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Learning to Feel the Presence of Kairos: My Living-Theory Account.

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Abstract

This paper offers an account of my on-going learning and professional practice as a Living-Theorist systemic coach. I also clarify my understanding and the meaning of my learning and development, starting from my values and my living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996). I authentically share what being a Living Theorist systemic coach means to me in that coaching capacity. Writing in this way strengthens and resources me to meet the challenges of this role. It helps me to make sense of my experiences. By writing in this way I open-up my learning to critical reflection with the hope that this will, in turn, create space for life-affirming dialogical relationships (Isaacs, 1999).

I focus on my professional practice as a systemic coach serving an Information Technology directorate within a United Kingdom Government agency. I share my values in action, with different data sources to ensure the paper is authentic. I share my learning as both a process-in-action through cycles of inquiry and then as a deeper more reflective piece in the summary. I hope this helps the reader to understand what I have learned as well as how I came about this new knowledge. This learning may have important implications for others who are seeking to create similar participative and productive spaces.

My practice involves the four principles of being a systemic coach. The principles of a systemic coach include: having a paradoxical non-attachment to any specific outcome; being loyal to the whole system; and balancing challenge and support in the process of what is emergent. My embodied value in this work is my loving kindness that I seek to demonstrate by creating the right environment or safe container. From this space, people I care about can more easily enter dialogue, co-inquiry and co-learning. This paper focuses on one key workshop that I called *the whole system event.* This workshop seemed to me to embody my learning.

Keywords: Living-Theory; Systemic Coach; Emergence; Aesthetics.

The Purpose of the Paper

The paper seeks to offer hope for change agents that from time to time get stuck. I was stuck back in October 2016. Now in May 2018 I am the happiest in work that I have ever been. I am in deep flow. I feel deeply connected to my sense of purpose, destiny and fate. Therefore, this paper offers a narrative of my learning in between these two key milestones. What on earth changed? Was it me? Was it the system? Or both? I'll let you decide. I offer a systemic lens or interpretation, as well as some personal reflections of my own intrapersonal learning. For me it seems that the two converge.

The Summary

Back in August 2016 with the arrival of a new Chief Technology Officer (CTO), the directorate was confronted with a leader whose communication style was very different from existing norms within the organisation, and perhaps within the civil service. His style (back then) was best described as frank, direct and no-nonsense. Within a few months, our attrition-rate spiked away from the previous low of 3.2% up to around 8%. Some of my friends were unsettled, and indeed a few left. I found this upsetting and found myself, at times, projecting my hurts on to the new leader. Then there was a turning point. In October 2016, I sat listening to a full directorate meeting, called a Town Hall event. As I reflected on what I was hearing and feeling, a rich archetypal image of a butterfly came to mind. I did not know really what it meant back then. What I did notice is that it spoke to me metaphorically of a whole system.

This resulted in me exploring a more systemic approach to my coaching practice. Cutting a longer story short, this resulted in four things that I detail in this paper more fully:

1. Training in systemic coaching and constellations (mapping)
2. A new role as the directorate change coach and being loyal to the whole system in that new role
3. Learning to embody an important systemic subtle skill or what I have called learning to feel the call of *kairos*
4. A mutual dialogical relationship with the Chief Technology Officer.

Signposting the paper

The paper has the following four sections.

Section Number	Content
One *Deep Dive*	A brief introduction to the key learning. A deep dive into the whole system workshop, where I claim the learning was embodied. What I mean by the key terms and ideas.
Two *Where am I coming from?*	Work background and context: I share my embodied values; I explain the four key values of a systemic coach; I explain the value that I call loving kindness and its importance.

Three	I outline two action inquiry cycles that weave through the full end-to-end journey.
Two Learning Cycles	
Four	As a final reflection piece. I evaluate my core learning and the ways by which my values have been realised as standards of judgement in explaining myself *via* this paper.
Reflections and Practitioner Learning	

Section One: What Have I Learned?

What have I learned?

I have learned several interconnected things. First, a refreshed realism that genuine transformational change is unsettling. Secondly, I have found that a systemic approach to my coaching practice has helped me. Next, I want to make the claim that I believe that the systemic approach has also helped the directorate. Lastly, I also want to recognise that having a supportive Chief Technology Officer (CTO) has given rise to a new job-role. The new role as the directorate change-coach has meant that I had an opportunity to bring my systemic training, skills and ideas into the directorate. Having the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) as a genuine critical friend has resulted in a life affirming leader-member exchange to the extent that I have learned to trust him and view his candour as a strength akin to authenticity and integrity. This is a significant shift from the negative projections back in October 2016. I recognise that a 'systemic lens' has a range of terms and language that might be new to you, so the next section unpacks and explains some of the key terms and ideas.

The key terms and ideas

There is a movement in complex or systemic change that uses language to describe what seems to me to be a similar phenomenon: sensing into the emergent future is also called prescencing (Senge, Sharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004). My experience is that this is best described as a subtle practitioner skill. It is based on several practical approaches under the rubric of the systemic coach. I will return and explain these ideas shortly. I want to explain a similar idea to emergence and this is what the Greeks referred to as kairos. This quotation from Stam (2017a) explains kairos very well:

The ancient Greek has two words for time: chronos, for the idea of time as planning and measuring device, and kairos, for the idea for the 'right' or most-opportune moment. Which do you use for your change planning? Chronos we know well. We use it for project planning and critical path analysis, and it is there every day in our agendas. Chronos works well with our strategic plans and our financial milestones.

But kairos and chronos don't always get on well together. Kairos has a habit of popping-up unexpectedly. Not only is it less reliable than chronos, it doesn't hang around too long either. Each kairos moment comes by once. Notice it and act without hesitation. Kairos doesn't bang on your door; you feel its presence. To catch it you need to be close to your intuition, some distance from the issue – and it helps to be a little out-of-focus. (p.59)

Once we have explored in rich detail the workshop, I will return to provide an explanation of how this learning fits into a greater whole that has taken some 18 months for me to integrate. To make sense of this workshop I will explain a little background and context for you.

The context and background

The IT Directorate is working through its own digital transformation programme. This means that we will have a double transformation: technical and cultural. It is important to understand why we are in the midst of this complex and demanding change programme. In the 21st Century, technology is moving at a faster rate than at any other time in history (Baker, 2015). In real terms this means that 'standing still' is experienced as going backwards. Because the IT directorate had 'stood still' for a significant period in its more recent history, we needed to move through significant or transformational change as part of our wider strategy.

Next, given the central role and importance in technology for enabling the wider organisational transformation, IT is providing the essential thought leadership in this area. Whereas three years ago, when I started in IT, we used to refer to 'the business' to signify our internal users of IT services, this no longer holds true. Today the terms 'IT' and 'the business' are synonymous. Lastly, the IT directorate's transformation is a 'mirror reflection' of what is also going on for our wider agency organisation, of which IT is a directorate. What I mean by this is that the wider business will soon be able to harness cutting-edge technology to transform the ways by which it designs its core business operations. This will give rise to new ways of working, new roles and a different culture. The easiest way to conceptualise this change is a move to a horizontal customer-experience model. Collectively these aspects are referred to as our 'operating model'. The cultural change, in the widest sense, is referred to as, 'Organisation First, Function Second'.

Notably, IT sits at the heart of this important movement. The technical transformation is a largely a capital investment, as we make prudent investments in a digital-delivery platform. This means that in the future we can offer new digital services. For example, in the future we will be able to offer new online (*i.e.* digital) services, when previously we could only offer customers a rather cumbersome paper-process (albeit with excellent standards of customer care). The cultural transformation for the IT directorate lies in the changes that we are making to our guiding socio-psychological assumptions (Schein, 2017). This includes changes for key work aspects such as the need for new technical skills, training for those skills, different technical roles, revised team structures, as well as revised sense of purpose. Notably, the cultural transformation is running in parallel with the technology changes, known as the Technology Road-Map.

The broad consensus by authors on digital transformation warns that the aspects dealing with human-relations are the most demanding, and often neglected, aspects of change (Baker, 2015; Lindsay, 2016; Maxwell, 2018; Rowles & Brown, 2017; Sharp & Johns, 2016; Van Belleghem, 2015). As part of addressing the human-relations aspects of the transformation, I was asked by the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) to design, implement and evaluate over 20 workshops. These workshops would explore each of the 22 teams' sense of

shared purpose. The final piece of the work was to run a whole-system workshop that brought together directorate participants from across all the 22 teams. We also called this event the 'map of maps' event. This whole system-event is the one that to me seems seminal in my learning in how to respond, or feel, the call of the emergent future, or what the Greeks called *kairos*.

A Deep Dive: The whole systemic workshop

For the whole system workshop, I took the view that having each of the six Heads of Professions (HoPs) along with a more junior member of the respective 22 teams would feel fair in terms of inclusion, as well as being representative of the IT Directorate. Strictly speaking, from a systemic perspective there is no need for any representative sampling (Rowlands & Rozenthuler, 2018; Whittingham, 2018). This is valid if the issue-holder has some sense of legitimacy in exploring the question they are bringing to the mapping session.

I wanted this approach to be seen and experienced as credible, and therefore I carefully designed our approach to fit locally. To make the reading of the workshop a little easier I have broken it down into five cycles of action learning and then share the post-workshop feedback, as well as an interview with two of the senior leaders via a short media film. Finally, I have also shared a Prezi™ link where you can see all the maps across the IT Directorate.

Cycle One

To ensure ongoing credibility, I took the view that for the whole system to create a map would call for a fair sense of inclusion and voice in the session. As I had previously run over 12 mapping sessions, I ran the session much the same as previous team purpose sessions, with a small variation. The variation was that for the initial six to eight-minute paired or dyad work, I invited the participants to, 'work with someone that you have not worked with that much before.'

At this point in the workshop process, my embodied value of being loyal to the whole system shaped my choice, as I hoped that this would increase the conversational and conceptual degrees of difference at the outset. The next small variation was that I invited each pair to share the insights on behalf of the other. Again, I built in this variation, as I hoped it would engender seeing and hearing things from a different perspective, demonstrating my value of creating spaces for the creative tension between support and challenge. By challenge I mean exploring the underlying assumptions of a line of reasoning from a dialogical perspective. The evaluative feedback I gathered three days after the event confirmed that both variations had helped in the ways hoped for. This was encouraging and helped to demonstrate my values in action. I asked two questions: first, whether the session was helpful in moving the IT Directorate forward; secondly, whether we managed to balance support and challenge in the session. The median score was 4 of out 5 for the first question and final question. The SurveyMonkey™ questionnaire is found in Appendix One as Item B.

Cycle Two

The next important point to note was that the opening comments via the 'check-in' were quite lively and 'problem-focused'. As I had previously facilitated a series of 12

workshops, it seemed to me somatically that there was more nervous and anxious energy in the room for this session. Once this was openly acknowledged by me as the facilitator it soon settled down. Three representatives asked about the future state. My learning journal for the event notes that I needed to remind them on three different occasions that we were, 'acknowledging the system as it is. We are mapping what it is like for you. Right now. Today. You will need to focus on that for the time being.'

Even though the systemic coach is seeking to serve the whole system I found that it is important to establish one's legitimate role as the mapping-facilitator, thus demonstrating the value of reconciling my embodied value as a living standard of judgement in the creative tension between challenge and support. I acted at this point in the workshop process as holding the value of challenging as more salient than supporting, in that I determined in the moment that they needed to focus on the current issues and not the future solution. The mapping session in and of itself ran much like many of the previous twelve-team purpose sessions I had facilitated then. The group managed to map the whole system and after the coffee break, they made several adjustments to the purpose map clusters, as well as identifying a few important gaps. You can see all the maps here:

https://prezi.com/view/ibLXzW99qWfEEFcp9i1U/

Cycle Three

I then enquired: 'So, collectively, what do you make of this map? What's serving a cohesive or shared sense of purpose? What blockers are getting in the way of flow across the Directorate?'

At this point the value of being loyal to the whole system was most salient as I sensed they needed to think at the whole level rather than from their respective parts or functional silos. According to my learning journal of the event, one of the leaders called Andrew who you can see on the video clip later said:

> Can I just check that I am speaking for us all when I say that this mapping session has really helped us in identifying what things are like right now, and where our blockers are, as well as what needs to improve. That's where our shared energy lies. Am I right, or is this just me?

At that point it felt to me as though the whole room erupted into energy. The conversations became enthused, excited and rapid. I noticed that my internal heart-rate had increased too. Conversations popped-up spontaneously and over-ran each other. The room was alive, quickened and enthused. Next, to be heard above other conversations the volume increased. It was an important moment to facilitate in order that we did *not* move into total chaos. This was too important. Therefore, I had a small meditation (Bion, 1961). Bion offers that there are three aspects to this type, of what he refers to as 'the here-and-now-experience including the object being observed', which in this case was the group process; the process of observing in itself (using sensory and mental abilities); and lastly, me as the observer. Thus, having a small moment for a reflective process meant for me the ability to pay attention to both the group and what was going-on for me in real-time. This has many similarities to presencing (Sharmer & Kaeufer, 2013). Following this short, but important

point of self-meditation, I said to myself, '*Kairos* has entered the room. It was both a joyful and a settling experience'.

Cycle Four

I then acknowledged what was happening and invited the whole-system representatives to work-up the key themes quickly that they were authentically experiencing as blocking the flow of work across the Directorate. My email to the Chief Technology Officer summarising the event, notes that they identified four key areas:

1. How do we stop political decision-making?
2. How do we communicate the strategy better?
3. How do we ensure that we effectively maintain IT?
4. How do we improve the ways by which we plan?

After drawing on the insights from a solutions-focused coaching approach, we created a poster for each of the four emergent themes, as I said: "It is important that you genuinely feel called to work on one of these key themes. Can you please self-organise by walking around the room and sensing the theme on which you will work as part of a smaller self-organised team?"

Cycle Five

Once the whole system had organised itself into four key-blocker themes, each of the four smaller sub-teams focused their attention on the practical solutions to those specific area blockers. They shared these at the end of the session as part of their action-planning and whole-system feedback. Where the sub-team identified a need for SLT intervention or decision, we ensured that the sub-teams developed practical recommendations. Therefore, I ensured to encouraged them to base any recommendations on their collective thinking, dialogue and learning from the rich mapping session. Writing this up as an interaction in the revision in May 2018, it now feels to me as though the whole system was speaking a 'new truth'. I will return to this insight in the final evaluation.

Initial feedback data

After the session, Steve, the Head of Consulting Services gave some feedback. One important piece of feedback I recorded in my journal, was that he noticed:

You did a good job in there today. That was not the easiest of sessions. I was impressed that you knew at what points to let the discussion move into a fruitful ground and then at others you brought it back in again. I really think we all got something valuable from the session today. Thanks. (J. Hocknell-Nickels, personal journal, March, 2017)

Interview feedback data

You can see and hear feedback from two senior leaders about the workshop session. Steve is the Head of Consulting Services and Andrew is the Head of Solutions Architecture. Media presentations are an important way within action research in terms of improving the validity (Whitehead, 2002, 2018).

Video 1:   Conversation
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3l29rkbZ6k&feature=youtu.be

For me, Steve authentically acknowledges the mature discernment that the session called for. As I have noted, the Greeks referred to this as 'the call of *kairos*'. Next, Andrew shares his memory of how he called out for the need to explore the blockers and how my holding the space – or what we have called the 'right environment' or 'safe container' – was an important part or enabler. These interviews demonstrate for me evidence of my values in action.

What flowed afterwards?

If we seriously take my claim to knowing that the whole system spoke a 'new truth' and that the collective truth seems to be connected to the shared sense of the emergent future, then what happened next is equally important to report. First, the four facilitators wrote-up the notes from the four emergent sub-teams and I sent their key notes along with an overall narrative to the Chief Technology Officer and his senior leadership team. What happened next was fascinating and speaks to me of the shift in social formations.

The Chief Technology Officer invited volunteers from across the 140 staff within IT (with protected time) to come forward and make contributions to the objectives that emerged from the four themes. Thus, stated simply, we had systemic permissions to self-organise. This seems to me to validate the idea further that he was also sensing into the emergent future or what wants to come forth across the directorate that, in the final analysis, he leads.

When I saw these permissions for development and systemics, they reminded me of a previous heartfelt conversation that I'd had with the CTO. I recorded this in my learning journal for May 2017 and noted how we were discussing the paradox of non-attachment in outcomes. Stated briefly, he reminded me that as the CTO he, 'couldn't do it all himself', as this would be an impossible task. I asked him:

'So, what can you do? How do you reconcile the paradox of leadership?'

'Well, I can help to create the conditions for the Directorate to transform and with the help and support from the SLT we can create the right environment. The working environment needs to be one that is both supportive and challenging so that we can all move forward together.'

'Sure thing,' I replied, 'but what about outcomes? I mean our focus is outcome based, right?

'Yes, outcomes are important. No doubt. When you do what is right then the outcomes will come. It really is a puzzle …

(slight laughter from both of us)

… but you do need to have one eye on the outcomes, whilst knowing that it is not a straight line from where you are, to where we need to be. And then? Then I trust.'

'Oh right. You trust that the outcomes will flow from trusting what we are doing?'

'Exactly. It is a paradox indeed,' expressed with a warm smile; and with that we left the room for our next meetings.

Finally, what flowed from the self-organised volunteer groups has also been important. The groups focussed on three key themes:

1. Communicating the IT strategy

2. Collaboration

3. Fairness.

The Fairness group looked at processes to ensure a felt sense of fairness with temporary promotions and developmental (*i.e.* growth) appointments. This has included an innovative new role: the 'fairness champion'. The six fairness champions have been nominated from across the Directorate by their peers. They are currently working on their work-plan for the next 12 months. This is a subtle but important movement across the directorate.

Section Two: Where am I Coming From?

History

I work in the UK Civil Service in a Government Agency within Information Technology (IT). We employ around 140 staff in various IT roles. I started working here in April 2015. Not long after I started we had a new Chief Technology Officer (CTO). He was recruited from the private sector as a well-established leader in digital transformation. Before he had taken up the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) role it is fair to say that three or four previous CTOs had come and left within short periods, typically 12–18 months, which is very short for that type of senior leadership role. This is known as the 'ejector-seat syndrome' within the systemic approach, as it highlights a systemic pattern rather than an assessment of the individuals seeking to occupy their role. Once our CTO had arrived he soon started to make appropriate changes, as well as opening-up a mature dialogue about what needed to improve, and why.

However, I noted that his honest and upfront style of communication did not seem to be received very well. In fact, after what we call a staff Town Hall event in September 2016 (to which all 140 staff are invited), I wrote in my leaning journal, 'The Boss does not

seem to be looking to make any friends here', noting the ways by which my colleagues who had been here much longer than I were sharing the experiences of the Town Hall event. It is fair to say that his communication left no doubt as to his meaning but did not seem to be motivating them either. He spoke directly and with a 'no nonsense' style. To me there seemed to be a high level of resistance to what he was offering. My hypothesis was borne out to some degree as within a few months the attrition rate spiked to its highest for many years. You'll need to be bear in mind that the previous attrition rate was around 3% which I would argue was too low, and more especially within IT in which skills and jobs moved quite fluidly. Having said that, in one Town Hall event I did ponder and reflect what was going on for me as a Business Psychologist and employee.

My learning journal for that month notes:

I saw a beautiful butterfly in the midst of a wild wind or storm and I realised that the butterfly needed the wind to carry it where it needed to go. I noted too how the butterfly and the wind were part of the same system. They were parts to a greater whole. (J. Hocknell-Nickels, personal journal, 2017)

This rich or archetypal image of metamorphosis spoke to me deeply on an intuitive level. This was just over three years ago.

The following week I went looking for a more systemic approach to my professional practice. I did not know this at the time when I went looking, but it later transpired that the systemic lens has richly helped me to move from being stuck to a new place of being deeply connected to my work or in deep flow. In fact, the mature discernment that Steve provides as authentic learning can be traced to this new (systemic) way of working. The butterfly below (image 1.) reminds me of this intuitive knowing and is my screen-saver for my work PC.

Image 1: Butterfly[1]

Values as living standards of judgement

I want to make the claim that I bring loving kindness or compassion as a key value into my professional practice. Therefore, it is worthwhile explaining what I mean when I refer to my embodied values. By an embodied value I have in mind an intrinsic motivational, purposeful and important attitude that gives rise to personal judgements. I see these values as constellating along an ethical matrix that helps me to choose or select a course of action.

These actions can and are evaluated from my ethical ground, and when negated give rise to associated feelings such as regret, shame, guilt and embarrassment. Likewise, when these values are lived in actions, this gives rise to feelings of authenticity and wellbeing. There is a sense of living a 'good life'. However, these values constellate in the moment of action and are often in creative tension with others. This gives rise to ethical dilemmas and cause for deeper reflection prior to significant action.

Next, as Maio (2011) rightly reminds us:

> This is a problem I have been studying for over a decade, and the solution is complex. People are not always motivated and able to link their abstract values to particular actions. In addition, the values relevant to particular actions are often not salient to us when we act: when we see a beggar on the High Street, this is probably at a time when our consumerist concerns have been cued, making it more difficult to remember that we value helpfulness and that this value is relevant to whether or not we spare any change. In general, any value will compete with other values for our attention, making the application of any one value difficult. (p. 12)

I hope that through various sources of data this claim reads authentically within this paper. That is not to say that I live this value fully in my practice all the time. I do not. Nonetheless, my living-theory for me equates to the practice of acting in the world from this ground of being in the world and, through action inquiry, it pays attention to when I do live out this value. I am curious about the effect of this on individuals, teams and the whole IT system. I am also curious about when I don't live this value and in those moments, experience my Self as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989).

For the purposes of this account I would like to share five values. These five values are:

(i)   Being loyal to the whole system;

(ii) Holding the balance between challenge and support;

(iii) Systemic presence;

(iv) Being non-attached to any specific outcomes; and lastly

(v) Loving-kindness. As will be seen, there are times when these values coalesce in emergence and these moments seem particularly rich and meaningful.

Next, my values that are ontologically embedded are interwoven with each other, and above all they seem to be connected to the value that I call 'loving kindness'. One of my notable experiences of loving kindness or compassion seems to me to be linked to my intuitive knowing that our new Chief Technology Officer was, metaphorically speaking, a beautiful butterfly in the midst of a wild storm. This deeply rich experience (from a phenomenological perspective) inspired me to act as part of an action inquiry cycle framed by the question, 'Is there any systemic training that can help me?' When I say, 'help me', at the time of looking for the training I was, professionally speaking, 'stuck'. Some of my closest friends were upset, and a few did in fact leave. It is fascinating that there was also an alternative story, that the CTO was also experiencing genuine challenge in his new role.

I did not know this at the time that I explored the training options, but some three years later I can say authentically that the systemic lens has served the IT Directorate, and indeed, the CTO. In this paper I share multiple examples of how this is the case. Two examples will suffice here. First, the participants' feedback from the purpose team maps and secondly you can read what happened and what flowed from the whole system workshop. It shows a significant organisational shift both in terms of the processes of the legitimacy of self-organisation supported by the Chief Technology Officer and then the response from the directorate members to that invitation.

The most effective way I have found of weaving different parts of my life together is through an educational Living Theory approach, which provides me with the legitimate space for scholarly enquiry – space where my experiences, practice, values, feelings and voice are heard and appreciated. My life celebrates my natural creativity and innovation and Living Theory encourages methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 169). I seek to weave together what is personally going on for me (first-person); what is going on at the level of the group-relations (second-person), and what is happening at the whole system (third-person). This represents learning from co-operative enquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2000). This gentle weaving together of the aspects of my life helps me as I explore questions of the kind: 'How can I improve what I am doing?' (Whitehead, 1989).

I broadly work from five different perspectives or stances. The IT terms are provided in the glossary at the end of the paper. I have used various methods to these ends. These methods have included:

- Conceptual constellations

- A systemic lens to guide hypotheses and actions

- Group-relations theory

- Team development activities by drawing on a strengths-based approach

- Dialogue training and sessions (Rozenthuler, 2012).

What is a constellation?

The easiest way to make sense of a constellation is that it is a co-created map. You can see the full set of maps from all IT teams in here:
https://prezi.com/view/ibLXzW99qWfEEFcp9i1U/

My grounding of my practice: experiential or phenomenological

My chosen methods and approaches in this work are primarily from my experience, that is to say phenomenological (Rowlands & Rozenthuler, 2018). Next, from my experiences I actively shape and create my own living-theory, as this assists me in making sense of my experiences, and to bring an analytical and explanatory approach that can be openly shared. In this sense of making my learning public, I want to suggest that there is the potential for others to learn from my experiences and test my claims to knowing for themselves. In this way I claim to be creating new learning and knowledge. Thus, by making my account open for inspection, I make the claim that I am adding to the body of educational knowledge that

meets the criteria for originality of mind and authenticity. To help the claim to validity and authenticity I have sought candid feedback from some of the workshop participants. In this way, Living Theory research brings people and their different practice together with the scope of learning, inspiring and influencing each other.

There is the possibility in Living Theory as a community of practitioners and researchers for dialogue that enriches relationships and that sparks new insights. I hope that my work speaks of my values. Furthermore, I ask serious, productive and important questions such as, 'How do I help to make our working practices kinder, more productive and enjoyable? In other words, 'how do I turn the living contradictions I have experienced into learning in how to become a person whose mind is free to question and find solutions in line with his own values and to live them fully?' This is important to me, as I seek to live, in the full sense, a life of enquiry. To this end I have been moved by ideas around the whole person (Heron, 2002).

Next, I hope that my account might help other coaches in their own journey as 'fellow travellers'. I work within two professional communities of practice and hope that my writing might not only strengthen me as the writer, but in addition others who are facing similar serious questions and complex challenges.

I hope that you will be able to see that for me writing-up my life as inquiry brings life-affirming joy. I have discovered that my writing resources and strengthens me. It brings renewed energy. It quickens my soul. In addition, it helps to give my life additional meaning that is connected to my sense of purpose, destiny or fate.

My living-theory approach

My account uses a Living-Theory methodology. I take seriously the idea of the whole person (Heron, 2002). Stated briefly, this means that I view the people that I serve within the Directorate and work alongside as whole beings that have spiritual, emotional, socio-psychological and physical aspects to their whole selves. This means someone who is in a set of whole, interpersonal relations in a whole culture in a whole, planetary environment integrated within its trans-planetary field (Heron, 2002, p. 312). In my professional practice I seek to include and embrace the whole self in the ways by which I design, facilitate and evaluate the shared environment, space or field.

The shared field or the safe container must be strong enough to enable teams and individuals to encounter one another directly. In other words, meeting face-to-face gives rise to genuine dialogue. It seems to me that the whole-system workshop demonstrates a richly dialogical space. Furthermore, by encountering each other as whole selves they fully take in and experience the other as a legitimate whole person. I want to make the claim that taking the time, consideration and skills in the ways by which I have introduced this new approach to meeting is underpinned by the value of loving-kindness. In other words, I believe that the elements of the appropriate meeting-environment create a space for participants to bring their full selves and find psychological safety from which to fully express their ideas. In the short media clip, you can hear how Andrew, who is a senior leader and workshop participant, notes that for him the ways by which I 'held the space' meant that he could call out what he felt needed to be expressed.

Next, I claim that what emerges from my response to what I am claiming to be the 'call of *kairos'*, and what Steve refers to as 'mature discernment' and what others have referred to as 'emergence' were hot or sensitive topics – such as: 'How do we stop political decision making?' I think you can sense that this was a genuine theme that I claim required the correct environment from which to find expression, and indeed action. The very act of co-creating the right environment as a statement of intention for our meeting and, in turn, facilitating in such a way that enabled that to be realised in concrete terms, I claim is underpinned or grounded by my loving care and kindness – and indeed by my expressed intention to embody loyalty to the whole system. Figure 1 below illustrates the co-created right environment that we adapted locally for our purposes.
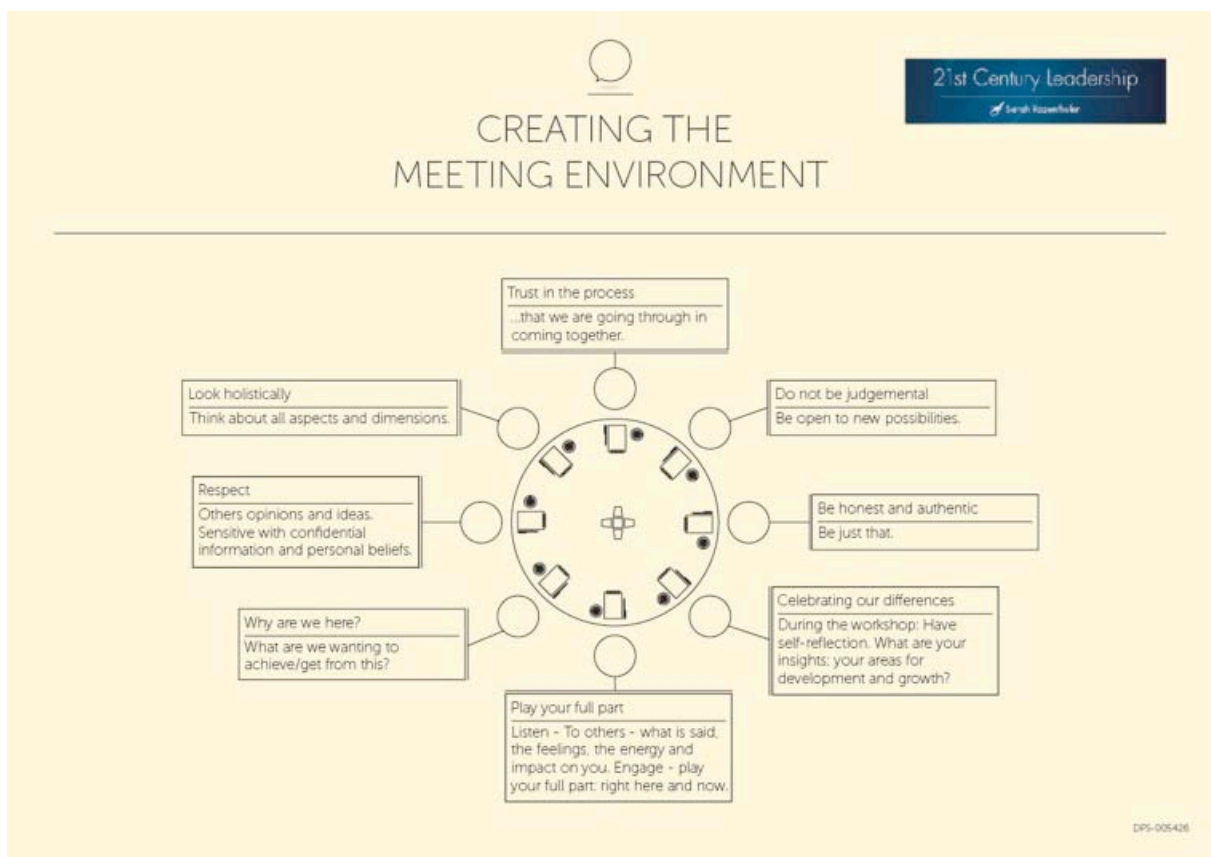
Figure 1: Creating the Meeting Environment. Rozenthuler (2012)

Living Theory helps me to work through the living contradictions of my values in my work environment. Such contradictions are experienced as being stuck, frustrated, angry, disillusioned, upset, anxious and perturbed. I share some of the ways by which a systemic coach can take care of themselves in the processes of complex change. It is my experience that learning to attune to the system in the ways described has personal and emotional consequences, both uplifting and depressing. To help manage these processes, I shared some methods that I have found to be effective strategies.

These include for me writing life as enquiry, ensuring ongoing advanced supervision, being active within one's communities of practice and bodybuilding to 'get into my body' and further develop my masculine energy. The philosophy of a Living Theory means that I give space, time and authentic recognition of such experiences and then, importantly, seek to work them through with patience, care and effort. I have personally discovered and agree that Living Theory is the philosophy of life that I embrace and it has taken my professional development a step forward by helping to smooth out the living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) I encounter along the way (Briganti, 2009, p. 80).

There are times when my embodied values coalesce in emergence and these moments seem particularly rich and meaningful; my values that are ontologically embedded are interwoven with each other and, above all, they seem to be connected to the value that I call loving kindness. This important value, it seems from my experience, holds the greatest potential for genuinely transformational spaces and organisational life, as well as for the future of humanity. I view this as the grounding of my professional practice and the basis of my being-in-the-world. There are risks in acknowledging the value of loving kindness in professional practice and this is especially true in highly technical workplaces. However, the ways by which I have facilitated the creation of the appropriate meeting environment, and the ways by which I hold that space in real-time and, in turn, encourage the workshop participants to bring their full selves to the purpose mapping workshop meetings, are genuine examples of my care and loving kindness in action.

So, what do I mean by a 'systemic approach'?

Within organisational life we have adaptation because organisations consist of human beings as sentient entities. When seen from this perspective an organisation as a living system has many advantages to making sense of what really goes on. Therefore, for our purposes we call this a 'systemic approach'. When seen in this way, a living system is focused on its survival. It will seek to adapt, to change to any new circumstances and of course it will seek to learn from its experiences to ensure its survival. When we think of organisational life in this way, then we can view a strategic plan, for example, as an important survival plan. The systemic perspective also brings with it other insights as well.

For example, one can see that each organisation as a 'whole entity' is embedded within a greater whole that includes its external environment. The external environment is, in and of itself, also changing dynamically. From my training and reading from the systemic lens, I have summarised the systemic approach as consisting of the following:

- A living system has an intrinsic link or motivational energy to help ensure its ongoing survival.
- The whole organisation is more than the sum of its respective parts. These parts might be Departments, Directorates, functional silos, or even sub-parts like teams, for example.
- Every system is itself embedded within a greater whole including its external environment.
- This external environment is itself a dynamic interface (*i.e.* it is also changing).
- Living systems have the natural means for self-regulation. This regulation will have patterns associated with it.

- Each system lives or survives based on the principle of permanent exchange. Stated simply, each organisation gives and receives in various ways (*e.g.* selling a service or product for which it gets paid).
- Living systems, therefore, seek to optimise the key dynamic between their own preservation and their exchange (Rowlands & Rozenthuler, 2018)

Ecology, as we view it, is the wide system from within which each organisation survives and even thrives. The wider environment or ecology is a key concept. The IT Consultant group, Gartner (2018), agrees with this view and it defines ecology in traditional business language as:

> A business ecosystem is the collaborating network of enterprises that delivers products or service solutions to a market segment and category of needs through competition and cooperation. The information technologies of the internet age make it possible to link enterprise activities to initiate, grow, change, and recombine such business networks more easily and fluidly. But that doesn't just 'happen'. It requires purposeful design. (p. 6)

I agree with Gartner: it certainly does not just happen. This paper is dedicated to demonstrating one seminal example of how this happened as I saw and experienced my work more systemically than before. It is from my experiences over the last three years that I'd suggest that a deep shared sense of purpose is at the heart of any genuine digital transformation. For the purposes of this paper I highlight that there are four systemic principles for understanding organisations. Two key systemic leaders note the regularity with which these surface, thus demonstrating their explanatory power within many systemic communities of practice (Whittingham, 2018).

These are:

- Organisations as living systems want to be complete.

- Organisations as living systems want to exchange with other organisations, be that internally or externally.

- Organisational systems have an intrinsic order, which they seek and indeed thrive on when aligned.

- Organisational systems 'want to reach their destiny'. (Stam, 2017a, 2017b)

A key systemic method: Conceptual Constellations (The Map).

The easiest way to think of a Conceptual Constellation is that it creates a rich map from which you can see and have a first-hand experience of the whole organisation. You get the inside view of the ways by which the parts and the whole are dynamically relating. In addition, you gain and appreciate fresh ideas and new perspectives on any presenting problems or what we call 'systemic symptoms'.

And here I am adding a little important history. Bert Hellinger, a Catholic priest, philosopher and psychotherapist, started using Constellations within his family-systems

therapy work, and found it to be practically powerful in helping individuals and families to identify the genuine root causes of their problems and issues. This is akin to the foundations for this work. Later, in 1995, Hellinger set up the first organisational Constellation using the same approach with families to help organisations. Hellinger passed this organisational work across to Weber who, 'with great energy and enthusiasm … began to use the word systemic' (Kaat & de Kroon, 2017, p. 33).

Within our digital transformation we have successfully used an innovative approach to help our IT Directorate to map their shared sense of purpose. This work took several months and covered a total of 22 teams and over 140 IT employees. To ensure that we could evaluate our innovative approach, we base-lined several important outcomes. Over the last year our staff's engagement scores improved, as demonstrated below.

Area of Engagement	*2016* *N=120*	*2017* *N=123*	*Year-on-year* *% improvement*
I am proud when I tell others I am part of the organisation	63%	74%	11%
I would recommend the organisation as a great place to work	62%	74%	12%
I feel a strong personal attachment to the organisation	48%	64%	16%
The organisation inspires me to do the best in my job	50%	57%	7%
The organisation motivates me to help it achieve its objectives	46%	49%	3%

Table 1: Staff Engagement Scores

It seems fair to suggest that this work played a part in that improvement. Having one eye on the staff engagement improvements as data has ensured the credibility of our approach within the wider digital environment. This is because digital evaluation is currently more comfortable with a techno-rational evidence base. Therefore, this account is an important balance in terms of the evidence from a Living Theorist. A whole system-map or Constellation is best thought of as a rich map of the organisational systemic dynamics as organisation members seek together to understand (*i.e.* from the systemic lens) how the dynamics between whole and parts are working or not.

Next, it reveals the analysis of the root cause in a novel and quite enlightening manner that can help the transformational process, with a careful eye on the important outcomes. It is also deeply participative, in that each participant has the same number of mapping elements. Lastly, it is co-creative as the map is created by each participant contributing to the whole map. The participants make map adjustments together which lends itself to rich dialogue and an enriched understanding of each other's internal mental maps.

Systemic principle: Finding your place as an Internal Systemic Coach.

The consensus by authors on digital transformation warns that the human-relations aspects are the most demanding and are often neglected (Baker, 2015; Government, 2016; Lindsay, 2016; Maxwell, 2018; Rowles & Brown, 2017; Sharp & Johns, 2016; Van Belleghem, 2015). Therefore, given the cultural challenges and my experiences in complex change and skills as a Business Psychologist, our Chief Technology Officer (CTO) invited me for a conversation in October 2016.

The CTO started the conversation by saying:

'I'd like you to work alongside each team within the Directorate and help them to understand their team's purpose. There is another important strand of work running in parallel to purpose. This will be the stakeholder management training. This piece will help them to see stakeholders not simply as external customers but also the other teams within the Directorate.

'Running alongside the stakeholder work I'd like you to help them develop a collective sense of purpose. This will be valuable in the transformation of the Directorate. What are your thoughts?'

I looked directly at the CTO and attempted to get a sense of what was on offer. I wondered whether we had a strong enough trust between us for this to really work. My question around trust was that he was new in post and his communication style was very candid and direct. This style was quite different from previous leaders with whom I'd had relationships of trust. I guess that I did not know him well enough or where he was coming from.

'The truth is that I would love this opportunity to serve the Directorate. My training and understanding of mapping is really helping me. But would you be willing to be open and honest with me? To be a genuine critical friend?'

'Yes. In fact, why don't you go away and have a think about how you would like to approach this? Write it up as a short proposal. Then I will have a careful read and give you candid feedback. I will tell you as it is. Is that what you are asking me to do?'

'Yes. Thanks. My first thoughts are that we will need to change the language of the methodologies terms; just so that there is no need for any 'translation' when we use it here within a technical or digital space.'

'OK. Once we have got this about right then let's do a rapid prototype with a team that would be willing to do that. We can adapt and learn with pace. In fact, leave this with me as I can speak with the Head of Business Analysis. He would be a good lead for this.'

'Thanks Boss. This is very exciting. I am really thrilled.'

'Well you have skills and experience in this area. We need to utilise them in a good way. You know when you do what you love then it no longer feels like work. Do you think soccer aces like Wayne Rooney feel like they are working when they are playing top-level football?'

'No, I am sure that Wayne is simply doing what he's always dreamed of doing.'

'Exactly. This will be the same for you. When you do what you love then you are no longer working for a living. You are just being you. That's what I can see will happen for you if we get this right and this is what I want.'

'Thanks Boss.' I then hurried out of his office. My work calendar notes that that early the following week I started to make plans that would eventually see each of the 22 team's mapping their purpose (J. Hocknell-Nickels, personal journal, October 2016).

I share this short story to frame our approach properly from the very beginning of the purpose of our work. It is important to understand that getting the right person to 'serve the whole' is important. The best fit is the person having the right aptitude, training and external support. Significant here is that having sufficient technical digital understanding is not as important as the people skills. It is, however, essential to have a depth of experience in complex technical implementations from which to build credibility. In addition, having the Chief Technology Officer to commission the work was a key element of success in our experience. This provides the wider systemic legitimacy, which is a firm foundation for success. In other words, having top leadership approval and support means that it is easier to get genuine interest from the IT Directorate. Next, one of the most interesting challenges for any internal systemic Coach is how to maintain a healthy distance between the organisation and one's whole self. Addressing this point, Katt & de Kroon (2017) in their delightful book entitled *Systemic Consulting,* write that one of the most important attitudes is detached involvement (p. 86). They go on to say:

> Letting go of judgements is easier when there is a bit of distance. Simply watching seems to invite better perception, bring more within your reach. It invites the question: what on earth could possibly be the function of the behaviour you are witnessing? Moreover, your involvement is essential too: what do you see in the other person, what do you notice about yourself, your thoughts, what feelings pop up voluntarily? Just by opening yourself to the system and getting into real contact with it, relevant information from the system might appear. 'Without judgement' does not degenerate into aloofness or analysis. (Kaat & de Kroon, 2017)

There are three points, which are key to my learning:

1. There is a systemic leadership paradox. The paradox is that the more we do not get attached to specific outcomes, the more helpful we can be to the whole organisation or system.

2. As an internal change agent, I found that legitimate distance, or what I call the 'right place' was found in a new team that was branded as the 'IT Change Team'.

3. Being internal to the IT Directorate calls for being what I termed 'loyal to the whole system' in other words, seeking to serve the whole and, more especially, being careful not to collude with the Senior Leadership Team.

Section Three: Learning From Getting Things Wrong.

In this section I will demonstrate two key learning-cycles. The first cycle is an example of when I got things wrong, and the second cycle when things went much better. Finally, I will share the evaluation of the ways by which I presented the purpose maps via the presentation layer called Prezi ™.

Learning One: Rapid prototype

It is worthwhile sharing that not every new idea, experimentation or prototype that I tried was a success. Accordingly, I learned a great deal from our cultural approach that we called 'fail fast and learn quickly'. One lesson was the balance between genuine emergence and attempting to utilise a more top-down model or framework on the session. I did not think that I was, in effect, imposing a framework when I planned the idea. However, with the benefit of rapid learning it soon became clear that to the representatives it was experienced as though I had! My failure in this respect was most evident when we experimented with inviting the team to create their team purpose-map, at the same time as utilising a classic strategic 2 x 2 matrix. I hypothesised that the matrix would help the team to identify some potential meta-map coordinates that we might be able to use as a common approach. Therefore, I invited a team who enjoyed experimenting and prototyping to test this idea by placing the 2 x 2 matrix as four map points akin to north, east, south and west. My learning journal for the event notes that after a few minutes one of the team said:

> 'This just is simply not working for us. The four reference points are not the way that we are making sense of our purpose. They might make good sense from a business management book, and even helpful for rational strategic development.

> 'However, in this context, when what is important for us is emerging in real-time; well to be honest, it is frustrating as these four reference points are getting in the way of our flow. Can we get rid of them and see if that is better for us?' (Hocknell-Nickels, personal journal, 2016)

On reflection, perhaps was there a clue in that I was looking to utilise the 2 x 2 matrix to help me? My learning here is that it seems to me now a team with the right systemically-led facilitation will draw on resources to help them in that moment or in real-time. The difference is subtle, but in professional practice I discovered it was significant. I learned that constellations are more effective, as teams and groups learn and develop together and that having too strict or rigid an idea can get in their way.

Learning Two: The presentation of The Map

One of the challenging questions concerns the ways, in which I presented the complexities of the connections between the twenty-two purpose maps, and then the whole map. A colleague said that the Prezi software ™ was an excellent resource. This is because Prezi ™ enables you to easily 'zoom out' to view the whole map, including the connections between the parts. Furthermore, it enables you to 'zoom in' to see each respective team purpose map in detail. This 'presentation layer' we discovered, was engaging and appealing to both technical and non-technical audiences. I am sure that there are alternative software programs, or indeed approaches that could be equally useful to these ends. I simply share our directorate's shared experiences as illustrative. I really like that part of my own coaching style is utilising engaging IT software to engage with IT professionals in deeply profound systemic understandings. You can view the Prezi map here:

https://prezi.com/view/ibLXzW99qWfEEFcp9i1U/

When we revealed the whole presentation to the IT Directorate, using Prezi as described, the feedback included the following comments.

It is a really valuable visual map that is easy to understand and see the connections between the teams.

This is a powerful way to help us see the Big Picture. Thanks!

It really helps me to see the ways that teams can collaborate in their common objectives or purposes.

We did not get any negative comments.

Section Four: Final Reflections.

Final reflections

I have four main reflections at this stage in the writing and enquiry process. I cannot claim that I understand the emergent future. What this really means is a mystery to me, so I do not want to confuse my experiences with witnessing it as an observable phenomenon, as something that I fully comprehend. I don't. My sense is that I am open to the possibility that this process is helpful in genuine transformational change when our previous history, or past, along with our historical paradigm assumptions, are no longer appropriate. This is the best I can currently offer. Have I seen it? Yes, I have! I do believe I have seen something powerful, something akin to genuine transformation. How do I come to this assertion?

Consider the convergence of the following elements of my story. First, being stuck and upset and projecting my upset on to the new leader, or Chief Technology Officer. Then, the emergence in that moment of the richly archetypal systemic image of metamorphosis. Subsequently, my actions leading to my systemic training and the emergent 'window of opportunity' leading to a new change coaching role, as well as a life-affirming relationship of trust with the new Chief Technology Officer.

As I introduce the new systemic paradigm, we have the deeply emergent new truths being called out in the whole-system event and the report back to the Chief Technology Officer and his trusting the emergence and, in turn, granting permissions for whole system to self-organise along the key themes. This is still a mystery, but it has been a real phenomenon. This is my truth. Next, there is the paradox of non-attachment has taken about 18 months for me to fully experience and embody as a part of my own aesthetic style. Previously, I approached my change agent work with too tight a grip on specific outcomes and this gave rise to anxieties and especially when seemingly things were going wrong in the short or medium-term.

What I have learnt from the systemic lens is that problems are really solutions-in-progress. When we bring our grounded presence and systemic understanding we can help to gently untangle what is currently entangled. For example, earlier in the week I had a brief discussion with our Chief Technology Officer, who is very much determined to complete the transformation of the Directorate. It is evident to me, given his length of stay to date as well as his sense of mission and determination, that he is not experiencing the ejector-seat syndrome of his predecessors. I would suggest this is in part an outcome from the gentle,

systemic insights underpinned by my coaching from this new paradigm. This is a bold claim, but I make it in all humility and not as an individual (*i.e.* in the traditional individual hero narrative) but rather as a *systemic witness* to the events of the last few years, including the whole-system workshop detailed herein.

Part of my learning was also, it seems, that in 'letting go' one can be more fully present and this may be a precondition for experiences such as sensing *kairos*. This strikes at the heart of something important for me. I am very results-orientated. I am also very keen to move into helping. I can now understand that having the right systemic stance and appropriate distance are very important learning-points. These will hold me in good stead as we move into the final three years of our transformation-programme. Finally, finding your right place as a systemic coach is equally important. I have been fortunate to have an organisation, a CTO and an SLT that have ensured that I have the right type of job and scope so that I can practice as a systemic change coach in the ways described.

Lastly, what have I learned about my living standards of judgement? What does this mean for me given the experiences outlined in this paper? In terms of the process of thinking about and selecting a given course of action from a range of possibilities, it seems that my embodied values sit within a matrix. This means, within a moment of time, the most salient values resonate as important to the decision that faces me. In that moment some of my embodied values (as a dynamic set) seem more salient, important or relevant to me in that moment and guide my ethical choices and actions in the world. In this sense, I see my values as living (dynamic and alive as contrasted with being static and fixed) standards of judgement and giving rise to my action.

There is more to be learned in this area for me in moving forward. However, I am encouraged that to some extent (*i.e.* the limits of the data included here) I have lived my values as actions and made public my account for inspection. Values, when shared in this way, form the basis of judgement in the explaining of ourselves with respect to acting in the world with others (Laidlaw, 1996; Delong, 2013).

Choice points and ethics

As a member of the British Psychological Society and Association of Business Psychology I have ensured that my research is consistent with their recommendations and guidelines; for example, the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code on Conduct and Ethics (BPS, 2018). My professional values as a BPS member include respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. I have demonstrated respect by creating spaces for genuine dialogue and voice for all the participants. Additionally, in terms of competence I have ensured that I have worked in areas for which I have the commensurate skills, experience and training. This is also linked to acting responsibly. Finally, in terms of integrity I have ensured that my account is authentic and honest, and that any data is valid and reliable to these ends.

In terms of practical ethics, there are several important points and ethical considerations for Living Theorists. Primarily, there is a question of power-relations and the possibility for collusion. It is important to have the commitment of senior leadership for this

type of work. You'll recall that for me this was the introduction and sustainability of introducing a new paradigm that I genuinely felt would be a benefit to the whole system, as well as the new Chief Technology Officer (CTO). Once you have the senior leader's approval and support for the system to be able to see itself, this calls for courage and resilience; as in my case the new paradigm was anathema to our current ways of collective thinking and sense-making.

There is also the question of language about theory and methodology and local culture. Having the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) and then an early adopter team to help with the translation of the systemic lens into a digital context, has been very important. I was keen to demonstrate my knowing or competence in the introduction of this new paradigm. It is fair to say that I wanted to be seen as credible.

The temptation for me is to want to be seen as intelligent (*i.e.* an ego need) by using the specific paradigmatic language as evidence of knowing, rather than taking into full account the need to translate that language to fit locally. Therefore, what I have learned is that the additional skill asks: What language will help these new ideas to be easily understood? As you can see, we changed the safe container to the appropriate meeting environment; and then the constellation to be called locally 'a map'. These two examples will suffice.

And finally, as I finish writing this paper there is a sense of completion. I have emptied my heart or my soul as well as my ever-thinking head. I am finished. It is done, so to speak. My question is, what is next in terms of my writing? As I let this inquiry settle down, I breathe out. I feel alive, quickened by the fire in my stomach as well as this short but important moment of humility as I recall the beautiful words from Rumi:

> *Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field.*
>
> *I will meet you there.*
>
> *When the soul lies down in that grass*
>
> *The world is too full to talk about.*

Acknowledgments

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Appendix One

Item A: Conversation with Jack and Marie.

I am sitting in a delightful café opposite Bath Spa train station, sipping from a cup of fresh Cappuccino with Marie and Jack. We are talking through the ways by which my writing resources me. Marie and Jack quite naturally are encouraging this insight. They help me to explore the potential to be a participant with a global network of living theorists. There are, Jack notes, a few support groups that meet at different times of the week. I am thrilled about this prospect and it is catching my imagination. I express this with a warm smile and some further questions. They then connect to my genuine interest and in turn highlight the opportunity of writing-up my work, via a Doctorate. This sounds like a wonderful idea. This desire has been bubbling away for over 20 years. I wonder if this is the emergent future calling it/me forth.

On the short return train journey, I notice afresh my embodied sense of adventure, joy and challenge of this next movement. Fab!

Item B: The Survey Monkey Questionnaire Design for Workshop Participants.

Q1. How well did you understand the objectives before attending?

(5-point Likert scale)

Q2. How psychologically safe did you feel that you could fully participate?

(5-point Likert scale)

Q3. How well did the workshop meet your objectives?

(5-point Likert scale)

Q4. Did we get the right amount of challenge?

(5-point Likert scale)

Q5. Did the meeting space feel supportive enough to share your ideas?

(5-point Likert scale)

Q6. What three things can be done to improve the facilitation processes?

(Open text feedback)