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Systems Leadership: Exceptional leadership for exceptional times

Source Paper 4a Systems Leadership for Children's Services in the USA

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This paper was produced as part of a study of systems leadership undertaken for the Virtual Staff College by the Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation with the Centre for Health Enterprise, Cass Business School, City University London. It is one of a suite of supplementary papers intended to be read in parallel with the core Synthesis Paper *Systems Leadership: Exceptional leadership for exceptional times* (Ghate, Lewis and Welbourn, 2013). All the study reports can be found at <http://www.cevi.org.uk/publications.html>

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Introduction and Background

In the United States, the provision of services to children and families most commonly occurs within distinct sectors (i.e. health, food and nutrition, child protection, child care or education), delivered through narrowly mandated agencies or programs. The current approach to service provision, constrained by “competing or contradictory mandates” and restrictive funding mechanisms, creates serious problems for meeting the needs of children and families, especially those with more complex needs (Anderson, et al., 2010).

Numerous examples can be cited:

- the health system is not well-connected to mental health services;
- mental health and substance abuse services are often handled by entities that are not funded to accept clients with co-occurring problems;
- current funding mechanisms often complicate the incorporation of prevention and family strengthening services into the array of widely available services for families;
- funding may be available to meet the needs of young children, but as the needs of parents become clear, no funding is available to address the needs of the parents;
- the quality and the availability of appropriate services are widely variable.

Challenges, as described above, ensure that opportunities to intervene early are often missed, needs go unidentified, and even identified needs are frequently inadequately addressed. This bleak reality has motivated a number of innovative responses which have required systems thinking and systems leadership. This literature review attempts to pull together the evidence and the lessons learned from those efforts.

In searching for appropriate publications for review, particular attention was paid to the context of the study or paper; the initial search focused on publications that involved or were directly informed by cross-sector or multi-agency efforts attempting to transform or create systems that were more able to address complex, “wicked” problems (to include efforts such as Systems of Care, Communities that Care, PROSPER, and Comprehensive Community Initiatives). It should be noted that the Systems of Care approach has influenced many complex system change efforts in the United States beyond children’s

mental health, to include education, child welfare, and juvenile justice (Hodges, et al., 2010, 4).

Sixty references were included in the initial collection of articles and books; forty-three publications were carefully reviewed, and ten were determined not to provide sufficiently aligned material to be included in the literature review. (The other seventeen articles and books are included in the list of references, marked with an asterisk, as the review of the materials is continuing.) An additional fifteen references were identified after the initial period of review, based on their inclusion as key references in other publication; they will be reviewed as time allows. (These articles, as well, have been included at the end of this document in the section titled, additional materials to review.) Most of the studies reflect the collection of “lessons learned” based on case study methodology.

Describing Systems Leadership

For this review, systems leadership is described as “leadership across organizational and geopolitical boundaries, beyond individual professional disciplines, within a range of organizational and stakeholder cultures, and often without managerial control.”

Given that “systems leadership” does not yet have a widely agreed upon definition, the *description* of systems leadership was used to find relevant publications. As predicted, systems leadership, as a search term, did not produce many results; the term “systems leadership” was found in only one of the reviewed articles. Other closely related terms and topics did produce relevant information; terms such as “integrative public leadership,” “catalytic leadership,” “transformational leadership,” “leadership of emergence,” “collaborative leadership,” “civic leadership,” “adaptive leadership,” “enabling leadership,” and “complexity leadership” were linked to concepts and initiatives that align with the shared definition of “systems leadership” that is being used to anchor this study.

For example, Crosby and Bryson (2010) describe **integrative public leadership** as the role of “bringing diverse groups and organizations together in semi-permanent ways, and typically across sector boundaries, to remedy complex public problems and achieve the common good” (211). Another leadership perspective, based on the work of Luke (1998), defines **catalytic leadership** as a set of activities in which “individuals and groups convene multiple stakeholder groups and facilitate and mediate agreement around tough issues” (3). **Transformational leadership**, as described by Ferreira and colleagues (2007), involves communicating a vision, developing trust, providing inspiration, and encouraging personal growth and problem solving (Bass, 1990; Kreitner, 2007)” (1). Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) describe the **leadership of emergence** “as the capacity to influence others” (618). Drawing from the work of Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Senge (2006), Gregory (2010) propose five common elements of **collaborative leadership**:

- Values/Actions/Congruence
- Shared Vision
- Question the Status Quo

- Learning Together through Collaboration
- Integration of the Whole/System Thinking.

Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) have developed a **Complexity Leadership Theory**. To begin, these authors explain that leadership “only exists in, and is a function of, interaction” (302). Complexity Leadership Theory represents three key and interacting leadership functions: adaptive, administrative, and enabling leadership (305). **Enabling leadership** is “leadership that structures and enables conditions such that [complex adaptive systems] are able to optimally address creative problem solving, adaptability and learning” (299). The authors describe **adaptive leadership** “as a generative dynamic that underlies emergent change” (299). Uhl-Bien and colleagues explained that “[e]nabling leadership works to catalyse the conditions in which adaptive leadership can thrive and to manage the entanglement between the bureaucratic (administrative leadership) and emergent (adaptive leadership) functions of the organization” (305). Other authors provide alternative definitions of Adaptive Leadership. For example, as a part of the description of the program “Leadership, Organizing, and Action,” the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School provides the following definition of **adaptive leadership**: “We define leadership as accepting responsibility to enable others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty. Finally, Easterling (2012) describes **place-based leadership** and **civic leadership** using adaptive leadership principles:

- Leadership is an activity, not position or authority.
- The activity of leadership starts with a personal intervention.
- Exercising leadership is inherently risky. Once we intervene, we lose significant control over the outcome.
- The risks of exercising leadership are both personal and professional.
- Making progress requires us to do what is needed in the situation rather than what is wanted or is comfortable for others or ourselves.
- To make progress, we have to be willing to raise the heat to get others and ourselves into the zone of productive work. (55)

Although the field is without shared definitions or terms, the interest in the activity of leadership to tackle cross-sector, complex, wicked problems is substantial. The diversity of experience and perspectives reflected across this literature may provide a broader view through which to consider how this study of systems leadership can leverage what is the

same and different from the efforts of others who are studying and writing about these closely associated topics.

The Contribution of Systems Leadership to Outcomes for Service Users

What do the data tell us about the role or contribution of leadership to the success of complex system change efforts? Quantitative data are lacking, however, the findings from case studies and the experience of systems change practitioners is rich.

Based on the findings from the review presented in the article, *Community and team member factors that influence the early phase functioning of community prevention teams: the PROSPER project*, Greenberg and colleagues (2007) documented the following:

Much of the available research indicates that factors such as participation, leadership, task-focus, cohesion, and identity are related to indicators of success (Allen 2005; Florin et al. 2000; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001a; Gottlieb et al. 1993; Greenberg et al. 2005; Kegler et al. 1998; Stevenson and Mitchell 2003). For example, teams with ineffective leadership are frequently riddled with conflict or lack a clear focus and are less likely to make effective decisions or implement programs with quality (Emshoff et al. 2003) (4).

Hays and colleagues (2000) were interested in the relationship between community impact and structural characteristics of community coalitions. Using three measures of impact and engaging 28 coalitions, they found that “while leadership does not directly contribute to system impacts, it does indirectly contribute by stimulating membership participation” (377), which they hypothesized to be a key leadership activity.

Ferreira and colleagues (2007) engaged in a careful analysis of the role of leadership in *effective* Systems of Care communities. In their study, the data “indicate that established systems have determined, effective, and trusted leadership” (4). This study did not have comparison data for less successful System of Care sites, so it is difficult to know if determined, effective, and trusted leadership was a variable that is correlated with effective Systems of Care communities.

However, given the review of the literature thus far, it may be necessary to consider approaching the study in a manner similar to the one used by Ferreira and colleagues (2007). Based on the definition of systems leadership that is being used in this study, it

may be beneficial to analyse the literature that has focused on successful complex change efforts that cross organizational and geopolitical boundaries, beyond individual professional disciplines, within a range of organizational and stakeholder cultures. A review of these study findings may provide insight into the activities, processes, or conditions that *were linked to the success* of the change effort. Using this approach, several articles offered qualitative findings which provide insights into 1) the core competencies and processes that are correlated with increased success, and 2) the evolutionary nature of cross-sector collaboration which may broaden the discussion of the types of outcomes that are being sought through systems leadership.

CORE COMPETENCIES AND PROCESSES FOR SUCCESS:

For example, Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2001) completed a large qualitative analysis of materials related to collaboration and coalition functioning “to develop an integrative framework that captures the core competencies and processes needed within collaborative bodies to facilitate their success” (241). The authors defined collaborative capacity as “the conditions needed for coalitions to promote effective collaboration and build sustainable community change (Goodman et al., 1998)” (242), and their findings suggest that *successful efforts* require “collaborative capacity at four critical levels: (a) within their members; (b) within their relationships; (c) within their organizational structure; and (d) within the programs they sponsor” (242). The findings related to the first two critical levels are worthy of consideration as the concept of systems leadership is being explored. Related to the first level, Foster-Fishman and colleagues collected extensive evidence related to skills and knowledge needed by coalition members.

- 1) Skills/knowledge to work collaboratively with others around the table (e.g., how to cooperate with and respect others, resolve conflict, communicate, understand member diversity)
- 2) Skills/knowledge to create and build effective programs (e.g., program planning, design, and evaluation; knowledge of content, targeted community, and change processes)
- 3) Skills/knowledge to build an effective coalition infrastructure (e.g., coalition and organizational development processes, member roles and responsibilities) (243, 245).

It may be worthwhile to consider if similar skills and knowledge apply to at least some systems leadership activities.

THE EVOLVING IMPACT OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Directly linking leadership activities to improved outcomes for service users can be difficult. However, Crosby and colleagues (2010) provide a helpful construct to consider, in their use of first-, second-, and third-order positive effects connected to cross-sector collaboration. They describe first order effects as the “immediate results of the collaboration process. [First-order positive effects] would likely include the creation of social, intellectual, and political capital, high-quality agreements, and innovative strategies” (226). As the collaborative effort continues, Crosby and colleagues (2010) explain the potential for second-order positive effects, which “might include new partnerships, coordination and joint action; joint learning that extends beyond the collaborative, implementation of agreements, changes in practices, and changes in perceptions” (226). With the passing of additional time, third-order positive effects might be experienced, to include “new collaborations; more co-evolution and less destructive conflict between partners; results on the ground, such as adaptations of services, resources, cities, and regions; new institutions; new norms and social heuristics for addressing public problems; and new modes of discourse (Lawrence et al., 2002)” (226). Similar findings were reported by Gray (2000), to include “achieving goals, generating social capital, creating shared meaning, increasing interaction, and shifting the power distribution” (Crosby, et al., 2010: 226). Although these findings do not relate to improved outcomes for service users, one can see the ways in which cross-sector leadership activities create the enabling conditions for activities that could be directly linked to service user outcomes.

Hernandez and Hodges (2003) caution the field against describing systems change efforts as failures when a direct link to changes in outcomes could not be demonstrated. They explain the following:

“Although the application of systems-of-care values and principles has been found to positively affect the structure, organization, and availability of services, it does not ensure that effective services and supports are provided

to individual children and their families. It may well be demonstrated in the future that child-level outcomes, when reported as a measure of the effectiveness of any particular system of care, reflect more upon the system's choices of available services and the quality of their implementation than upon the effectiveness of the system in achieving organizational-level outcomes." (22)

The authors go on to say, "[t]his lack of evidence should not be construed as a failure of systems of care but rather as providing the impetus for a better understanding of the mechanisms, structures, and processes involved with ultimately improving the lives of children with [serious emotional disturbances] and their families" (22). Their findings emphasize the need to transition leadership activities from the early work of convening stakeholders to address emergent concerns to the necessary, more directive work required when implementing an agreed upon change.

The findings across these studies highlight the complex set of system leadership activities that are required to move between adaptive and technical challenges so that improved outcomes from service users can be realized. Several frameworks and theories will be discussed in this review, in the section entitled, Systems Leadership Practice, which will provide a way to think about how systems leadership activities link to service user outcomes. For example, Complexity Leadership Theory, as described by Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007), provides a framework that incorporates the need for adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership, so that the work of adaptive leadership can be translated and implemented through new or existing structures to the benefit of service users.

Enabling and Inhibiting Conditions for Effective Systems Leadership

Conditions are described in different ways by different authors; however, this section will focus primarily on the work of Eoyang, Uhl-Bien and colleagues, Ansell and Gash, and Crosby and colleagues. After a brief description of each of the authors' perspectives, an analysis of the common themes is presented.

Eoyang (2012) presents three conditions that exist in complex adaptive systems and are seen as influencing the “speed, path, and direction of self-organization.” Based on her description, one can infer that these conditions could be seen as either enabling or inhibiting for effective systems leadership. Eoyang describes the three conditions as container, difference, and exchange.

The first condition is a container for self-organization. The container describes whatever may create a boundary for the work that draws people together to interact. Eoyang explains that “a container can be a bounding condition (fence), an attractive condition (magnet), or a combination of multiple mutual attractions (network)” (636).

The second condition that exists in complex adaptive systems references differences that influence the types of patterns that emerge. Eoyang provides two functions that difference serves in complex adaptive systems: “First, it articulates the pattern as it emerges. Second, it establishes the potential for change. At a given moment, in any given human system, at any given scale, an indeterminate number of differences articulates the systemic pattern and holds the potential of the system to change” (636).

The third condition is exchange or the connections between the parts of the system. For Eoyang, “[e]xchange includes any transfer of information, energy, force, signal, material, or anything else between or among agents. [Exchange] appears as flow from one part of the system to another, and it establishes relationships that are observed before, during, and after self-organizing processes in human systems” (636).

Smaller containers produce patterns more quickly than larger ones. Too many differences prevent patterns from becoming clear, but too few differences will prevent patterns from

emerging. Finally, closely connected exchanges produce stronger patterns than more-loosely coupled exchanges. With a careful assessment of these conditions, Eoyang suggests that one can influence the conditions to be more enabling of self-organization.

Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) present the concept of enabling leadership which fosters interaction, interdependency, and adaptive tension to encourage and coordinate interactions. These authors suggest that these enabling conditions “catalyse adaptive leadership.”

Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) describe interaction as the behaviour that *enabling leadership* promotes to catalyse the network. By fostering interaction, linkages are created throughout the network which supports information flow and further connection. The authors described *enabling leadership* as promoting “the general structure of complex networks and the conditions in which sophisticated networks can evolve” (309).

Interdependency, combined with interaction, creates the conditions under which people are more likely to act upon information. The power of interdependency emerges naturally from the “conflict constraints” of networks. The authors explain the emergence of conflict constraints as following:

Conflicting constraints manifest when the well-being of one agent is inversely dependent on the well-being of another, or when the information broadcasted by one agent is incompatible with that broadcasted by another agent. Such constraints pressure agents to adjust their actions and to elaborate their information (309).

The authors explain that enabling leaders are able to promote interdependency through the strategic use of rules “that apply pressure to coordinate (Eisenhardt, 1989; McKelvey et al., 2003)” (310).

Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) view tension as the condition that creates a sense of urgency “to act and to elaborate strategy, information, and adaptability” (311). Tension can be fostered through the development of an atmosphere in which there is respect for diversity and a tolerance of divergent perspectives on problems.

For Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007), attention to these conditions, which they consider the work of enabling leadership, can be used to support the efforts of what they refer to as adaptive leadership.

Another perspective on enabling and inhibiting conditions can be drawn from the work of Ansell and Gash. Based on their review of 137 cases of collaborative governance as an approach to policy making and public management, Ansell and Gash (2008) described three starting conditions that influence the success of collaborative efforts: power/resource imbalance, incentives to participate, and prehistory of antagonism and cooperation. These authors draw the following conclusions about each of the starting conditions:

POWER/RESOURCE IMBALANCES:

If there are significant power/resource imbalances between stakeholders, such that important stakeholders cannot participate in a meaningful way, then effective collaborative governance requires a commitment to a positive strategy of empowerment and representation of weaker or disadvantaged stakeholders (551 – 552).

INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE:

If alternative venues exist where stakeholders can pursue their goals unilaterally, then collaborative governance will only work if stakeholders perceive themselves to be highly interdependent (553).

If interdependence is conditional upon the collaborative forum being an exclusive venue, then sponsors must be willing to do the advance work of getting alternative forums (courts, legislators, and executives) to respect and honor the outcomes of collaborative processes (553).

PRE-HISTORY OF ANTAGONISM AND COOPERATION:

If there is a prehistory of antagonism among stakeholders, then collaborative governance is unlikely to succeed unless (a) there is a high degree of interdependence among the stakeholders or (b) positive steps are taken to remediate the low levels of trust and social capital among the stakeholders (553-554).

The starting conditions, referenced by Ansell and Gash (2008) as a part of their *Model of Collaborative Governance*, are understood to influence (enable or inhibit) the development of the collaborative process.

Crosby and colleagues (2010) describe initial conditions in their framework for understanding leadership and the creation of cross-sector collaborations: turbulence and institutional and competitive forces within the general environment, sector failure, and a short list of significant direct antecedents. These initial conditions directly influence the development of two other critical aspects described in their framework: processes and practices and structure and governance (216). Crosby and colleagues summarize the influence of the initial conditions in the first three (of 24) propositions that explicate their framework for understanding leadership and the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations:

Proposition 1. Like all inter-organizational relationships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to form in turbulent environments. Leaders will have more success at launching these collaborations when they take advantage of opportunities opened up by driving forces (including helping create or favorably altering them), while remaining attuned to constraining forces (218).

Proposition 2. Leaders are most likely to try cross-sector collaboration if they believe that separate efforts by several sectors to address a public problem have failed and the actual failures cannot be fixed by a separate sector alone (218).

Proposition 3. Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when one or more linking mechanisms, such as powerful sponsors and champions, general agreement on the problem, or existing networks are in place at the time of their initial formation (219).

These authors emphasize the importance of attending to the contextual conditions, enabling and inhibiting, as the work begins and continues.

Based on this review, the various views of enabling and inhibiting conditions are significantly aligned. The concept of a container from Eoyang, and her description of the effects of how a system is bounded align with Uhl-Bien and colleagues' condition related to

interdependency. In addition, the incentive to participate, as described by Ansell and Gash, as well as Crosby and colleagues' initial condition of turbulence, institutional and competitive forces, and sector failure support the importance of this initial condition. Based on these perspectives, a systems leadership question, such as the following, could be asked to uncover enabling or inhibiting conditions: *What system dynamics or connections encourage interaction?*

In addition, Eoyang and Uhl-Bien and colleagues present the necessity of the flow of information and interaction between system parts. Eoyang calls this condition, exchange, while Uhl-Bien and colleagues uses the term, interaction. In this same vein, Crosby and Bryson discuss direct antecedents, such as the critical role of initiators, sponsors, and champions and existing relationships or systems. The system leadership question for this enabling or inhibiting conditions could be as follows: *What is the strength of the network connections to allow for the development of relationships which will support and sustain the change process?*

Both Eoyang and Uhl-Bien and colleagues address the issue of diversity in the system in their discussion on enabling conditions. Eoyang discusses "difference," while Uhl-Bien and colleague discuss "adaptive tension." Further, Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) reference McKelvey & Boisot (2003) when presenting their Law of Requisite Complexity, an adaptation of the concept of requisite variety, which aligns well with this condition:

It takes complexity to defeat complexity—a system must possess complexity equal to that of its environment in order to function effectively. Requisite complexity enhances a system's capacity to search for solutions to challenges and to innovate because it releases the capacity of a neural network of agents in pursuit of such optimization. That is, it optimizes a system's capacity for learning, creativity, and adaptability (301).

These authors highlight the necessity of diversity within the system while acknowledging the potential challenges: *To what extent is there sufficient diversity to address the complexity of the identified challenge?*

Uhl-Bien and colleagues present "pre-history of antagonism and cooperation" as a enabling or inhibiting condition. Similarly, various other authors, including Crosby and Bryson

(2005, 2010), Ferreira and colleagues (2007), Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007), Ansell and Gash (2008), and Johnston and colleagues (2012) describe the importance of the role of trust in supporting groups to work together in new ways. One aspect of historical conditions of agents in the system is related to access to power and resources. Ansell and Gash present “power/resource imbalances” as a starting condition that influences collaborative efforts. Previous experiences, positive and negative, create a powerful enabling or inhibiting condition for complex change efforts: *What historical conditions, recent and in the past, influence interaction dynamics in the system?*

In summary, based on the themes from Eoyang, Uhl-Bien and colleagues, Ansell and Gash, and Crosby and colleagues, the following questions allow for an initial analysis of key aspects of the current enabling or inhibiting conditions within a system:

- *What system dynamics or connections encourage interaction?*
- *What is the strength of the network connections to allow for the development of relationships which will support and sustain the change process?*
- *To what extent is there sufficient diversity to address the complexity of the identified challenge?*
- *What historical conditions, recent and in the past, influence interaction dynamics in the system?*

Systems Leadership in Practice

The practice of systems leadership can be extrapolated from the descriptions of the key activities of those engaged in complex system change efforts. A number of frameworks or approaches to complex systems change will be described briefly, prior to highlighting the themes across the models. To begin, the following five frameworks or models will be described:

- A Framework for Conceptualizing Systems Change
- Framework for Leadership for the Common Good
- Framework for understanding leadership and the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations
- Contingency Model
- Behaviours for the Leadership of Emergence

A Framework for Conceptualizing Systems Change

In their framework for “conceptualizing systems change,” Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) draw upon various systems theories to provide guidance for “the assessment of system functioning and to identify potential levers for change” (200). Based on their review of the system change literature and informed by their direct experience with community change efforts, the authors identify the essential components involved in transformative systems change work. These components describe aspects of systems change work that could be translated into system leadership behaviours or capacities: bounding the system, understanding fundamental system parts as potential root causes, assessing system interactions, identifying levers for change (see Table 1).

In addition, Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) emphasize the importance of engaging stakeholders in processes that allow for the exploration of various and often unaligned perspectives, as this “can serve to create transformative shifts in stakeholders’ understandings of the problems” (201). Furthermore, the authors explain that insufficient attention is often given to understanding the deep, underlying causes of current system

Table 1. Essential components of transformative system change

BOUNDING THE SYSTEM	UNDERSTANDING FUNDAMENTAL SYSTEM PARTS AS POTENTIAL ROOT CAUSES	ASSESSING SYSTEM INTERACTIONS	IDENTIFYING LEVERS FOR CHANGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Problem definition ➤ Identification of the levels, niches, organizations, and actors relevant to the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ System norms ➤ System resources ➤ System regulations ➤ System operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reinforcing and balancing interdependencies ➤ System feedback and self-regulation ➤ Interaction delays 	<p><u>Identifying Parts to Leverage for Change</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Exerts or could exert cross-level behavior ➤ Directs system behavior ➤ Feasible to change <p><u>Identifying Interactions and Patterns to Leverage for Change</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ System differences that create niches compatible with system change goals ➤ Long standing patterns that hinder change goals ➤ Gaps in system feedback mechanisms ➤ Cross-level/sector connections that are needed

(from Foster-Fishman, P. G., Nowell, B., & Yang, H. (2007), Figure 3, page 202)

behaviours prior to the identification of solutions. If the goal is to alter the status quo, a deeper analysis of system behaviour is necessary. With a deeper understanding of the system, stakeholders are more able to identify leverage points in the system. Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) provide guiding, “diagnostic” questions to assist with the analysis they describe.

Framework for Leadership for the Common Good

Crosby and Bryson (2005) developed their framework for “leadership for the common good” for the purpose of providing direction to people who seek to address complex, systems issues. Their framework draws upon the research on leadership, and they illustrate the use of their framework through case examples. The framework acknowledges “multiple levels of action” (185) and the various critical leadership capabilities. The authors describe the four components of the framework as follows:

- Attention to the dynamics of a shared-power world

- The wise design and use of forums, arenas and courts, the main settings in which leaders and constituents foster policy change in a shared-power world
- Effective navigation of the policy change cycle
- The exercise of leadership capabilities (Crosby and Bryson, 2005: 182 – 3).

Highlighting the diversity of critical leadership activities, Crosby and Bryson (2005) describe the eight main leadership capabilities as follows:

- Leadership in context – understanding the social, political, economic and technological ‘givens’; understanding when a situation is ripe for successful change
- Personal leadership – understanding self and others.
- Team leadership – building productive work groups.
- Organizational leadership – nurturing humane and effective organizations.
- Visionary leadership – creating and communicating shared meaning in forums.
- Political leadership – making and implementing decisions in legislative, executive and administrative arenas.
- Ethical leadership – adjudicating disputes and sanctioning conduct in courts.
- Policy entrepreneurship – coordinating leadership tasks over the course of policy change cycles (187 - 188).

The authors acknowledge that there is an insufficient research base to describe *best practices* for leadership in “shared-power, cross-sector” initiatives, however, they suggest that the framework for “leadership for the common good” provides a set of constructs that may be informative to future research efforts on this topic.

Framework for understanding leadership and the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations

Crosby and colleagues (2010) revised their earlier framework to emphasize the role of what they call *integrative leadership* in the “creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations that advance the common good” (212). They explain this revision as follows:

The revised framework draws attention to crucial leadership work related to bridging processes and structures, including: bridging roles and boundary spanning activities (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004), the creation of

boundary experiences and boundary groups and organizations (Feldman, Khademian, Ingram, & Schneider, 2006), boundary object creation and use (Carlile, 2002, 2004; Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006), and the development of nascent or proto-institutions (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002) (212).

The framework is comprised of five parts, as shown in Figure 1, which are then explained through 24 propositions. The five parts of the framework are listed below:

- Initial conditions
- Processes and practices
- Structure and governance
- Contingency and constraints
- Outcomes and accountabilities (216)

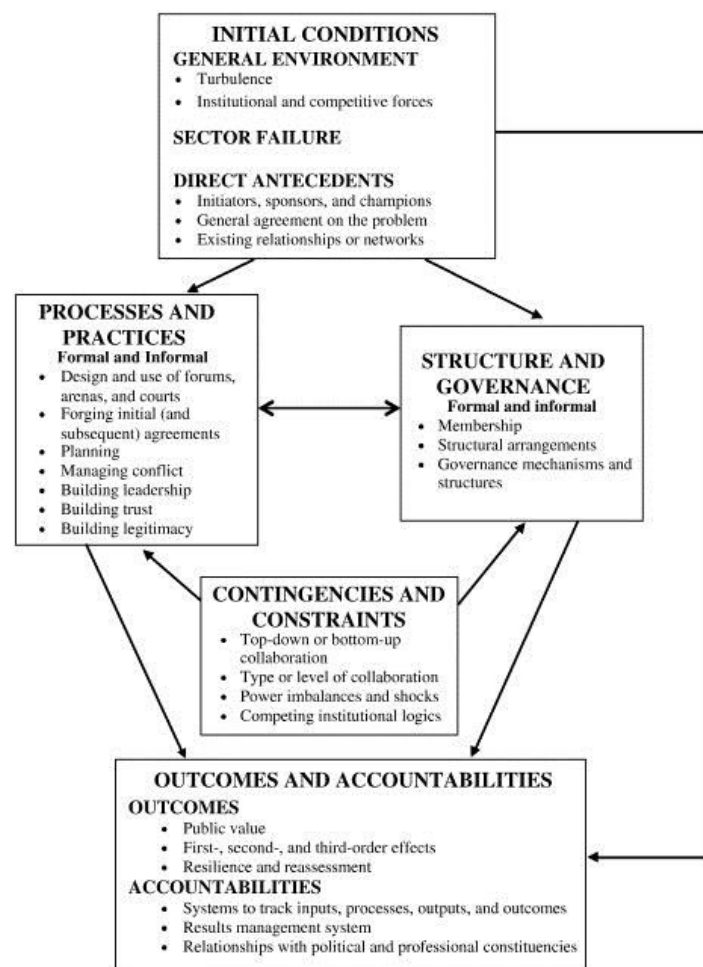


Figure 1. A framework for understanding leadership and the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations (adapted from Bryson et al., 2006, p. 45) (Crosby and Bryson, 2010: 217)

As seen in Figure 1, Crosby and colleagues (2010) illustrate their view that initial conditions directly impact processes and practices, as well as structure and governance, and these two parts of the framework are understood to be interconnected. In addition, contingencies and constraints are understood to interact directly with processes and practices and structure and governance. The authors also theorize that initial conditions have a direct effect on outcomes and accountabilities, along with processes and practices and structure and governance. With their interest in further understanding the role of integrative leadership, it follows that the parts of the framework may provide insights into system leadership behaviours or capacities.

Contingency Model

Ansell and Gash (2008) developed the Contingency Model based on their meta-analysis of over a hundred case examples of collaborative efforts. Their model identifies “the contingent conditions that facilitate or discourage successful collaboration” (Ansell and (561). The model is comprised of five contingencies:

- Starting conditions (power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, incentive for and constraints on participation, and pre-history of cooperation or conflict)
- Facilitative leadership (including empowerment)
- Institutional design (participatory inclusiveness, forum exclusiveness, clear group rules, process transparency)
- Collaborative Process
 - Face-to-face dialogue (good faith negotiation)
 - Trust-building
 - Commitment to Process
 - Mutual recognition of interdependence
 - Shared ownership of process
 - Openness to exploring mutual gains
 - Shared understanding
 - Clear mission
 - Common problem definition
 - Identification of common values
 - Intermediate Outcomes

- Small Wins
- Strategic Plans
- Joint-Fact-Finding
- Process outcomes (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 550)

The full model is shown in Figure 2. The authors describe the “virtuous cycle of collaboration [that] tends to develop when collaborative forums focus on “small wins” that deepen trust, commitment, and shared understanding” (543). Again, the elements and insights from this cross-sector change model may inform a deeper understanding of critical system leadership behaviours or capacities.

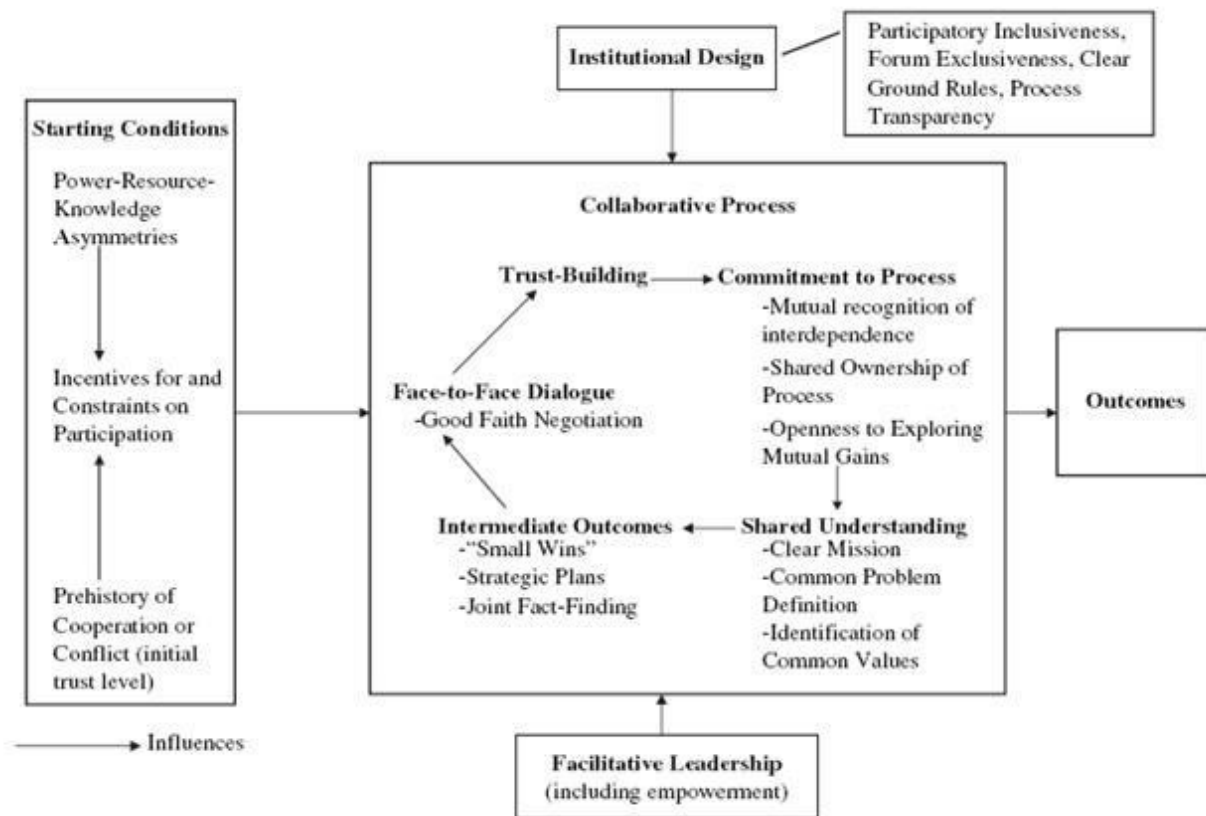


Figure 2. A Model of Collaborative Governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008: 550)

Behaviours for the Leadership of Emergence

Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) analysed three empirical studies that document “emergence in distinct contexts” (617). Based on their review, they developed a set of nine

leadership behaviors to generate emergence. The leadership behaviors fall into the four categories below, as shown in Figure 3:

- Disrupt Existing Patterns
 - Embrace Uncertainty
 - Surface Conflict and Create Controversy
- Encourage Novelty
 - Allow experiments in fluctuations
 - Encourage rich interactions in a ‘relational space’
 - Support collective action(s)
- Sensemaking and sensegiving
 - Create correlation through language and symbols
 - Recombine resources
 - Leaders accept ‘tags’
- Leadership for stabilizing feedback
 - Integrate local constraints

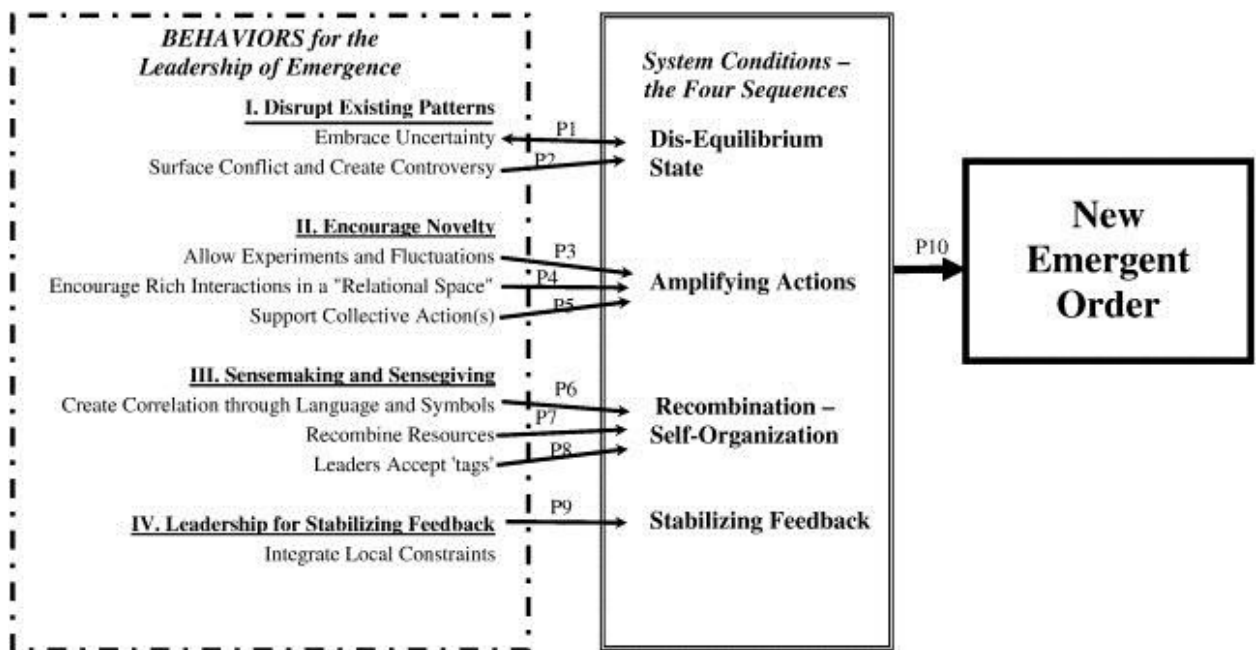


Figure 3. Behaviors that co-generate the conditions for new emergent order (621)

Through the intentional engagement in these leadership activities, change agents can create four critical system conditions: dis-equilibrium state, amplifying actions, recombination/self-organization, and stabilizing feedback, which these authors assert will lead to a “new emergent order.”

To explain their meso-model of leadership, Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) provide the following ten propositions:

Proposition 1: The more that leaders and members embrace uncertainty, the more likely that a Dis-equilibrium state will be initiated and/or heightened in the system.

Proposition 2: Once a system is pushed to a Dis-equilibrium state, the more that its leaders and members surface conflict and create controversy, the more likely that the system will generate novel opportunities and solutions.

Proposition 3: The more that leaders and members allow experiments and fluctuations, the more likely that Amplifying Actions will be present in the system.

Proposition 4: The more that leaders and members encourage rich interactions, the more likely that Amplifying Actions will be present in the system.

Proposition 5: The more that leaders and members support collective action, the more likely that Amplifying Actions will be present in the system.

Proposition 6: The more that leaders and members create correlation through language and through symbols, the more likely that Recombination /“Self-organization” will be initiated and expanded in the system.

Proposition 7: The more that leaders and members recombine resources, the more likely that Self-organization will be supported throughout the system.

Proposition 8: When one or a few individuals accept the role of “tag” as a symbol for an emergence process, there is a higher likelihood that Recombination/“Self-organization” will be increased in the system.

Proposition 9: The more that leaders and members integrate local constraints, the more likely that newly emergent order will be stabilized in the system.

Proposition 10: The combination of the four sequences—Dis-equilibrium state, Amplifying Actions, Recombination/“Self-organization” and Stabilizing Feedback—are necessary (but not necessarily sufficient) conditions for the generation of Newly Emergent Order (622 - 626).

These authors have attempted to outline leadership behaviors that reflect a developing perspective that “emergence can lead systems and that leaders can foster emergence” (628). This perspective aligns well with this study’s definition of systems leadership.

In addition to the five frameworks or models described above, six additional “sets of guidance” will be presented. These findings, as well, reinforce aspects described in the frameworks above and highlight key systems leadership practices.

Five Conditions for Collective Impact

The research of Kania and Kramer (2011) suggests that successful complex initiatives reflect “five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results

- a common agenda
- shared measurement systems
- mutually reinforcing activities
- continuous communication
- backbone support organizations” (39).

Five Operating Principles for Systems Change

Behrens and Foster-Fishman (2007) present five operating principles for Systems Change based on case examples and direct system change experiences:

- 1) Clarify the purpose of the systems change
- 2) Identify whether the intervention is an effort to change an existing, well-defined system, or an effort to create a new system out of currently disorganized parts
- 3) Conceptualize interventions as systems change at the beginning
- 4) Use an eclectic approach to systems change work

- 5) System change agents need to be open to opportunities that present themselves, while also undertaking a formal analytic process in order to maximize the power of these emergent leverage points (414).

Four Common Themes of Successful Leadership to Support the Development of System of Care

In their analysis of successful leadership to support the development of a system of care, Ferreira and colleagues (2007) discovered four common themes:

1. Build leadership on the vision and mission of the system.
2. Build structures to sustain the vision and mission.
3. Provide autonomy and resources to solve problems and make decisions at all levels of the system.
4. Develop leaders from within the system (1).

Conceptual Model of Systems Change

Hodges and colleagues (2012) summarize the six major findings from their qualitative study of successful systems of care sites:

1. Create an early and consistent focus on values and beliefs.
2. Translate shared beliefs into shared responsibility and shared action.
3. Recognize that opportunities for action related to systems change are not linear.
4. Know that being concrete does not mean being static.
5. Structural change, without a solid anchor in values and beliefs, rarely has the sustained positive impact that [system of care] implementers seek.
6. The system emerges from the individual choices and actions of stakeholders throughout the system (527).

Four Key Practices of Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz and colleagues (2004) suggest that exercising adaptive leadership requires four key practices:

- mobilizing people and focusing attention
- generating and maintaining productive distress
- framing the issues to “encourage shifts in mind”
- mediating conflicts (30).

From this perspective, systems leadership involves creating and sustaining “the conditions through which stakeholders take responsibilities for tackling tough problems and generating answers that are better adapted to the politics, culture, and history of their situation” (23).

Competencies for Civic Leadership

O’Malley (2009) outlined four key “competencies for civic leadership”:

- **Diagnose situation.** “If you are trying to intervene to help your community make progress on a tough issue, it is critical that you understand what you are intervening into” (8).
- **Manage self.** “Exercising effective civic leadership requires artfully deploying yourself. And artfully deploying yourself requires knowing yourself well enough to make conscious choices” (10).
- **Intervene skillfully.** “Leadership is about change. And the catalyst for change is often an intentional, well designed intervention. . . . Citizens who exercise civic leadership are intentional about when, why and how they intervene in a civic system or organization” (13).
- **Energize others.** “No one individual or entity can tackle a daunting civic challenge on their own. Leadership on these challenges must involve energizing more people to take up the difficult work of civic leadership” (14).

Based on this overview, one can observe common themes across models, frameworks, and other guidance that may inform the development of an emerging set of key system leadership practices.

“Lessons Learned” from Systems Leaders

Systems Leadership Interview Participants

Complex human service system change efforts were identified, such as Systems of Care, Communities that Care, and early childhood system building. Individuals associated with these efforts were then contacted about this research opportunity, via email (see below).

The Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation, working with Cass Business School at City University London, has been commissioned to undertake a research study and implementation development work on the topic of leadership across human service systems. In this work, we are describing Systems Leadership as "leadership across organizational and geopolitical boundaries, beyond individual professional disciplines, within a range of organizational and stakeholder cultures, and often without direct managerial control."

As a part of this work, I have been asked to produce a small number of miniature case studies or short accounts of examples of approaches to systems leadership taken by specific leaders and their partners illustrating key challenges and how these have been tackled, and key ‘success’ stories that illuminate ‘what works’ in systems leadership. We are hoping to contact leaders via email to arrange for a phone interview in February, 2013.

We are very interested in interviewing you [or someone you would recommend] as an effective “systems leader” from [name of initiative]. ***Would you be willing to participate?*** [If the best candidate to participate was not known the question was: ***Would you be able to make a recommendation?***]

Interview protocol

Listening for key challenges and the approach taken to address those challenges, as well as illustrations of “what works” in systems leadership, the following questions were available to guide the conversation:

Tell me about the [systems change initiative] in which you have been engaged?

Based on your experience, tell me about how you *think* about the concept of leadership to support complex systems change?

If you were to describe the “outcomes” of effective leadership, in the context of a complex, systems change process, what would you say they are?

What conditions need to be in place for leadership to be able to support a complex change process? What conditions interfere with the ability of leadership to support complex change?

What are the essential practices for systems leaders?

How can the capacity of leaders be intentionally developed?

Leadership Scenario #1: Smart Start (Early Childhood System Building)

Background:

As described by the Center for Law and Social Policy:

Smart Start is a public-private birth-to-five initiative to expand and improve early childhood services for children and their families. Smart Start began in 1993, when [North Carolina] Governor Jim Hunt convened a group of experts to design an initiative that would enable communities to improve outcomes for low-income children. Experts recommended developing a system that allowed local decision making regarding new investments.

(http://www.clasp.org/resources_and_publications/publication?id=0541&list=publications_states)

As described by Karen Ponder in North Carolina's Smart Start: Implications for Public Policy:

Smart Start is a state-local early childhood initiative serving North Carolina children under the age of six and their families. Established by the governor and state legislature in 1993, Smart Start has the goal of ensuring that all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. A total of 81 local partnerships covering all 100 North Carolina counties have focused their attention and funds on three major areas: child care and education, family support programs, and health services. Several specific needs are addressed within each of the three categories.

Child Care and Education includes child care subsidies; higher quality and availability of child care; service to children with special needs; and teacher education, compensation, and support.

Family Support Programs include child care resource and referral; family resource centers; literacy programs; transportation; parent education; and support for teen parents.

Health Services include health care access; health screenings; parent education; immunizations; and dental care.

Collaboration and local planning are basic principles of Smart Start. Each local partnership board—comprised of community leaders, child care providers, parents, teachers, human service professionals, religious leaders, and business people—works together to plan and fund programs that best meet the needs of their local community.

(http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/s_wifis17c05.pdf)

Interview Highlights:

Karen Ponder – Early Childhood Consultant and Former President of Smart Start

February 22, 2013

A few individuals in leadership positions had a vision for a statewide early childhood system for North Carolina through which young children’s needs would be met so that they would succeed when they entered school. The challenge was to create a system that met individual and collective needs.

In this case, there was a widely shared goal; however, for the goal to be achieved, different people (local champions and local stakeholders) needed to be engaged to help different people (local early childhood providers and community members) in different ways. Local stakeholders needed to advocate for the shared (political) agenda; neighbors needed to know enough to help families in their neighborhoods to get their children connected.

Ponder provided the following insights about key leadership activities needed to accomplish the early childhood system building goals:

Build and nurture relationships: Because Smart Start was developed to support but not to direct local early childhood partnerships, the work had to be focused on relationship development. Part of the role of leadership is to be involved in continuously engaging critical partners, seeking out their advice, and including them in the discussion. As relationships are established, a formal mechanism for communicating and “staying connected” becomes important, especially during times of transition. Along the way, old “wounds” will surface. Ponder suggested, “Don’t address the past pain, but build structures to get around it.” Leaders need to make decisions for what is right, not for who will be mad.

Based on Ponders' experience, interpersonal conflicts were based on misunderstandings about half of the time.

In addition, "leading by example" helps to maintain relationship. Ponder emphasized that one must consistently interact with others (individuals and organizations) in the way you would want them to interact with you. She provided the following advice: "Behave and speak to others the same in public and private; trust is built by being true to your word." When the political environment is difficult, systems leaders must come together with a single message, so as not to confuse. In addition, with any success, recognize the contribution of all and share the credit. Ponder asserted, however, "relationships are not enough; building relationships must lead to action."

Analyze the System: Ponder emphasized the importance of understanding the current system before deciding on the change. To fully understand the system, it is important to seek out multiple perspectives at multiple levels. For instance, how does state policy impact the community? Listen for and attempt to understand any power imbalance in the system. It is also important to understand previous efforts and successes to improve the system. Whenever possible, build on previous successes; this may produce a "quick win." Ponder underscored the need to keep an open mind and to learn from everyone.

The development of a shared vision supports system change: Creating alignment across sectors related to shared goals and a commitment to use funding to maximize progress towards the agreed upon goals is challenging. The work of creating a shared vision and aligning goals across the system may begin informally, but there are benefits to developing "memoranda of understanding" between early childhood agencies. In addition, it is important to commit to standing "together in public" and working in private to resolve disagreements. Variations in knowledge, skills, and disposition towards the desired change, at both local and the state level, inhibit progress.

Develop shared measures to monitor progress: Shared activities without shared goals do not allow the community to be able to answer the question, "Are the children getting better?" However, establishing shared measures is very difficult because there are diverse perspectives related to how the measures should be determined. When creating shared

measures, it is critical that there is a deep understanding of what are the critical indicators and outcomes for a particular population of concern. A commitment to specific outcomes for children and families can still allow for local flexibility related to how those outcomes are achieved. In addition, a commitment to outcomes for children and families provides a strong rationale for engaging in continuous assessment of what has been achieved and planning for what is next. Ponder stated, “never be satisfied with the status quo.”

Leadership involves clarifying the direction and moving the process forward, even when the decisions are unpopular.

Define roles and responsibilities: Everyone must understand the role they play in the change effort; community members must know that they have a role to play. As roles and responsibilities are clarified, leadership behaviors are distributed throughout the system. Strong local leaders learned the benefits of training community members on the importance of quality programs for young children; if community members understand the issues and their roles, they are able to participate in creating a better system of supports for young children. To encourage involvement, create incentives to participate. In addition, there is no reason to bring someone to the table if they cannot see their vested interest; it is important to explain the benefit to them: “what is in it for me?”

Leadership Scenario #2: Children's Mental Health Systems of Care

Background:

As described by Stroul, Blau, and Friedman (2010):

A system of care is a spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children and youth with or at risk for mental health or other challenges and their families, that is organized into a coordinated network, builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth, and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs, in order to help them to function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

Systems of care are:

- Family driven and youth guided, with the strengths and needs of the child and family determining the types and mix of services and supports provided.
- Community based, with the locus of services as well as system management resting within a supportive, adaptive infrastructure of structures, processes, and relationships at the community level.
- Culturally and linguistically competent, with agencies, programs, and services that reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences of the populations they serve to facilitate access to and utilization of appropriate services and supports and to eliminate disparities in care.

Systems of care are designed to:

1. Ensure availability and access to a broad, flexible array of effective, community-based services and supports for children and their families that address their emotional, social, educational, and physical needs, including traditional and nontraditional services as well as natural and informal supports.
2. Provide individualized services in accordance with the unique potentials and needs of each child and family, guided by a strengths-based, wraparound service planning process and an individualized service plan developed in true partnership with the child and family.
3. Ensure that services and supports include evidence-informed and promising practices, as well as interventions supported by practice-based

- evidence, to ensure the effectiveness of services and improve outcomes for children and their families.
4. Deliver services and supports within the least restrictive, most normative environments that are clinically appropriate.
 5. Ensure that families, other caregivers, and youth are full partners in all aspects of the planning and delivery of their own services and in the policies and procedures that govern care for all children and youth in their community, state, territory, tribe, and nation.
 6. Ensure that services are integrated at the system level, with linkages between child-serving agencies and programs across administrative and funding boundaries and mechanisms for system-level management, coordination, and integrated care management.
 7. Provide care management or similar mechanisms at the practice level to ensure that multiple services are delivered in a coordinated and therapeutic manner and that children and their families can move through the system of services in accordance with their changing needs.
 8. Provide developmentally appropriate mental health services and supports that promote optimal social-emotional outcomes for young children and their families in their homes and community settings.
 9. Provide developmentally appropriate services and supports to facilitate the transition of youth to adulthood and to the adult service system as needed.
 10. Incorporate or link with mental health promotion, prevention, and early identification and intervention in order to improve long-term outcomes, including mechanisms to identify problems at an earlier stage and mental health promotion and prevention activities directed at all children and adolescents.
 11. Incorporate continuous accountability and quality improvement mechanisms to track, monitor, and manage the achievement of system of care goals; fidelity to the system of care philosophy; and quality, effectiveness, and outcomes at the system level, practice level, and child and family level.
 12. Protect the rights of children and families and promote effective advocacy efforts.
 13. Provide services and supports without regard to race, religion, national origin, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical disability, socio-economic status, geography, language, immigration status, or other characteristics, and ensure that services are sensitive and responsive to these differences.

Interview Highlights:

Myra Alfreds - retired Director of Children's Mental Health Services at the Westchester County, Department of Community Mental Health

Carol Hardesty - Executive Director at Family Ties of Westchester

Michael Orth – Deputy Commissioner in the Westchester County Dept. of Community Mental Health and oversees the Coordinated Children’s Services Initiative

February 27, 2013

Before there was ever a mention of “systems of care,” a problem had been identified in New York that was described in a critical New York State report issued by Senator Nick Spano.

[The report,] "Pay Now or Pay Later," was written by a state senator who held hearings across the state. It was the first written document describing the fragmented children's system and highlighting that children with the most serious mental health needs were being served by other systems, such as education, social services, and juvenile justice. Based on these findings, the Community Mental Health agency was instructed to look at the needs of children *across systems* (Alfreds, personal communication).

Alfreds referenced the impact of Jane Knitzer’s seminal work, *Unclaimed Children: The Failure of Public Responsibility to Children in Need of Mental Health Services*, which influenced the U.S. Federal government to provide funding to states and communities to support “coordinated, collaborative, community-based children's systems (System of Care)” (Alfreds, personal communication).

Alfreds, who was tasked with developing the data system, became interested in more than data collection and analysis but in understanding and addressing the mental health needs of children in this community. Quickly a small group of committed leaders, Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth, none of whom came from community mental health, began working to establish community networks to support families and to meet the needs of children. Although this original core came from various child and family serving systems, they shared a commitment to community building with families as full partners.

In the beginning, their work together was not “officially” sanctioned and ongoing meetings were discouraged. This commitment to working together as a community for children and families began to be noticed as different, recognized as beneficial, and to grow in numbers. Alfreds explained that they attempted to work without calling attention to their effort, “until we received state and county awards for our work and ultimately, a 6 year federal [Systems of Care] grant and [a Technical Assistance] contract to serve as a Host Learning Community for other grantees” (Alfreds, personal communication).

Alfreds provided the following narrative of how the work began:

[Alfreds] was tasked with developing a registry, to count children with [Serious Emotional Disturbance] in each system. Of course, it was an impossible task, with little money. While other communities in the state struggled with a registry, we decided to “quietly” expand our community efforts, to develop community-based Networks so that the local system would work in a more coordinated, collaborative way. This structure has continued in our county and remains at the heart of local collaboration and planning. There are nine community Networks and a parallel structure with providers and parents in our Early Childhood System of Care. Also, in the late 1980s, we discovered that parents of youth with serious emotional problems were coming together to support one another. We were wise enough to support this work and develop community-based resource centers to provide more access to parents and youth. Ultimately, our family movement led to one of the strongest independent family organizations in the country, Family Ties of Westchester (Alfreds, personal communication).

Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth provided the following insights about key leadership activities needed to accomplish the community’s goals related to families and children:

Leadership is a *shared process*: For shared leadership to be effective, it is essential that there is clarity about the core beliefs, goals, and values of the effort. For any system, the current ideas drive the way the system functions. For the system to begin to function differently, these underlying ideas and beliefs must change. An articulated theory of change is also beneficial when addressing challenges, and it can make transparent a commitment to a shared leadership approach. For example, as problems were discovered, committees were created. These committees would then make proposals to the

appropriate governing body, so that funding could be sought. Alfred stated: “the work of the committees led to new funding, but even more importantly, the committees are part of a sustainable structure in the county that effects policy, planning, training, and program design that crosses all systems.” Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth noted that is easier for individuals to demonstrate leadership when the hierarchy is as flat as possible.

Commitment to core values: Shared leadership was developed through a continuous commitment to clarifying and embedding the core values of the work at each level of the system and within each committee; these leaders explained that everyone engaged in the community networks knows the values that drive the work. Alfred credited both Hardesty and Orth “for insisting that the work be principle and value-based, and that it is driven by the children and families, and communities we serve”. Furthermore, the development of a *theory of change*, which incorporates multiple perspectives, assists in clarifying core beliefs, goals, and values. This process, as with every other process, must be informed by the system beneficiaries or users; in this work, it is acknowledged that families and communities are the experts on their needs, so listening to their perspectives is essential. Alfreds credited Orth as ensuring that “Community is at the heart [of the work], along with parent/youth engagement/involvement and exploring all opportunities to infuse system of care thinking/practices into improving the system.” The family movement and the development of an independent family organization ensure that families are integrated into every aspect of the system. The importance of shared core values requires continuous attention; as new individuals are welcomed into the system, they must be oriented to the values.

Seeing and making connections: A key leadership role involves creating connections, between individuals, organizations, and initiatives. At the heart of their change approach was the development of community networks to support families and children. In addition, these individuals created the right connections to solve problems, which might involve connecting with a county commissioner or creating a new subcommittee to address an emerging issue.

As with many system change efforts, some of the most important connections are with individuals who are not yet “on board” with the change effort. These leaders discussed their strategy of “sneaking ahead” of key stakeholders who were not supporting the work by engaging them “as if” they were supporters of the work and “as if” they shared the commitment to the core values.

In addition, to accomplish this type of system change required actively expanding the view of each part of the system (which viewed itself as the whole system) to see the importance of connecting to other parts of the system to create a more effective and sustainable system. Positive, shared experiences strengthen connections and creates resources to support future efforts.

Using data for decision-making: Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth stated that effective leadership asks the questions, assesses the data, and attempts to determine what the problem is. Most recently, their work has expanded to include disparities related to race and the integration of trauma-informed strategies.

Strategic analysis, politically savvy, and transparency:

Leadership involves both the courage to change and sufficient insight to know how to negotiate the political environment. Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth benefited from their deep understanding of various parts of the system, based on their collective knowledge. Their history and status in the community assisted them in developing county leadership support. Alfreds shared the following comments:

There were many challenges along the way and lack of belief in what we were doing. Our strength was always in the parents, youth and community, as well as our positive relationships in other systems ([due to our] deep roots in other system). We believed in what we were doing, and I think we could always communicate this belief and commitment. And eventually, the data proved us right (Alfreds, personal communication).

In addition, they were interested in determining, “Who else needs to be at the table? Who can support the identified need or idea?” Then they actively engaged partners and invited key stakeholders to sit on the leadership team and attend weekly meetings. It was noted

that what occurred prior to the first meeting is important. To engage partners, it is necessary to understand the person's current perspective and current efforts and expand from there. As they included new partners and accomplished key goals, they intentional gave the credit away. These leaders began by acknowledging past accomplishments before discussing next steps for improvement.

Coordinating the process: Alfreds, Hardesty, and Orth recognize the importance of structures and processes to support the change effort. Good communication and the development of an internal language are beneficial. In addition, the leadership and coordinating role of the Coordinated Children's Services Initiative (CCSI) Advisory Committee is essential to guiding the work. However, the following description of the work of the sub-committees clarifies what is involved in making deep, systemic change:

[Sub-committees] were developed as a result of parents and professionals bringing critical issues directly to the Advisory Committee. [Alfreds explained that they] would start with a short study and data to determine need and then a broad search to determine state of the art responses in the nation and elsewhere, then create policy, practice, and training with leadership from the sub-committees (Alfreds, personal communication).

Alfreds provided the following description of the work of some of the subcommittees that support this system change effort and their responsibilities:

All committees are responsible for the following:

1. Coordination and collaboration in specific area of expertise across all systems;
2. Reaching out to new partners to engage them in the philosophy and values of "system of care;"
3. Researching and assessing new theories and "best practice" to enhance and expand system of care work;
4. Creating and delivering cross system training to develop and enhance skills and abilities for workforce development;
5. Developing and re-aligning programs, practices, and approaches to meet needs across systems;
6. Recommending changes in policy and practice to support system change when needed.

Examples from current sub-committees:

Early childhood: Using a system of care structure and design, the Early Childhood Sub-Committee has developed an all-inclusive, county-wide response to young children and families at highest need. More than 50 agencies and programs support young children and families and coordinate their work with families on daily basis across all systems.

Juveniles with fire-setting behaviors: Psychologists from hospitals, residential treatment centers, juvenile detention facilities, mental health clinics, schools, etc. are trained in fire-setting risk assessment and treatment and participate in individualized family Networks to maintain children safely in their homes, schools and communities. This is paired with a community response in conjunction with case managers and fire fighters.

Youth with sexually problematic behaviors: The original committee recommended new requirements that were incorporated by DSS into contracts with residential treatment centers serving Westchester children.

Similarly, the following committees operate with all of the same guidelines and have some additionally noted activities:

Children with co-occurring mental health and developmental disabilities: The work of this sub-committee led to development of new program for parents with co-occurring disabilities.

High Risk Adoption: This sub-committee coordinated response across all agencies and co-sponsored annual speakers and training for foster care and adoptive parents & professionals.

Undoing Racism: This sub-committee supports the county-wide commitment and training for all workers in all systems. Recent training took place exclusively with young people.

Trauma-informed care: This sub-committee supports the county-wide effort and approach across all systems is changing the underpinnings and nature of treatment and care in every system.

Transition/Aging Out: Westchester was first in country to include youth over the age of 18 in its federal system of care grant. It is now a required focus in all federal SOC grants. Young people became part of system of care on policy, planning, program, and training levels. 20 years later we are re-visiting this work with a new generation of young people. They recently

revised and expanded a document, "What Helps/What Harms" to define the issues in their own terms and advocate for solutions.

(Alfreds, personal communication)

Leadership Scenario #3: Communities that Care

Background:

As described by the Social Development Research Group:

Communities that Care (CTC) is a coalition-based community prevention operating system that uses a public health approach to prevent youth problem behaviors including underage drinking, tobacco use, violence, delinquency, school dropout and substance abuse ([http://www.sdrp.org/ctcresource/About CTC NEW.htm](http://www.sdrp.org/ctcresource/About%20CTC%20NEW.htm)).

[The operating system is developed in phases.]

Phase 1: Get Started

In the first phase, community leaders concerned with preventing youth problem behaviors assess community readiness to adopt the CTC system, as well as local barriers to implementation. Other major activities during this initial phase of implementation include identifying one or two key leaders to champion CTC, hiring a coordinator to manage CTC activities, and obtaining school district support for conducting a youth survey that will provide data on local patterns of youth risk, protection, and behaviors.

Phase 2: Organize, Introduce, and Involve

The major task in phase two is to identify and train two pivotal groups of individuals from the community in the principles of prevention science and the CTC prevention system. The first group consists of influential community leaders (e.g., the mayor, police chief, school superintendent; and business, faith, community, social service, and media leaders). The main responsibilities of this group are to secure resources for preventive interventions and identify candidates for the CTC Community Board. This board constitutes the second pivotal group needed to advance the CTC approach. Among the board's tasks are developing a vision statement to guide its prevention work and establishing workgroups to tackle the details involved in putting this vision into action.

Phase 3: Develop a Community Profile

In phase three, the board develops a community profile of risk factors, protective factors, and problem behaviors among community youth; targets two to five of these factors for preventive action; and identifies existing prevention resources and gaps. (Social scientists use the term protective factors to refer to influences that protect an individual against risk or problem behavior; for example, having involved parents is a protective factor against delinquency for many adolescents.)

The major source of data for the community profile is the CTC Youth Survey, a questionnaire that students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 fill out in school. This information is supplemented by archival data (e.g., statistics on school dropout rates and teenage pregnancy or arrest records). The resulting community profile provides baseline data against which areas targeted for intervention can be evaluated.

Related to this, board members survey service providers to measure the extent to which high quality, research-based prevention programs that address particular youth problems are already available in the community and then identify existing gaps in prevention efforts.

Phase 4: Create a Community Action Plan

In phase four, board members use information gathered in phase three to develop a Community Action Plan. The board chooses policies and/or programs from the Model or Promising Programs lists on the Blueprints for Violence Prevention website at www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/ or from the CTC Prevention Strategies Guide, a compendium of prevention policies and programs found effective in changing risk and protective factors and problem behaviors in at least one high-quality controlled trial. These tested and effective policies and programs include parent training programs, such as Incredible Years Parent Training, Functional Family Therapy, and Strong African American Families; after-school programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters; and school-based programs, such as Life Skills Training, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and the Good Behavior Game."

Phase 5: Implement and Evaluate the Community Action Plan

The last phase consists of implementing the Community Action Plan. Training to implement the plan emphasizes the importance of adhering

faithfully to the content, amount, and manner of delivery specified in program protocols. Through this training, board members and program staff learn to track implementation progress, assess changes in participant outcomes, and make adjustments to achieve program objectives. Monitoring is accomplished through the use of program-specific implementation checklists, observations, and surveys administered to participants before and after the program has been introduced. During this phase, the board also reaches out to local media as a way to educate the community about the rationale for the program and generate public support for the new preventive interventions.

http://www.sdr.org/ctcresource/Phases_of_CTC_NEW.htm

Interview Highlights:

Dalene Dutton – Communities that Care
February 27, 2013

Jaclynn Sagers – Communities that Care
February 27, 2013

For some communities, Communities that Care (CTC) provides an answer to an urgent need. This was the context for one of the case examples in which the community had experienced multiple youth suicides and alcohol related accidents in a short period of time. This created a sense of urgency within the community to come together to do something dramatic to change the situation for the young people of their community.

For any community, the CTC operating system provides an evidence-based approach, informed by prevention science, to improve outcomes for the young people in their community. The CTC process is highly structured so the implementation process looks very similar from one community to the next.

Dutton and Sagers provided the following insights about key leadership or change activities needed to accomplish the community's goals related to improving the outcomes for young people.

Engaging and influencing key stakeholders: CTC is a community mobilization process that begins by convening key cross-sector "formal leaders," to include municipal board

members, school board members, school superintendent, other key human service system leaders, and opinion leaders. Through the careful and intentional engagement of a broad range of key stakeholders, political “push back” is minimized. To initiate the CTC process, the identified key formal leaders receive a half day of training, at the end of which they are asked to commit to supporting the process; their commitment is to remove any barrier, to help facilitate the change effort moving forward, and to allow the data about their community and prevention science to guide the process.

The CTC approach uses a community mapping process to consider who is in a position to influence key individuals and different groups, such as law enforcement, policy makers, young people, and parents. The engagement of parents is seen as essential. As the various perspectives of community members are understood, it becomes more possible to tailor key community messages. Ongoing shared training events allow for the development of shared knowledge and language.

Creation of a system of coordination for distributed leadership: By design, CTC is not about any individual, but it is about an assertive shift to the development of effective teams. The CTC process has been found to be much *less effective* when embedded within a hierarchical organization. Early in the CTC process, a Coordinating Council or Advisory Board is established and Work Groups, comprised of informal leaders, are formed to address six key areas of work: risk and protective factors, resource assessment, funding, outreach, coalition maintenance, and youth involvement. The CTC process develops communication mechanisms between the coordinating council and the Work Groups, and a benchmark tool assists all involved individuals in an on-going assessment of progress.

This type of shared leadership requires a number of key practices: CTC requires communities to articulate their structure for decision making, based on a consensus decision making model, and conflict resolution. These key practices ensure that there are no “winners or losers.” The key practices require good listening skills.

Assess and address the skills needed in the community: The CTC process involves a social development strategy that has been developed by Hawkins and Catalano. This process includes a community readiness assessment, intensive training, and technical

assistance to support the first year of work. In addition, the Work Groups complete skill inventories. The assessment makes visible gaps in the skills in the collective group. As gaps are discovered, additional individuals are recruited and/or training is requested, and the coordinating council arranges to meet the training need.

The CTC approach acknowledges the need to educate the community about its needs and the possible solutions. This approach educates community members in prevention science and attempts to shift the conversation to a prevention perspective. In addition, the CTC approach uses data to educate the community about itself and to promote different conversations. When evidence-based programs are chosen as a part of the solution to the community need, the CTC approach works to develop a community-wide commitment to fidelity.

Development of Collective Vision: The CTC process includes the development of a community vision: Why are we here? What do we want for our community and youth? Image this community in the future; what is it that you really want? Once a vision has been articulated, then the CTC work groups are developed as the mechanism to achieve the goal. All of the individuals involved in the training are asked to sign up for at least one work group. In addition, each work group designates a chair and vice chair.

Using data for decision-making: Using data to make decisions is at the heart of the CTC approach. The philosophy of the CTC approach is to engage coalition members in the review of their own data and then to promote self-organization so that the community can draw upon its own collective wisdom.

Two Work Groups are directly involved with the collection and analysis of data: the Risk and Protective Factors work group and the youth involvement work group that administers the CTC youth survey.

The data related to community risk and protective factors inform the community's decisions related to the focus of their work. In addition, based on the areas of most concern, the coalition must assess the community's capacity to "make real change" and to

see the work through until “real change” is achieved. The CTC model encourages communities to think about their effort as a ten year process.

AN EMERGING SET OF KEY SYSTEM LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

- Analyze Initial Conditions
- Understand and define the emerging concern
- Build Relationships and Influence Participation
- Create Structures to Support the Work and to Promote Self-Organization
- Develop Formal Communication Strategies and Feedback Mechanisms
- Acknowledge the Dynamic Tensions/Manage Conflicts
- Strategize
- Experiment and Act

Analyze Initial Conditions

As described early in this review, based on the themes from Eoyang (2012), Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007), Ansell and Gash (2008), and Crosby and colleagues (2010), an initial analysis of key aspects of the current system conditions (enabling or inhibiting) has emerged as a key systems leadership practice. Crosby describes ‘leadership in context’ as “understanding the social, political, economic and technological ‘givens’; understanding when a situation is ripe for successful change (Crosby and Bryson (2005) 187 - 188). Key aspects of the system analysis would include the following:

- System dynamics and/or connections that encourage interaction
- The strength of the network connections to allow for development of relationships that will support and sustain the change process
- The level of diversity as compared to the complexity of the challenge
- The historical conditions that influence interactions within the system.

The importance of a careful analysis of the system, before the work begins, was also emphasized in the early childhood systems building case example.

Understand and Define the Emerging Concern

Numerous authors assert the importance of clarifying the emerging concern along with the development of a deep understanding of the underlying causes of the problem situation. Crosby and colleagues (2010) suggest that “general agreement” on the emerging concern is key to the success of cross-sector efforts (219). Behrens and Foster-Fishman (2007) discuss the need to “[clarify] the purpose of the systems change” (414), and Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) discuss the importance of “bounding the system,” which requires defining the problem and identifying “the levels, niches, organizations, and actors relevant to the problem” (202). Kania and Kramer (2011) and HanleyBrown and colleagues (2012) assert the importance of establishing a common agenda. Other authors assert the importance of articulating shared values and beliefs (Hodges, et al., 2012).

As the concern is defined, it is critical that the situation be deeply understood from various perspectives (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007: 201). O’Malley (2009) explains the importance of diagnosing the situation as follows: “If you are trying to intervene to help your community make progress on a tough issue, it is critical that you understand what you are intervening into” (8). Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) encourage the development of a deep understanding of the root causes of the emerging concern through an analysis of “system parts and their patterns of interdependency” (201), with particular attention to system norms, system resources, system regulations, and system operations. Defining the challenge within the system and working to understand the “root causes” may be considered one set of critical systems leadership practices.

The importance of defining the concern, with an emphasis on the importance of clarifying the shared or collective vision for the improved system, was a theme in all three “systems leadership” case examples.

Build Relationships and Influence Participation:

Another common theme in the literature is related to the importance of building relationships and engaging stakeholders in the analysis of the emerging concern, as well as the search for solutions. O’Malley describes a key leadership role as “energizing others.”

He asserts that “leadership . . . must involve energizing more people to take up the difficult work of civic leadership” (14). Heifetz and colleagues (2004) emphasize the leadership roles related to mobilizing people and focusing attention. One of the findings of Hays and colleagues (2000) suggests that leadership plays a strong role in the participation of diverse stakeholders (377), and Crosby and colleagues (2010) suggest that the engagement of diverse and “powerful sponsors and champions” at multiple levels in the system and linking into “existing networks” is key to the success of cross-sector efforts (219).

A part of building relationships and influencing participation is the development of trust. Based on the review of the literature by Crosby and colleagues (2010), “Collaboration partners build trust by sharing information and knowledge and demonstrating competency, good intentions, and follow through; conversely, failure to follow through and unilateral action undermine trust (Arino & de la Torre, 1998; Merrill-Sands & Sheridan, 1996)” (223). Crosby and colleagues (2010) describe trust-building activities, along with “nurturing cross-sector understanding,” as part of the continuous work of leaders engaged in cross-sector work (223).

Finally, Crosby and colleagues describe “personal leadership” as the ability to understand self and others. O’Malley (2009) suggests that a core competency for effective leaders is the ability to manage oneself: “Exercising effective civic leadership requires artfully deploying yourself. And artfully deploying yourself requires knowing yourself well enough to make conscious choices” (10). Based on this review, critical system leadership practices include building relationships and engaging diverse stakeholders from multiple parts and levels of the system in the analysis and search for system solutions.

The key leadership role of engaging and influencing key stakeholders, relationship building, and creating connections was a theme in all three “systems leadership” case examples.

Create Structures to Support the Work and to Promote Self-organization

Another topic addressed by various authors is that of structures, both to support the work and to promote self-organization. Behrens and Foster-Fishman (2007) describe the

development of structures as a key strategy to encourage cooperation. These authors focus on the actual development of partnerships, teams, work groups, or other mechanisms (412). Kania and Kramer (2011) and HanleyBrown and colleague (2012) recognize the development of “backbone support” for the work as one of a few key requirements for “collective impact;” backbone support provides administrative and technical support to the teams and organizations engaged in the work. Ferreira and colleagues (2007) and Hodges and colleagues (2012) emphasize the importance of building structures that are anchored in a shared set of values and beliefs so that the system change efforts will be sustained. What also surfaces in the literature is the importance of attention to how the structures and processes are developed. Chrislip and Larson (1994) assert the need to develop credible and open processes to support the ‘profound shift’ from thinking about individual opportunity to a collective impact perspective. Referencing Tyler and Lind (2001), these authors state:

An open and credible process embodies what the procedural justice literature calls the “voice effect”: the strong tendency for people to see processes as more legitimate if they have a reasonable opportunity to influence them before a final decision is made (Tyler and Lind 2001). (Johnston, et al., 2012: 700)

In addition, Crosby and colleagues (2010) assert the importance of developing structures that are flexible and adaptive enough to manage shifts in the system and changes in membership. Furthermore, the process by which initial agreements are developed and the extent to which stakeholders are engaged is critical. These authors also posit that the process by which the structures and governance mechanisms are developed “is likely to influence the effectiveness of the structures and mechanisms” (225).

Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) add to the discussion of structures a commitment to enhancing opportunities for self-organization within the system. These authors suggest that structures can be developed to promote opportunities for “rich interactions” (623) and to “recombine resources (625) with an understanding of the ways in systems can reorganize around emerging efforts. The importance of developing appropriate structures

to support systems change efforts in an open and credible way, with an eye towards flexibility and adaptation may be another key area of systems leadership practice.

The importance of defining roles and responsibilities and coordinating the system to support distributed leadership was discussed in all three “systems leadership” case examples.

Develop formal communication strategies and feedback mechanisms

Along with structures, another theme across frameworks and models is the development of formal communication strategies and feedback mechanisms. Anderson and colleagues (2010) strongly encourage attention to the development of “open lines of communication within and among all systems” (521). Behrens and Foster-Fishman (2007) assert that “the work of creating feedback mechanisms, specifying interdependencies and time delays, and identifying the overall shared purpose of the system must be consciously built in” (412). Kania and Kramer (2011) and HanleyBrown and colleagues (2012) include continuous communication and a shared measurement system as two requirements to achieving collective impact. In addition, in the review of the literature by Crosby and Bryson (2010), the authors found that “cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they have an accountability system ... and “use a variety of methods for gathering, interpreting, and using data (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 52)” (226). Intentional development of formal communication strategies and system performance and feedback processes could be seen to be critical systems leadership practices, as well.

In all three “systems leadership” case examples, there was attention to the use of data for decision-making and the benefit of shared measures to support continuous assessment of “next steps.”

Acknowledge the dynamic tensions/manage conflict

Throughout the literature, there is an awareness of the need to acknowledge the “dynamic tension” that exists in complex, cross-sector “shared-power” work and to manage the

conflict that has the potential to derail progress. Heifetz and colleagues (2004) describe one key role for adaptive leaders as “regulating distress”:

The idea is to regulate this tension so that it stimulates but does not overwhelm people engaged in adaptive work. Stress should not be eliminated altogether – that would remove the impetus for adaptive work – but rather maintained at a level that motivates change (27).

Therefore, Heifetz and colleagues (2004) suggest that easing or mediating conflicts among stakeholders is a critical activity of leadership. Crosby and colleagues (2010) acknowledge the challenge of “competing institutional logics,” and therefore, a role for leadership is to “reframe disputes” in a way that can increase understanding across agents.

Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) begin by encouraging change agents to “embrace uncertainty,” understanding that destabilizing the system is a necessary early step (622). Once the system has been “pushed to a disequilibrium state,” conflict will be surfaced, but this is expected to produce new thinking and new possibilities (622). Crosby and colleagues (2010) call attention to issues related to power imbalances and acknowledge the importance of ensuring that solutions are not imposed (222). Systems leadership involves acknowledging and regulating distress and the conflict that emerges from systems change efforts.

In one of the case examples, “lessons learned” were described related to acknowledging and managing “old wounds” and the importance of analysing power imbalances.

Strategize

Several authors describe a set of strategic activities to support systems change. To begin, Behrens and Foster-Fishman assert the importance of conceptualizing the work as systems change work from the beginning (414) and approaching the work with an eclectic approach (414). Hodges and colleagues (2012) emphasize the non-linear nature of the work which influences how opportunities to intervene in the system are perceived (527). Behrens and Foster-Fishman (2007) provide additional guidance to “be open to opportunities that present themselves, while also undertaking a formal analytic process in order to maximize the power of these emergent leverage points” (414).

Heifetz and colleagues (2004) describe the way in which issues can be carefully framed to 'encourage shifts in the mind' (23), while Crosby and Bryson (2005) discuss the intentional development of shared meaning (Crosby and Bryson (2005) 187 - 188). Hodges and colleagues (2012) suggest that shared beliefs can be translated "into shared responsibility and shared action" (527). Similarly, Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009) advise that shared understanding and ways of communicating about the challenge can produce self-organizing behaviours in the system (625).

The issues of leverage points is explored in depth in the work of Foster-Fishman and colleagues. These authors promote a set system leadership activities that would include identifying leverage points or interactions and patterns to leverage change. Key levers are those that "exert or could exert cross-level behavior" and those that "direct system behavior" (202). In addition, examples of interactions or patterns to leverage change are "system differences that create niches compatible with system change goals," "long standing patterns that hinder change goals," "gaps in system feedback mechanisms," and "cross-level/sector connections that are needed" (202).

Finally, Crosby and Bryson (2005) provide several suggestions related to strategy. In their work, they emphasize "the wise design and use of forums, arenas and courts" ... which can be used to "foster policy change in a shared-power world" (182 - 3). From their perspective, a critical systems leadership activity involves navigating change efforts through the policy cycle (187 - 188). Strategic decisions appear to be an essential skillset involved in systems leadership.

Although the strategic role of "systems leadership" did not emerge as a labelled theme in any of the case examples, various examples were provided related to strategic responses to common challenges, as well as strategic approaches to systems change, in general.

Act

As a deeper understanding of the emerging challenge is developed and agreement about "next right steps" grows across stakeholders, the work of those involved in systems change leads to action. O'Malley (2009) describes a key leadership activity as "intervene skilfully."

O'Malley states: "Leadership is about change. And the catalyst for change is often an intentional, well designed intervention. . . . Citizens who exercise civic leadership are intentional about when, why and how they intervene in a civic system or organization" (13). The findings of Hernandez and Hodges (2003) highlight the need to clarify the desired outcome and to develop a well-designed intervention so that sufficient attention can be given to implementation of the change at multiple levels of the system. The findings related to effective implementation have been summarized by Fixsen and colleagues (2005) and guidance related to the development of usable interventions has been summarized by Fixsen and colleagues (2012). Hodges and colleagues (2012) explain, however, that "being concrete does not mean being static" (527). Similarly, Heifetz and colleagues (2004) assert that given the adaptive nature of the work, it can be expected that experimentation will be required: "One has to be able to deviate from the plan as learning takes place" (27). This perspective is also found in the work of Lichtenstein and colleagues (2009), as experimentation and fluctuations are seen to produce "amplifying actions" in the system (623). System leadership activities related to clarifying and acting upon next steps, while adjusting and experimenting, as necessary, may be crucial to shift from current system functioning towards the desired future state.

Embedded in each case example was a commitment to move from identifying and understanding a problem to action, often with an emphasis on using data to provide an on-going method to inform and adjust next steps.

Optimising the Conditions and Developing Capacity for Systems Leadership to Flourish

Based on the review of the literature, the following two next steps may be worth consideration:

- 1) Partner with other experts in systems leadership development to increase awareness and skills to support systems leadership
- 2) Secure resources to create and sustain complex, systems change efforts

1) Partner with other experts in systems leadership development to increase awareness and skills to support systems leadership

To actively increase awareness of a systems thinking-informed approach to the leadership role and activities in support of complex, system change efforts, it may be beneficial to utilize the resources from or partner with the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School to increase awareness of systems leadership and key practices. Based on the field of implementation science related to developing and sustaining practice change, it would be important to pair such formal training opportunities with additional support and coaching for those involved in current or developing system change efforts to enhance systems leadership.

Offered through the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School, the “Leadership, Organizing, and Action” program explores how leadership is exercised through mastery of five practices:

- Public Narrative
- Building Relationships
- Structuring Leadership Teams
- Strategizing
- Action

(http://ksgexecprogram.harvard.edu/forms/loa/marshall1121.aspx?utm_source=marshall1121&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=loa).

Another potential partner may be the Kansas Leadership Center, established by the Kansas Health Foundation. The Center has developed training programs for Civic leaders based on the following competencies, as presented by O'Malley (2009) and referenced by Easterling (2012):

- Diagnose situation
- Manage self
- Intervene skillfully
- Energize others

Additional discussion of these competencies can be found in the previous section of this paper. More information about the Center and their programs can be found online:

<http://www.kansasleadershipcenter.org/>

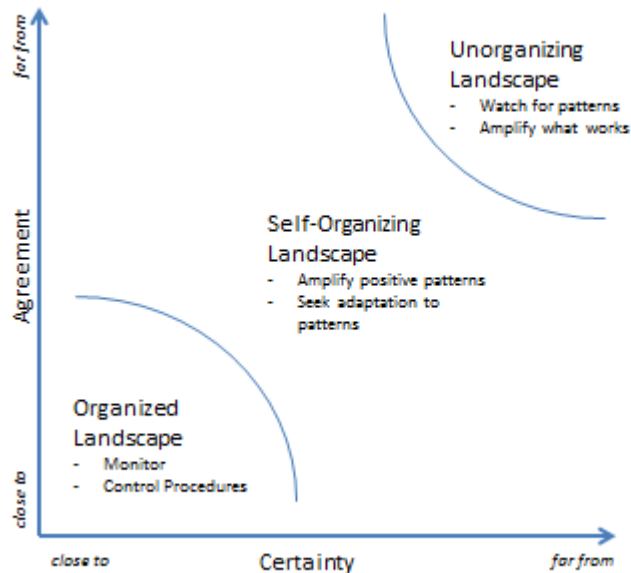
2) Secure resources to create and sustain complex, systems change efforts

Given the understanding that “solving adaptive challenges requires a period of work that can only be done by the stakeholders involved” (Heifetz et al., 2004, 25), resources to develop and sustain system change opportunities could create, enhance, or sustain the enabling conditions necessary to progress through the following types of mechanisms:

- a) Create opportunities (encourage interaction) for facilitated discussions and “self-organizing” around complex social issues, to support the development of connections and relationship across typical service system boundaries.
- b) Support the development (and maintenance) of communities of practice for individuals who are currently engaged in systems leadership.
- c) Create resources to support “backbone organizations” to bolster system change efforts that cross organizational and geopolitical boundaries.

Conclusion

The task at hand is complex. Ralph Stacey might suggest that this work is occurring within a space in which there is neither certainty nor agreement. There is uncertainty about what would make the most difference, and therefore what few next steps should be taken, as what will happen cannot be predicted. In addition, agreement or consensus will have to be developed across the group of decision makers for this work. However, this group may benefit from choosing to “head towards an agreed upon future state even though the specific paths cannot be predetermined” (<http://www.plexusinstitute.org/page/edgeware/>).



(source: <http://www.hsdinstitute.org/about-hsd/what-is-hsd/faq-tools-and-patterns-of-hsd.html>)

Our colleagues at the Human Systems Dynamics Institute suggest that in this space, the “landscape is **self-organizing**, and this is where creative things happen. It is also where relationships, risk, and growth take place” (<http://www.hsdinstitute.org/about-hsd/what-is-hsd/faq-tools-and-patterns-of-hsd.html>). To be in the space is both exciting and unsettling, and it reinforces the importance of reflecting on the practices being used to guide this work, itself.

In addition, as this work progresses, there may be value in encouraging the planning group for this study to reflect on the use of the term, “systems leadership,” as the term itself may be constraining the creative process. At this point, there may be value in redefining the discussion to be less aligned with the term “systems leadership” and redefined to address the essential practices, skills, processes, and roles needed to support complex systems change (that involves “working across organizational and geopolitical boundaries, beyond individual professional disciplines, within a range of organizational and stakeholder cultures, and often without managerial control), without the label of “systems leadership.”

The breadth and depth of the experience of those who have been engaged in complex systems change efforts has the potential to inform the next steps for this project. Their frameworks and “lessons learned” provide relevant insights on this quest to better understand and build systems leadership capacity.

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