

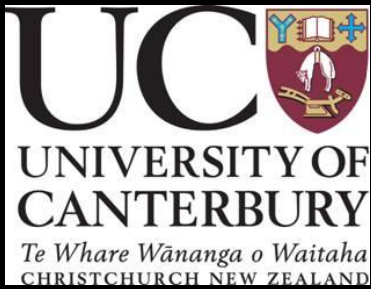
# Developing professional learning communities through Appreciative Inquiry



EARCOS Leadership Conference 2012  
Chris Jansen – University of Canterbury, New Zealand







**Chris Jansen**



**linwood college**


Providing learning  
pathways to the future...



# Overview

- assumptions about change
- positive psychology
- appreciative inquiry components
- exploring leadership
- experience AI process
- applications to creating professional learning communities



A wide-angle shot of two surfers riding a wave. The surfer in the foreground is crouched low on a purple surfboard, creating a large splash of white water. The second surfer is further back and to the left, also riding the wave. The ocean is a deep blue with visible ripples. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

Mike Parsons  
Final Wave



# Change

Change

Complexity

Uncertainty

Ambiguity

**change is changing.....**

Opportunities

Paradox

Speed

Lack of Control

Freshness

Unintended consequences

**...an exponential rate of change....**

Change manager

Driving change

Alignment

# Change Processes

Change proposals

'Consultation'

Cynicism

Social engineering

Underlying assumptions; ie: "If you allow people freedom to innovate – discipline will take a beating" – Gary Hamel, "The future of Management"



# **Positive Change Processes?**

# Positive Psychology

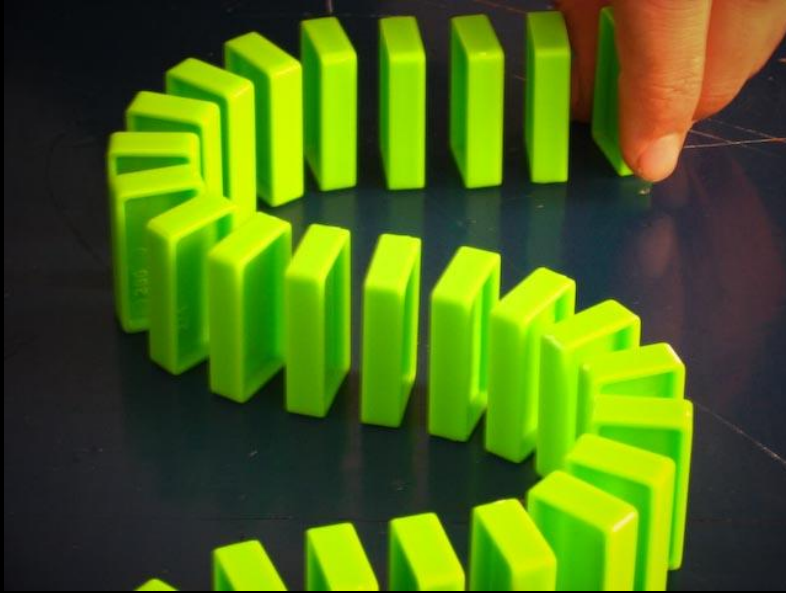
**'what we focus on becomes our reality'**



## **Heliotropic Hypothesis**

*"social systems evolve towards the most positive images they hold of themselves, toward what gives them life and energy, in much the same way that plants grow in the direction of the sun"*

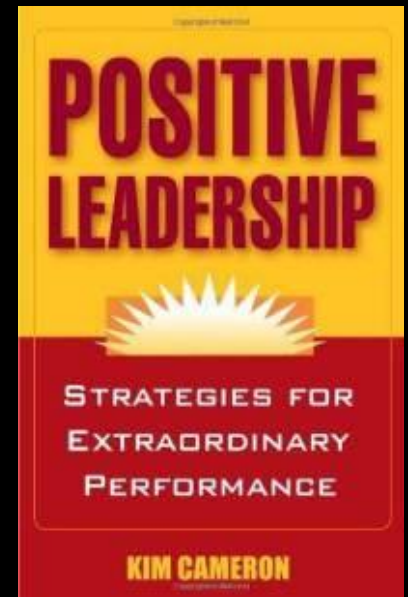
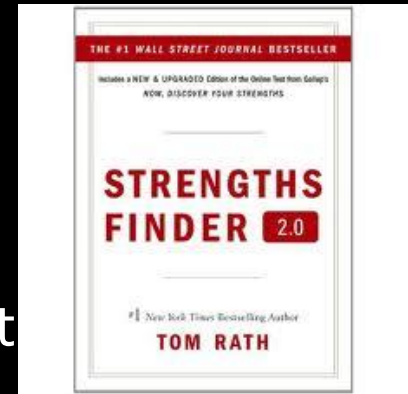
# What do we tend to focus on?



- vision
- planning
- detail
- problem
- drama

# Applications of Positive Psychology

- Solution focused therapy / narrative therapy
- Placebo effect / positive thinking
- Positive expectations on educational achievement
- Positive deviancy
- Positive leadership – leveraging strengths
- Appreciative Inquiry





# Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry focuses on supporting people getting together to tell stories of positive development in their work that they can build on.  
(Reed, 2004)

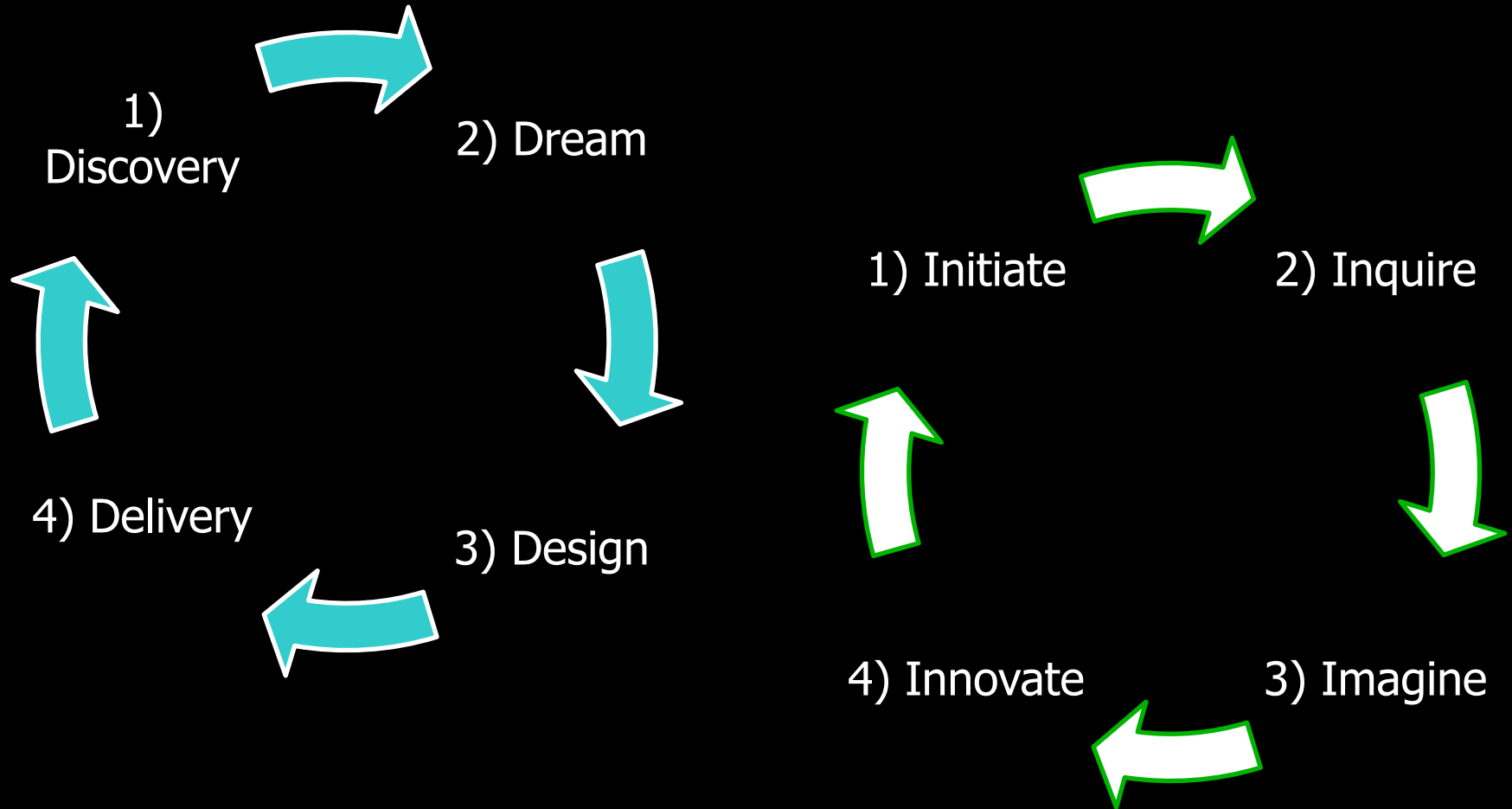
AI as an **orientation to the positive** rather than just a series of techniques

- Focus on the positive
- Inclusivity – shared ownership, voice, decision making



*Appreciative Inquiry is an exploratory process for positive change. It identifies the best of what is happening in the present moment to pursue what is possible in the future.*  
(Harkness, 2004)

# Appreciative Inquiry Processes



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. (Hammond)

# LYNGO Project: Key areas of inquiry:

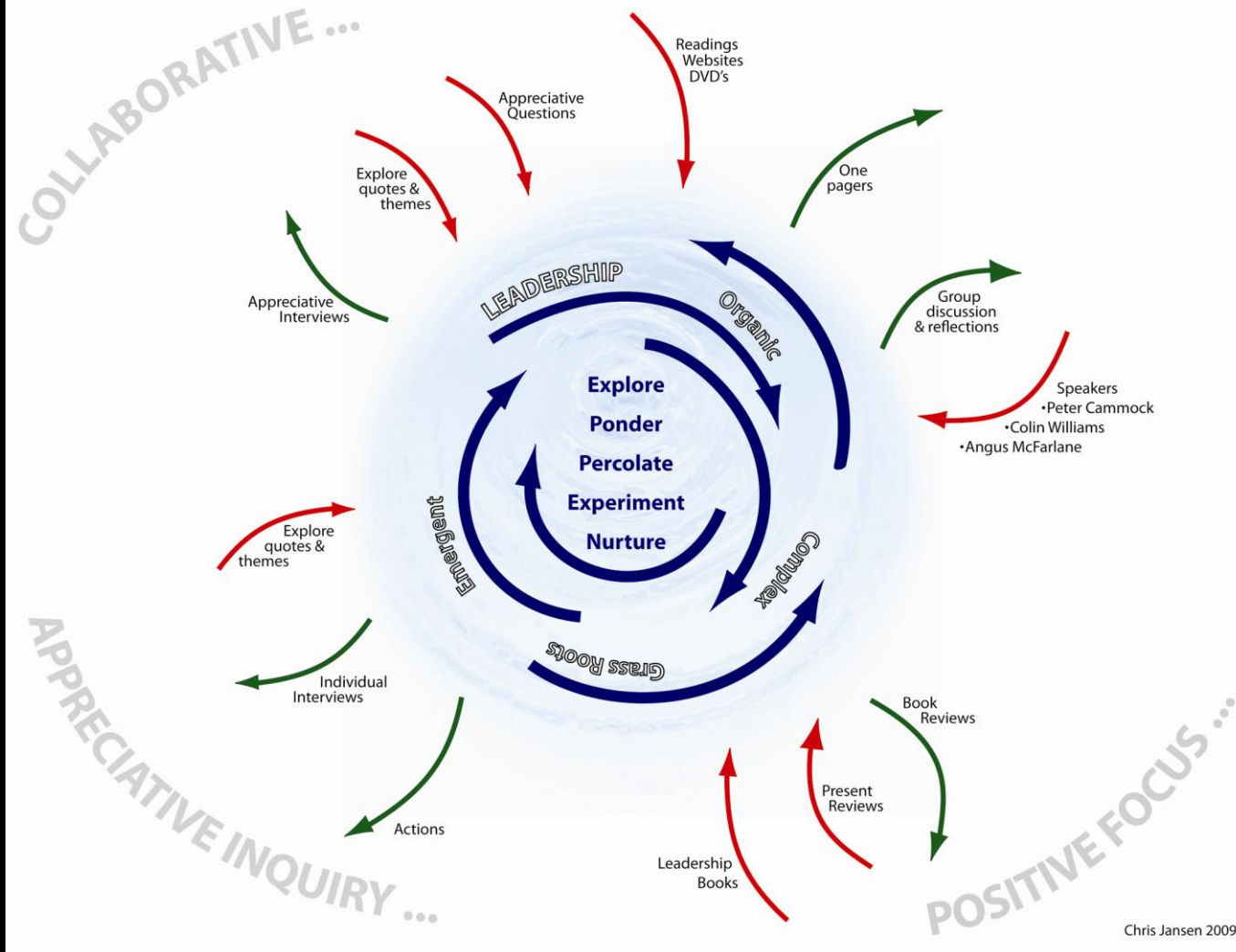
1) *"What beliefs, values and actions characterise leaders in adolescent focussed NGO's in NZ?" .....WHAT?*

2) *"What impact does exploring NGO leadership appreciatively have on practice?." ..... HOW?*



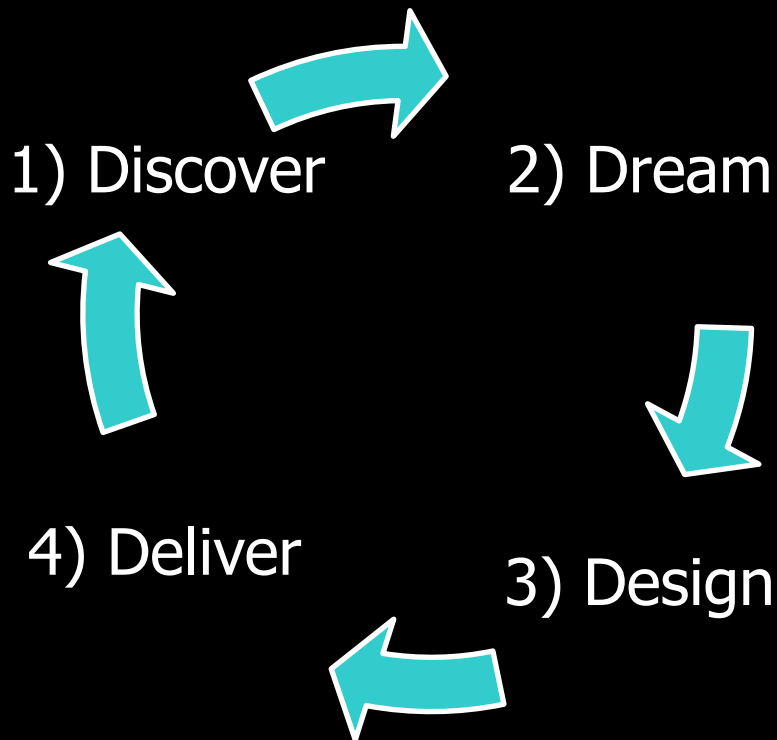
# Otautahi NGO Leadership Project – LYNGO

## Exploring our Leadership





# Appreciative Inquiry Process



## **Discover**

- collective discussion around focusing questions
- paired interviews around positive and real experiences

**Dream** - collective sense making

**Design** - practical visioning based on these concrete past experiences

**Deliver** - collective action taking

# Step 1) Discover

Think back over your experience as a leader and locate a moment or period that was a high point in your leadership, when you felt a sense of satisfaction in your work, when you went home saying YES!



- 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?
- When you reflect on this experience—what beliefs and values guided you in your leadership?

## Step 2) Dream

Collectively draw out the key themes from the peer interviews in step 1

- Listen to each sound bite
- Consider key themes emerging
- Build up collective mind map of clusters of similar foci



# LYNGO Deeply held values



*Equality*  
*Social Justice*  
*Compassion*  
*Dignity and respect*  
*Generosity*  
*Honesty and integrity*  
*Passion and energy*  
*Humility*  
*Quality*  
*Commitment*



*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.*

(Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry)

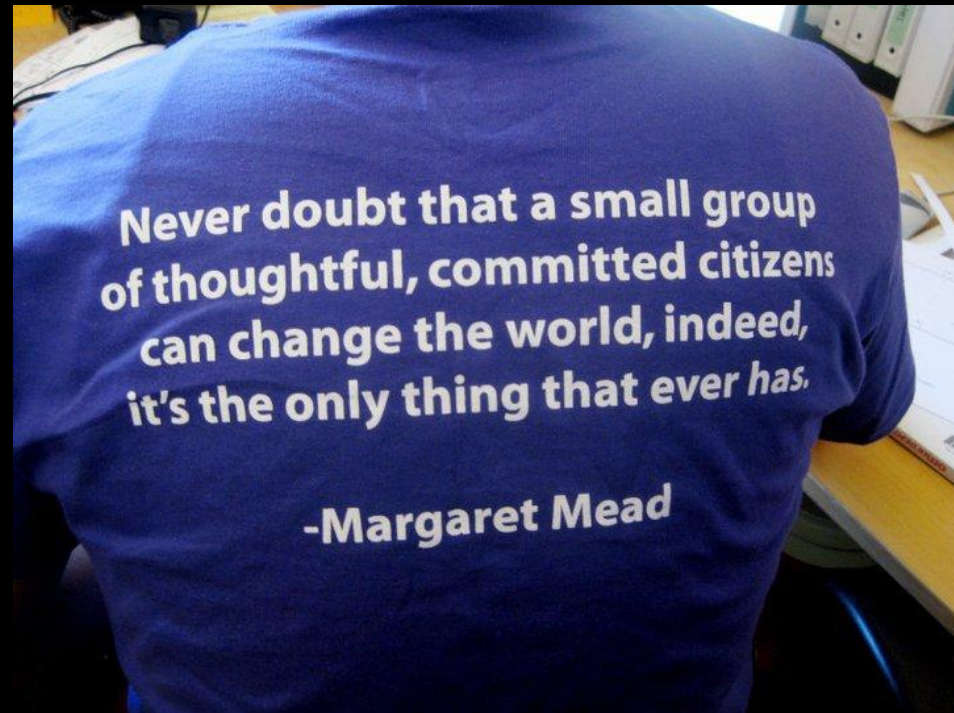
## Step 3) Design

Collective dialogue to explore;

- What energises and motivates us?
- What do we have in common?
- What could we do collectively that we couldn't do individually?

## Step 4) Deliver

- If we were to carry this conversation on beyond EARCOS 2012 what could that look like?
- What opportunities are there for us to further these conversations?
- What would we like to achieve?



# LYNGO Emerging Themes

- 1. Transformative change*
- 2. Creating space to empower people*
- 3. Deeply held values*
- 4. Share the journey – share leadership*
- 5. Influence of our stories – looking back, looking forward*
- 6. Flow – in the 'zone'*
- 7. Building positive relationships*
- 8. Walking our talk – congruence*







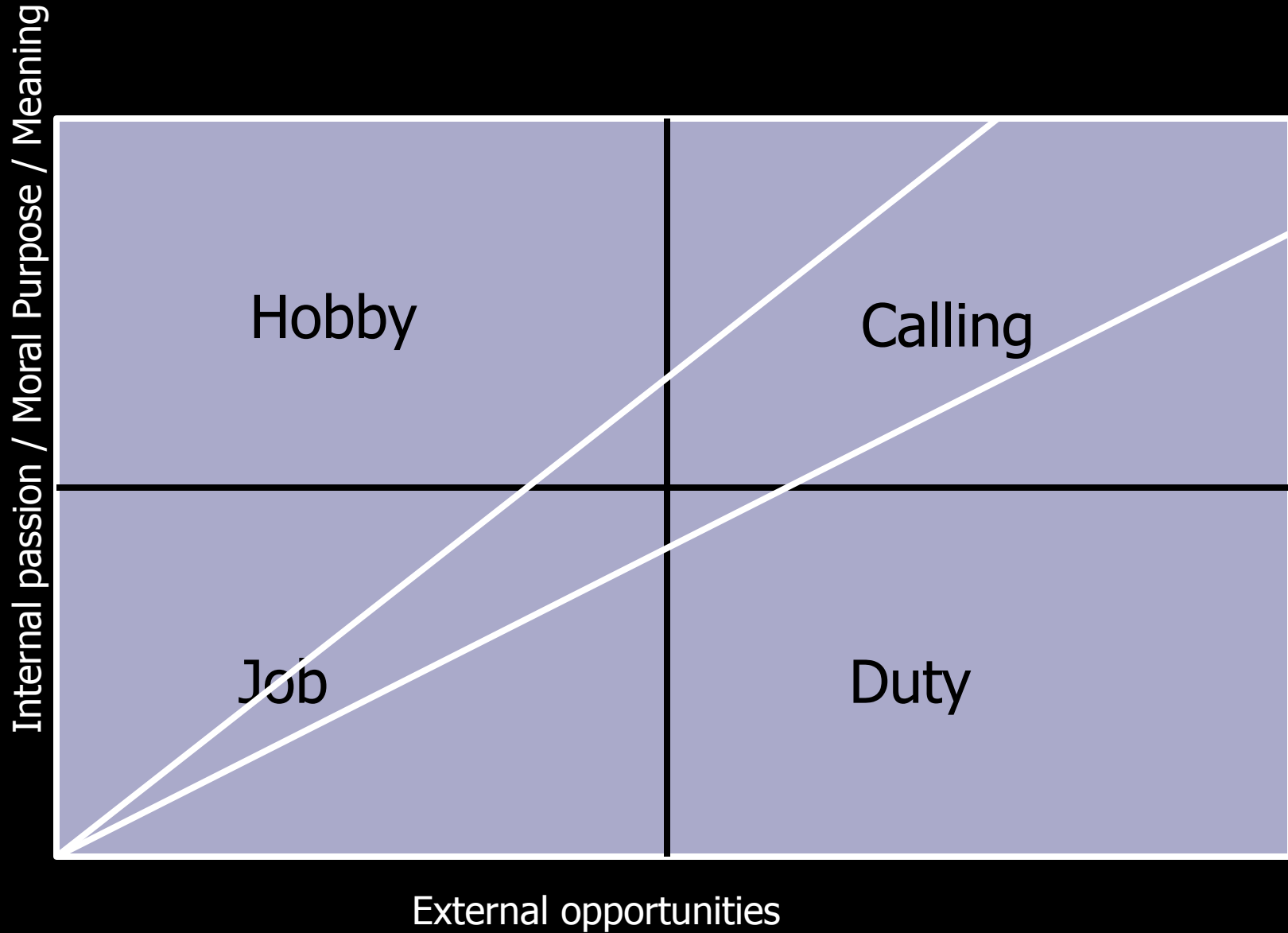


## Questioning our moral purpose....

1. What's the one change you want to see in the world?
2. What do you currently do in your role that contributes to this?  
How do you play your part?
3. What strategies would you have to do to move more towards this?
4. How would your leadership be different?
5. How would you know if you had achieved this shift?

adapted from Jan Robertson 2010

# Getting into the flow...



# AI as a positive change process

## Characterised by both;

- participative processes
- collaborate solution finding

## Benefits:

- Engagement, ownership leading to...  
...enthusiasm/energy and commitment
- Better solutions – innovation

# The Pronoun Test

## "I" or "We"

## "My" or "Our"

# "We" or "They"

*Daniel Pink – "A whole new mind"*

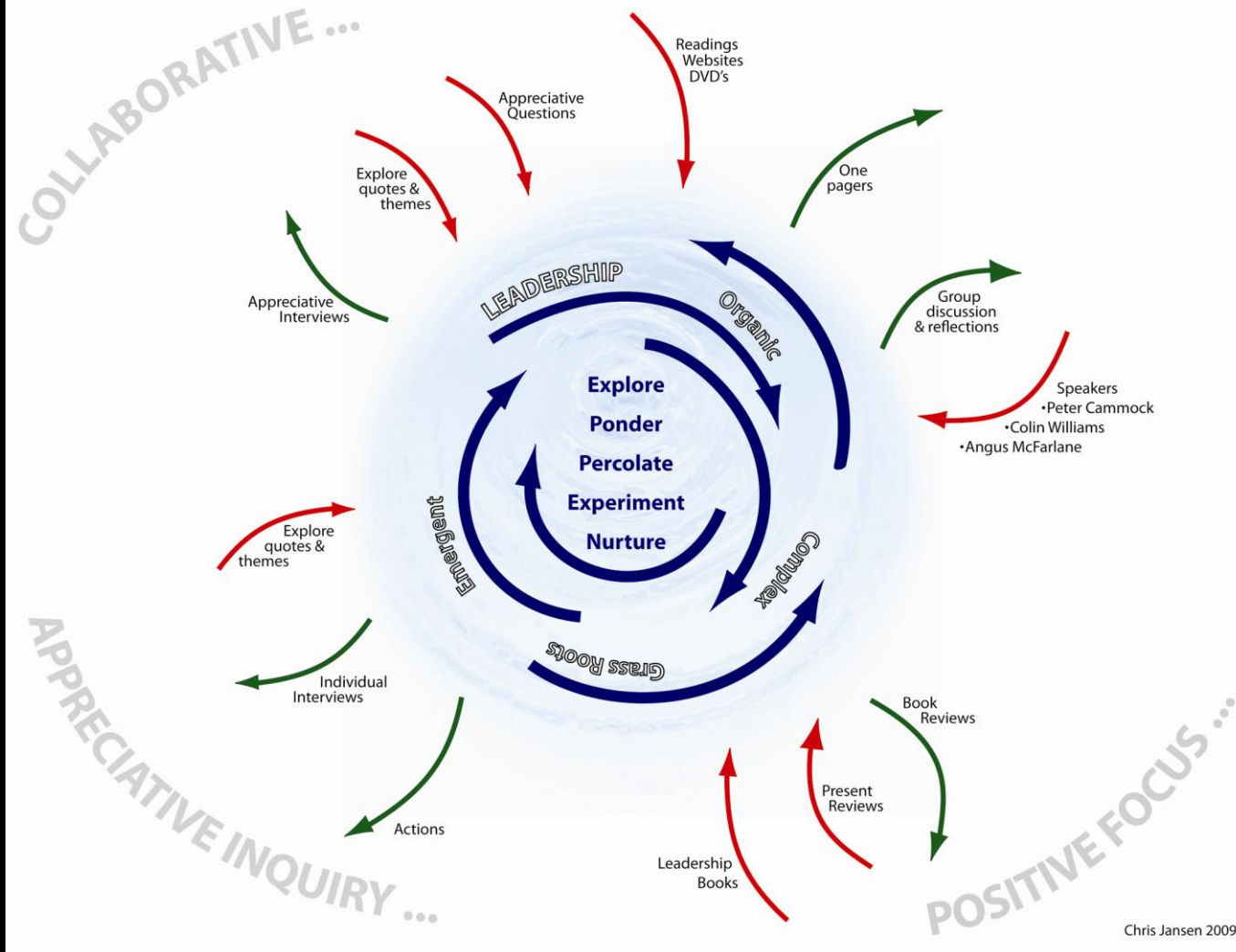
## *"Surfing the Edge of Chaos"*



"There's only one thing better than ownership – authorship!"  
*Simon Breakspear, "Talent Magnets"*

# Otautahi NGO Leadership Project – LYNGO

## Exploring our Leadership



# Touchstones for building learning communities

**Focus on the positive**  
strengths, what's working

**Inclusivity**  
shared ownership, voice, decision making



# Creating a professional learning community

## Guiding principles

- Positive focus
- Collaboration

## 5 key strategies

- flexible and negotiated structure
- sharing powerful stories
- cycles of exploration
- individual and collective reflection
- significant time frame



## Outcomes

- Leadership insights and practice
- Development of professional relationships
- Ongoing NGO Leaders Network – self managing, collective voice
- Emerging collaboration

## What is success?

To laugh often and much  
To win the respect of intelligent people  
And the affection of children  
To earn the appreciation of honest critics  
And endure the betrayal of false friends  
To appreciate beauty  
To find the best in others  
To leave the world a bit better  
Whether by a healthy child, a garden patch  
Or a redeemed social condition  
To know even one life has breathed easier  
Because you have lived  
This is to have succeeded

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



# Keeping in contact....

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