Resilient leadership amidst complexity

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Resilient leadership amidst complexity

Amidst more than two decades of a discourse calling for third sector organisations to be more 'business-like' (Tennant, 2007), there has been relatively little research about the strengths of being 'nonprofit-like' (Dym & Hutson, 2005). This paper draws on recent research which was grounded in theory-building with civil society practitioners in two Aotearoa NZ leadership learning contexts (Malcolm, 2014) to draw out their tacit wisdom about leading amidst complexity. The research challenges dominant, implicit assumptions about leadership, for example as strong, heroic, decisive, visionary heroes and heroines. An alternative understanding of leadership is explored, drawing on complexity thinking constructs, to see leadership as a whole, multi-layered, dynamic learning system. What may look to the outsider as messy, disorganised or contradictory leadership responses, are instead understood as polarities within a complex adaptive system that is always in movement.

This paper will highlight some of the learning for civil society practitioners, researchers and educators from this collaborative inquiry research, in particular:

- four interwoven layers of leadership – personal, relational, cultural and structural – and some of the polarities that are in ongoing movement

- complexivist[1] leadership strategies that help leading amidst the complexity of civil society contexts

- three core interactions to pay attention to, to enable leadership learning in everyday complex contexts

At a time when most complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007) has come out of business contexts, this research contributes important insights from third sector organisations and community-led development contexts to deepen understanding of leading amidst complexity. Complexity thinking as a way of being, thinking and acting (Davis & Sumara, 2006) points to a

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[1] A term used to describe those who work from a complexity science, complexity theory or complexity thinking paradigm

different discourse about leadership and challenges complexivists to be able to notice, read and work with the patterns, flow and constant movement of living systems, together with all their paradoxes and emergent possibilities.

Collaborative Inquiry research as a methodology supporting leadership learning

This paper draws on a collaborative inquiry in 2010/2011 with Inspiring Communities' national leadership team around a central shared research question: *what supports the emergence of civil society leadership?* Together with a previous action research cycle with Unitec's Not for Profit Management programme graduates and teaching team, the study (Malcolm, 2014) harvested tacit wisdom about leading amidst the complexity of third sector organisations and community-led development in order to support theory-building and praxis outcomes for practitioners.

The core value at the heart of both action research cycles was a commitment to co-creating research 'with' each other, rather than doing research 'on' people. There were interesting contrasts between the two cycles in the different forms of collaboration that evolved within the context constraints. The Unitec research was everyday research on the run, using appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011)to inform team discernment about a major programme rewrite. The Inspiring Communities action research was more intentionally setting out to build a collaborative inquiry (Heron, 1996) around an open-ended knowledge-harvesting intent.

In the Inspiring Communities co-inquiry, we were all co-researchers designing the research, participating in gathering the data, analysing together what we were noticing, writing up different aspects and sharing in disseminating our learning. I was curious to see how the way we did the research could support leadership learning at the micro-level, as we inquired together into leadership learning in the macro community-led development context. We invested strongly at the outset in developing a detailed working agreement about how we would work together as five co-researchers. We agreed to use four full day workshops spread across a year, and journals (or 'random jottings and dumpings' as we later renamed them) in between to keep our multi-sensory noticing antennae switched to 'on' as often as possible.

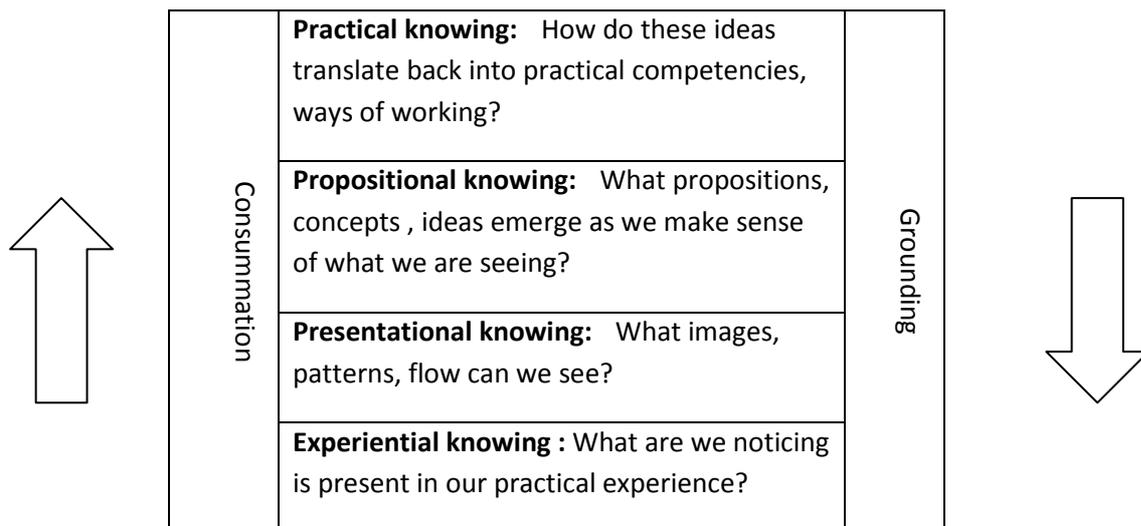|		
Consummation	**Practical knowing:** How do these ideas translate back into practical competencies, ways of working?	**Grounding**
	Propositional knowing: What propositions, concepts , ideas emerge as we make sense of what we are seeing?	
	Presentational knowing: What images, patterns, flow can we see?	
	Experiential knowing : What are we noticing is present in our practical experience?	

Figure 1: Extended Epistemology of Cooperative Inquiry (Heron, 1996)

New knowledge emerged and was validated through an epistemology summed up by John Heron (1996, p. 169) as "it's true because it works and it works because it's true". Emergent theory arose from our reflections on our practice. Patterns and propositions emerged as we made sense of what we were seeing and in turn the new thinking continues to develop and inform our practice. I have since contributed towards Inspiring Communities' Learning by Doing publication (Inspiring Communities, 2013), and Inspiring Communities have contributed much wisdom towards my PhD. What has emerged is more a way of thinking and acting in our work with communities. It's not a model or a recipe.

Three key findings from our research shed light on our understanding of resilient leadership amidst complexity and are explored in this rest of this paper: reframing our understanding of leadership; the power of collaborative inquiry; and the contribution of complexity thinking as a powerful way of fostering, analysing and understanding leadership and learning amidst complexity.

Reframing our understanding of leadership

A key finding from the research was that we need to be open to reframing our understanding of leadership, disturbing some of our taken-for-granted assumptions about what leadership 'is'. Our immediate, dominant, implicit assumptions about leadership are often about strong, heroic, decisive, visionary individual leaders. Add the 'resilient' word, and the dictionary throws up more synonyms like strong, tough, hardy, robust! But what we noticed was that for each leadership property we identified as important, we often found the opposite was equally relevant at different points in time too: Leaders needed a strong sense of self, *and* to be able to be vulnerable. They needed to be able to facilitate inquiry to find answers together as much as having the decisive answers themselves. They needed to be able to lead out front, *and* from behind *and* from the middle. They needed to work to put structures and systems in place *and* be equally comfortable with more organic, emergent mess. They needed to build a strong culture of doing 'with', *and* discern the time for doing 'for'.

Our inquiry highlighted how community leaders' resilience and effectiveness came from what we called '*and-and' thinking*: an ability to work with paradoxes, contradictions and multiple truths about how they might best intervene (or not). As a co-inquiry team we started out to intentionally notice leadership behaviours that blocked or enabled active citizen leadership. As we paid attention to what we were seeing, we came to realise that the same responses could be a block or an enabler at different times and in different contexts. There was no fixed truth about 'effective' civil society leadership – it depends on the situation.

We came to think of leadership as a whole living learning system, not just as an individual leader with particular qualities or competencies. Learning was at the core of the community leadership we were noticing, always moving between polarities of potentially contradictory responses. It's like the flow of the tide always moving in and then out. I move between my strong self and my vulnerable self all the time.

The challenge is not to stay stuck in one or the other polarity, or take them to the extreme. Because each polarity taken to the extreme has its shadow side, like the rip current in the sea in which people sometimes drown. Strong can become big, controlling ego-driven. Vulnerable can become paralysed by self-doubt. The interesting thing about rip currents is that we have to swim in a different direction to what we intuitively want to, if we are not going to be dragged under by it. Similarly, we can use our encounters with the shadow sides, the negative extremes of these polarities, as an energy source helping us shift in a new

direction. The tensions between these polarities and with their shadow sides are actually a key part of what keep complex adaptive systems moving and learning.

So why does this reframing matter? When we hold onto images of resilient leaders as these amazing strong, heroic, decisive, visionary individuals, we can too easily write ourselves out of the leadership story. We can't see ourselves in that image or role – it's too big a leap and/or we are too self-effacing to use that label. Who me? I don't think of myself as a leader! Yet it can be quite freeing when we realise that leaders can just as usefully come with their vulnerabilities, their curiosity and their questions – and lead by facilitating learning around shared vision and action. We can think of ourselves as all swimmers in a big sea, sometimes riding waves, sometimes being dumped by waves, always learning, moving and adapting, alongside others around us – and that in so doing we influence the whole system. Then we can more easily see our part, starting from wherever we are. We don't have to know it all or have the powerful vision. In fact, it can often be really helpful if we don't! When we put learning at the centre of leadership, then we open up the potential for everyone to engage, lead, learn and contribute as active citizens from whatever their roles – in extended family, street, neighbourhood, community, workplace, voluntary organisation, or tribal structures.

So what can we make possible with this different way of thinking about leadership as learning, leadership as a moving tide between polarities, to work with tensions we might experience ourselves? Table 1 (Malcolm, 2014) below elaborates many more examples of leadership polarities that emerged from our co-inquiry, tipping over to their shadow sides at the extremes, and some examples of enabling practices in the middle that support discernment around how, where and if we might intervene. For example, in the personal dimension I move between my energised, engaged, busy, stretched self and my exhausted, self-doubting vulnerable self. When life gets totally out of balance, I am reminded (yet again) of my need to create daily times for even a little stillness, space and rest. Yet I let go any idealised ideas about 'balance' which I have never found possible except in very temporary, momentary forms. In the relational dimension I move between my strengths around facilitating inquiry and learning – and the times when groups just want me to be more directive. It's situational leadership supported by really listening and noticing how I need to adapt. In the structural side, we can get very attached to plans, agreements, and outcome measures. They are really useful tools as long as we understand them as most likely temporary support structures – and that we also need to be able to work with more organic, unfolding developmental processes. In the cultural dimension, a strong theme is our movement between working "with" and working "for". Another tension arises between abundance/strengths based thinking and our resourcefulness with scarcity – especially of time and money – which can create opportunities for new people to step up and engage.

The more I come to understand about complex adaptive systems, complexity thinking and resilience, the more I realise that there is no life without polarities and movement. So often we seek for consensus and equilibrium around one answer, yet the polarities need each other, embody aspects of each other and it is often out of the tensions and movement between them that we are able to create change, innovation and transformation. Rather than trying to resolve polarities, we can ask different questions. As you read table 1, consider which polarities resonate with real situations you are involved with. What might the tensions around this polarity make possible? What are you noticing that needs to shift? How can you play a part from where you are in this living system to keep it moving towards new creative possibilities? What resources in the middle column might you draw on? What's a good enough response for now? Who could you talk with to help explore these possibilities further?

Table 1: Leadership properties as polarities in movement (Malcolm, 2014)

	Shadow side of each leadership property if taken to an extreme	Enabling leadership properties as polarities in movement	Enabling Qualities, Competencies, Practices that support coherence and discernment in the ongoing movement between polarities	Enabling leadership properties as polarities in movement	Shadow side of each leadership property if taken to an extreme
PERSONAL THREADS	Ego, dominance, self-interest	Sense of self: my gifts, identity, strengths, values….	Curiosity Astute noticing Sense Making Humility Reflective practice Self assessment tools Generosity Giving and receiving Ethical standards and decision making tools Mentors and mentoring Feedback and feed-forward Experience of being trusted Taking responsibility Finding courage Sense of possibility Living with uncertainty Reframing e.g. constructive discomfort	Vulnerable self: my doubts, my questions, the 'not-knower' mindset	Fear, pessimism, paralysis, depression
	Individualism	Self awareness Self care Self leadership Self-directed learning		Awareness of and genuine interest in others Motivation to serve others Motivation to learn from others	Over responsibility Burnout
	Rigidity Status quo Top-down control	Fears Doubts Questioning		Letting go Risk taking Creativity	Recklessness Anything goes
RELATIONAL THREADS	I am right and you are wrong Differences masked and not even surfaced	My voice counts Opportunities to participate 'Fierce' conversations when necessary	Empathy Engagement Valuing diversity Search for common ground/shared intent 'And-and' thinking Offering leadership opportunities & accepting invitations Alignment of self-motivation and shared intent Can do attitude Confidence to 'just do it' – in a thoughtful way Walking alongside Leaving gaps, spaces, silence Distributed intelligence Intentional peer learning and feedback mechanisms Facilitation competencies	Listening to others' voices and views Standing in others' shoes Discussing, understanding different worldviews	Overwhelmed by too many possibilities leading to inertia Too polite and not addressing real issues
	One person 'band' My vision 'follow me' Controlling Doing 'for' Professional as expert directing the show	I can make things happen, see my part in this Leading out front – stepping up, catalyst, thought leader, facilitator, convenor Personal vision & commitment		We can make things happen: agreed shared purpose Leading together – doing 'with', stepping back, group critique, decentralised control Building shared vision ownership & commitment, one conversation at a time	In group/out group Them and us thinking 'They' need to change not 'us' 'Group think' without enough diversity of perspectives

CULTURAL THREADS	Pressure to replicate one size fits all 'answers' Time pressure for tangible results Undue focus on *what* gets done over *how* Overwhelmed by enormity of the issues Disabling, disempowering, deprivation Victim mentality Entitlement mentality Not spotting where the energy is	Clear 'WHY' shared intent and ability to translate into 'WHAT' next steps 'Bite sized', do-able actions, assignments Tangible success to motivate ongoing engagement **Scarcity** Deficits, gaps as opportunities for others to contribute	Clarity around 'WHO' needs to be around the table New voices at the table, incl those with lived experience Time spent building trust relationships with internal and external stakeholders from the outset Understanding social, political and cultural context **Facilitation** **And-and thinking** Seeing the bigger picture Resourcefulness to work with 'what is' Skills to identify and mobilise resources Seizing and creating opportunities Responsibility New language reflecting new ways of seeing Celebrations, rituals, symbols Intrinsic rewards Framing, reframing, translating across cultures	'Doing with' culture around the 'HOW' process and values Active citizenship opportunities for leadership learning as an outcome in itself Model the leadership you want to grow in the wider context **Abundance** Unleashing individual, group and community strengths, assets, resources	Process bogged down in revisiting issues with no doable actions surfacing Leaderful 'how' culture not articulated or understood Reality check on readiness to mobilise & use strengths Abdication of responsibility for creating enabling policy or learning environment for local action Discourses around individualism, materialism, professionalism
STRUCTURAL THREADS	Silos Inflexible either/or thinking One size fits all Seeing what is written down as fixed Overly focused on 'what' Overly teacher –led learning out of tune with student needs Labels Patch protection Power 'over' Powerlessness mindset Bullying	Formal structured plans, tasks, roles, responsibilities, agreements, timeframes, parameters Writing things down Structured teaching content, assignment tasks and deadlines Clockware **Competition** **Negotiation** **Independence** Separate identity, especially for marginalised groups Confidence to say 'no'	Ability to design, source, use and oversee appropriate management systems Able to set up and facilitate safe group learning environment and effective learning processes Hold structures lightly as temporary Adaptability/agility Multi- sensory awareness Reading patterns Able to use, critique and apply diverse range of analytical frameworks for sense-making Redundancy, overlap of some commonalities Real time feedback loops Collective reflective practice and dialogue Discernment of what is needed in each practice context Awareness of existing power structures Shared power 'with' intent Noticing who is excluded Inclusive facilitated processes for cross- generational, cross-cultural, cross- sector conversations Catalysts/Brokers/translators	Emergent, flexible, multiple pathways Organic ways of working with strong focus on process, dialogue, relationship Self-organising, intentional peer learning mechanisms Swarmware **Cooperation** Alliances, partnerships beyond organisational boundaries Interdependence Collective shared identity New voices at the table	Too messy Completely out of control Person dependent Tyranny of structurelessness Overly focused on 'how' Overly student-led learning to exclusion of other expertise and frameworks Unsanctioned, hidden power dynamics Unresolved, destructive conflicts Fears about own & other organisation's branding, positioning and power

Multiple dimensions of living, learning, complex adaptive systems

Before our inquiry began, Inspiring Communities had adopted a particular theory of change based on a reflective peace building framework which had been developed from noticing successful change in challenging circumstances (Lederach, Neufeld, & Culbertson, 2007). The framework identified four dimensions of change (personal, relational, structural and cultural) that need to be influenced for transformation within communities. We worked with this framework to reflect on our practice and theorise about what we were noticing about leadership that was supporting community transformation.

Figure 2: Dimensions of Change for transformation within communities ((Inspiring Communities, 2013)

By the end of the inquiry, we had added a power dimension that ran through all four interwoven layers. Any complex, living system continues to co-evolve as different agents in the system (people, organisations, ideas, communities, power structures) bump into each other, clash, stretch, flex and find new shape. In this sense, the power dimensions we had made explicit in our co-inquiry, were part of the energy and movement of the interwoven whole, not a separate dimension. It is in our noticing, in our curiosity, in our sense-making, that we discern what might be useful qualities, competencies and practices that tip this fluid situation from falling apart, towards temporary equilibrium, from anarchy to possibility. Shadow sides become blocks when stuck in equilibrium or total chaos, but can also be an enabling constraint, a tipping point that turns the system towards new possibility.

With our reflective awareness, our noticing, our sense-making, we can discern which layers of the system require more of our attention at particular points in time. We all usually have a comfort zone of working in some of these dimensions more than others. For example, we might be really competently getting structures and systems in place that we expect to focus a community initiative, but if the values and culture of 'why and how we do things around here' are not clearly established or the relational dimension is not strong, there will be no buy-in to the action. In every situation we need to be asking, is there is a different layer of the living system that needs our attention? Are we just sticking with where we are most comfortable leading from? Where are our growing/learning edges? Our responses attend to different

layers, and in doing so, we sow the seeds of possibility that small changes might achieve bigger outcomes in the movement of the whole system.

Leadership strategies amidst complexity

The leadership strategies outlined below bring together complexity thinking principles with our research findings to identify an emerging perspective about '*how*' we might lead effectively, with resilience, within the complexity of the civil society space. Some stories from Inspiring Communities help illustrate some of the strategies identified. Some complexity thinking principles will be elaborated further in the next section.

At the personal level, we identified curiosity as at the core of effective leadership, change and development. A learner, 'not knower', inquiring mindset brings a humble attitude which assumes I may not have the only or best answer, solution or knowledge for any particular situation. 'Not knower' inquiring curiosity engages diverse perspectives, which are essential in complex contexts where much is unknown or unknowable. I don't need to know the answer to exercise leadership, but I do need to offer and keep engaging with insightful questions to find a way forward, and bring all my senses to then notice what unfolds. I need to be aware of my own strengths, shadow sides, values and identity. I need to try to let go my need for power and control and my fear of the unknown and unknowable. I need to remember the non-linearity principle – that small actions can produce big outcomes – beyond any logical predictions or plans. I need to be intentional about redistributing power in how I lead and engage people. Is it time to be actively influencing out front; stepping back and leaving gaps to allow others to step up and self-organise; or enabling and walking alongside from the middle?

A local community example:

Barbara from Mataura had the idea for a community garden long before she could get anyone else interested. Then a negative report about the town got locals angry and a community visioning workshop provided just the right moment and momentum for the community to come up with their own solutions. This provided the trigger to get the garden and other ideas underway. The way in which the community garden operates has adapted and changed largely because of the open, inquiring and inclusive style that Barbara has brought. It was originally created to help locals stretch their budgets and enjoy healthier nutrition. It is now feeding 65 families, 60 people volunteer their time and skill, the 'purchase system' is a gold coin donation because people didn't want to receive handouts, and there are several offshoot projects such as: fruit tree workshops; support to the local school garden club; providing fresh produce for a new local "Meals on Wheels' for housebound people – replacing frozen meals that were previously coming in from out of their town. Those outcomes were unknown and unknowable at the outset. It took curiosity, inquiring together and ongoing leadership – out front, alongside and stepping back – to grow the garden together.

In the relational layer, we identified that our ability to facilitate inquiry within ourselves and with others was central to civil society leadership as learning. Intentional individual and collective reflective processes support stillness, personal awareness, respectful relationships and growth of collective wisdom. We know it's a challenge to take time out for that reflection amidst our passion for action. It feels like a luxury but it's actually a necessity! Ongoing cycles of reflection need to be resourced with time and space. What are we

noticing? What patterns are we seeing? What sense are we making of what we are seeing? What possibilities open up? What next steps are informed by what we are learning? Collaborative reflective spaces are one important way we build leadership confidence and competence in the whole team, by learning together, not just relying on a few individual leaders to do all the thinking and planning.

Complex situations like communities live far from certainty and agreement. Complexity thinking encourages us to make the most of uncertainty, diversity, tensions, discomfort, disturbance and paradoxes as the driving energy for learning, movement, change and innovation, pushing us away from the shoreline into counter-intuitive, creative possibilities. Movement away from equilibrium is essential and life-giving for complex systems. Our job is to shape insightful questions to support sense-making through the unknown. We need to offer encouragement for others to also step into the unknown and recognise their potential.

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> **From service provider to local community-driven trust**
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> For example, Barnardos made a shift from working as a service provider setting up a new local service to first asking Taita residents what they wanted for themselves and their community. After 1000 conversations they heard that people in Taita didn't want any more services. They wanted to make connections with each other and to be helped to connect with the services that already existed. And Great Start Taita was born, with a wide range of actions like a Children's fun day, the children co-designing a park with the local Council, a children's string orchestra being formed and much more. At the heart lay conversations and relationships with people from local Council, businesses, social services, between young and old, new and long established residents. In 2013 Great Start Taita formed its own independent community trust. Many large and small organisations are exploring a shift from projects and services to place-based community-led development. It's a culture shift that's building one conversation at a time and forging new relationships across sectors, neighbourhoods, silos and hierarchies

Within the structural layer, we identified the power of peer learning interactions, when people stepped across established role and organisational boundaries and really engaged with each other about what needed to change in structures, systems, formal 'rules' in communities at any level – to make a real impact. That means thinking beyond the usual allies and people we have within our immediate sphere of influence. If the whole system is going to make a shift, then we need to maximize the connections and peer learning interactions horizontally and vertically across and between every level of the system.

An important lesson from complexity thinking links to this need for porous boundaries, with a warning against over-specialisation of roles (of people, organisations, neighbourhoods, sectors). Apparent duplication or excess in the system may not be inefficient at all, but a vital resource for innovation, change and turbulent times. Because any structures, agreements and roles we create will most likely be temporary and need to continue to adapt. So we need to hold them lightly and discern together when and how these need to evolve organically into new forms.

New voices at the table shaping new approaches

The Good Cents Initiative, in Porirua East is an example of working at the structural level. Good Cents emerged as a locally grown response to the concern about unsustainable personal debt, involving multiple sectors. A key step for setting direction and building ownership in the initiative's early days was a workshop that brought 'the whole system' into the room. They stepped into the unknown, putting together people you wouldn't expect to talk to each other: bankers, people in debt, the local Mayor, senior central and local government staff, funders, church ministers, 'loan sharks' and voluntary service organisations. 'Thinking together' they shared their concerns, experiences and insights. These were people and roles that would often actively avoid each other, for a variety of reasons, from deep shame or blaming each other or simply working and living in different worlds.   Together they developed a common goal and created a core group as a 'light structure' to guide the Good Cents initiative. This initiative has, in turn, built a number of practical activities creating tangible changes for low income households based on agreements and peer learning all the way. Wesley Community Action who facilitated this initiative have in turn experienced structural change from this work. Their Cannons Creek food bank has been turned into a community pantry, their site has been dug up for a community garden and they now support 65 back yard gardens and a thriving food coop.

The cultural layer expresses how and why we do things the way we do. At the core of this dimension is the community-led development principle of building a strong collaborative inquiry culture of 'doing with' in preference to 'doing for'. We experienced the power of that for ourselves in being co-researchers rather than just research participants and researcher. In everyday community-led development contexts we were noticing ourselves and others consciously stepping up, stepping alongside and stepping back, to intentionally redistribute power, to support resourcefulness, and to enable the growth of the leader in everyone, at every level of the system. Service delivery organisations are similarly grappling with what it means for them to make a shift from 'doing for' to supporting more place-based community-led development and 'doing with'.

Probably one of the most important shifts in this dimension is making intentional spaces for inquiry learning. For example, Inspiring Communities has fostered learning networks between different groups experimenting with community-led development approaches locally, across NZ and internationally. Organisations can foster deeper learning from their practice by simple interventions – for example, through questions around which they frame their regular team meetings. An important aspect of 'learning by doing' is recognising that the culture and context of each situation is different and we can't just import solutions from one place to another. For example, new initiatives can be inspired by stories of what worked in Mataura, Taita or Porirua, yet each community needs to start with building trust, relationships and a culture of working together to discern what is appropriate for their context.

One of the patterns that emerged about inquiry learning, was the strengths of facilitating some commonalities around the 'WHY' and the 'HOW' to hold a diversity around the 'WHO' and the 'WHAT'. That is, over time inquiry learning can establish a strong shared sense of common vision (the WHY purpose) and shared values and culture (the HOW) for working together. The range of people and organisations involved (the WHO) can bring a rich diversity of perspectives, practices and resources. This is an essential resource to draw on for ongoing learning and adaptation amidst complexity. We need to pay attention to whether we have enough diversity of voices involved, including those with the lived experience of the issues we are want to address. Practical, achievable, yet diverse action steps (the WHAT) will likely emerge incrementally as the learning and action inform each other – and not necessarily down the pathways first envisaged.

Complexity thinking as a way of seeing, thinking, learning and leading

Complexity thinking was a powerful way of fostering, analysing and understanding community leadership and learning amidst complexity in this research as a whole complex, living, learning system. There are many metaphors in nature that help illustrate this idea of living, self-organising systems with highly distributed intelligence. These 'complex adaptive systems' (CAS) are systems that learn (Davis & Sumara, 2006), given the right conditions. For example, there is no obvious queen ant in an ant colony 'calling the shots'. Yet there are some conditions within the whole system that enable the ants to learn and adapt from their interactions with their near neighbours. So what can we learn from the ants and what we know about CAS that can help us understand the enabling conditions for resilient leadership amidst complexity and therefore where we need to put our energy and attention?

From a complexity thinking perspective, for a system to be defined as complex, it needs to exhibit certain properties. These properties of CAS that inform this research focus attention on:

- neighbour interrelationships, communication and feedback mechanisms, and how CAS co-evolve, self- organise and learn from each other

- self-similarity patterns of organisation that give CAS inherent coherence and stability across different levels, alongside random uncertainty, that enable them to function far from equilibrium

- the balance of diversity which enables creative new responses alongside CAS capacity to find commonalities

- the ability of CAS to balance independent action with an interdependent responsiveness to each other in non-hierarchical decision making

- the understanding of CAS as nested structures, composed of and part of other systems in a multi-layered, dynamic reality with porous boundaries

The civil society space can be seen as nested systems of associations, actors, sectors and discourses. Leadership within this space is strongly focused on interdependent stakeholder relationships, while supporting shared ownership of core values, vision and intent that give a more independent identity. Civil society and its organisational forms function as CAS far from equilibrium, as they seek social change and are impacted by ongoing changes in the environment. Civil society leadership calls upon both a level of redundancy[2] and diversity as resources for managing coherence, uncertainty and adaptation.

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[2] In complexity thinking, 'redundancy' refers to an excess of some key common qualities needed for the complex system to function well (e.g. common language, agreed norms, shared practice knowledge). Minimal redundancy implies high specialisation which can appear more efficient but puts adaptability more at risk in complex systems (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Complex systems need an abundance of commonality as a resource for managing volatile situations and supporting the self-organising properties of decentralised leadership. For example, it may seem inefficient to have three people skilled enough to be running an organisation, but when an earthquake hits, this flexible leadership resource becomes an asset that can support adaptability, continuity and consolidation of new forms of operation more readily than one with high specialisation and minimal redundancy.

Davis and Sumara (2006, pp. 135-136) suggest that three particularly relevant conditions that a teacher or researcher may be able to affect to support the self-organising properties of CAS for learning. Our research has provided evidence that these conditions are also relevant to CLD practitioners or community organisation leadership:

- Enabling quality neighbour[3] interactions through decentralised controls

- Living in tension between internal diversity and internal commonalities

- Balancing randomness and coherence

Inspiring Communities' work has shown the power of creating new nodes and linkages for neighbour interactions for learning and adaptation: between CLD practitioners, residents, local and central government, business, iwi and more. New nodes, new links and some rewiring of existing connections has been needed for new ideas and new pathways to emerge (Kilduff, Crossland, & Tsai, 2008), and the inertia of the system to be overcome. People have been connected across the boundaries of their traditional roles, hierarchies and silos of working in particular sectors, to enable, for example, community gardens, neighbourhood strengthening, a shift in debt culture, regional connections and learning. And the interactions are not just between people, but also between knowledge systems, structures, projects, which collide, diverge and regroup to support the emergence of new knowledge and learning amidst the action.

Our emerging understanding is that there are three key interactions that we need to pay close attention to, in order to facilitate leadership learning in any complex systems. :

- invest from the outset in creating high trust relationships, and over time build peer learning interactions at and between every level of the system – for example, between governance, management, staff, bankers, residents, iwi, hapu, whanau, families, local authorities, community groups, teachers...

- enable people to engage with new ideas and experiences, that stretch them beyond the known and often outside their comfort zones. Respect your 'insider' knowledge harvested through peer learning but also seek challenging and creative 'outsider' perspectives.

- ensure opportunities to exercise leadership in practice, so that people have the chance to build confidence and competence from the doing at whatever level is meaningful for them – whether it's helping at a community garden or leading a big new initiative

Secondly, Davis and Sumara (2006) tell us that CAS need to work with the tension between their level of diversity and what they hold in common. CAS need diversity as a rich source of information for adaptation and sustainability (Zimmerman, Plsek, & Lindberg, 2002) but not so much diversity that they completely fragment (Kaplan, 2002). Coherence is supported by a level of redundancy: duplication, overlap and commonalities in the system. One of the patterns evident in Inspiring Communities' stories was how in so

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[3] In complexity thinking, neighbour interactions are not just referring to residents living near each other. Rather these interactions are between nearby parts of the whole system, which might include, for example, interaction with particular people (e.g. colleagues, managers, family members) but also bodies of knowledge and worldviews (e.g. professional practice standards, values, ethics, cultural practices)

many community situations, effort went into co-creating an abundance of shared understanding around the WHY and the HOW: the vision, values and culture for working together. In contrast there was often a rich diversity around the WHAT and the WHO: the people, perspectives and pathways that would over time achieve the vision and uphold the values and culture. Small changes in one part of the system can produce unexpected interactions that disturb equilibrium. Interactions in CAS are not linear, and therefore our shared common intent around the WHY needs to be open to diverse and unexpected 'WHAT' outcomes and pathways.

Thirdly, CAS thrive far away from any neat and tidy plans or equilibrium. They hold a paradoxical mix of randomness and coherence in tension. They are always in movement. Chaos theory suggests that order and chaos are partners in the creative process of change (Wheatley, 2006). CAS are full of paradoxes and contradictions, and this invites us to inquire about what each polarity needs from the other rather than seeing them as either-or choices (Patton, 2011). Collaborative inquiry helps us notice and make sense of what's happening in our ever-changing world of practice, and to review how, where and if we need to intervene next in this moving system. For example, we might need to strengthen clarity and coherence around a shared common purpose or an organisational learning culture at a time of funding crisis, significant change in team members involved, let alone a Christchurch earthquake.

Complexity thinking (and its understanding of CAS characteristics) challenges many traditional assumptions about leadership – for example, about our intentionality (plenty random things just happen as systems self-organise), our influence (directly as individuals or on the conditions for leadership to flourish in the whole system) and our equilibrium-seeking assumptions (for example about consensus, plans and predetermined performance measures) (Plowman & Duchon, 2008). Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) suggests we move between more bureaucratic or top-down levels of influence, to enabling roles in the middle and at other times stepping back to trust self-organising systems to lead themselves. Our research has painted a rich picture of this sense of moving between polarities of very different leadership responses, to work with the complexity of the community or civil society spaces we work in.

Complexity thinking offers a rationale for holding different perspectives in dialogue, without any one perspective having to be 'right'. 'And-and' thinking enables exploration of multiple possibilities, rather than being locked into 'either-or' binaries. Trans-disciplinary perspectives bring a rich resource for new thinking, without the need to fix on one truth or consensus. 'And-and' thinking enables understanding of leadership within CAS as partly intentional and partly self-organising – and shifts the leadership focus towards influencing conditions for self-organisation, learning and transformation to flourish.

Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) is a relatively new field of academic study, drawing mostly on research within business contexts. Our research contributes important insights from third sector organisation and community-led development contexts. The study highlights, as Collins (2005)foreshadowed, what business, government, teachers and researchers can learn from the civil society's enabling and adaptive leadership strengths, drawn from a depth of experience of working with uncertainty and complexity. The research challenges dominant discourse about civil society needing to become more 'business-like', by naming some of the complexity of civil society leadership, without essentialising this understanding in fixed positions or models. Collaborative inquiry research methods have created "a space in which dominant discourses [were] challenged and reframed, shifting the horizons of the possible" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, p. 176). In disturbing our culturally conditioned discourses about

leadership, the intent is to encourage everyone's leadership potential as active citizens, and engage a more respectful peer learning, cross-sectoral dialogue about leadership.

The key messages, working from whatever sector, role or place are to:

- embrace the paradoxes of leadership with a learner's inquiring curiosity and a capability to facilitate collaborative inquiry

- think of leadership as learning within complex adaptive, living systems, not just individuals

- keep discerning what layers of the system (personal, relational, structural and cultural) need attention (or not) to change the conversation and keep growing active citizen leadership

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