Changing systems; changing outcomes
What happens is not an accident ...... Paradigms, Perception and Ways of Thinking.

- Early humans - primal paradigm
- Middle ages – magical paradigm
- Age of reason and industrial revolution – mechanical paradigm
- 20th/21st Century – living system/complexity paradigm
A crisis of perception...?
(From Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi: “The systems view of life”)

The major problems of our time - energy, the environment, climate change, food security, financial security, cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means they are all interconnected and interdependent.

Ultimately these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. It derives from the fact that most people in our modern society, especially our large social institutions, subscribe to an outdated world view, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our complex overpopulated, interconnected world.
The Newtonian ‘mechanical’ paradigm was so successful it spilled over into management

Newton assumed:
If you understand the parts you’ll understand the whole. Hence mechanical metaphors.

• step up a gear
• run like clockwork
• run like a well-oiled machine
• the machinery of government
• policy instruments
• policy levers
Mechanical’ management assumptions

If you understand -
1. The Task
2. Hierarchies
3. Functions

You can-
- separate and reduce everything to its simplest component, then fix it.
- plan with certainty e.g. make timetables with penalties for non compliance.
- manage and discipline by replacing parts like worn out cogs.
The mechanical paradigm is good for...

Technical problems, with linear, and predictable solutions; may be complicated, but not infinite options and there are knowable solutions if you have the expertise. E.g.

- mending a car, computer or washing machine
- choosing a move in chess
- finding an accounting error
- working out how to engineer high speed trains
- making a detailed analysis of finance flows
Problem with the mechanical paradigm: people are not machines...

- People don’t obey instructions – they think, react, rebel, interpret!
- People make different assumptions; with different (conflicting) values, mental models and perspectives; one person’s knock down evidence is seen by another as irrelevant.
- Context varies: culture, history, allegiance, ideology, aspiration.
- People outcomes can’t be predicted, can’t be guaranteed.
- Increased communication technologies means knowledge and communication is global, accessible and potentially infinite.
- Doesn’t address the **complexity** of human life.
The ‘new science’ – living system paradigm

Human systems are living, eco systems.

They are:

- Alive and dynamic; constantly changing; diverse and unpredictable. They can’t be controlled, measured or fixed as if they were machines.

- Uncertainty is a feature - certainty can’t be planned.

- Knowledge is emergent and constantly has to be discovered.
The ‘new science’ – living system paradigm

Synergy: everything is connected and interdependent.

- Understanding and working with the nature of the relationship (ie what characterises the relatedness) matters more than “getting on”.

- Understanding and working with the connections matters more than understanding the parts.

- The personal is an expression of the systemic.
The ‘new science’ – living system paradigm

- **Guiding principles** - *what happens is not an accident* - but the repeated enactment of behaviours in relation to shared purpose (not always espoused).

- **Simple rules** - shared ways of thinking and communicating (patterns) in relation to shared purpose. Simple rules reveal actual purpose, rather than espoused purpose.

- **Perturbance and energy “pokes”** - A small action can release temporary change; repeated actions can create a tipping point.
Change in a living systems paradigm – 2 key factors

**Autopoiesis** - *Resistance is inevitable.*
Living systems act to preserve their identity and survive. They are self reproducing, self recreating, autonomous, self referencing i.e. the past is used to shape the future; they have an inbuilt immunity to maintain their shape; to change and adapt only in order to protect core identity and survive intact.

**Perturbance/“pokes”** - *Innovation will be killed off and needs protecting.*
A system disturbed will act to remove the source of disturbance; a small action can release temporary change; repeated experiments can create a tipping point when the nature of the system is changed.
Different types of leadership

**Personal leadership:** influenced by individual style & personality.

**Organisational/departmental/team leadership:** partial role and purpose.

**System leadership:** collective context influenced by shared purpose and ambition; generative conversations and co-creating the future.

Peter Senge – “The Dawn of System Leadership”.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership
Extraordinary Management
- Saying ‘yes to the mess’
- Encouraging connectivity and conversation
- Foster diversity/amplify difference
- Challenging habits and assumptions
- Reducing power differentials
- Containing anxiety

Ordinary Management
- Technical/rational decision making
- Simple structures
- Effective procedures
- Monitoring/co-ordination
- Providing direction

A complexity approach
Ralph Stacey
Implications - system leaders...

- Are committed to the whole; can work with system priorities well as individual/organisational priorities.

- Are connected to shared purpose -can cede personal & organisational goals for shared goals.

- Use personal authority as much as role authority: legitimacy comes from influencing & quality of relationships, not positional power.

- Are congruent - embody espoused behaviours and principles.

- Broker relationships and connections: see difference, contradictions, ambiguity and multiple perspectives as helpful; can move from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future

- Accept there is no ultimate truth; only multiple, possible next steps; comfortable making progress, not fixing.

- Are learners: they start anywhere but notice where they go; are interested in patterns.

- Search for hidden assumptions and meaning; see “not knowing” as a resource; are experimental - see failure as an opportunity for discovery, create learning environments.

- Can work with “the personal” in context of “the systemic”.

- Are defined by the questions they ask, not the answers they provide.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living systems feature</th>
<th>Change leadership practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity and synergy</td>
<td>Build relationships, broker connections/link different perspectives, explore relatedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence</td>
<td>Learning and new insights emerge from the interactions between people (and things); sit lightly to determining outcomes/controlling process. Allow knowledge to emerge; notice patterns/simple rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autopoiesis</td>
<td>We see what we know; we recreate what we already have. Threat to identity = resistance; Privileging of our own framing assumptions and world views</td>
</tr>
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Examples of system leadership

The practice of system leadership
Being comfortable with chaos

Author
Nicholas Timmins
May 2015
Examples of system leadership

The Revolution will be improvised: Stories and insights about transforming systems
A report by Richard Volan for the Systems Leadership Steering Group

LOCAL VISION

Patients as partners
Building collaborative relationships among professionals, patients, carers and communities
Becky Seale

Leadership in action
School leaders and whole systems?

Patterns and questions

• Extent of involvement/non involvement – excluded/left behind?

• What system? (system = schools system not whole system?)

• Organisational focus and agenda privileged

• What practices/behaviours/mindset/culture define school leaders? (Command & control/telling style of leadership; less influencing more telling; distributed = conferring?)
Systems mapping

Creating a memory of the future
AN ELEPHANT IS LIKE A SNAKE

AN ELEPHANT IS LIKE A BRUSH

AN ELEPHANT IS LIKE A ROPE

AN ELEPHANT IS SOFT & MUSHY

AN ELEPHANT IS LIKE A TREE TRUNK
Is this man thinking systemically?
“Maybe we should write that spot down.”
Patterns in complexity

Anchor Points
The strength of weak ties....
(Mark Granovetter)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Bm93gN1zJg
Pop goes the weasel
I’m sure glad the hole isn’t in our end...
7 systems change ideas

- Everything is connected to everything else – relationship matter
- Start anywhere but notice what happens...
- Make progress rather than fix..
- A small action can have a disproportionate impact
- The “5 whys”- what might that lead to ..... 
- **Who does the change, owns the change: we own what we create**
- A system that knows itself can change – learning systems
- Multiple perspectives a resource; the power of weak ties
- The emotional dynamics of change: transition and resistance
Part 1 - Creating a memory of the future –

- What is the change you want to make ie -what do you want to be different?

- Why does that matter to you and your organisation; why does it matter to the communities you serve?

- Articulate your change ambition as an objective.
Part 2 - mapping your change objectives

• If you achieved your objective, what might that look like?

• What might it lead to….and what might that lead to?

• To achieve this, what would need to change/what stay the same?
Part 3 - Systems Analysis

- What are the anchor points?
- What are the connections & relationships: locally/wider?
- Where are the points of maximum leverage?
- What might be the unintended consequences?
- Who else needs to be involved - Strong/weak connections?
- What are the blind spots/assumptions?
- What might you need to let go of?
- Solutions, ideas, experiments, curiosity?
- What principles/simple rules can you agree?
- What are the first practical steps to make progress?