

A Consilient Approach: Supporting Leaders To Manage And Sustain Successful Change In Complex, Emergent And Contingent Environments

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This paper proposes an approach to change with leadership teams in the context of an understanding of the dramatic failure rate of most change programmes. It explores how this failure rate can be understood in relation to complexity approaches to management and leadership and their practical application. A Consilient approach to change is then outlined, exploring how this approach can address some of the failures of change programmes as well as supporting a complexity thinking approach to organizations. The application of this approach is then explored with a Local Authority leadership team. In a year they faced: political uncertainty; a 30% reduction in their budget and the transformation of the policy context for service delivery. Evidence is provided of the impact during the first year. The paper concludes by identifying next steps in both the development of the work and the approach.

Setting The Context: Managing And Leading Change

In 1995, John Kotter published one of the key works in change management suggesting that only 30% of change programmes are successful and identifying eight key errors made in change programmes of all sizes. Over ten years later Isern and Pung (2006) reporting results from a McKinsey survey of 1,500 business executives reported that still only 30% agreed that they considered their change programmes successful or partially successful. The IBM study of Global Chief Executives in 2008 identified a growing need to manage change along with a growing gap (22%—a gap which had tripled in three years) in their perceived ability to manage change successfully in relation to their expected need for it.

Keller and Aiken (2008) identified that change programmes fail because they fail to change the key things they are trying to transform: employee attitudes and management behavior. They cite Price and Lawson's (2003) holistic approach to influencing employee attitudes and management behavior as providing a rational, yet flawed, basis for a psychology of change management. Keller and Aiken argue that human behavior is not rational:

In the same way that the field of economics has been transformed by an improved understanding of how uniquely human, social, cognitive and emotional biases lead to seemingly irrational decisions, so too the practice of change management is in need of a transformation through an improved understanding of the irrational (often unconscious) way in which humans interpret their environment and choose to act (p. 3).

They then proceed to identify ten inconvenient truths about the irrationality of human behavior which should be taken into account in order to improve the odds of leading successful change.

Higgs and Rowland (2005) conducted a number of research studies into three core questions in relation to leadership and change, relating to concerns that the root cause of many change problems is leadership behavior and an inability to learn from previous experiences. They asked three key questions:

- What approach to change management is likely to be most effective in today's business environment?
- What leadership behaviors tend to be associated with effective change management?
- Are leadership behaviors related to the underlying assumptions within different approaches to change?

Their key finding was that change approaches built on the assumptions of complexity were most successful and those classified as emergent change were found to be the most successful across most contexts. If change is perceived as complex and emergent then Wheatley (2000) argues leaders must be brought to a transformational edge so that they can work differently.

In assessing the leadership factors associated with each change approach Higgs and Rowland found that emergent change emphasizes creating capacity followed by framing change. Creating capacity focuses on creating individual and organizational capabilities, understanding the power and significance of informal networks which promote understanding and communicating and making connections. Framing change creates an overall container for the whole of the change process which includes: establishing starting points for the journey; designing and managing the journey and communicating guiding principles in the organization. Two of their key findings were:

In high magnitude change, that which impacts on a large number of people and entails changes to multiple parts of the system, an emergent approach is the most effective. The leadership factor accounting for the highest variant in success in this context was framing change...

In short term change which needs to be implemented in under 12 months and will impact on a large number of people in the organization, leadership

behaviors are critical to success. The set of behaviors encompassed within the factor framing change appear to be those most likely to lead to success (p. 8).

Finally they draw on the work of Meyer and Allen (1990) who identified three types of commitment: affective; continuance and normative. They demonstrated that levels of affective commitment in an organization are positively related to organizational performance. Using this work Higgs and Rowland established a significant relationship between emergent change and affective commitment, leading them to conclude that: "this approach may not only lead to change success but also to individual performance within the change."

The Application Of Complexity Theory To The Management And Leadership Of Change In Organizations

Overview

The most recent IBM survey of Chief Executive Officers (2010) noted the following development:

In our past three global Chief Executive Officer (CEO) studies, CEOs consistently said that coping with change was the most pressing challenge. In 2010, our conversations identified a new primary challenge: complexity. CEOs told us they operate in a world which is substantially more volatile, uncertain and complex (p. 8).

One of their key findings was that: 'Today's complexity is only expected to rise and more than half of CEOs doubt their capacity to manage it - a 30% gap.' The report concludes that:

The effects of rising complexity calls for CEOs and their teams to lead with bold creativity, connect with customers in imaginative ways and design their operations for speed and flexibility to position their organizations for 21st Century success (p. 9).

So what does complexity theory have to offer managers and leaders in dealing with this situation? Smith and Humphries (2004) undertook a critical evaluation of complexity theory as a management tool. They cite Tetenbaum's (1998) assertion that seven trends help explain why complexity theory helps to understand the dynamic context of organizations: technology, globalization, competition, change, speed, complexity and paradox. She concludes:

The new world is full of unintended consequences and counterintuitive outcomes. In such a world, the map to the future cannot be drawn in advance. We cannot know enough to set forth a meaningful vision or to plan productively (p. 24).

Marion and Barnes (2000) contrast complexity theory with the classical scientific management view which assumes linear causality and encourages reduction-

ist approaches to management. They specify three characteristics of complex systems:

- The whole is more than the sum of individual behaviors;
- Complex organizations stimulate outputs that cannot be predicted simply by understanding all of the inputs, and;
- Organizations can create behavior that is neither definitively predictable nor unpredictable—they can exist on the ‘edge of chaos’ where there is enough order to ensure functionality and also enough chaos to preclude all prediction.

The Edge Of Chaos, Emergence And Change

The ‘edge of chaos’ can be seen, in organizational terms, as a balance between structure and chaos; (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997) as a chaordic state which contains elements of order and chaos at the same time (Fitzgerald and Van Eijnatten, 2002). As Hock (2005) describes in his account of the creation of VISA such chaordic states can lead to the transformation of organizations and the creation of new forms. This obviously has implications for the management of change. Lissack (1999) notes that emergent behaviors are typically unanalyzed and may contain at least as much risk as opportunity—“In the study of emergence, complexity science and organization converge”.

Smith and Humphries conclude their review of complexity theory as a practical management tool as follows:

Complexity theory is therefore best seen as a device for thinking about and for encouraging managers to cultivate and foster the environment that facilitates emergence...The danger facing managers is that applications of complexity thinking become reduced to another simplistic recipe for success (pp. 103-4).

Leadership And Complexity Thinking

For Dooley (2008) complexity leadership focuses on the dynamics of leadership as it emerges over time in all arenas of an organizational system. Each interchange and every connection provide opportunities for leading, as peers individually and collectively learn and grow and engage in the continual process of organising. This perspective on leadership may offer new insights into the emergence of innovation, the creation of order and the dynamics of performance in 21st Century networks and organizations.

Marion and Uhl-Benn (2001) argue that complex leaders enable interactions but do not control them, recognizing the importance of interactions, correlation and unpredictability among ensembles or aggregates of individuals. Instead they allow them to emerge through engaging in nonlinear processes.

Lichtenstein *et al.* (2006) situates complexity leadership within the framework of

the idea of a complex adaptive system where relationships are primarily understood as interactions between agents rather than being defined hierarchically. Leadership is understood as an emergent event rather than a person-a complexity view suggests a form of distributed leadership and the creation of a collective identity:

According to the adaptive leadership perspective, this identity formation occurs over time, as participants together define 'who we are' and what we are doing with our interactions. In this way, the emergence of a social object occurs through the "in-forming" of a joint social identity (p. 5).

Complexity leadership theory suggests that participants need to be made aware of this dual process of identity creation and projection, in order to take back ownership of their role in the identity formation process:

Complexity leadership theory provides a clear and unambiguous pathway for driving responsibility downward, sparking self organization and innovation, and making the organization much more responsive and adaptive at the boundaries. In turn, significant pressure is taken off formal leaders, allowing them to attend more directly to identifying strategic opportunities, developing unique alliances and bridging gaps across the organizational hierarchy (p. 8).

Complexity Thinking And Local Government

Batram (1996) produced a 'Learning From Complexity Pack' for use by Local Government in the United Kingdom arguing that:

Local Government needs new approaches to learning and change which recognizes the complex characteristics of local government; approaches that offer a new language to facilitate dialogue and flexibility (p. 4).

David Henshaw of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) noted in the forward: "Attempting to deal with this ever increasing complexity requires new approaches... the simple issue is that Local Authorities need to transform themselves in their thinking."

A Consilient Approach To Change

Introduction

A complexity science based approach encourages, supports and legitimizes the abandonment of rational, linear reductionist approaches to planning. It also supports managers and leaders to engage with and understand their particular, unique, contingent history. This constitutes the sensitive dependence to initial conditions on which to focus their perceptions as the external environments and drivers shape and reshape this in a continually unfolding process.

Complexity thinking alerts facilitators to attend to the networking and relationships, both formal and informal, of the group they are working with, as well as supporting and trusting that things will self-organise at a higher level of complexity if we attend to them well enough and for long enough.

The tools that we require are those which allow us to take a group and hold them for long enough, well enough, in an uncertain, anxiety provoking, risky space to enable them to reframe their identity and their organizational boundaries. But tools as Seddon (2007) reminds us can be dangerous things in the wrong hands without the understanding or the knowledge of how they should be used. Seddon is particularly critical of tools which are a codification of method:

From codifying methods it is a short step to choosing those 'tools' that appear to be making the big difference and describing them as a series of tasks or steps to be undertaken. Codification itself suits the command and control culture. Tools can be taught, directed at problems and reporting on progress can be institutionalized through the hierarchy (p. 1).

The danger with codifying method as tools is that by ignoring the all important context it obviates the first requirement to understand the problem, and, more importantly, to understand and articulate the problem from a systems perspective (p. 7).

Resistance To Change And Disrupting Patterns Of Organization And Communication

What is it that makes organizations so resistant to change? Maturana and Varela (1987) developed the notion of autopoiesis to account for what is distinctive about living systems. For Stacey (2005) autopoietic systems have three characteristics: identifiable components, a boundary and internal mechanisms and communications. Boundaries are not imposed from outside but determined by internal relationships, and in determining its own boundaries an autopoietic system establishes its own autonomy and therefore its own identity. An autopoietic system interacts with its environment in order to preserve its homeostasis and its identity, and therefore to resist change. For Stacey:

Organizations can be seen as a self-contained entity functioning according to the principles of its own identity, as a living autopoietic system. It is an organizationally closed system but it is perturbed by changes in other organizations. These perturbations trigger change, but the change itself proceeds according to its own internal dynamics, its identity. Organizations coevolve reflecting the history of their structural coupling (p. 146).

For Battram (1996) this has profound implications for communication and change in organizations:

- We don't experience the world directly by receiving incoming data;

- We preserve ourselves: we are conservative, we resist change, and when forced to change, we respond in such a way as to maintain our unbroken sense of self, and;
- We are only interested in what we are interested in, and not much else. So we will only learn what we want to learn, and we will fit it into our existing view of the world.

He concludes: "These points lead us to a healthily pessimistic view of human communication as innately difficult and human behavior as both self determined and resistant to external changes" (Complexicon, p. 233).

For any change process to be successful it must acknowledge: the way in which systems seek to preserve their identity; understand how this process operates and can be interrupted and then support an organization to emerge into a different identity.

For Luhmann (1986) social systems maintain their autopoiesis by focusing on continual communications and the ongoing flux of events rather coordinated action and reflective processes. Price and Shaw (1998) suggest that by slowing down and becoming aware of the patterns we are caught up in we can 'shift the patterns':

Evolution addresses itself to change, to the change in such patterns, which, over time, has led to such richness of life and living forms on the earth... We and not the pattern and its replication, nor the vagaries of blind evolutionary processes, have the capacity to take the lead. That capacity has been granted, interestingly, by virtue of cultural evolution. As a species, we, alone have grown beyond our biological inheritance. We can also grow beyond our cultural inheritance (p. 313).

For Distin (2010):

Human culture is built by human agents on the basis of cultural information which they are able to create and acquire by virtue of cognitive mechanisms that discretize cultural information in ways that match the discretizing methods of the cultural language within which this information is shared (p. 232).

Discrete units of cultural information are linked to the notion of the meme, a term first coined by Dawkins(1976) and taken on into the field of organizations by Price and Shaw:

An organization is coded via 'ideas and images of the mind', abstract strands of thinking, perception and language, the smallest units of which may be thought of as memes which may be interpreted as: the smallest element capable of being exchanged, with an associated sense of meaning and interpretation, to another brain (p. 160).

It is also important to understand the impact of contingency on our ability to consistently apply tools and to explain change. For Gould (2004):

The central importance of contingency as a denial of reductionism in the sciences devoted to understanding human evolution, mentality, and social or cultural organization strikes me as one of the most important, yet least understood, principles of our intellectual strivings (p. 225).

Consilience

Consilient Change is a transition focused consultancy based in Sheffield in the United Kingdom. We provide personalized and bespoke support and solutions for individuals, teams, companies, organizations and partnerships facing crisis and transition to create successful and sustainable futures. Consilience, with reference to William Whewell (1840) and Steven Jay Gould (2004), describes:

The act of bringing together separate experiences, areas of knowledge, skills and expertise to create a new whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

The best example of this 'consilience of inductions' in action is the creation of the theory of evolution. Whewell was a mentor of Darwin's.

The Process And Key Elements Of A Consilient Approach To Supporting And Sustaining Change Based On Complexity Thinking

It is important to understand why things stay the same and with this understanding to work with people to help them make the changes that are important for them. It is important to assist people to get into a defended space where they will not be subject to the distractions noted by Luhmann (1986) earlier. It is also important to be clear with people where they feel they are stuck and to try and be explicit with them about which patterns they would like to change and gain a shared commitment to that purpose.

The next stage of the work is to build a community of practice and through social learning to develop the social and intellectual capital of the group. Within this it is important to retain a focus on the unique contingency of their circumstances, context and configuration and to pay attention to what emerges from the process of trying to shift the patterns within this environment. A range of techniques are described which support this emergent process.

It is important to pay attention to the emotional states and responses within the group, particularly in relation to the management of anxiety and uncertainty and to try and stay internally grounded and anchored so that their reactions don't impact too much. A mindful awareness is important.

As the group becomes more reflective they should become more system aware and start to see the patterns underneath their reactions to the patterns. As iden-

tity starts to shift this may provoke a crisis in the group which needs to be supported, contextualized and framed.

The group then needs to be assisted to move from knowing to doing and to avoid being paralysed from acting. The group can then reflect on the journey travelled and whether or not the patterns have been interrupted. Cycles of action learning and action research are important in helping people make the transition from one identity to another and this is taken forward by developing the dialogue and assisting the group to move from breakthrough to transformation.

This process of engagement, informed by the complexity thinking about change and leadership described above is linked to three key elements described below to form a Consilient approach: framing, supporting and shaping the flow of emergence: integral hosting and mindful awareness.

Framing And Designing Emergence

In our approach to assisting groups in framing and designing emergence we use the following conceptual frameworks to support them in thinking about framing supporting and shaping emergence as it arises from their unique contingent circumstances (I will discuss how these conceptual frameworks are deployed as part of the discussion of the case study in the next section):

- Stacey's work (2007) on how we understand the development of strategy and leadership in situations which are uncertain, incoherent and emergent, juxtaposing this with the expectation that organizations are stable, rational, linear bureaucracies and how we move management teams from one construct of experience to the other. This is used to introduce groups to a different nonlinear non-reductionist way of thinking about the circumstances in which they find themselves.
- Mintzberg's (1987) work on emergent strategy. This supports groups to focus on thinking about strategy as an essentially emergent experience. It acts as a frame for thinking about how they create strategy from the current emergent and contingent circumstances in which they find themselves.
- The work on situational awareness (Endsley, 2000) defined as: 'The perception of the elements in the environment within a volume of time and space, the comprehension of their meaning and the projection of their status in the near future' is used to support the focus on understanding the current environment in detail. This is linked to the work on error reduction and decision making under stress (Flin *et al.*, 1997) to assist them to slow down in the process and to pay attention to seeing the systems and circumstances they are caught up in as they are unfolding.
- Wenger's work on developing communities of practice (2002) is used to assist groups to understand the importance of forming communities of prac-

tice in relation to social learning, the difficulty of changing identity in groups and as method of managing knowledge collectively based on shared experience.

- Scharmer's (2009) work on the 'U' journey through change and the processes of 'presencing'—letting go, letting come, crystallizing and prototyping which support this theory of change is used to help situate groups in a process of change which is focused on leading from the future as it emerges, helping to contextualize and frame change in the present with a focus on the future rather than seeking to repeat the old patterns of the past.
- Whole system approaches (Mumford, 2003) assist in supporting bringing together a whole leadership team and help to frame the conversation dialogue and graphic facilitation.
- Dialogue approaches based on Bohm (2004), Kantor (1995), Scharmer (2000) and Gunnlaugson (2007) help to deepen the conversation once a community of practice has been established.

Integral Hosting

Integral hosting is used as part of the Consilient approach to groups to work with them in a variety of ways and to use space in different ways to support a journey of emergence based on the exploration of the conceptual frameworks identified above. This process is linked to the art of hosting which is described by Corrigan as:

An emerging set of practices for facilitating group conversations of all sizes, supported by principles that: maximise collective intelligence; welcome and listen to diverse viewpoints; maximise participation and civility and transform conflict into creative cooperation.

Hosting is also linked into an integral philosophy and to an explicit intention to support the development of integral thinking as identified by Wilber(2001) who argues for the dawning of 'an integral age at the leading edge' based on a full spectrum of knowledge in four quadrants: the cultural; the conscious; the behavioral and the systemic.

We use the following techniques to facilitate an integral approach:

- Open space methodology (Harrison, 2008) is used to help the important questions for individuals emerge into the group and to help to shape both shared significance and the community of practice.
- Scenario planning (De Geus, 1997) is used to help groups explore a range of different potential futures as they might emerge from the situational awareness of the present.

- World Café approaches (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) help to share significance in the group; to build communities of practice and to create and develop the social and intellectual capital of the group.
- Graphic facilitation (Sibbet, 2006) helps to capture material as it emerges in a dynamic, memorable and integrated way reflecting material generated as part of a community of practice.
- Kinaesthetic, auditory and visual approaches to engagement and learning help us to engage all learning styles and a full range of intelligences.
- Done on the day digital capture and harvesting means we get the material generated from the day to the participants in electronic format the following working day.

Mindful Awareness

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines mindful awareness as: 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose; in the present moment and non judgementally'. For Corrigan being present means 'showing up, undistracted, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be.' This adapted quote summarizes for me the state I aspire to in facilitating events:

Can you love and respect the people and respect their inquiry without imposition of your will?

Can you intervene in the most vital matters and yield to events taking their course?

Can you attain deep knowing and know you do not understand?

Conceive and give birth and nourish without retaining ownership?

Trust action without being guided by outcome? (Interpretation of words attributed to Lao Tzu, c. 550 BC)

Interventions are designed based on Kolb's (1984) theory of learning and Prochaska and Di Clementi's (1982) Cycle of Change to assist groups with blocks to the process and flow of learning and change.

Isabel Menzies-Lythes' (1960) work on managing anxiety is used to help people understand and work with the relationship between structure and relationship as part of the management of anxiety and uncertainty in risky situations.

Fineman's (2003) work underpins our approach to managing and containing the emotion and anxiety raised by the contemplation of the personal implications and impacts of addressing major budget reductions, loss of services and redundancies of staff.

Applying The Consilient Approach To A Real World Situation: The Case Study

Background And Overview: A Year Of Change, Emergence And Uncertainty

We began work with a Local Authority in the UK in December 2009 as it was beginning to face up to the likely implications of significant budget reductions for the Public Sector following the General Election in May 2010, whatever the outcome. There was awareness in the organization that previous attempts to manage change had not been successful and that the current programme of Leadership Development was not delivering the desired results.

The development programme initially began as an inquiry with the Chief Executive and his leadership team of around forty Senior Managers focused on managing a budget reduction of between 20 and 30% over the next three years. Our aim was to help them to create a narrative and options for the budget reduction which could be presented to local politicians following the Local Elections in May 2010. The initial commission for the work ran from February to June 2010.

This work was extended through to March 2011 in two further phases. From July to November we worked on moving the group from knowing to doing, helping them cope with the emergent and uncertain nature of the budget settlement as it progressed from the emergency budget in July to the proposed settlement in November. From December 2010 to March 2011 we helped them with the implementation of the proposals as well as coping with a final settlement which was much worse than anticipated.

The patterns that we agreed with the group we should support them to disrupt were as follows:

- Improved connectivity and communication within and between the leadership group;
- More proactive and consistent external communication by the leadership group;
- Improving the conversion of information and data into knowledge in a nimble and agile way;
- Acting on the knowledge generated and following through on decision making in a timely fashion, and;
- Keeping responsibility and accountability for change at the leadership level

Framing Emergence

We also set out to frame expectations and create a reflective process prior to each event. Once we had completed the planning we sent an e-mail to the group laying out our thinking, identifying the themes for the workshop, acknowledg-

ing the emotional environment and asking them to think about certain things prior to the workshop.

Moving To Co-Creation

As the process progressed we were able to achieve more flow and coherence in the planning and commissioning of the events. Originally we were asked to run one event and then, when this was successful, we undertook a programme of development work, agreed with a planning group, in order to run a further event in March 2010. Following this the Senior Management Team commissioned two more events. In May we were able to process the material using the techniques and approaches we felt best suited the group and in June we co-created the event together having agreed the flow and outcomes of the programme. As we moved into more in depth appreciative inquiry the dialogue engaged more people and began to drive the process. The planning groups, having been formally chaired, flowed as action learning type discussions from which the focus for the event naturally emerged. The briefings with the Chief Executive reinforced and completed the flow of the programme and the Senior Management team endorsed and supported the programme which the planning group came up with.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the work of the year, including the key themes addressed in each stage and a summary of the content of each session.

Initial Work: November 2009 - February 2010

The initial workshop was difficult to deliver. The venue was not really big enough for us to work with the whole group, the over large Christmas tree didn't help either. However the group felt that progress had been made. For them, there had been a better degree of engagement than in previous sessions, and the drumming workshop had been a success. Would we facilitate a further set of development workshops in March, June and September?

We met with a planning group in the middle of January to review the December event and plan ahead for the March event. Following a meeting with the Chief Executive we agreed on an initial development programme to run on a monthly basis from March to June 2010 to focus on:

- Promoting further communication and connection within the group;
- Shifting the pattern of engagement and outcome so that the group could own responsibility and take decisive, cohesive action about the forthcoming budget reductions;
- Create a vision for the future of the Local Authority that they could use to navigate through the uncertainty of the next year;
- To keep up the momentum but hold people in a reflective process, and;

- Overall Aims of Programme:**
- Lack of connectivity as a leadership team
 - Collecting too much information and data
 - Communicating with each other and externally
 - Not enough action and completion before we move onto the next thing
 - Disrupting established patterns
 - Devolving responsibility and then blaming

A Years Development with the Leadership Team

		'Being in the bubble' - situational awareness	
		Trying to create a narrative to fit the financial envelope	
		Managing communication differently	
		Exploring our relationship with lead members	
		Implementing action plans—programme office	
		Resilience and capability	
The Gathering Storm	The 50% Scenario	Exploring the minimum and the common sense councils	
04.12.09	Jan & Feb	11.05.10	23.11.10
Swot analysis	02.03.10	16.04.10	04.10.10
• Fish bowl	5 Key Ideas	• Key Lines Of Enquiry & cross cutting themes	Agreeing a 20 day plan
• Drumming	• The 50% scenario	• Community of practice	• Visioning
• Presentations	• Open space 9 questions	• Social & intellectual capital	• Deeper dialogue
• Key inter-views	• Feeling / thinking intent	• 22 million	• Member relationships & decision making
• 50% scenarios		• Dance-floor mapping office	• HR1 prep & comms
		• Knowing to do	• New figures
		• The gallery	• Energy
		• Equity dialogue	• Emotions
		• World café	• Supporting others
		• 22 million	• Intention
		• Dance-floor mapping office	• Terms & conditions
		• Programme office	
		• Knowing to do	
		• News room	
		• Situational awareness	
		• Identity	
		• Leadership Redlines	
		• Anger	
		• Intent	
		• Member relationships & decision making	
		• Communication	
		• Cycle of change	

Figure 1 A Year's Development With The Leadership Team

- To integrate the strategic thinking and planning with the feelings and emotional reactions this work raised.

We also agreed a preparatory programme prior to the first event in March which included:

- Interviews with five key leaders;
- Each Manager constructing a scenario, to an agreed template, about what they would do if they only had 50% of their current budget to spend. We agreed to process these templates and feed them back to the next leadership development day in March.

Creating A Community Of Practice: The March Event, A Taste Of Things To Come

Mindful Awareness

We prepared the both the content and the process of the day carefully. We were aware that we still didn't know the group that well and that we needed to cater for a range of preferred learning styles and intelligences as well as ensure that we had a range of activities which enabled people to interact and connect with each other dynamically and purposefully.

Framing Emergence

We began with a set of ground rules which were designed to create a safe respectful container within which the group could confidently enjoy learning with and from each other and move outside individual and collective comfort zones whilst feeling safe enough to take some risks in order to explore ways in which normal routines and patterns of behavior could be disrupted within agreed boundaries of confidentiality. The ground rules sought to: establish a reflective space with a commitment to active listening; create a responsible environment where the perception of both feeling and thinking was encouraged; promote individual ownership of thoughts, experiences views and opinions and provide confidence in the group that we would call time out if the group dynamics or content of the conversations were causing too much distress, frustration or anger.

We also wanted to promptly introduce and present the conceptual frameworks we wanted to work within and to establish these as having relevance for the current and emerging circumstances they were facing. We chose four key conceptual frameworks to begin with:

- Stacey's approach to leadership in uncertainty, incoherent environments (see Figure 2);
- Mintzberg's emergent approach to creating strategy (Figure 3), and;
- Scharmer's Theory U (Figure 4)

A Leadership Paradox?

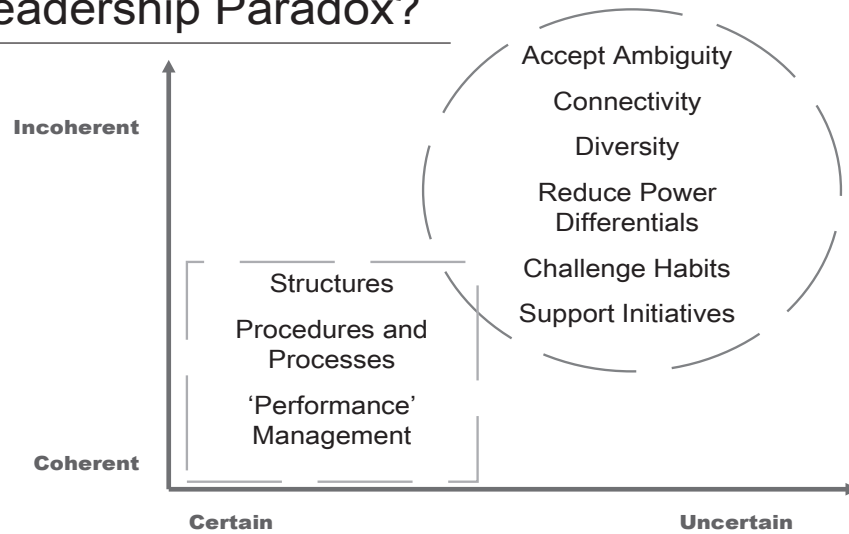


Figure 2 *A Leadership Paradox?* (Adapted from the work of Ralph Stacy and Caryn Vanstone)

We then went through a basic presentation on Wenger's concept of a community of practice looking at what a community is and why it might be a helpful construct to inform the development of our work on developing knowledge management and changing identity. Our final presentation was an overview of the individual work they had done on managing with 50% of their budgets which gave them sufficient information to work with as a community of practice, without being overwhelmed by the detail (see Figure 5).

Integral Hosting

In order to keep up the level of momentum and conversation we then asked the group to stand up and move about the room and to process their reactions and responses to the presentation in continually changing pairs to see if they could keep a dialogue progressing. From this conversational processing we would then took them into a kinaesthetic space where we asked them to position themselves in the room in relation to how positively or negatively they were thinking and feeling about what they were about to lead and manage as a group. What we learned from this was that the group shared a high level of positive intent and commitment to see this process through despite acknowledging the potential impact on them.

After the first break we ran an open space session which helped the group identify and progress conversations with each other which were important for individuals to explore and to build a shared significance. We ended up with nine conversations. In the session after lunch we offered a 'framing the future' session which gave the group a choice of either creating a vision for the future in 2020

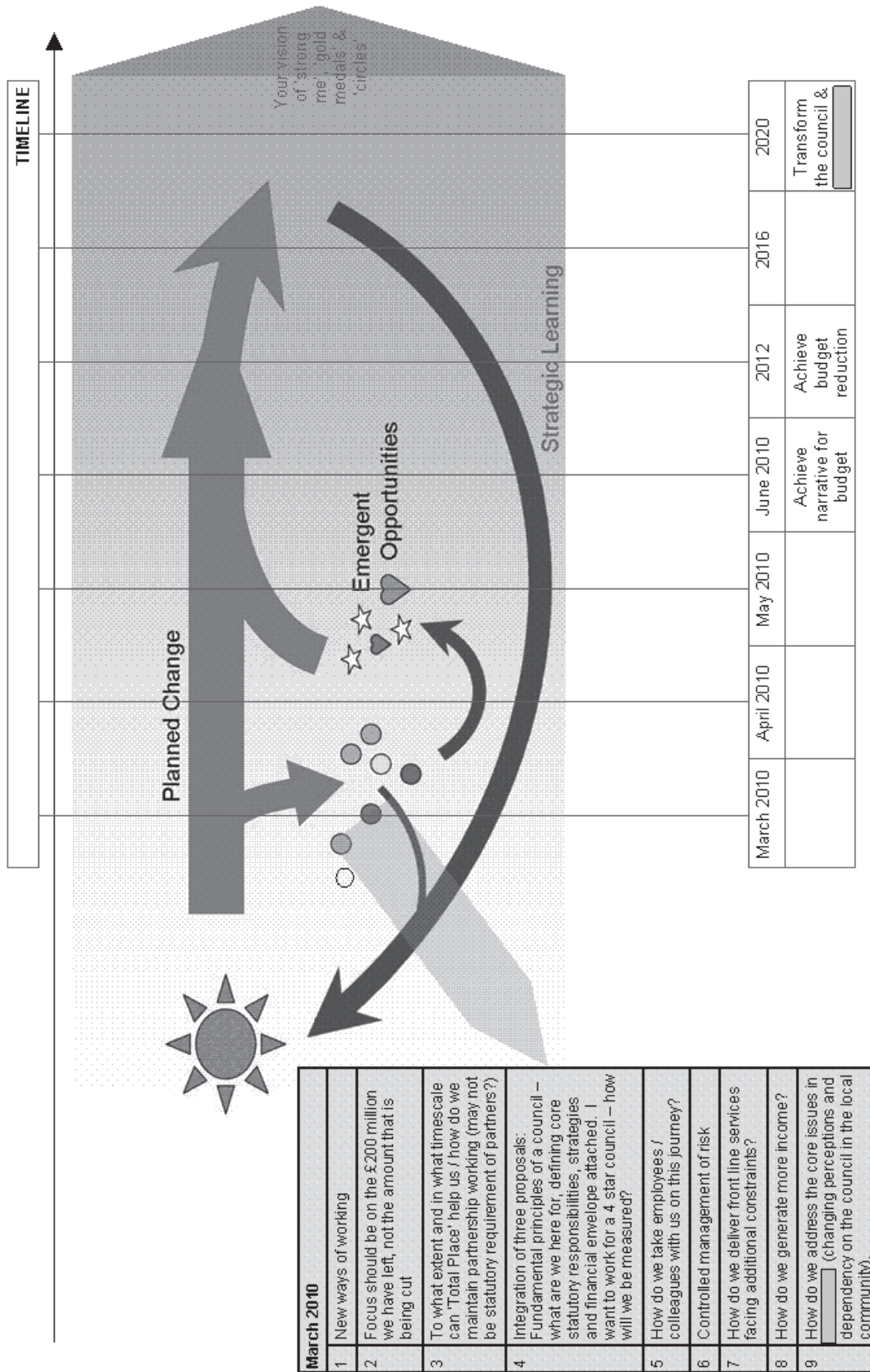


Figure 3 Change As Dynamic

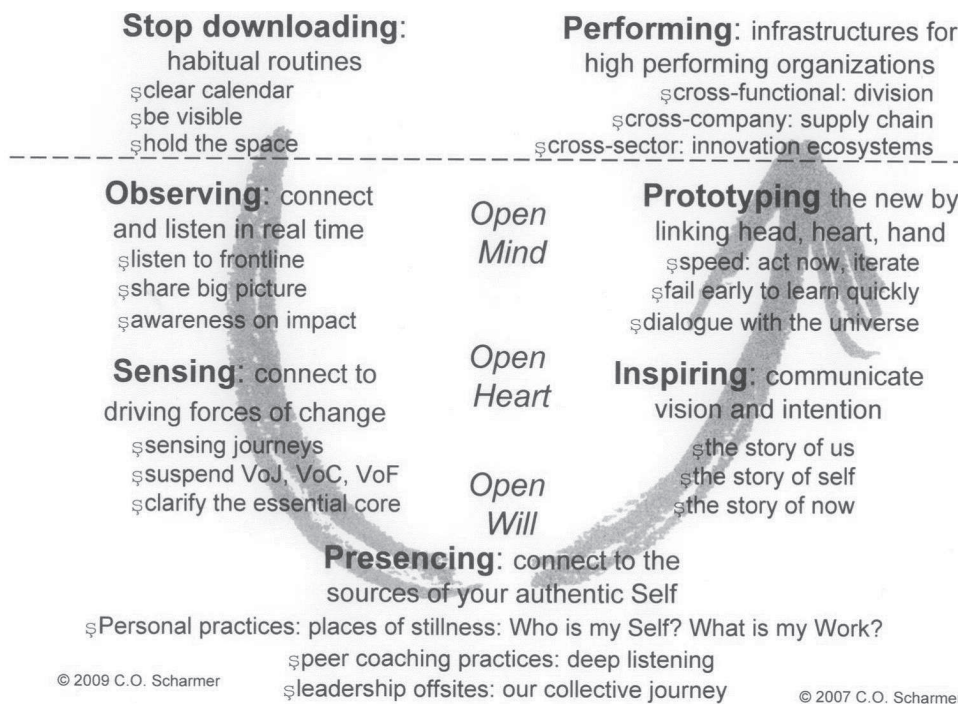


Figure 4 Shärmer's Theory U.

or running a scenario inquiry and reporting back on the outcomes from 2020. In the end four groups created visions and one group ran a scenario. In the final hour we ran a whole group dialogue bringing them close together in a circle, starting with the story from Dee Hock about the difficulty of disrupting patterns and behaviors and the difficulty of overcoming autopoietic states:

When everything changes around us and it becomes necessary to develop a new perception of things, a new internal model of reality, the problem is never to get new ideas in: the problem is to get the old ideas out. Every mind is filled with old furniture. It's familiar. It's comfortable. We hate to throw it out... there is nothing we fear more. We are our ideas concepts and perceptions (p. 107).

Building And Creating Social And Intellectual Capital: March To June 2010

Mindful Awareness: Making Sense Of What Happened In The First Event

We learnt a lot from the first event:

- How to build on working together and working within the group so that there was more co-creation;
- That the level of engagement with, and commitment to, each other as well as their intellectual and emotional commitment to the task did not translate into effective or coherent working together, and;

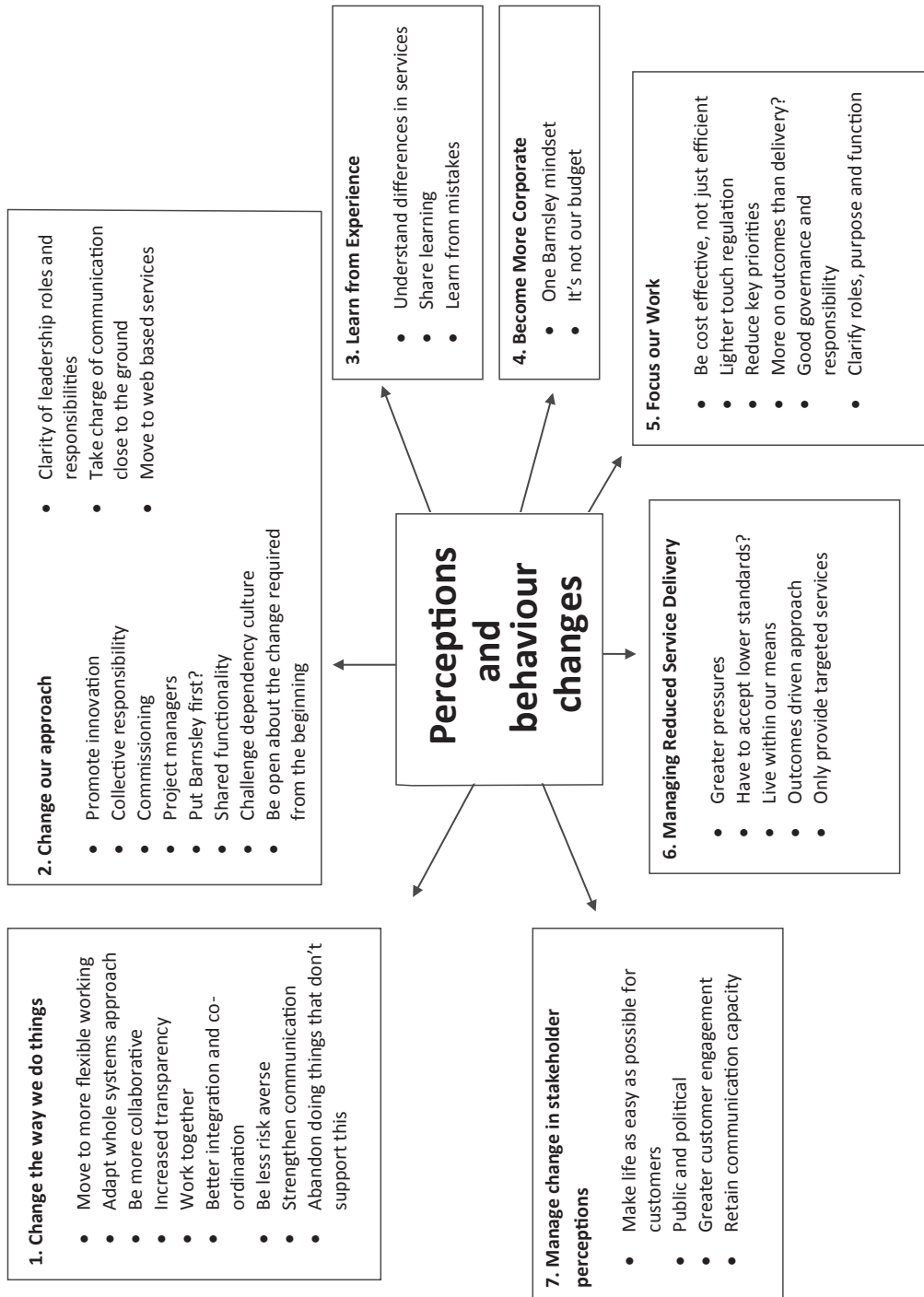


Figure 5 *Perceptions And Behavior Changes.*

- Something of the patterns in the group which enabled and prevented conversation and action.

Framing Emergence

The Senior Management Team took control of the agenda for the next sessions which they commissioned quickly, with a further event in March and another one in April. They directed the planning group to commission us to facilitate two further events which would involve Directorate presentations to each other to explore the concept of a 'Minimum Council' to support the development of key lines of enquiry into ways of saving money and rethinking the structure and provision of Council services within an articulated risk matrix. This would also build shared knowledge within the group about the functioning of the Council as a whole system.

We also explored the information and knowledge we created within the conceptual frameworks we used in the first session in March. We populated Mintzberg's emergent strategy with the work from the open space and vision sessions to create a frame for focusing on further information and knowledge management (see Figure 2)

We agreed a process which allowed us to facilitate the beginning and end of these days in relation to recapping and sharing some of the work which had been developed in the previous sessions. We were able to put some ground rules around the dialogue and challenge which followed each presentation and to facilitate the sense making which came out of each presentation. A pattern of small and large group dialogue which built through each of the sessions was established. The key outcomes from this part of the programme were:

- Building up a community of practice and inquiry around dialogue and standards for depth, style and presentation of material;
- A first view as to whether the proposals, aggregated together, would reach the budget reduction required, and;
- Keeping people engaged in dealing emotionally and intellectually with the complexity of the information which was emerging.

Integral Hosting

In May we felt we were ready to bring the knowledge we had created so far and present it as part of a strategic time-line. By this time three members of the group had begun to devote most of their time to supporting and challenging the work of the Directorates and work had also begun to shape cross cutting themes which were beginning to emerge. In this session we wanted to focus on a 'minimum' and a 'common sense' council within the budget reduction targets.

At the May event we began with a gallery-like display of the work of all the Directorates and then reflected on peoples' reactions to this. It was at this point that

we began to disrupt the pattern of equity which characterized their conversations about change and reductions as key members began to realize that there would be differential impacts in each Directorate and that there was a degree of variation in how they had approached this. We explored with them whether this variance was within tolerable limits to sustain a community of practice or whether they needed to provide further internal challenge. They agreed that they needed to provide further internal challenge.

We assisted the flow, sharing and development of knowledge in the next session in the morning where we ran a world café style dialogue session based on the work of the cross cutting themes. It became clear from this process that two of the themes could be abandoned. The pattern of activity and priority between years one, two and three also became clear at this point.

The room we were working in doubled as a function room and at one of the events a dance floor was laid down for a function later in the evening. We asked the hotel to put the floor back down and used this as a visual frame to report on progress so far and agree the time-line and approaches within Directorates and in relation to cross cutting themes.

We gathered around the edge of the dance floor and looked at, and spoke about, the knowledge and strategy we had created as a whole group. We hadn't reached the target for the minimum. We had no 'wriggle room' to allow us to be flexible in the construction of a 'common sense' Council we would have to challenge our sense of who we were becoming further and realize that the 'Minimum Council' model was going to be part of the new reality.

Mindful Awareness

From the first workshop in March both the emotional and cognitive intent of the group remained high. There were consistent voices in the group, including the Chief Executive, reminding people of the emotional component of the task at hand. During the first workshop a majority of the group expressed a high level of positive affect and intent for the task in hand. People were realistic about the challenge of the task but remained positive that this climate gave them the opportunity to achieve a new vision—something that they felt they should have grasped a long time ago. We tested this further at the workshop in May, turning the dance floor into four sections at the conclusion of the presentations and asking them whether they still felt they could achieve the task and to place themselves in the quadrant which most aligned with their level of confidence. The majority of the group stayed in the strongly confident quadrant.

Containing uncertainty was also a key component of this transition. Prior to the election there was concern about the outcome both locally and nationally with a change probable in both. The result of the elections in May—a national Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition and an enhanced majority locally for

the current party did not resolve this uncertainty. By the time we met in June, we had some measure of the kind of additional budget cuts which were going to be asked for and had to find a way of containing this new anxiety. Not only had we not identified sufficient savings to reach the minimum council level, there were now going to have to be additional cutbacks and over four years rather than three as originally envisaged, with a weighting to more cuts in the first year.

The June Event

We agreed a clear process and set of outcomes for the workshop which was to take us from 'knowing to doing'. A briefing for Local Councillors on this work and the additional challenges had been arranged for the 1st July. Our issue was that we did not really have a full understanding of how to support the group through this process. We planned, reflected and talked again on the morning of the event. All I knew as we started the event was that we wanted them to start by talking with each other over coffee and then come into a 'newsroom environment' to update each other.

It became clear that there had been further progress on bringing together a team to progress the challenge work. They had established a full time team of three working at senior level and all of the Directorates had progressed their work as well. We then asked them to think about Meg Wheatley's work on three critical questions around dialogue and identity: Can we talk? What just happened? And who are we now? Their work was displayed for viewing and we invited people informally to catch up and have 'water cooler' conversations about their responses and reactions to this newly emergent reality. Then we had a break.

After the break we decided to offer an input to the group on decision making under pressure and recognizing complex emergent environments. We then went back to the Stacey and Mintzberg diagrams we had been using and reviewed the importance of situational awareness in planning in highly emergent environments, particularly the importance of perception in this process.

We agreed to park that for a while and returned to the updates on the cross cutting themes. We discovered and explored some displacement anxiety as a conversation over saving money on car park passes took up time in the group over a conversation about the likely level of redundancies which would now be required. The presentations created their own dynamic for decision making, as well as landing the emotional reality that significant job losses could not be avoided.

After lunch we named some of the anger and distress that people were experiencing, realizing the likely impact on them, their staff and on the local area. This became the departure point and the place where they made choices about moving into responsible leadership and moving on. The group worked on checking

the Directorate work and the cross cutting themes along with the implications for the changed environment. From this, we agreed a programme of key actions for the following ten days and confirmed these decisions. The moment for action had arrived.

From Knowing To Doing: July To September 2010

We agreed a further session for July to review these actions and from this a further session in September to allow us to keep up momentum over the summer holiday period.

Mindful Awareness

In the preparation for the July event we agreed that we should bring the emotional impact of the work to centre stage as we moved from preparation to implementation. We planned a whole session prior to lunch to address this. We realized that we would have to build on our work on managing uncertainty and situational awareness and so we also agreed that we should keep the newsroom format.

As we settled into the July event it became clear that significant members of the group were missing without a clear understanding of why. This became a crisis moment for the group and again their strong sense of intent and purpose meant that they resolved to continue with the session rather than cancel. A lengthy and very high quality dialogue as a whole group then emerged which continued for the whole of the morning and for the last session of the afternoon. Within this dialogue the group was able to:

- Develop their situational awareness of how the current situation was unfolding and how they were responding to these challenges emotionally;
- Review the initial presentations and dialogues with the politicians and reflect on the success of their preparation in disrupting previous patterns of preparation and engagement, and;
- Update each other in detail on what had happened since the last session and explore their emotional reactions to it.

In the afternoon we presented Prochaska and Di Clementi's model of the cycle of change and used this to explore how to avoid going into relapse and to maintain momentum and resilience over the summer. We also presented a model of managing risk and decision making where there are high levels of uncertainty (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 2008). This enabled the group to undertake some detailed exploration and planning of the work over the next nine months and to agree to expand the membership and work of the project office over the summer. At the end of this event we booked a follow up for early September to complete this phase of the work.

After the summer we felt the first impact of the budget cutbacks as the September event took place in the Town Hall- we returned 'home' after a tour of local Hotels and Community Centres. In this event we spent time looking at how to integrate the complex range of management tasks each person in the room would need to be able to fulfil over the coming months and to rehearse the skills and knowledge required to manage this well. We concentrated on three key areas of work: HR, Communications and Programme Management and created a 25 day programme to see the proposals that we had created ready to be launched for formal consultation at the beginning of October. We used this event to reflect more deeply to reflect on the comparative success of the work and to explore that we still did not have a narrative within our lines of enquiry which added up to the required saving over four years, nor were we able to reconceptualize our earlier visions to create a new view of what the Council of the future would look like. However we felt that we had created a very positive container, process and time-line which would be helpful in managing and minimizing the impact on individuals and that a shared approach to maximizing employment and retaining investment was emerging.

From Turbulence To Flow: October 2010 To January 2011

The next three events saw the group move from knowing to doing and from turbulence to flow. Over this time period we implemented a further three integrated action plans. The first centred on how to begin the statutory consultation process for redundancies and how to proactively manage the press coverage. We learned quickly from this process so that by the time we got to the December and January events we were managing and delivering on five separate consultation processes at various stages of completion as can be seen in figure one earlier in the paper. An example of one of the integrated action plans focused on situational awareness and managing a small time frame of projection can be found in table one

As part of the preparation for the November event I sat in on the Senior Management Team meeting as they engaged in a dialogue about the future, informed by the work we had undertaken with them. As the conversation progressed I was able to see a picture of the future emerging (see figure six) which I presented to the confirmation meeting with the Chief Executive and secured agreement to share it with the wider group.

In November we set out to build the groups resilience and to emphasise that they were the strongest and most coherent part of the system able to deal with these unprecedented challenges. It emerged that there might be some hope of a better final settlement following extensive lobbying of the National Government. This hope was boosted by the postponement of the announcement of the final settlement figures until later in December.

	Principles & strategy	4—8 Oct	11—15 Oct	18—22 Oct	25—29 Oct & beyond
Communication	Need to respond to staff suggestions at some point Try to identify where the PR story is in each KLOE	P to issue letter to all staff to advise of the process 5 th Oct LT meeting to review additional 8.3M progress Use the 50% exercise to reassess	15 Oct: 8.3M has been looked at and decided with impacts noted—a clear mandate for the additional 8.3M so that we can consult with TUs	Press FOI once we are confident staff consultation has gone	20 th December—what is the actual cuts package?
KLOEs & Savings	A full picture of the scale of cuts may further engage members	5 th Oct LT meeting to review additional 8.3M progress Use the 50% exercise to reassess	15 Oct: 8.3M has been looked at and decided with impacts noted—a clear mandate for the additional 8.3M so that we can consult with TUs	19 th October: SMT to take stock of progress on the £8.3M	
Programme Office & Governance	Need consistency in attendance and feedback Continue weekly meetings—feedback & coordination role Regular reports back to SMT & LT where necessary	Need HR1 numbers with additional cuts for Friday Programme office meeting	12 th Oct SMT to review progress on HR1 & financial plan Friday 15 th October: All implementation plans to be completed and put on web for year 1 Discuss 8.3M gap for Y4	Friday 22 nd October: Discuss comprehensive spending review	
HR1 Prep	Early retirement costs—need to look at changing Meeting every Wednesday with TUs; any feedback required—ask HR Face to face where possible Involve shop stewards ASAP If you can reach agreement early, do so	5 th Oct LT meeting / clinic Friday 8 th Oct—HR1 Issued	Detailed discussions and letters to staff Non staff savings explained Track all consultation notices issued—Crucial		November: HR catch ups with DMTs November 2010: Detailed discussions with service users and partners
Key Events		HR1 Issued	Consultation with Staff begins	Thursday 21 st Oct: Comprehensive Spending Review	Half term

Table 1 Session Four: Agreeing A 20 Day Plan

We facilitated an exercise with them, designed to promote resilience which asked them to draw a situation which they had been in before and then on the back to draw the outcome. We used these drawings in the group to promote a number of discussions between people focusing on the drawings exploring what it meant to them and the impact, the positives experience and the learning they could bring to bear on this situation having seen it before. We displayed these images as a gallery before we had lunch and viewed the whole community's experience.

After lunch we focused on how they as a leadership group could identify and support the diverse range of needs of their service users, staff and other stakeholders who would all be differentially impacted. This enabled the group to articulate a coherent, integrated strategy for support.

In the afternoon we shared and explored the vision (see Figure 6) with the whole group which used three key metaphors for the journey of the group: climbing safely down the cliff of budget reductions; getting in to the four year financial envelope and then transforming services.

The December meeting began with a bitter and very angry Finance Director describing the sense of betrayal and outrage felt at the settlement, announced earlier in the week, which had resulted in poorer councils losing more and richer councils gaining more. He and the Chief Executive then gave an example of how they had seen this before and we would now have to get on and find the money. The group then had a dialogue and a debate about how best the Chief Executive should advise the Leader of the Council on the issue of potentially saving money through a variance in terms and conditions. The group was able to bring its' knowledge to bear on the issue and to provide sophisticated advice on the issues involved.

We assisted the group to make a complex plan as the new financial circumstances meant a new round of consultations about further job reductions. Our learning and rehearsal as a community of practice in October paid off as the group were able to organise to communicate with every member of staff before Christmas as well as run two more consultation processes and issue the first round of redundancy notices.

We were also able to help the group contextualize their immediate difficulty by presenting an overview of the journey of the group over the last year (see figure one again) and how they had responded to a highly uncertain and deteriorating financial situation over the year. This time frame then enabled us to evaluate the work of the year in relation to the extent which people felt that the patterns identified at the beginning of the year, as issues for the leadership group, had been disrupted (see Figures 7 and 8).

We met again in January, after the full Council had met to agree the redundancy notices and further consultation processes about job losses and other savings.

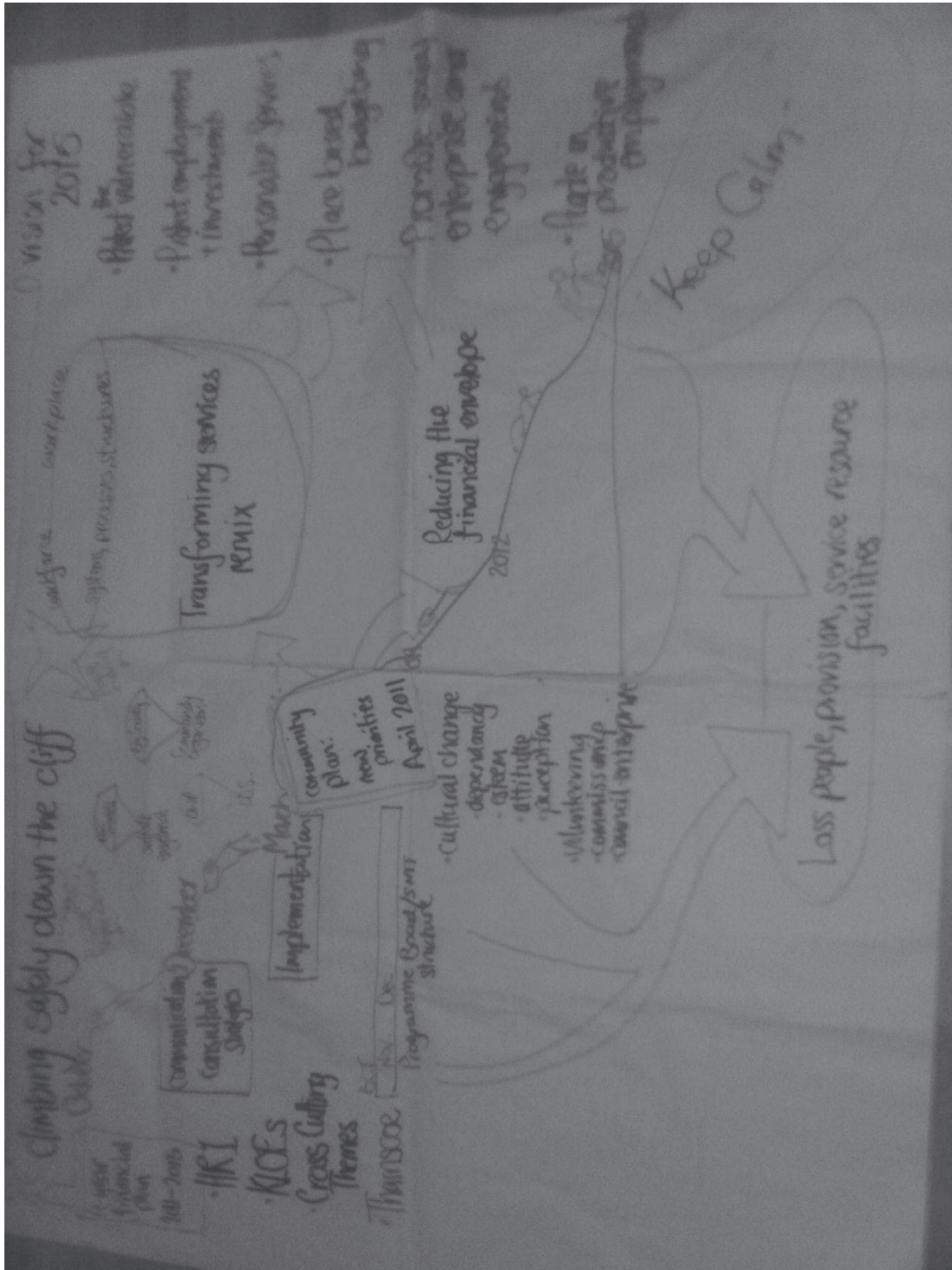


Figure 6 The Group's Journey Through Metaphor

After we had made a plan to take the work forward to March the group took time to consider some of the longer term issues that they would need to face and address in relation to culture and transformation. We formally rehearsed dialogic approaches to these issues with the group and the results were highly engaging with the real depth and challenge of the issues. There was agreement that further dialogue was required. When we went back to meet them for the preparation for the March event they had already had further dialogue sessions and had come up with both a vision and a process for transforming the Council and its local area. We will be working on this material in March.

Conclusion: Disturbing The Patterns?

We asked the participants to evaluate the programme over the year as to whether it had succeeded in disrupting the key patterns identified previously. The scores were from 1 (not at all) to 5 (yes the pattern has been shifted). The results in terms of actual and mean scores can be seen in Figures 7 and 8.

Both these results and the overall feedback were indicative of some success. We are going to follow this up by taking some external views of the programme as well as looking at the budget outturn and outcomes. They certainly seem to be doing better than their local competitors. Some quotes indicate the impact it has had on people:

The context of cuts, cuts, cuts was depressing but the process was truly engaging and absorbing.

A job well done and a very good exercise in management team building. It will benefit this programme and other work.

A high in the years I have worked for the Authority and they exceed 20 years.

We will run a final session this year in March (2011) and are beginning to talk about creating a planned development programme for the next year: 'From Breakthrough to Transformation' with a focus on reframing and addressing dependency culture and extending the programme through the system and the organization with others in the group taking on a range of development roles, including with other partners.

Final Comment

We feel that the Consilient Approach as exemplified by this case study offers some qualified support to Higgs and Rowlands conclusion in relation to the efficacy of complexity approaches, based on complexity on framing and containing emergence, having something to offer large scale and short timescale programmes of change. We have also seen that the maintenance of a high level of affective commitment in the leadership group, and a consistent focus on what it is important to do next about what is emerging, has also been important as has

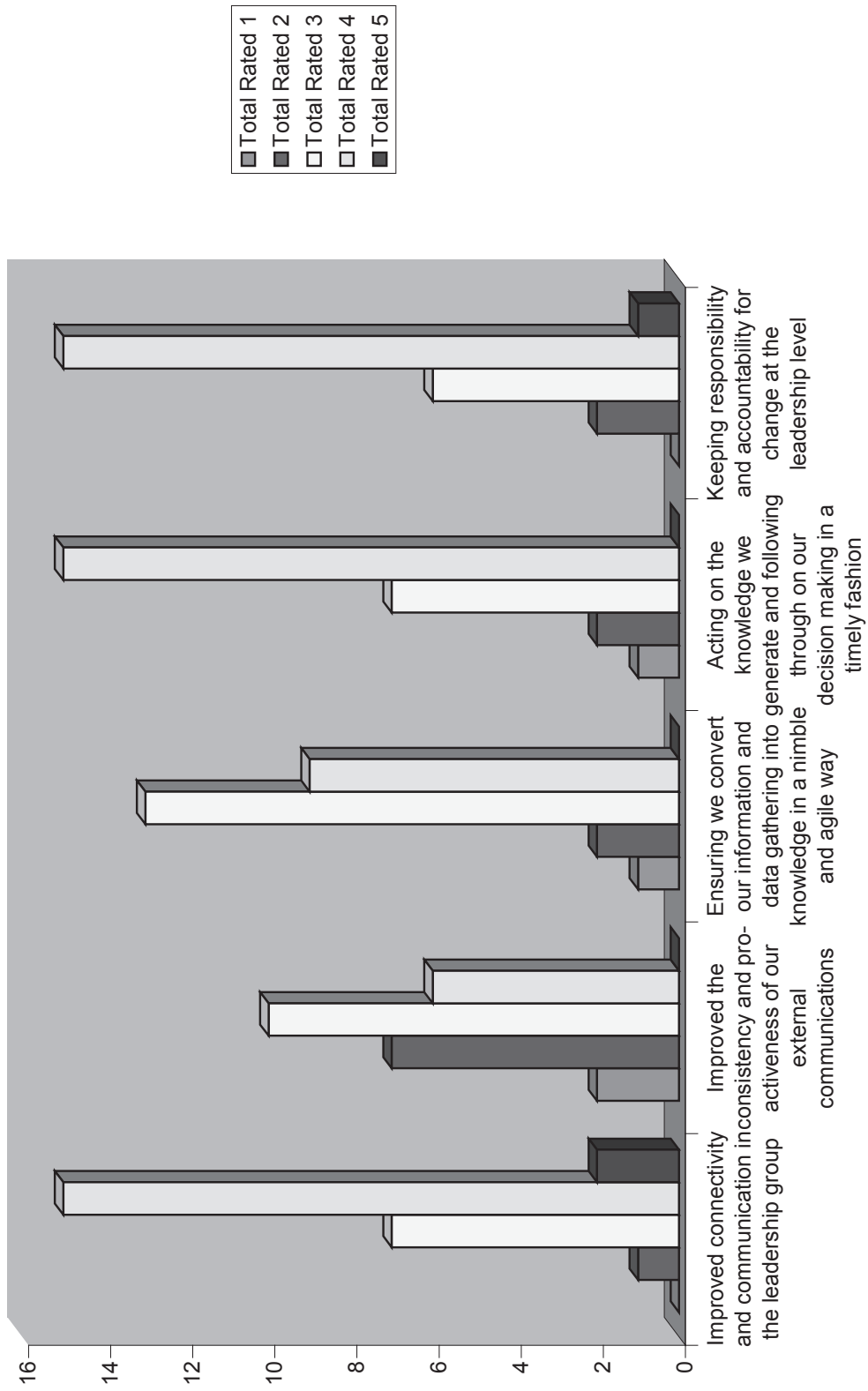


Figure 7 Shared Significance: Achieving The Key Outputs From The Programme

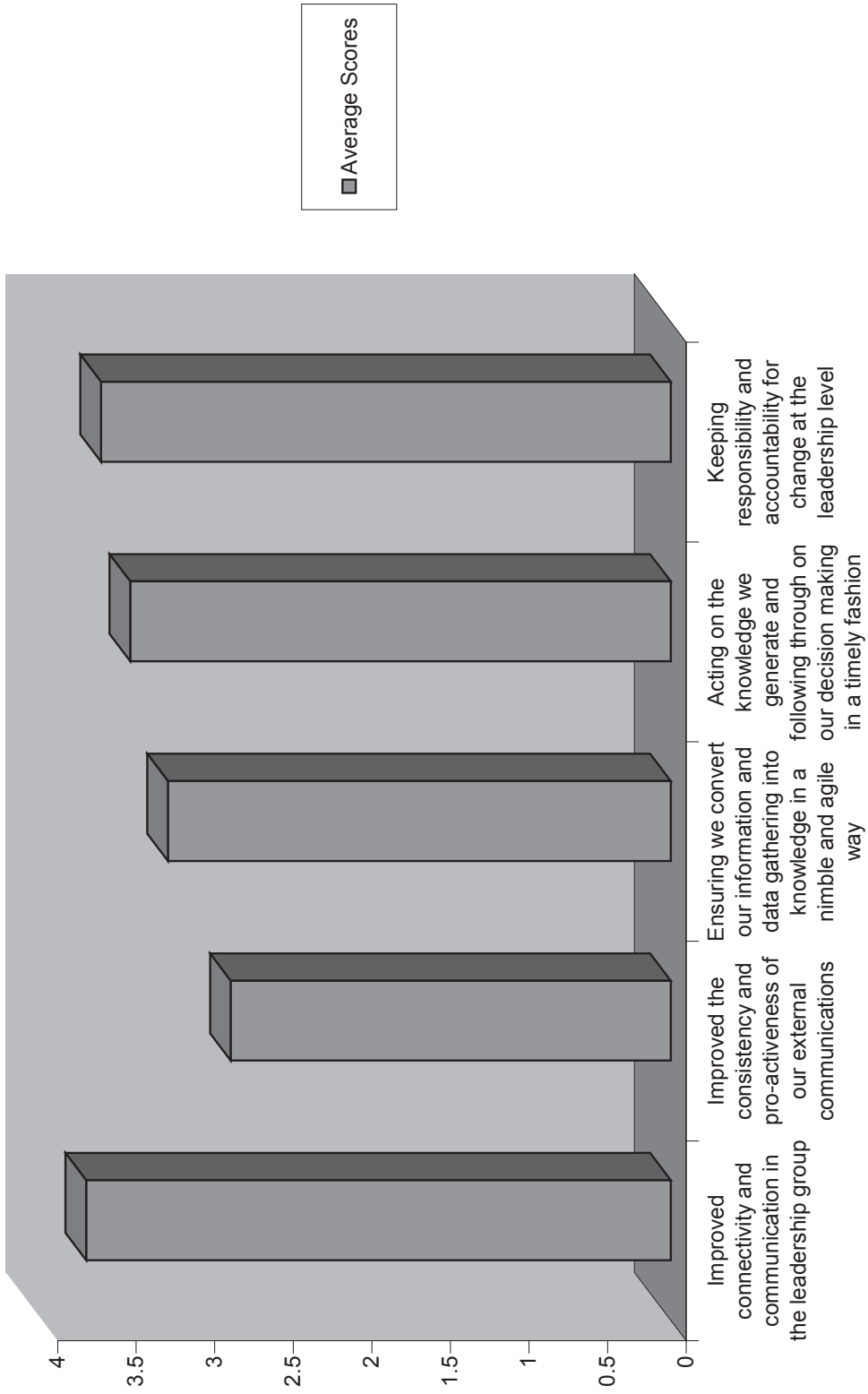


Figure 8 Shared Significance: Achieving The Key Outputs From The Programme

the refusal to be detracted into reactive unconsidered responses.

Building the intellectual and social capital of the leadership team through a highly engaging programme and grounding and promoting their emotional resilience all seem to have made a contribution to creating something which is more than the sum of its' parts.

As Steven Jay Gould (2004) concludes:

I too seek a consilience, a "jumping together" of science and the humanities into far greater and more fruitful contact and coherence-but a consilience of equal regard that respects the inherent differences, acknowledges the comparable but distinct worthiness, understands the absolute necessity of both domains to any life deemed intellectually and spiritually "full", and seeks to emphasise and nurture the numerous regions of actual overlap and common concern... Our richest form of unification emerges when we can agree a common set of principles and then derive our major strength for their realization from the different excellences of all cooperating components: e pluribus unum, or one from many. Let us compile a list of necessary components even longer than the effective and inherently different stratagems ... with science and the humanities as the two great poles of support to raise the common tent of wisdom (p. 259).

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