community festivals, pop-up art and sculptures and even a BYO pub.

Complexity thinking as a sense-making framework

Although many of the leaders in my doctoral project were a part of this recovery effort, I am not suggesting that their participation in the project resulted in them creating these

opportunities. I am quite sure that many individuals, communities and organisations would have seen the opportunity for emergence and different ways of operating in the earthquake context. However, what is interesting is to view this widespread phenomenon through a ‘living system’ lens. It allows us to see how an enormous external change not only triggered the temporary breakdown of conventional organisational structures but also led to the spontaneous emergence of self-organisation—of individuals responding to the threats and the opportunities in ways that enabled them to support themselves and/or others.

Complexity thinking helps us make sense of what we see in this regard. As described in detail in Chapter 2, complexity thinking is a field that emerged from studies of species such as birds that are able to fly in incredibly complex but self-organising, unpredictable but patterned ways. As observed in that chapter, this phenomenon is common throughout the natural world but can also occur in human systems. Adherents of complexity thinking argue that self-organisation or emergence cannot be engineered in any specific direction. They also tend to claim that systems need four conditions (see Section 2.4) to be present in order for self-organisation to occur:

- Independent agents (individuals with the freedom and intuition to respond);
- Communication and interaction with neighbours (maintains the connection and prevents chaos);
- Decentralised control (no formal or positional leaders—leaders emerge and are replaced on a needs basis); and
- An attractor (a threat or opportunity or preferably both).

I examined each of these four conditions in relation to the leaders’ actions and reflections in Chapter 6, and was able to document many connections between the former (each condition) and the latter (actions and reflections).

Looking at each of these four conditions in relation to Christchurch, one can readily see how each of these became present during and after the earthquake sequence. The conditions were ideal for prolific self-organisation, and that, of course, is what happened. Community members suddenly became independent agents as their workplaces were closed (for days or weeks). They could choose to leave the city or respond to the needs around them.

Communication systems decentralised (the power was off for one to three weeks in various parts of the city and its environs) and became much more informal (conversations with immediate neighbours, in public places, such as supermarkets and through texts and other social media). Innovative invented solutions met immediate needs. People were scared and many highly intimidated by the power of the quakes, but for many this fear acted as a provocation to act differently; there was also a tremendous outpouring of empathy, goodwill and social capital as community members saw and acted on opportunities to help friends and strangers alike.

The following two case studies explore examples of such an organisational hybrid that is occurring currently in post-quake Christchurch. These case studies reinforce and validate the complexity-based hybrid findings from the doctoral project with leaders from non-

governmental organisations (NGOs). They also underpin the validity of advocating for the application of complexity concepts when thinking through the design of organisations, systems and learning processes.

8.4.2 Renewal and resilience: Case Study 1, the CERA psycho-social recovery plan

In Chapters 2 and 6 of this thesis, the point was made that both the machine model (technical) and the self-organisation (complexity-based) model of organisation (Figure 7) have strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, as discussed in Section 8.2 of this chapter, the task of an adaptive leader is often to discover ways to create a hybrid between these two system responses or approaches to leadership.

Figure 16: Depictions of the ‘machine’ model and the ‘living system’ model



Much of the community-level response in relation to the earthquakes in Christchurch has thus been based on complexity behaviour. This response has been accompanied by a simultaneously occurring and growing centralised response from organisations and agencies involved in relief and recovery efforts relating to specific emergency situations (e.g, collapsed buildings), restoring services (power, water, sewage) and coordinating multiple other relief efforts.

In mid-2011, the New Zealand Government set up the Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) as a statutory arm of the government to manage the system response on all levels. In 2013, CERA produced a draft psycho-social recovery plan titled *Community in Mind*. In the foregrounding section of this plan, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman of the Office of the Prime Minister’s Science Advisory Committee recommended that a comprehensive and effective psychosocial recovery programme be put in place in response to the Canterbury earthquakes. He stated such a plan was necessary for two reasons:

... firstly to support the majority of the population who need some psychosocial support within the community (such as basic listening, information and community-led interventions) to allow their innate psychological resilience and coping mechanisms to come to the fore, and secondly to address the most severely affected minority by efficient referral systems and sufficient specialised care. Insufficient attention to the first group is likely to increase the number represented in the second group. (Kidd, 2013, p. 2)

Gluckman argued that the city needed to ensure there was support for the majority of people who needed some psychological support as well as the most severely affected

minority. However, the scale of response that was required to address the needs of the first, larger group was well beyond the capability and capacity of the formal organisations (government or NGO), the members of which were doing a considerable amount of the needed work with the more severely affected group. Consequently, the psycho-social recovery plan went on to elaborate three key themes (see Figure 17) that agencies needed to consider when addressing the widespread psycho-social wellness needs across the city.

Figure 17: Key themes of CERA’s psycho-social recover plan

The key themes within this Plan are:

Theme One	Effective psychosocial recovery involves a service response that is coordinated, consistent, reliable, accessible and adaptable.
Theme Two	Effective psychosocial recovery involves positive, inclusive, self-organising, often spontaneous, diverse and satisfying responses at neighbourhood and community levels.
Theme Three	Effective psychosocial recovery involves communication, interaction and engagement between the service response, the self-organising responses and individuals and communities.

Source: Kidd (2013), p. 2.

These themes inherently acknowledge that effective psychosocial recovery must encompass a co-ordinated government service response (Theme 1) and a self-organising community response (Theme 2). The plan acknowledged the essential contribution of grassroots community-led initiatives (Theme 2)—of neighbours helping one another. This approach made sense in the context of the huge outpouring of voluntary good-will initiatives around the city as described above. The plan’s claim that 35% of the Christchurch population reportedly volunteered is probably an estimate on the low side, though; most contributions have been informal and therefore not reported in volunteer registers. An important question with regard to any grassroots initiative, however, is how do we continue to activate and support grassroots responses, especially as they begin to wane and tire?

The plan also emphasised the need to traverse the terrain that exists between these two approaches; in other words, to create a hybrid of these two approaches in order to leverage the strengths of both. The plan appreciated this need but also posed it as a dilemma (Theme 3), which could be presented as a question: What does the city need to do to create a hybrid between the plan’s two philosophically opposed system responses (i.e., Theme 1 and Theme 2)?

In an effort to present answers to the questions asked in the above two paragraphs, I present in the next section an example of a new post-quake alliance of existing organisations that exhibits a successful hybrid leveraging both machine and self-organising system dynamics before returning to Case Study 1 to describe the emerging process that is occurring in that case.

8.4.3 A nexus of innovation: Case Study 2, Strengthening Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT)

SCIRT was created in 2011 to address rebuilding Christchurch’s horizontal infrastructure (roads, storm water, sewage, drinking water) across the whole of Christchurch, much of which was severely damaged after the quake of 22 February 2011. For the population of Christchurch, scenes like the one in Figure 8.3 are all too familiar throughout the city, now known to some as the ‘sea of cones’.



Figure 18: Post-quake Christchurch: a ‘sea of cones’

SCIRT is an alliance of five major construction companies (see Figure 9) that have created a commercial alliance to work collectively on the horizontal infrastructure rebuild, which is worth over two billion dollars. SCIRT’s genesis came from an informal meeting of the Chief Executive Officers of two these construction companies immediately post the largest earthquake in February 2011. They had each just been awarded contracts for infrastructure repair work following the initial September 2010 earthquakes and reflected on the futility of repeating a similar competitive tendering process for this much more extensive challenge ahead. This led to the suggestion of a collaborative alliancing process with a coordinated approach across the entire city.

SCIRT’s work is split into two processes, the first of which is the responsibility of its design team. The team, known as the Integrated Services Team (IST), is comprised of over 300 engineers, project managers and technical designers seconded from over 70 consultancy companies from around New Zealand and offshore.



Figure 19: SCIRT’s foundation companies

The second process is the work of the delivery teams, which consist of very large construction teams from the five contributing construction companies. SCIRT has no employees; all workers are seconded to the alliance from their ‘home organisation’.

In 2012, SCIRT contracted a colleague and I to undertake an external review of its activity in both the short term and longer term. Our initial review of the alliance’s peak performance framework/plan noted SCIRT as “an organisation that despite operating in a complex and uncertain environment has a clear sense of purpose, an outcome focus and a

team of aligned and committed team members. Team members across SCIRT have responded to the enormous challenge of reinstating the horizontal infrastructure of an entire city by 2016” (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 3).

SCIRT has made extraordinary progress towards its goals over a very short timeframe. By the beginning of 2014, it had completed 80% of its design work and 30% of the construction work. The IST was producing at this time over 10 million dollars’ worth of design each month, and each of its five delivery teams had lifted its construction completion from initially around one million dollars per month to over ten million dollars per month. SCIRT monitors its workers’ engagement through a quarterly engagement and alignment survey, the results of which indicate that worker engagement has hovered at around 80% over the last two years, which does not surprise my colleague and me, given our initial impressions of worker satisfaction: “Team member initiative and sense of shared community and enterprise in the SCIRT IST office was clearly evident and the sense of team and discretionary effort was palpable” (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 3).

As indicated, our external review in 2012 focused mainly on reviewing SCIRT’s peak performance framework, which has as its main purpose ‘not leaving high performance ‘to chance’ and creating resilience and high performance in an environment of uncertainty (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 4). The framework includes six key performance indicators (KPIs), all of which were intentionally designed by SCIRT and are reviewed and/or revised every 12 months in order to maximise SCIRT’s ongoing efficacy (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 5). These elements are; strategic business facilitation, wellness, high-performing teams, integrated teams, industry learning and development; and transition and engagement.

From a complexity-thinking perspective, SCIRT has worked hard to create the conditions for both self-organisation and hybridisation of this self-organisation, given its formal structures for finance, accountability and work-quality assurance. “The organisation is to be highly commended for the clarity and effectiveness of the 2012 plan; it is a best practice example of intentionally designing key organisational structures and processes to develop a high performance culture” (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 3).

When, as part of our 2012 review work, we interviewed over 40 staff from all levels of the organisation, we were surprised that, without prompting, almost all of them articulated that the SCIRT vision was a paramount motivation for them (see Figure 11). Expressed in complexity-thinking language, this vision acted as an immensely motivating attractor with

regards to the opportunity to contribute to getting ‘our city’ back on its feet after such an enormous threat and to maximise value for money for the taxpayer.



Figure 20: SCIRT’s vision statement

It is clear that team members' alignment to the noble purpose and values of SCIRT has generated deep commitment from team members. (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 3)

A second attractor is SCIRT's aim of maximising return to each company. SCIRT's alliance contracting is a new phenomenon in New Zealand. Essentially, its intent is to ensure proactive collaborative behaviour between the organisations in the alliance, which in the past would have competed fiercely on the open market. SCIRT has in place a process called 'pain-gain'. Each month, the five delivery teams are allotted the same amount of work to complete at a pre-set price, and they are measured on their performance. If, at the end of the month, one team has completed its work for under the set price, this 'profit' is placed in a central pool. If another delivery team has a difficult month and goes over budget, the 'loss' is also placed in the collective pool. This profit (gain) or loss (pain) is then shared equally by all five delivery teams, thus creating a powerful incentive for each delivery team to ensure that the other four teams also succeed. SCIRT's earlier cited key performance indicators are also included in the pain-gain mechanism. The consequences of this mechanism have been immediate collaborative support, information and innovation sharing and resource pooling. In terms of complexity thinking, this practice provides a powerful example of an enabling constraint facilitating the opportunity for self-organisation (in this case collaboration) to occur.

SCIRT has developed many additional processes (all of which are founded on the values and behaviours shown in Figure 12) that maximise the other three conditions for self-organisation. Workers are encouraged to be independent agents through the rapid prototyping of innovative solutions, quarterly performance reviews, comprehensive wellness initiatives, and a suite of training opportunities, including leadership workshops and coaching. Communication and interaction with 'neighbours' is maximised through mechanisms such as weekly lunch and learn forums, an open plan office structure, encouragement to talk to people face to face instead of using emails, regular social events and 'community celebrations', and internal communication via multiple media channels. Decentralised control is leveraged through an open door policy across all levels of management, regular role rotation, and cross-functional teams based on key areas of performance, including the KPIs

mentioned above.

Team member groups we talked to could reference the positive difference between SCIRT and their home organisations in terms of noble purpose, goal orientation, achievement focus, collaboration and an absence of bureaucracy. The linkages they made were unprompted by us as reviewers. As reviewers, alignment to this level is not seen as common practice in New Zealand organisations. (Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 3)

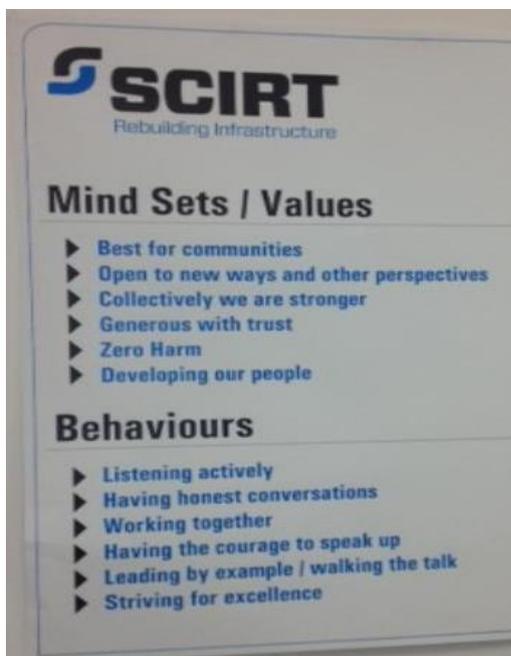


Figure 21: SCIRT's grounding values and behaviours

The last question in each of the evaluation interviews with those involved was “What have you learnt and experienced during your time at SCIRT that you believe would be invaluable for your home organisation to adopt?” The outpouring of enthusiastic responses to this question was not anticipated; a small sample of the responses is listed below (taken from Andrew & Jansen, 2012, p. 18).

Leadership is more performance based than position based.

To encourage knowledge sharing and teamwork, remove 15 minute timesheets—this incentivises people to use their time to help others and share knowledge.

Goal setting and individual accountability combined with a shared noble purpose is a powerful combination.

Give people a goal and empower them to reach it.

Identify what people are good at and let them go for it.

Remove boundaries and move to a flat management system— open access between all ‘levels of staff’.

SCIRT is not without its challenges going forward. The external operating environment will continue to have elements of complexity and uncertainty combined with increased scrutiny and political influence. Internally, there will be a need for exemplary management as the different phases of the project lifecycle move into wind-down and close-out. However, SCIRT stands out as one of the shining examples of collaboration and peak performance in the rebuild of Christchurch. This reputation is not accidental; it is the result of innovative leadership, both in the initial genesis of the alliance, and also in the ongoing leadership of many of the staff throughout the organisation.

8.4.4 Harnessing and amplifying the emergence

Section 8.4 of this thesis has focussed on highlighting the relevance of complexity thinking and in particular emergence to the post-quake rebuild of Christchurch. In this sub section I build on the case study of SCIRT by returning to the dilemma raised in Case Study 1 to explore recommendations for creating intentional learning processes in and across various sectors of Christchurch so as to harness and amplify the unique multi-paradigmatic ways of working and responding that Christchurch needs for its ongoing recovery.

Activate people everywhere to think creatively when designing hybrid responses

In response to CERA’s psycho-social recovery plan discussed in Section 8.4.2, I made my first ever public submission on a government proposal. In this submission, I applauded the focus on the three themes and acknowledged that this was the first government document I had seen that explicitly valued and emphasised community-level contributions. I also agreed completely with Theme 3’s emphasis on the need to find ways for the systems in Themes 1 and 2 to interact and complement each other. My suggestion was that although I agreed with the ideals of the plan, I could not see any solid reference to a mechanism to allow this to happen.

“What is required,” I wrote in my submission, “is engaged, committed and connected people in both government services and community initiatives who can make sense of the

complexity and work together to create new hybrid solutions (Jansen, 2013, p. 5). I suggested that the city needed leaders with a lower-case ‘l’, that is, emergent leaders, as well as positional leaders who could show leadership—the ability to make sense of and broker totally new responses. What was not needed, I argued, was self-proclaimed leaders—leaders who have influence and authority but whose frame of reference sees them reliant on solutions from the past that work in different contexts.

I consider that the logic implicit in my suggestion applies to all sectors of enterprise within society, whether that sector is business, as with the SCIRT example above, or the health system, the education system etc. I furthermore consider—based on the literature and project data documented and scrutinised in this thesis—that this logic needs to provide a blueprint for longevity, not just for responses to extraordinary situations. It could be all too easy to revert to practices from the past that no longer apply to the complex contexts of the 21st century.

So, for example, in relation to the psycho-social recovery from the earthquake sequence discussed in Section 8.4.2, I see an urgent need for support and growth of the many informal leaders who have emerged in the post-quake environment, but have been not significantly resourced and supported, and thus risk burn-out and discouragement. A question that I asked elsewhere has relevance here (Jansen, 2013, p. 15) : “How can we be sure that in five years, we can be even more proud of our vibrant diverse and resilient communities across wider Canterbury ... as opposed to ... do you remember how fantastic our communities used to be in 2012?” Activated, connected and *supported* community leaders could actively work towards creating the four conditions of community development advocated for by Kidd (2013, p. 37). These are common identity, manageable scale, places to gather, and vehicles of collective action. Such people would need to be in both government organisations/NGOs (Theme 1) and communities (Theme 2) and focused on people taking responsibility for their own wellbeing (or creating a hybrid).

These hybrids require considerable tenacity and commitment on the part of the people within them, given that both the centralised and decentralised systems have the potential to clash philosophically. Addressing this challenge requires the two ‘sides’ to undertake intensive, clearly directed, collaborative inquiry. The leaders in these hybrids would thus need to work side by side with the individuals in them, always striving to maintain high levels of positivity within these relationships and within their own leadership practice and personal functioning. People involved would also need to be able to make sense of complex systems. And they would need to navigate the difficulty of community partnering with a government whose work is divided by functions.

Consider developing a leadership incubator

Leadership is key, but leaders who can think and act differently are vital. Therefore developing leaders to do this is key . . . how about considering a large-scale strategy to build capacity in key people across the city in organisations (theme one) and communities (theme two). (Jansen, 2013, p. 5)

Clearly, I experienced a very strong resonance with the three themes in the CERA psycho-social recovery plan, and it was this that motivated me to make the relatively bold suggestions in response as I have outlined above. My submission ended with a suggestion that CERA consider creating a fit-for-purpose leadership incubator.

In endeavouring to explain what I meant by an incubator, I painted a picture of a leadership learning programme, six to nine months in duration, that pulled together a diverse group of informal leaders, provided them with expertise on sense-making and community-building, allowed them to connect with one another and get creative, and provided the facilitation and support that would enable them to research, design and implement their own hybrids. I also suggested that the programme should be project focused, with organisations (including CERA, the Ministry of Social Development, and community groups) nominating potential candidates for scholarships that would allow them to access the programme.

I pointed out that a leadership- learning programme such as this could be the ‘attractor’ needed for self-organisation, and I recommended that CERA ask community leaders themselves what would be useful for them. The question I suggested in this regard was: “What do you think would be most valuable in terms of fostering and sustaining thriving communities around Christchurch?”

One other feature of my submission was the ‘story’ of my doctoral project.

My PhD was working with 25 managers of NGO’s working with adolescents around Christchurch— we created a leadership learning community that lasted for 14 months. They started off as a pretty loose group with some tensions present and ended up being a very tight-knit and practical, focused network of key NGO leaders who have created all sorts of hybrids together. Their learning community has become self-sustaining—no finances required—they facilitate it themselves (it's now called LYNGO – leaders of youth focussed NGO’s). (Jansen, 2013, p. 6)

Finally, I cited other examples of such a dynamic both within organisations such as SCIRT but more importantly in communities around the city, all of which were exhibiting the self-organising dynamic of community members working together and creating all manner of grass-roots psycho-social initiatives.

To my delight, CERA was keen to talk and their reply to my submission has led to 9 months of conversations with government bodies, philanthropic funders, community leaders, like-minded consultants and, at the time of writing, a formal response that is still emerging. While the details of this process and potential project are beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe it illustrates the impact of the concepts that I have explored in this thesis

8.5 Designing a leadership incubator

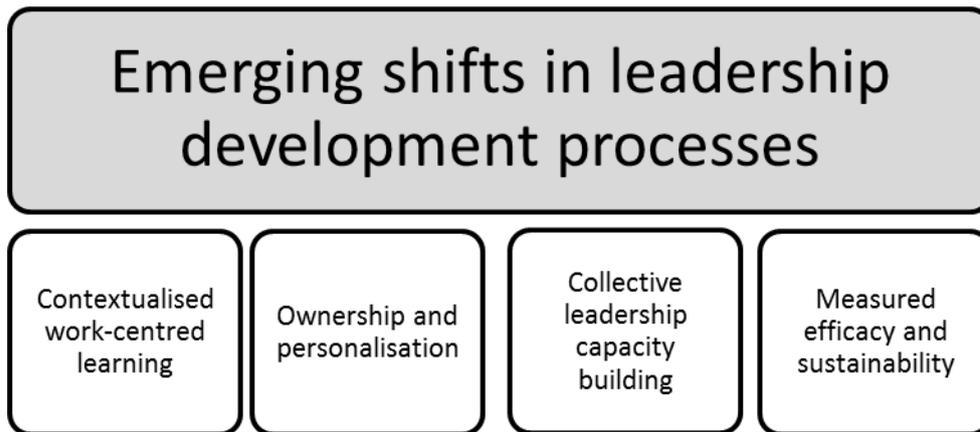
As discussed in Section 2.6.3, organisations must focus on conscious learning and adaptation. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) consider that the key role of leadership in this regard is to “foster distributed intelligence throughout the organisation”(p. xx). Enabling and harnessing this collective intelligence has many practical logistical implications, implying that

organisations need a “deep seated buy-in to the ongoing importance of distributed intelligence and the need to cultivate it properly” (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 52).

Collective intelligence is leveraged through the creation of learning processes directed towards generating solutions. This process is known colloquially as an idea factory, a think tank or an incubator. In this section I have adopted the third of these terms – a leadership incubator.

Chapter 3 explored the following four emerging shifts in leadership development process.

Figure 6 (from Chapter 3)



Based on integrating these with the learning in this research project I have formulated the following five design principles for a creating a bespoke leadership learning incubator (see Section 8.4.4). These principles are a work in progress and currently read in summative form as follows.

Principle 1: Embed learning in leader’s context(s)

- Create a learning programme rather than an event to maximise application of learning and change;
- Emphasise a blended structure through pre-course surveys (to ascertain what leaders want from courses) as well as workshops, supported work applications from colleagues and mentors, action learning groups, coaching, and ongoing peer networks;
- Open up space for collaborative projects within the programme.

Principle 2: Transfer development ownership to the leader

- Orientate leaders so that they understand the learning programme is a personalised inquiry based on their own setting(s);
- Have leaders critique cutting-edge organisational/developmental frameworks in the light of their own particular inquiries;
- Ensure that programme content is flexible and emergent by basing it on leaders’ needs;

- Provide leaders' with opportunities to prototype and communicate their inquiry, planning and implementation with peers.

Principle 3: Create a learning community to maximise peer interaction and learning

- Structure multiple opportunities for leaders' to connect
- Provide an opportunity to select a 'critical friend' from another sector to provide feed-forward.
- Leaders in programme undertake structured mentoring and peer development of leader colleagues in their workplace.
- Design a shared online platform for collating expertise

Principle 4: Leverage diversity to create cross-pollination of learning and collaboration

- Remember that innovation happens on the fringes and spaces between current expertise;
- Create a culturally responsive learning setting where diversity is valued
- Explore potential for ongoing network.

Principle 4: Focus on tangible action

- Focus on putting ideas into actions that make a real difference in communities;
- Identify and develop opportunities for positive sector and community impact;
- Develop successful partnerships /collaborations.

8.6 Conclusion

“much of what we know about leadership is today redundant because it is literally designed for a different operating model, a different context, a different time” (Pascale et al., p. 4).

This thesis described a project that was designed to explore ways to enhance leadership capacity in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Christchurch, New Zealand. It included 20 chief executive officers, directors and managers from organisations covering a range of settings, including education, recreation, and residential and community therapeutic support. All of these NGOs were working with adolescents.

The project involved the creation of a peer-supported professional learning community that operated for 14 months. The design and facilitation of the community was informed by the principles of appreciative inquiry (AI), positive focus and collaboration. At the completion of the research project in February 2010, the leaders decided to continue their collective processes as a self-managing and sustaining professional network that has grown and in 2014 is still flourishing under the title LYNGO (Leaders of Youth-Focused NGOs).

The research project found that the NGO leaders in this study held a distinctive set of beliefs and values formed from a range of influences and experiences leading to a strong sense of moral purpose and personal vision. This base made for a high degree of engagement and commitment to their organisations and their leadership roles, and strongly influenced how they led. The doctoral project also explored the efficacy of the AI process in creating a powerful, professional learning community.

However, the most significant finding from this project was the resonance that the leaders encountered when exploring complexity thinking as a framework for adaptive leadership of their organisations. This thesis therefore explored this complexity-thinking-informed leadership in detail, on the premise that it could offer an opportune alternative to more traditional forms of positional leadership. The many factors, including ecological, social and financial crises, contributing to today's exponential rates of change and uncertainty in organisations and decreasing employee engagement are associated with a growing global critique of status quo, traditional leadership. Instead of an intensification of compliance and control-based management, there is a growing emphasis on the need and desire for new thinking and approaches that promise returns with regards to innovation, flexibility and responsiveness of leaders and organisations—all key qualities in a 21st century-context. The leaders in this study agreed that complexity thinking has much to offer this shift in leadership and organisational approaches. In addition, this project concluded that leaders need to focus on creating hybrid organisations because these leverage the strengths (and minimise the limitations) of self-organising complexity-informed organisational processes, while at the same time retaining many of the strengths of more traditional organisational management structures.

Complexity-based approaches are at the forefront of innovation in the leadership field because they provide a framework for addressing pervasive and 'adaptive' challenges as well as accommodating the unpredictable and rapidly changing nature of our global context. This thesis has provided a wealth of participant data giving ample evidence of the pragmatic applications of such a complexity lens for leaders. The doctoral project's application of complexity-based approaches in the NGO sector in New Zealand has seldom been explored in detail in the past and yet had strong resonance with the participating NGO leaders.

The thesis also extended this application of complexity thinking by considering the possibility of creating organisations that are 'hybrids', which means they combine the strengths of the self-organising complex adaptive system and the strengths of a well-structured and efficient bureaucracy. Five keystones for developing such a hybrid approach were suggested and explored in relation to two brief case studies from the post-disaster earthquake recovery landscape of Christchurch city. These case studies reinforced and validated the complexity-based hybrid findings from the doctoral project with NGO leaders, thus presenting the plausibility of applying complexity concepts in the rethinking of the design of organisations, systems and learning processes, all issues that have been, are and will continue to be of vital importance as Christchurch and its people traverse the road to recovery.

...one of the challenges for those involved in such capacity-building work lies in designing interventions that **enable NGO leaders to thrive in, not just cope with, the complex environment** in which most of them operate. (Hailey, 2006, p. 26)

This seems to be a suitably open and emergent place to finish this doctoral thesis. The six-year journey that is this project has been an incredibly authentic, collective and transformational learning process for me, and I am thrilled that although the thesis is completed . . .

. . . this story is not.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Initial scoping letter

26 September 2008

Using Appreciative Inquiry to develop the leadership capability of directors of adolescent focussed NGO's in NZ

We must reject the idea – well intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become ‘more like a business’. Indeed tomorrow’s great leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around. Jim Collins, 2005

Dear

My name is Chris Jansen, and I am contacting you regarding a collaborative research project using Appreciative Inquiry that I am facilitating through my PhD thesis at the University of Canterbury. I am contacting a number of colleagues like you who work as directors of non-government organisations (NGOs) in New Zealand who focus fully or partially on developing adolescents (defined as 13–25 year olds for this study). As some of you will be aware, I work in the College of Education at the university; however, this research is being implemented through the Department of Management and so is an interdisciplinary study with my supervisors coming from both management (Dr Ian Brooks and Dr Peter Cammock) and from education (Dr Lindsey Conner). At this stage I am looking for expressions of interest and also requesting your input into some aspects of the project design.

Purpose and rationale of research

Directors in adolescent-focused non-government organisations (NGOs) have critical roles in leading organisations that focus on developing young people to respond to a diverse range of the growing social and community needs in New Zealand. The complexity and intricacies of their leadership roles have not been explored in depth in New Zealand. In addition, pathways in the development of leadership for such organisations are unclear.

I have a background in various leadership roles (HOD PE at Mangere College in Auckland, Director of Te Ora Hou Otautahi, Curriculum Coordinator of Outdoor and Environmental Education at College of Education, Director of Project Adventure New Zealand, etc). One thing I have noticed in all of these roles is that although my colleagues and I were very committed to and curious about optimising our leadership, we often had limited engagement with ‘cutting edge’ leadership models developed in other sectors. This was perhaps due to time constraints and/or information access. I know for myself that I have had leadership books on my shelf for years but never really engaged with the concepts in them at any depth!

The results of this study are intended to assist in capability building of current and emerging leaders within this sector. It is intended that the participants in this study will help design a dynamic, contextualised and user-friendly model of leadership for adolescent-focused NGOs in New Zealand, while also experimenting with an effective process within which to develop these leadership competencies.

Project Details

This study will allow the group of directors involved to reflect on their leadership beliefs, values and actions in a collaborative manner with other peers in similar roles over an eight-month period. It will follow an Appreciative Inquiry format, which is an internationally proven process that identifies the best of what is happening in the present moment to pursue what is possible in the future.

Phase One:

- An initial ½ day focus group in late November 2008 (24th–26th). The Appreciative Inquiry process involves four steps: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate. The format of this focus group will involve peer interviews which focus on past peak leadership experiences, and then collective brainstorming with other directors relating to key themes and envisioning leadership characteristics into the future. Participants will then select a development focus in their own leadership.

Phase Two:

- Participants will develop their leadership focus back in their own organisation.
- Collaboration with other participants will be negotiated but could include leadership learning sets through email/conference calls or face-to-face meetings, online web-based forum site, and input from leadership literature/training. I will simultaneously be undertaking a literature review of leadership in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors and feeding this information into the developing process.

Phase Three:

- A second ½ day focus group in July 2009 which will involve Appreciative Interviews based on leadership development experiences in the last eight months, reporting back on comparison of summarised focus-group data and leadership literature, and identifying key points of distinction regarding leading an adolescent-focused NGO in New Zealand. Each participant will be forwarded all the data collected in these focus groups at the end of each stage.

Participants

The research has deliberately set out to access known networks and relationships to facilitate the research as part of an Appreciative Inquiry collaborative research process. This process is known as snowball sampling, and I am keen for you to recommend people who you know fit the criteria below:

- Directors of adolescent-focused NGOs with at least five staff.
- At least five years' leadership experience in leadership role (not necessarily current organisation).
- Organisations must have existed for five years or more.

I am interested in getting a sense of who is well respected in the community for their leadership contribution and to create the final participant list by collating all your suggestions.

What is Expected of Participants?

- A willingness to explore your own leadership values, beliefs and actions.
- A time commitment to two focus group meetings and some negotiated collaboration with other members of the group in implementing a leadership development focus in your workplace. (Collaboration can be as big or small as people like.)

What's in it for you?

- Increasing your depth and breadth of knowledge in leadership across the NGO sector.
- A chance to work collaboratively with a group of directors in your region and develop good relationships with these people.
- A professional development opportunity to be involved in cutting-edge Appreciative Inquiry research.
- A free lunch or two!

Questions that I would like feedback on

- What is your initial reaction to the focus on the project? Curious? Any questions?
- Who else would you recommend as potential participants in the Canterbury area that you know fit the selection criteria?

I realise you are all very busy so I appreciate the precious time that this requires, so if you can, please flick me a quick email at chris.jansen@canterbury.ac.nz. I am keen to collect all feedback by October 15th, and then I will be in touch with you as to where to from here. Thanks for taking the time to read all this, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Chris Jansen

Senior Lecturer, Outdoor and Environmental Education, College of Education

03 366 7001 ext 44398, 0272111332

email chris.jansen@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix 2: Information sheet

4 November

INFORMATION SHEET

Using Appreciative Inquiry to explore the leadership of directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in NZ

Dear

Thanks for your interest in being involved in this exciting project. This letter is to provide you with more information and to officially invite you to participate in the above PhD research project. I would appreciate if you could read the following information and then return the attached consent form by **November 14th** so that we can confirm the involvement of all involved and the logistics for the study.

I have attached a **list of participants** who have indicated they would like to be involved; there are a couple of others that have yet to confirm. If you have other recommendations, please let me know asap. Also, I am keen to have a couple of people involved a little more extensively in an **internal reference team**, which would have input into all decisions made in the direction of the project, especially around the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry. I would meet with these people perhaps monthly. Let me know if you are interested.

The aim of this project is to explore the following questions:

“What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?”

“What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury?”

The results of this study are intended to assist in capability building of current and emerging leaders within this sector. It will follow an Appreciative Inquiry format, which is an internationally proven process that identifies the best of what is happening in the present moment to pursue what is possible in the future. It is intended that the participants in this study will collectively explore their leadership roles and work towards designing a dynamic and contextualised model of leadership for adolescent-focused NGOs in New Zealand, while also experimenting with an effective process within which to develop these leadership competencies.

This project will involve the following components:

Phase One:

- An initial focus group on **Tuesday November 25th 2008, from 8.30am to 1.30pm**; venue yet to be confirmed. The Appreciative Inquiry process involves four steps: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate. The Initiate step has begun with our discussions so far and will continue with an overview of the objectives of the research as well as information regarding the Appreciative Inquiry approach. The Inquire phase will involve paired peer interviews which focus on past peak leadership experiences. The 'Imagine' step involves collective brainstorming with other directors regarding key themes and envisioning leadership characteristics into the future (possibility statements). The Innovate step will involve participants selecting an exploration focus in their own leadership setting. At this stage, collaboration with other participants will be negotiated and could include; leadership learning sets (three to four people) who meet regularly through email/conference calls or face-to-face meetings, participation in an online web based forum site, and input from leadership literature/training etc. (Each person will be able to select strategies that suit their time commitments; **this commitment can be as big or small as people like.**)

Phase Two:

- Participants will explore their leadership focus back in their own organisation using the strategies agreed to in Phase One. There will also be an opportunity for leaders to opt into getting 360-degree feedback from some of their staff via a confidential online questionnaire. This feedback will be based on the possibility statements designed in Phase One and could assist each leader in exploring their leadership focus; this will be entirely optional. I will be simultaneously undertaking a literature review of leadership in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors and feeding this information into the emerging process via online discussions on the website we are designing (www.leadngo.co.nz).

Phase Three:

- A second focus group in July 2009, which will involve Appreciative Interviews based on leadership exploration experiences in the last eight months, comparing the summarised focus group data and leadership literature, and identifying key points of distinction regarding leading an adolescent-focused NGO in New Zealand. Each participant will be forwarded all the data collected in these focus groups at the end of each stage. Leaders who opted into the 360-degree feedback will initiate a second round of confidential online questionnaires at this point.

The results of the project may be published at some stage, and you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of the data gathered throughout the process:

- The identity of the participants will not be made public without their consent.
- Pseudonyms will be used for each leader when the information is written up to prevent the specific source of any quote or information being disclosed.
- You will have the opportunity to contribute your ideas at the focus groups where there will be a group of other leaders involved. Consequently, in order to protect you, each participant will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

During the focus groups, paired conversations will be audio recorded and group discussions will be video recorded. The audio recording will be transcribed by a professional typist, who will also sign a confidentiality agreement. The video recording will be transcribed by myself

and not be seen by anyone except my supervisors and myself. All recordings will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my university office, and all electronic data is password protected on the university server.

In addition, each participant will be forwarded all the data collected in these focus groups, and you may withdraw any of your information if you have any concerns.

The project is being carried out as a requirement of a PhD in Management by Chris Jansen under the supervision of Dr Ian Brooks and Dr Peter Cammock from the Department of Management and Dr Lindsey Conner from the College of Education. These supervisors can be contacted at (03) 3667001. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided.

Please fill out the consent form on the following page by **NOVEMBER 14th** to register as a participant in the project, and fax or send to me at the address below.

Regards

Chris Jansen

Senior Lecturer, Outdoor and Environmental Education, College of Education

Phone 03 366 7001 ext 44398, 0272111332, Fax 03 3458381

Email chris.jansen@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix 3: Consent form

4 November 2008

CONSENT FORM

Using Appreciative Inquiry to explore the leadership of directors of adolescent focussed NGO's in NZ

I have read the attached Information Sheet and have had the details of this PhD research project explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. I am also aware that I will receive draft copies of all information shared by me in this research and I will have the right to edit this as I feel fit.

I agree to be involved as a participant in this research project, including the focus groups on the 25th November and in July 2008, as well as the negotiated leadership exploration and collaboration as per the information sheet.

I agree to keep all information shared by other participants in this project confidential.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

This project has been reviewed by the Canterbury University Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix 4: Outline of AI Summit: Tuesday 25th November 2008

Research Project Purpose

WHAT?

PhD Leadership research project: Exploration and reflection on leadership beliefs, values and actions in a collaborative manner with peers in similar roles over an eight-month period.

Supervisors:

- Ian Brooks, Peter Cammock – College of Business and Economics
- Lindsey Conner – College of Education

WHO?

- Directors of adolescent-focused NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand

WHEN?

- November 2008–June 2009

HOW?

- Appreciative Inquiry format—internationally proven process. Identifies the best of what is happening in the present moment to pursue what is possible in the future. Four stages—Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate

WHY?

Intended outcomes:

- Collaborative design of a dynamic model of leadership for adolescent-focused NGOs in New Zealand
- Exploring an effective process within which to develop these leadership competencies.
- Capability building of current and emerging leaders

Key areas of inquiry...

What shared beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury, New Zealand?

What is the potential contribution of an appreciative inquiry process in developing leadership capacity in the directors of adolescent-focussed NGOs in Canterbury?

Focus group agenda...

- 8.30–9.30 Initiate—Intros and overview of Leadership focus and Appreciative Inquiry Process
- 9.30–10.30 Inquire—stories of peak leadership...
- 10.30–10.45 Tea
- 10.45–11.30 Inquire—locate themes in stories...
- 11.30–12.15 Imagine—create shared images for a preferred future...
- 12.15–1.00 Innovate—explore innovative ways to create that future...
- 1.15 onwards Lunch

What to expect from this AI focus group:

Role of facilitator

- Introduce and manage the Appreciative Inquiry approach
- Explain the purpose and guidelines for activities
- Create a constructive learning environment

Your role

- TELL LOTS OF STORIES about meaningful, important experiences you have had or learned about in your interviews
- Contribute your knowledge, experience and ideas
- Analyse information and imagine new possibilities
- Listen, ask and be curious
- Self-manage your group, time and tasks
- Build the future you want for the sector

Housekeeping

- Observe time frames
- Turn off anything that rings or buzzes
- Record all discussions on the paper provided and post on wall
- Audio and video recording
- Confidentiality—each person signed, also informed consent of recordings
- Food, toilets, breaks etc

Interview Guide

What attracted you to this work?

- Think back to when you first became involved in leadership of an NGO. What was it that attracted you to role? What did you hope to achieve personally and professionally? What were you passionate about?

Peak Leadership Experience

- Think back through your career as a NGO leader and locate a moment or period that was a high point. This should be a time when you felt a sense of pride, accomplishment and true satisfaction in your work.
- Describe the situation. What happened? What was the result?
- What was your role in creating this experience? What other people and factors contributed to this exceptional moment?
- How has this experience influenced you as a leader? What conscious choices do you make as a result?

Your Values

- Let's talk for a moment about some of the things that matter deeply to you, specifically about the nature of your work and your organisation.
- Without being too humble, describe what you value most about the qualities you bring to your work?
- When you think about your current role, what beliefs and values guide you in your leadership?
- What/who have been the key influences in shaping your beliefs and values?

Image of the Future

- Imagine it's a year from now and you are feeling really fulfilled in your leadership role. Your team is delivering excellent outcomes and both you and your team feel inspired and motivated by your work.
- Describe your leadership role within the team. How are you behaving? What characteristics are you demonstrating?
- What are people saying in your organisation, outside of your organisation?
- What are two or three small steps you might take to start making this vision a reality?

OPTIONAL

Inspiring Leadership (Optional)

- Think of the best demonstration of leadership that you have experienced (i.e., when you personally were not the leader). This should be a time when you felt inspired and motivated to fulfil your role to the best of your abilities.
- Who was/were the leader(s)? What characteristics did they have that inspired and motivated you?
- Describe a specific incident when you saw this person demonstrate this leadership.

- What was the impact of their leadership on you and your behaviour?
- What learnings about leadership have you taken from this experience?

Step 2) Inquire

10.45–11.30am

Purpose

- Develop a shared understanding of the positive core of leadership in this group
- Identifying collective themes (30 mins)
- Report back to focus group (15 mins)

Guidelines

With your interview partner, move to the tables and join TWO other pairs to create a group of six.

Assign roles for this working group

Facilitator—helps everyone in the group to engage in dialogue, checks for levels of agreement, asks for differing views, manages air time so all can contribute

Time-keeper—helps the groups accomplish the task on time

Recorder—writes all the ideas of the group on chart paper

Reporter—reports the outcomes of the groups work to the entire group.

Go around the table. Introduce your interview partner by **sharing a story or brief highlights** from your interview that you found particularly interesting, inspiring and energising.
(approx. 1 minute /person)

As a group, talk about what these stories and responses tell about your about the beliefs, values and actions of leaders in this sector and create a list of themes that relate to these areas.

Select six to eight of these themes that you feel are most important to consider, preserve and/or develop in the NGO sector. These may be overarching themes that combine several of the smaller themes you have identified. Write each on a separate piece of paper and prepare to share them with the larger group along with a brief story from your group that illustrates one or more of the themes.

Appendix 5: One-pager (Focus Group 2)

Leaders are busy and their time is limited. Restricting writing to one page allows key insights, ideas and thoughts to be captured and documented.

We have discovered that for busy people like us, it is manageable to write about a key insight or idea and to share that writing when we restrict ourselves to one page.

One-pagers have emerged as a way of writing that captures people's insights into an exciting innovation without requiring conformity to academic conventions.

Our ideas evolve as we work and talk.

Please take a few moments to write some thoughts about today's focus group ... (i.e., How are you feeling about today? What did you find most interesting? What are you looking forward to?)

Appendix 6: One-pager (Focus Group 3)

Interview Quotes and Themes

We have just spent an hour exploring excerpts from our own stories around leadership in an NGO setting ...

- How do you feel about the process?
- What was most useful?
- What else could have been useful?

Tasks and Skills of Leadership

- What did you find interesting? Challenging? Intriguing? Motivating?

The process???

Now that we are part way through this project, have a think about the process we are involved in? (Focus groups, books to review, input from Peter, reviewing quotes from other participants, discussion with peers about them, readings in the mail, website, learning sets, one pagers, etc.)

- What has been useful?
- What would you like more of? Why?

Leadership Action Plan

- What would I like to have a go at implementing in my own leadership over the next few months?
- What steps will I take?
- What resources or support will I need?
- Who will be involved?

Appendix 7: One-pager (Focus Group 4)

Kiwi Leadership for Principals

- What parts of this model make sense in an NGO setting?

Educultural Leadership

What did you find interesting? Challenging? Intriguing? Motivating?

The process???

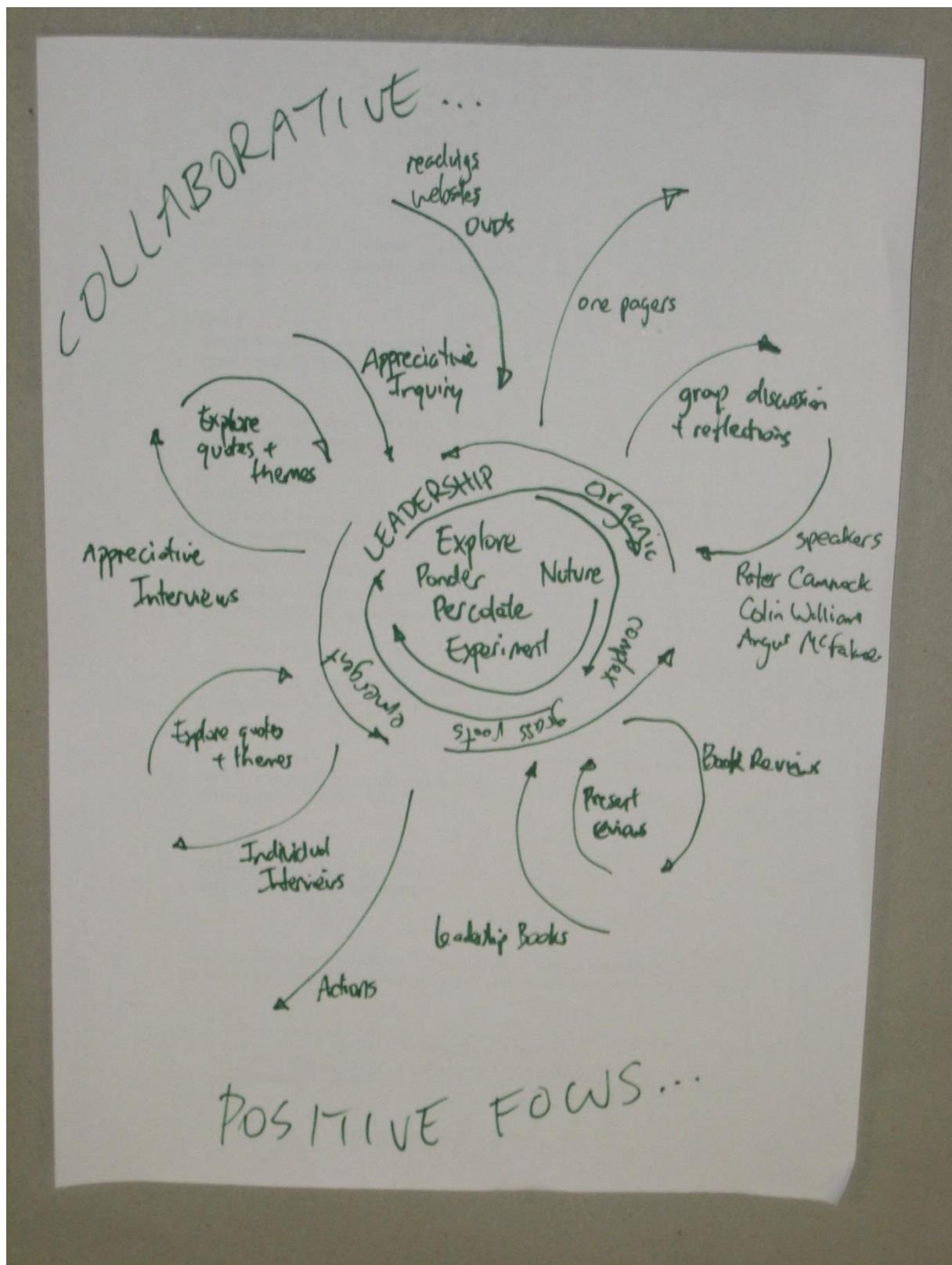
Now that we are part way through this project, have a think about the process we are involved in? (Focus groups, books to review, input from Peter, reviewing quotes from other participants, discussion with peers about them, readings in the mail, website, learning sets, one pagers, etc.)

- What has been useful?
- What would you like more of? Why?

Photos of member checking in progress



Photos of incubator diagram when first developed at Focus Group 4



Appendix 9: LYNGO Otautahi: Leaders of Youth-Focused NGOs (summary sheet)

Participants:

- Managers/CEOs of NGOs who work with adolescents in Otautahi/Christchurch

What are we about?

- a learning community
- professional peer support
- generating creative ideas for youth initiatives
- coordination and information sharing

Format:

- ½-day hui every two months
- 50% time on leadership input and learning
- 50% time exploring external initiatives and ideas for contribution in our city

Organisations include:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Waipuna Youth and Community Services | - Trevor Batin and Paddy Pawson |
| • Youthline | - Tina Mackie |
| • Te Ora Hou Otautahi | - Jono Campbell |
| • YMCA CHCH | - Josie Ogden |
| • Youth Cultural Development (YCD) | - Anni Watkin |
| • Spreydon Youth Community/Baptist Church | - Duane Major |
| • Canterbury Youth Workers Collective | - John Harrington |
| • STOP | - Maureen Lorimer and Don Mortensen |
| • Agape Trust | - Steve Reid |
| • Community Colleges NZ | - Doug Reid |
| • He Waka Tapu Trust | - Daryl Gregory |
| • Bluelight Canterbury Youth Development Programme | - Mike Field |
| • START Inc. | - Maggy Tai Rakena |
| • Crossover Trust | - Roy Kenneally |
| • Korowai/198 | - Sue Bagshaw |
| • Action Works Trust | - Peter Young |
| • Girl Guiding NZ | - Rosemarie Thomas |
| • Te Poutama Arahi Rangatahi | - Lesley Ashworth |
| • 24-7 Youth Work | - Jay Geldard |

Background

This network was originally formed during 2009–2010 as part of a doctoral research project at the University of Canterbury undertaken by Chris Jansen. The project was titled Otautahi NGO Leadership Research Project and involved 20 managers of adolescent-focused non-government organisations (NGOs) in Christchurch. These leaders participated in a 14-month project that used a process called appreciative inquiry to develop a professional learning community, allowing each of the leaders to focus on developing their own leadership. The process was guided by the two principles of appreciative inquiry—a positive focus and collaboration.

As predicted by Jim Collins in the following extract from his book, *Good to Great in the Social Sectors*, the leadership findings from this project discovered a very high level of leadership expertise across the participants in this study:

We must reject the idea – well intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become “more like a business”. Indeed, tomorrow’ great leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around. (Collins, 2005)

The findings from this study have been published internationally in the following areas:

Outcomes

Jansen, C., Cammock, P. & Conner, L. (2011). Leadership for emergence: Exploring organisations through a living system lens. *Leading and Managing*, 17(1), 59–74.

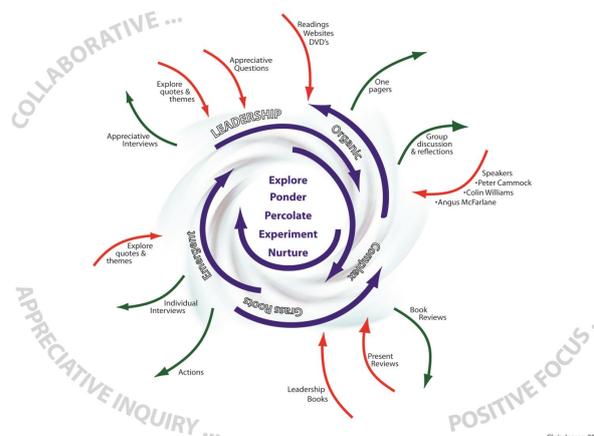
This article relates to the Otautahi NGO Leadership Research Project described above and outlines some of the leadership behaviours that the participants explored during the project. Proactive mentoring, fostering interaction and shared learning, strategies for distributing power and decentralising control, and exploration and articulation of deeply held values emerged as the key leadership behaviours that these leaders implemented in their roles.

<http://wfct.org.nz/Resources/Publications>

Jansen, C., Conner, L. & Cammock, P. (2010). Leaders building professional learning communities: Appreciative inquiry in action. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 25(2), 41–54.

This paper outlines the key success components that emerged during the project: a flexible and negotiated process, a focus on positive stories, cycles of reflection and a substantial period of time over which to conduct the development process. <http://wfct.org.nz/Resources/Publications>

Exploring our Leadership



Jansen, C. (2011). Creating a professional learning community: Embedding Appreciative Inquiry in a complexity thinking framework. *International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry*, 13(2), 69-74.

For more information contact Chris Jansen, Senior Lecturer, Canterbury University,
chris.jansen@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix 10: Post-project evaluation

Looking back ...

What do you see as the benefits for yourself and your own leadership from having been a part of this LYNGO Leadership Network?

For your organisation?

For the wider sector and community?

How could have the process been fine-tuned to be more effective?

Looking forward ...

What are you most interested in/motivated about in terms of future possibilities for the LYNGO Leadership Network?

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