Embedding Sustainability into Organisational DNA: a story of complexity

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This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of the Professions, Adelaide Business School at the University of Adelaide.

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Acknowledging with gratitude

Completing this thesis after eight years of part-time research and study has required the generous support of many people. My supervisors, of course, are top of mind and I extend my sincere gratitude to them for helping me through an unusual and complex research project. Particularly my principal supervisor – its been a long haul!

I am also particularly indebted to the CEO and Executive team at the City of Marion for agreeing to host this action research. And i extend my heartfelt thanks to the group of co-researchers who travelled the journey with me over seven years. You are all now firm friends for life, and I thank you for your generosity of spirit and willingness to participate in exploring how we might evolve organisational life into a form that sustains people and planet. I have not named you because I promised anonymity for each when we began, but without you, there would have been little to report on, and there may not have been the evolution of the City of Marion that manifested.

On a personal note, I also extend my gratitude to my ever-patient husband and children. Thank you for dinners made; social occasions that were left unattended and even reading draft chapters. My eldest off-spring beat me over the line to her doctorate by several years but ensured I benefited from her knowledge of Word templates as I compiled this document. Thank you.

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Thank you also to all who I have met through the Action Learning Action Research Association; never before have I encountered a professional group that is not only extremely knowledgeable and wise but also so generous in supporting each other. I am grateful to have been the beneficiary of that generosity of spirit.

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Finally, I am sure there are other people and authors who have guided, assisted and supported me along the way that I have not acknowledged above – thank you.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Scholarship.
Statement of Authorship

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Abstract

One indicator or measure of our global unsustainability is the ecological footprint which simply put, “measures how much nature we have and how much nature we use”. When I commenced this research in 2009, our global ecological footprint was 1.4 and world overshoot day was September 25. As I complete my research, our global ecological footprint in 2016 was 1.6 and world overshoot day was 8 August. Despite efforts to move towards sustainability – the ecological footprint is one indication that we continue to move away from being sustainable on a global scale.

Organisations of all types with their financial and human resources that enable quite sophisticated problem solving have a role to play, to lead a shift from exploiting resources to nurturing them. There is some agreement from those who represent the strong sustainability school of thought, that the shift from exploitation to nurturing is underpinned by a shift from a Newtonian paradigm to the paradigm of living systems (or complexity). But how might that shift be cultivated?

The research detailed in this thesis:

• Identifies the paradigm of complexity (living systems) as the paradigm from which we may be best able to understand the challenge of sustainability and understand how to respond to it. The paradigm shift goes beyond a cerebral appreciation of complexity and explores the multiple dimensions of a whole human being within a complex system (the organisation).

• Through the literature review exploring weak and strong sustainability, identifies the key research question – “What is the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to nurture a sustaining organisation? Sub themes of leadership and organisational culture are intertwined in the complexity of identifying a path to evolve the organisational culture.

• Develops an integrated, high-level model of emergent change to nurture a sustaining organisation and associated principles for the
researcher/facilitator cultivating such a change, founded in an understanding of living systems.

- Designs an emergent systemic action research methodology to trace and make sense of the expected emergent change. Reflection upon the intended methodology and what actually occurred provides findings in regard to the methodology itself.

- Identifies research topic findings from a first person, second person and third person perspective. These findings are used to refine the high level model of emergent change to form a sustaining organisation into a stage 2 model that describes the nature of the emergent change.

- Employing an abductive approach, re-engages with the literature and iterates a stage 3 model that illustrates both the nature and dynamic of emergent change to form a sustaining organisation – a model that traces shifts in new ways of being emerging into the organisation – and details principles for practitioners to nurture each holon of the stage 3 model.

This thesis provides an account of the powerful subtleties involved in cultivating a human environment within which the paradigm shift to sustaining may be liberated. Liberated because the research findings support the notion that the ‘new’ paradigm is lying dormant within employees and needs only to be reawakened and reprioritised.
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## Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoM</td>
<td>City of Marion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer of the City of Marion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMG</td>
<td>Executive Management Group that comprised the CEO and three executive members who were individually known as Directors and later General Managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
<td>Corporate Management Group that comprised a group of up to 20 senior managers within the City of Marion. This group technically also included the EMG but where both are referenced together as one group I make this clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OD</td>
<td>Organisational Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUFU</td>
<td>Sustainability Futures Unit a department within the City of Marion that were seen as leading the organisation’s integrated sustainability capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-research group</td>
<td>A small, passionate group of employees of the City of Marion, who volunteered to be a part of the action research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The paradigm shift</td>
<td>If not specifically stated otherwise, this term is used to refer specifically to the shift from the Newtonian paradigm to the paradigm of complexity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm of complexity</td>
<td>Also often referred to as the behaviour of complex adaptive systems or living systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Model</td>
<td>The literature review proposes the high level model, identifying elements that may be a rich mix to cultivate the conditions for the paradigmatic shift to form a sustaining organisation. This model is developed from the literature as Stage 1 of The Model in Chapter 2. The Model is refined to Stage 2 in response to the research findings in Chapter 5. The Model is evolved to Stage 3 in Chapter 6 by returning to the literature that became implicated by research findings in Chapter 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principles</td>
<td>Accompanying each stage of The Model are principles for executing The Model in practice. The principles are derived from applying the understanding of the paradigm of complexity to organisational behaviour and leadership. The Principles also evolve through three stages with The Model. The Principles Stage 1 are developed in Chapter 2. The Principles Stage 2 are refined in response to the methodological approach findings in Chapter 3. The Principles Stage 3 are evolved in Chapter 6 along with The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Synergistics</td>
<td>A global consultancy that has developed intellectual property and expertise in measuring organisational culture and key contributors to influencing organisational culture. More can be found at their website <a href="http://www.human-synergistics.com.au">http://www.human-synergistics.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| FMA          | References Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) action research cycle including the declaration of three major elements.  
F: Framework of ideas  
M: methodology  
A: area of concern |
| ALARA        | Action Learning, Action Research Association.                            |
| BEF          | Business Excellence Framework                                            |

Table 1:1 Glossary of terms
CHAPTER 1: Introduction to embedding sustainability into organisational DNA: a story of complexity

Figure 1: Mind map of chapter 1
“Sustainability is a possible way of living or being in which individuals, firms, governments, and other institutions act responsibly in taking care of the future as if it belonged to them today, in equitably sharing the ecological resources on which the survival of human and other species depends, and in assuring that all who live today and in the future will be able to flourish – that is, satisfy their needs and aspirations.” (Ehrenfeld, 2000, p37)

1.1 Why is this research important?

I commenced this research because of my own concern for what I perceived as our collective slow response to the global challenges which include climate change, peak oil, polluted water supplies, reduced fish stocks, the fifth mass species extinction, reduction in arable lands, increasing income inequality in western economies and a continuing growth in global population – all expressions of our ongoing un-sustainability.

One indicator or measure of our global unsustainability is the ecological footprint which simply put, “measures how much nature we have and how much nature we use” (Global Footprint Network, 2017, para 1 ). When I commenced this research in 2009, our global ecological footprint was 1.4 (meaning globally we used 1.4 Earths worth of resources in that year) and world overshoot day (the day when we use more than one Earth) was September 25. As I complete my research in 2017, our global ecological footprint in 2016 was 1.6 and world overshoot day was 8 August 2016 (2017, section 4 ). Despite efforts to move towards sustainability – the ecological footprint indicates that we continue to become more unsustainable on a global scale. The reasons for this are complex as identified in the Club of Rome report, The Limits to Growth (Meadows et al., 1972). The dynamics demonstrated in that report were reiterated in the 30 year update (Meadows et al., 2004). We as a collective have known about this challenge for a long time. It appears that the human family are in a state of perpetual denial, unable or unwilling to implement the actions that we know are needed.
As I updated my literature review to conclude this thesis, an interesting pattern emerged. Authors seem to have stopped publishing on the topic of sustainability from an organisational perspective. Between my first literature review in 2009 and my update in 2017, there appeared to be little new and substantive emerging. I am not sure how to interpret this pattern, but I find it disconcerting. I believe that our collective unsustainability, is the challenge of our era – and that its resolution would also resolve many other problems we face. Why do we continue to find other distractions?

1.2 Introduction to this thesis

Within this thesis I will argue that our unsustainability may only be resolved if we undertake a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) in the way we view and interact with the world. That paradigm shift is distinguished by a change from seeing and working with parts of the problem (such as economic growth or climate change), to understanding the whole and the relationships between the parts.

I have focussed on organisations because of their strong influence on the way we live and work. Organisations of all types have a role to play, with their financial and human resources that enable sophisticated problem solving, to lead a shift from exploiting resources to nurturing them. My thesis is focussed on the role that organisations may play in this paradigmatic shift from a more mechanistic worldview (Newtonian) to a more organic worldview of interdependence (the paradigm of complexity or living systems). While my interest is in organisations generally, this thesis is set within the context of one local government organisation, from which principles are derived to apply more broadly.

The identification of the need to make a paradigmatic shift is not new – prominent authors and practitioners in the field have previously identified it. In reviewing their work, I note that the organisational sustainability literature contains descriptions of:

• Societal and individual changes within the context of evolution (Sahtouris, 1999);
• Change processes motivated by a desire to gain competitive advantage by becoming sustainable (Senge et al., 2008); and

• More holistic descriptions of organisations that have transitioned to being sustaining. (A term coined by Dunphy and colleagues (Dunphy et al., 2007) to describe an organisation that has made the paradigmatic shift of perceiving and acting in the world based on living systems worldview).

The thesis employs the conceptual lens of complex adaptive systems throughout. I employ the terms complex adaptive systems, complexity and living systems interchangeably. This conceptual lens was chosen because, as will be identified in the literature review, it is the paradigm that best enables our understanding of the nature of sustainability itself and how we might respond to the challenge it presents us.

Through the literature review, I identify the research question central to this thesis as relating to how the paradigmatic shift to seeing and acting in recognition of the world as a living system, can be nurtured within an organisation. My principal research question is:

**What is the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to nurture a sustaining organisation?**

This question will be answered conceptually, however this research seeks to explore the theory in practice, aiming to shape a process within a given organisation, that results in that community of people making the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation.

It will not be possible to generalise the specific change processes because, within the paradigm of complexity, what is effective for one organisation (and even at one point of evolution in the organisation) is unlikely to be so for another, given different histories or starting points and inherent unpredictability. Additionally, organisations cannot be thought of as separate from the social and natural ecologies within which they are embedded, and so any changes within the legislative environment, community expectations and even climatic conditions will have an impact upon the particular organisation. At the micro level, the detail of
who comprises an organisation will also influence the process of change. Lastly, the influence of the researcher herself cannot be overlooked as she becomes a part of the system in a manner that is unique to her own abilities.

But despite these caveats, it is intended that this thesis identifies principles of emergent change and leadership that are relevant to other organisations that aspire to become sustaining. The contribution to the understanding of emergent change, leadership and organisational change for sustainability is designed to be practical and substantial.

The intention of this thesis, therefore, is to record and explore processes to identify the principles that may be employed to cultivate a sustaining organisation. Sub-objectives that emerge from the key research question are to:

1. Trace the emergent change process and compare it with the proposed theoretical model, thus refining the model;

2. Trace, explore and record the process of generating a shared vision that orientates the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation; and

3. Better understand the nature of exercising leadership to both facilitate the paradigmatic shift and the liberation of human creative capacity in the formation of a sustaining organisation.

Through consideration of the nature of the paradigmatic shift for the particular purpose of sustainability, I develop an integrated, high-level model of emergent change and associated principles for exercising leadership to cultivate that change. These are referred to as The Model and The Principles respectively throughout the thesis.

A qualitative approach to the research was desired to explore the more subtle facets of the change process. As I applied the conceptual lens of living systems, I realised that a systemic action research methodology was appropriate. A central ingredient in The Model to nurture a sustaining organisation became emergent change. The methodological challenge was to devise a methodological approach that was itself emergent to trace and explore emergent change. I developed my emergent, systemic action research methodology employing the lens of complex adaptive
systems. The methodology is in itself a contribution to knowledge and I include my findings regarding the methodological approach itself.

Any choice in methodological approach embeds advantages and disadvantages. The main inherent advantage of my methodology, the ability to be flexible and trace the more subtle facets of the emergent change process, enabled the evolution of The Model and The Principles through three stages. The third stage illustrates both the nature and dynamic of cultivating the conditions for the paradigmatic shift, however Stage 2 remains relevant and useful to highlight the nature of the change. The Model and The Principles are not to be considered separately but comprise a whole at each stage.

The action research itself took place over two and a half years within one organisation in collaboration with a co-research group of employees who volunteered to be a part of the research. This introduction to my thesis includes an introduction to the host organisation. The thesis provides a summary of my activity within the organisation over the period from July 2010 when I approached the organisation to gain their involvement, to early 2013, when the final interviews with co-researchers were completed. In essence, I joined in a collaboration with the CEO who personally desired to further develop the organisational capacity to be “a leader in the delivery of the Community Vision” (City of Marion, 2010, p 5). The community vision encompassed four pillars of sustainability – Community Wellbeing, Cultural Vitality, Dynamic Economy and Healthy Environment. My intention when I commenced the research was to form a small group of passionate co-researchers from the employees, and that we would collectively work out what to do after that. That is what occurred but it no way met my initial expectations or assumptions about what would happen over two years. I experienced considerable ambiguity and although on one level this story is about organisational transformation – my transformation and that of the co-researchers becomes central to the tale.

1.3 Structure of this thesis

This thesis takes shape over six chapters, each of which is outlined in this section to provide an arc of a research story of complexity and resultant findings.
Within the thesis, each chapter is introduced with a mind map of the relevant chapter, followed by a brief introduction and overview of the chapter intent, content and structure. The chapter is concluded with a brief summary of major insights and a short statement about how these relate to the following chapter.

**1.3.1 Chapter 1: Embedding sustainability into organizational DNA – an introduction**

Chapter one provides an introduction to this thesis, why it is important and a very high level introduction to the two key areas of contribution to knowledge the thesis makes. An introduction to the host organisation as context for the systemic action research is also provided.

**1.3.2 Chapter 2: Identifying the research question and framework through the literature**

Chapter 2 reviews the sustainability literature and reveals two different understandings of sustainability, termed weak and strong sustainability. **Weak sustainability** is essentially business as usual with a concern to decrease harm to the environment, while **strong sustainability** is understood as representing a paradigm shift in the way in which the world is perceived – from Newtonian to the paradigm of complex adaptive systems or living systems.

The key research question is identified: what is the nature and dynamic of change to nurture a sustaining organisation? The chapter then identifies barriers to the paradigmatic shift that may be involved:

- Different understandings of the term sustainability;
- The way change itself is perceived; and
- A desire of leadership to control outcomes.

The final section of Chapter 2 draws together the literature to develop a proposed integrated model, comprising the elements that may be involved cultivating the paradigmatic shift to form a sustaining organisation (The Model Stage 1).
Chapter 2 also identifies the principles of living systems as they may be applied to guide the leadership of the emergent change, or to express it an alternative way, principles by which The Model may be implemented and are therefore foundational to the methodological approach developed in Chapter 3 (The Principles Stage 1).

Chapter 2 presents the first iteration of The Model and The Principles, which are evolved two more times throughout the thesis.

1.3.3 Chapter 3: Developing a systemic action research methodology

Chapter 3 develops an intended methodological approach for an emergent systemic action research project. The approach is founded upon The Model and The Principles that were developed in Chapter 2. The methodological approach is distinguished by its inclusion of the researcher as a part of the living system that is the organisation.

The second section of Chapter 3 contrasts the intended methodology and methods with my experience as I attempted to implement the methodology. The contrast between intention and experience results in a refined methodological approach from my experience. The Principles are refined to Stage 2 in this chapter.

The development of both the intended and refined methodological approach is viewed as a significant contribution to knowledge made by this thesis.

1.3.4 Chapter 4: Description of the action research activity

Chapter 4 recounts the major parts of the story of what I did within the City of Marion over the two and a half year period. The opening section of Chapter 4 provides a visual overview of the major activities and incidents, and different parts of the story are referenced forward into Chapter 5 where the activities and stories are examined to generate findings about the key research question. To avoid repeating parts of the story of what I did in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 where the story is fundamental to identifying research findings, cross references are provided to make it easy to move between Chapters 4 and 5 as desired. It is not necessary to follow these, but they are provided to cross check if desired.
The detail included in Chapter 4 is not essential reading but provides added detail if required or desired by the reader. Methodologically, it provides enough detail for the reader to be able to track what happened and understand why I made certain choices.

1.3.5 Chapter 5: My learning about embedding sustainability within the City of Marion’s DNA

I employ the structure of my methodological approach, first person, second person and third person to order my research findings. The learning is employed to refine The Model Stage 1 to The Model Stage 2 to clarify list of ingredients proposed to cultivate the paradigmatic shift and identifies the everyday conversations of co-researchers as the key emergent process that fuels the process. These two elements, the list of ingredients and conversations identify the nature of the change to nurture a sustaining organisation.

1.3.6 Chapter 6: From the nature of the change to revealing the dynamic of the change

Chapter 6 takes up the challenge to delve deeper from the understanding of the nature of the emergent change to consider its dynamic. It answers the question: ‘What is the energetic source of the change?’ This chapter re-integrates the methodology represented by The Principles Stage 2 with the research findings represented by The Model Stage 2. In doing so, The Model and The Principles are each reconceived to Stage 3. Finally, The Model Stage 3 is mapped onto the integral theory quadrants and demonstrated to be an integrated model that should offer a sustained approach to the continuing evolutionary change required to form a sustaining organisation.

Chapter 6 identifies the second key contribution to knowledge delivered through this thesis as The Model Stages 2 & 3 and The Principles Stages 2 & 3, which reveal the nature and dynamic of the emergent change processes to nurture the evolution of a sustaining organisation from one that was previously not sustaining.
1.4 An introduction to the host organisation and my relationships with it

The case study organisation is a past and at the time of the action research, an existing client of my consulting practice. It is a local council in South Australia – the City of Marion (CoM). The public council records indicate the research was being undertaken and anonymity is not required.

The CoM as the administrative organisation comprised approximately 450 employees when the research began, spread over five different delivery sites and one administrative centre.

I had been working within this organisation since about 2007, providing a range of services including executive coaching, team development and leadership program design and delivery for middle and senior managers. More recently we had also designed and delivered a self-leadership program, open to anyone in the organisation. Through these various programs, I had worked with approximately 120 employees or 27% of the 450 employees at CoM. The work of my firm was well regarded by staff within the organisation, and I had a close working relationship with the CEO and the Organisational Development Manager.

That said, my firm was not the only provider of developmental work within the organisation. Over time, I noticed that the impact of our more novel ideas and concepts, such as leading change within complexity, became diluted. Perhaps this dilution is a reflection of Dee Hock’s observation that the old paradigm is continuously imported back into the organisation with every new recruit (Hock, 1995).

My relationship with the organisation and its staff was pivotal to gaining access to undertake the research. The success of the research is at least related to the previous work and foundational ideas regarding complexity, that were seeded in several iterations of a leadership program called Leadership for Success during 2008 to 2011. This program was delivered to approximately 60 middle managers within the organisation (comprising 50% of those I had worked with directly in total or 13% of the total employees at CoM) and was regarded by many as transformational in its outcomes. The nature of the transformation is best
summarised as moving from management by control to management and leadership through the liberation of people.

The action research commenced in early 2011 and my consulting and coaching work continued with the organisation during this time. All work, research and consulting, was consistent with the same principles of complexity and was seen by the CEO as one seamless expression of my contribution to the organisation’s development. However this thesis reports only on the PhD research project – it is a focus on one experimental facet of the ongoing organisational development work. Where interdependent relationships exist between consulting and research work, I have attempted to recognise them and make them explicit.

1.4.1 About the City of Marion as a context for this research

The CoM is a local council with a community vision for sustainability (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.1). As will be explored further in the methodology chapter 3, it was important for the organisation I chose to undertake this research with, to have its own vision to be a sustaining organisation and for my research not to impose this purpose on the organisation through the research.

The CoM community is located in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, approximately 10 kilometres south of the city of Adelaide, with a population of 88,900. It has an elected member council comprising the Mayor and 12 Ward Councillors, who stand for office every four years (City of Marion, 2017). At the time of my research the Mayor had held office for at least two terms (8 years) and the relationship between the Mayor and CEO was stable and supportive.

The CEO arrived at the CoM in 2000 and this role was seen as likely his last position before retirement. He has a professional background in psychology and social work and has been involved in the local government sector most of his working life. He is a firm believer in leading a transformation of the organisational culture to improve the organisational capability to deliver the community vision. His reasons for pursuing this transformation are both subjective and objective: subjective because he believes that people do their best work when they care about what they do and can do so in a humanistic environment; objective because he was also aware of his responsibility to nurture an organisation capable of delivering the
community’s desires to the best of its ability – its vision. The CEO measured progress carefully regarding organisational culture using the Human Synergistics Organizational Cultural Inventory and other performance measures. These measures have been used consistently within CoM since 2001 till the CEO’s departure from CoM in 2015 after the completion of this action research in 2013.

In 2007 the City of Marion was recognised with a Cultural Transformation Award from Human Synergistics and The Australian Business Excellence Awards - Bronze Award (from the Business Excellence Framework license holder). In 2009 and 2011 the City of Marion received Cultural Sustainability Awards, and in 2010, The Australian Business Excellence Award - Gold Award. These awards indicate that it could be argued that CoM was already well progressed on its path towards making its final transition to being a sustaining organisation as outlined by Dunphy and colleagues in their three waves of change model which will be detailed further in Chapter 2 (Dunphy et al., 2007). The CoM had invested heavily in both the human capacity of its people and in developing technological solutions to environmental sustainability issues.

The CoM has been exploring sustainability and what it means since the United Nations Rio convention in 1991 which resulted in the Agenda 21 initiative taken up by many local governments around the world. CoM’s interest in and progress on this subject is indicated by the formation of a Sustainability and Futures Unit (SUFU team) developed to provide leadership of sustainability within the organisation. Many of the research co-researchers were a part of this team.

1.4.2 Reasons the City of Marion was a good choice as host of this research

CoM was a prime subject for my research because:

1. It already had its own desire to explore sustainability and had its own community vision of becoming sustainable – this was a necessary condition for my methodology (see Chapter 3);

2. Leadership at CoM had been stable before the research began and fortunately remained stable during the research period, 2010-2013, which
meant that my research findings were not subject to confusion caused by any major shift in strategic emphasis;

3. Consistent with Dunphy et al.’s (2007) model of waves of transformation, CoM had been and is, on a cultural transformational journey where they aspire to value and develop people to liberate their best (see chapter 2); and

4. On a purely practical level, my existing relationships of trust enabled me to gain access and indeed a collaborative approach to the emergent action research project.

1.5 Glossary of terms

Throughout this thesis, a number of organisational terms specific to the CoM are employed, along with various terms related to complex adaptive systems and the concrete outputs of this thesis. A glossary of these terms is included prior to this Chapter 1 in Table 1:1 for easy referencing during reading and it also identifies the chapters in which each iteration of the primary outputs of this research are developed, namely The Model and The Principles in each of their three stages.

1.6 Summary of this chapter and connecting to Chapter 2

In this introductory chapter to my research thesis, I have identified my motivation for this research – our global unsustainability. Organisations of all types have a role to play, with their financial and human resources that enable quite sophisticated problem solving, to lead a shift from exploiting resources to nurturing them. This specific research reports upon one systemic action research project within one local council over a period of two years.

The research detailed in this thesis:

1. Identifies the paradigm of complexity (living systems) as the paradigm from which we may be best able to understand the challenge of sustainability and understand how to respond to it.
2. Identifies the key research question this research addresses – “What is the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to nurture a sustaining organisation?

3. Develops a high level model of emergent change to nurture a sustaining organisation and the associated principles for leading such a change

4. Designs an emergent systemic action research methodology and reflects upon the lessons of applying it;

5. Identifies research topic findings from a first person, second person and third person perspective. These findings are used to refine the high-level model of emergent change to form a sustaining organisation into The Model Stage 2 that describes the nature of the emergent change.

6. Employing an abductive approach returns to the literature and iterates The Model Stage 3 that illustrates both the nature and dynamic of emergent change to form a sustaining organisation and The Principles Stage 3 that nurture the holons identified in The Model Stage 3.

The following Chapter 2 returns us to the beginning of my desire to research the present topic of organisational sustainability by reviewing:

- Our global state of unsustainability;

- The contribution organisations may make to becoming sustainable;

- The meaning of the term sustainable and the identification of the paradigm of complexity as a relevant lens for becoming a sustaining organisation;

- The key research gap and question; and

- Through the review of the change management and leadership for sustainability literature, the development of The Model Stage 1 and The Principles Stage 1 to nurture the formation of a sustaining organisation.
CHAPTER 2: Identifying the research question and framework through the literature

Figure 2:1 Mind map overview of Chapter 2
2.1 Overview

This research seeks to understand how a sustaining organisation – one that not only reduces harm to the environment but also heals and nurtures the natural and human ecologies within which it is embedded - may be intentionally formed.

This chapter suggests that barriers to forming a sustaining organisation include:

- a lack of consensus in the understanding of the term ‘sustainable’;
- the poor success rate of traditional change management processes; and
- the pervasive influence of the Newtonian paradigm that affects, amongst other things, the practice of organisational leadership and change management.

Understanding the nature of sustainability led me to employ the lens of complexity throughout this thesis and apply that lens to organisational behaviour, leadership and change.

Major approaches to developing sustainable businesses and organisations are reviewed. These models and frameworks refer to the need for a paradigm shift but offer no detailed explanations of how the paradigm shift may be cultivated. Further, the existing approaches are not fully integrated frameworks. Understanding the nature and dynamic of emergent change to form a sustaining organisation in an integrated manner is the research gap this thesis aims to address.

The output of this chapter is the development of a high-level model for emergent change to form a sustaining organisation, founded upon the principles of a new paradigm of living systems (The Model Stage 1).

The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) is referred to as high level because it is more like a list of ingredients in a recipe than a detailed model of how the elements interact. The Model Stage 1 suggests three essential elements, the first of which is adaptive leadership with an understanding of living systems and emergence. The second is the capacity to envision a sustaining future. The third is leadership that encourages self-actualisation of the organisation’s members. These three elements are all
combined within emergent change processes to cultivate the paradigmatic shift from a mechanistic way of perceiving and acting within the organisation, to perceiving and acting in a way that is founded in an understanding of the paradigm of complexity.

Accompanying The Model Stage 1 are principles (The Principles Stage 1) to guide the leadership of emergent change or the implementation of The Model Stage 1, to form a sustaining organisation (Table 2:5).

2.2 The Context and rationale for this research

The scientific evidence is now confirming what was first recognised in the 1970s by the Report to the Club of Rome: the dynamics between economic growth, pollution, technological capacity and global population growth are placing the future of humanity, and other species, at risk (Meadows et al., 1972; Turner, 2008; Oerlemans et al., 2016). We are now in overshoot consuming approximately 1.6 Earths per annum (Oerlemans et al., 2016). Overshoot means that humanity is devouring more of the Earth’s natural resources each year than the Earth can regenerate. This dynamic is the equivalent of spending the principal of a capital investment and expecting the interest to continue flowing unabated. It is an unsustainable state of affairs, and the growing ecological footprint (Figure 2:2) is only one indicator of our global unsustainability (Global Footprint Network, 2017, section 4).
There are those proposing a system wide transformation to find a more sustainable way of living and working (Brundtland, 1987; Capra and Luisi, 2016; Capra, 2002b; Cooperrider, 2008; Dunphy et al., 2007; Dunphy et al., 1997; Ehrenfeld, 2000; Ehrenfeld, 2005b; Eisenstein, 2011; Hames, 2009; Hawken, 2011; Hawken et al., 1999; Mackey, 2011; Jackson, 2009b; Meadows et al., 2004; Sachs, 2008; Senge et al., 2008; Senge et al., 2007; Swimme and Berry, 1992; Oerlemans et al. 2016; Hart, 2005). The authors making such proposals come from varying disciplines and the focus of their work varies greatly from brokering global agreements between governments, to measuring carbon footprints, to suggesting new economic systems and business models to nurture more sustainable enterprises.

My focus in this thesis is on how organisations might best respond within a whole systems response and play a role in nurturing the whole system to midwife a shift from exploitation of resources to nurturing resources – both human and natural.

Organisations (business and government) have come to wield particular influence upon the way in which we work, manufacture and spend. This is through their enterprises in the case of business; and through the development of infrastructure...
and the creation of a legislative environment within which business operates, in the case of governments.

Given the level of influence of organisations, it seems plausible that organisations could adopt a leadership role in finding a way to operate sustainably (Capra and Luisi, 2016; Dunphy et al., 2007; Hart, 2005; Senge et al., 2008; Wheatley, 1999). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is one example of a group of some 5,000 mostly multinational companies who have accepted just such a challenge as they strive bring their vision to “create a world where more than 9 billion people are all living well and within the boundaries of our planet by 2050” (Davis et al., 2010, p8) into being. In 2016 WBCSD also declared their support for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the last two decades in particular sustainability has become increasingly visible as an issue in the community at large and within organisations. But there is evidence to suggest that, despite the higher profile and the increasing pressure on corporates to report on their activities in relation to various essentially voluntary standards (e.g. Global Reporting Initiative, UN Global Compact, UN SDGs), little real progress in regard to reversing the trajectory of unsustainability is being made (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003; Emmerson, 2009; Global Footprint Network, 2017; Global Reporting Initiative, 2009; Gray and Milne, 2002; Milne et al., 2006; Lozano et al., 2015). As an example, when I commenced this research in 2009 the global ecological footprint was 1.4 and in 2016 it was 1.6 earths. Organisations report moving towards sustainability without a clear understanding of what sustainability means or recognising the values reprioritisation involved in becoming sustainable (Milne et al., 2006; Tregidga et al., 2006; Gray and Milne, 2002). Milne and his colleagues, after reviewing the academic literature, argue that a more critical approach is required by academics to the hegemonic discourse that they identify as heavily influenced by vested interests and corporations themselves (Tregidga et al., 2006). Without critical thinking, they suggest organisations are unlikely to move beyond “moving towards” sustainability and make a paradigm shift to a new way of being.
Reporting on sustainability attracts a great deal of interest and is a growing activity based on the belief that transparency will deliver better decisions and greater accountability for sustainable outcomes. The number of sustainability reporting instruments being used globally, has risen to over 400 in 64 countries in 2016 (King et al., 2016). Various government legislation or financial bodies mandate approximately two thirds of these reporting instruments. The sheer volume of instruments creates its own confusion for multinational companies operating within different jurisdictions (King et al., 2016).

The Accounting for Sustainability (A4S) Report from the UK also recognises that while many organisations now have policies in place, very few have found a way to embed sustainability “into the DNA of their business.” (McGill, 2008, p6). It is interesting to note the developments in the approach of A4S since McGill’s 2008 report. The organisation remains supported by the Prince of Wales, and continues to champion the call to embed sustainability into corporations. It is doing so through focussing its attention on CFOs and accounting systems, while calling for integrated thinking. The key assumption underpinning its strategy appears to be that if corporates can be persuaded to account, in monetary terms, for the cost being done to the planet’s ecosystem through economic growth, and that cost is internalised into decision making – then this equates with embedding sustainability into organisational DNA (Accounting for Sustainability, 2016). The A4S approach is an example of the attempts to engage decision makers to change within the limits of the current paradigm and I will argue that embedding sustainability into organisational DNA, requires embedding sustainability into the organisational culture and therefore necessitates a more integrated approach than working with CFOs and one process within organisations.

One barrier to becoming sustainable is the confusion about just what sustainability means and therefore what it is that organisations are seeking to achieve (Milne, et al., 2006).

2.3 The Sustainability Literature
Within the literature it is possible to identify two schools of thought, each representing a different broad understanding of the term sustainability.
2.3.1 ‘Business a little less than usual’ or ‘weak sustainability’

The first is a business as usual approach with the added intention of reducing harm to the environment by reducing pollution and waste. It is based upon concern for predominantly environmental issues in isolation from the social justice and personal wellbeing facets of sustainability, and often in isolation from the ecosystems that underpin the more visible symptoms of dysfunction. This has become known as eco-efficiency (Ehrenfeld, 2005a) and when combined with product redesign based upon ecological principles, was hoped to enable economic growth to absolutely decouple (that is, in absolute terms, not merely as a percentage relative to GDP) from the consumption of non-renewable resources (Jackson, 2009a; Jackson, 2009b). This much-hoped-for decoupling would mean little disruption to the existing economic system based upon the pursuit of continuous growth, and enable the existing business models to remain largely unchallenged.

The level of eco-efficiency required, when allowing for a continuing growth in global population and the emergence of the Chinese and Indian middle class aspiring to western materialism, was analysed in depth by the UK based Sustainable Development Commission (Jackson, 2009a). A major conclusion of this report was that the efficiencies required are of such magnitude that “it seems almost fanciful to suppose that we can achieve “deep” resource and emission cuts without confronting the nature and structure of market economies” (Jackson, 2009a, p57). Although the Sustainable Development Commission UK was closed in March 2011, its conclusions from 2009 appear to be supported by the continuing increase in the global ecological footprint as at 2016.

Further, eco-efficiency may represent a systemic risk to future sustainability due to the rebound effect (Font Vivanco et al., 2016; Giljum and Polzin, 2009; Horace Herring and Roy, 2007; Jackson, 2009a; Sorrell and Dimitropoulos, 2008; Yang and Li, 2017). The rebound effect, an economic concept, describes the dynamic of increasing efficiencies, which are usually accompanied by decreasing prices, and so increasing absolute consumption rather than reducing it. Resource efficiency is necessary - but not sufficient - to address the underlying issue of our global unsustainability (Ehrenfeld, 2000). This is an important point. I am not rejecting the eco-efficiency contributions, as will be seen in a following section, they are an
important part of the early phases of the transition but they should not be seen as
the destination of the transition to being sustainable. Eco-efficiency represents the
easier, technical responses within the existing paradigm. And as is demonstrated by
more recent research into the rebound effects, the success of eco-efficiency
contributions needs to be assessed systemically.

It is possible that a second group of authors describe the only pragmatic way
forward.

2.3.2 Understanding the nature of ‘strong’ sustainability
The second group in the sustainability literature is less frequently encountered, and
is distinguished by the view that to become sustainable, organisations will need to
fundamentally transform themselves - by placing sustainability at the heart of
organisational practices rather than relying on the technological solutions
represented by eco-efficiencies. The authors in this second group (Capra and Luisi,
2016; Dunphy, et al., 2007; Edwards and Orr, 2005; Eisenstein, 2011; Gopel,
2016; Hart, 2005; Hawken, et al., 1999; Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; Senge et al.,
2008; Stead and Garner Stead, 1994; Stead and Stead, 2000; Swimme and Berry,
1992; Wheatley, 1999), which may be identified as proponents of strong
sustainability (Milne, et al., 2006), are united in the view that responding to
sustainability requires the unveiling and challenging of unconscious, unexamined
assumptions or deep beliefs about how the world works (mental models). This
recognition is argued to form the foundation of a transformation by shifting
paradigm, which is identified as one of the higher order leverage points in any
system (Meadows, 1999). Meadows added an even higher order leverage point,
transcending paradigms, which leads us into the realms of enlightenment and
consciousness, but I do not pursue such a lofty ambition in this research
(Meadows,1999, p19).

But what is the shift in paradigm? The nature of the new paradigm espoused by
strong sustainability proponents, is described as one where interdependence is
recognised. It is a paradigm that has emerged from the natural sciences of living
systems, and subsequent theoretical branches such as chaos theory and complex
adaptive systems (Capra and Luisi, 2016; Edwards and Orr, 2005; Gopel, 2016;
Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; Senge, 2014; Wheatley, 1999). The paradigm of
living systems then, is the framework of understanding the dynamics of how the world works, from which we might become sustainable. This paradigm is founded upon a set of underlying assumptions that are very different from the long-dominant Newtonian paradigm.

Wherever I refer to the paradigm shift within this thesis, I am referring to the shift from perceiving the world and acting in it based on the Newtonian paradigm to perceiving and acting based on an understanding of livings systems (or the paradigm of complexity). The difference between the two paradigms is returned to again (section 2.4.1). Proponents of strong sustainability, employ the lens of complexity or livings systems to understand what is happening within a system of interest to decide what action to take.

2.3.2.1 What elements are important in an understanding of strong sustainability?

There is no one accepted definition of the term sustainable. The Brundtland report definition is often quoted:

“sustainable development, which implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

(Brundtland, 1987)

However, even within the definition one can discern that this is regarding sustainable development, not sustainability in its own right. Sustainable development is a term that does not question the assumptions underpinning continuing economic growth and development but seeks to understand how development can be undertaken sustainably (Banerjee, 2003). The Brundtland definition was challenging in its time, but it has come to be questioned in terms of it ability to assist shift paradigms in the 21st century (Lozano, 2015). Some authors are questioning if business as an institution has redefined sustainable development to “business as usual” or at least, “business-a-little-less-than-usual” (Tregidga et al., 2006, p 4).

More representative of the contemporary understanding of the definition of strong sustainability is Ehrenfeld’s contribution:
“Sustainability is a possible way of living or being in which individuals, firms, governments, and other institutions act responsibly in taking care of the future as if it belonged to them today, in equitably sharing the ecological resources on which the survival of human and other species depends, and in assuring that all who live today and in the future will be able to flourish – that is, satisfy their needs and aspirations.” (Ehrenfeld, 2000, p37)

In this definition, sustainability is not a destination or an end point. It’s a way of living or being.

Using the biological understanding of living systems, sustainability is a dynamic state. Evolutionary biologist, Sahtouris (2003, 1999) describes sustainability using Koestler’s (1976) notion of holons and holarchy. Holons (Figure 2:3) describe the nested subsystems comprising a whole system.

![Figure 2:3 Holons in holarchy - dynamic mutual consistency (Sahtouris, 2005)](image)

Each subsystem is whole and complete in itself and a part of the larger system. Using this way of describing the relationships between the parts, Sahtouris describes a mature sustainable ecological system (type III) as one where resources and territory are shared in order to ensure the life of all species. One in which, at every level of the holarachy, “self-interest is negotiated, which leads to compromises and cooperation or intelligent dynamic harmony” (Sahtouris, 2005).

The system in question, is of course a part of a larger environment and adapts to the environment around it, so the relationships between the subsystems are in a constant state of negotiation. Sustainability can be understood to be a dynamic
state of constant becoming through “learning to feed each other instead of fight each other” (Sahtouris, 2003, p 3).

Senge (2014) reflects on the use of language and particularly the English language as he considers how to understand the word sustainable. In the English language where so many terms become things or nouns, sustainable sounds like a thing we can have or a destination. But Senge goes on to notice other languages exist which do not have nouns but rely upon dynamic descriptions of processes e.g. the Black Foot of America. For this group of indigenous people, life, a noun in English, roughly translates as “surfing the flux” (2014, 29mins 15secs). Imagine then, the word sustainable if we had only a language that describes processes, not things. I might then understand the term sustainable as a dynamic process, for example:

*The continuous unfolding of life where people and all the diversity of species on Earth, live in intelligent dynamic harmony so that all are flourishing now and into the future.*

Even this definition is full of nouns! Such is the powerful yet subtle influence of our culture as it is expressed through our language.

Another element appears, perhaps somewhat surprisingly for those who promote the eco-efficiency approach, as we encounter the writings of those in the strong sustainability school. It is a dimension of spirituality. For example:

- Eisenstein writes about sacred economics and spirit (2011) and develops connections to the stories we tell ourselves about who we are as humans and how we live in community with all Earth’s creation and natural wealth.

- Meadows in her final pages addressing leverage points within systems points to the power to transcend paradigms and notes “It is to “get” at a gut level the paradigm that there are no paradigms, and to see that that itself is a paradigm, and to regard that whole realization as devastatingly funny. It is to let go into Not Knowing, into what the Buddhists call enlightenment.” (1999, p 19).
• Dunphy et al., discuss the development of a cosmocentric consciousness that is in “harmonious relationship with nature” (2007, p299); that nurtures caring and love within organizations; and is a spiritual intelligence that enables us to connect to an emerging or unfolding future (2007, p 300-301).

• Scharmer includes intention and mindfulness (Buddhist practices) to illuminate consciousness in his 13 propositions to lead change (2011).

• Senge (personal communication, 2010) and Wheatley (personal communication, 2013) both follow Buddhist traditions in their daily living.

Once a person begins to see systems as holarchies, it follows naturally that they recognise themselves and others as integral parts of a much larger system. Strong sustainability also recognises not only the wholeness of systems outside us, but also the wholeness of each human, in all of their dimensions – mind, body and spirit. Terms such as flourishing emerge as expressions of humans developing and living into their full potential in a way that not only meets their needs but also their aspirations (e.g. Ehrenfeld’s earlier definition of sustainability) and stewards the care of other species on the planet as integral parts of a much larger system.

However different authors understand the term, there is broad agreement of the following distinguishing features of strong sustainability (Capra and Luisi, 2016; Dunphy et al, 2007; Sahtouris, 1999; Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; Senge, 2014; Wheatley, 1999):

• A dynamic evolving state
• Acts upon an awareness of ecological systems and the recognition that everything is interdependent and not separate– social, cultural, environmental and economic elements as an integrated whole
• Takes a long temporal and broad geographic perspective
• Acknowledges the added dimension of human spirit and impulse towards contributing to something larger than ourselves.

In the rest of this thesis, when I employ the term sustainable or sustainability, I am referring to the understanding of strong sustainability.
2.3.3 How to make the paradigm shift to strong sustainability?

But having identified the need for a paradigm shift, none of the proponents of strong sustainability (Capra, 2007; Dunphy, et al., 2007; Hart, 2005; Senge et al., 2008; Stead & Garner Stead, 1994) propose a model describing how such an organisational transformation may be made by an existing ‘old paradigm’ or non-sustaining organisation.

2.3.3.1 About paradigm shifts more generally

Kuhn (1962) studied the history of scientific paradigm shifts and proposed that such shifts do not eventuate merely because of mounting evidence suggesting the old paradigm is flawed. He argued that the shift came when the new paradigm was articulated - and was then embraced because it explained the evidence better. Until the new paradigm was articulated, Kuhn observed that scientists altered their existing theory and practice at the edges of the old paradigm – attempting to make the old paradigm fit the evidence (1962). Within the context of sustainability, it could be argued that eco-efficiency or weak sustainability represents the attempt to make the old paradigm fit the evidence for change, while the proponents of strong sustainability are articulating the new paradigm.

2.3.3.2 Personal and societal metamorphosis

Sahtouris employs the metaphor of the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly to describe how the new paradigm of strong sustainability, a new way of living and working, will come into being (Sahtouris, 2016). This story is duplicated in Table 2:1.
Although this metaphorical story does not prescribe how to transform an organisation, it does provide a strong indication that like the caterpillar, personal transformation is involved; along with a collective element that involves a gathering of like-minded people with a new vision. It suggests that the DNA for the new may be lying dormant within the old, waiting to be activated by a crisis. It also prepares us for the likelihood that this communal transformation will wax and wane over time before the inevitable metamorphosis is complete at a societal level.

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**Table 2.1 The butterfly story (Sahtouris, 2016, para 1)**

A caterpillar can eat up to three hundred times its own weight in a day, devastating many plants in the process, continuing to eat until it’s so bloated that it hangs itself up and goes to sleep, its skin hardening into a chrysalis. Then, within the chrysalis, within the body of the dormant caterpillar, a new and very different kind of creature, the butterfly, starts to form. This confused biologists for a long time. How could a different genome plan exist within the caterpillar to form a different creature? They knew that metamorphosis occurs in a number of insect species, but it was not known until quite recently that nature did a lot of mixing and matching of very different genome/protein configurations in early evolutionary times. Cells with the butterfly genome were held as disclike aggregates of stem cells that biologists call 'imaginal cells', hidden away inside the caterpillar all its life, remaining undeveloped until the crisis of overeating, fatigue and breakdown allows them to develop, gradually replacing the caterpillar with a butterfly!

Such metamorphosis makes a good metaphor for the great changes globalisation, in the sense of world transformation, is bringing about, as Norie Huddle first used it in her beautiful book Butterfly. Our bloated old system is rapidly becoming defunct while the vision of a new and very different society, long held by many 'imaginal cell' humans who dreamt of a better world, is now emerging like a butterfly, representing our solutions to the crises of predation, overconsumption and breakdown in a new way of living lightly on Earth, and of seeing our human society not in the metaphors and models of mechanism as well-oiled social machinery, but in those of evolving, self-organizing and intelligent living organism.

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2.3.3.3 Corporate strategy

Senge has travelled a path that began publically with his seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (1994) in which he proposed five disciplines for forming a learning organisation - personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. His work
naturally grew, through an awareness of interdependency, into an interest in sustainability after founding the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) in 1997 and co-authoring several handbooks on how to nurture a learning organisation employing the five disciplines. His latest co-authored book, *The necessary revolution: how individuals and organisations are working together to create a sustainable world* (Senge et al., 2008) proposes five stages and emerging drivers of sustainability within organisations (Figure 2:4).

![Figure 2:4 Five stages of development (Senge et al. 2008)](image)

The five stages chart the path of an organisation becoming more sustainable over time as its appreciation of sustainability moves from a reaction to the need to comply with government regulations and consumer pressure, through to seeking competitive advantage with an integrated strategy to being more sustainable in stage 4.

Stage 5 marks what I am terming the paradigm shift, where the organisation becomes restorative and in Senge et al.’s model, aligns with core organisational values. Like Hart (2005), Senge et al.’s focus is on corporate strategy as a vehicle
for understanding the different motivating forces (or values being expressed) by organisations.

The motivation between stage 4 and 5 is different. In stage 4, the motivation is profit driven through competitive advantage, while in stage 5, the motivation to be sustainable is driven by the desire to positively influence the whole. In stage 5, it becomes intrinsically important to the organisation and its leadership and Senge et al. discuss the importance of this shift from profit as a purpose, to a greater sense of mission as the authors consider the impact of vision and what it does. Senge et al. reference Willard and agree with him that because the behaviours of stages 4 and 5 are essentially the same, “the difference in motivation between stage 4 and 5 organizations doesn't necessarily matter at this point.” (Senge et al., 2008, p 118). However, the literature regarding motivation suggests that it may matter a great deal. The difference is between extrinsic (driven by forces outside the individual) and intrinsic motivation (driven by forces inside the individual). The literature remains somewhat divided on whether one source of motivation is more powerful than another to gain high performance, but there is research to support the proposition that intrinsic motivation provides greater employee satisfaction and engagement (Giancola, 2014) and is a source of greater creativity (Amabile, 1997).

If a sustaining organisation is to be formed to meet the aspirations of its employees and customers (Ehrenfeld, 2000), it will also need to innovate new ways of doing things. In this case, engagement and creativity will be required along with the capacity for exercising leadership of adaptive change. Such leadership is also sourced in what people care about, or their values. Or in other words, such leadership requires intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is therefore likely to be an essential element in the paradigmatic shift.

Senge et al. (2008) share many stories of businesses moving towards sustainability, that is, doing less harm; and some stories of how large corporates such as GE are leading the field of sustainability. But the stories do not include the specific
dynamic of how these changes came about – especially how the shift from stage 4 to 5 occurs.

Where the dynamic is described, it is through the influence of traditional hierarchical authority. For example, there is an unquestioned assumption about the role of senior management (and the CEO in particular) being responsible for setting the vision (Senge et al., 2008, p 337). And, by inference, the authors condone senior leadership employing almost punitive measures if business unit managers do not get on board with the sustainability vision and goals. It is likely that these stories come from organisations that are still operating at a level that does not yet fully understand how to cultivate a human environment that fully engages with their employees at an intrinsic level, and so employs extrinsic motivators such as ‘carrots and sticks’.

The five stages and drivers model employed by Senge et al., and their later reference to Hart and Milstein’s model (cited Senge et. al, 2008, p122) is focussed on corporate strategic orientations and is not explicit about how these strategies relate to the organisation’s culture and the cultivation of the human environment for work. Although it is clear from reading all of Senge’s work that the human dimension is a strong and important component, as are constructive cultures in which people can inquire and innovate. Perhaps an underlying assumption of the authors is that ‘we’ already know how organisations are best designed and how to lead these changes. I question that assumption and will return to it (2.4.2).

Dunphy et al.’s (2007) waves of sustainability provide a much more explicit picture of the different organisational perspectives on environment and people as it moves through the stages of development to the final paradigmatic transformation (Table 2:2).

---

1 The transformation of Interface Carpets under the leadership of Ray Anderson is another similar story where the paradigm shift from eco-efficiency to greater purpose was made, however the nature and dynamic of the change itself was not specifically traced. (ANDERSON, R. 2009. Confessions of a radical industrialist: Profits, people purpose - doing business by respecting the earth., New York, St. Martin's Press.)
Table 2:2 Three waves of sustainability (Dunphy et. al., 2007)

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<tr>
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Dunphy et.al. (2007) describe a sustaining organisation as the third wave of change, an ideal, where the organisation “reinterprets the nature of the corporation to an integral self renewing element of the whole society and in its ecological context.” (2007, p17). That is, the sustaining organisation marks a shift from reducing harm, to promoting health, in the environmental and social ecologies within which it is embedded. This shift, like Senge et al.’s (2008) stage 5, also marks a subtle shift in purpose of the organisation because within the underpinning of the paradigmatic shift to strong sustainability, is the realisation that self-interest resides in the health of the whole. There is a shift from perceiving the organisation as a separate identity to the recognising the organisation’s identity as a part of the whole. The remainder
of this thesis employs the term **sustaining organisation** to describe such an organisation; that recognises its wellbeing is dependent upon the wellbeing of the whole and therefore purposefully nurtures the whole, people and planet.

Dunphy and colleagues track the different characteristics of each stage of development, telling illustrative stories of organisations that display certain characteristics of each stage. They conclude the book by discussing the qualities of leadership required to lead such a change – but are again not specific about how an organisation may make the paradigmatic shift and transform itself into a sustaining organisation (Dunphy, et al., 2007).

### 2.3.4 **The research gap**

But even with the articulation of the new paradigm for a sustaining organisation in theory (e.g. Senge’s Stages 5 and Dunphy’s third wave of transformation) and the emergence of some businesses actively pursuing it, system wide acceptance of the need to transform into a sustaining organisation is not evident (Dunphy, et al., 2007; Emmerson, 2009; Lozano, 2015; McGill, 2008; Senge et al., 2008, Tregidga and Milne, 2006). This apparent inability or unwillingness to embrace the new paradigm of strong sustainability, combined with an absence in the literature explaining how to nurture a sustaining organisation, identifies the gap in current knowledge that this thesis seeks to address through innovative contributions.

#### 2.3.4.1 **Integral theory – further clarifying the gap and appreciating all models**

If the organisational stages of development theories are correct, then work at all stages is necessary to make the final shift to becoming sustaining. Further, the different approaches, even if reflecting similar stages of development, may be seen as different perspectives on the same transition in the organisation – whether it is a technical solution to eco-efficiency or a behaviour change program.

Another way of thinking about the different models for change to become sustaining is provided by integral theory promulgated by Wilber (2001). Wilber considered how to synthesise seemingly disparate fields of human undertakings such as politics, science, business and religion. He proposed a simple but profound quadrant that can contain all different perspectives on human development. These quadrants, (Figure 2:5) are only one component of the theory. In its entirety, one
version of integral theory is often referred to as AQAL (All Quadrants All Lines). AQAL encompasses the four quadrants, several levels and lines of human development, several states of consciousness and types (topics that do not fit into the preceding categories). For my purposes at present, however, I am concerned only with the quadrants.

The quadrants are formed along two axes. The vertical axis represents either the individual (I) or the collective (WE). The horizontal axis represents either the Internal or External qualities of the vertical axis. For example, an organisation may be viewed through the four quadrants in the following way. The organisation is comprised of:

1. Individuals, the I, who each possess their own ways of thinking, their own beliefs and values. This describes the upper left quadrant - the Interior qualities of the I.
2. Each individual also displays certain behaviours and ways of making decisions. These elements are shown in the upper right quadrant - the Exterior qualities of the I.
3. With regard the collective WE that forms the organisation as a whole, the Internal qualities include shared stories and values that contribute to the culture and are shown in the lower left quadrant.
4. Various management systems, planning processes, policies etc comprise the collective Exterior of the organisation.

Integral theory proposes that for a change to be successful, it needs to involve changes in all four quadrants in an integrated manner (Hessler-Key and Wood, 2006; Hunt, 2009; Volckmann, 2005.). The implication for this current thesis is that for an organisation to become sustaining, we need to understand how to influence change in all four quadrants, rather than models or theories that privilege one quadrant or perspective over all others, for example, focussing on corporate strategy alone.
Within the sustainability literature there is no integrated model or understanding of how to:

1. Cultivate the conditions for an individual to transform their own interior - their values, beliefs and aspirations to support being sustaining (I);
2. Transform the collective interior – the organisational culture that is focused on shared stories, values and beliefs to support being sustaining (WE)
3. Influence the behaviours and decisions employees make on a day to day basis so that their work aligns with forming a sustaining organisation (I);
4. Integrate the substantial technocratic work (Lozano et al., 2015) that has been developed as organisational processes or systems to support being sustaining - e.g. strategic planning in organisations or technical processes to improve eco-efficiencies (ITS).

Let’s return to the three major contributions from Sahtouris (2016), Senge et al. (2008), and Dunphy et al. (2007) considered in section 2.3.3 to understand existing notions how to make the paradigm shift to form a sustaining organisation.
• Sahtouris' (2016) Butterfly Story supports a new way of understanding the context of our collective unsustainability. The metaphor generates a new collective story for the collective interior (WE) and may encourage the individual beliefs of listeners (I) although is unlikely to change them.

• Senge et al. (2008) focus their attention on corporate strategy of the collective exterior, the ITS. Their book does discuss collective values (WE). Senge (1994) in his seminal work, The Fifth Discipline, identifies mental models and personal mastery (I), shared vision (WE), and team learning (WE) as elements of forming a learning organisation. However, these elements are not developed into an integrated framework that illustrates the nature and dynamic of the change process to form a sustaining organisation.

• Dunphy et al. (2007) provide a model that is centred on the collective exterior, the ITS, with consideration of corporate strategy, human resource management systems and environmental management systems that will support the three waves of transformation.

I do not seek to misrepresent the authors identified above; their work all recognises the need for change at all levels within the system, but their models do not provide integrated approaches to reveal the nature and dynamic of change within all four quadrants.

Most of the sustainability literature privileges the exterior quadrants – either IT (e.g. A4S focus on decision making with CFO’s) or ITS (e.g business models, corporate strategy and management systems). It could be argued that modern management as whole privileges the collective exterior (ITS) quadrant. Perhaps this privileging is a result of the Newtonian paradigm and its pervasive influence on management (to be discussed further in section 2.4.1) and is illustrated by the received wisdom through assertions such as “you can’t manage what you can’t measure”.

The quadrants provide another way of understanding the gap in the literature that I am identifying. This thesis as a whole does not rely upon integral theory as the primary lens although as a systemic approach it is consistent with the lens of complexity being employed. Integral theory is introduced here only as a useful perspective from which to clarify the gap in our current knowledge.
My key research question is:

**What is the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to nurture a sustaining organisation?**

And as integral theory came into view, my evolving intention became to answer this question in an integrated manner.

As organisational change is now at the centre of my attention, the topics of change management and leadership come into view and these are profiled in the following section.

### 2.4 Development of a high level model of emergent leadership and change to nurture a sustaining organisation

The following section reviews organisational change for sustainability and develops a high level model of the elements that may be involved in cultivating the conditions for an organisation to become sustaining. Because my basic tenet is that a paradigm shift is required to become sustaining, I have not taken the more common research route of surveying what existing leaders in corporate sustainability are currently doing. Reviewing existing strategies would heavily prejudice the research towards the existing weak sustainability approach and the external ITS quadrant in integral theory.

#### 2.4.1 From the Newtonian paradigm to the paradigm of complexity

The Newtonian paradigm employs the metaphor of machines and clockwork to describe the universe and the world in which we live. This metaphor has often been used to describe organisations (Capra, 2002a; Capra, 2007; Capra and Luisi, 2016; Marion, 1999; Sahtouris, 1999; Wheatley, 1999). As the mechanical metaphor was employed, an unconscious approach to change and culture emerged. If an organisation is a machine, then it follows the machine must have a maker and someone to care for it to ensure it does not fall into disrepair (the role Newton ascribed to God in maintaining the universe). It can be argued that senior management of organisations have assumed this role and ensure that the necessary strategic, structural, behavioural and cultural changes are made to improve the
efficiency of the machine and thus ensure its ongoing viability. In the Newtonian paradigm, cause and effect is direct and linear, which leads to a strategy that is planned to deliver predetermined outcomes; an organisational structure that is shifted like cogs in a machine; and culture that is engineered to control behaviours (extrinsically) to achieve the desired results.

But within the new paradigm of complexity, a metaphor of a living system presents itself for organisational life. By employing the term living system here, I am referring to any autopoietic system that reproduces itself from its parts (Maturana et al., 1974). Examples of livings systems include humans, animals and flora, but extend to natural ecologies, weather patterns and even economies. Organisations may also be thought of as living systems in that they are capable of reproducing themselves from their existing parts. Perceiving organisations in this manner first appeared within management and leadership with the publication of Wheatley's seminal work (1999), and could be thought of as a type of biomimicry, however biomimicry (Benyus, 2002) is usually a term reserved for technological innovations in the form of product design and production.

A living system exists with its own nominal boundaries, and is populated by members of the organisation (agents) who self-organise to achieve the organisational purpose, based upon their often unspoken understanding of their identity as a community (Figure 2:6). Within this living system, it is the community that comprises the organisation, that decides what information is relevant to respond to and what is not; the community that makes new meaning of new relevant information; and the community that responds with novelty that may become emergent change with reference to their identity, in order to adapt (Capra and Luisi, 2016; Geus, 1997; Maturana et al., 1974; Wheatley, 1999). The response to adapt to either an external stimulus or an internal novel idea, is termed emergent change.
Figure 2:6 Emergent change within an organisation perceived as a living system

In this metaphor, structure is self-organising, while change and culture (the way in which agents work together) are emergent properties of the living system. This metaphor, representing a very different way of an organisation functioning, is a significant challenge to existing organisational hierarchy – as its role and desire to control needs to be abandoned, in order to liberate and influence the change that resides as an innate potential within the organisation as a living system. There is no blueprint for predetermined outcomes in the complexity of a living system – a living system is inherently unpredictable (Capra, 2002b; Marion, 1999; Zhu, 2007). These principles of the behaviour of living systems are itemised and contextualised for organisational life in Table 2:3.
2.4.2 Nature and dynamic of change within the paradigm of complexity

There is evidence to support the argument that it is precisely because best practice change management is founded upon the metaphor of organisation as machine, with all its inherent Newtonian assumptions, that it boasts only a 10 – 30% success rate as defined as achieving the intended outcomes (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Higgs and Rowland, 2005; Kotter, 2007). Research by Higgs and Rowland (2005) further concludes that change processes based upon assumptions of complexity are more successful than those founded upon Newtonian assumptions, and those change processes that are emergent in nature were found to be the most successful of all.

An example of an emergent process was one where managers adjusted as they progressed and did not follow a predetermined blueprint for the desired change throughout the entire process. However, it was still a process where managers were leading the change. There is however a lack of widespread agreement on this point (Lawrence, 2015) with an argument that the more traditional step-like change models (e.g. Kotter, 2007) serve a purpose in the appropriate context.

Within the literature, theory that describes organisational emergent change within the paradigm of complexity and maintains internal consistency with the principles of complexity, is rare. This is argued to be the case because the phenomena itself

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Self-organisation of structure and responses involving interdependency and multiple feedback loops – results in uncertainty and unpredictability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Identity as a community – vision, purpose and values.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Participation of all agents is the norm.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Change and culture emerge as agents make sense of new information, referencing the identity of the organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Influence is possible; control is not possible.</td>
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Table 2:3 Principles of living systems as related to organisational life.
challenges the managerial desire and indeed its presumed function within the Newtonian paradigm; to co-ordinate and control. The **managerial paradigm** (Griffin et al., 1999; Griffin et al., 1998; Mowles et al., 2008; Stacey, 2000; Stacey, 2007) is so pervasive that is seems very few authors addressing the topic of emergent change are able to propose theoretical and pragmatic approaches that challenge senior management’s desire for the illusion of control (Zhu, 2007). Zhu (2007) concludes that none of the theories by authors in his literature review on the topic were able to maintain internal consistency with the paradigm of complexity, with perhaps the exception of Stacey and his colleagues from Hertfordshire University, UK (Mowles et al., 2008; Stacey, 2007; Stacey, 2000).

2.4.2.1 **Stacey’s complex responsive processes**

Stacey’s school of thought contributes useful insights into how change may manifest within the paradigm of complexity, but paradoxically, does so by refuting that organisations may be considered to be systems at all. Referring to the aforementioned view on control, he attributes blame for the strongly held managerial desire for control, to systems thinking rather than the Newtonian paradigm. Systems thinking is not one way of thinking but a ‘broad church’ of different schools of thinking about systems representing different lineages of development, complexity being one of those schools of thinking (Ison, 2010). In blaming systems thinking, Stacey places himself at odds with authors at the leading edge of organisational change within the paradigm of complexity. Zhu describes this “**wholesale condemnation and abandonment of systems thinking**” as “**less than open-minded, selectively ignorant and at times self-conflicting.**” (Zhu, 2007, p452). However, the principles Stacey espouses in his **complex responsive processes** remain useful, because they have been developed using complexity as a metaphor for organisational life (Stacey & Griffin, 2008).

Stacey (2007) explains his complex responsive processes can be understood to be:

- complex: the very act of human relating is uncertain;
- self-organising and emergent: people interacting at the local level do so without any plan or blueprint for what emerges from the interaction; and
• evolving: differences between individuals cause conflict that can amplify into novelty.

Combining Stacey’s understanding of complex responsive processes with the principles of livings systems as related to organisation life (Table 2:3), it is possible to extend our understanding of how emergent change might be cultivated to support the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation. It is to be expected that the emergent change will occur through emergent conversations, within which those exercising leadership will seek to influence and assist people to make new meaning of information deemed relevant. The new meaning is likely to reference the organisational identity, that is, its vision, purpose and values. The principles guiding the understanding of emergent change within a living system are summarised in Table 2:4.

| 1. Change is a natural evolving process of learning or adaption to a changing external and internal environment |
| 2. Change is an emergent property of organisations; and |
| 3. Emergent change is embedded in the emergent conversations that people engage in, and is the recognition of new meaning. |

Table 2:4 Principles of change within living systems as related to organisational life.

2.4.2.2 The importance of organisational identity

The alignment between Table 2:3 and Table 2:4 is clear, and expected as both understand change to be an emergent property of the system as it adapts. Stacey’s complex responsive processes add the emphasis on the unplanned conversations between different people that generate new meaning and the resultant emergent adaptation. The primary difference between the two perspectives is the organisational identity (or DNA to continue the living systems metaphor). Stacey, unlike Wheatley (1999) and Senge (1985), believes that shared values will not bind people together and as stated earlier, denies that an organisation may be viewed as a system at all (2007).
Within an organisational setting, values are important and can be argued to have a cohesive effect on the organisation. Schein (1990), who views organisations as open systems, has written extensively about organisational culture and defines organisational culture as:

“Culture can now be defined as (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (Schein, 1990, p 111).

The definition is consistent with the living system perspective of an organisation with his reference to assumptions developed by a given group to cope with external adaptation or internal integration (Figure 2:6). Schein goes on to note that the core pattern of assumptions results from values that have stood the test of time. Schein proposes that organisational culture may be thought as comprising three inter-related layers. The first being artefacts which are observable features such as behaviours, company records and policies, etc. The second layer comprising values, lived rather than espoused, and the third layer being the unconscious assumptions or beliefs that determine behaviour and represent values of norms that have stood the test of time (Schein, 1990, pp 111-112).

2.4.2.3 The Principles Stage 1: Principles of living systems and emergence to guide leadership

Combining the discussion to date, Table 2:5 has been developed employing:

1. The understanding of the principles of living systems as developed in Figure 2:6 and Tables 2:3 and 2:4;

2. Schein’s understanding of organisational culture having values that have stood the test of time and patterns of assumptions at its centre (1990);

3. The perspective that a living system will respond or adapt to new information by referencing its identity (Figure 2:6);
4. Wheatley’s (1999) identification of the organisational identity as its vision, purpose and values; and

5. The discussion following in section 2.4.3.

In Table 2:5 the left-hand column identifies the principles of living systems and emergence of change. The right-hand column of Table 2:5 expands these principles in a way intended to guide those exercising leadership within the organisation to nurture emergent change for the purpose of forming a sustaining organisation. The origin of the behaviours identified in the right-hand column of Table 2:5 are explained in the following section 2.4.3 where the role and nature of leadership is considered and the The Principles Stage 1 and The Model Stage 1 are developed.

2.4.3 The role and nature of leadership for sustainability

Inspired by stories such as Interface Carpets and the epiphany of Ray Anderson (Anderson, 2009), I was initially drawn only to a focus on developing leadership capacity to lead the organisational transformation to form a sustaining organisation. But, even if one leader undergoes a personal transformation, the organisation is not yet transformed because the organisational culture, that pattern of unconscious assumptions that reflect values that have stood the test of time (Schein, 1990), remains dysfunctional for the formation of a sustaining organisation. And the leader is not immune to the organisational culture; it influences that person as much as other employees. This section aims to explore how a leader may influence the organisational culture in a way that nurtures a sustaining organisation.

The term leader is often an ambiguous one, frequently being used interchangeably with senior management, and meaning those in positions of high authority within the organisation. But anyone may choose to exercise leadership at any time (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Heifetz, 1994) and it may be at the individual and team level with a more operational focus or at an organisational or strategic level. Neither may be separated from the other in reality, but to facilitate an understanding of leadership within the paradigm of complexity and to form a sustaining organisation, the following sub-sections discuss leadership within each of these two spheres.
### Principles of living systems and emergent change

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<th>Leadership Principles and Behaviours</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Change is an emergent property of a living system. (Table 2:4 point 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage people in conversations that are not limited by predetermined outcomes – be curious and seek to learn or adapt together (p 60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask questions that assist people make new systemic meaning (p 60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Liberate the best from people by facilitating their self-actualisation and allowing them to work from their strengths and passion – liberate intrinsic motivation (p 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hold the space for conversations that challenge existing mental models and long held values (p 65).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be mindful of the influence of processes or systems to either reinforce or decrease the influence of feedback loops (p 65).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-organisation of structure and responses involving interdependency and multiple feedback loops – resulting in uncertainty and unpredictability. (Table 2:3 point 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experiment to see what may work – embrace error as a basis for learning (p 60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give up desire for control – seek the more powerful option to influence with consideration given to the systemic nature of any given situation (p 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific measurements may not be suitable, due to a lack of direct cause and effect, instead develop an understanding of indicators within the system (p 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Starting conditions are important – carefully consider who should be present at initial conversations (p 65).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A living system is self-referential to its identity as a living system. (Table 2:3 point 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create an emergent and shared vision of what people really want and identify the underlying shared values (p 64).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Those exercising leadership will influence more effectively if they to embody the values and live the vision – so reinforcing the identity of the system (p 64).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participation of all agents in the living system enables spontaneous, emergent, self-organisation and evolution (without a blue print) (Table 2:3 point 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Locate responsibility with people and allow them to self organise – do not impose control or organisation (p 60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be inclusive and invite everyone to participate – appreciate the wisdom in groups (p 62).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Change may also derive from the small differences between agents within the living system, that are amplified within the system. (Figure 2:6, Table 2:4 points 1 and 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appreciate and work with genuine diversity and ‘hold the space’ for these differences to amplify into new solutions (p 62).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:5 The Principles Stage 1
2.4.3.1 Exercising leadership operationally

Within living systems it is recognised that a system can survive without optimising its best fit within the environment in which it exists. But, the system is most resilient when it has at its disposal its broadest range of behavioural responses – when it achieves its best fit (Ison & Russell, 2000). The following identifies conversations to negotiate self-interest and the development of people to self-actualise, as important elements of leadership for cultivating the paradigm shift and enabling best fit with the organisation’s environment.

Conversations to negotiate self interest with the whole at every level

The concept of best fit may be most easily understood employing the notion of holons. Previously, I identified Sahtouris’ (1999) understanding of a sustainable state which emerges when each holon has successfully negotiated its self-interest with the whole (Figure 2:3). Applying this principle to an organisation suggests that an organisation will be sustainable when the self-interest of each holon is negotiated with the whole. That is, at the individual, team, divisional and organisation levels as illustrated in Figure 2:7.

![Holarchy of negotiation of self-interest in a sustaining organisation](image)

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2 The whole system is of course broader than the organisation and extends out into suppliers, customers and the environmental and social ecologies within which it is embedded – an important point to remember as the sustaining organisation needs to negotiate its self interest more broadly.
The role of leadership, therefore, includes the cultivation of a human environment that best facilitates the negotiation of self-interest of every level of holon, as the interests of the whole are served (McLean and Wells, 2010). Negotiation of self-interest represents a significant shift from more traditional management practices, which as identified by Stacey’s management paradigm (2007) are more focussed on control than emergence. If each employee is to negotiate their self-interest, the relevant manager needs to be aware of what each individual requires to do their job well as well as what that individual aspires to and has as resources to contribute to the organisation’s success. This means that each manager requires “high levels of human insight, interpersonal behaviours capability, advanced coaching skills” (McLean and Wells, 2010, p 4) and a capacity for facilitating conversations that liberate the best from people. It requires a willingness to be open to experimenting with what works for each team member and benefitting from that learning. The learning has two dimensions. The manager learns, and the team member also learns what works best. Leadership in this context is, therefore, the facilitation of learning and adaption.

Leadership behaviours to be included in Table 2:5 are:

1. Engage people in conversations that are not limited by predetermined outcomes – be curious and seek to learn and adapt together.
2. Ask questions that assist people to make new systemic meaning.
3. Experiment to see what may work – embrace error as a basis for learning.
4. Locate responsibility with people and allow them to self organise – do not impose control or organisation.

**Nurturing self-actualisation to develop courage to change and nurture creativity**

Human flourishing is a fundamental element in Ehrenfeld’s (2000) definition of sustainability. He names three types of strategies to become sustainable and he holds little hope of the flourishing element being activated by any of them:

1. Rationalistic (e.g eco-efficiency);
2. Naturalistic (e.g. frameworks like the Natural Step that employ principles of closed systems design); and
3. Humanistic (e.g. include notions such as fairness, equity in sharing resources, and social justice).

These three strategies are all focussed **outwards** at solutions that can be delivered by governmental policies or business strategies, rather than **inwards** focussed strategies. The approach in this thesis, along with that of others (Hunt, 2009; Huston, 2007; Snorf and Baye, 2010), recognises that the activation or reawakening of the flourishing element of the transformation to become sustainable, is an internal transformation within people, that organisations and their leadership can nurture to enable us to “recover our sense of beingness” (Ehrenfeld, 2000, p 38).

Maslow postulated that a human’s highest need is to self-actualise; a state in which the individual is at ease within the realm of the unknown, treating challenges as an opportunity to learn and play with new ideas (Maslow, 1959). These are qualities that are an advantage when working within the paradigm of complexity. A key feature of self-actualising people is a spontaneous sense of fun and creativity that is the source of new perspectives to enable learning and innovative solutions to complex problems (1959). The connection between creativity and self-actualisation is also supported, although not directly referred to, by Amabile (1997, p 42) who suggests “that creativity is most likely to occur when people’s skills overlap with their strongest intrinsic interests – their deepest passions” and thus implicates each individual’s personal values.

Creativity, learning and personal development are also outcomes that research from the discipline of positive psychology is demonstrating emerge when people are able to employ their personal strengths more often at work (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001). Employing personal strengths is intrinsically motivating and another facet of self-actualisation.

Operationally then, it follows that the nature of the leadership within a sustaining organisation will include the intention to nurture a work environment that fosters the development and growth of people, facilitates self-actualisation, and liberates the creativity and learning that will be the source of innovative solutions to the challenge of becoming sustaining.
Leadership principles to be included in Table 2:5 are:

1. Liberate the best from people by facilitating their self-actualisation and allowing them to express their personal strengths and passion (values) – liberate intrinsic motivation.

2.4.3.2 Leadership at the more strategic level

Operate from an understanding of complexity – seeing systemically

The foregoing suggests that to enable emergent change, organisational leadership will respond from an understanding of the principles of living systems and emergence (Table 2:5). Perceiving the whole organisational system and its relationship with the system beyond the nominal boundaries of the organisation, will provide a different set of strategic imperatives (e.g. society wide threats and opportunities). The principles of living systems and emergence will also influence the manner in which those in positions of authority view strategic planning and the implementation of strategies. It is likely that from this worldview, a more emergent style of strategic planning (Mintzberg and Waters, 1984) will evolve because of the inherent unpredictability of living systems. It is also likely that because change emerges from participation of agents within a living system, that organisational leaders will place greater value on:

- engaging with employees and stakeholders in a way that change emerges from conversations rather than holding preconceived notions and persuading people to their predetermined solutions; and
- engaging more broadly to obtain more systemic perspectives.

Leadership principles to be included in Table 2:5 are:

1. Give up the desire for control – seek the more powerful option to influence with consideration given to the systemic nature of any given situation.
2. Be inclusive and invite everyone to participate – appreciate the wisdom of and in groups.
3. Appreciate and work with genuine diversity and ‘hold the space’ (Heifetz, 2009) for these differences to amplify into new solutions.
4. Specific measurements may not be suitable, due to a lack of direct cause and effect, instead develop an understanding of indicators within the system.
Nurture a common and shared vision – envisioning

Given the emergent nature of the change, a way of fostering coherence, rather than chaos, within the system is required. As referred to earlier (2.4.2.2), this coherence is provided within a living system by its sense of identity – its reason d’être (Capra, 2002b; Wheatley, 1999).

Within contemporary organisations the publication of a vision is often employed to provide a sense of direction to people within an organisation – and is traditionally provided by senior management. The preceding discussion with regard to organisations as living systems, however, emphasises the importance of ensuring that all members of the system participate (Wheatley, 1999) in the development of a shared, emergent vision (Wells and McLean, 2013).

Within the context of sustainability, Meadows (1994) adds to the understanding of the richness of the vision required when she insists upon a vision of what we each really want, not what we will settle for. In addition to contributing to identity, generating a shared vision is also a practical process for each holon to negotiate its self-interest with the remainder of the system.

Meadows (1994) also suggests that at the level of a deeply felt response to the question, “What is your vision for this organisation - the vision that you really want?”, people are able to access the paradigm of sustainability: that their responses will reflect an understanding of a whole and complete life – and one that is wholesome. This is consistent with Sahtouris (2016) and The Butterfly Story, where she suggests the liberation of “the vision of a new and very different society, long held by many 'imaginal cell' humans who dreamt of a better world” from such a process. It would appear, then, that in this particular paradigm shift, the new paradigm may be accessible to people from within the old paradigm rather than from outside it. And underpinning the vision, which will be different for each person in its fine detail, are a set of values with the potential to unite people (Wells and McLean, 2013).

As a broad generalisation, it may be argued that many organisations have a set of espoused organisational values but they are usually more in service to the interests of the organisation than their people: mandating values that are linked to
behaviours considered desirable to implement predetermined strategies and thus controlling people rather than liberating them. With the simple notion of involving more people in the generation of the vision and values that they really want, it is suggested that powerful natural forces may be liberated. The simplicity of the idea is challenged in reality because it confronts deeply held beliefs about control and power within organisations.

Co-creating a shared vision of how we really want to experience work, is also a way of influencing organisational culture at the level of values (Schein, 1990). The process of envisioning is anticipated to evolve the organisational culture in a manner that supports a sustaining organisational to emerge.

Leadership behaviours to be included in Table 2:5 are:

1. Create an emergent and shared vision of what people really want and identify the underlying shared values.
2. Those exercising leadership will influence more effectively if they embody the values and ‘live’ the vision – so reinforcing the identity of the system.

Capabilities of emergent leadership
Envisioning (Wells and McLean, 2013) is a subtle process, that requires people to dance with the system (Meadows, 2008) – not attempting to impose irresponsible dreams upon the whole system but recognising an interconnection with the whole system and all its various feedback loops, that limits the range of possibilities. And, counter-intuitively, also recognising that learning to dance with these powerful forces, implies learning how to be more powerful – not less. These implications point to some of the personal qualities required of those exercising leadership within the complex environment such as humility, curiosity, and respect for everyone.

To fulfil the roles outlined above, those exercising leadership, require an understanding of how to create and hold the space within organisations for groups of people, representing different perspectives of the system, to engage in conversations that challenge mental models and beliefs. Heifetz terms this holding the space for adaptive work. Work that is heavily values laden, requiring learning that reprioritises values (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz, Grashow
& Linsky, 2009). (This is in contrast to technical work that requires neither new learning nor reprioritisation of values.)

The adaptive leadership framework, founded in an understanding of living systems, provides an understanding of how to influence the system as a whole and yet it does not make the principles of living systems and emergence transparent.

Leadership behaviours to be included in Table 2:5 are:

1. Hold the space for conversations that challenge existing mental models and long held values.
2. Starting conditions in systems are important – carefully consider who should be present at initial conversations.
3. Be mindful of the influence of processes or systems to either reinforce or decrease the influence of feedback loops.

The practice of adaptive leadership combined with an understanding of the principles of living systems and emergence to guide leadership identified in The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5), provides a framework for leadership that should support the evolution of a sustaining organisation.

2.4.3.3 The Model Stage 1

The foregoing discussion in this section proposes three major ingredients may combine richly with emergent change processes, to evolve a sustaining organisation. These ingredients are:

- An organisational leadership that nurtures an environment for self-actualising;
- The formation of a shared and co-created vision; and
- The practice of the adaptive leadership framework that is grounded in an understanding of the principles of living systems and emergence to guide leadership identified in Table 2:5 (The Principles Stage 1).

It is proposed that when these ingredients are mixed with an intention to liberate emergent change from conversations with people within the organisation, a sustaining organisation may be liberated or evolved from within. Figure 2:8 combines these ingredients and illustrates a high level model of emergent change.
to form a sustaining organisation. It is high level because it lacks the detail of how the elements may combine. The model may appear as a linear process, but the change process is not expected to be linear as indicated by the term iterative within the cloud of emergent change processes which are expected to include conversations. It is expected that the change process will take time and involve many iterations.

Bearing in mind the stages of development to form an advanced, evolved sustaining organisation (Dunphy et al, 2007; Senge et al, 2008), The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) is dependent upon the organisation having already developed past the earlier stages of compliance. It needs to be one that is ripe for the evolutionary transformation. The degree of ripeness is addressed in Chapter 3.

Figure 2:8 The Model Stage 1

The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) and The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5) should be read together to gain an understanding of the elements proposed to be important in nurturing a sustaining organisation, and how to cultivate the conditions for that evolution.
2.5 Summarising Chapter 2

This chapter has made clear our global state of un-sustainability and the explored the role that organisations may play in resolving that state. It noted the difference between weak and strong sustainability and argued that a transformation to being sustainable is a paradigmatic shift. The nature of this paradigmatic shift is from a Newtonian perspective to a living systems perspective.

I have examined the sustainability literature that indicate stages of transformation to become a sustaining organisation, but none explicitly declares an integrated model that addresses how that transformation may occur.

My key research question is ‘What is the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to nurture a sustaining organisation?’.

The intention of this thesis, therefore, is to record and explore processes to identify the principles that may be employed to cultivate a sustaining organisation. The objectives are to:

1. Trace the emergent change process and compare it with the proposed theoretical model, thus refining the model;
2. Trace, explore and record the process of generating a shared vision that orientates the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation; and
3. Better understand the nature of exercising leadership to both facilitate the paradigmatic shift and the liberation of human creative capacity in the formation of a sustaining organisation.

Through the literature review, the principles of livings systems and emergent change were identified and extrapolated into an organisational context to develop a list of principles and behaviours to guide the researcher to exercise leadership in a manner consistent with the paradigm of complexity to cultivate the conditions for a sustaining organisation to emerge. These are summarised in The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5).

Additionally, The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) visualises the major inputs that may be involved in the paradigmatic shift, namely:
• An organisational leadership that nurtures an environment for self-actualising;

• The formation of a shared and co-created vision; and

• The exercise of leadership consistent with the Adaptive Leadership framework and the principles of living systems and emergence.

These three inputs are proposed to combine in unknown, iterative emergent change processes from which a sustaining organisation may emerge. Figure 2:8 also highlights a haziness about the nature and dynamic of the emergent change processes which are at the heart of this research.

The methodology employed to undertake this research is identified in the following Chapter 3 and makes its own contribution to knowledge as an emergent systemic methodology is developed to explore an emergent research topic.
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CHAPTER 3: Developing a systemic action research methodology

Figure 3:1 Mind map of chapter 3
3.1 Introduction: An emergent methodology to trace an emergent research topic

The conceptual lens described in Chapter 2 to explore how a sustaining organisation may be formed is that of living systems also known as the paradigm of complexity. To ensure consistency between the research topic (how to form a sustaining organisation) and the methodology for exploring the research topic, a methodological approach that acknowledged the behaviour of the paradigm of complexity was desired. Such a preconceived methodology was not uncovered in the literature, so this chapter traces the development of such a methodology.

Applying the lens of complex adaptive systems is often referred to as systemic approach that sees the whole and works with the functioning of the whole in mind (Whittington, 2016).

The research topic also lent itself well to an action research approach to learn what emergent processes might unfold to nurture the shift to a sustaining organisation. Indeed Reason and Bradbury (2008), in their introductory comments, predicted the use of a systemic action research methodology for exactly this purpose.

The two key outputs of the literature review in Chapter 2 are the early model of elements proposed to contribute to forming a sustaining organisation (The Model Stage 1 depicted in Figure 2:8) and The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5) to guide the behaviour of the researcher in implementing The Model. Neither suggests the precise form the emergent change processes may take, other than the realisation they will involve emergent conversations. (The processes being represented in Figure 2:8 by the ‘cloud’ situated between the inputs and outcome.) These circumstances mean that the researcher can not develop a pre-planned methodology.

The intended methodological approach for this current research was founded upon The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5). My intention was to apply these principles.
within a systemic action research project to form an emergent research methodology in which the emergent change process to become a sustaining organisation may be explored and analysed.

This chapter contains two subsections that:

1) Detail the rationale and development of the intended methodological approach; and

2) Identify methodological findings by contrasting the intended methodology with what actually occurred as the methodology was implemented.

3.2 Foundational philosophy of the methodological approach

Founded in an appreciation of the literature review in Chapter 2, the elements that have become important in designing the methodological approach were identified as follows and are each explored individually in the following sub-sections:

1. A systemic approach
2. Intervening at the level of mental models and paradigms
3. Researcher behaviour in alignment with the behaviour of complex adaptive systems
4. Awareness of the researcher’s epistemology and teleology

3.2.1 A systemic approach

Research is often undertaken in a systematic manner, which is significantly different to a systemic manner (Checkland, 2000). The distinction between the two is that systematic is a step-by-step process undertaken in a linear and often predetermined fashion while systemic focuses on seeing the whole and understanding the relationship between the parts before intervening. Chapter 2 identified the paradigm of complexity as the most appropriate lens through which to view the research and a significant implication is that it precludes the development of a pre-planned, step-by-step methodological approach, because the organisational system is assumed to be unpredictable. Due to the inherent unpredictability of a complex system, a systemic approach is more experimental, iterative and emergent in nature (Whittington, 2016).
The original methodological literature search undertaken in 2009, of action research (AR) approaches that were also systemic in their underpinnings revealed Ison and Russell’s (2000) systemic AR approach. Ison and Russell’s research methodology is underpinned by cybernetic systems thinking\(^3\) rather than complexity. They argue their systemic AR methodology is equivalent to the conditions of complexity when applying second order cybernetics as a lens and not imposing goals of control on the system of interest (Ison and Russell, 2000; Russell and Ison, 2005; Ison, 2008).

Second order cybernetic thinking is distinguished by Ison and Russell from first order cybernetics by employing the above distinction between systematic and systemic. First order cybernetics, they argue, places the researcher as an outside observer of the system. This is distinct from a second order cybernetic approach in which the researcher is a part of the system by virtue of observing and/or interacting with it. Ison places the responsibility for making the distinction between first or second order cybernetic approaches with the researcher (2008) and in so doing points to the necessity for the researcher to have an awareness of the assumptions underpinning each approach.

The first and second order cybernetic distinction is an important one within the context of this research because a second order cybernetic approach recognises the findings of any observation as an outcome of interpretation by the observer and so brings a constructionist perspective in contrast to the positivist perspective to the research. It is this constructionist perspective to which Kuhn referred in his work on scientific revolutions, when he discussed proponents of different paradigms “practicing in different worlds” (Umpleby and Dent, 1999, p 95). In this manner, systemic thinking acknowledges the inherent uncertainty of our individual human experiences, and the importance of different perspectives (1999).

I chose to incorporate Ison and Russell’s (2000) systemic AR methodology into this research because:

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\(^3\) Cybernetics is one branch of systems thinking that emerged from the study of control and communications between machines and people.
1. When combined with being mindful of engaging people in conversation about the purpose of a system, rather than imposing goals upon the system, the conditions of emergence and self-organisation may be satisfied; and
2. The second order cybernetics approach included the researcher as a part of the system that is also consistent with the lens of complexity that I wished to employ.

3.2.2 Revealing and challenging mental models and paradigms

When determining an appropriate methodology for this research, an essential criterion was that the methods enable the observation of more than superficial expressions of the organisational behaviour as a system. That is, it was important that observation was empowered to recognise: events, patterns of behaviour, structure, and at the deepest layer, the mental models and paradigm of thinking (Senge, 1994; Meadows, 2008).

My intention in exploring how to shift an unsustaining organisation to form a sustaining organisation, was to explore the possibility of a restructure of the organisation through changes to the mental models and paradigm that were foundational to it as a system. This questioning of mental models (Senge, 1994; Meadows, 1999) and adoption of new mental models is another way of identifying the nature and dynamic of the adaptive work (Heifetz et al., 2009) undertaken. Working at the level of mental models and paradigms is the most powerful leverage point for changing a system (Meadows, 1999). She identifies nine different places to intervene in a system (Table 3:1) where position 1 is the most influential and 9 the least influential in the system. Meadows subsequently added in a more powerful level – the ability to transcend paradigms – which takes us into the realms of consciousness and enlightenment (1999, p 19).
The intention to attempt to alter the mental models and paradigm from which the organisation is operating, is also consistent with Schien’s (1990) understanding of culture previously discussed (Schein, 1990). (His model of how organisational culture might be understood and evolved, highlights the role of “a pattern of basic underlying assumptions” (1990, p111) which he identifies as evolving from values that have stood the test of time and that are reflected in the artefacts (behaviours, records, reports, strategic plans, etc.) of the organisation.)

3.2.3 Researcher behaviour consistent with the principles reflecting the behaviour of complex adaptive systems

Chapter 2 identified The Principles Stage 1 to guide my leadership (Table 2:5). My intention was to apply these principles to my understanding of the organisational system I was within as a researcher. The intention to subject the researcher’s behaviour to the same lens as the research topic is a contribution to knowledge in itself. I return to this issue in section 3.5.1 when I consider my methodological findings.
3.2.4 Awareness of the researcher’s epistemology and teleology

I chose a methodological approach consistent with my epistemology and the understanding of how knowledge is formed and demonstrated through the lens of Maturana and Varela’s **biology of cognition** (Maturana et al., 1974; Ison and Russell, 2000). This means that knowledge is understood to be:

- formed through a response (a moment of insight) to a stimulus; and
- displayed in the decisions and behaviours of people.

Knowledge is not understood as coded bits of information that can be transferred from one being to another because it is biologically impossible for words, being intangible, to penetrate the human nervous system (Maturana et. al. 1974). The implication of this understanding of cognition is that one person can never really know what another person knows. The best that can be expected is an acceptance, using the language we have in common, of an understanding that is close to that of another’s. That sense of acceptance is important in generating a positive feeling, enthusiasm or **intrinsic motivation**, from a conversation such that we may do things or take action differently in response to knowing differently. The knowledge is then seen in action as it is reflected in the decisions made or behaviour demonstrated by those involved in the conversation (Ison & Russell, 2000; Ison, 2008).

Understanding knowledge in this way I consciously intended to nurture an environment (enabled by appropriate group norms) where co-research participants would seek to understand each other’s perspective to the point of generating a mutual sense of satisfaction. The intended group norms relate back to the earlier discussion (Chapter 2) of self-actualising, intrinsic motivation and creativity, and also reflect emerging research findings from the field of neuroscience regarding how learning occurs in the brain (Schwartz and Rock, 2006; Rock, 2011).

Further, the research sought data that reflected knowledge in action. That is, decisions made or action taken that reflected a shift in the organisation’s collective worldview from predominantly mechanistic assumptions to the paradigm of complexity.
The research topic was developed in response to my personal quest, arising from my consulting and coaching practice, to understand how the shift to a sustaining organisation could be nurtured. The value placed on this research by me is very high and aligns with my personal sense of purpose in the world. This sense of purpose and value has enabled a long-term engagement with the research.

As a professional executive coach and facilitator, I also had a solid skill base including communication and interpersonal skills with which to explore the research topic and execute the methodological approach described above.

3.3 Methodological design

The intended methodological design employed FMA action research cycles (Checkland and Holwell, 1998) with the systemic action research (Ison and Russell, 2000) to meet the identified need for a systemic approach.

3.3.1 FMA action research cycles

Checkland and Holwell’s (1998) cycle for action research is illustrated in Figure 3:2.

![Figure 3:2 FMA action research cycle (Checkland & Holwell, 1998)](image)

The FMA cycle (Checkland and Holwell, 1998) requires the declaration of a framework of ideas (F), a methodology (M) and an area of application (A) with articulated research themes.
With regard to the present research:

- The framework of ideas (F) is encapsulated by The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5) and The Model (Figure 2:8).
- Essentially the methodology (M) is executing the framework of ideas (F) developed above and as explained in more detail in this chapter.
- The area of concern (A) is that of organisational change with the purpose of forming a sustaining organisation (from one that is currently not sustaining).

3.3.2 Four stages of the systemic action research

Ison and Russell (2000) developed a four-stage model grounded in second order cybernetic thinking that approximates the conditions of complexity. I intended to follow the four stages identified by Ison and Russell (Table 3:2).

| Stage 1: Bringing the system of interest into existence (naming the system of interest); |
| Stage 2: Evaluating the effectiveness of the system of interest as a vehicle to elicit useful understanding (and acceptance) of the social and cultural context; |
| Stage 3: Generation of a joint decision making process (a ‘problem determined system of interest’) involving all key stakeholders; |
| Stage 4: Evaluating the effectiveness of the decisions made (i.e. how has the action taken been judged by stakeholders?) |

Table 3:2 Four stages of systemic action research (Ison and Russell, 2000, p210-213)

Within the context of this research, these stages were adapted as follows:

**Stage 1**: Find a suitable host organisation within which to conduct research (i.e. one with a pre-existing aspiration to be a sustaining organisation).

**Stage 2**: Talk with people in an unstructured manner, following informal networks (Shaw, 1997) with a view to developing:
• Relationships of trust from which to undertake the research and exercise my own leadership;
• An understanding of what it is to work in this organisation, what the real, and unspoken values are, what the deep assumptions are, how power is used, how things are done, who the key influencers are (trying to obtain an insider’s perspective of the organisation);
• Perspectives upon the organisation’s journey towards sustainability to date, providing context to the systematic data to be collected that reflect the same journey (e.g. annual reports, website publications, regular internal reporting within the organisation); and
• Triggering intrinsic motivation for forming a co-research team, approximately five to twelve people, for the purpose of pursuing that journey to form a sustaining organisation.

**Stages 3 and 4** comprise the bulk of the research where the intention was for the participants and researcher to work together to determine what action could be undertaken in order to meet their purposes and jointly evaluate the effectiveness of the action. The intended research described here aimed to invite and create a leadership and co-research team of interested and passionate people within the organisation who would be involved in Stages 3 and 4.

3.3.3 *Research methods*

I chose to focus attention and collect data on several levels, to reflect both the systemic nature of the research and also the complexity of working within the context of organisational change. These levels are generically referred to as first person, second person and third person (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

3.3.3.1 *First Person*

First person research describes the ability

“of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach ... to act choicefully and with awareness, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting... [it] provides a practice and discipline through which we can monitor the impact of our behaviour.” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p6).
Two methods were intended to be employed, a research diary (Symon, 2004) and conversations with an uninvolved third party with whom to critically reflect and debrief. The intention of each of these activities was to enable an awareness of the possible impact my own presence within the organisation specifically applying the lens of complex adaptive systems. Marshall captured my intention perfectly when discussing the need of the researcher to be aware of the

“ideas of connectedness, systemic properties and dynamics, persistence of patterns; respecting emergence and unfolding process; ... and typically experiencing myself as involved, not apart, in any systemic relationships I am seeking to understand.” (Marshall, 2004, p309).

From this awareness I intended to examine and report upon the personal exercise of leadership within the paradigm of complexity (employing The Principles Stage 1 and The Model Stage 1).

3.3.3.2 Second Person

Reason and Bradbury (2008) describe second person AR as the

“practice [that] addresses our ability to enquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern... [it] starts with interpersonal dialogue and includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning organizations.” (2008, p6). The research incorporated second person action research in the form of a group of volunteers that became a co-researcher team. The team was intended to:

- Develop a common purpose for the team to engage with the organisation in such as a manner as to form a sustaining organisation (Stages 3 & 4 above);
- Participate in devising, planning and execution of specific interventions (the first of which will be the development of a shared organisational vision) to guide the organisation, or parts thereof, in bringing the vision into reality; and
- Engage in the cycles of critical reflection upon actions taken and lessons learned, to evaluate the interventions and resulting benefits.

By doing so, it was envisaged that the team would be exercising its own leadership within the organisation. I intended to develop, facilitate and where necessary teach
the co-research group, whilst holding the intention of the research (to make the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation) and applying the principles and emergent change model described above. All intended to liberate emergence, self-organisation and encourage enthusiasm.

I planned to collect and count as new knowledge (with permission from the co-research group):

- Voice recordings of all team meetings;
- Copies of all diagrams, systems maps, plans and meeting minutes… including any document that is shared within the group, in order to record and trace the topics of conversations, activities, and critical reflection resulting in lessons learned by the group;
- Records of interventions as appropriate (film clips, photos, minutes, and interviews from select participants representing specific stakeholder interests).

3.3.3.3 Third person

Third person research addresses the need to extend research in one organisation to a broader context to generate a wider impact (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and reflects Gustavsen’s (2003) suggestion that although many action research projects are limited to one off case studies, by their nature, there is an opportunity and a need, to recognise the importance of creating networks of researchers, sharing knowledge and practices.

The method of contributing to the third person perspective was intended to be through the writing of this thesis, which will tease out principles for undertaking action to nurture the shift to a sustaining organisation that can be discussed and shared with others. In addition I presented facets of my research findings at ALARA conferences in Australia (McLean, 2013; McLean, 2016) and the Positive Psychology Conference (McLean and Koth, 2016).

3.4 Research validity

The question of the validity of AR often arises as traditional academic research, founded upon the Newtonian paradigm, privileges reductionist, objective and
repeatable findings (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; Herr and Anderson, 2005). These qualities of findings are often possible within the natural, physical sciences. Repeatability becomes problematic within the social sciences due to the acknowledged multiplicity of perspectives and the inability to repeat any experiment within a social laboratory. Aside from these influences, the discipline of psychology, in particular, is reporting difficulties in replicating scientific findings (Spellman, 2015).

How then, might the validity or as I prefer to frame it, the quality of the research be affirmed (Marshall, 2004)? Validity is a notion that is framed from within the modern scientific method of right answers, whereas quality is a concept more aligned with excellence. Within a complex adaptive system, there are no right answers, but the desire for excellent research is one that can be aspired to in both Newtonian and complexity paradigms.

Checkland and Holwell (1998) emphasise the importance of a recoverable research process that is based upon “a prior declaration of the epistemology in terms of which findings which count as knowledge will be expressed.” (1998, p9). By recoverable, they are arguing for a clear account of what was done and the reasoning behind it such that others may understand the process and make their own evaluation of the findings accordingly. This requires a clear declaration of the research themes, framework of ideas (F), methodology (M) and area of concern (A) previously identified (Figure 3:3), and specifically addressed above.

Ison (2008) identifies that recoverability is often provided by a written account, which is of necessity, divorced from experience, and proposes that recoverability is also possible through the development of a community of practice. In this research, recoverability is addressed in both manners:

1. Through tracing the process and recording events, and the writing of the thesis.
2. Secondly via the creation of a community of practice within the co-researcher team inside the organisation.

In particular, Chapter 4 provides a written summary of what I did to accompany the conceptual underpinning provided here.
Additionally, for quality systemic action research Ison (2008) suggests another three criteria, namely an:

- Epistemological awareness – which has been addressed in the methodology above;
- Ability to employ systems thinking tools for participants and to have the capacity to choreograph the emotions of the participants – which is present in my personal skills set and professional practice; and
- Ability to work with purposefulness – as addressed earlier in identifying the conditions under which second order cybernetics systems thinking is aligned with emergence and the conditions of complexity.

3.4.1 Time frame for the research

The proposed model and principles for cultivating change within the organisation (Table 2:5 and Figure 2:8) do not refer to a timeframe at all. Emergence is a term that implies that any change will emerge in its own time. However, based on the organisational transformational change literature, I expected that the paradigm shift could take up to ten years to emerge as an organisational culture, although given what has already been described about the behaviour of living systems and unpredictability, the paradigm shift could occur unexpectedly and express itself in a relatively short time frame.

The time I was able to dedicate to this research was dictated by other more concrete demands such as university expectations of doctoral research and the balance required between being self-employed and earning a living and undertaking unpaid research activities. I decided to spend two years on a part-time basis, in action research in the selected organisation. The expectation was that up to two working days of each week may be used by the organisation in two manners:

1) directly in co-research group activities; and
2) in meetings and change processes requested by the executive of the organisation.
3.5 Methodological approach findings – lessons learned and recommendations for future practitioners of emergent systemic action research

The development of the philosophy underpinning this systemic action research methodology is itself a contribution to knowledge. The majority of published action research (including those that employ systems thinking) demonstrate the researchers’ capacity to think and analyse systemically but not to explicitly enter the system and act according to the behaviour of complex adaptive systems themselves. That is to say, the researchers perceive themselves as being outside of the system of interest.

To support this statement, I followed the methods of Davis et. al in their literature review methodology (2015) and undertook a literature review of publications employing the search terms ‘systemic, systems thinking, action research, methodology and organizational change’ on 6 June 2016. This revealed only 19 publications with the dominant journal being *Systemic Practice and Action Research*. I then searched within this journal specifically for action research publications that employed systems thinking, systemic approaches or referred to complex adaptive systems as a lens. I discovered researchers employing systems thinking to observe and analyse the system they were engaging with – not as a way of perceiving themselves within that system and deliberately engaging with the system in a manner that reflects the behaviour of complex adaptive systems. (Walker, 2016; Restrepo et al., 2016; Basile et al., 2016; Raymaker, 2016; de Lima et al., 2016; Clarke et al., 1998; Midgley, 2011; Torlak and Muceldili, 2014; Raza and Standing, 2011; Davis et al., 2015). In all the research cited here, the researchers had a planned methodological approach from which findings emerged, but the methodology was for example, planned as interviews that were subsequently analysed by employing a systemic lens, or intended to develop a systemic model, or planned and applied an appreciative inquiry process to the research topic. In these publications, the researchers have reflected the modern scientific paradigm that the researcher is separate from the system of interest (Capra and Luisi, 2016) and able to objectively observe system without affecting the system. In this manner, the action research implicitly reflects at least two
paradigms, Newtonian and complexity, which is not an inherently negative element. For example, Midgley argues the benefits of consciously employing multiple paradigms (2011). But it appears that the researchers are unaware (at least they have not explicitly informed the reader that they are aware) and perhaps it is believed that they might employ the paradigm of complexity to the research topic without it applying to themselves as a part of the system of interest. They become a part of the system of interest as they observed it. I argue that the researcher should be explicit and that by doing so, I have added to the research methodology in a significant manner.

The methodology developed in this research explores what systemic action research might be if the researcher applied the same lens to his or her own activity within the system of interest. My approach provides one answer to the question about how to deliberately and transparently undertake research of an emergent research topic employing the paradigm of complexity.

The application of the methodological approach and the intended design was not easy nor straightforward, and the design was adapted to circumstances as they emerged and new methods developed in response to the experience. The remainder of this chapter explores these adaptations and further develops the methodological approach in response to the experience gained from implementing the methodology.

These findings are organised according to the previous structure in this chapter. That is, by reviewing the lessons learned in relation to the methodological philosophy and the overall design, then followed by reference to the first, second and third person methods.

**In doing so, this section details a revised methodological approach.**

3.5.1 *Revised methodological philosophy and principles underpinning the approach.*

A key contribution made by this research is the explicit linking of The Principles (Table 2:5) with the behaviour of the researcher or practitioner seeking to cultivate the conditions for a paradigmatic shift to for a sustaining organisation. Although
similar lists of leadership behaviours under conditions of complexity may be found (Senge, 1985; Sahtouris, 1999; Wheatley, 1999), making the conceptual link to guide the behaviour of the researcher is an additional insight apparently not previously made.

The principles and inferred behaviours were employed as consistently as human self-awareness allows during the action research. One of the greatest lessons learned from the experience of applying the principles in Table 2:5 was remaining mindful of the purpose of the research and orienting myself, within a context of very high degrees of ambiguity and uncertainty. This issue arises time and again in this thesis, in particular as the first person methods findings are shared. Conceptually, the finding relates to The Principles Stage 1 (Table 2:5). If we consider the research methodology and the researcher as a part of one system, then The Principles Stage 1 lack an identity or DNA from which the system of research may reproduce or evolve itself.

There is a reference to the DNA of the research topic through recognition of the vision and values of the organisation (Wheatley, 1999) in Table 2:5, principle 3 “a living system is self-referential”. The detail of the method by which I filled this gap is explained in section 3.5.3.1. Suffice it to say here that the omission to provide for this self-referencing need for the researcher in the methodology was overlooked in the conception of The Principles Stage 1. Table 2:5 has been updated for this omission in Table 3:3. The amendment is shown in bold italics and highlighted in yellow.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Principles of living systems and emergent change</strong></th>
<th><strong>Leadership Principles and Behaviours</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Change is an emergent property of a living system. (Table 2:4 point 2) | • Engage people in conversations that are not limited by predetermined outcomes – be curious and seek to learn or adapt together (p 60).  
• Ask questions that assist people make new systemic meaning (p 60).  
• Liberate the best from people by facilitating their self-actualisation and allowing them to work from their strengths and passion – liberate intrinsic motivation (p 62).  
• Hold the space for conversations that challenge existing mental models and long held values (p 65).  
• Be mindful of the influence of processes or systems to either reinforce or decrease the influence of feedback loops (p 65). |
| 2. Self-organisation of structure and responses involving interdependency and multiple feedback loops – resulting in uncertainty and unpredictability. (Table 2:3 point 1) | • Experiment to see what may work – embrace error as a basis for learning (p 60).  
• Give up desire for control – seek the more powerful option to influence with consideration given to the systemic nature of any given situation (p 62).  
• Specific measurements may not be suitable, due to a lack of direct cause and effect, instead develop an understanding of indicators within the system (p 62)  
• Starting conditions are important – carefully consider who should be present at initial conversations (p 65). |
| 3. A living system is self-referential to its identity as a living system. (Table 2:3 point 4) | • Create an emergent and shared vision of what people really want and identify the underlying shared values (p 64)  
• Those exercising leadership will influence more effectively if they to embody the values and live the vision – so reinforcing the identity of the system (p 64).  
• **Articulate your own vision of the change process and associated values to guide the emergence of the process (p 85).** |
| 4. Participation of all agents in the living system enables spontaneous, emergent, self organisation and evolution (without a blue print) (Table 2:3 point 3) | • Locate responsibility with people and allow them to self organise – do not impose control or organisation (p 60).  
• Be inclusive and invite everyone to participate – appreciate the wisdom in groups (p 62) |
| 5. Change may also derive from the small differences between agents within the living system, that are amplified within the system. (Figure 2:6, Table 2:4 points 1 and 3). | • Appreciate and work with genuine diversity and ‘hold the space’ for these differences to amplify into new solutions (p 62). |

**Table 3:3 The Principles Stage 2**
Reviewing the other principles in the light of hindsight and experience, leads to the conclusion that they do not need to be changed. This may be surprising: perhaps the broadness of The Principles adds to their conceptual endurance. However, it is worth highlighting that applying them in practice is difficult. In particular principle 4 (Table 3:3) relating to broad participation and principle 5 that encourages behaviour associated with appreciation of diversity. Human biases exist for both the researcher and the participants being invited that make the implementation of these principles challenging in practice. Some practical implications of this conceptual awareness are explored in the second person methods section to follow.

3.5.2 Revised methodological design findings

3.5.2.1 Evolving Checkland and Holwell’s FMA cycle of action research

The design of my methodology employed Checkland and Holwell’s FMA cycle of action research (Figure 3:2). It is clear that Checkland and Holwell expect learning to evolve from AR in regard to the methodology (1998, p13), see Figure 3:3.

![Diagram of FMA cycle](image)

**Fig. 2.** Elements relevant to any piece of research.

Figure 3:3 Learning about M from AR (Checkland & Holwell, 1998, p13)

My research where my framework of ideas (F) was applied as the intended methodology (M), created an entwinement (perhaps not unlike a quantum
entanglement where one element can not be described without reference to the other) between the:

- Research topic data from which research topic findings would emerge (denoted as Research themes in Figure 3:2 and from which the Research Findings emerge); and
- Methodological data from which the next steps of the applied methodology emerged.

Figure 3:4 Systemic AR cycle reflecting an emergent methodology

Research topic data and methodological data were the same observations – made at the same time and often in the moment. The experience was very different from that which I expected based upon the diagrams of the process (Figure 3:2 and Figure 3:3). Both these figures, as I understood them, led me to expect a much more orderly experience. I experienced considerable confusion until I realised that I needed to reconceive and evolve the depiction of the action research cycle to reflect the close relationship between F and M. Figure 3:4 depicts this re-conception and continues to employ the nomenclature Checkland and Holwell (1998) originated, namely:
• F remains the framework of ideas (F) was originally summarised in and
• M is the intended emergent methodology previously outlined within this chapter; and
• A is the area of concern or real problem situation, in this case the research topic inquiring into the nature and dynamic of the change processes to form a sustaining organisation.

The revised systemic AR cycle (Figure 3:4) is a very simplified version of the reality I experienced. It fails to represent the concurrent multiple cycles of action and reflection operating at different time scales and in relation to different groups of people. For example, within a co-researcher group meeting, my action and reflection cycle may be seconds, minutes or hours in duration as I observed the group, reflected upon how to respond, took action with a comment or question, and moved back into observation mode again. All the while, that level of action and reflection was taking place within a longer-term cycle of action and reflection within that group given the purpose of the research and with reference to the methodology being implemented. Concurrently, another cycle of action and reflection within which the other cycles exist is taking place within the organisational context.

Figure 3:5 attempts to represent the different concurrent cycles that may be possible and aims to reflect a sense of the increasing degree of complexity of the research environment. The arrows connecting the different cycles of action and reflection are shown to flow in one direction. In practice of course, they may flow in both directions with smaller cycles influencing larger cycles and larger cycles influencing smaller cycles.
3.5.2.2 Reviewing Ison and Russell’s four stages of systemic action research

Ison and Russell’s (2000) four stages of systemic AR were incorporated into the methodological design and were intended to add a broad structure and process to an otherwise very unstructured research proposal. In practice however, I found the application of the four stages largely unhelpful. Below, I reflect on each stage and record my findings from attempting to apply this framework.

Stage 1: Bringing the system of interest into existence (naming the system of interest):

I interpreted this stage as requiring me to find an organisation that was willing to inquire into how to become a sustaining organisation. I was fortunate that within my network I was familiar to and already trusted by one such organisation. Even so, the process of engaging with the organisation was a longer and more complicated process than I imagined at the outset. It took over six months of conversations with the CEO and executive team, then expanding to the Organisational Development (OD) Manager and Sustainability Futures (SUFU) Team Manager, to secure
enough understanding of what I was attempting to do and learn, combined with the confidence and willingness to proceed. The findings in relation to this stage are most appropriately situated in the first person findings (shown below in section 3.5.3.1)

Stage 2: Evaluating the effectiveness of the system of interest as a vehicle to elicit useful understanding (and acceptance) of the social and cultural context;

I interpreted this phase as not so much evaluating the system of interest but rather connecting to it through conversations with employees within it – becoming a part of it with a view to understanding more about it and specifically forming the co-research group. I had of course, entered into the research with the organisation being hopeful that it would help me understand more about my research topic. My hopefulness was founded in my understanding that the organisation was seeking to understand how to develop the internal capacity to deliver the community vision of a sustainable community. The findings most relevant to stage 2 of Ison and Russell (2000) framework, relate to the formation of the co-research group and are detailed under second person findings (section 3.5.3.2).

Stage 3: Generation of a joint decision making process (a ‘problem determined system of interest’) involving all key stakeholders;

My expectation in regard to stage three when initiating the research included notions of formal, planned cycles of action and reflection that would incorporate a consensus decision-making process. This type of a priori action research cycle occurred on only several occasions and a pre-planned review or reflection part of the cycle was always difficult to undertake in a disciplined manner.

The co-research group never explicitly discussed how decisions would be made, but the group norms that developed supported an implicit consensus decision-making process. The consensus however went deeper than obtaining a sense of “can I live with the decision?”, to exploring why group members’ thought and felt the way that they did. In this often time consuming and messy manner, mental models were explored and new possibilities and ways forward came into view. Decisions were generally made when everyone was finally in full agreement and the sense of mutual satisfaction had been achieved (section 3.2.4).
The decisions did not include all stakeholders. The most obvious stakeholders missing from the conversation were the community as represented by the elected members. The less obvious stakeholders omitted were perhaps represented by those staff who were initially attracted to the group and left because it did not deliver on their expectations. It remains open to speculation and further research, but my sense is that these people had a greater focus on a narrow and environmental interpretation of sustainability, combined with a desire for tangible action and tasks. They had less interest in exploring the more subtle values and habits of individual thinking that then aggregate over time into organisational culture.

The CEO and EMG were informed of the group’s progress and learning by me on a number of occasions. If we were planning anything that they may have felt was unwise, they had every opportunity to intervene.

The research became characterised more as an exercise of leadership for a cause rather than gaining buy-in or support for planned action. The major action that emerged in this AR was the conversations involving group members that were unplanned and yet highly influential. I should have expected this given my appreciation of Stacey’s complex responsive processes (2007) but for some reason the mental model of emergently planned action persisted in my mind. The need to involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes about planned action was redundant.

The stakeholder group in regard to Stage 3 of Ison and Russell’s systemic AR process (2000), may be viewed as those involved in the co-research group.

Stage 4: Evaluating the effectiveness of the decisions made (i.e. how has the action taken been judged by stakeholders?)

The research topic findings as identified in Chapter 5 and 6 were provided to the remaining core of the co-research team when I had completed the first drafts of each chapter - approximately three years after the research group officially disbanded. The group reconvened to discuss the findings and provide their feedback to me. There was very little modification of the findings and some feedback asking me to highlight the apparently obvious nature (to them) of The
Model Stage 3 developed in Chapter 6 and the importance of spirituality to us as a group.

An interesting unintended outcome of the reconvening of our co-research group, was the opportunity to inquire and discuss again what we had all learned from the experience. The co-research group members are all a living source from which to recover the research findings (section 3.4). They all reported exercising their leadership in the organisation in different ways now, than they did prior to the research process. At the time of writing, all are still employed within the organisation.

**Summary**

If I undertook this research again, I would not include the Ison and Russell (2000) 4 stage process (Table 3:2) as I now view it as largely unnecessary. The two major contributions made by being aware of the Ison and Russell framework (2000) was:

1. The importance of being mindful of locating an organisation with the desire to be sustaining and not imposing this goal upon the system form outside of the system.
2. The criteria for valid research (section 3.4).

**3.5.3 Revised research methods**

**3.5.3.1 First person methodological findings**

Gaining access to the organisation to undertake the research.

Whether employing Ison and Russell’s four stages (2000) or not, I needed to identify and contract with a host organisation. This activity resulted in significant first person learning for me.

Articulating the paradigm shift to becoming a sustaining organisation was very difficult in short amounts of time that constitute the average management meeting. I learned that the language I had acquired from academic papers did not serve me well and I needed more accessible language.

During the meetings where I had time to persuade others of the virtues of the research I wished to undertake, my attention was focussed on the importance of the
research, The Model and The Principles (Figure 2:8 and Table 2:5) and the emergent nature of the methodology.

I might have been better served by focussing on the possible outcomes from the research. The tide was eventually turned in favour of undertaking the research, by the ability of the Organisational Development (OD) and Sustainability Futures (SUFU) Managers to turn my language into language and aspirations the organisation already held. For example, The SUFU Manager was able to translate my intention into “finding out how to influence the day to day actions of employees so that they are all aligned with being sustainable”. And the OD Manager’s insight that the process I was describing was potentially “a leadership development program that we would be willing to pay a great deal for”.

I had assumed that the EMG members had a shared understanding of what sustainability meant to them as a group. Despite the organisational aspiration to deliver a community vision of sustainability, this was not the case. As my research literature review and research findings show, sustainability is term that is understood in many different ways.

Gaining support when the methodology was emergent in nature required a large amount of trust because I was unable to be specific about what I was going to do and when. The paradigm shift from Newtonian to the lens of complexity involved in research topic and methodology was affronting to those who are more familiar with being in control and planning processes and pre-determined deliverables (more about this in Chapter 5).

Ambiguity – envisioning for the researcher

The environment into which I had placed myself as a researcher was highly complex and ambiguous. I have previously identified the need for a methodological self-reference point from which I could orient myself from a methodological perspective. I had The Principles to operate from, but they were not assisting me to answer questions such as “Am I on the right track? Am I or are we, making progress?”. 
I commenced working with the co-research group in February 2011. My personal reflections reveal an increasing sense of disorientation and by November 2011 I decided to experiment to determine if I could orient myself in some way. I chose to spend time developing my own vision for the research applying the envisioning process (Wells and McLean, 2013) to myself as a researcher.

I found this highly effective and satisfying. The process did not reduce the ambiguity but it did assist me to guide myself within the ambiguity. Of greatest practical assistance were the indicators of success because I could look around me and ask what I was observing. If my observations aligned with my indicators, I reassured myself that I was on track.

I have included my vision, values and indicators that I used to orientate myself through the research in the Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter (section 3.7.1).

Recording the sense of the whole – my personal reflections

As I commenced the research I intended to record all meetings and use the transcriptions to code the recorded conversation in NVivo. After several meetings, I found this a very unsatisfactory method as it did not capture a record of all of the data. It recorded words and voices but not the experience of being in the meeting and the meaning attributed to the experience.

Accordingly, I continued to record the meetings but also wrote my own reflections on each meeting typically on the same day, but always within three days of the meeting. The reflections enabled me to consider key parts of the conversations and also what I felt and experienced during the meeting. It also enabled me to connect with other experiences I had within the organisation in order to make broader meaning. These personal reflections became my primary research data – a form of coding that included subtleties, meaning and connections.

Reflections with my principal supervisor

Regular conversations with my principal supervisor guided me to interpret what I was experiencing and consider the next steps from a methodological and a research topic findings perspective. The conversations were of enormous assistance as I learned more about interpreting my observations and experiences from a systemic
perspective. I cannot imagine undertaking this type of research without support from someone guiding and supporting a systemic perspective.

3.5.3.2 Second person methodological findings

Co-researcher group formation process

I formed the volunteer co-research group from an invitation email sent to all staff members via the CEO (see Appendix 2, section 3.7.2.). The invitation sought to ask people with a passion for sustainability to express their interest and self-select - no matter their formal position in the organisation. From responses to this email, individual meetings were arranged to discuss the research topic, process and discover what level commitment potential co-researchers might possess. The co-research group meetings were arranged after this initial contact on a basis of consensus about the level of commitment they could maintain. For the majority of the two-year period, this translated into two-hour meetings once a fortnight at the Living Kaurna Cultural Centre (LKCC) – a facility within the CoM.

The location was important to the group; it was a culturally sensitive building that is situated within Warraparinga, a traditional Aboriginal meeting place of local and national significance. It is simply beautiful and detached from more obvious human built environments of a city. The location also provided co-researchers the opportunity to disconnect from their normal work environment and enjoy the walk to and from the meeting location.

Co-research group norms

I was aware that co-researchers would only continue to offer their time if they enjoyed and benefited in some way from the meetings. I also wanted to cultivate group norms that aligned with a sharing knowledge and learning with a sense of mutual satisfaction (section 3.2.4). Additionally, I was cautious about over-facilitating the space and possibly stifling emergence from within the group.

Combined, these desired outcomes influenced the creation of a space that one researcher referred to as a “treasured space”. It was a space where it was intended that everyone would feel valued, listened to and respected. It was a space in which co-researchers were free to raise topics of interest and importance to them that
related to our core purpose to research how the organisation may transform to be sustaining. It was a space to which they came as they could and where processes were developed to bring people up to speed as required. My intention was to remove any possible sense of guilt if someone was unable to attend. People were free to come and go as they felt they were able.

Usual meeting processes such as agendas and minutes were abandoned in favour of attendees fully participating in the conversation and carrying it with them when they left. Co-researchers looked to me to gently facilitate the space. I kept the core research question at the centre of our conversations, and responded to what was important and relevant to co-researchers as they arrived at each gathering. Our conversations ranged far and wide. I reflect further on the topic of how to facilitate such a group in my first person learning about exercising leadership to cultivate a sustaining organisation (section 5.2.5).

In this way, personal relationships were placed ahead of task in these meetings.

When disciplined reflection appears to be in conflict with group norms

I attempted to facilitate a more formal, planned reflections on several occasions to determine what co-researchers were learning. These occasions were:

- After the December envisioning with EMG, however the restructure of SUFU meant that the focus of attention for co-researchers was more on processing their emotion than on reflecting on what we had learned. None the less, I did gain some indirect reflection and learning regarding leadership.

- During the second year I tried to engage co-researchers in a formal process at the beginning of each meeting to identify ways in which they had attempted to influence in an emergent fashion between meetings. It was becoming apparent to me that the planned action for our action research was the fortnightly conversations. I wanted to determine what was emerging from those conversations. As a result of trying to implement this reflection I learned that co-researchers could not remember what they had done. The group norms also worked against me dictating to the group what they should talk about, so I was not in a position to insist.
Never the less, reflections were taking place. We reflected a great deal – just not always about the topics I believed to be important, or at the time I believed them to be important.

Other methods employed to reflect at the end of the research period

Largely due to my lack of success in undertaking formal pre-planned reflections as I thought it should be done, I developed two processes at the end of the two year period in an attempt to capture what we had learned as a group.

1. The first was a group reflection focused on the question “what have we learned?” that was voice recorded and visualised employing a mind map drawn on butcher’s paper in front of us all as we talked.

2. The second process was a hermeneutic interview circle (Debesay et al., 2008; Llewellyn, 1993; Tappan, 1997). Hermeneutics arose from an interpretative inquiry to understand biblical texts. It has broadened to be an approach to interpreting text in general that offers an iterative approach that leads to a deeper and deeper understanding of the meaning of a text (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Hermeneutics has also been applied to understanding actions within a management context where Llewellyn (1993) drew upon the work of Ricoeur (1981) to make the link between text and action. Crist and Tanner (2003) described a methodology that I modelled my interview process on to develop a deeper understanding of how each co-researcher understood the learning identified in the group mind map and how their individual learning related to each other’s learning. The method is detailed in Appendix 3 at the end of this chapter (section 3.7.3).

Employing hermeneutic circles revealed a deeper and richer layer of understanding as it enabled me to delve underneath the collective learning displayed in the mind map, and understand individual subjective views about what was most important about the process to individual participants. Significant research findings were revealed through these methods.
The role of direct cause and effect and time in emergence

Identifying conversations or actions that result in significant emergent change appears to be possible only in hindsight. At least my attempt to help the co-research team members to identify specific conversations that may catalyse change, as they had such conversations, was unsuccessful. It was as we developed the concluding mind map of group learning and then the closing hermeneutic circle interviews, that the emergent changes seeded by the group, came into view. When viewed through the lens of complexity, this finding makes absolute sense. The paradigm of complexity is inherently unpredictable, so it makes sense that a conversation may or may not result in an emergent change. Any particular conversation’s significance is only identifiable after a resultant emergent change becomes evident.

It was a further two years after my action research had finished, that the artefactual evidence (Schien, 1990) of a shift in the organisational worldview emerged. This evidence was the transformed format of the strategic plan.

The method I used to detect a link between the co-research group activity and the emergent change was to trace the story of the change through different people and integrate the different perspectives to gain an overall perspective.

3.5.3.3 Third person methodological findings

The third person methodological approach remains a challenge for me. When researching one case study, it is very difficult to share findings that can be generalised to other contexts and researchers. My methodological solution to this challenge has been to aim to develop principles that may be applied elsewhere.

I have wherever possible, developed connections with other researchers interested in my research topic, ‘how to nurture sustaining organisations?’ however often these researchers come from many different disciplines and each has their own preconceived answers. With reference to the integral theory quadrants introduced in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.4.1) the different approaches are also a reflection of a bias towards different quadrants (Figure 2:5). For example, a particular discipline may favour technical decisions or behavioural approaches (IT), while another discipline may favour solutions stemming from organisational management systems or
processes (ITS). Learning how to listen to and learn from each other across disciplines so that we can develop integrated approaches that span all four quadrants remains an enduring challenge that must be successfully addressed if we are to learn how to be sustainable (Snorf and Baye, 2010).

3.6 Summarising the methodological approach

The methodology of this research is a contribution to knowledge in itself. It contributes an apparently new methodology enabling systemic emergent action research that enables the research of an emergent research topic.

At the level of methodological approach and design, my contribution includes the following to guide the practitioner or researcher in this employing the methodology:

- Revised the principles to The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3); and
- The evolved depiction of the systemic action research cycles (Figure 3:4 and Figure 3:5).

My experience was that the four stages for systemic action research as detailed by Ison and Russell (2000) (Table 3:2) were not very helpful in this instance.

At the finer resolution of methods employed, the salient findings at each level include:

- 1st person perspective
  - Personal reflections being employed as a coding of meetings and events that included my experience of being a part of them.
  - Employing the envisioning process in relation to the research process itself to orient me.
- 2nd person perspective
  - The planned fortnightly conversations and subsequent emergent conversations were the action.
  - The group norms established to liberate the desired intrinsic motivation identified as a part of the high level model of emergent
change, had unexpected and unintended consequences for decision making within the group and the lack of formality of the reflections.

- 3rd person perspective
  - There exists an ongoing challenge not only to share research findings about sustainability in organisations across disciplines so that we can gain from each other's different perspectives as portrayed by the integral theory quadrants.

The following chapter 4 provides a narrative of the major activities in which I was involved over the research period, from June 2009 till early 2013. It does not distinguish between activity designed to identify answers to my research question and methodology. In the telling of the story of what I did, both these elements become one, as I am the embodiment of the methodological approach described conceptually here.
3.7 Chapter 3 Appendix

3.7.1 Appendix 1: Researcher’s Vision to orientate the research

What do I really want my research to make available?

The little girl…

Somewhat serious looking, but I am drawn to this because she also looks curious and puzzled to me… and I have just watched a TED clip about how young children have greater capacity to see more broadly and postulate more creative and original questions or hypothesizes. So I would love to be the person who is able to do this – and maybe even assist those in the research team to do likewise.

The group of children walking on the beach …

I see the research team in this – that we are walking together and guided in direction by the water to one side… so we have some focus to our walk, but we are pretty free to wander where we like and at the pace we like. We are together… like the proverb… if you are to travel fast, go alone… if you want to travel far, go with others….
Children again, because I see in this a **willingness to play, to explore, try out new things** and not be limited by the ‘grown up world’ .. as I write this, I know they are limited by the grown up world…. Maybe this links to Donella’s sharing of the vision, if it is shared it is responsible…. I do want us to be **responsible**, but not heavy and driven by thoughts of why things can not be.

**The man doing yoga**…

Strong, and flexible…. And with humility. A tall order for me to live up to. **Strong and robust research that has credibility** to be taken seriously and influence others. **Flexible in its approach** to respond to the childlike enquiries of the group and the context of different groups of people in different organizations. **Humble** enough to not reject out of hand some ideas and processes that seem like that should be rejected… such as ‘change management’ and ‘psychology’… I have work to do on my own mental models….

**The fisherman …**

Reminds me of Dad going fishing… **whistling** and really looking forward to a day in the sun, with **peace and quiet** on the boat, and **going out to see what is there**…. Based upon his **deep knowledge and experience** of the waters gained over a lifetime of fishing the same waters since he was a little boy. *We go here for the crabs and we catch crabs in this way…. We go here on this type of day to catch the best whiting…..* We are careful to only take a responsible catch home. Not more than we can eat or small fish either… We fish with **enthusiasm, and care**…

**The row of flowering fruit trees …**

These represent the organisation that may be influenced by the work I and the team do. That they take on board the possibilities it will open up and flourish into a **wonderful row of nature inspired organisations**…. Each different by with **nature and her principles, in their sap**….. it flows through them like sap and is inherent in everything they do…. they nurture conditions for themselves and the ground they
grow in. They **grow and harvest, good and nutritious fruit** and the right time and in the right quantity.

**The doorways and small chest …**

A slightly oriental feel, and I am so inspired by the possibilities of linking modern western cultural assumptions with eastern Taoist thought – its roots in nature herself. **A feminine way** of operating and being in the world to counter the predominantly masculine approach of our more recent past. The doorways imply an unlikely straight and clear view of the chest, which may contain treasure. The **treasure is in the chest, but its hard to see and teases me** … it seems to be in clear view… but its inside the chest where I can not see…..

**The treasure….The pearls …**

A complex tangle of pearls and beads…. Some sparkling with possibility, some in plain view and not catching my eye because they are in plain view. In my humility, this must also **embrace the pearls of wisdom from others too**. I want my research to assist move from complete confusion and chaos to some sense of **principles** that are important and can be **strung together to form an elegant and simple whole** that is **attractive to others** and they too want to try on the necklace and wear it… so that they too may enable trees that are fruitful and abundant.

**Core messages (values) that relate to me**

- Curious and puzzled
- Creative and original questions
- Whistling, peace and quiet
- Going out to see what is there
- Builds upon my deep knowledge and experience
- Enthusiastic and exercises care
- Western and eastern (Taoist) combined
- Feminine approach
Indicators of success relating to me

- I am feeling relaxed and peaceful in the research process, recognizing that creativity and curiosity need space and a fear free space.
- I am enjoying the process.
- I am not feeling pressured to adopt or accept more traditional and forceful approaches.

Core messages (values) and Indicators of Success that relate to observation of the co-research group

- Focussed walk with a broad pathway
- A pace we like
- Willingness to play, explore and experiment
- Act responsibly but without heaviness

Indicators of success

- Laughter in meetings.
- New processes and ‘tools’ being trialled by the group

About the research outcomes

- Credible research that influences
- Flexible in approach
- Nature inspired organisations
- Principles in their sap
- Grow and harvest good and nutritious fruit
- Embrace pearls of wisdom from others
- Principles as a string of pearls – elegant and simple – attractive to others

Indicator of Success

- It is possible to review the outcomes of the research and employ the insights and/or principles in other organisational contexts..

13/10/11
3.7.2 Appendix 2: Internal announcement of PhD research and the role of the researcher

Dear City of Marion Staff,

The City of Marion has been invited to participate in a study to explore “the theory and practice of organisational change for sustainability.” This research will benefit the CoM through personal and leadership development consistent with the organisation’s cultural focus and further raising awareness of sustainability throughout the organisation. It is hoped that the CoM’s participation in this project will assist in learning how to form organisations that are internally sustainable in order to lead changes that enable sustainability outside the organisation.

This is research with a difference – the researcher, known to many of you already, is Josie McLean who will ‘join us’ on a part time and unpaid basis, over the coming two years, working with us organisationally as seems appropriate and specifically with volunteer co-researchers and co-leaders as a team. So rather than standing at a distance and observing us all, Josie will be a part of catalysing action and recording what emerges.

If you have a passion for ‘sustainability’ and exercising your own leadership to develop the organisation in its quest to deliver the community vision 2020…. then please make yourself known to Josie (contact details below) and explore the possibilities of joining the research team. This project is aligned with our core purpose as an organisation and it has EMG support to ensure those joining the team are able to do so from a workload load perspective. Operational details of the team will be developed with those who express an interest in the project.

**Things you should know about the research**

As an organisation, we have volunteered…

As this research is designed to help CoM deliver its vision and is an organisation wide project, Josie will be meeting with people throughout the organisation over a long period of time. She will be gathering data, observing people, talking with people about their work, and facilitating workshops etc. All the while, recording
(using notes, voice recordings, photographs and video) what she sees and experiences.

If you, as an individual, do not want to be a part of this research ...

You must OPT-OUT by letting Josie know you are choosing not to take part – otherwise she will assume that you are participating.

You can opt out by:

Contacting her by email or phone now; or

Letting her know in conversation when you see her.

There is no pressure to be a part of the research. The photo is to help you recognise her.

The volunteer co-research team will provide specific consent

The exception to the opt-out rule, is the team of co-researchers who will be asked to sign a specific Volunteer Consent Form. Josie will supply this and a Participant Information Sheet and Complaint Form to those who choose to join this team.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is much the same as for your day-to-day work meetings, although the researcher will record some conversations. Our commitment to you is:

All records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Adelaide; and

You will not be personally identified in any published materials.

Grievances

We expect this to be an uplifting experience for all concerned, however should you have an unpleasant experience, we ask you in the first instance to discuss this with the researcher, Josie McLean.
If you have a grievance or issue that you would rather not raise with the researcher directly, please contact her principal supervisor, Dr. Sam Wells on:

Office: 8303 8336

Mobile: 0419819959

Email: sam.wells@adelaide.edu.au

A further channel for feedback about the research is available via the Ethics committee and you may contact the Human Research Ethics Committee’s Secretary at the University of Adelaide, on phone (08) 8303 6028.

**In Closing**

I am excited to be a part of this learning, personally and for City of Marion. We have set ourselves the organisational challenge of being ‘a leader in the delivery of the Community Vision, _Broad Horizons, Bright Future_.’ We are hopeful that this research and action project will assist us, and many other organisations globally, learn more about how to do this.

I encourage you to offer Josie your full support.

Regards,

Mark Searle.

**Josie’s Contact Details**

Mobile: 0409 097 568
3.7.3 Appendix 3: Hermeneutic circle method in detail – final interview method

The following are notes that detail the method employed to in the closing interviews with co-researchers.

I designed the process to focus attention on my key research questions at this time after the co-research group mind map had been created together:

What has been learned during the co-research team's gatherings? What has that meant to them personally? Why is that important? How has that transferred into the organisation?

I interviewed the five remaining co-researchers, holding in my mind the identifying characteristics of threshold concepts (Yip and Raelin, 2011):

1. Transformative
2. Integrative
3. Irreversible
4. Troublesome (adaptive) \(\Rightarrow\) transformative

The interview process was semi-structured and was held with the group generated mind map (see section 5.4 for a detailed photograph of this mind map) placed on the floor for the interviewee to see and reflect upon as we talked. I used the group mind map as a starting point with conversation around each person's contribution and what they meant by that.

- What was the part of this mind map that meant the most to you personally?
- Why is that important?
- What do you remember the content of other's contributions to this facet?
- What do you think that means?
- Do you agree that this was learned?
- What makes you think/say that?
• Some say that knowing translate into action....What examples or stories do they have to illustrate what was learned?

• What particular parts of the learning you have identified as important for you, was both troublesome or disturbing because it made you re-evaluate what you thought you knew and integrate new ways of thinking? Has this way of thinking been irreversible so far?

• Is there anything that we haven’t covered that is important to be mentioned in the summing up?

I undertook all interviews over a two-week period and the conversations were recorded and I took notes as I listened.

After each interview, I used my notes to develop a record of learning that was identified and discussed, and what was important to whom. I shared this record with subsequent interviewees in the circle. I closed the circle by going back to the original two interviewees and sharing later insights with them. All interviewees were aware that my summary of their learning would be shared around the group and they consented to this.

Employing hermeneutic circles enabled a deeper and richer layer of understanding as it enabled a delving ‘underneath’ the collective learning displayed in the mind map, to the subjective or the way of being that facilitates a certain understanding. The very significant research findings relating to how the group was itself a sustaining organisation, were revealed through this method. The interviews also confirmed two key emergent changes emanating from the group.
CHAPTER 4: Description of the action research activity

Figure 4:1 Mind map of Chapter 4
"But there is another aspect to a Wave Rider’s relation to work ... On occasion, all of their busy doing simply stops. The task lists are put away, the goals and objectives are all placed on hold. The Wave Rider is content to be there in that present moment. An outside observer might legitimately conclude that the Wave Rider has given up, but the truth is rather different. She or he has simply let go... The commitment to the original passionate concern remains unshaken, and if anything, is deepened and intensified ... there is a recognition that any "doing" in the sense of organizing, managing, forcing – will not only be ineffective, but may well be counter productive."


4.1 An introduction to “what I did”.

This chapter summarises the story of my research experience within the organisation, how I went about the action research, and why I chose certain courses of action at various points in time. From a methodological perspective, this account enables a degree of recoverability of the research process. From the standpoint of the research question and objectives, the story that follows is a summary of the data that is drawn upon in Chapter 5 to generate the research findings.

My intention in writing this chapter is to provide an understanding of what occurred over the two years. However, I know that in writing this account and then analysing specific stories in chapter 5, that some repetition will occur that may be wearisome for the reader. I have attempted to overcome this by noting where substantial parts of the activity are discussed in Chapter 5 and provided a cross reference to that section of that chapter. I know this is not an ideal solution and may cause frustration in its own right. I ask for the reader's indulgence in this matter.

The story portrays the complexity of the real world and my experience of being a part of it - in it and not a separate, dispassionate observer of it. My research intended to combine the three perspectives of intrapersonal, interpersonal and
multi-personal and these three different but interconnected views are included in the narrative.

The case study also attempts to bring views of others involved, so that the reader has the benefit of multiple perspectives; however, this is by and large my story. A story of how I interacted with the organisation and what I was attempting to explore and understand more about - the nature and dynamic of prompting the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation. A story of how I interacted with the co-research team members and other people within the organisation. And a story that was also influenced by conversations with peers, my research supervisors, and other more experienced action researchers whom I encountered at ALARA conferences.

The experience was not unlike surfing a wave as I attempted to execute The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) and The Principles (Table 2:5). One way of thinking about my activity in the organisation is as the embodiment of the research methodology described in Chapter 3.

The story is structured chronologically for the most part and employing Ison and Russell’s (2000) four stages of the intended methodological approach (Table 3:2). I have indicated dates in the subheadings so that the reader may keep track of the sequence of events.

A graphic overview of all my activities (Table 4:1) provides a visual summary of research activities 2010-2013. It identifies different types of activity, such as:

- The various stages of engaging with the organisation;
- Meetings with the Executive Management Group (EMG);
- Research group meetings; and
- Critical incidents that occurred over the two years.

The story that follows does not include all the detail of every activity; a recount of this nature would be a book in itself. But it does attempt to relate the major elements of the research while illustrating the methodological approach and
provides one type of recoverable record of the research from which others can understand the research process and make their evaluation of the research findings accordingly.
Table 4:1 Visual overview of research activities 2010-2013
4.2 Stage 1: Bringing the system of interest into existence (June 2010 – December 2010)

Over six months from June 2010 - Dec 2010, I held a series of meetings with the CEO and executive management group (EMG) of CoM to explain and enrol them in the research process. This process was difficult and protracted due to the nature of the research topic, the emergent methodology and my own evolving capacity to explain what I would be doing.

The research methodology in particular challenged preconceived notions of change management. The enrolment process also revealed that the four members of the EMG did not have an existing common understanding of the term sustainability - this was still evolving. Given the absence of this understanding, different EMG members had a different sense of priority for their employees’ time and their possible investment of that time into the subject of this research.

The research finally obtained support from EMG after the contributions by two senior managers responsible for Organisational Development and Sustainability respectively, who were able to explain why they thought it was important to support the research.

More about this part of the story and the detail of what I learned from this stage of the research is detailed in my findings in regard to the methodology (section 3.5.2.2).

4.3 Stage 2: Evaluating the effectiveness of the system of interest as a vehicle to elicit useful understanding – forming the co-research team

My methodology included the formation of a co-research team. Because self-actualisation was an important part of my theoretical understanding of the paradigmatic shift, I formed the team on the basis of personal passion for the research topic, rather than functional position or level of authority within the organisation. When formed, the team decided the duration and frequency of research team meetings. These settled into a pattern of two-hour meetings on a fortnightly basis.
Section 3.5.3.2, details more of the group formation story. It identifies what I learned as a result of forming a group of this nature and how I formed it – intentionally creating norms that placed people and relationships before tasks.

The team was not static over the course of the research period. Members attended as they could and new people were enlisted by existing co-research members from time to time. It became apparent however, that it was not easy to integrate new members even with our best intentions to hold the space open for new people to arrive. As chaos theory informs us, starting conditions matter and it was very difficult for new members to understand the language and the norms that had developed within the group. After the first few months, most new team members left almost as quickly as they arrived. I was not always able to discover why they left. For some it was because their work location changed, for others, it was indicated that the group was not what they expected.

4.3.1 Engaging with CMG – Mar-Apr 2011

At the EMG's invitation I shared an overview of the research topic and methodology with the corporate management group, CMG, in March 2011. CMG comprised approximately 20 senior managers in the third and fourth tiers of the organisational hierarchy. I was provided with a 20-minute segment within their usual monthly meeting, to share the major research concepts and gain their support for team members attending the research meetings. I am not quite sure what possessed me to think that these were achievable outcomes in 20 minutes – given the scope of the research and its foundations in the paradigm of complexity! Although the CMG remained civil to me, I left feeling very dis-satisfied with my progress on both objectives.

In April 2011, I was summoned by the EMG to hear feedback from them about my presentation to CMG. The heart of this feedback was negative and after forcing myself to listen by furiously writing notes, it seemed the central theme was CMG’s and EMG’s lack of understanding of the lens of complexity that I was employing and its contradictory implications for change management as viewed through the Newtonian lens. By identifying this for EMG, I was able to open an awareness raising discussion with CMG that helped them identify that within the community
they already worked emergently and that this was the process I was employing internally. The discussion shifted from an initial critical tone to a more exploratory and inquiring tone that generated some shared understanding and language.

The following subsection contains my more detailed notes of and reflections on the meeting with EMG, written that evening. I felt quite triumphant after the event because through listening and responding to the core issue that I thought I heard, I was able to turn this event into one that developed our mutual understanding of what I was attempting to do and how.

4.3.1.1 Notes and reflections from meeting with EMG regarding my presentation to CMG

Notes from the meeting (handwritten and unrecorded because I didn’t expect the meeting) are scanned into the "Internals" NVivo folder. This memo expands those notes out and adds my observations and reflections.

When I was informed about the nature of the meeting I was quite concerned on 2 levels:

- Firstly my own sense of being judged kicked in. I was uncomfortable at the thought of receiving feedback from 4 other people at once.
- Secondly, I was concerned about CEO trying to fix this issue and exercise some control over the research project itself.

CEO was very well intentioned - trying to ensure the project was set up to succeed with the support of senior management - EMG and CMG.

Meeting commenced with CEO positioning his concern about the feedback he had heard, principally through one EMG member who I refer to as “J” below (and who was very supportive during the CMG meeting I thought - and appears to continue to be so).

Feedback summarised as:

- Most didn’t understand what I was talking about
- Didn’t understand the unplanned approach
- Emergent thinking is baffling
• J received strong feedback - stronger than most presentations have received before (and negative I suspect although he didn’t say this)

• Concerned this is now actual push back from CMG members and the staff team will not receive CMG support.

• Also concern that there will be overlap and duplication of work (because I mentioned the 30 year plan). Concerns that this group will run across those working groups

• Questions about how do we get communication through the organisation and between groups to ensure overlaps etc do not occur.

• Felt a goal was missing - no end point or strategy for achieving it.

"They are practical people who are saying we don’t know what we will be getting (through this project)"

Two EMG members agreed with the feedback - indicating to me that they are both linear thinkers who like plans and pragmatic details.

Having waited so long before I entered the conversation was a bonus - I did not weigh into questions of duplication of work - we were able to go to the heart of the matter. I was also feeling confident and not under attack - which was great!

I spoke for about 5-10 minutes about how:

1. Dumb of me it was to try to explain the research in 20 minutes...

2. I can describe the shift in thinking required - and proceeded to described the Newtonian to complexity paradigm - particularly the direct cause and effect assumptions to nonlinear feedback loops... implications for change and planning change... [I have never introduced this to them before]. I linked this to CMGs discomfort - of course they are uncomfortable - the project challenges nearly everything they have been taught about management, control and getting results.

Another EMG member asked "How can we help this (project) be comfortable within the organisation? CEO asked "how can we let it be and be uncomfortable?"
CEO - wanted to optimise the senior management support. He outlined a way for me to explain my approach to CMG using Einstein's quote re "solve problems at a level of thinking different to that which created the problem." and his definition of insanity... and move into explaining that we are all trained to think in certain ways...

Discussion moved to the RSA You tube clip of Sir Ken Robertson... (all EMG had viewed this very recently... CEO is stoked by it)

EMG member reflects upon evolution and how life will find a way. "How can we find a way for this to exist in our organisation?"

J - traditionally we sponsor it... ensure it has senior authority...

I spoke for some time detailing what is actually happening within the co-research team - their faces shifted from concern to intense interest... (at this stage we have had two meetings and have about 18 people interested in the team). Most particularly I related the distinction between 'white rabbit actions' and 'butterfly actions' – the metaphors that emerged in our co-research discussions.

This metaphorical distinction was picked up actively in the conversation that followed my description of the team. CEO started to reflect on whether this is the way they often work... they provide management resources for something then stand back and let it emerge. They discussed how the recent Lantern Festival just last weekend happened. Where did that come from? We didn’t suggest it... "We created an environment for emergent thinking..."

Conversation digressed into big picture thinking about how China suppresses and controls compared with democratic nations like India and whether China's approach (which may work better in the short term) will be sustainable in the longer term...

J "we need to be aware of when to intervene and when not to. And what are the signals for us to intervene to release another butterfly?" Demonstrating an incomplete understanding of emergence.

More discussion about planned versus emergent change. This time with respect to the Multi function polis (MFP)... planned and held tightly in a plan and it was only
after the state govt let it go that any action took place to develop Mawson Lakes and it emerged...

Decision: Leave the research project as it is at present. We don’t need to do anything just now. I suggested we do remain vigilant about remaining connected to both EMG and CMG. The communication and feedback loops are important. All agreed we just call a meeting when we need to :) Plans not required!

The metaphors referred to in the EMG meeting are discussed in more detail in chapter 5 (section 5.3.7.2) and again in chapter 6 (section 6.2.1.1). They represent a major finding regarding the nature and dynamic of emergent change.

4.4 Stages 3 and 4: Generating joint a decision making process and Evaluating the effectiveness of decisions made – the action research

4.4.1 Regular co-researcher team meetings

Throughout the two-year period of the action research the co-research group met on a fortnightly basis for a period of approximately two hours per meeting. We did not meet over the Christmas period from mid-December to late January.

We met in an informal room with a central oblong table that we sat around. The room enjoyed natural light and large windows overlooking Warraparinga reserve of 3.5 hectares with expansive lawns and huge old gum trees. It is the home of the Living Kaurna Cultural Centre (LKCC). Culturally, Warraparinga is associated with the Tjibruke Dreaming story and also has a heritage listed farmhouse from early European settlement. In 1998, the site was redeveloped as a native wetland to filter water from the Sturt River. Figure 4:2 is a photograph of the group’s preferred meeting room at LKCC from the outside looking in.

Throughout the two-year period of the action research, the co-research group met on a fortnightly basis for approximately two hours per meeting. We did not meet over the Christmas period from mid-December to late January.

The general format of the meeting was informal. I would have an idea of what I might ask the group to consider, but it was not unusual for other group members to bring their issues, concerns, insights or observations to the group for discussion.
We would check in with each other to develop an idea of topics for conversation and then lead into the one that seemed to be of interest to the group. The topics all focussed on the core research question of how the CoM could become a sustaining organisation.

Agendas, time keeping and minutes were not a part of our meeting processes. Eliminating these traditional meeting processes was a deliberate experiment on my behalf to see what would emerge in the space without these structures. I facilitated the meetings gently; I intended to provide just enough structure for emergence to dominate the meeting space.

![Co-research group usual meeting space at LKCC](image)

Figure 4:2 Co-research group usual meeting space at LKCC

Co-researchers attended meetings as they could, and if they missed a part of the conversation, those who were in attendance retold the conversation as best they could if the topic became relevant. This was time-consuming, and of course, in the re-telling, new insights would be uncovered. After several months I was asked to supply minutes of our meetings, but I didn't have time to provide these - and I didn't want to because removing these traditional meeting structures was a part of
my experiment. Instead, I provided the voice recordings online for people who were unable to attend a meeting. No one ever listened to these recordings – so I stopped producing them after several months. Minutes were not mentioned again.

We relied on what people recalled of our conversations as minutes. Nearly all conversations were recorded with the intention of transcribing and coding through NVivo. I always sought permission to turn the voice recorder on and was an only two occasions asked to turn it off – which I did. As previously discussed (section 3.5.3.1) I altered my methodology to rely upon my personal reflections as a coding of my experiences due to the subtleties that were missed in recording voices and transcribing. Section 3.5.3.2 also details my methodological findings regarding group norms that provided one major organising structure in our group.

4.4.2 Getting the beat within the co-research group

The first several meetings were spent:

- Getting to know each other
- Becoming comfortable within the relatively unstructured meeting space
- Gaining a sense of what we each understood by the term sustainability (this discussion continued for the entire research period in various forms); and
- Identifying and exploring the path towards sustainability that participants and CoM had already travelled.

In particular, we took a strengths based or appreciative approach, seeking to understand what the organisation had done well. In these conversations, I was also listening for possible leverage points within the system that was CoM.

One important facet of our conversations was the emergence of various metaphors to assist us share our understandings and communicate concepts. More is related on this topic and its significance in (section 5.3.5.2) where I discuss those topics of conversation that transformed those who were a part of them.
4.4.3 Envisioning a shared vision and shared values (June 2011 – December 2011)

One element within The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) included envisioning a sustaining organisation. Envisioning is a specific process that I had been involved in developing (reference). The co-research team members also discussed the community and organisational vision and employees’ connection to it, or more precisely lack of connection. We identified vision as a possible leverage point in the system, which was convenient that the co-researchers also perceived the need for something like an envisioning process. We explored co-creating a shared vision of what we would like the CoM organisation to be like for it to be well equipped (have the capability) to deliver the community vision of sustainability. As people came and went from the team, we also explored how to keep the vision alive and relevant over time and to new members. Our conversations about envisioning and vision continued over nearly a year commencing in June 2011 and included an envisioning process with EMG in December 2011.

The vision was a leverage point within CoM, and section 5.4.1.1 identifies findings regarding the envisioning process I employed. Additionally, staff being connected to the vision was defined by the CEO as a missing element in delivering the community vision and strategic plan. These components became entwined over the two years. Independently, I also provided the envisioning process to 3 different functional teams within CoM and the CMG as a part of my consulting. I reported back to the co-research team to discuss what I had learned.

4.4.4 Fear is recognised (mid 2011)

During a co-research team meeting in mid-2011, we discussed two major topics:

1. what we were learning about envisioning and integrating new team members into our vision; and

2. the role of the Business Excellence Framework (BEF) within CoM.

We identified that the BEF might be stifling progress because of its somewhat static interpretation of systems thinking. I suggested we share what we had learned about envisioning and open a conversation about the BEF, with EMG and asked if anyone might like to join me. I thought that the team, as co-researchers, may like
to take responsibility and credit for their insights and findings. And, I perceived this sharing of what we were learning with EMG as a planned action within the action research cycle. This discussion may be an intervention in itself. I was struck by the fear that arose in the group – it was a physical effect. No one was prepared to join me and the discussion with EMG. It seemed people were fearful.

I met with EMG again on 12/7/11 with my agenda and no co-researchers. After sharing with EMG a little of what we had been discussing and learning within the co-research group, I related the story of asking team members if they would like to join me at this meeting. Together, EMG and I sought to understand the fear through the lens of culture, mental models and perhaps even the unintended consequences of the previous use of authority and power and perhaps the manner in which previous organisational restructuring had taken place. It was very interesting to hear some, certainly not all, EMG members indicate a lack of understanding that others may perceive them as key authority figures. One EMG member possessed a lack of awareness of the dynamic of power in relationships with others in the organisation. This lack of awareness was endearing on one level – wanting to be egalitarian within the organisation, but maybe the lack of awareness could result in damaging outcomes with others.

As time progressed and I explored fear further, it became apparent that the fear exhibited by the co-research team might be interpreted as a pervasive element of the organisational culture - and a possible leverage point for change. Section 5.4.1.2 discusses fear as a leverage point within the organisation and its’ sources.

My primary intervention over time was to discuss and name this fear with the CEO, EMG and co-researchers, seeking to bring it to their attention and help us all understand why it might exist. I deliberately chose not to take any other action to reduce the fear because I was concerned that by focussing attention on it too much, it would grow.

4.4.5 Sharing what the research group was learning with EMG – a visit by EMG

Following on from my conversation about fear with EMG in November 2011, we agreed that it would be great for EMG to join the research team for a conversation about what we were learning.
EMG and I had discussed at some length how to enable this conversation so that the co-research team members felt comfortable and they even considered not accepting the invitation to ensure the team continued to feel safe.

I accepted responsibility for setting clear ground rules that would enable everyone to take appropriate responsibility for an open conversation.

When the visit eventually took place, the CEO was on holidays, the Acting CEO only stayed for 30 minutes, one Director was an apology and the other acting Director stayed for the entire meeting. Of the research team, only six were in attendance, with the member who felt most threatened by this meeting not attending. The conversation settled quickly into a description of the power of the envisioning process we had experimented with. The Acting CEO's questions and statements illustrated his understanding of the term 'sustainability' as equating with "longevity of the brand". What was perhaps most interesting about this meeting for me was the lack of follow through on the decision to attend the research meeting to learn from or with the research group.

4.4.6 Dealing with my own sense of overwhelming ambiguity – Sept 2011

In September 2011, my own sense of being overwhelmed by ambiguity and a sense of lack of direction, became so strong that I needed to do something about it. After some thought, I created my own vision of how I wanted to experience the research project and what my indicators of success would be. I employed the same envisioning process as used in the co-research group to date, except I did it alone. I used the resultant vision to guide me and help me make decisions about what to do as I experimented at a different level with employing my own theory and methodology on my own research project. More about this in section 3.5.3.1.

4.4.7 Envisioning within the co-research group again – Oct-Dec 2011

Not all the research team members had been present at the first team envisioning and after some lengthy discussion we decided to participate in another envisioning session with the intention of answering the questions "what are we going to do?", "what is our purpose?" These questions were becoming more frequent in our meetings – an indicator of the ambiguity. I hesitantly suggested another team envisioning that would build on what we had learned from the first exercise and
move through the entire process to develop indicators of progress that may suggest what type of action we could undertake together.

The team members had deep, unanswered questions about the process and how it might help them with a sense of purpose. We jointly co-designed a design process for another envisioning that involved me liaising with essentially one other team member and then reporting back to the team as a whole with our recommendations. Co-designing was an approach I employed again in working with other teams. I co-designed or tailored the process with team leaders to take into account differences in personality preferences (e.g. more analytical or conceptual) and contexts.

Over several meetings, we developed a plan to envision again in early December and we developed a list of additional people we wanted to influence, to invite. I had invited EMG to attend through the CEO. To gain agreement to undertake this exercise took time, as a team we kept returning to the question of "what will doing it again add?" We had deep discussions about visions and their usefulness, dangers and different types. There was a realisation that "I [team members] have had lazy thinking around the word: vision". More about the envisioning processes in section 5.4.1.1.

4.4.8 The germination of ‘letting go’ – Nov 2011

During the intervening period between the meeting when we agreed to undertake the envisioning process again and the next meeting that we had set aside to co-develop a process together, I attended an online course provided by Otto Scharmer on Theory-U. This course had one standout impact on me. It was the idea of 'letting-go to let come'. To date, I had struggled continuously within the co-research meetings with the notion of allowing emergence and still yet, still having input into what occurred. I was acting in a very hands off manner. At the next meeting, I shared my insight and we had an even deeper conversation about listening, contributing and not taking positions - co-designing. We used and developed this skill of sharing and ‘letting go to let come' to explore one team member's continued hesitancy to re-envision. More of this story and learning from it are elaborated on in section 5.3.5.2. ‘Letting go’ and ‘sowing seeds’ in conversations became a key practice and also identified as a threshold concept.
4.4.9 *Staying connected with the CEO and germinating a seed – Nov 2011*

On 14/11/11, during the preparations for the next envisioning process, I met with the CEO alone to update him on the research progress. Specifically in relation to two items.

1. My more detailed understanding of the theory of how an organisational culture may shift to be sustaining.

2. I shared with the CEO on that day was the concept of systems and processes that crowd the space for anything new to emerge. Reducing the prevalence of systems as a strategy was, I discovered, running counter to a recent consultant report into the effectiveness of the organisation which suggested it was “running on culture and needed more systems”.

The response from the CEO to the first topic was polite but he exhibited limited interest. Perhaps he had already developed his own theory.

On the topic of systems, he appeared to be seemed diversionary, so I just sowed the seed and let it go.

Of particular interest to me was the CEO's statement at a later meeting with me on 29/11/11. He announced that he had been working with EMG to “clear the decks” and get a “clear line of sight to the vision”. Perhaps the seed I had sown had germinated. Another example of emergent change.

4.4.10 *Envisioning with the research team and EMG in December 2011*

As EMG had been invited to this meeting, and aware of the fear that may be associated with it for some co-researchers, I spent some time considering the power dynamics in the group. I was conscious of ensuring that the process was one that the research team could enjoy. I did not know who would attend the meeting. History had shown that an acceptance of an invitation at CoM did not mean that people would actually arrive. I planned that if EMG did arrive, I would separate them from the research team in the early stages of the process, allowing the research team, who had participated in deeper conversations over a longer period
of time about sustainable organisations, to work on their own and benefit from their shared conversations.

On the day, the entire EMG team was in attendance. The CEO had decided that it was important for the EMG to be present - and they were.

As I observed the groups from the research team members and then the EMG group sharing their individual visions to create a shared small group vision, the difference between the visions and records of them was stark. The EMG vision was much less detailed and as a group, they had trouble staying on task. Figure 4:3 captures a rich picture of the co-created shared vision that was drawn by two co-research team members, to record the aggregated, shared vision of all attendees. Section 5.4.1.1 describes vision as a leverage point within the CoM.

Figure 4:3 Co-research group and EMG combined visual depiction of their shared vision.
4.4.10.1 The vision story and indicators of success that accompanied the rich picture.

The combined co-researcher and EMG group developed the following vision of the community in which they work and the qualities of the organisation that will enable that vision to become a reality in December 2011.

The vision of City of Marion community as a place to work and live...

Nature

Birds, butterflies, flowers, kangaroos….Green spaces, water and trees … community gardens. A local economy with bizarre type market places and market gardens surroundings – providing for local needs. A local community swap card (credit card).

And an absence of industrial age noise – quiet, nature and laughter.

Music and art

Children, multiculturalism and love. There is connectivity between people – young and old, different cultures. Wisdom is nurtured and shared… Retirement villages within universities…Life long learning. ‘Tribal elders’ are respected. (Westfield becomes a university) and also provides an international exchange – and outward looking focus and connection too.

No cars – traffic.

We create our own renewable energy – old roads treat water now. Most of the costs of services that drive council rates are eliminated. Everything is recycled….

Circles for inclusive conversations – and as a design for interactive locations/places and work stations. Connectivity around nodes. Circles as a symbol for communal gathering – rather than hierarchy A real integration of community, staff, administration and the surrounding location – seamless transitions. Council as a tennis club – admin does the ‘executive’ functions, but its the members (people within the community) that ‘drive’ it.
The entrance to the council administration building reflects this seamless integration – a community court (soap box area) where people come to talk about what is important in round circles and facilitated discussions groups. And people want to be here – not just to pay rates – they are engaged and active.

Permeability – physically in buildings between human made structures and nature – and also between the community and the council as an administration body. The entrance to the admin building is a place of wisdom sharing between community members and admin staff, young and old … the two become inseparable(?). Workers also live in the community.

Council’s role is to facilitate and catalyse discussions and decision making. Its bold leadership enables community desire. Learning and sharing. Creating memories – sharing stories and ‘managing knowledge’. We aim to extend the thinking and possibilities within the administration and community.

Listening, learning, engaging, and empowering…. A motto underpinning council’s facilitation.

Council staff are connected to their work through their own life purpose – their work is meaningful and spiritually fulfilling. Lots of smiling faces and laughter – and some sad faces too… A sense of purposefulness, calm and trust in ourselves and each other.

We are adaptable and flexible – undertaking an adventure and comfortable with uncertainty. Not fixed on the outcomes – energised and orientated by our vision. We are proud to be council’s staff.

We value imperfection in ourselves and others – because we genuinely value authenticity and diversity. We are a collection of people doing the very best we can – but we acknowledge we are not perfect. We value people as ‘wholes’ and facilitate working arrangements that suit a diversity of people in different life stages.

We deliberately expand our consciousness to enable the use of an integrated lens in understanding issues and making recommendations to council members.
We nurture effective partnerships with neighbouring councils, state governments and other relevant stakeholders. We recognise we are not an island – we are connected and can influence and catalyse through our connections.

We are optimistic - living, working and loving at a very special time in history.

**Indicators of Success** (developed by co-research team after the envisioning)

- We see new ways of involving remote staff (e.g. webinars)
- We see infrastructure in place that supports staff through different life stages (e.g. breast feeding) and life choices (e.g. bike racks)
- Tools and practices that help people gain an integrated/connected perspective.
- Council reports provide an integrated perspective of all issues
- Decisions are put through an integrated lens/filter
- Everyone feels valued and understands their contribution to the whole.
- Jobs have meaning and are related to personal aspirations and desires.
- We hear laughter

4.4.11 *Envisioning outside the research group and within CoM – Aug 2011-Dec 2012*

Over the two years of research, I worked with four teams outside the research team to explore the nature of the envisioning process and its impact further. Three of these teams were under the auspices of my research – SUFU, Community Arts Team, and the Information Communication and Technology team. The other was a consulting brief with the Corporate Managers Group (CMG). The process evolved as a result of these experiments and I developed a deeper understanding of the power and limitations of envisioning for sustainability and a sustaining organisation (section 5.4.1.1).

4.4.12 *A critical event – restructuring SUFU – Dec 2011-Mar 2012*

A critical event occurred the next workday after the EMG envisioning (9/12/11). The SUFU team was restructured without consultation. The team was split into different teams and the SUFU Manager moved into a new role; apparently without consultation. Strategic planning was relocated into another department. Several of the SUFU team members were also research team members and the restructure took on significant proportions in the research team.
As the research team met for first meeting in 2012, I had completely underestimated the psychological grief being suffered by the SUFU team. From a research perspective, this meeting was fascinating because the research team used the vision we created in December as a way of checking in on what a sustainable organisation would look like - an organisation they would like to be a part of. They contrasted this with the way in which the restructure was undertaken, from their perspective.

From my research reflections just after that meeting:

"The group talked about how the dynamic of this type of action builds a sense of fear in the organisation. I have previously wondered where it comes from – and maybe this is a major source. Despite feedback (e.g. from one of our team members to the OD department when she and her team were subject to a similar process a couple of years ago) the organisation... the system... keeps reproducing the same behaviours... avoidant and power driven is the way the team members report experiencing it.

The group reflected and discussed the failure of management – of leadership and inability to manage performance. A block to the constructive culture."

The research findings in relation the restructure as an example of one source of fear can be found in section 5.4.1.2 and in relation co-research group reflections on leadership within a sustaining organisation in section 5.2.4.

In March 2012, I managed to organise a meeting with the CEO and the Director to whom the SUFU team previously reported, to discuss their perception of the need to restructure, the way it was undertaken and what was intended. From a research perspective I was interested in two elements:

1. The restructure seemingly moved away from a more integrated view of sustainability because the new team was called “Environmental Sustainability”.

2. The real reason for the restructure and specifically the way in which it was handled.
During the period I was researching within CoM, my firm was also contracted to deliver a significant intervention. I worked with a co-facilitator during this contract.

The organisation's senior management group, known as CMG, was having difficulty recognising the possible benefit of working together as a leadership team within the organisation. It sounded as though there were two factions within CMG - one that wanted to be a team and another that didn't see the need for it. A number of attempts at team building exercises had been made over several years. None had made any positive impact on the group dynamics.

We developed an intervention employing the principles of Envisioning combined with Appreciative Inquiry to engage the CMG as a whole in a conversation. Our aim was to bring them together but the CMG as a whole, did not yet see the need to work together. The process needed to unfold, garnering support for the next session, one session at a time. The question at the heart of the process emerged from our first session with the group.

"When is there an evident need for a group of Corporate Managers?" The answer to this question centred more around leadership of the organisational culture, collective problem solving, clear and consistent communication, developing synergy and caring for each other – more than individual CMG member's functional roles or responsibilities. This was an eye opener for some.

Over a year from October 2011, we managed to engage them in a process that was a container for adaptive work. We delivered eight, 3 hour workshops. We cancelled one of these workshops due to poor attendance - and surprised many people by declaring our unwillingness to engage in a token exercise without a majority present.

We started the process by working separately with CMG even though it technically includes EMG. EMG were excluded for a period of time to allow a space that was safe for people to say what they wanted. This was suggested by a small group from the CMG who were the process sponsors and confirms the existence of fear within
the group. We then integrated CMG and EMG after the initial Dreaming phase to co-create one shared Dream.

From our perspective, we were engaged in several pieces of adaptive work in the CMG which emerged and became apparent over the time we worked with them:

- From "I do my job" to "we can be more effective together" (which also reflects a shift from a reductionist understanding of performance to a more systems thinking understanding of emergent synergy from connection of the parts);
- From "I keep the wheels turning" to "I can shape the wheels to be turned";
- From "I am fearful to speak up in front of EMG members" to "it’s OK to challenge EMG thinking".

We also worked separately with EMG and identified additive work there too, namely:

- From “leading with answers” to “facilitating conversations to reveal answers”; and
- From “protecting CMG from the politics” to “exposing and supporting them to learn”.

The resultant 'Dream' or vision developed with EMG, reflects this adaptive learning from the Discovery phase combined with our 'coaching' style reflection questions and feedback from our observations of CMG and the dynamic that appeared to exist between CMG and EMG.
The combined vision and values that emerged from the process resulted from asking the question "How do you really want to experience working in CMG?"
The process although called an AI process was the envisioning process I had been conducting within the organisation under the heading of my research. The vision they created was a vision of being a team and so the adaptive work of "will we be a team?" had been resolved (Figure 4:4).

Our final workshop with CMG was on 15/11/12 and as we left we were not sure if the process had helped. However, touching back with the HR manager, one Director and the CEO only a month later, all were abundant in their praise. The CEO was particularly impressed as he observed that the CMG were now picking up responsibility for "shaping the wheels" and that they were coming together and working together on corporate issues very well. The HR manager felt that it wasn't the deliverables or pieces of paper that we helped the group generate that made the difference but the fact that the process had made them get to know each other better.

I have included a record of this process in my research because it appears to have contributed significantly to the development of the organisational culture and it was based upon the same envisioning process as I had been exploring with the research team - except that this process was longer and we were searching for the adaptive work to be undertaken at the same time as engaging the group in the envisioning process.

4.4.13.2 Leadership development programs

During the 2 year period of the research period, my firm also delivered two different leadership development programs. Both are founded on the principles of complexity as we explore what management and leadership that liberates the system may be like. One program, Leadership for Success is delivered to middle and emerging managers. The other, The Equation, is a self-leadership program that anyone in the organisation may nominate for and is designed to enable the participants to recognise where and how they might make their greatest contribution to the organisation. Both are designed to reinforce the Human Synergistics’ constructive thinking styles and behaviours.
4.4.14 Service Reviews and embedding Envisioning into the annual planning process

4.4.14.1 SUFU envisioning and service planning – Sept 2011

Throughout the research period, there was an almost constant thread of conversation about the usefulness, or otherwise, of the envisioning to engage employees and influence the day-to-day doing. This expressed itself as a conversation about how to incorporate envisioning into the organisation's annual service review and planning process. It was the progress on reforming this process to the CEO’s satisfaction that appeared to be in part responsible for the SUFU restructure.

This conversation first emerged with the SUFU Manager when she invited me to conduct an envisioning process with the entire SUFU team in 15/9/11. The team, she indicated, would then decide if they thought it may be useful. Although I attempted to gain access to be a part of or even listen to this discussion (even suggesting recording it), I was excluded. The reason offered to me was that the team may feel uncomfortable about being open in my presence. I found this explanation bewildering - yet telling.

I was never told what the team decided but as the process was not included in plans for the service review process from this source, I can only assume that the process was deemed inappropriate for their needs. During a much later conversation I can recall the SUFU manager saying in passing that the vision the team created during this experimental run was not as powerful as that the research team created together. Maybe this had something to do with it.

4.4.14.2 Meeting with a Director about service review process 19th April 2012

As a result of my conversation with the CEO and a Director in March to review the SUFU restructure, I met with the same Director in April to further the idea of providing a workshop for EMG and CMG on complexity and its implications for

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4 It is worth noting that the Director was also a member of the co-research team on occasions. Attendance by this person was somewhat sporadic.
change, planning, measures and indicators of progress, and leadership. This also had links to the incorporation of the envisioning process into the strategic planning process and its associated annual process called service planning (the equivalent of unit business plans).

I heard ideas about complexity and emergence that I had been promoting and educating around during EMG meetings come back to me during this meeting. My personal reflection on Lao Tsu at this time was that he must have been a saint as I recalled his wisdom "When it is done the people will say, we did it ourselves" and "You can achieve anything if you do not care who gets the credit".

The meeting progressed with the Director telling me a lot about current developments but she decided that a workshop was not necessary. I indicated why I thought it was necessary. The decision was delayed till 2nd May when we were both scheduled to meet again with CEO, HR Manager, and another Director.

4.4.14.3 Next meeting 2nd May 2012

My research reflections indicate a decision on my behalf to leave my growing sense of frustration with the Director (mentioned above) I had been in contact with behind, and focus on the outcomes I was trying to achieve. I also reviewed how I would do this.

Before entering the meeting, my deliberate strategy was to let go of my 'need' and 'knowing' that CMG must understand complexity. And by letting go, see what comes into the space. So I deliberately decided not to chair the meeting or to commence it – and to just listen until asked to participate. Not that I would withhold my participation – but I didn't want to drive my agenda.

The group discussed ending the operation of the 30 year plan response steering committee, the need for this role to now be embraced by CMG, the envisioning process my firm has been facilitating with CMG, and the strategic management framework review and transition to a new process. The co-research group was added to this list. These different pieces in the organisation are now converging and the Director I had been in contact with, had an impulse to talk about bringing them together...
The HR Manager shared his experience of the Envisioning process bringing CMG together but he sees team building happening where CMG has resisted this at all costs in the past when it has been suggested or undertaken as an activity in itself – now it is emerging from our process.

The key strategy (… dominant actions/theory to achieve a certain goal) is engagement to achieve outcomes – both internal and external. The CEO even talked of the strategic plan being a by-product of the process of engagement and continuous learning. This is the beginning of another phase in CoM’s cultural journey. I can feel a shift in energy and an excitement that people are feeling around it – well some – the Director and CEO in particular…

They have developed their own model (Figure 4:5) around this (strategic management framework as it has come to be known) and it is surrounded by what looks like Kolb’s learning cycle but is a BEF plan, do, act, reflect cycle renamed I think.

Figure 4:5 CoM internal model developed to respond to the State 30 year plan.
The framework developed as an attempt to work out how to work with complexity and recognise that they have influence but not control over a 30 years time span. It was developed from a collective intuitive sense of what needs to be done rather than theoretical underpinnings.

The CEO spent some time sharing the idea that had emerged for community inspired visions to be linked to a sense of place - maybe up to 10 different places in the community. Key to its success was a facilitation process that they hoped I would contribute to.

During this meeting again I noted more inconsistencies in the way in which the language and concepts from complexity theory were being used. They think they understand it but have not yet mastered it. However, they are energetic in their learning.

I indicated I would be happy to contribute to the design of the facilitation process.

The research team did not seem to come into consideration and I wondered if this may be a result of most being associated with the 'old SUFU' team and being politically out of favour?

The original intention of the meeting was lost during the meeting - perhaps because I had decided not to stand for it. Although there is also a pattern of not following through on ideas.

At the end of this meeting I arranged a meeting with the CEO to review the research process and seek his reflections of the research team's influence.

4.4.14.4 A series of meetings – Mar 2012- Aug 2012

The combination of the emerging new approach to strategic planning and the recognition that vision was key to this, prompted the CEO to encourage me to engage with the Strategic Planning Manager who was previously the Director with whom the CEO and I met to discuss the SUFU restructure. The Director was acting in that role and had failed to win appointment to the permanent position. The CEO wanted the Strategic Planning Mgr and me to determine how to integrate the
envisioning process into an employee staff engagement process that would be a part of the service review and planning process.

Before the CEO left to go on four weeks holiday, he intended to explain his intention with the Strategic Planning Manager, but forgot. I became involved in a series of at least six conversations over a period of six months which became increasingly frustrating for me due to their lack of progress towards concrete action. I also sensed a lack of collaboration, which may have been a result of unclear expectations for us both.

During these conversations (which I will not detail specifically), an increasing number of requirements were placed on the process I might devise to integrate the envisioning and the service review and planning process. From my research reflections, The Strategic Planning Manager was requesting that the process:

1. Dovetail into a service planning process that delivers a business plan for each work group too (even though the service planning is only being an audited at present) – this would be great in fact, and it links to the following points

2. Incorporate hard data on customer expectations of service delivery

3. Integrate and use a template that is developing a service plan for work groups – this should be ready in 2 weeks

4. Integrate organisational KPIs that need to cascade down through the organisation that are also being developed at present.

I developed a proposal ("envisioning process integration 120924") outlining what I thought the process could do, the delivery method and benefits it might deliver. This was intended for the Strategic Planning Manager and EMG to consider.

Specifically, the process incorporated learning from the research group and other experiments to date:

- An upfront conversation about what sustainability is

- The envisioning process as we had experienced together
• Working with the team leader or manager to develop a process that would suit the team members

• Identify any specific mental models or adaptive challenges for the group

The research team assisted me in developing the proposal over a one month period with specific assistance in understanding the political hooks to gain traction. I received no feedback from anyone regarding this proposal - it just disappeared into a black hole. I did not pursue it either because of the difficulties already encountered and requirements that needed to be met. I decided to 'let it go'. (Another idea that lacked follow through).

The conversations with the Strategic Planning Manager were also complicated by trying to deliver the proposed pilot process concurrently with another external consultancy that delivered the service review (audit) process. This was a source of added complexity regarding which team would be examined next and when, and finding a consultant who was open to working with me. In the end, none of these facets converged, and I found a team to pilot the process with through a research team member and personal connections. This was the ICT team, and the process employed there is referred in the section subtitled 'experiments outside the research team' (section 5.4.1.1).

My reflections mused upon the difference between trying to plan an adaptive change such as employing a very different process like envisioning, and allowing it to emerge. The emergence with the ICT team was much more rewarding.

I also recalled Demming's observation that 85% of behaviour is a product of the system rather than individuals. I pondered about how one paradigm may protect itself against the emergence of another. I shared these musings with the CEO in November 2012, and he smiled. I think I was describing a dynamic within his experience.

The above summarises a long process that taught me much about distributed leadership (section 5.2.3), system self-organisation (section 5.2.2); and the dynamic of emergent change (section 5.4.2).
4.4.15 Direct action by the research group – a meditation group – Sept 2011

My story has moved away from the research team itself but the team continued meeting on a fortnightly basis in the main and was of great assistance to me in interpreting what I was experiencing in the organisation.

We also explored some ideas about taking direct action in the organisation.

After the Christmas envisioning with EMG, we gained CEO support to undertake an organisational wide envisioning process. Before we could action this however, the political ground shifted and the consent was removed in support of envisioning organisationally within the context of the new strategic management framework. Then it morphed into me undertaking some pilots with the CEO support within the Service Review and Planning process - a story that is related above. This experience is itself emblematic of what life within CoM can be like. It was a highly emergent space and people were muddling through as they learned. But for those trying to operationalise ideas, it could be highly frustrating.

The research group also explored the idea of offering lunch time workshops or experiences using film clips and facilitated conversation to assist council staff develop their own integrated understanding of what sustainability means. These didn't ever take place either due to timing issues over Christmas 2012 and then the research coming to a close. Which in itself is interesting that the research was the driving force.

The third idea for direct action came out of a conversation on 28/9/11 after I had vented my frustration with the attempts to integrate an envisioning process within the Service Planning process. The group conversation centred on the proposition that there is no time within the organisation for anyone to think clearly enough to actually do anything differently. There is a lot of talk about doing things differently but it doesn't often translate into action. The white rabbit takes over. This conversation also connected to some thoughts about how to progress our work without damaging ourselves 'energetically' was the word used.

The following extract from my research reflections tracks the lines of thought and decision to 'just do something'.
"What I have learned so far in taking action, is that it is much easier to just 'do something' than take it through formal processes where everything seems to grind to a halt.

And what emerged during the conversation was my memory of Ma's suggestion maybe up to a year ago, that we set up a meditation space for employees. It bubbled into my mind with a joyful little bit of cheekiness - joyfulness and ease that we could actually just make this happen!

We explored what needed to be done and how we might do it to include as many as possible. Ma will create a flyer over the weekend and we will use Ian Gawler's breathe work/ tapes as a basis for the meditation so it should suit nearly everyone if they have an existing practice or not.

We can book a room at Fairfield house with cushions in it already. We will invite the CEO so he knows it's happening. We will float it under the Think Safe Live Well initiative and the room hire can be paid for under an existing budget! Too easy!"

The team reasons for doing this are shown in 5.3.5.1 where I reflect on giving ourselves permission.

C shared that he thought that everything we have done has been a search for spirit....

Why didn't we do this 12 months ago? ... Maybe we were thinking too technically? Maybe we as a group didn't have enough courage to just do it. Maybe we had not given ourselves permission? Who were we waiting for?

4.4.16 Observing emergence from the research group in the strategic planning process – Sept 2012

Whilst I was engaged in the conversation about the service review process, I was invited to observe several meetings (at the time I thought it was related to integrating envisioning into the service reviews).

One such meeting on 27/9/12 was the briefing session for the consultant leading the facilitation of an upcoming Elected Member's planning workshop. During the
meeting I witnessed emergent change from conversations within our research team. A record of this is captured in my research reflections:

One major highlight from ... meeting was watching (research team member's name deleted) position the integrated thinking around the four pillars (of sustainability) in the meeting with Scott Way and helping him to understand that the 4 pillars should be used as an integrated 'prism' or lens on each issue and not a number of headings that projects are placed underneath. This was an example of how the sustainability co-research group's conversations and understandings leaked out of our small group and into the organisation – emergent change and influence. This became a principle of the facilitation that Scott worked with in the Elected Member’s strategy session.

Tracing or tracking emergent change had been so difficult to record in the research group. Perhaps it is done unconsciously rather than consciously.

4.4.17 Third person perspective influence on me – ALARA September 2012

I joined the ALARA conference seeking to understand why I felt so confused about my methodology. It felt it was a mess!

After talking with others at the conference and Bob Dick again in particular, it became evident to me that my sense of confusion was due to multiple action research cycles over varying timeframes. Things did not become simpler, but I was relieved that they were now clearer and I was still on track.

I continued to share what I was doing learning with others in informal conversations.

4.4.18 A meeting reflecting on the research with the CEO – April 2012

I spent quite a bit of time preparing myself and the CEO (with an email containing questions and outcomes I would like to achieve) for this meeting.

I discovered that the CEO had a very difficult time recalling any of the detail that I had kept him up to date with as it emerged from the co-research group. He was also unable to separate my research from my other consulting work in the organisation.
I emerged from this meeting feeling very dis-satisfied and frustrated. I knew that I had seen evidence of my influence and emergent changes 'leaking' from the group into the organisation. But the CEO was unable to notice them as I tried to employ him as a point of triangulation.

Again I was struck by the personal development requirements for someone doing this type of work. I suspect it is not only me that desires to see the impact of my work. And yet when exercising influence with emergent change and employing the lens of complexity, there is much frustration and little sense of having achieved anything.

Some thoughts emerged from this conversation and my subsequent reflection that are more associated with methodology and research topic findings (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

4.4.19 Final co-research group reflections in November 2012

As 2012 drew to a close, I was keen to understand what the research group thought it had learned as a result of our conversations together. I had attempted to run formal reflection sessions in the past but they had never quite turned out the way I intended. Perhaps due to the established group norms where informality and lack of structure ruled supreme.

On this occasion, I decided to attempt the process employing a mind map to focus everyone's attention. It was successful and engaged people to such an extent that our meeting ran overtime.

During this conversation a most enlightening story came to light about how the research team had influenced the organisation. It was a story of influencing from the research team members, to CMG, to elected members, and illustrates the nature and dynamic of emergent change specifically within the context of forming a sustaining organisation.

The mind map (Figure 4:6) also captured other facets of organisational life that we had collectively learned about. Importantly these facets were a combination of personal development and awareness combined with understanding the system. They were systemic observations appreciating the interconnectedness of
everything (as evidenced by the connecting dots between different elements of the mind map).

Figure 4:6 is a photo of the mind map after the first conversation. After this conversation, the team decided they wanted to extend it at a second conversation. Larger scale photos and an analysis of these group reflections can be found in section 5.4.
4.4.20 *Hermeneutic circle reflections*

After sharing the mind map of reflections with my supervisory panel, it was suggested I employ another process to delve deeper into individual team member's personal experiences of being a part of the research team and our conversations.
By the end of December there was a core team of just four who had been a part of the team since inception and one Director\textsuperscript{5} who had come and gone from the co-research team on several occasions.

I employed the hermeneutic circle method to a series of individual interviews that were highly unstructured but consistent in my underlying intention to each interview. This data forms the bulk of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} person perceptive learning detailed in section 5.3 and is detailed in the methodology chapter (section 3.7.3).

4.5 Summarising chapter 4

In this chapter I have attempted to share ‘what I did’ within the CoM without writing an entire book to do so.

Inspired by and standing for my vision of the research process and what CoM may become as it moved closer to becoming sustaining, I learned about myself as much as anything. It was a transformative process for me as I learned to act in conditions of high ambiguity. Overall, the process was an enjoyable one and one that I remember fondly – because of the lasting relationships I formed with the people who were involved.

The standout findings from my activity within the co-research group and outside of it are captured in Chapters 3 with regard to methodology and 5 with regard to the research question.

Chapter 5 to follow, analyses the data from my own reflections on events, co-research group reflections and documentation from the CoM to refine the key elements identified The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) to develop The Model Stage 2 to be read in conjunction with The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3).

\textsuperscript{5} This Director is the same person who was Acting Director and a part of the SUFU restructure conversation with the CEO; subsequently the Strategic Planning Manager; and now a newly appointed full time Director.
CHAPTER 5: My learning about embedding sustainability within the City of Marion’s DNA

Figure 5:1 Mind map of chapter 5
“The movement of the Tao consists in Returning.

The use of the Tao consists in softness.

All things under heaven are born of the corporeal:

The corporeal is born of the incorporeal.”

(Lao-Tzu, 1961) Verse 40

5.1 Introduction

Consistent with the methodology structure in Chapter 3, Figure 5:2 illustrates the organisation of the identification and discussion of the research findings into the following four subsections.

Figure 5:2 Research findings organised according to methodological intent

Weick (2011) argues that "what is often 'absent' in change management is a vivid picture of flux associated with first hand experience. Also missing are concepts and hunches that preserve small, subtle details whose foregrounding can produce large
consequences." (Weick, 2011, p8). The following recounting of stories and distillation of the lessons I learned is an attempt to persevere the more subtle elements of a first hand encounter with change that Weick refers to, as I seek to understand more about nurturing a sustaining organisation.

The research findings that follow are derived from a combination of:

- my personal reflections on each of the co-researcher group meetings, and meetings with other organisational members and teams;

- the hermeneutic circle interviews that captured the most salient findings; and

- the summative mind map that captured the group’s reflections on ‘what we have learned’ (Figure 4:6)

Where applicable, supporting documentation from specific meetings has been provided. As the findings emerge from the activity I observed, there is an unavoidable overlap between chapters 4 and 5 and some material may be repeated. I request the reader’s forbearance with such repetition. I also provide cross-references between Chapter 4, where the story was told more broadly, and the story as it is related in more detail in this chapter, to elicit findings. The cross references are available if you want to check on any particular points; they do not represent required leaps between chapters. I hope these cross-references are helpful.

The first person findings (section 5.2) centre on a reflexive approach. The section identifies the ways in which I was transformed by the experience and addresses the first element of the third research objective that was to understand better the nature of exercising leadership.

The first person approach was employed to guide me, as the researcher, to more effectively identify the impact of my actions (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The co-research group also indirectly addressed the desired nature of leadership within a sustaining organisation as it debriefed the SUFU restructure in December 2011 during a co-research group meeting. The co-research group reflections are included
in this section on first person findings as another perspective to my findings and as a way of keeping the findings on this one topic in one place.

The second person findings address the first two research objectives and as mentioned above, the second element of the first objective. Specifically the second person findings relate to:

1. Better understanding the liberation of human creative capacity in the formation of a sustaining organisation;

2. Trace the emergent change process and compare it with the proposed theoretical model, thus refining The Model; and

3. Trace, explore and record the process of generating a shared vision that orientates the paradigmatic shift to a sustaining organisation.

The second person findings are identified in two subsections. The first (section 5.3) identifies findings that emerged from a hermeneutic circle interview with co-researchers and relates their personal and group growth and development that provides findings relating to cultivating the conditions to liberate human capacity. The second (section 5.4), identifies findings about the organisation from the perspective of the primary researcher and the co-research group. The bulk of the research findings are to be found in the second person perspective.

The third person findings (section 5.5), responds to the need identified for this type of case study research to be shared with other researchers to share learning and generalise findings (Gustavsen, 2003).

Each of the 60 findings is clearly identified within the text that it relates to and is numbered as we progress through the chapter.

Finally, section 5.6 draws together and summarises the salient findings as I revise The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) to The Model Stage 2 (to be read in conjunction with The Principles Stage 2 in Table 3:3) in answer to the question what is the nature of the paradigmatic shift to form a sustaining organisation.
5.2 Primary Researcher (first person perspective)

In one sense there is little new here when read within the context of contemporary leadership development literature (Brown, 2011; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz and Laurie, 1997; Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Nirenberg, 1998; Senge, 1996; Senge et al., 2008) which perceives the need for leaders developing or enhancing their ability to see systems and nurture the personal qualities to enable them to operate more effectively within increasingly complex environments. However, having lived the experience, I am now able to offer a slightly different understanding of the theory than that gained from merely reading the theory. Some people on a spiritual path sometimes reflect that one might read the same scripture again and again, and still learn something new with every reading. My experience has been similar as I read new nuances into the theory now, than I did before.

I interacted with the system and it interacted with me. We are both different as a result of the interaction and neither will be the same again. This section discusses the following five salient findings:

1. Identifying cause and effect in a systemic worldview

2. A deeper, more subtle and systemic understanding of distributed leadership

3. Different ways of being that contribute to my understanding of distributed leadership

4. Incorporating the co-research team’s reflections on leadership in a sustaining organisation

5. Cultivating and holding the space for emergence

5.2.1 Identifying cause and effect in a systemic worldview

One of the most confounding facets of this type of emergent research, is the apparent inability to ascribe direct cause and effect, except at very close quarters in time and space. In this thesis, I claim influence within the CoM. I will employ the strategic planning story and Central People District story (section 5.3) as examples of emergent change emanating from the co-research group. But I cannot claim that
the co-research group had the only direct influence on these outcomes because there were other influences converging at similar points within the organisation. This realisation caused me great deal of concern during the research period as I considered re-titling my thesis “I was there but what influence did I really have”? The cause and effect dilemma was resolved eventually by realising that because the interaction was at least two way, events could not have evolved the way they did unless I was present. The summative group conversation identifying what we had collectively learned, combined with the individual hermeneutic circle interviews clarified that I had influenced something – maybe even powerfully.

Prior to undertaking the research it had never occurred to me that I would face the challenge of identifying the impact of my research activity because such identification is so often taken for granted through the lens of a more mechanical worldview with a scientific or positivist methodology.

**Finding 1:** When applying the lens of the paradigm of complexity to systemic research, cause and effect is difficult to determine. The researcher should not assume that the outcomes will be easy to identify and attribute.

### 5.2.2 A deeper, more subtle and systemic understanding of distributed leadership

The adaptive leadership framework incorporated in The Model Stage 1 implies a distributed leadership - one where anyone can choose to exercise leadership. But this perspective still reinforces an individualist approach rather than a systemic one. By that I mean, it typically still views the leadership of one person within the context of a system, rather than appreciating the leadership capacity that exists within a system as a whole. My experience taught me more about the latter perspective, and in the process, I learned more about how I needed to adapt the exercise my leadership in response. Much of my learning in the regard of distributed leadership was catalysed through noticing resistance to changes I wishes to implement within the organisation.

I noticed a source of energy that resided within the system of interest. It was not dormant, but was difficult to notice in the day-to-day life of the organisation. It was in part the culture, the pattern of unconscious assumptions that reflect values
that have stood the test of time (Schein, 1990) and I noticed this energy when I attempted to incorporate the envisioning process in the annual service or business planning process (section 5.4). And yet it felt like it was more than this. I am familiar with encountering a group of people who do things in a particular way because they have not questioned the assumptions lying underneath their thinking. My experience of these types of situations is that they feel like a brick wall; a dead end. There is no energy – it’s just not up for question. In these situations, over a period of time, I am often able to develop the questions that enable people to identify and assess the assumptions residing underneath their thinking. What I felt in the circumstance of attempting to embed the envisioning process into the service planning cycle was different. It felt as though I was trying to “paddle upstream without a paddle”, to use a colloquial expression. It felt as though I had encountered a flow of energy going somewhere and not where I thought I wanted to go. The energy I encountered:

- Possessed qualities of movement and mass. It may have been the result of the organisation’s own questioning and inquiry – which was proceeding at quite a pace during the research period.

- Did not even manifest in obvious behaviours suggesting resistance or unwillingness to change, but rather an inability to progress my intentions for all manner of perfectly understandable reasons. Conversations were engaged in, time passed and nothing happened or progressed. The experience was hugely frustrating!

I adapted by learning to work with and influence the level of collective energy, rather than pitting myself against it because that proved futile (e.g. my efforts to incorporate envisioning into the service planning process.) My alternative tactic was to find another stream of energy within the organisation that was going somewhere else.

This energy may have been what has been termed organisational inertia (Weick and Quinn, 1999). Organisational inertia is understood as a network of relationships within the organisation that generate a dynamic of stability until planned episodic change is delivered by senior management to address their
concerns about future performance. My discomfort with naming the energy I experienced “inertia”, is that this concept is a feature of an episodic perspective on change (Weick and Quinn, 1999), rather than a concept associated with continuous change of an emergent nature. Additionally, my experience was not one of stability – there was a great deal of movement and instability.

Language is important and rather than use organisational inertia because of its accompanying overtones of a more mechanistic view of change, I will employ the term self-organisation.

**Finding 2:** The facilitator of emergent change can experience self-organisation within the organisation as a flow of energy that has its own direction and momentum.

The nature of the energy associated with **self-organisation**, may also be considered in another more encouraging manner – “we are all connected”. As confirmed by the members, the co-research group became invisible within the organisation and as a consequence, I thought our opportunity to influence was limited. I felt inadequate to the task and powerless. But the realisation that has emerged for me, is that because we are all interconnected through the self organisational energy, “we are powerful beyond measure” (Williamson, 2009). The operative word in this quotation is ‘we’. My reading of quotations like this in the past, have had me understand that we are all individually powerful beyond each person’s belief. I now understand this quotation in a more literal sense. ‘We’ as a collective are more powerful beyond ‘our’, as a collective, belief – because we are all interconnected and the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

My experience identified another way of viewing distributed leadership from a systemic perspective and distinguishing it from the nature of the more traditional hero or individual leadership. The distributed leadership of which I write is more akin to Loa Tzu’s leader who

“When his task is accomplished and things have been completed,

All the people say, “we ourselves have achieved it!””
The sense taken from Lao Tzu’s quotation may be (although not the intention I believe) that the leader is being clever in making people feel as though they have done the work, but really the leader was behind the scene orchestrating events. This is not dis-similar to Heifetz’s adaptive leader who strategically (or some may argue manipulatively) orchestrates adaptive work (Heifetz et al., 2009). The distinction I am making is that in my experience of this research, there was little possibility of orchestrating events or outcomes that ran contrary to the energetic expression of self-organisation within the system and when I tried, I was unsuccessful. The only option for me was to intentionally contribute my leadership along with that of everyone else’s in the system to see what might emerge. I could not flow against the existing flow of self-organising energy within the system. I learned a great deal about my self as I attempted to create my own flow of energy – and failed. I learned about the need to find and flow with an existing flow of energy, attempting to influence it and even enhance it with my own. There is a sense of surrender involved in this expression of going with the flow – but not helplessness.

I influenced according to my own vision and values, as did others, but it was the convergent and emergent efforts from various people within the system, that influenced the system rather than the individual efforts of one person. The transformed system emerged from the whole, not one part trying to change the whole – not just one leader. The whole system transformed itself. Does this mean that every person within the system transformed? No. I am trying to convey that the system as a whole has the capacity to transform itself. As Heifetz reminds us in his first book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, the genetic difference between a human and a chimpanzee is about 1.2% (Heifetz, 1994). Not every element of a system needs to transform in order for the system as a whole to be transformed into something very different.

**Finding 3:** Distributed leadership may be perceived as a collective capacity within the organisation rather than individuals all exercising their leadership individually.
5.2.3 Different ways of being to contribute to distributed leadership

A way of being can be understood as a combination of perceiving the world including mental models, acting in the world and the way we notice if we are being successful in what we do (Snorf and Baye, 2010). In particular the shift in the way of being to contribute to the systemic distributed leadership (5.2.2) marks a shift from seeking to control events and people to genuinely liberating the full potential of the system of interest at this point in time.

As I re-read my reflection notes that were written after each co-research group meeting and major interaction within the system, I identified four specific evolutions in my way of being that stand out for me:

1. Learning about surrender, letting go and the threat of losing connection;
2. Working with ambiguity;
3. Monitoring my progress; and
4. Dancing with the system.

5.2.3.1 Learning about surrender, letting go and the threat of losing connection;

As I attempted to exercise my leadership, I came to realise that pushing harder and harder for any of my given desired outcomes, appeared to make them less likely to emerge.

The nature of my leadership then was to orientate myself with my vision (3.7.1) and allow events, conversations and shifts to emerge while remaining curious and connected. Any number of paths is possible. The one that emerges will be determined by so many complex factors such as who is present, the legislative environment prescribing certain outputs and measures, existing systems, organisational culture etc. Scharmer (2009) in describing his Theory U identifies the skill or art of “letting go to let come” and the need for individuals to surrender to the whole, in the moment, in order for the new to emerge. I, along with the co-researchers learned and practiced the art of surrendering to the whole – of letting go of preconceived notions (as much as possible) and working with what is
happening in the moment. This finding is also elaborated upon in the second person perspective (section 5.3).

Observed, surrender or letting go, is a practice or behaviour and it is underpinned by a significant shift in each individual’s way of being. Letting go was not easy because I had spent an enormous amount of time and energy formulating how I believed the transformation I was researching might be catalysed. I had and have a great deal of emotional energy invested in my ideas and models. From the description immediately above it may be possible to hear the need for me to let go of being right.

The most obvious example within the organisation during my research period was the desire for me to help educate the senior managers about complexity. I was convinced this was necessary for the theoretical understanding to be in place for managers to do things differently. Apparently I was wrong. It seems some shift in thinking, as indicated by the new strategic plan format has taken place anyway (section 5.4) and without my educative input. The resultant shift could be explained in various ways:

- Through my influence combined with the co-research group members who did understand complexity;

- Through the cumulative teaching of the adaptive leadership framework within the consulting work we had undertaken;

- Through the understanding of systems intelligence that suggests humans are born with an innate understanding of complexity because we live with it all the time (Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2004; Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2007a; Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2007b,).

Or most likely, the shift occurred through a combination of all of these possibilities.

Whatever the explanation for the change, one of my personal responses to needing to be right, is an inclination to argue more strongly for the outcome I believe in. I learned in an embodied manner that this tendency does not make it any more likely that people will do as I desire. I already knew that telling does not change
behaviour in a cerebral sense, but the cited example was another lesson to help me
to understand it more deeply – in my heart if you like. Letting people take their
own time and find their own path appeared to be much more productive in this
circumstance. Remaining interested, respectful and connected, I learned, was
paramount. Disconnect – either physically or emotionally, and influence is lost.
The need to be right and being argumentative in being right is a source of
disconnection with people.

Finding 4: Letting go of preconceived notions of preconceived ideas regarding the
right path forward, enables more opportunities and options to emerge. Trust that a
path will emerge.

This finding exists very comfortably within the paradigm of complexity where no
one solution is right. We all have to continue to adapt to the people and world
around us. But even though I am aware of the need to let go of being right, I still
battle with the shift, so deeply engrained is my desire to be right. I now also
understand this desire as another expression of Heifetz et al.’s explanation of the
lure of the technical challenge (2009).

5.2.3.2 Envisioning to cope with the ambiguity of emergence

I developed greater tolerance for working in a situation of great ambiguity. In my
previous work as an executive coach and facilitator, I thought I already had good
capacity to work with ambiguity. I rather arrogantly perhaps, expected not to gain
much in this sphere, however within the context of this research, I knew nothing!

My research methodology was emergent, the research topic was about emergent
change and I was an outsider attempting to influence the system of interest. My
reflection notes are crowded with references to my uncertainty about what to do
and about how to interpret what I was observing. I considered giving up on many
occasions due to the extent of the ambiguity.

Employing the envisioning process for my research and myself in September 2011.
The process helped me gain a sense of orientation and balance. These qualities
emerged because I had identified values that were important to me, and developed
a series of indicators of success that enabled me to monitor my progress. I
discussed the envisioning process (section 3.5.3.1) in the methodology chapter, and I emphasise it again here because the vision, values and indicators I created for myself was my way of orienting myself concerning the research objective regarding understanding the exercise of leadership better. The power of a detailed, vibrant, values based vision cannot be under-estimated. The envisioning process was developed for complex circumstances where the concrete outcome or goal is emergent and unknowable in nature. But that doesn't mean that those exercising leadership can not be guided by something less tangible and perhaps more powerful. I experienced first hand the power of values to guide me. It influenced how I was being, in a significant manner. From being confused and frustrated much of the time; to being more purposeful and relaxed more often.

**Finding 5:** Employing the envisioning process enabled me to navigate high degrees of ambiguity with a greater clarity, sense of purpose and reduced sense of frustration. It improved how others experienced me and my capacity to influence.

5.2.3.3 Monitoring my own progress

As mentioned above, the ambiguity extended to the identification of what influence my presence was having within the system too. I am a person with a high need for achievement and not being able to identify what I had achieved was very disconcerting for me. The shift in being required for me in this regard resulted in me altering the way I monitored my achievement. The indicators of success became my new monitoring checklist. Table 5:1 below, reproduces the indicators I developed (3.7.1), that were related to me personally, the co-research group context and finally, the research itself.
Reading through the indicators, particularly in relation to my own experience and that of the co-research group, reveals my prospective success being monitored by how people experienced the process. It does not detail how I thought I would monitor my success when I commenced the research, but I know that I anticipated certain events occurring in certain ways. I didn't know exactly what they would be, but that they would be planned and we would, as a group, reflect on the activity. The shift in my monitoring process can be said to have moved from, events occurring to the more subtle experience of the process.

Table 5.1 Reproduction of my indicators of success (3.7.1)
Finding 6: Employing the indicators supported a shift in my own way of being because I monitored my progress with regard to the way in which others experienced the process, rather than the specific, tangible outputs of the process or events occurring.

5.2.3.4 Learning to observe, interpret and act more systemically

The shift in my way of being also included me becoming more conscious of a clearer professional awareness of seeing and acting systemically.

During the first few co-research group meetings, I very much had the sense of getting a feel for of the system which Meadows et al. (2004) refers to as getting the beat of the system. I became familiar with what had been done before in the sustainability sphere of the organisation, getting to know the people and how they felt about sustainability issues. There was much that had been done and a great deal of positive and passionate energy – and also a degree of frustration. Understanding the history of the people and organisation together, as a group was important to contribute to the shared understanding that we developed.

I also learned first hand about interpreting my observations from a systemic perspective. Throughout my research, I noticed a growing ability to interpret observations of behaviour within the co-research group and organisation, not as personal behaviours but as ways in which the system encouraged people to act. This provided clues as to the unseen dynamics within the system. I hesitate to suggest that this interpretation provided answers – it didn't. But it did provide another way of understanding what was taking place. I explored such possibilities in conversation with others, trying to gain a sense of their interpretation too.

I observed how certain feedback loops, within the organisation appeared to be dulled by the impact of fear of speaking up to people in senior authority and by existing procedural and planning requirements that seemed to clutter the system. I learned to consciously create feedback loops or reinforce them as a systemic intervention.

For example, the fear that arose in the co-research group when I suggested we share our insights, some of which were critical, about the Business Excellence
Framework (BEF) (of which the CEO was a very strong proponent) with the EMG, commenced my inquiry into fear within the organisation and the reasons for it, rather than a reflection about how my co-researchers were lacking in courage (Sections 4.4.4 and 5.4.1.2).

A final point to note here is the development of my conscious use of the notion of a microcosm within systems to detect what may be occurring within the whole system from the behaviour of a much smaller part of it. For example, again using the conversation in the co-research group in which I felt the group’s fear of openly sharing with the EMG and CEO about their critical observations of the BEF – this situation was an example of consciously employing the idea that the whole may be expressing itself in a smaller subsystem or holon.

**Finding 7:** Consciously practicing to observe, interpret and act employing the lens of complexity developed my capacity to embody it and use the approach in an unconsciously competent manner.

5.2.4 *The co-research group meeting reflecting on leadership and culture in a sustaining organisation*

As mentioned in the introduction, the co-research group also reflected indirectly on the leadership and culture to form a sustaining organisation. This reflection came about after the co-research group and EMG envisioning process (section 4.4.12). Followed immediately by the divisive SUFU restructure in December 2011. Those in the SUFU team and co-research group felt very disgruntled, disenfranchised and betrayed for a period of time. I was asked to turn off my recorder during this meeting, so these findings are based on my own reflections written immediately after the meeting and my notes taken during the meeting (Table 5:2).
Table 5:2 Co-researcher reflection on leadership in a sustaining organisation

“It is difficult to know how much these reflections were coloured by the emotion of the time. It was very emotional with some participants crying at times over their sense of betrayal with the process of the SUFU restructure. Given this context, have removed the subtle critical elements of the reflections about the CoM leadership without removing the important reflections on those important elements of leadership that would exist within a sustaining organisation.”

“As I listened, I heard a range of values that they[co-research group] identified as important in a sustainable/sustaining organisation – the organisation they want to be a part of...

- Learning and the importance of a learning environment and attitude (a sense that many senior managers in the organisation are not open to learning at present – that they have a sense of expectation that they know this management stuff already)

- Networking connections between people being important and especially casual connections without agendas.

- Informal structures – people working together to achieve integrated outcomes despite the org structure – empowerment and accepting responsibility

- Promoting (within the org) own good outcomes and work (stories) – links to self-actualisation and ensuring your light is not hidden

- Integration of environmental sustainability with economic, social and cultural work.” (Reflections from Team Meeting 20 on 10/2/12)
Findings 8: Important facets of leadership within a sustaining organisation include:

- Ongoing capacity and willingness to learn.
- Promoting networking connections and informal structures.
- Capacity to see in an integrated manner and act in an integrated manner – seeing the connections between different elements of the system.
- Promoting positive stories that relate to achievements.

5.2.5 Cultivating and holding the space for emergence as the facilitator

My vision for the co-research group was a safe environment where everyone felt valued to contribute based on their passion and strengths (an element in the proposed high level change model developed before the research). I also deliberately cultivated a space in which co-researchers would feel free of guilt if they were unable to attend particular meetings (since they were volunteering their efforts). I set the tone of the group by placing relationships before task – we were a group that valued people over getting things done.

My role within the group was to set a very broad agenda with the research question at the centre of the group and facilitate the conversation lightly to explore the question. What do I mean by light facilitation? The level of respect I held for each participant was such that I would let my planned agenda go if someone had something else that they particularly wanted to share or explore within the group. As will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.3.2, the norms that were established within the group nurtured a dynamic that sustained those people participating within the group.

Finding 9: Cultivating a space for emergence is possible when relationships are privileged over action and meetings are less formally structured, encouraging attendees to explore issues of interest and importance to them around a central issue.
I saw my role as exercising leadership in the manner described by Heifetz and his colleagues (2009) in the adaptive leadership framework. The central research question was and remains an adaptive challenge. We don't know the answer to it in many ways. Even if we are aware of the technical process, people have to find their own ways to the answers because the answer involves each person seeing and doing things differently – having reprioritised values in the process.

I placed the research question at the centre of the group and held the space (Heifetz et al., 2009) for it to be addressed and explored in ways that were relevant to the co-research group members. I asked questions about what I noticed to discover what others noticed and allowed us all to do our own adaptive work.

**Finding 10:** Questions informed by the worldview of living systems, promoted adaptive work through conversations within the co-research group.

I kept the co-research group connected to the EMG and CEO in particular so that:

- the organisation would also benefit for what we as a co-research group were learning; and

- I could gain a broader perspective on the co-research group members’ ideas.

**Finding 11:** Cultivating connections around the co-research team was a part of my role as facilitator.

I was courageous (for me) at times and in holding the mirror up for individuals to reflect upon themselves, opened up new conversations in particular regarding emergence in contrast to planning in complex circumstances. We also explored the genesis of fear within the organisation. The group and I were courageous together as we explored the envisioning process and shared what we each experienced from the process. It was a meaningful experience for the CEO as he then held the space for the CMG and others within the organisation to explore and experience the power of envisioning. I did plenty of my own adaptive work and shared it with others, demonstrating my own vulnerability and willingness to learn. But more
important I believe, was the sharing – it was a social learning process that we engaged in.

**Finding 12:** The process of facilitating the space for adaptive work and emergence sometimes required courage to face our own fears and those of others.

### 5.3 Co-researchers (second person perspective)

The following section identifies what occurred within the co-research group as I engaged with them, implementing The Model and The Principles. It identifies five areas in which the salient findings are identified:

1. Personal and professional development through the group process
2. The process that was sustaining and nurturing
3. Common language, understanding and practices that emerged into the organisation
4. A largely invisible but effective source of emergent change that is difficult to identify and trace
5. Identification of the transforming threshold concepts

#### 5.3.1 Personal and professional development through the group process

The major surprise finding from the Hermeneutic Circle Interviews was the degree to which co-researchers who were a part of the entire two year research journey, reported personal development as a result of the process – and they reported different development. There was general agreement with one co-researcher who reported that “different people got different things” and that “The outcome is our transformation”. Some of the personal development was also attributed to conversations about various threshold concepts (Meyer and Land, 2005) which are identified in 5.3.5.
**Finding 13:** The co-research group process was transformational; catalysing personal and professional development that was different for each person, but at the edge of their own development needs.

Each co-researcher identified different but similar impacts from the conversations and the group process for them personally. Because the conversations were explorative and curious in nature, they developed a strong capacity to be in the unknown without holding on to a strong position about specific ideas. “You’re connecting with your soul and sharing thoughts with yourself and others and you are listening and you are resonating…. And it does make a difference… at that subtle level.”

**Finding 14:** The group process developed a greater capacity of participants to sit within ambiguity.

The group also learned more about open and honest dialogue and deliberately practiced the skill of inquiring to the level of assumptions. The group practiced sharing thoughts and then letting go of the thoughts shared to the extent that thought or idea could then be moulded or shaped further by the group. “I don’t think we even had a real argument” was one co-researcher’s recollection. The group experimented with conversational processes to seek to understand and let go of positions to curiously explore an idea.

“They’re willing to share what they think, but what they think is not owned by them, whereas at the beginning, what they thought, was owned by them.”

**Finding 15:** The group process developed the skill and capacity to inquire and lead inquiry to the level of mental models (and paradigms) as participants practiced listening to understand and letting go of preconceived ideas.

Within the group, people developed a stronger sense of confidence in themselves individually. This included confidence in their thinking as they practiced to “Articulate new ideas ...explore them out loud in a safe environment.” That safe environment was defined as one with “people you trust and who know you”.

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Finding 16: The group process increased the self-confidence of participants to articulate new ideas.

But the growing sense of confidence went much deeper and transcended some very deeply held beliefs about themselves. “It’s something I have really valued. And I think it’s contributed to my becoming more of who I am.” To a much deeper expression of the value added by the group …

“I don't have a qualification. So I have always viewed myself ...as not capable or worthy...and therefore my style of work and thinking isn’t bonafide ... this group has reinforced that my real value will not come from an MBA. [This process] has given me the confidence to be who I am...”

The process apparently allowed co-researchers to feel valued for their authentic self as they shared deeper and deeper ideas without judgement of them as people. (There was perhaps an unconscious recognition that we are not our thoughts.)

Finding 17: The group process increased some participants’ sense of self worth and confidence in their authentic self.

One co-researcher reflected that the group may have attracted and retained people who wanted to connect at this deeper level of what she termed consciousness. Various people did come and go from the group over the two years. It was apparent that those more inclined to action found the group process frustrating, as they desired to do things rather than explore ideas. At various times, all group members expressed some degree of frustration with this facet of the group process.

“The group found kindred souls in terms of being able to have a conversation about the collective unconscious, and the way that that influences and can influence what it is that you do. To talk with someone about that and know that they know what you are talking about, and that it resonates with them ... is really nice. Because there is not a lot of people you can talk about that with.”

Finding 18: The group process appealed more to those who valued the power of conversations, than those who valued what they perceived as more direct action, or “doing”.

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On a more professional level, the co-researchers identified more obvious benefits of spending time getting to know other people from different parts of the organisation and gained a much broader context for their work. “It’s enabled me professionally, ... to be able to think more deeply about how what we are doing is...help[ing to] drive an agenda that’s going to be corrective for the planet.” And from another co-researcher “it feels like a bit of a privileged understanding of the organisation which influences the approach and the conversation I have with colleagues.”

Additionally, co-researchers identified the opportunity to watch others in different roles communicate in different ways and to listen to stories about how they operated as a leader.

**Finding 19:** The process created a space for participants to observe different communication and leadership styles that they adapted for themselves.

The “Group took me into areas of thought I would never have explored on my own” and examples of these areas include the topics of spirituality as we discussed people as whole people that stemmed from a discussion about fractals and holons, and a question “what does sustainable mean for us as individuals?”.

**Finding 20:** The emergent process focussed on the key research question, allowed the areas of conversation to be led by curiosity and extended into spirituality as an element of understanding organisational sustainability.

5.3.2 *The process that was sustaining and nurturing*

Co-researchers reported that the group process itself was enjoyable, and provided a “time and space” where they “could explore ideas”, “stop and think”, “learn, develop and explore, and be curious”.

**Finding 21:** Participants enjoyed the group process of conversations.

There was a sense that because of the process, there was a degree of inevitability of the ultimate outcome which was identified as their individual and collective transformation – expressed by one as “I think if you had these conversations with any individual, and peeled away the onion rings, they would eventually find this
place within themselves as being true and a place where they want to live in and work in.”

The ‘place’ referred to is a place of authenticity – a place of being able to bring their whole selves to work. This facet will be referred to in more detail in the section about threshold concepts.

Most important about the group process for those who stayed, was that they enjoyed it and reported that it helped them through some difficult times (a specific reference to the restructure of the SUFU team). It sustained them by providing a sense of being nurtured and cared for but also a place where they could explore ideas of importance to them and learn and grow as a result. “And it’s just self actualising stuff and this is what this has done. It’s given people the time to work on that part of themselves.”

**Finding 22:** The process nurtured and cared for participants to gain a greater sense of self or authenticity which was viewed by the group, as an important precondition for the organisation to become sustaining.

5.3.3 Common language, understanding and practices that emerged into the organisation

Through the way in which the co-research group functioned, the co-researchers identified that they “talked the language of the group” and when they did so in one meeting of senior managers (CMG), they discovered that “it resonated” with others and triggered an in-depth, explorative conversation about the difference that might be effected if a term like Central Business District was changed to Central People District. Indeed this was one emergent conversation that travelled all the way through the administrative organisation and into an Elected Member’s strategic planning workshop, where although the new term was not adopted, the impact of the conversation was felt and discussed.

Reflecting on this initial conversation in CMG, one co-researcher identified the importance of “time and relationship building in the group” which allowed a safety in numbers to develop. The deeper the conversation and understanding of each other, the more certain they each were that if they spoke up in a larger group
situation and required assistance from another co-researcher in the group – that help would be there. There was a sense of not being alone in the divergent thinking and way of being.

**Finding 23:** The conversations within the co-research team developed a strong sense of confidence in each other and a common language. Together these supported individuals to take greater risks in conversations outside the group, catalysing conversations that challenged the status quo elsewhere.

The story referred to above was related to me by one of the members in the group who witnessed the entire process through the organisation. But the story demonstrates more than a common language at work, it also demonstrates that the small group of co-researchers, instigated and facilitated a very different conversation. The norms and practices of the research group also emerged out into the organisation and was noticed by others as “working groups without fixed agendas” but a focus of conversation. The observation of new group processes emerging in the organisation was confirmed by triangulation in an EMG meeting during the research.

**Finding 24:** Working groups without agendas began to emerge within the organisation, creating a series of emergent spaces within the organisation.

5.3.4 *A largely invisible but effective source of emergent change that is difficult to identify and trace*

The co-research group was formed with the intention of creating specific (planned) action in the organisation and being very visible. But the group became largely invisible.

“there would be so many people who wouldn't even know what was happening. My manager [name removed] knows that I go but I don't think she really understands what it is that we’re doing. My team knows that I go but I don't think they really understand what it is, even though I have tried to talk about it. That is probably true of most of the organisation.”
Finding 25: The co-research group became invisible to most within the organisation.

However, the impact of the group was felt within the organisation as, in a manner that is difficult to trace, co-researchers took “the conversations back to our own work”. The co-research group was a source of emergent change although it appears team members were often unaware of it at the moment.

Earlier in the two-year group process, I attempted to instigate a regular fortnightly reflection process within the group to explore whether they could identify conversations of influence they had engaged in that resulted from our discussions in the co-research group. But the reflection and identification process was unsuccessful because co-researchers reported being unable to recall such conversations. This phenomenon suggests that because emergent change is unpredictable and almost unobservable as it is transmitted from one conversation to another, that it only becomes obvious in hindsight when some tangible change has manifested over time. One prime example of this is the change in the strategic planning process within the organisation (5.4.1.3).

Finding 26: Conversations that result in emergent change may only be identified in hindsight, after a more tangible change has emerged, and the trail of conversations can then be traced back through different people.

5.3.5 Identification of the transforming threshold concepts

During each of the final hermeneutic circle interviews I described the notion of a threshold concept (Meyer and Land, 2005) and asked each co-researcher to reflect on topics that may have been threshold concepts for them.

Finding 27: There was a strong degree of convergence as the co-researchers identified the major threshold concepts:

- Self permission to bring their whole selves to work – especially their values as identified in the envisioning process
- The paradigm of complexity and the associated concept of emergence
• Sustainability
• Mental models

The following explains the nature of each concept more fully and identifies the following three elements for each threshold concept, although not necessarily in this order:

• how the concept was supported by learning materials or processes;

• why co-researchers found this a particularly transformative concept; and

• new behaviours or stories that illustrate how the threshold concept has transferred into new behaviour(s). I have also attempted to identify and relate some of the changed behaviours.

5.3.5.1 Giving self permission to bring their whole selves to work

All co-researchers discussed the importance of the insight that, for a sustaining organisation to emerge, they had to give themselves permission to bring their whole selves to work. Facets of themselves that they identified included their personal values that related to how they felt about global and local issues and people and themselves. They recognised that their hearts and not just their heads matter.

Finding 28: For a sustaining organisation to emerge, employees have to give themselves permission to bring their whole selves to work, especially their personal values.

This is important on different levels. Firstly, bringing their whole selves to work enabled increased meaning in their work and lives. But there was also a deeper connection to more fundamental values such as love and gratitude and how these influence a person’s very being rather than just their thinking.

One co-researcher reflected on previously focussing her leadership efforts on processes and systems in a logical manner, but recognising that this focus had actually denied her inherent ability to work at what she described as the edge of chaos using her “passion, creativity, innovation and diversity” to find her way and
allow answers to emerge. This person recognised that she had not given herself permission to be true to herself due to existing approaches within the organisation and maybe her own mental models “because the typical Western tradition is such that it is more mechanistic than allowing chaos to exist, its always trying to order and control things.”

**Finding 29:** As people bring their whole selves to work, some of the more analytical and systematic approaches to work may give way to more innovative and intuitive ways of working, allowing more emergence.

At an even deeper level, another co-researcher reflected that when working with the power of the heart and at the level of intention, he could be even more powerful or influential in what he termed a “more subtle realm”. He had experimented a great deal with this concept and he recognised that who he was being at any point in time had more impact on outcomes than his direct orders, instructions or personal preferences.

“Maybe we just need to be less critical, less wanting to influence and just more allowing. If that is true, those intentions in subtle realms, maybe the best thing I can do is just to completely let go. I’ve set the intention...”

This concept of being his whole, multi-dimensional, self also links directly with another threshold concept I will explain next the art of letting go in order to enable emergence.

**Finding 30:** Bringing your whole self to work enables more personal development at work and a greater emphasis on who you are being rather than what you are doing.

Another facet of giving self-permission was the group exploring this concept together in a collective fashion. It was noted that giving yourself permission to bring your whole self to work is easier when others are doing likewise and conducted in a group that was sharing very deep discussions about the values that each holds. This conversation emerged through the envisioning process early in our two-year journey. The group explored how each individual “really wanted to experience working in the organisation”, and there was a general recognition that
everyone wanted fundamentally the same experience (see Error! Reference source not found.). The sharing of each individual’s values and subsequent recognition of shared values, appeared to provide a solid platform from which to feel safe about expressing those values.

**Finding 31:** Giving self-permission to bring your whole self to work is easier in a group than alone. The envisioning process provided a safe group process to share personal values that catalysed the process of permission giving.

I believe there is another facet of giving yourself permission to show whole at work. This was not reflected upon by the group, but by me alone as I noticed the group’s last planned action to create a meditation group at work in September 2011 (4.4.15). The team reasons for doing this were:

- Recognizing the need to slow down and make space for good decision making and thinking – this is an organizational and individual need for many people
- Promote individual mindfulness
- The documented research on the connection between mindfulness and heart/mind connection
- An overt declaration of the importance of spirit.

This idea had surfaced once before but we had not acted upon it – we had perhaps not given ourselves permission to act upon it. In the end, it was remarkably easy to do.

I supported the concept of working from the heart by circulating a research paper and findings from the Heart Math Institute (McCraty et al., 2001). This material provided scientific evidence of the value of coherence between heart and head and provided another view of how people could improve their wellbeing and performance at work in ways that question the received management wisdom in phrases such as ‘leave your emotions at the door’.
5.3.5.2 Understanding the paradigm of complexity and emergence

Within the first few team meetings a distinction was made metaphorically between white rabbit and butterfly way of being. This was a conversation about the difference between rushing around with hectic activity, timed by a clock or calendar, that actually seemed to deliver very little – and the story of the Lorenz’s butterfly (Lorenz, 1963) unpredictably generating a tornado on the other side of the world.

![Figure 5:3 Metaphors illustrating different ways of being](image)

Figure 5:3 Metaphors illustrating different ways of being

Figure 5:3 illustrates the White Rabbit, a character in Lewis Carroll’s classic novel, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, that was used to describe a state of hectic activity with little thinking. The Butterfly derived from co-researcher conversations about Lorenz’s metaphor of the ‘Butterfly Effect’ to describe sensitivity to initial conditions and the unpredictability of complex systems (Hilborn, 2003) and chaos theory.

**Finding 32:** Metaphors provide a rich and effective way of communicating and drawing attention to different ways of being.
This distinction between the white rabbit and butterfly, deepened into learning about the difference between the Newtonian or mechanistic paradigm and its implications for management practices, and the contrasting paradigm of complexity. I supported this inquiry by asking the team if they would like someone from the university to come along and share some theory about the two paradigms and implications for organisational behaviour – they agreed. The team was very interested and this distinction was probably the most powerful and enduring one during the period of the research. It had very powerful personal implications as identified above in the personal and professional development of co-researchers. It also came to have powerful implications for how we operated as a group and how we influenced the organisation as a whole – a key one being the difference between seeking to control and letting go of an attachment to certain outcomes.

“But I think that when you are trying to change the way, well, its that paradigm shift, you actually need to allow people to come to...that point themselves. And it may take longer, and you need to allow that to happen. You can’t force. But I think, ... what I can do is ask questions and be curious and understand why and see what happens.”

“And to me, that is done by stealth in holding the space... I’d use that planting the seed analogy as well, and you water it every now and then if you need and see what emerges, see what grows.”

Prior to the research I am reporting on here, my consulting firm had been teaching Heifetz’s Adaptive Leadership Framework within the organisation and within the quote above, there are clear resonances with the teaching about holding the space for adaptive change (Heifetz et al., 2009). But there is a also deepening of Heifetz’s framework that although set within the paradigm of complexity, focuses more on working out how to achieve or undertake certain hypothesised adaptive work, in a planned next step manner even though it experimental in nature. The research group took the notion of adaptive work deeper into the realm of uncertainty and talked of sowing seeds, needing to let go of the idea and into Loa Tsu’s territory of leadership that is not seen by the people. These concepts also resonate with Otto Scharmer’s work describing the journey to the bottom of the U
to let go in the moment - work of needing to ‘let go’ to ‘let come’ (Scharmer, 2009).

The group discussed the ideas of seed sowing and letting go very directly in one team meeting where I shared with the group my own dilemma about facilitating the group in a manner that facilitated emergence. My question to the group was “how do I facilitate emergence but still contribute what I ‘know’?” It led to a deep discussion and subsequently the practice of the communication skills, about sharing an idea, but not holding on to it as a position that you are taking. The discussion identified the notion of offering an idea as a gift to the group and after sharing it, letting it go to be further shaped by the group. It was a major point of development for me as the primary researcher too. I moved from withholding what I thought I knew to sharing and letting it go.

Statements that further explain this distinction, in the co-researcher’s terms, include:

“It’s within chaos that ... [you] can express your passion, creativity, innovation and diversity, all of those things that I think are a part of a healthy individual, and part of a healthy society... The typical western tradition is such that it is more mechanistic and doesn't allow chaos to exist, its always trying to order and control things…”

“These intentions, the subtler, the more actionable they become... I think its because there’s a letting go element. There’s an intention in allowing.... All these things came out in these conversation with greater clarity for me.”

“Controlling is wrestling. It’s more in the physical realm of action which is course and takes more mechanics. Where as letting it go, you’re into a subtler ...realm... you’re actually at the organising level.”

Within the co-researcher’s reflections there is also an appreciation of the influence that an individual’s role (formal authority) has on an individual’s willingness to practice letting go, in addition to the role of each person’s ego and need for recognition.
“Now that I work without [my previous levels of] formal authority … I can be
more effective. People take my advice. They don't have to listen to it and there is
no consequence… I am not a threat to them … so I can plant seeds … and then I
watch it take. And it’s rewarding.”

“Sometimes if they are bigger things that I know other people will take credit for,
I’ll say “Actually that was my idea”. But I choose which ones I do that for. I’m
more conscious of which ones I do that for... maybe I’ll get to the point where I
realise that it doesn't matter. I mean, it doesn't matter if I am visible or not, just as
long as I’m having influence.”

**Finding 33:** Providing education about the distinction between the Newtonian
paradigm and paradigm of complexity, enabled conversations within the group
exploring how to be more effective emergent change agents. It also supported the
conscious development of skills and practices such as sowing seeds and letting go,
to support emergent change at a more subtle level of organisation.

5.3.5.3 Understanding ‘sustainability’ as a term

The group explored the notion of sustainability in its various expressions over the
entire two years. During that time the group developed a shared understanding of
the term that shifted significantly for nearly all participants. That shift was
different for different people depending upon the understanding with which they
arrived. Upon arrival, most used the term within the context of environmental
sustainability. This was to be expected as for some of the original group, that was
also the context of their work responsibilities. For others, the term meant survival
or longevity or even financial viability.

Over the course of the two years we explored sustaining ourselves as individuals,
organisational sustainability and the paradigm of complexity.

**Finding 34:** Gradually a shared, deeper and more expansive understanding of the
term sustainability emerged, encompassing concepts of wholeness,
interdependence and spirituality as another dimension of our human experience of
wholeness.
“Sustainability was environment centred, we think of sustaining the environment. But it’s moved a bit. It’s also sustaining our right [as humans] ... to live in a relationship with the environment of our choosing. We have equal right to be in and sustain our preference to the extent that we ... also sustain the environment that our preference plays in.”

“I didn’t think deeply enough about it, but sustainability now to me is the relationship of us and our environment.”

“Sustainability for me has always meant ... you’ve got limits around the environment and that we have our social structures and our community or individual needs, and then systems and structures that society sets up are the ones that we can change, but are the ones that seem to be driving us. So they are the one’s that we made, so why don't we change them?...”
Another facet of sustainability that became clearer for participants was the relationship between environmental sustainability and organisational culture. One
conversation in particular focussed on this relationship and the summary is shown in Figure 5:4. It was a connection of which their CEO had talked for a long time but most employees had not understood the relationship nor its importance (an observation made from working within the organisation for in excess of six years).

“Not in terms of how the organisation operates, I probably hadn’t really [thought about that]. And for me… that kind of links back to the organisational culture idea we were talking about earlier. And that for me I think has been quite a big connection...I still keep coming back to the importance of that... If you have an organisation or culture than enables people to work or be in that organisation in a way that is true to their values...But then as an organisation, if we’re sort of saying “well this is the direction that we are going in”, in terms of being a sustainable organisation, how do we then create space for the emergent? Or is it ...maybe the strategic direction that needs to be flexible enough?”

In this last quotation, we are also able to notice the emerging thoughts that distinguish organisational sustainability from a notion of longevity and instead link it with a particular type of organisational culture. At the end of the quotation is also an emerging line of inquiry, that reached fruition two years after this interview, about the nature and role of strategic direction (not planning). I will link back to the shift in the way the organisation expresses its strategic direction as an artefact (Schein, 1990) indicative of the paradigm shift from a more Newtonian paradigm to a living systems paradigm consistent with forming a sustaining organisation.

**Finding 35:** Despite the co-researchers’ individual interests in environmental sustainability, at least twelve months passed before all co-researchers realised the importance of the relationship between sustainability, a sustaining organisation and organisational culture. The relationship between these concepts is highly adaptive work.

For two participants in the group of five interviewed at the end of the two years, this deepening understanding was fed by and in turn nourished their personal expanding consciousness as proposed by Dunphy and his colleagues (2007). Dunphy et al emphasise a shift from a Newtonian and positivist perception with our own ego at the centre of our attention, to a cosmocentric way of being that is in
a more “harmonious relationship with nature” (2007, p299). One co-researcher expressed the understanding of interdependence or connectedness in this way:

“Yeah, the infinite love and gratitude resonates with everybody… creates a resonance of universes …that’s powerful because if my intention resonates with your intention, your field of influence, it affects someone else. And we are all intimately connected… The world in an instant of time… through possibly one person… can influence that resonance of all, to unite.”

Finding 36: The understanding of the term sustainability becomes an increasingly subtle experience of inter-dependence.

Identifying specific behaviour shifts flowing from this new understanding of the term sustainability is not as easy as that for other threshold concepts. This shift in understanding the term sustainability appears to be more fundamental, underpinning a different worldview that expresses itself in everything a person does. It may explain what Dunphy et al. mean when they discuss change agents and express the view that it is not what change agents do that matters as much as who they are being (2007, p 293).

On reflection, I identify the my own worldview as being an influencing factor in fuelling the understandings expressed above. In attempting to identify how the threshold concept understanding sustainability was supported and developed, I believe it was my own perspectives that supported the conversations and exploration of the term, as I shared and let go of – and which developed further in conversation with group members.

Finding 37: The primary researcher’s worldview and embodiment of the paradigm of complexity was an important influence upon the co-researchers’ exploration of the term sustainability.

5.3.5.4 Noticing and challenging mental models

For all but one of the final group of co-researchers, the concept of mental models (Senge, 1994) was introduced in my firm’s leadership development program for the organisation, before the co-research group was formed. So this was not a concept that was new to most in this group. But its influence was very powerful.
“When the concept of mental models was first described to me, that was ... a real important moment as well... that was before this process, but I think that's been a really important understanding. Or just an awareness, I guess, ... naming it.”

“It’s around the mental models stuff... being able to let go of the fear and making people much more conscious of that process. What is holding us back ... and from an environmental point of view, acknowledging the story that we’re facing and how we got people to face that fear and hold them while they are processing the fear to get to a positive space of action.”

The second quotation also identifies a specific application of the awareness of mental models for this group member.

**Finding 38:** Developing the capacity to notice and name a mental model is transformational for an individual and develops the capacity to nurture change with others.

5.4 Organisational perspective (second person perspective)

I now shift our attention to my interactions in a broader context. This provides research findings, still within the second person perspective, but from an organisational perspective.

Figure 5:5 is a photograph of the mind map that identifies what the co-research group believed they had learned about our research question ‘what is the nature and dynamic of nurturing a sustaining organisation?’ Analysis of the mind map reveals that it also offers answers to a different question ‘what is getting in the way of becoming a sustaining organisation?’ The mind map summarises a conversation that was specific to the host organisation, the CoM. The co-research group created the mind map before the hermeneutic circle interviews were undertaken.

This map (Figure 5:5) reiterates some findings from the previous section, shows how co-researchers saw interdependencies between different elements they identified as learning, and also identifies the three organisational findings that are elaborated upon here.
Figure 5:5 Summative mind map of co-research group learning (Dec 2012)

The mind map (Figure 5:5) is not that easy to read in this document because it was drawn with people standing around a central table, and so the writing is not all aligned to one vertical axis. Figures 5:6, 5:7, 5:8 and 5:9 provide close up versions of each quadrant of the mind map. Each photo is orientated such that the centre of the mind map is consistently facing upright. The photos are organised in the
manner that a mind map is usually read, that is from 12 o’clock and moving clockwise.

Figure 5:6 Upper right quadrant of mind map (Figure 5:5)
Figure 5:7 Lower right quadrant of mind map (Figure 5:5)
Figure 5:8 Lower left quadrant of mind map (Figure 5:5)
Figure 5:9 Upper left quadrant of mind map (Figure 5:5)
I have reproduced the major branches of the mind map reading from 12 o’clock and shown those elements not yet discussed are shown in red text (Table 5:3).

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Language is important (Figure 5:6)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Fear (Figure 5:6)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Communication – mental models (Figure 5:7)</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Organisational environment is different (Figure 5:7) – changing EMG, Elected Members, CMG?, the leadership development programs delivered – are we different? – “we don't know why, but things are different”</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Permission to subvert (Figure 5:8) – dotted line connection shown to Allowing whole self - “An innate sense of what is ‘right; for ourselves, connections, social &amp; spiritual &amp; environment” - “This group gave us permission to speak up”</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Allowing whole self (Figure 5:8) - core values – ‘work is not just a 'project' – bringing core values to the project brings different outcomes” - organisation doesn't know how to be flexible enough (dotted line connection shown to Fear) – systems and processes that enable equal treatment if not equitable treatment (Newtonian?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Creation of shared visions (Figure 5:9) (joyful, creative, spontaneous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Influencing back into the organisation/community (Figure 5:9) – taking conversations back into our own work – visioning influencing new building at City Services – struggle to change from technical to adaptive – “Example of adaptive change was the not Central Business District, rather Connected People”</td>
</tr>
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Table 5:2 Summary of mind map branches (Figure 5:5)
Item 5 “noticing that the organisational is different”, is a reflection that the organisation was undergoing a large amount of self generated internal change (novelty) and also change in response to outside events (adaptive). The group was unable to be very specific but reflected that the organisation was different due to a variety of factors including the leadership development work that my consulting firm had been delivering at different hierarchical levels in the organisation. All the work we delivered was consistent with the principles of living systems that this thesis is founded upon. In addition, another local council election had been held and new elected members were in office. The state government had also developed a 30 year plan and requested all local council to develop plans to complement it. A great deal was happening within the organisation. I will not examine this item any further.

Items 1, 3, 6, 7, and 10 have already been addressed in the co-researcher’s second person findings.

5.4.1 Leverage points in the system

Employing a systemic lens to the challenge of organisational transformation meant that I was alert to identifying possible leverage points within the system where small changes may deliver disproportionately large changes. The remainder of the discussion in this section relates to items 2, 4, 8 and 9 as consideration of three specific key leverage points that were identified within the organisation during the course of the research.

**Finding 39:** There existed three leverage points within the organisational context. These were:

1. Creation of shared visions (item 8);
2. Fear within the organisation (item 2); and
3. The strategic planning process (items 4 and 9).

The first two items were identified through the co-research group. The third was already being actively explored and experimented with within the organisation.
during the research period due to the CEO’s interest in identifying a new and more effective way of planning.

5.4.1.1 Creation of shared visions and the envisioning process within the City of Marion

Setting the context: City of Marion vision and employee engagement with the vision

Envisioning (Wells and McLean, 2013) is an element of The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8). The co-research group also discussed the organisational vision as being an important influence within the organisation and identified the small degree to which employees felt engaged by the vision. These observations from within the co-research group were supported by my own observations during earlier consulting work in the organisation, and are implicit in the CEO’s own expressed interest that was catalysed during the research period, to enable employees to have a “clear line of sight to the vision”. There was a strong sense that vision was important leverage point, but a lack of understanding about how to gain greater employee engagement with the vision.

Like most organisations, the CoM had a vision. Indeed the organisation had two visions, one for the community and one for the administration. CoM had facilitated the articulation of a community vision known as Broad Horizons Bright Future, expressed in the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan (City of Marion, 2010). The management of the organisation, influenced strongly by the CEO, also documented an enabling vision of the organisation itself, to deliver the community vision for a sustainable community. The community vision, as published in the Strategic Plan 2010-2020 is reproduced in Table 5:4.
Imagine the City of Marion in the year 2020… (Marion, 2010) p. 4

Safe, vibrant and diverse communities flourish in our neighbourhoods, change is welcome and people make a difference. Together we create and share a strong sense of community, respecting each other’s cultures and supporting each other’s needs and differences.

Marion is a progressive and accessible city, for us and our visitors. People meet and relax in beautiful public areas, parks and open spaces that are cared for, well used and we enjoy healthy lifestyles.

High quality facilities that promote learning, health, business diversity, arts, culture and recreation make Marion a regional centre in Adelaide’s south.

Changing community needs for housing, employment, transport, environmental management, community support and informational technology are met.

Our limited resources are used wisely and our community is a committed to understanding and reducing our environmental impact. We embrace the use of renewable energy sources, we are water wise, we minimize waste and work actively to improve the natural environment.

Marion is seen as a model for community and neighbourhood development. We believe that together we can make a difference in creating a more sustainable future.

Table 5:4 City of Marion community vision, Broad Horizons, Bright Future
The vision for the administration of the City of Marion is reproduced (and adapted for ease of reproduction) in Figure 5:10 and is accompanied by the explanatory comments (Table 5:5) (City of Marion, 2010, p 7).

Figure 5:10 City of Marion organisational vision (City of Marion, 2010, p 7)
Given my purpose to explore how to form a sustaining organisation, the organisational vision is the more relevant to review here although the community vision is not irrelevant. In my firm’s consulting work with the organisation since 2009, and again from co-researcher discussions, it was clear that employees in general were highly motivated by the purpose of the council to serve its community. It was less clear if employees were aware of and motivated by the
community vision (Table 5:4) or the organisational vision (Figure 5:10) and the implications of each for their day-to-day work.

During the envisioning process conducted as a part of my research within the ICT team, it became evident that team members were unaware of the community vision and the organisation’s sense of purpose to deliver it. They were aware of the organisation’s focus on the Business Excellence Framework and Human Synergistics suite of tools that were the key instruments being employed by the EMG to form an organisation of excellence.

The community vision is a story of what it will be like to live in the city in 2020. It is quite detailed, aspirational and values rich. In contrast with the community vision, the business vision is a statement “A leader in the delivery of the community vision – Broad Horizons Bright Future” (City of Marion, 2010, p 7). The process for developing the community and organisational vision did not automatically include all staff – it included some staff (some of whom were members of the co-research group and SUFU) in the community consultation process and of course Area Work Plans were prepared in consultation with specific work areas. The Area Work Plans were of a short-term nature, covering activity for the coming twelve months and limited in scope to the work of that work area, encouraging a functional or more silo mentality.

My experiences with the envisioning process in this research, which resulted in powerful personal experiences for participants, suggests that the reason why neither vision particularly engaged employees is that they were not involved as participants in either process. Additionally, the business vision is a succinct statement that is aspirational but very short on the detail of what it would be like to work in such an organisation. The lack of specificity makes it difficult for anyone to read and then understand the implications for their day-to-day work. This lack of clarity was confirmed in co-research group discussions time and again, although it was not a perspective that the CEO or executive could easily understand – they believed they had clearly communicated both visions.

Finding 40: Employees who did not participate in the creation of either the community or organisational visions were largely unengaged by them.
Envisioning: Researcher and Co-research Group Action

The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8) identifies the envisioning process (Wells and McLean, 2013) as being an important component of forming a sustaining organisation. It was an element I desired to explore within the co-research group and CoM more broadly and during the course of the research I achieved this intention.

Initially, we explored co-creating a shared vision within the co-research group, of how we desired to experience working at the CoM in order for it to have the capability to deliver the community vision. In effect, this process expanded upon the organisational vision as described in Figure 5:10 and, however the formal documentation was never mentioned, by either me or the participants, during any of the envisioning processes.

The first envisioning within the co-research group was undertaken in June 2011 after discussions over several months that developed a shared understanding the term sustainability. The process employed was the envisioning process (Wells and McLean, 2013). Central to the process are:

- principles of full participation and inclusion;
- focus on engaging at the level of individual values; and
- providing a process in which adaptive change can be undertaken.

Envisioning is a process that was developed to meet the need for planning but recognises that in a living system the future cannot be predetermined because of its inherent unpredictability. The lack of ability to predict the future means another way needs to be found to provide organisational coherence, orientation, motivation and aid decisions about what to do now (Wheatley, 1999; Meadows, 1994). The vision created during the envisioning process is of a different nature to more conventional visions created as the beginning point for more linear strategic plans (Wells and McLean, 2013).

Envisioning is a different way of understanding and engaging with vision.
The vision created within the envisioning process is:

- A story rather than a pithy one sentence
- Values rich
- Focussed on the question “how to you really want to experience work?”
- Intended as a container for ongoing experimentation to learn how to bring the vision into being (adaptive work).

As people came and went from the team, we also explored how to keep the vision alive and relevant over time and to new members. Our exploration continued over nearly a year commencing in June 2011 and also included an envisioning process with EMG in December 2011. In addition, I undertook three other envisioning processes with three different teams within CoM, including the ICT during the research period.

The research findings from engaging with the co-research group and other employees in the different envisioning processes are now identified and discussed.

Findings in relation to the envisioning process:

Overall, the feedback from co-researchers was that the envisioning process was very engaging and powerful – it reached people’s hearts and its effect remained over an extended period of time. There was a clear connection between the shared vision created and individual’s values (in contrast to the organisational values which did not exist within the CoM as a formal organisational artefact but instead resided within the Human Synergistics’ constructive behaviours). The following two quotations from co-research team members collected during the final hermeneutic circle interviews, illustrate the powerful nature of the process.

“I have certainly used the stuff [envisioning output] that we did that on that fateful afternoon ... I think the process was a way to get more in touch with ourselves ... And it really just worked. I found the visual side of it really valuable ...”
“[It's not so much] the vision, but its values. Which hopefully reflect the values of the individuals that make up the organisation.”

Those involved in the envisioning process, were deeply affected by it. Of particular influence within the organisation was the powerful testimony of one of the co-researchers, who had a prior experience as a senior executive in local government and significant informal influence within the organisation. Referring to the photos displayed in Figure 5:11 that represented the co-researchers’ first shared vision, he reported to the EMG members on 2/9/11 that:

“Choosing the photos that represented something important to you ... opened you up even more ... and created a stronger dynamic in the group. So much so that at the end of the day, we struggled to leave and go back to work... I only have to look at those photos now and I am deeply engaged again...the next meeting I wasn't at. And other people contributed to the vision by adding their photos. I look at that now, and it doesn't do it for me. It doesn't engage me emotionally.” (Source: Team meeting 2/9/11 transcribed direct from recording.)

Figure 5:11 Photos that represented the first co-created vision by the co-research group
As the co-researcher spoke, others in the group were nodding and murmuring in agreement. The later summative hermeneutic interviews (section 5.3) record the group’s understanding that the power of the envisioning in engaging people is through the values that are activated in the process. The co-research group also reinforced the sense that the envisioning process “created a stronger dynamic in the group”. Others also reported the sense that it strengthened relationships between people as illustrated below.

“I think it also helped us to be a cohesive as a group, doing that process and having to talk about those things that we chose and see other parts of ourselves.”
(Source: Hermeneutic interview)

**Finding 41:** The envisioning process offered a new way for people to express their desire for the future and brought them together into a cohesive group by enabling a connection with their personal values and then sharing them with each other.

The envisioning process was designed as an inclusive process to form a high level collective agreement of the desired future that would then form a container capable of holding the adaptive work of learning, as the group progressed to changing their actions in order to bring their vision into being (Wells and McLean, 2013). But the co-research group reflections bring another important facet of the inclusive nature of the envisioning process into focus. The inclusive nature may also ensure that the whole system is represented and contributes all the necessary perspectives and elements to the vision.

“I’m getting a vision (picture) of a sort of globe with lots of little facets and we all need to be in the facet for that globe to do its work .... So we needed each other to do the whole thing.” (Source: Hermeneutic interviews)

**Finding 42:** The inclusive nature of envisioning enables the whole to be present through the multiple perspectives that become available with broad participation.

During the research period, I was involved in six different envisioning processes within the CoM. These were with:
• Initial envisioning with the co-research group (including a follow up attempt to integrate members who were absent)

• Consulting intervention with CMG and EMG from June 2011 – December 2011 (aimed at enhancing the CMG team ethos and culture)

• SUFU team in September 2011

• Co-research group and EMG in Dec 2011

• Two workshops with the Arts and Community Team (December 2011 and February 2012)

• ICT team 3 x 2 hour workshops (Aug 2012-March 2013)

Each process articulated a vision and identified core values within the vision. Table 5:6 summarises and compares the different core values identified within three of envisioning process identified above. I have excluded the CMG work because it was a part of a consulting brief rather than this research and the SUFU team envisioning because most of the members of this team were also a part of the co-research team. Having excluded the data from these processes I would like to add that the core values identified in both these envisioning processes were not inconsistent with the core values identified in Table 5:6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Co-researcher and EMG</th>
<th>Arts and Community Development</th>
<th>ICT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core values</strong></td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Shared discovery of possibility</td>
<td>Learn from mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taking time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Connection and renewal</td>
<td>Building bridges with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The aggregated visions for each different team were sensitive to the varying context of each team - and they shared common values. Values such as learning through experimentation, fun or humour, connecting with others, and leading differently were common although expressed differently. Despite being developed in a bottom-up fashion compared with the more common corporate top down process, there exists a commonality about the values from each different team. They are perhaps, surprisingly compatible with each other. As Table 5:6 shows, there is a strong sense of humanistic qualities in these values with spiritual

Table 5:6 Comparison of core values in each team's vision.

fulfilment being a stand out feature in the co-researcher and EMG vision that is unusual in most corporate visions (also refer to Figure 5:13). There is also a shared sense of being aware of the complexity of the environment in which they work with values reflecting a desire to develop bridges, deep understanding and learn from mistakes. The arts and community development team were very sensitive to
the need to understand the system, take time to make decisions and to experiment with the community to share discovery of possibilities. The vision and values of the ICT team may have reflected the overall younger age of this team with several Generation Y team members. But the same themes existed in the identified core values. The values expressed by the co-researchers and EMG together are very consistent with those expressed in the community vision in the 2014 strategic plan: liveable, biophilic, engaged, prosperous, innovative, and connected (City of Marion, 2015). The strategic plan will be discussed further in section 5.4.1.3.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 5:12 Co-research team and EMG shared vision

What can we infer from the consistency of values? It is possible that the community vision and attitudes were unconsciously active within the CoM’s administrative body – that they had been incorporated into the pattern of unconscious assumptions at the foundational level within the organisational culture (Schein, 1990). But given the CEO’s ongoing frustration with trying to engage employees at the level of the community and organisational visions, combined with the co-research member’s observations of lack of engagement with the visions, and my own observations of lack of employee engagement and understanding of
the visions, the explanation of the values being unconsciously integrated does not appear to be sound.

Another explanation for the consistency of values that sit at the heart of the team visions is offered by Donella Meadows:

“I have noticed, going around the world, that in different disciplines, languages, nations and cultures, our information may differ, our models disagree, our preferred modes of implementation are widely diverse, but our visions, when we are willing to admit them, are astonishingly alike.” (Meadows, 1994, p 4).

I make the same observation. Additional research is required to fathom why the values commonality is the case. It could be argued that it makes complete sense that encoded deep within the human species is the knowledge about the environment and conditions in which that species will best thrive (Ehrenfeld, 2000; Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2004).

**Finding 43:** There exists a commonality of values embedded within the shared visions that can be employed as a cohesion creating foundation from which a group may collectively experiment to learn how to bring their co-created and shared vision into being.

Additionally, it appears that executives of an organisation can trust the co-created and shared vision that emerges from employees in a ground up process. This is due to the commonality found in answer to question at the heart of the envisioning process; what employees want is also what the executive want. The inclusive and shared nature of the vision also eliminates any aberrations that may be seen as unreasonable or irresponsible (Meadows, 1994).

**Finding 44:** The envisioning process offers a way to articulate a co-created and shared vision with values that may form the DNA at the heart of the organisation.
Finding 45: The envisioning process offers a way of engaging employees in a process to help them explore and understand how the vision affects their day-to-day work experience and behaviours.

Participating in the envisioning process is an adaptive challenge in itself. The different nature of the vision makes it difficult for people to understand the process as a vision. It’s not what they are used to and my observations of the many groups suggests that they seek to create a vision about a tangible endpoint. And yet, there was an appreciation from the co-researchers during the final hermeneutic interviews that the vision needs to be flexible or adaptable.

“It is vital that the vision is shared but there’s enough flexibility built into how you might deliver against a vision to be able to adapt to changing or emerging environments or needs.” Source: Hermeneutic interviews

The observation in the above quotation reinforces why the envisioning process was designed around the question “How do you really want to experience work?” The mental models around what a vision is appear to be very strong and need to be addressed within the process for it to be successful. As the facilitator, I included a description of how this envisioning process is different, but observing people continuing to struggle with the concept suggests two possible solutions to date.

1. Incorporate an opportunity for people to discuss the differences as described during the introduction to the process and create a container for adaptive work around the mental model of ‘vision’ within the process. I have not yet explored this option.

2. This research explored the development of a modified process that accommodated both types of visions – tangible and intangible. The envisioning process undertaken with the EMG and co-research group in December 2011 was the first experiment with this approach which seemed to work well for participants.

Finding 46: Modifying the envisioning process to incorporate both tangible and non-tangible elements of a vision provided one way of working around the
adaptive work created because the envisioning process is values based rather than the more common experience of vision as a tangible, pre-determined endpoint.

In the envisioning process I facilitated for the Arts and Community team, I also asked them several questions at the end of the two-workshop process to gauge whether envisioning was adaptive work. I was curious because my observations of people engaging with the envisioning process, were of people who were very relaxed, and who found the process easy and joyful. This does not align with Heifetz’s description of adaptive work as requiring some degree of discomfort (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002,). Table 5:7 details the question I posed and the Arts and Community team members’ responses to it. At the end of the opening question is a colloquial term, ‘blurt spurt’ that is peculiar to this team. It is a term used by them to describe something that is said without thinking – it just blurts or spurts out.

The responses suggest that the first phase of the envisioning process may not be adaptive work, but more akin to technical work that is a reflection of no learning being required or we already know this.

Finding 47: The first part of the envisioning process where participants are asked to share a story in response to the question “How do you really want to experience work?” has more in common with technical work than adaptive work, which means that respondents already know what they want. They need only learn how to bring it into being within their organisational context.

An interesting side conversation in the Arts and Community Development team was one that considered who was responsible for keeping their vision lively. By lively, I mean that they would refer back to it regularly in a similar way that the team refers back to its budget and service plan during the year. Analysis of the conversation suggests that realising that the vision needs to be referred back to regularly and that responsibility for the review sits with the team, is adaptive work.
**Researcher:** “So the first one [question] takes us back to when we actually did the envisioning process… I just wondered if you could reflect on that process and, do you have any sense of where your vision came from? I asked you to think about how it is that you really wanted to experience work and how you wanted the community to experience you. Do you have any sense whether that was a highly analytical process for you, that you actually thought it through, or was it sort of a spontaneous ‘blurt spurt’?”

**Participants:**

“Very spontaneous I think from my perspective. Visual imagery created the thoughts that just came.”

“I think the process of using the images makes it a fairly spontaneous thing and then the process of talking it through becomes a little bit more analytical. But the images, the images still resonate because they’ve come from a place of spontaneity I guess and it comes from a, I’m trying not to use the word “spiritual”, but it comes from a place of inner knowing I guess. Inner knowing about what I want for myself and for the team and for the work we do.”

“I was going to say it's effective isn’t it? It's like the sort of feeling side of your life is where you feel powerful, and I guess that involves the intellect of everything as well, but straight away I think there are, because there are feelings involved. That’s quite a spontaneous sort of body felt thing. There’s a physical experience when you feel joyful or whatever, it comes out of the body first and you kind of think about it later. So that’s a very powerful feeling.”

“Although there is still this selection process happening, because you have a lot of, you gave us a lot of images to select from, so your thought process is already starting there in that selection. And then once you’ve selected those, you analyse why you selected those.”

Table 5:7 Descriptions of the experience of envisioning
It took the posing of questions and discussion for the team to realise that these facets of the process were within its own power. Follow up with the team leader six months later suggests that more adaptive work would need to be done for team members to follow through and take responsibility for keeping the vision lively. This team had not done so.

**Finding 48:** It is adaptive work for the team to take responsibility for its own team vision.

The remaining questions discussed by this team reinforced the power of the values in the vision and their sense of connection to their desired culture. They discussed the desire to leave the team if this culture was not something they could aspire to and experience.

Feedback from envisioning processes throughout the organisation and the reflection in meetings with co-researchers, suggest the following changes to the process to improve its effectiveness:

a) Developing a shared understanding of the term sustainability upfront

The co-research group in particular believed that their discussions in developing deeper and broader appreciation of the threshold concept sustainability (5.3.5) enabled their envisioning together to be better informed and more impactful. As a result, I trialled including a sustainability discussion into the ICT team envisioning process. We spent the first of two workshops viewing a short 5 minute film\(^6\) that described the broader global sustainability challenge and discussed the implications at a local level to place their team envisioning in this broader perspective. I hoped that the video may support a broader conversation and understanding of sustainability and I also introduced the notion of mental models.

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\(^6\) The video was a section from the Awakening the Dreamer Symposium developed by the Pachamama Alliance with whom I worked for several years. It is a subsection of the symposium called 'Separateness'. It provides a summary of the progress the western modern world has made using the mechanistic (Newtonian) paradigm and suggests we have arrived at our current state of 'un-sustainability' through an acceptance of an unconscious assumption of that paradigm – that we are all separate. The video goes on to note that this assumption of being separate is challenged by nearly all spiritual traditions and modern science. It suggests that we are all one in terms of the source from which we all come – the big bang. We are all kin and what we do to each other is what we do to ourselves. It introduces the notion of interconnectedness.
Feedback after this first workshop was positive and my own reflections were positive (Table 5:8).

**Finding 49:** Incorporating an additional conversation at the beginning of the envisioning process, to develop a deeper understanding of the term sustainability can be helpful, however the nature of the adaptive work required for most people may make it interesting but not very influential on the shorter term outcomes.

The difficulty for participants after the first workshop was making the conceptual link between their understanding of what was occurring out there in the world and the organisational culture required to help the team deliver sustainable outcomes. This is the same conceptual understanding that the co-research team took a long time to come to recognise. It suggests that the conceptual connection between the
internal organisational capability and delivery of sustainability is difficult to make and takes time as already captured in Finding 35.

b) Conditions for bringing personal values to work in the envisioning process

Reflection about the envisioning process in the Arts and Community, and ICT teams revealed two different but related facets of the envisioning process. The ICT team reflected on feeling uncomfortable revealing their personal values to each other. They discussed how work and personal are separate and “should be separate”.

**Finding 50:** To facilitate the success of the envisioning process through to bringing the vision into reality, mental models about bringing personal values to work need to be identified and addressed.

In comparison with the ICT team, the Arts and Community team was more mature in terms of age of team members, higher overall level of formal education and more used to dealing with a wider variety of people. A related but slightly different reflection from this team leader was the need for “people need to get up to speed and have permission to go into deeper parts of themselves to vision, otherwise it becomes just another exercise that you are doing.”

One member of the co-researcher group also found the process of identifying and sharing personal values very challenging. This particular person, with strong introverted tendencies, required a very safe environment to be created and clear demonstration of other participant’s willingness to listen and be respectful, before being willing and able to share. The difficulty for this person was not the same as that experienced within the ICT team however – it was not a question about the desirability of sharing, rather the conditions in which sharing could occur comfortably.

**Finding 51:** Ensure a safe and respectful environment is created for people to share their personal values and visions.

c) “Clear the decks” to gain a “clear line of sight to the vision”
Supporting the CEO’s insight that too many processes and systems were getting in the way for people to see the vision, was the Arts and Community team leader’s longer term insight about her team’s response to the envisioning process.

“We got confused by a whole heap of other systems that are trying to apply to everything, all of which have value … this process has very deep value but I think when we did it with the team, it got very confused with … the service plan … KPIs … Whereas in this group [co-research] we did all that talking and so that vision still sits very deeply. I wouldn’t be able to articulate to you right now what the images were but the feeling of the vision we’ve still got.” (Source: Hermeneutic interview)

When considering the nature and dynamic of emergent change, I referred to the managerial paradigm of which Stacey is particularly critical (section 2.4.2). This paradigm which he ascribes to maladapted systems thinking, and I attribute to the broader Newtonian paradigm, results in management rationally designing and controlling organisations so that managers feel they are in control (Stacey, 2007). The managerial paradigm is concerned with control rather than liberating emergence within organisations and the research finding in this section adds grist to the mill, that one impact of the continuous layering of processes to control is that these very processes get in the way of achieving the very outcomes managers desire.

**Finding 52:** The sheer number of managerial process and systems can inadvertently have the effect of reducing the intrinsic motivation liberated within employees when they are strongly connected to the organisational vision through their own values.

Over time, a major challenge identified by the co-research was that of keeping the vision alive and relevant as team members came and went. Because sustainability is not a destination but an evolving state, it is important to keep the vision lively over time and not allow its influence to wane. Keeping the co-researcher group vision lively was also a challenge that the group was unable to meet as new people came into the group – and left again.
The co-research group experimented with two approaches:

a) Integrating new people into the vision by explaining and sharing the vision as they saw it and;

b) Re-envisioning again and again.

The first approach was found to be ineffective and the second very tiring, repetitive and inhibited a sense of making any progress at all. The envisioning process in its entirety does contain a facility for maintaining a sense of connection to the vision for those who participate in creating it, but integrating new people into the vision remains an area for further research.

**Finding 53:** A continuing challenge is keeping the shared and co-created vision lively and relevant to everyone as people come and go over time.

5.4.1.2 Fear working against becoming a sustaining organisation

Setting the context: organisational fear

I identified organisational fear initially as a leverage point within the system. It emerged from noticing fear within the co-research team during a meeting when I suggested we share what we had learned with the EMG (described in 4.4.4). I began thinking about the co-research group as a microcosm of the organisation in this regard. As time progressed and I explored fear further, it became apparent that the fear exhibited within the research team might be interpreted as a pervasive element of the organisational culture - and a possible leverage point for change. I determined to follow the topic of fear and part of my own decision making to do so was influenced by my own sense of growing fear around raising the topic of fear.

The conversation about the dynamic of fear in the organisation did not stop at one conversation with EMG. It continued on throughout the remainder of the research in one form or another. Despite the CEO's rejection of the notion initially, I purposefully triangulated the issue of fear within the organisation to test if it really was an issue and to help me understand it better. There were a number of people who agreed that fear of speaking up existed and that it was sourced in or at least fuelled by events such as organisational restructures.
Fear also emerged as an issue in our consulting work with the CMG where we were advised by the OD Manager and a small group of CMG members, to keep the EMG and CMG separate in the early stages of the process in an effort to ensure CMG members spoke up freely. In this context it appeared that the source of the fear to speak up was a past pattern of being overridden by EMG members and the restructures that resulted in CMG members finding their departments being depleted around them or their positions being shifted sideways.

Findings in relation to the source of the fear

The co-research group did not focus on this question specifically. But we touched on it many times as the discussion explored other topics. The following is my interpretation of the possible sources of fear within the organisation and identifies this topic as another area for further research. The fear has many sources rather than one source. The following identifies those different sources and provides a quote from a co-researcher in support.

Fear is:

a) Imported into the organisation in the form of individual mental models about authority and hierarchical power that dis-incline many people from speaking up or challenging the views of those in positions of formal authority;

“But generally there’s a fear of sticking your head up. Putting your head above the radar…” Hermeneutic interview

b) Fuelled by the nature of the adaptive nature of the challenge to become a sustaining organisation:

 “[Fear] came up organisationally around processes. It came up about the challenges that we were potentially going to bring back to the organisation. It came up when we talked about showing…. We did talk about that action of running those films and ... that was holding people’s fear, the big fear ... you look at it with part of what we’re talking about was love, opening yourselves an holistically operating from that point and helping people face their fears and for the organisation not to be fearful, to let people think more holistically. ’” Hermeneutic interview
c) Strengthened by individual managers and team leaders who are insensitive to the power dynamics within their working relationships (4.4.5);

“If you play devil’s advocate, you are too negative. If you don’t say ‘yes’ you are perceived as a problem.” Hermeneutic interview

d) Somewhat ironically, generated unintentionally in this organisation, through the team restructure process that was created to promote constructive behaviours⁷. Some people described this process as being inherently red or aggressive defensive (in the Human Synergistics’ circumplex terms);

“And there is still that fear. And I think it’s probably because a lot of people have been moved on. People who, I don’t know, who don’t fit the mould or something.” Hermeneutic interview

e) Strengthened by the gap between espoused behaviour and actual behaviour resulting in a lack of trust; and

“We purport to be blue, but we’re in fact red/green. The actions of the organisation are red/green. But we promote that we value blue. But that talk isn’t walked, from the top down. And then you see people like [name deleted], and a few others who then get sidelined.” Hermeneutic interview

f) A systemic outcome of the relationship between Elected Members and the administration body of local councils.

“There was always a nervousness around councils at election time, and this one even more so because we got an [elected] member back who had been on council for four years, and everybody was... my god, so there was a lot fear in the organisation about that. And we probably didn’t do enough to future proof the organisation around that... to support the organisation not to be afraid in that circumstance.” Hermeneutic interview

Fear is the anti-thesis of the different yet common co-created visions of a sustaining organisation, which included the values of inclusion, joy, love and fun. A quick search of the academic literature revealed a consistent inquiry into organisational fear in different disciplines to the extent that an entire doctorate could be undertaken focussing on this one topic. I will not endeavour to take this topic further here for lack of time and space. It is important that if an organisation is to be sustaining, then relationships need to be such that fear is not an issue as employees consider whether to speak up or innovate new ways of doing things. Those in senior positions of authority need to be very aware of the potential of seemingly everyday management practices such as organisational restructures, for fuelling the continuing existence of fear within the organisation.

Finding 54: There were many sources of fear within CoM that interfered with employees making their greatest contribution to the organisation. Some of these exist within people as they are recruited and others are fuelled as an unintended consequence of seemingly innocuous and everyday management actions.

5.4.1.3 Strategic planning – an enabler and indicator of the paradigm shift

Overview of this section

The account in this section regarding the strategic planning process illustrates the interconnectedness of the major findings identified in this thesis. It also tracks some connections between the research activity (where I directly witnessed and recorded certain conversations) and the eventual emergence of a new strategic planning process and community plan format. I suggest that the new strategic plan format is one indicator of the organisation having made the shift from a more Newtonian way of perceiving the world to a perception that is more consistent with that of the paradigm of complexity.

Context regarding strategic planning at City of Marion

Several of the co-research group were influential in the organisational strategic planning process. This process was under the auspice of the SUFU team when the research commenced and later the activity was managed by another of the co-researchers at the end of the research process (after the SUFU restructure). During the research process at least seven people with strong influence on the process and
plan format came into direct contact with the co-research team. The contact was either directly through the co-research group or through conversations that I participated in with the EMG (including CEO) and a group preparing for the Elected Members’ strategic planning retreat in September 2012 (4.4.16).

The CEO was heavily involved in energising the search for a new and better way of articulating and executing the organisation’s key strategies. After experiencing the power and rich experience of the co-research group’s envisioning process in December 2011, and a subsequent meeting with me, his language changed and began to include phrases such as “clear the decks” of superfluous systems and processes and “developing a clear line of sight to the vision”. He was very keen to understand how to engage each staff and community member, in the process of bringing the vision of a sustainable community into being.

The CEO and the SUFU Manager before the restructure, had been experimenting with trying to shift the strategic and business planning process from a heavily checklist oriented process to one that engaged and empowered staff to do what was required to deliver the Council’s community vision. Their focus reflected a largely technical approach rather than an adaptive approach and had resulted in new annual Work Area Plan forms to complete, but these seemed to produce little difference in the level of employee engagement with the vision.

The strategic plan that was current at the time comprised 52 pages, 4 major themes or pillars of sustainability (community wellbeing, cultural vitality, dynamic economy and healthy environment), a total of 18 directions and 47 strategies (City of Marion, 2010). Each project or initiative that council undertook was allocated by the relevant Work Area, to a major theme of sustainability pillar and associated with the various directions and strategies to identify its relevance. This process, the CEO explained, meant that each Work Area team spent an enormous amount of time filling out paper work and less time doing what was required. The process appeared to focus people’s attention on the planning rather than effectiveness in achieving the vision.

The new community strategic plan when it emerged in published form in 2014 after being endorsed by Council in December 2013, was one page (Figure 5:13). It
identified a shared vision of the community in 2040 and the six core values that would guide decision making as the council took action to bring the vision into being. It had moved from being a called a strategic plan to a community plan. The language within the organisation had also moved from defining sustainability according to the Brundtland report (City of Marion, 2010, p 52), to an integrated appreciation of wellbeing - wellbeing of people, environment and economy all at the same time. The detailed 4 pillars of sustainability, 18 directions and 47 strategies to achieve the strategic plan were gone.

The CEO with whom I worked in this research departed the CoM in 2015 and a new CEO was appointed. The business plan 2016-2019 was endorsed by council in September 2016, nearly three years after the endorsement of the Community Plan - Towards 2040 vision. In the 3 year business plan, the vision has now reverted back somewhat to its pre-2013 version. Some may say the differences are subtle, but that is all it needs to be to indicate that the more Newtonian way of thinking has returned. The six values Liveable, Valuing nature, Engaged, Innovative, Prosperous and Connected have reverted to themes (performing a similar role to the previous four pillars of sustainability) within the plan. The circular visual image remains with the themes (values) around the edges, but without the word Wellbeing in the centre of the image. The business plan has again assumed more convention planning protocol with an organisation purpose “to improve our resident’s quality of life; continuously, smartly and efficiently” (City of Marion, 2016, p3). A set of organisational values have been developed which feature respect, integrity, achievement, and innovation. The goals in the business plan are again assigned under the themes rather than reflecting the integrated approach of the 2013 community plan.

Dee Hock, when reflecting on his experience as CEO of VISA where he employed the principles of living systems to organise the company, stated that he underestimated the power of the old paradigm being imported back into VISA with each new recruit (Hock, 1995). Given the story of the CoM from 2013-2016, that influence appears to be even stronger if the new recruit is a new CEO.
Findings in relation to the community plan and strategic planning process

The City of Marion Community Plan – Towards 2040 format places vision and values at the centre of organisational life as suggested by Wheatley (1999). The vision and values were used to make decisions about new strategic initiatives. It
employs images to relate the vision in support of the words. The values that surround the central vision of Wellbeing are consistent with the values identified during the co-research and EMG envisioning workshop (Table 5:9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Co-researcher and EMG (Table 5:6)</th>
<th>Community Plan Values (Figure 5:13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core values</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laughter and fun</td>
<td>Livable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Being bold - leadership</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>Prosperous</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual fulfilment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Biophilic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:9 Comparison of co-researcher and EMG core values with Community Plan values

Finding 55: The values expressed by the Co-researcher and EMG group in the December 2011 workshop are consistent with those expressed in the 2013 Community Plan vision and values.

A past co-researcher, still involved in the strategic planning process and a key influencer, also shared that the intended process to employ the vision and values was to assess each new initiative on the basis of its degree of consistency with and
contribution to the vision and all the values (personal communication 16 April 2014). No longer were projects to be assigned to one of the four pillars. This new assessment process denoted a significant shift in the way the administration of the organisation was seeing the world and thinking about how it impacts the world. A shift from a more singular direct cause and effect to the more interconnected or integrated worldview of living systems.

**Finding 56:** The visual representation of the community vision and the manner in which it was intended to be used, indicated a paradigmatic shift within the organisation from a Newtonian planning process to one more consistent with an understanding of the behaviour of living systems. It placed vision and values at the centre of the organisation as a reference point for determining what should be done.

The new paradigm, as indicated by the form of the strategic plan did not emerge into the public sphere until late 2013. This was more than twelve months after this research officially finished although it was seeded during the research period. A key lesson for me was that emergence can take time however, the shift happened quite quickly when placed within the context of expected time for organisational transformation, which is often allowed ten years to occur. The new community plan emerged with Council endorsement only four years after the research commenced.

**Finding 57:** Emergence is unpredictable with regard to timing and the new format of the strategic or community plan emerged two years after the official research period ended and four years after the action research commenced.

I wish to bring us full circle within the second person perspective findings as I spend some time clarifying the relationship between the personal and professional development the co-researchers experienced (self-actualisation) and the emergence of the new format of the community vision and method for using it. Both outcomes required leadership of self and others. The co-researchers identified the role of the co-research group in enabling self-actualisation and the exploration of new ideas together. It also empowered them to know that they were not alone in leading change or subverting the status quo as they sometimes referred to it. For example:
“Yes, the self actualising part. I think that’s... its given people the time to have those conversations and have the ah-ha moments together and not feel alone about subverting. ...that permission to subvert is really important because it’s saying we can’t keep going this way just because that's the way we’ve always done it. We need to keep challenging what we do and change it and not getting permission to change it and just do it, just do it and see what happens.” (Hermeneutic interviews)

Beyond the co-research group, the CoM is an organisation that had had the same CEO for 10 years (at the time the research commenced) who had strongly championed the self-actualisation of people everywhere. The human environment within CoM, despite the element of fear identified above, was very conducive to people self-actualising and becoming more comfortable with taking risks by trying new ways of doing things.

Linking back to the source of the fear, in conversation with the CEO, I asked what would happen if someone just tried something out without permission? His response was that he wished they would but he thought that people stop themselves by thinking that “they would not like it”. The they in this latter statement is a reference to the anonymous they in many organisations, referring to those in authority. This appears to be an example of fear being self generated by people’s unchallenged mental models:

“I actually think that I was afraid to do things, more so than now... I think there was some fear there and that was possibly around my confidence and around...that permission to do what I felt I needed to do... and how I would be perceived in that. I’ve really just starting to realise...what caused the fear. ” (Hermeneutic interviews)

The form of the 2013 Community Plan – Towards 2040 is an extraordinary example of people over coming fear and being willing to take a risk and try something unconventional in an effort to bring the community vision into being.
Finding 58: The process of self-actualisation supports the leadership of self and others as they become less afraid to challenge the status quo and innovate new ways of doing. This is illustrated by the emergence of the new format of the community vision and the new process for employing it to determine what to do.

5.4.2 The dynamic of emergent change

A connected part of the story of the emergence of the new format of the Community Plan – Towards 2040, is about how this new format came into being. It was a strong theme throughout the two years of the research and was centred upon integrating the envisioning process with the service planning process. It provides useful insights into the different dynamics of planned and emergent change and suggests that in the case of attempting to evolve a sustaining organisation, emergent change may be more effective. (4.4.14.)

The following findings may appear simple and obvious, however this does not diminish the power of the realisations, and may even make it more important to emphasise the elements that are often taken for granted.

5.4.2.1 Findings in relation to planned and emergent change

The strategic planning process is implicated because it reflects how the organisation engages with people, internally and externally, in an effort to develop and implement its strategies. The strategic planning process is also one, that if successful, embeds the new strategy into the organisational culture (or DNA) so that it is lived and implemented. The excerpt from a meeting reflection (Table 5:10), describes the different way in which the strategic planning process was beginning to be viewed: as a snapshot of a continuous process of learning, rather than an end in itself that would inform people about what to do. This perception is a fundamental shift from more traditional planning processes that define what will be done and then give permission to do, or hold people accountable for doing that.
Finding 59: The strategic planning process itself was being perceived differently: from a more traditional process to determine what to do over the coming period of time, to a continuous process of learning, with the plan being a snapshot at a point in time.

The second element in the reflection is the energy that was being generated around the learning and the shift in perspective. It was a very exciting time of discovery as the organisation explored how it could engage with communities through specific places and assist to generate visions of their desired futures at those places.

Finding 60: High levels of energy and excitement accompanied the shift in perception of the strategic planning process.

The intended envisioning’s in the community never came to fruition as the Elected Member body vetoed it. Apparently the Elected Members felt it was their role to develop the vision on behalf of their community and they did not want their role diminished. It could be argued that this is another institutionalised element of the older mechanistic paradigm that also resisted the emergence of the new paradigm.

My attempts to integrate the envisioning process into the existing strategic planning process and provide all of the usual output that the conventional process delivered for the organisation, was probably doomed to failure before it began.
(4.4.14). Viewing the process and dynamic from a systemic perspective, the difficulty was not the Strategic Planning Manager, although from my early reflections it may appear so. One way of interpreting the difficulty is that the adaptive work to move from the old strategic planning process, heavily informed by the older mechanistic paradigm, to a new process that embraced complexity, had not yet been done. And in hindsight, one interpretation may be that the approach I took was not assisting it to be done more quickly. Another interpretation may be that the organisation as a whole was not yet ready, and nothing I did differently in my conversation with the Strategic Planning Manager would have made a difference to the pressures that this individual experienced from her own expectations and indeed those of the whole organisation.

My lesson was to expect one paradigm to naturally reject the introduction of another. I should have expected this. It makes complete sense in re-reading Kuhn – the new paradigm is so fundamentally different that people adjust at the edges to accommodate new data rather than embrace the new paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). The rejection, even with a person who was a part of the co-research group, may have been a function of planning to introduce the envisioning process rather than allowing it to emerge naturally from another circumstances – and with people who were insiders to the organisation to guide it.

**Finding 61:** My planned attempts, supported by the CEO’s authority, to replace a planning process founded upon a more mechanistic paradigm, with one founded upon principles of the paradigm of complexity, support the proposition that one paradigm naturally rejects another.

My reflections at the time considered the difference between trying to plan an adaptive change such as employing a very different process like envisioning, and allowing it to emerge. The emergence with the ICT team was much easier (despite the fact that some team members found it initially challenging to bring their personal values to work), and resulted in making a difference for the team. It came about through an interest expressed by the ICT Manager to one of the co-research group who introduced us and facilitated the connection. This experience also suggests that emergent change occurs as people seek answers to their own challenges in the moment, combined with their own decision to try something new.
In this moment, their minds are open and if approached in a respectful manner, to address the problems they are experiencing, emergent change appears more likely. The ICT Manager had identified issues within her team (including not aware of the community vision, inward looking and not very customer focussed) that she needed to address and she perceived that issue as related to the culture of the team. I was able to explain how the envisioning process may be helpful to her. I worked closely with her and her team leaders to implement the lessons I had already started to learn about facilitating the envisioning process, to co-develop a workshop process that would be sensitive to their team’s needs.

**Finding 62:** Adaptive change and shifting into a process underpinned by the paradigm of complexity, was easier when the other party identified specific unmet needs.

### 5.5 Third person perceptive

My experience in sharing what has been learned from this research and obtaining feedback has been limited and I can understand why others also find this challenging. The research was emergent and completely dependent upon what was transpiring within the organisation at the time. No other organisation will be in the same place and time again. The methodological remedy to this realisation is to seek to identify principles that may be applied in other organisations, as will be identified in the next chapter.

While my consulting commitments limited the number of conferences I could attend and articles I could write, one way the research findings or lessons have been shared more broadly is through the co-researchers involved in the two-year journey with me. Half of the co-researchers who participated over the two years, have left to work in other organisations and by their own admission they have moved through the experience and developed in different ways. This development will not be undone although it may or may not be liberated within other organisations. The specific findings identified in this chapter have been shared with them to provide a check and balance on my own perceptions of the research findings and also as a reminder of the experience. Minimal changes were suggested
and these have been incorporated into this document. The core group and I remain in regular contact because we grew so close and we all remain enthusiastic about the ambition of CoM becoming a sustaining organisation.

**Finding 63:** The co-researchers are a source of, or repository for, the learning and development we all experienced together.

### 5.6 Revising The Model

The development of The Model Stage 2 reunites the methodology (The Principles Stage 2 in Table 3:3) with the research topic again in as far as the researcher who is undertaking the role of facilitator of the process, is viewed as a part of the system. It is important to be clear here that The Model Stage 2 is dependent upon the facilitator sees, acts and monitors progress, employing the lens of living systems (Findings 1-8). As I intend The Model to be employed by others, I have also consciously shifted the language from researcher to facilitator. Overall, the findings support the thrust and initial conceptual reasoning employed to develop The Model Stage 1.

The following section summarises the fundamentals of each component of The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:14), based upon The Model Stage 1 and incorporating the findings identified in the preceding sections of this chapter. The Model Stage 2 also now integrates The Principles Stage 2 as revised in Chapter 3, through the behaviour of the facilitator. Table 5:11 aggregates the previous findings into the different elements of The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:14). Where applicable, the table also denotes where a finding is a reflection of experiences that the facilitator may encounter through employing The Principles Stage 2, the basis of the methodology.
Figure 5:14 The Model Stage 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Elements of The Model Stage 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: When applying the lens of the paradigm of complexity to systemic research, cause and effect is difficult to determine. The facilitator should not assume that the outcomes of her action will be easy to identify or attribute.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The facilitator of emergent change can experience self-organisation within the organisation as a flow of energy that has its own direction and momentum.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Distributed leadership may be perceived as a collective capacity within the organisation rather than individuals all exercising their leadership individually.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Letting go of preconceived notions regarding the right path forward, enables more opportunities and options to emerge. Trust that a path will emerge.</td>
<td>The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Employing the envisioning process enabled navigation in circumstances of high degrees of ambiguity with greater clarity, sense of purpose and reduced sense of frustration. It improved how others experienced me and my capacity to influence.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 and envisioning added to The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Employing the indicators supported a shift in my own way of being because I monitored my progress with regard to the way in which others experienced the process, rather than the</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 and envisioning added to The Principles Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>specific, tangible outputs of the process or events occurring.</td>
<td>identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Consciously practicing to observe, interpret and act employing the lens of complexity developed my capacity to embody it and use the approach in an unconsciously competent manner.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Important facets of leadership within a sustaining organisation include:</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing capacity and willingness to learn.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promoting networking connections and informal structures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Capacity to see in an integrated manner and act in an integrated manner – seeing the connections between different elements of the system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promoting positive stories that relate to achievements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9: Cultivating a space for emergence is possible when relationships are privileged over action and meetings are less formally structured, encouraging attendees to explore issues of interest and importance to them around a central issue.</td>
<td>Small passionate group Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Questions informed by the worldview of</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>living systems, promoted the necessary adaptive work through conversations within the co-research group.</td>
<td>Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Cultivating connections around the co-research team was a part of my role as facilitator.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: The process of facilitating the space for adaptive work and emergence sometimes required courage to face our own fears and those of others.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2 identified chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: The co-research group process was transformational; catalysing personal and professional development that was different for each person, but at the edge of their own development needs.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14: The group process developed a greater capacity of participants to sit within ambiguity.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: The group process developed the skill and capacity to inquire and lead inquiry to the level of mental models (and paradigms) as participants practiced listening to understand and letting go of preconceived ideas.</td>
<td>Small passionate group Letting go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: The group process increased the self-confidence of participants to articulate new ideas.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
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<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>17: The group process increased some participants’ sense of self worth and confidence in their authentic self.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
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<tr>
<td>18: The group process appealed more to those who valued the power of conversations, than those who valued what they perceived as more direct action, or “doing”.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19: The process created a space for participants to observe different communication and leadership styles that they adapted for themselves.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21: Participants enjoyed the group process of conversations.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22: The process nurtured and cared for participants to gain a greater sense of self or authenticity which was viewed by the group, as an important precondition for the organisation to become sustaining.</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23: The conversations within the co-research team developed a strong sense of confidence in each other and a common language. Together these supported individuals to take greater risks in conversations outside the group, catalysing conversations that challenged the status quo elsewhere.</td>
<td>Small passionate group, Emergent conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>24:</strong> Working groups without agendas began to emerge within the organisation, creating a series of emergent spaces within the organisation.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25:</strong> The co-research group became invisible to most within the organisation</td>
<td>Experience of emergent conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>26:</strong> Conversations that result in emergent change may only be identified in hindsight, after a more tangible change has emerged, and the trail of conversations can then be traced back through different people.</td>
<td>Experience of emergent conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>27:</strong> There was a strong degree of convergence as the co-researchers identified the major threshold concepts:</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self permission to bring their whole selves to work – especially their values as identified in the envisioning process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The paradigm of complexity and the associated concept of emergence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mental models</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>28:</strong> For a sustaining organisation to emerge, employees have to give themselves permission to bring their whole selves to work, especially</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Values</td>
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<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<td>their personal values.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>29:</strong> As people bring their whole selves to work, some of the more analytical and systematic approaches to work may give way to more innovative and intuitive ways of working, allowing more emergence.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30:</strong> Bringing your whole self to work enables more personal development at work and a greater emphasis on who you are being rather than what you are doing.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>31:</strong> Giving self-permission to bring your whole self to work is easier in a group than alone. The envisioning process provided a safe group process to share personal values that catalysed the process of permission giving.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>32:</strong> Metaphors provide a rich and effective way of communicating and drawing attention to different ways of being.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>33:</strong> Providing education about the distinction between the Newtonian paradigm and paradigm of complexity, enabled conversations within the group exploring how to be more effective emergent change agents. It also supported the conscious development of skills and practices such as sowing seeds and letting go, to support emergent change at a more subtle level of</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
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<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<td>organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>34: Gradually a shared, deeper and more expansive understanding of the term sustainability emerged, encompassing concepts of wholeness, interdependence and spirituality as another dimension of our human experience of wholeness.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35: Despite the co-researchers’ individual interests in environmental sustainability, at least twelve months passed before all co-researchers realised the importance of the relationship between sustainability, a sustaining organisation and organisational culture. The relationship between these concepts is highly adaptive work.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36: The understanding of the term sustainability becomes an increasingly subtle experience of inter-dependence.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37: The primary researcher’s worldview and embodiment of the paradigm of complexity was an important influence upon the co-researchers’ exploration of the term sustainability.</td>
<td>The Principles Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38: Developing the capacity to notice and name a mental model is transformational for an individual and develops the capacity to nurture change with others.</td>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
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</table>
### Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Elements of The Model Stage 2</th>
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</table>
| **39:** There existed three leverage points within the organisational context. These were:  
  • Creation of shared visions (item 8);  
  • Fear within the organisation (item 2); and  
  • The strategic planning process (items 4 and 9). | Envisioning  
Organisational Context |
| **40:** Employees who did not participate in the creation of either the community or organisational visions were largely unengaged by them. | Envisioning |
| **41:** The envisioning process offered a new way for people to express their desire for the future and brought them together into a cohesive group by enabling a connection with their personal values and then sharing them with each other. | Envisioning  
Personal Values |
| **42:** The inclusive nature of envisioning enables the whole to be present through the multiple perspectives that become available with broad participation. | Envisioning |
| **43:** There exists a commonality of values embedded within the shared visions that can be employed as a cohesion creating foundation from which a group may collectively experiment to learn how to bring their co- | Envisioning  
Personal Values |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Elements of The Model Stage 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>created and shared vision into being.</td>
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</table>
| **44:** The envisioning process offers a way to articulate a co-created and shared vision with values that may form the DNA of sustainability at the heart of the organisation. | Envisioning  
Personal values |
<p>| <strong>45:</strong> The envisioning process offers a way of engaging employees in a process to help them explore and understand how the vision affects their day-to-day work experience and behaviours. | Envisioning |
| <strong>46:</strong> Modifying the envisioning process to incorporate both tangible and non-tangible elements of a vision provided one way of working around the adaptive work created because the envisioning process is values based rather than the more common experience of vision as a tangible, pre-determined endpoint. | Envisioning |
| <strong>47:</strong> The first part of the envisioning process where participants are asked to share a story in response to the question “How do you really want to experience work?” has more in common with technical work than adaptive work, which means that respondents already know what they want. They need to learn how to bring it into being within their organisational context. | Envisioning |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Elements of The Model Stage 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>48:</strong> It is adaptive work for the team to take responsibility for its own team vision.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>49:</strong> Incorporating an additional conversation at the beginning of the envisioning process, to develop a deeper understanding of the term sustainability can be helpful, however the nature of the adaptive work required for most people may make it interesting but not very influential on the shorter-term outcomes.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>50:</strong> To facilitate the envisioning process through to bringing the vision into reality, mental models about bringing personal values to work need to be identified and addressed.</td>
<td>Personal Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>51:</strong> Ensure a safe and respectful environment is created for people to share their personal values and visions.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>52:</strong> The sheer number of managerial process and systems can inadvertently have the effect of reducing the intrinsic motivation liberated within employees when they are strongly connected to the organisational vision through their own values.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>53:</strong> A continuing challenge is keeping the shared and co-created vision lively and relevant to everyone as people come and go over time.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>54: There were many sources of fear within CoM that interfered with employees making their greatest contribution to the organisation. Some of these exist within people as they are recruited and others are fuelled as an unintended consequence of seemingly innocuous and everyday management actions.</td>
<td>Organisational context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55: The values expressed by the Co-researcher and EMG group in the December 2011 workshop are consistent with those expressed in the 2013 Community Plan vision and values.</td>
<td>Envisioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56: The visual representation of the community vision and the manner in which it was intended to be used, indicated a paradigmatic shift within the organisation from a Newtonian planning process to one more consistent with an understanding of the behaviour of living systems. It placed vision and values at the centre of the organisation as a reference point for determining what should be done.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57: Emergence is unpredictable with regard to timing and the new format of the strategic or community plan emerged two years after the official research period ended and four years after the action research commenced.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation The Principles Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58: The process of self-actualisation supports the leadership of self and others as they become</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Elements of The Model Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>less afraid to challenge the status quo and innovate new ways of doing. This is illustrated by the emergence of the new format of the community vision and the new process for employing it to determine what to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>59:</strong> The strategic planning process itself was being perceived differently: from a more traditional process to determine what to do over the coming period of time, to a continuous process of learning, with the plan being a snap shot at a point in time.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60:</strong> High levels of energy and excitement accompanied the shift in perception of the strategic planning process.</td>
<td>Emergence of sustaining organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>61:</strong> My planned attempts, supported by the CEO’s authority, to replace a planning process founded upon a more mechanistic paradigm, with one founded upon principles of the paradigm of complexity, support the proposition that one paradigm naturally rejects another.</td>
<td>Experience of The Principles Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>62:</strong> Adaptive change and shifting into a process underpinned by the paradigm of complexity, was easier when the other party identified specific unmet needs.</td>
<td>Emergent conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>63:</strong> The co-researchers are a source of, or</td>
<td>Small passionate group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5:11 Findings allocated to the elements of The Model Stage 2

### 5.6.1 The Facilitator embodying The Principles Stage 2

Other systemic action researchers (Ison, 2008; Checkland, 2000) recognise the need for the facilitator to be familiar with systems thinking tools, such as casual loop diagrams, to bring them to the participants in the research as required. In this research methodology, the facilitator requires an understanding of the behaviour of complex adaptive systems and a willingness to learn how to apply that understanding to guide the methodology and the participants in their understandings.

The findings from the first person perspective support the notion that embodiment of the understanding of complexity is a more fundamental resource than being able to refer to various thinking systems tools. The facilitator becomes a seed or catalyst of the paradigmatic shift by using it to prompt a shift in worldview of others who are willing. The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3) represent this worldview and the change to include an envisioning process for the facilitator reflect the relative importance I place on Findings 5 and 6 from the experience of the first person perspective. Other findings reflect the experience of facilitating employing The Principles Stage 2.

Two important attributes of the facilitator are reinforced by the findings:

1. The attitudes and communication skills, particularly listening and questioning, to enable the participants to find their own answers to questions; and

2. An understanding of the adaptive leadership framework, itself founded in the principles of complexity, to guide the creation of containers for adaptive work within the participant group and the organisation as may be required.
As the facilitator guides the participants and organisation, the findings from this research indicates that the elements indicated in the arrows on the left hand side of Figure 5:14 are important ingredients in nurturing a sustaining organisation.

5.6.2 A passionate small group and norms that liberate emergence

Firstly, central to the emergent change model is a small passionate group of participants (co-researchers) who are invited to self nominate to participate because they care about the organisation and its capacity to nurture a sustainable future within the social and natural ecologies within which it is embedded. Positions of authority are not required and nor is a large group. This research has reconfirmed the much-quoted sentiment from Margaret Mead to “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.” It may seem counter-intuitive, but not everyone in the organization needs to be involved in the change initiative at the initial or seeding stage. It is not a change that is rolled out over the entire organisation as assumed by the more mechanical or project managed types of change initiatives but one that is seeded in unplanned, emergent conversations with others in the organisation and outside it.

The norms involved in the functioning of this group are important. As previously identified, norms include:

- People and relationships are more important than getting things done or tasks;
- Developing a relatively unstructured space, so that topics of most concern to the participants are discussed. Normal meeting procedures such as timed agendas and meetings notes are abandoned in favour of different organising principles such as purpose, relevancy, and emergence.
- An egalitarian atmosphere where everyone is respected for his or her contribution regardless of organisational authority, length of organisational tenure etc.
- Participants are equal decision makers with the facilitator.
5.6.3 Envisioning

The research has identified the envisioning process (Meadows, 1994; Wells and McLean, 2013) as being helpful in connecting participants involved with the experience of a sustaining organisation in a very personal manner: this is a source of the paradigm shift. The visions were shared because of their co-creation. The envisioning process touched participants at a very deep level, the level of personal values. The envisioning experience also provided the surprising realisation for participants that they all valued essentially the same work experience. The research also suggested that the threshold concepts of ‘understanding sustainability’ and ‘mental models’ be incorporated into the envisioning process. The threshold concepts are considered in more detail (5.6.5) but mentioning them here also reminds the reader that all these elements are interdependent although they appear separate in this list.

5.6.4 Personal Values

Through the envisioning process, participants also realised the importance of bringing their personal values, as identified in the envisioning process, to work and liberating them in their work. This realisation required participants to give themselves permission to do this. There were some individual mental models actively inhibiting the liberation of personal values.

5.6.5 Threshold concepts

The identification of mental models (5.3.5.4) as an active ingredient in the change process, brings me to identify other threshold concepts that are important in catalysing the emergent change under research here. To reiterate, these are:

- Giving self permission giving to bring whole selves to work
- Understanding the paradigm of complexity and emergence
- Understanding the term sustainability
- Noticing and challenging mental models
5.6.6 Letting go

Emerging from the preceding elements came the practice and realisation of letting go or seeding conversations with new ideas to see what would emerge from them. Scharmer (2009) identifies this practice with the ability to be present to the emergent future collectively. This research, however, reported more on individual participants who experimented with other individuals in conversation. They asked questions that pointed to a new possibility or merely seed a new idea, without any expectation that the other party would necessarily do anything with the idea or insight. But they might, it is a possibility. The most outstanding quality of this practice is the ability to let go of the need for control or certainty. Participants reported that the more they let go, the more powerful their interventions appeared to become as people assumed their ideas as their own. Although the number of findings relating to this practice are relatively small, the power of the practice and its importance to the members of the small passionate group, has determined that this practice has its own element in The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:4)

5.6.7 Emergent conversations

In The Model Stage 1 (Figure 2:8), conversations were thought to be a part of the processes of emergent change. This research now confirms and identifies the as unplanned, emergent conversations that arise from the context in which the research participants work. These conversations are fuelled by all the preceding elements that have been nurtured in the small passionate group. These elements and practices then filter into the organisation in an unplanned, unpredictable and emergent nature.

5.6.8 Organisational context

An important facet of the context in which the research was undertaken, the organisation was not merely flirting with the concept of sustainability and the CEO had already developed his own understanding of the importance of an appropriate organisational culture to support cultural change (within the organisation and its community) from which a sustainable state would emerge. It was ripe to make the paradigmatic shift to sustaining. There may not be widespread common acceptance
of what this means, but a desire to discover what it means needs to be present within the organisation.

The Model Stage 2 does not include the role of the CEO, but the willingness of this person to hold the space and actively work in the same direction to facilitate the transformation cannot be underestimated. Without the CEO’s willingness to let go, trust and see what happened, this research would not have been possible. A concerted effort was also made by the CEO to minimise fear in the organisation. This research indicates that employees may unintentionally thwart that organisational effort as they bring their mental models about authority, their role and what they can and can’t do to work with them.

**5.6.9 Emergence of a sustaining organisation**

The final element identified in The Model Stage 2, is the emergence of a sustaining organisation. The previously identified elements combine in an uncontrollable and unplanned manner for the organisation to evolve itself over time. How much time? As long (or as short a time) as the process takes. It cannot be rushed or pushed. It is dependent upon so many variables.

**5.7 Summarising the research question findings**

Chapter 5 has identified the research findings and they are bountiful with a total of 63 being identified. These have been summarised in the process of developing The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:14). The Model Stage 2 now provides a clearer and more detailed understanding of the key elements involved in the paradigmatic shift to sustaining, and takes a systemic view that incorporates the facilitator’s worldview and organisational context. It illustrates the nature of the change process by identifying the key elements involved in the evolution of the organisation to become sustaining, but it does not explicitly identify the dynamic, the source of energy for engaging in the change. The following chapter takes up the challenge of further evolving The Model and The Principles to express not only the nature but also the dynamic of the change processes. The vision I held for this research was to contribute principles that others may work from in order to facilitate the
transformation of more organisations, so that they might benefit along with our communities and the planet.
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CHAPTER 6: From the nature of the change to revealing the dynamic of the change

Figure 6:1 Mind map of chapter 6
Introduction to this concluding chapter

The preceding chapters have answered my key research question regarding the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to becoming a sustaining organisation. A list of ingredients has been identified, that includes the:

- Context in which such a shift may be contemplated as likely to succeed;
- Worldview of the practitioner facilitating the change;
- Gathering of a small, passionate group together to inquire into the nature of a sustaining organisation while practising the other four identified transformational elements; and
- Role of day-to-day conversations as the dynamic of the emergent change.

These ingredients are included in The Model Stage 2 model (Figure 5:14), and form a rich mix to cultivate the conditions for the paradigmatic shift to forming a sustaining organisation. Unlike a recipe however, the model does not suggest a step-by-step approach to catalyse or plan the change as more traditional change management processes might suggest. Instead it identifies the elements involved and it is left to the facilitator to determine the relevancy of each element at any one point in time. The elements are all inter-dependent and because a sustainable state may be viewed as a continuously evolving one, adaptive change is likely to be ongoing as different social and natural variables in the surrounding environment wax and wane. The employees within the organisation need to adapt to the surrounding environment and commit to shaping and nurturing that environment according to their own co-created and shared vision.

Evidence has been provided in the case study to support the notion that at least in part, the case study organisation had made the paradigmatic shift from a
mechanistic way of perceiving and acting in the world; to perceiving and acting in the world through the lens of livings systems (section 5.4). That is, the shift to a sustaining organisation was in part or in full made. The Model Stage 2 combined with The Principles Stage 2, is a significant contribution to knowledge in itself.

But how might these ingredients be understood within a different organisational context? And, is it possible to better understand the underlying dynamic of the emergent change?

The final chapter of this thesis:

- Evolves The Model Stage 2 further to The Model Stage 3 model that addresses the question of the dynamic of the emergent change to form a sustaining organisation. In doing so, I return to the integral theory literature to explore and incorporate the notion of ways of being that emerged in the research findings and is as yet unaddressed.

- Identifies principles that facilitators may apply in other organisations by integrating The Principles Stage 2 from the methodological approach in chapter 3 and research findings in chapter 5.

- Demonstrates that The Model Stage 3 is an integrated approach that addresses all four of the Integral Theory quadrants.

Finally, this chapter identifies future research and I close with some reflections upon the contribution made by this research.

6.2 Identifying a new way of being as the central dynamic to nurture a sustaining organisation

The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:14) satisfactorily answers the research question in a manner similar to identifying the ingredients required for a given cooking recipe and identifies the central role of seemingly everyday conversations. The recipe in this case does not include a step-by-step process but The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3) guide the facilitator in implementing The Model (Figure 5:14). Combining the research findings from the methodological approach and research outcomes in this
way is another unique feature of this study and results from the employment of the lens of complexity - everything is interdependent and a part of a whole.

My research emphasises that the nature of the change process is emergent rather than planned, but what is the dynamic of the emergent change? What is its energetic source and what energises the effort of the change?

The research at CoM reflected change emerging from every-day conversations that the co-researchers engaged in with their colleagues - unplanned and emergent conversations. This is an understanding of the dynamic of emergence at one level and is identified in the cloud (Figure 5:14). Patricia Shaw pointed to the realisation that the conversation is the change rather than a vehicle for the change (Shaw, 1997) and Stacey’s (2007) complex responsive processes lead me to expect conversations to be a part of the dynamic. But how is the new conversation inspired? Where does the impulse for the new conversation come from?

Through conversations, underpinned by mutual respect, trust and willingness to inquire within our co-research group, team members identified and exposed to the air certain personal and collective mental models that challenged the very way they perceived themselves, the organisation and the way in which the world operates. In the process they opened new possibilities for seeing, doing and noticing the outcomes of their actions. These new possibilities of seeing or thinking and doing may collectively be referred to as a new way of being (Ehrenfeld, 2000; Huston, 2007; Snorf and Baye, 2010).

A new way of being has been a quiet thread throughout this study and has not yet been addressed. It is presently sitting underneath a number of findings in relation to:

- My own development as discussion in the first person methodological findings (3.5.3.1);

- My first person research findings in relation to exercising leadership (5.2.3); and
The co-research teams identification of metaphors that described different ways of being (5.3.5.2).

To address and integrate the topic of ways of being, I return to the literature.

6.2.1 Literature review of ways of being

Ehrenfeld (2000), a thought leader in systems thinking and sustainability, identifies human being at the heart of the full and rich transformation to being sustainable. He identifies the core challenge in attaining a sustainable state as “recovering our sense of beingness” (2000, p 38). In saying this the author understands being as distinct from having in order for humanity to become sustainable; and he proposes that we need to find a way to appreciate or value being more than having, which he associates with fuelling consumerism (2000).

But will any way of being form a sustainable and sustaining organisation or society? No. It is a specific way of being, different to the one that has been at cause in creating humanity’s current state of unsustainability. Ehrenfeld (2000) makes a connection between the notion of beingness and the notion of human flourishing and self-actualisation. The causal relationship between self-actualisation and flourishing, which I am equating with strong sustainability and sustaining (2.3.2), has become a key element of this research, focussing on the liberation of personal values within the workplace. The emphasis on being recognises that the transformation to become sustaining, begins inside people before it is manifested in tangible changes in the world around them.

But despite the inherent growth and development implied in Ehrenfeld’s concept of beingness, it is not as well developed as the concept of being that comes to us from the expanding literature of Integral Theory (Wilber, 2001). Here, a much more nuanced understanding of ways of being has been researched and understood within the context of stages of human development over a lifetime (Beck, 2004; Cook-Greuter, 2007; O'Fallon, 2010; Rooke, 2005). The human stages of development may be understood as predictable patterns of people’s development that “influences what they identify with, notice, or can become aware of and, therefore, what they can describe, articulate, influence and change.” (Cook-Greuter, 2007, p 51). The stages of development depict an ever increasing capacity
for effectively coping with increasing complexity and are considered to be vertical development that reflect quite different worldviews at each stage. A person may also develop within a stage, improving knowledge and skills within that stage but not fundamentally changing the way in which he or she makes meaning of these things. This latter type of development is termed horizontal development (Cook-Gruenter and Soulen, 2007). Integral counselling and coaching practitioners have been researching how to guide the full development of each worldview or stage of human development and how to assist people transition from one stage to the next when the time and conditions are appropriate for that person (Cook-Greuter, 2007; Hunt, 2009; Huston, 2007; O'Fallon, 2010; Snorf, 2010; Wilber, 2001).

A way of being can therefore be understood as a conditioned, but not fixed, way of perceiving the world that influences the way we approach our lives and work. It influences what we notice as a problem or challenge, how we intervene to solve problems using our range of talents and skills, and what we discern as a solution. The term way of being, may reflect a change in the stage of development or it may reflect a fuller and richer understanding or mastery of an existing stage of development (Snorf and Baye, 2010).

6.2.2 A shift in the way of being promotes new conversations and emergent change

As I seek to identify the source of the different conversations located centrally in The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:15) my research findings indicate that a shift or change in my and the co-researchers’ way of being occurred as a result of being involved in the co-research group. It is this shift or change that can be identified as the most fundamental source of the emergent change – before the every-day, unplanned conversations that cultivated change amongst others. The research process fostered the conditions in which participants could become more aware of their own conditioned ways of seeing (or thinking – mental models); their ways of going or taking action; and their ways of determining success or checking in. As they became more aware of their current way of being (CWOB), a space was opened for questioning if other ways were possible in order to generate better results given the challenge with which they were engaging. As participants practiced new ways of seeing, going and checking in (mostly within the small co-
research group), a new way of being (NWOB) was embodied (Snorf and Baye, 2010).

Kegan (1982) identified that human evolution in a psychological sense is generated in the space between the CWOB and the NWOB: or the continuing iteration between experiencing oneself as subjective and then realising the self may be regarded as objective.

The source of the emergent change I seek to understand then can be thought of as the space in-between the CWOB and NWOB, for each individual that creates an energetic tension between what is and what is aspired to. It is each individual’s awareness of a possible new way of interacting and attaining more desirable outcomes. The experience is different for each individual because each is at a slightly different stage and state of development. Individuals will be at their own edge of development. Additionally, it, the experience of shifting to a NWOB, is associated with a feeling of excitement, a need for courage to experiment, and practice to do things differently. These emotions are akin to those I observed within CoM (5.4.1.1).

As I have discussed the transition to a NWOB, it is easy to interpret this as a shift from one state to another state. But it is important to recognise that each shift is more of an expansion of awareness, rather than a linear shift in awareness that is from one perspective to another perspective. The NWOB transcends and includes the existing way of being. The CWOB is not forever lost or forgotten, it is included in an expanded repertoire of possible ways of being. Research indicates that a change in life circumstances or pressures can catalyse a retreat to old ways of being (Cook-Gruenter and Soulen, 2007).

6.3 Reconceiving The Model Stage 3 and The Principles Stage 3

6.3.1 The nature of a NWOB that is sustaining

Recent empirical research (Brown, 2011) indicates that the NWOB is a distinct stage of human development referred to as the Strategist (Rooke, 2005). My thesis cannot support nor reject the proposition that the NWOB is the Strategist, and further research would be required to ascertain what stage of development was
attained by co-researchers and whether they indeed shifted an entire stage of development. As I began to become aware of the possible relevance of the human stages of development, I had my own stage assessed in 2015. The centre of gravity of my own development was assessed as late Strategist. I am also aware through personal communication that the CEO of CoM had also previously been assessed as Strategist before I commenced this research in 2009. This information lends further support to the notion that in the background of this research is another layer that could be further studied in regard to the stages of human development and it’s implications for the paradigmatic shift to become sustaining. How helpful this research would be in terms of its practical implications for evolving an organisation is questionable. My own view is that being aware of the CEO’s (or other key authority figure’s) stage of development could be a helpful guide as to the context within in which the evolution is being cultivated. Without a senior authority figure willing to take informed risks and try new ideas, the paradigmatic shift appears unlikely to occur. With regard to others in the organisation though, my research observes that the methodology enabled each co-researcher to develop at the edge of their development without knowing their existing stage of development.

Changes in the way of being may also occur without people developing an entire stage (Snorf and Baye, 2010). A NWOB may be a more complete and rich form of an existing stage and represent a horizontal development of a stage. It is unclear which type of shift in being occurred in this research, however, the research findings do enable a description of some features of the NWOB at the heart of the emergent change to form a sustaining organisation.

Metaphorical images are often employed in integral coaching to assist participants to reveal new ways of being (Snorf and Baye, 2010). In my research two metaphors were identified early in co-research group discussions that can be contrasted to help clarify the NWOB. These are the White Rabbit and the Butterfly. (5.3.7.2)

These two metaphors represented the CWOB and NWOB of the co-research group respectively. Although each could be (and in Chapter 2 have been – section 2.4.1) described in theoretical detail using the metaphors of the mechanistic and living
systems, to the co-researchers the important principles foundational to each metaphorical image are shown in Table 6:1, employing Snorf and Baye’s (2010) three elements (seeing, going and checking in) to clarify each way of being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of ways of being</th>
<th>The White Rabbit CWOB</th>
<th>The Butterfly Effect NWOB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeing</strong></td>
<td>Individual or department tasks to be done in a hurry</td>
<td>A complex web of relationships between people and tasks across the organisation and outside it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only a part of me comes to work – my skills and expertise</td>
<td>All of me: body, mind, spirit - my feelings, thoughts, skills, experiences, and aspirations - come to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Going</strong></td>
<td>Not thinking too much but rushing to action – “get things done!”</td>
<td>Seeking to understand how things are now and what may occur if action is taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility for outcomes belongs to others who made the decision to act.</td>
<td>Linking up with others to see if tasks/projects can be integrated together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarifying intentions and vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognising whole systems including whole people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Checking in</strong></td>
<td>Task list is checked off.</td>
<td>Have we achieved what we intended through an integrated lens of values and an understanding of the organisational and community vision and values?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:1: Contrasting the CWOB and NWOB of co-research group employing Snorf and Baye's (2010) three elements of a way of being

My research also identified the important threshold concepts that contributed to each co-researcher’s personal transformation from their CWOB to their NWOB. Reiterating from Chapter 5, the threshold concepts identified are:

- Giving self-permission to bring their entire and whole selves to work
  (especially their personal values as expressed in the envisioning process)
• Understanding the paradigm of complexity and emergence

• Understanding the term sustainability; and

• Mental models.

The threshold concepts integrated into the co-researchers’ NWOB and supported a perspective that recognised the interdependence of everything or the importance of the relationships between different parts of the system. This view aided them to feel more self-confident in working in areas of complexity where they didn't know the answers to problems. They recognised that identifying and challenging mental models would open new possibilities and that an easy of way of doing this was to bring people together to share different perspectives.

I obtained feedback from the co-researchers on this chapter and they asked that I also emphasise the importance of the notion of spirituality in the NWOB and in particular the concept of operating from a higher purpose that is heart-felt.

6.3.1.1 Values as an element of the NWOB and at the heart of being sustaining

Implicit in the NWOB that promotes sustainability are people’s personal values. Proponents of integral theory (Beck, 2004: Cook-Greuter, 2007), predict this relationship between values, worldview and way of being. The relationship between sustainability and the vertical psychological growth described by the stages of human development is rarely identified in the field of leadership for sustainability or organisational sustainability, however more recent research is bringing it to our attention (Brown 2012, Divecha, 2014)

In his doctoral dissertation Brown (2012) specifically discusses different stages of human development, worldviews and values for sustainability in some detail. His literature review reveals that the emphasis of much work in the field of sustainability, with regard to values, is focussed on trying to identify which values are important for promoting sustainability with a view to nurturing these values within people. Although my action research methodology does not incorporate the stages of development of the co-researchers, the envisioning process and the co-researcher’s subsequent realisation of the importance of bringing their personal
values to work, suggest that another line of inquiry may be warranted in regard to identifying values that promote sustainability.

The envisioning process employed within CoM in different teams resulted in very similar values (5.4.1.1) and suggests that there may not be values for sustainability, understood as something new that we need to identify from outside ourselves. Rather, it supports the idea that humans may be biologically 'hard wired’ to know what enables them to survive and thrive and thus sustain themselves in complex systems (Ehrenfeld, 2000; Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2004; Hamalainen and Saarinen, 2007a). In this way, the current research may be seen as inconsistent with the results from the stages of human development research and suggests that the values for sustainability may already be within people, at all stages of development, and need only to be re-awakened and re-prioritised.

To explain re-awakened I refer back to my research finding that the initial stage of the envisioning process may be more of a technical change in nature rather than adaptive (Heifetz, 2009). People responded quickly, easily and even joyfully to the envisioning. It was no struggle to articulate what they really wanted – their desires appeared to be reawakened after seemingly lying dormant.

By reprioritised I mean that personal values are reprioritised in relation to long held corporate values. The existing organisational values which, founded on Newtonian assumptions about how an organisation should work, have privileged the organisational needs over the employee’s needs. The notion that personal values play a role in a sustaining organisation is supported by the earlier recognition of a sustainable ecology (2.3.2.1). Here I noted the definition Sahtouris (2005) offers of sustainability as being a state where “self interest is negotiated, which leads to compromises and co-operation or intelligent dynamic harmony” (2005). The reprioritisation of values then is to negotiate the self-interest of the organisation and the employee, so forming an “intelligent dynamic harmony” between the two (2005).

In considering the dynamic of emergent change, the threshold concept of co-researchers giving themselves permission to bring their own personal values, their whole selves, to the work is a powerful contributor. Heifetz et al., (2009) posit that
people exercise leadership because they care about something enough to take the risk. Leadership is sourced in values and the identification of a gap between the current reality and the aspirational vision of possibility.

Additionally, the co-research group conversations may be seen to have developed a shared, values rich vision of what may be possible and a resultant collective will to bring it into being. The group conversations that developed deeper relationships were also reported by co-research group members as contributing to a greater sense of courage to lead conversations that they may not have led before the research group convened.

It is the individual and subsequently organisational recognition of the possibility of a transition to a NWOB that this research suggests is the source of the dynamic change process to form a sustaining organisation.

6.3.2 *Principles for the facilitator to nurture the NWOB*

How then, might a facilitator support or nurture the conditions for the NWOB to emerge within individuals and the organisation? Drawing upon the research findings and the foregoing discussion, principles to guide the facilitator to nurture the NWOB are identified in Table 6:2. The principles do mention the previously stated necessary pre-condition that the facilitator is someone who is operating from an understanding of complexity and emergence as described in The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3). This pre-condition remains. The new principles provide greater specificity with regard to what to do to nurture the conditions for the NWOB to emerge. The nature of the principles vary and include both process related and content related direction. Once again, the principles need to be applied in a way that appears most appropriate to the facilitator within any given context. These are principles, not step by step directions.
Practices to seed the transformation

The co-research team members drew on the practices we employed to conduct our co-research group conversations (section 5.3.4) to respond to their colleagues differently over the course of the research and beyond. They led unplanned conversations that reflected the norms and practices that existed within the co-research group. In essence, they practiced listening to each other deeply, seeking to understand, exploring for mental models and new ways of seeing things, letting go, seeding ideas, and envisioning to co-create a shared vision. Practicing new ways of seeing, going and checking in enabled the co-researchers and me to embody a NWOB. Providing a space to practice is not to be underestimated.

6.3.4 Principles for the facilitator to nurture practices to embody the NWOB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles for the facilitator to nurture a sustaining organisation are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discussion of threshold concepts will seed the transformation. The relevant threshold concepts are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-permission giving to bring their entire and whole selves to work (especially their personal values as expressed in the envisioning process)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The paradigm of complexity and emergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sustainability as recognition of interconnectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mental models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Group norms that encourage freedom of expression and deep exploration of different perspectives will cultivate a helpful environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Liberate people’s personal vision and values about how they wish to experience work, their organisation and its impact in the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:2 Principles for the facilitator to nurture the NWOB
Combining the research findings summarised above with the foregoing discussion of how NWOB are embodied, Table 6:3 identifies the specific principles that may nurture practices to embody the NWOB to seed the transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles for the practitioner to nurture a sustaining organisation are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide a safe and nurturing psychological space to practice the NWOB and embody it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Specific practices that may assist include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Letting go (of control and certainty) to let come (Jansen et al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sowing seeds of new ideas into conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skill of inquiring to the level of assumptions or asking questions that identified and challenged individual or collective mental models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Envisioning is a process to reawaken and reprioritise personal and organisational values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:3 Principles for the facilitator to nurture practices to embody the NWOB

6.3.5 *Emergent conversations*

The conversations emerged naturally and were unplanned. Confidence to have them was developed by the unfolding NWOB combined with a shared and safe space to practice the NWOB. The conversations therefore can be viewed as being conducted in two different types of spaces. The first is within the small group of passionate participants and the second is within the broader organisation. Co-researchers reported one more important element, that they could count on each other for support if they were in a room together and one took the lead on a new conversation.

6.3.6 *Principles for the facilitator to nurture emergent conversations*
Again, drawing upon the research findings mentioned above, the facilitator may apply the principles in Table 6:4 supporting emergent conversations within the team and organisation.

**Principles for the practitioner that may be applied to nurture a sustaining organisation are:**

1. Emergent conversations will unfold as appropriate to the situation.
2. Fostering a sense of team amongst the small group of passionate participants will encourage support of each other as required.
3. Trust the relationships that will form between participants within the small group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6:4 Principles for the facilitator to nurture emergent conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6.3.7 **Responding emergently in shared situations**

The NWOB that each team member was experiencing, combined with their new practices, found opportunities for expression as new conversations in various shared situations that employees of CoM faced. They exercised their leadership as they responded outside of a structure of formal authority. They held a space to generate new conversations. This research supports Huston’s (2007) proposition that emergence and transformation arise out of a space that is not strongly structured – it is also consistent with the realisation that at the level of being, in the smallest holon, the energy for change is fuelled in the space of the formation of the NWOB.

6.3.7.1 **Strategic planning**

Specific mention has not yet been made of the transformation of corporate strategic planning processes within the CoM in my case study. This is because it may be categorised as one of those shared situations that the organisation faced. It is however, important enough to make specific mention of here because, the strategic planning process within an organisation is so often seen as the instrument through which the organisation may become sustainable.

The emergent organisational strategy at the CoM, was engagement of staff, stakeholders and community – whether intentional or not, it was connecting the
parts of the whole. And this was a strategy that lived within the COM’s organisational culture to the point where some employees complained about the level of consultation. As CoM moved into the forefront of deliberative governance in local government (led by one of the co-research team members), Elected Members felt the level of community consultation and engagement was usurping their role as the community’s representatives and sought to return to the old balance of power.

6.3.8 **Principles for the facilitator to nurture emergent shared situations**

The principles that the practitioner may employ to support emergence in shared situations are identified in Table 6:5. It is highly unlikely, although possible, that the facilitator may be present at these times of emergent conversations catalysed by shared situations or challenges, but the facilitator may support the organisation by enabling space that is structured differently. The space is structured by the norms and practices, and NWOB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles for the practitioner that may be applied to nurture a sustaining organisation are:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Change is more likely to emerge in a lightly structured space where time and curiosity are unconstrained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Structure for emergence is more subtle and can be facilitated through appropriate group norms and practices as identified in Table 6:2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:5 Principles for facilitator to nurture emergent, shared situations

6.3.9 **Organisational context**

In alignment with Ison and Russell’s (2000) systemic action research stages, this research affirms that an intention to become a sustaining organisation is required to exist within the organisation – but I now articulate the reason differently. The ways in which the words sustaining or sustainable are understood within the organisation does not appear to matter, but holding the intention to become sustaining is important because it is connected to the willingness to uncover a NWOB. Even if the organisation or people within it do not consciously understand that at the
beginning. The desire to seek and learn is important and propels people forward into the NWOB. There is a strong energetic quality in play. One cannot mandate that someone else feels the sense of quest or purpose to become sustaining. They must feel it for themselves and of course this also connects to the values people are aware of in their CWOB and NWOB, and the vision they hold for themselves and the organisation.

Additionally, the CoM had been heavily engaged in organisational development work to nurture a constructive culture for over ten years when the research began. Part of the cultural work was designed to “drive out fear” so that employees would feel free to bring all their creativity to resolving complex challenges. This activity is consistent with the 2nd wave of change described by Dunphy et al. (2007) where the capacity of people is gradually perceived as being more and more important as the transformation progresses (2.3.3.4).

The CEO was active in holding the space for progress in both these matters. More generally, my experience has included CEOs who are more figureheads than operating fully in the role of CEO. In these circumstances, the person(s) who operationally employ the CEO’s level of authority should be committed to holding the space to form a sustaining organisation.

These components form the context within which the action research took place and within which indicators of a transformation were cultivated.

6.3.10 Principles for the facilitator to identify and nurture a ripe organisational context

To avoid wasted time and energy in attempting to facilitate the paradigmatic shift in less than conducive circumstances, Table 6:6 captures the relevant element to assess and conditions to be nurtured.
This chapter has reviewed the salient research findings as described in The Model Stage 2 and The Principals Stage 2 and reconceived them in an effort to describe and integrate an understanding of both the nature and dynamic of the emergent change to form a sustaining organisation. The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) resulting from this re-conception summarises the different components discussed and attempts to illustrate the relationships between the components and the dynamic of the emergent change observed in this research. It illustrates a holonic view of the components and emergent change. Each holon is whole and complete in itself, and it is a part of the larger whole, interacting with all the other components.

At the heart is a new way of being, catalysed by the presence of the facilitator embodying the worldview of living systems. The NWOB has given self-permission to bring the personal values of the type enlivened by the envisioning process, to work. It is a way of being that is comfortable to sit with the unknown and is seeking to learn. It is a way of being that recognises the systemic connectedness of parts within the system and experiences. It is a way of being that appreciates wholeness in all its dimensions – in this sense, it has a spiritual component that respects life as a whole. It respects whole people, whole organisations and whole

### Principles for the facilitator that may be applied to nurture a sustaining organisation are:

1. A sustaining organisation will emerge from an organisational context in which employees are not fearful and are enabled to bring their whole selves to work.
2. The desire to be sustaining comes from within the organisation itself – locate where it exists and engage with these people to form the small group of passionate participants.
3. The desire to be sustaining needs to be actively supported by at least the CEO, or person(s) who act with the CEO’s authority, in the executive team.

Table 6:6 Principles for facilitator to identify and nurture the organisational context

### 6.3.11 The Model Stage 3

This chapter has reviewed the salient research findings as described in The Model Stage 2 and The Principals Stage 2 and reconceived them in an effort to describe and integrate an understanding of both the nature and dynamic of the emergent change to form a sustaining organisation. The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) resulting from this re-conception summarises the different components discussed and attempts to illustrate the relationships between the components and the dynamic of the emergent change observed in this research. It illustrates a holonic view of the components and emergent change. Each holon is whole and complete in itself, and it is a part of the larger whole, interacting with all the other components.
communities. It is a way of being that observes and is able to work with quite subtle levels of energy within people.

The practices are those ways of working with people that facilitate the exercise of leadership. These notably include the ability to comfortably hold a largely unstructured space within which those present can do the necessary adaptive work. This study supports the notion that a lack of traditional structure contributes strongly to conditions for emergence of new possibilities. By structure (or lack of) I mean a lack of fear inducing authority or hierarchy in the group and a lack of a formal agenda that controls space and time. But there is structure of a different sort. The structure is provided by norms that:

- enable people to speak from their hearts and be listened to respectfully
- allow time to explore issues raised
- encourage learning rather than knowing
- appreciate a whole-system or cross functional approach to resolving complex problems.

The practices also include an appreciation of the power of co-creating shared visions of how people want to experience a particular workplace.

The presence of these components, related to each other, lead to the conversations of emergent change when the shared situation requires it. The situation is the shared experience that triggers a shared will to respond (Huston, 2007). Huston was focussing her attention on situations of crisis as a source of emergence. This research has identified situations that matter to those involved, not necessarily in crisis, as a source of emergence. The values embedded within the compelling co-created and shared vision of what may be possible, are the source of energy for change in this research rather than a crisis or burning platform as assumed to be necessary in more mechanistic change models e.g. (Kotter, 2007). The shared situation provides the impetus for people to exercise their leadership by leading new, emergent conversations. These conversations are fuelled by what people care about (personal and shared values), inquire more deeply than usual, challenge
existing ways of doing things and explore at the level of mental models and paradigms.

All of these elements arise within an **organisational context** that we might refer to as the organisational culture that reflects not just ‘how things are done around here’ but also the journey travelled to date in the quest to form a sustaining organisation. It includes the CEO’s (or other authority’s) role in holding the space for the new ways of being, individually and organisationally, to emerge and consciously acting in ways that reduce fear.

To make the paradigmatic shift to become sustaining, I propose that the whole system transforms, or more accurately, evolves itself emergently from the inside-out in an individual and collective manner through the dynamic fuelled by the self-revelation of a **new way of being**.

These five essential elements are identified and their inter-dependence illustrated in Figure 6:2.

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Figure 6:2 The Model Stage 3
Because all the holons are inter-related and interdependent, there is no specified beginning place in this model. People and organisations will begin where they are. It could also be argued that some holons representing the different elements may be shown in a different order. For example, I had some difficulty deciding if the Emergent Conversations and Shared Situation should be shown in reverse (Figure 6:2). I came to realise that there exists a case for both orders. I also started to wonder about the order of other elements too. For example, are the Practices of holding space that is relatively unstructured, better included under the heading of Shares Situations? I have come to the conclusion however that it is more important to notice and recognise the interdependence between all of these elements rather than argue about the order in which they could or should be shown. The Model Stage 3 is a two dimensional abstraction of a very complex reality. It will be most useful as a reminder of important components and their interdependence, and as a reminder of the central role that the shift from a CWOB to the NWOB plays in fuelling the dynamic of the emergent change.

The Model Stage 3 may be interpreted as either an individual or a collective representation and you may notice that the reference to a small passionate group has now disappeared. Figure 6:2 is intended to be interpreted as taking place within a social setting – the first three holons in particular are visualised as being within the small passionate group and are coloured differently as a result. But it is to be noted that the holonic structure of this model means that the first three holons are not restricted to the small passionate group – they are a part of the organisation by its very nature. This research recognises that no one is ever truly alone or separate. The learning generated in this research and within the organisation under study was always social, as people shared new insights and sought to understand each other’s perspectives.

The small passionate group was never an individual or hero leader. The changes that emerged did so through the distributed leadership of everyone as they generated a new flow of energy that I identified as self-organisation within the living system that is the organisation. That leadership was en-couraged and sustained with fun and support by shared conversations, values and vision that
made taking action – leading different conversations in different ways – “easier together”.

6.4 Combining The Model Stage 3 model with The Principles Stage 3 for nurturing each holon

The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) illustrates the nature and dynamic of the change that nurtures a sustaining organisation but is somewhat lacking in detail on its own. Combined, with the principles for the facilitator identified in Tables 6:2 to 6:6, The Model Stage 3 comes to life. In total, 14 principles have been identified in the earlier discussion (6:2 to 6:6) that support the development and fulfilment of each holon in The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2). These principles are consistent with the findings in Chapter 5 and also The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:2). The Principles Stage 3 (Table 6:7) provide a less conceptual and more concrete framework of guidance to the facilitator than The Principles Stage 2, however I hesitate to advise that the earlier model and principles make way for the later version. Rather, both should be understood and employed together.
## Holons in the Stage 3 model

### New Way of Being

1. Discussion of threshold concepts will seed the transformation. The relevant threshold concepts are:
   - Self-permission giving to bring their entire and whole selves to work (especially their personal values as expressed in the envisioning process)
   - The paradigm of complexity and emergence
   - Sustainability as recognition of interconnectedness
   Mental models

2. Group norms that encourage freedom of expression and deep exploration of different perspectives will cultivate a helpful environment.

3. Liberate people’s personal vision and values about how they wish to experience work, their organisation and its impact in the world.

### Practices

4. Provide a safe and nurturing psychological space to practice the NWOB and embody it.

5. Specific practices that may assist include:
   - Letting go (of control and certainty) to let come (Jansen et al.)
   - Sowing seeds of new ideas into conversations
   - Skill of inquiring to the level of assumption or asking questions that identified and challenged individual or collective mental models

6. Envisioning is a process that may reawaken and reprioritise personal and organisational values.

### Emergent Conversations

7. Conversations will to unfold as appropriate to the situation.

8. Fostering a sense of team amongst the small group participants will encourage support as required.

9. Trust the relationships that will form between the small group participants in the core team.

### Shared situations

10. Change is more likely to emerge in a lightly structured space where time and curiosity are unconstrained.

11. Structure for emergence is more subtle and can be facilitated through appropriate group norms and practices as identified in point 2.

### Organisational Context

12. A sustaining organisation will emerge from an organisational context in which employees are not fearful and are enabled to bring their whole selves to work.

13. The desire to be sustaining comes from within the organisation itself – locate where it exists and engage with these people to form a small passionate group.

14. The desire to be sustaining needs to be actively supported by at least the CEO, or person(s) who act with the CEO’s authority, in the executive team.

Table 6:7 The Principles Stage 3
They provide different facets of the same subject. Similarly, The Model Stage 2 and Stage 3 each provide a different perspective of the nature, in the case of the earlier version, and dynamic of emergent change in the case of the later version, to nurture a sustaining organisation.

6.5 An integral view of The Model Stage 3 and The Principles Stage 3

Much earlier in the literature review (2.3.4.1), Integral Theory (Wilber, 2001) was identified as a way of clarifying the gap in the literature to which my research sought to contribute. To reiterate, Integral Theory employs four quadrants or four perspectives on any situation. Figure 6:3 illustrates how the holons of the The Model Stage 3 may be mapped to the four quadrants. In doing so, I am able to demonstrate that The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) is an integrated model that I identified in Chapter 2 as missing in the quest to understand how to form a sustaining organisation that is capable of delivering sustainable outcomes. (Please note that the colours in Figure 6:3 are not related to the colours in Figure 6:2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERIOR</th>
<th>EXTERIOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;I&quot;</strong> (e.g. Thinking Beliefs Values)</td>
<td><strong>&quot;II&quot;</strong> (e.g. Behaviours Decisions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWOB and NWOB</td>
<td>Practices Emergent Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;WE&quot;</strong> (e.g. Shared stories Shared values)</td>
<td><strong>&quot;ITS&quot;</strong> (e.g. Management systems Strategic planning Policies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Context</td>
<td>Shared Situations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6:3 The Model Stage 3 mapped to integral theory quadrants
6.6 Research benefits, contribution and future researcher

6.6.1 Research benefits and contributions

My research has yielded significant theoretical and practical contributions to our understanding of how to nurture a sustaining organisation. These include:

- A consistent lens through which to view the methodological approach, researcher and research question.
- A new emergent systemic action research methodological approach designed to work in tandem with an emergent research topic or question.
- The development of an integrated model and set of principles to inform facilitators wishing to nurture the emergence of a sustaining organisation. The major outputs of this research are The Model Stage 2 (Figure 5:14) and The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) and the accompanying principles for the facilitator, The Principles Stage 2 (Table 3:3) and The Principles Stage 3 (Table 6:7).

The outputs elevate the theory of complex adaptive systems from an objective abstraction applied to the system outside of the facilitator, to a holistic way of perceiving the challenge of becoming sustaining. The process I have described integrates methodology and research question into one seamless whole and provides a simple, but highly nuanced, understanding of the nature and dynamic of the paradigmatic shift to form a sustaining organisation. A shift that we find must commence within us before it can be manifested in the more tangible world around us. The nuances and subtleties, which are easily lost and forgotten when referring to a more rational model or table should be remembered.

Most notably, The Model and The Principles, represent an integrated, holistic exploration of the more subtle, more human factors – the deft touch – involved in shaping organisations that reflect a human presence on Earth that nurtures itself and the web of life upon which it relies.
6.6.2 Future research

Throughout this thesis, I have identified areas for further research within the context of the research topic and these are now gathered together (Table 6:8). Areas of greatest interest to me include understanding how to keep the shared vision lively and relevant over time, and the role of the stages of development in regard to the senior authority figure and the small passionate group. These two topics seem to me to hold the most potential for advancing our understanding of how to make the paradigmatic shift.

The composition of the small group is interesting, but even without the contribution of more people or more diverse people, the small group was very influential. Reducing fear in an organisation is important, and it will in my view, always exist. Attempts to focus upon it and take direct action to reduce fear may actually increase it and people focus their attention upon the negative feeling. Reducing fear can be achieved by more indirect means such as increasing a sense of caring and love within the organisation – perhaps through the envisioning. I have used the threshold concepts in other organisations as a part of my consulting work. It has been a less rigorous use, but I have confidence in them and the conversational process that surrounds them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Further research</th>
<th>Internal reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Composition of the small passionate group with regard to members who left because they did not perceive value in the process.</td>
<td>3.5.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning</td>
<td>How to keep the co-created and shared vision alive over time and representative of all employees as they come and go from the co-research group and the organisation.</td>
<td>5.4.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>What are the sources of organisational fear that interfere with nurturing a sustaining organisation? How might they be reduced?</td>
<td>5.4.1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold concepts</td>
<td>Will employing the thresholds concepts in a different organisation yield similar outcomes for participants and organisation?</td>
<td>5.3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Further research</td>
<td>Internal reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWOB</td>
<td>How is the stage of human development known as Strategist (Rooke, 2005) related to the paradigmatic shift to sustaining and the people involved in the small passionate group?</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:8 Areas for further research

### 6.7 Conclusion

“For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn't give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.” (Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.)

After all the inner mental gymnastics to understand the theory of complexity both cerebrally and then in an embodied manner; The Model Stage 3 (Figure 6:2) and The Principles Stage 3 that accompanying it (Table 6:7) appear simple and may be even obvious in hindsight. But within the sustainability, change management and leadership literature, perhaps this is the defining difference and my major contribution to the field. It is at that level of simple, apparently unremarkable deftness of touch that profound changes are cultivated.

I previously detailed how other authors identified several different ways of understanding the necessary transformation, namely the:

- Personal and societal transformation employing the story of the ‘imaginal cells’ of the over fed caterpillar rising up, coming together and gradually replacing the caterpillar with the butterfly (Sahtouris, 2016);

- Focus on the five stages of development, employing corporate strategy in order to move gradually from reacting to the need to be sustainable, to seeing it as a strategic advantage, and finally to embracing a higher purpose within the business to nurture people and planet (Senge et al., 2008); and
Model of three waves of change in perspectives regarding environment and human resources, that clearly identifies a paradigm shift in the third wave (Dunphy et al., 2007).

As I reflect on these I can clearly see that none is wrong – all are right. They provide different perspectives that combine to offer a more holistic view of the transformation that our world, our Earth requires at this time. The major elements of all three approaches are embraced in the The Model Stages 2 and 3 the accompanying principles (The Principles Stages 2 and 3) that explain how the final stage, the paradigmatic shift to be sustaining may be cultivated.

In the co-research group, I experienced the emotional ebb and flow of the ‘imaginal cells’ coming together, uniting and occasionally being overcome by the existing caterpillar DNA of the more mechanistic paradigm. Only to find the co-researchers rejoining and trying again. For a brief moment between 2013 and 2015, it appeared that the butterfly had birthed and taken flight – the paradigmatic shift to a perspective embracing living systems had been made. This was indicated by the publication of a new format of the strategic plan and a new process to develop it. But just as the ‘imaginal cells’ rose and fell in the co-research group, so have they at the organisational level. A new CEO has determined a new, or maybe old, path and a reversion to some of the older ways – but any regression cannot be back to the original starting point. At its most subtle and powerful level, what happened in 2009-2015 cannot be completely undone. It lives on in those ‘imaginal cells’, employees, who were a part of the co-research group. Only five of us remained within the co-researcher group after two years, but up to 20 had been part of it at some stage and some have dispersed into other organisations, carrying within themselves the memory of their inquiry and the seeds of new emergence. As I reflect now, I can see that we in the co-research group were a microcosm of a sustaining organisation.

An important element of the caterpillar story retold earlier and revealed again in the envisioning, is the realisation that the required transformation to become sustaining appears not to be a complete change in DNA within the people or employees involved. The caterpillar story describes how the ‘imaginal cells’ are a dormant part of the caterpillar that remember a different way of being. Similarly,
the research surrounding the envisioning process revealed that participants in these processes, knew, at a deep level, exactly how they want to experience work and their contribution to their community in a manner that would sustain them. In the language of the adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz et al., 2009), the envisioning process initially liberates technical knowledge. A complete metamorphosis is not required by the human species and this is good news! We are not inherently flawed as a species; we have just been mistaken in our perception and thinking with regard to how we have de-humanised work places. Over time as the more mechanistic paradigm prevailed, we have grown to work in separation from each other and our natural ecologies. This research demonstrates how it is possible to unlearn that mistaken way of being within an organisation and reawaken and reprioritise values within an organisational context to do the adaptive work. The adaptive work within the small passionate group took us deeply back into connection with ourselves as whole people and with each other. We all noticed and acted in accord with our felt sense of connection to the natural world too. We learned together and each contributed a useful perspective. The realisation that the process required to become sustaining may have more to do with unlearning mistaken and current ways of being, suggests that a major contribution can be made by just getting out of our own way.

I recall the CEO’s call for employees to “clear the decks and gain a clear line of sight to the vision”. This call identifies more concrete ways in which we get in our own way in organisational life – systems and processes designed to control outcomes that get in the way of directing people’s attention to the bigger picture and engaging people fully. But underlying this concrete layer is the more powerful and subtle means by which we get in our way. This deeper manner of getting in our own way refers back to the self-limiting modes in which we individually and collectively think and feel about what is true and right – our mental models.

Get out of our own way - so simple! And yet simple is not always easy as the institutionalised systems, processes and norms born of a different worldview invisibly shape what can and cannot be done.

The paradigmatic shift to be sustaining seems a huge shift in the way we see and do things now - and yet it is also one that appears to be available to us right now as
we ask ourselves quite simply, “what do we really want?” and then sit, inquiring with others to understand more about the implications of our desires. It seems that within a nurturing context, the required evolutionary changes can emerge from there.


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