

The Learning Community: Strategies for Bridging Organisational Learning Concepts with Communities

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Abstract

Albert Einstein said, "Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them." As conditions within communities become more complex, new approaches and processes are needed to address this complexity. Conventional wisdom has held that responding to challenges and issues is straight forward — identify the problem, figure out the solution, generate resources and implement. Today, many communities have discovered this approach results in naively simplistic reactions rather than the desired simple solutions. The tools and practices of "learning organisations" initially described by Peter Senge in the *5th Discipline* (1990) provide insights into new ways that issues can be explored, approached, and solved.

This paper frames the fundamentals of creating a learning community. Explored are the core elements of stewardship, collaboration and systems thinking as an infrastructure needed to support elegantly simple solutions. Working in support of the core elements are foundational principles of community engagement, servant leadership and capacity building. As these principles are applied in the development of the learning community and the working culture, six leverage points are considered which serve to foster engagement, support strategic design, and define the culture of working together.

The learning community is mobilised by utilising four engagement factors of dialogue and discussion — exploring new options and making decisions; embracing whole systems approaches — defining new ways for all resources to focus on desired shared outcomes; force field framing and reframing — identifying the real and perceived forces supporting and not supporting efforts; and design and implementing strategies on the A to B model — identify where the community is today (A) and where it wants to be (B) and the indicators that will define progress.

As funders, policy makers, and community members increase their investment in reaching positive outcomes, they will find themselves realigning how they do business. No two communities or their collaborative efforts are the same. However, they most often are based in common cores of stewardship, a sense of knowing and believing in community, and serving as servant leaders to build the capacity to create and sustain elegantly simple solutions.

Keywords

Collaboration, leadership, systems, stewardship, change, learning community

Issue: Communities striving for solutions in complex environments

Today communities seek to successfully address the complexity of issues. Factors such as the speed and availability of information; interdependent global market forces; local, regional, and global political challenges, and the transient nature of many people contribute to this complexity. The overwhelming amounts of information and pressures to “fix problems” create a sense of urgency that can lead to overly simplistic quick-fix reactions. Elegantly simple solutions are elusive; however, they represent goals more worthy of long term sustainability. The concept of developing elegantly simple solutions helps individuals, groups and businesses develop cultures of work that maximise human, economic and infrastructure capital at all levels. The challenge is to resist the “quick fix” mindset and use new and emerging approaches that allow us to emerge from the cloud of confusion and discover those elegantly simple solutions (Figure 1).

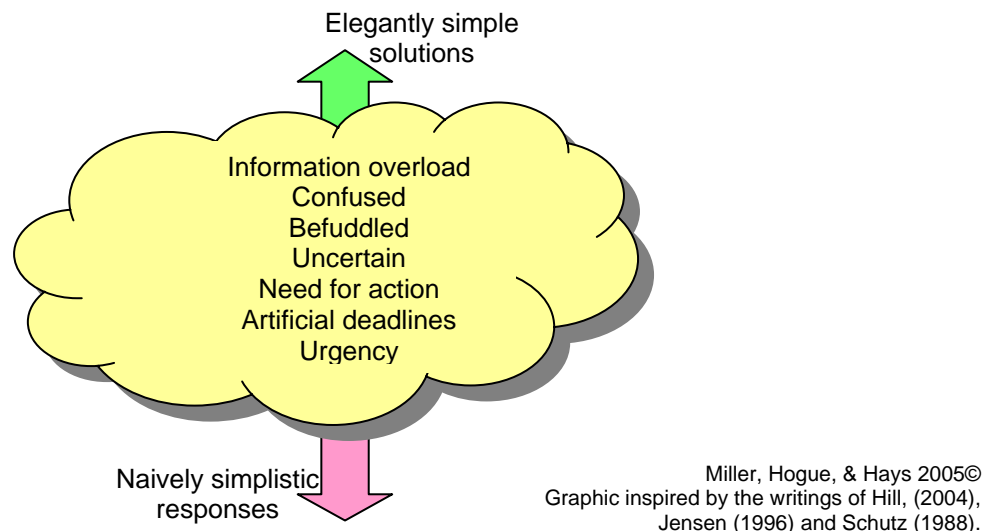


Figure 1. Concept of developing simple solutions

Creating a community that learns is about the framing of elegantly simple solutions versus reacting to a range of problems. It is about leadership that creates the climate in which communities continuously and collectively enhance their capacities to produce the outcomes they really want.

The challenges facing communities — either community of place (communities bound by geography), or communities of interest, (communities bound by shared purpose) — seem to be increasing in number, complexity and pace. How leaders and communities respond has the potential to profoundly change the culture in which people live and work (Kouzes 2002). Peter Boyer’s “A Different War,” (*New Yorker* July 2002) provides an example of these challenges. Boyer describes transformation of the US military resulting from the September 11 attack on the US. Prior to the attack, the military was

best fit to fight the last opponent where the enemy and their capacity was known. On September 11, the U.S. did not know their attackers, where they were, and what they were armed with. As a result, today's military operates with new tactics utilising information technology and enhanced intelligence capabilities. The military equips soldiers with information for decision-making, cross-functioning communication to solve problems, and the mindset that the new enemy is smart, elusive, and virtual. The military's challenge of being flexible, open to change and new perspectives, and adaptable to changing conditions are analogous to the challenges faced by communities.

Similar examples can be found in local communities as they address social, environmental and economic issues. For example, issues surrounding drug and alcohol abuse are addressed using a wide range of approaches that include prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. These strategies are enhanced with finding and addressing the underlying root causes of drug and alcohol abuse.

Today, communities experience heightened uncertainty about emerging issues. People, groups, organisations and businesses are more connected and social capital — the collective value of people who know each other and what they will do with and for each other — is a valued investment in developing solutions tailored to community uniquenesses.

Creating culture: Shifting from reactions to solutions

As communities address the complex issues facing them, they routinely struggle with four questions: How do we:

- *grow* successfully when so many issues are complex and seem overwhelming?
- *build* cultures of people and organisations to initiate, lead and sustain positive change?
- *shift* from “trying to fix problems” to one of “investing in solutions” that are about growth, development, and learning?
- *adopt* a culture of collaboration in an environment of continuous learning?

Successfully addressing these questions begins with examining leaders mental models.

Table 1. Creating culture: Mental models supporting solutions

Table 1 Creating Culture: Mental Models Supporting Solutions	
<p>Naively Simplistic Reactions Focus: Activities</p>	<p>Elegantly Simple Solutions Focus: The Learning Community</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation – Community members view their involvement as important but not necessary critical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engagement – A wide cross section of people, organizations, groups, and businesses serve as stewards of the community and value their commitment to realizing solutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Managing Change – Coping with complexity by presiding over order and consistency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stewarding Change – Coping with change by presiding over the orderly distribution of power. Operating from an orientation of service rather than control.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on Projects – Attention placed on specific actions often in isolation of unique community environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on Systems – Integrating whole parts of a system realizing no issue is addressed in isolation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spending Resources on Prescriptive Actions – Responding to issues with proven/best practices approaches regardless of community uniqueness’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investing in Creating Tailored Solutions – Leveraging a wide range of interdependent resources to develop and implement solutions unique to community issues.

Hogue, Miller, 2005

Leaders externalise their assumptions, beliefs, and mental models and embed them in community visions, missions, goals, structures, and working environments. There is little question mental models become major elements of community culture (Kotter and Heskett 1992). As communities focus on developing and implementing elegantly simple solutions, several common mindsets are evident and serve as a foundation for bridging organisational learning concepts with communities. The common mental model in communities where continuous learning is practised are noticeably different from the mental models found in reactionary, activity driven communities. Table 1 provides examples of the two fields of mental models.

Toward a learning orientation: Community trends, leverage points and transition

Reaching elegantly simple solutions is not theory alone; the notion of communities working together in innovative ways is crucial in today's fast-paced complex societies (Putnam 2002). The learning community, an integrated approach to creating effective working cultures, is much more than a tool for developing quick fixes, creating superficial teams, or spending grant money. Peter Senge (1990) describes learning communities as a group of people collectively enhancing their capacities to produce the outcome they really want to produce. Capacity is improved through collective skills, knowledge and wisdom and support the notion that more can be gained together than apart (Society for Organizational Learning (2002). At the heart of all learning is a deep, transformative process that creates new awarenesses and new capabilities, the building blocks for new practical know-how (Senge and Scharmer 2001).

Building a learning community engages a wide cross section of people, groups, and businesses in the investment of resources toward a common good. The learning community cultivates a strong sense of stewardship where leaders, recognised as "servant leaders" choose to preside over the orderly distribution of power and demonstrate a willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger community. They operate from an orientation of service rather than control (Block 1996). Elevating stewardship brings new levels of accountability that support the flexibility needed to address the ever-changing trends and shifts communities' experience (Block 1996). A learning orientation in communities strengthens all sections of the community including:

1. Individuals gain from enriched quality of life, new interests, and personal fulfillment
2. Individuals gain by maintaining their employability as lifelong learners in a context of rapidly changing jobs
3. Employers gain from building a learning culture in the workplace which feeds continuous improvement and adapting to changing conditions
4. Communities are regenerated and revitalised and become more cohesive and more interesting places to live (Kearns 2002).

Because learning occurs in a growing range of contexts, the role of stewarding partnerships to link these contexts in value-added ways is central to building a learning community (Kearns 2002).

A learning community is one that integrates the economic, social, and cultural development and fosters a sense of continual learning. Learning community strategies provide a means of reinvigorating communities as they adapt to the challenges of the 21st century (Putnam 2002). Central to this premise is the connection of diverse stakeholders sharing a common vision and working in partnership toward common purposes (Kearns 2002). Initiating diverse stakeholders in building a shared vision begins by examining the trends and patterns impacting communities and how these forces can be viewed, re-framed, and used more effectively.

Each community is unique in its own way. Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (1954, 1957). Like Tolstoy's unhappy families, every failed effort is unhappy in its own way. While the unique combination of circumstances, culture, personalities, and interactions will never be replicated from one community to another, there are common patterns and themes that can be shared across communities. These patterns suggest that communities confront similar issues and respond in similar ways. Two recognised approaches communities use include global and local trends, and leverage points. All while incorporating this information into the systematic work culture of the community.

Analysis of global and local trends contributes to the how and why leaders work together and guide development of community solutions. Table 2 presents global trends that reflect shifts in how community strategies are designed and implemented. The data on this table demonstrate the need for communities to work collaboratively with shared visions, operations, and accountability. It demonstrates the importance of developing systematic, flexible, integrated strategies that address root causes rather than symptoms of problems (Loftquist 1983). Addressing underlying root causes demonstrates investment in prevention strategies and developing new community cultures focused on desirable conditions rather than problems (Pittman 1998). Further, it frames the rationale critical to support change and investment in the flexibility needed by funders, policy makers and others who hold accountability.

Table 3. Community leverage points

Table 3 Community Leverage Points			
Leverage Point	Response Focused	Transition	Solution Focused
Mindsets or Organisational Culture	The shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs with a set of assumptions form the backdrop for actions		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick fixes ▪ Write a grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Short and long term planning</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Align resources for common good ▪ Sustainability
Decision-making	The answer to “who decides?” reveals decision-making levels. Are they experienced in judging situations, deciding on optimum alternatives, and acting on their own initiative? Or are they more comfortable with following orders?		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decisions controlled by a few 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Shared decision making</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies/procedures commonly practiced and developed collectively
Organisational Structure and Hierarchy	Layers of management, correlation of horizontal/vertical infrastructure, degrees of formality, and flexibility play significantly in collaboration.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rigidly controlled roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Participatory Teams</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance measured on outcomes
Communication	The degree of communication considered “normal” varies greatly among collaborative partners. This includes: overall tone and level of professionalism, the extent technology is used, and how people refer to each other.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Shared</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging
Management Practices	Information about the partners and their behaviors provides insights into the culture of collaboration, but is key to developing what the culture of the organisation and systems become.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Controlled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Separated</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nimble, flexible
Orientation to Change	The degree partners are comfortable with and ready for change yield important clues in developing a collaborative culture.		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closed – “we have always done it this way” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Tempered risk taking</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explores new options, continuous improvement
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As leaders begin identifying local and global trends impacting and/or emerging in their communities, they often find themselves overwhelmed by information, confused and uncertain about what actions to take, and believe the lack of financial resources limits their capacity to address the problems. In an effort to quickly implement solutions, leaders in activity focused communities often turn to outside funders, such as state, provincial and federal governments, non-profits (NGOs), and for-profit (business) sources. This naively-simplistic approach positions communities with unrealistic funding requirements, accountability measures, and a lack of strategies supporting sustainable solutions. Communities using this approach often find the money runs out just as evidence of effectiveness is emerging.

In contrast, communities where local and global trends are routinely examined and integrated into the culture of their work find themselves better positioned to address existing and emerging issues and having the capacity to develop desired futures (Putnam 2002). Examining trends helps learning communities understand why problems have developed, and where they may go. Strategic solutions are usually framed around underlying root causes of problems in learning communities, compared to activity-focussed communities who more often address symptoms of problems.

Examples of these two approaches are evident in a wide range of communities. Comparison can be made between communities with similar socio-economic rates, population, and ethnic diversity with one community exhibiting high education rates and the other low rates (Tompkins County Youth Services Department 2003).

The low education rate community has a tradition of receiving short-term (less than three years) grants and a history of short-term projects and activities for middle and senior high school youth. The community with high education rates has a culture of high expectations for education that include prenatal education for parents, public education accessible and available for early childhood through college and beyond. Community systems of civic organisations provide a continuum of scholarships, mentoring programs, and educational programs that compliment public school education.

Communities focusing on elegantly simple solutions use leverage points differently from communities who respond in naively simplistic ways. Leverage points and descriptors for response, transition, and solution focuses are identified in Table 3.

Transitioning to elegantly simple solutions requires intentional efforts to disengage from the environment that leads to naïvely reactive responses. Once communities begin aligning mental models and leverage points toward systematic solutions leaders can begin to work collaboratively, and the community begins to change. As leaders make new commitments and forge relationships, new levels of accountability and responsibility for community well-being emerge and the learning community begins its journey. This transition requires leaders and communities to become more aware of opposite forces that thrive in paradoxical relationships. The phenomena of “paradox” is probably one of the least recognised or understood forces existing within organisations and communities (Senge 1990). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines paradox as “one that possesses seemingly contradictory qualities or phases.” For example, breathing is a paradox in that if either inhalation or exhalation were taken away, the simple act of breathing would become impossible. One cannot happen without the other. In organisations and communities the paradox of power is often present — as more is shared or given away, it increases among all who hold and share it.

The paradoxical forces that exist within communities are varied and unique. For example, systems of evaluation are created which hold people individually accountable. But this sacrifices the collaborative synergy that otherwise might be generated. So people are asked to work in teams to gain that synergy. But this creates challenges in determining accountability, as decisions about retention, credit, and compensation are largely done at the individual level. Frequently size, time, competition, action, leadership, and reality appear as paradoxical forces in communities (Wacker and Taylor 2000).

As communities transition to systematic solutions, it is important to recognise and name the paradoxical forces and the leverage points that can address them (Figure 2). This action provides new insights into how challenges can be addressed, and opportunities for how various leverage points might be used to greater advantage.

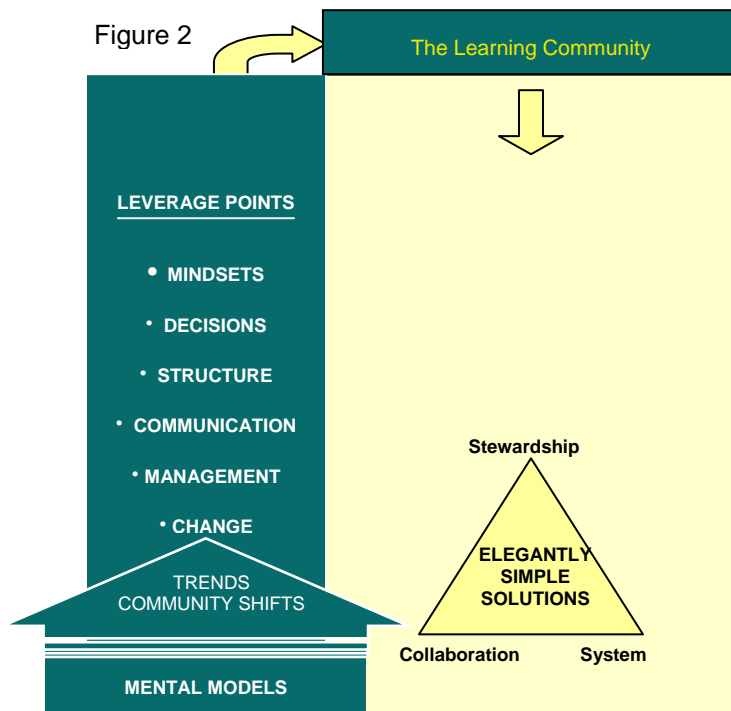


Figure 2. Leverage points to address how communities transition to systematic solutions

Initiating learning communities: Stewardship, collaboration and systems

Learning communities operate in environments of stewardship, collaboration and systematic applications. This environment cultivates the flexibility, agile alliances, innovation, and nimbleness in balance with direction, scope, and outcome focus needed in today's fast-paced complex communities (Figure 2).

Stewardship

While working collaboratively is an investment in mobilising existing energies and resources, interconnectedness of the strategies shape new community systems of working together. A strong sense of stewardship, those placing service above self-interest, generates new levels of advocacy, awareness, education, capacity, and policy supports needed to sustain positive directions

Stewardship frames a mind-set of accountability for the well-being of the larger group, organisation and/or community. As stewards, individuals, groups and collaborations, operate in an environment of service rather than control. As Peter Block (1996) states, "...it (stewardship) is accountability without control or compliance." Two characteristics are evident when stewardship is the core of community collaborative engagement:

1. Members exhibit the vitality, enthusiasm and spirit needed to elevate excellence
2. Every member of the collaborative effort experiences a true sense of meaning and purpose.

Examples of this vitality and purpose can be found in the United States wild-land fire communities. Recent weather patterns and population growth extremes in rural-urban interface areas have placed

people, wildlife, land, and structures at risk of sweeping wild fires. A wide cross-section of individuals, groups, businesses, and organisations are working together to encourage fuel reduction practices, implement new federal, state, and local policies targeting prevention and mitigation practices. They have discovered new ways to balance urban growth with protection of wild-land areas. The needs of the community and the collaboration become symbiotic in that the needs of the community drive the collaboration. In return, the needs of the collaboration drive the community's solutions.

Collaboration

Despite an apparent trend in decreasing social involvement described by Robert Putnam (2001, 2003), a new spirit of working together is surfacing across the United States and the world. This is occurring in the workplace, neighborhoods, among friends and in places of worship. Examples include: new partnerships among environmentalists and industry to address watershed issues in the western United States, and recent work in building multi-jurisdiction partnerships has created the United States Amber Alert system. It addresses the issue of missing and abducted children. Working together successfully occurs in environments where people feel safe and secure coupled with the knowledge that their contribution is valued (Parker 1996).

Collaborative working relationships are fostered when people, their interests and their values are closely tied (Gray 1989). To create and sustain these environments, people are involved in ways that they see success, discuss improvements, and celebrate outcomes. Generally, two types of collaborative working environments exist:

- *Communities of place* — people and organisations gather because of the places where they live, work, play, and/or call home.
- *Communities of interest* — people and organisations gather because of common interests held with little attention paid to geographic boundaries.

The working environment plays a significant role in building and sustaining collaborative efforts regardless of the type of community. The infrastructure of a community can be described as the working environment coupled with its policies and capacities. Collectively, this approach adds value to the community by:

- *improving efficiency* — achieving higher levels of productivity through economies of scale (producing an equivalent level of outputs using fewer resources or more output with the current resources)
- *increasing scope* — building capacity to see more broadly into complex issues, spot emerging trends and needs sooner, advance existing strategies into emerging areas, and create timely new solutions.

Today, individuals and groups accomplish more in a day than entire departments did just a few years ago. This is evident in implementing the Amber Alert in the United States. Within minutes entire systems including internet, radio, roadside message boards and television are notified of a missing

child and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. The Amber Alert mobilises thousands of people within an hour whereas in the past a limited number of police would have been notified in a small geographical area. This pace will become more elevated as the information age becomes an even larger driving force of how people, groups, and communities work together. As the reality of the information age expands and becomes more complex, the movement to implement collaborative systematic efforts becomes more critical. Successful collaborative efforts do not just happen; they use collaboration technology that is based in a principle of stewardship.

Collaboration is a growing necessity among communities and/or organisations sharing common interests. In a slow-moving world, organisations need a good executive in charge. In a moderately paced context, teamwork is necessary to deal with periodic change. However, in a world where information and communication is at a fast pace, teamwork and working collaboratively is enormously helpful almost all the time (Useem 1998).

Systems

Community issues today call for using systematic methods that guide clear, logical, and replicable strategies. The integration of a systematic approach supports the flexibility needed to make adjustments based on new learning (Senge 1990).

As systemic strategies are used, more insight is gained into the interconnectedness existing within communities. The community's strengths and weaknesses, its internal dynamics, and potential synergies become more visible. Communities are then more capable to re-envision how resources and strategies can be better used. New levels of working together and engaging decision makers, concerned citizen groups, and a wider array of funders characterise the re-envisioning process. This level of appreciative inquiry, examining situations in positive new ways, contributes to discovering new leverage points to maximise efforts. These efforts contribute to leaders discovering that the smallest action can have a profound effect on the community.

Peter Senge (1992) states that "for systems thinking to really become a part of the entire organisation (community), a fundamental shift in organisational structure or design will be required." As such, it is important for communities and engaged organisations to recognise and embrace the change needed to support this shift. One key in this shift is seeing that most organisations and communities are built and created on a common organising principle. That principle is linear in design and most often hierarchical in appearance. Organisations built over decades and centuries based on this principle tend to adhere to a common set of deeply held beliefs about "cause and effect" and relationships. One need look no further than the typical organisation chart. The underlying structure is "who do I answer to" and "who answers to me." It says nothing about what the organisation/community is trying to create, nor does it show the interdependencies of the various working relationships.

Examining the wild-land fire community provides an example of organisations undertaking fundamental shifts to become a “system of fire suppression.” As wild fires have become more invasive and expanded to encompass mass acreage; local, state and federal fire agencies have discovered that compartmentalisation of resources and practices enhances competition for funding, reduces or eliminates shared fire fighting practices and procedures, and ultimately creates increased chaos when catastrophic fires occur. New interagency systems have resulted in commonly shared fire suppression policies, procedures and practices, joint budgeting and leveraged resources, and new collaborative efforts placed on preventative fire management.

Systems thinking is a way of viewing the world, including organisations and communities, from a different perspective. This includes seeing the structures, patterns and events, rather than just events themselves. This broader view helps identify the real causes of issues and gives new insights on where (and how) to work. . Systems thinking provides tools that enable communities to look at their circumstances in new ways. Among the advantages of a systems approach are:

- Enhancement of abilities to look holistically at communities and challenges faced.
- Seeing many points of view and that “cause and effect” are not always closely (or directly) related.
- Tests our assumptions and opens us up to the inquiry of new perspectives.

The elements of stewardship, systems thinking and collaboration are key to developing quality learning communities. No one element can operate alone or become isolated from the wide range of stakeholders involved.

Strengthening the learning community: Core principles

Three core principles, underlying beliefs about the culture of the learning community, are fundamental in building a strong sense of community, fostering stewardship, and continually reaching results. The three core principles are: community, servant leadership, and capacity (Figure 3).

Community

Identifying with a shared purpose, a wide cross section of people, groups, organisations and businesses sharing a sense of stewardship and commitment to work collaboratively build the sense of community. Through community, people recognise the significance of creating results that are valued equally within the system and culture of working together. Viewing community with little value is the greatest waste of human potential and social capital (Celente 1997).

Servant leadership

Servant Leadership is best described as an individual and/or group who chooses service as a means of leading. A servant leader elevates accountability and productivity without control or compliance and is a key factor in reducing fragmentation and moving beyond debate (Spears 1997). Practising

servant leadership distributes power, purpose, and rewards among a diversity of people and groups. Servant leaders are characterised by:

1. *Balance of power*: People act on their own choices and lead actions tailored to meet existing and emerging needs. This requires a shift in thinking away from meeting sole monetary needs to meeting broader community goals. — if servant leaders do so, the money will follow. But too often leaders don't behave in this way and operate from a scarcity model.
2. *Primary commitment*: It is to the larger community and does not constrain its attention to individuals or small groups that can breed self-centeredness.
3. *Equal and valued participation*: Each person defines the purpose and culture of the collaborative effort.
4. *Balance and equitable distribution of rewards*: All members share in creating its wealth and expanding its resources.

Servant leaders contribute to the strategic direction of the community by providing a framework for the integration of stewardship. This framework includes identification of desired outcomes, to remind people, groups and the community about the outcomes, and why they are important. They initiate the celebration of successes as they emerge.

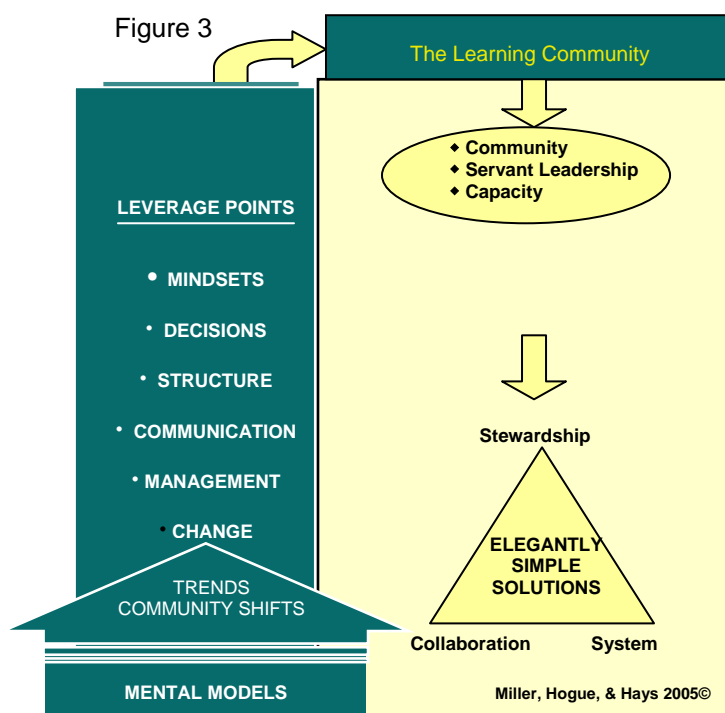


Figure 3. Core principles of strengthening the learning community

Servant leaders continually strengthen the principle of stewardship by building the capacity of individuals and groups to realise, recognise, and engage in roles of service. This is accomplished by creating mental models that support new systems of solutions. New mental models are developed by using tools that encourage different thinking.

Vertical and horizontal thinking are two such tools. Vertical thinking takes in new data and frames it into traditional patterns of problem solving. Lateral thinking takes in new data in relationship to new (and divergent) patterns. Vertical and lateral thinking are complementary skills. Lateral thinking enhances the effectiveness of vertical thinking by expanding the range of possibilities. And vertical thinking develops in greater detail the ideas generated by lateral thinking (Table 4).

Table 4. Differences between vertical and lateral thinking

Table 4 Differences Between Vertical and Lateral Thinking	
Vertical	Lateral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selective, focussed on problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generative, focussed on creativity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is sequential and moves only if there is a clear direction in which to move 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can jump in different directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is analytical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is provocative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rightness is what matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Richness, diversity, & depth are what matters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Categories, classifications, labels are fixed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible, nimble, and not fixed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follows the most likely paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explores the least likely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses the negative to block certain pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welcomes chance intrusions

Table adapted from: De Bono, 1973

Capacity

Capacity for productive change makes a substantive difference in whether or not organisations improve and evolve. Most public and private organisations can be significantly improved at an acceptable cost when a capacity for dealing with transformational change exists (Kotter 1996).

Capacity can be described by establishing and implementing:

- Moderate sense of urgency
- Vision and strategies
- Short term wins
- Broad-based action
- Long term gains and growth
- New approaches in the culture
- Guiding collaborative effort
- A change vision

By embracing core principles of community, servant leadership and capacity, communities are in a better position to mobilise the mental models and leverage points. By doing so they increase their chances of reaching the elegantly simple solutions needed to address today's fast paced complex issues.

Mobilising the learning community: Engagement factors

Building community engagement is about creating a sense and feeling of efficaciousness and the sense that contributions are making a real difference. Community engagement refers to the interdependent connections between governments, citizens and communities on a range of policy, program and service issues (Queensland Dept. of the Premier and Cabinet 2003).

Engagement is both formal and informal, direct and indirect, and encompasses a wide variety of interactions ranging from shared information to interdependent decision-making. Individuals and groups experience graduating levels of commitment as they progress from paying attention to issues with low levels of commitment to participating with moderate levels of commitment.

Four Engagement Factors (Figure 4) have proven most useful in putting the core principles and leverage points to work. They are Dialogue and Discussion, Whole Systems Approach, Force Field Framing and Reframing, and Moving From A to B (Hogue and Miller 2002). These Factors support: 1. discovering new and innovative ways to approach complex issues; 2. self-reflection; 3. gaining solicitation of opinions, perceptions, and ideas; 4. careful listening; and 5. staying open to new ideas.

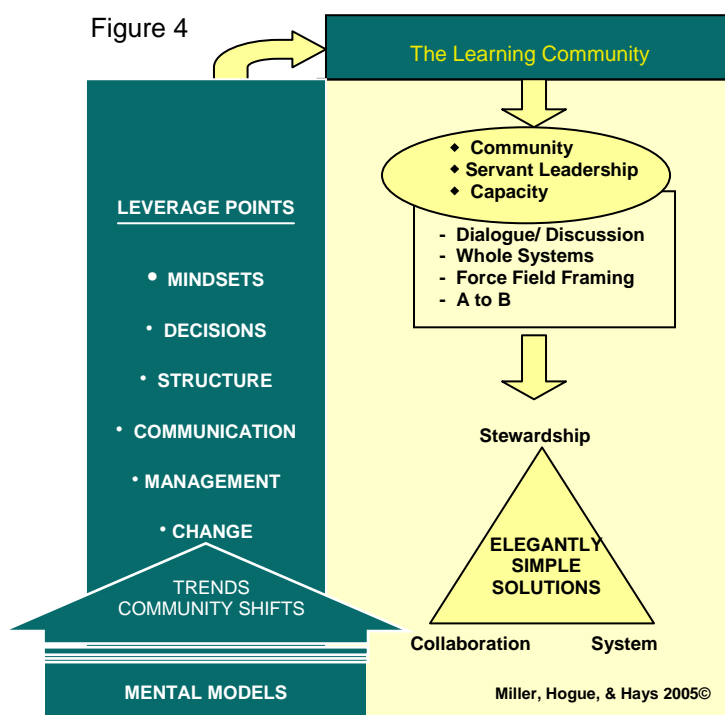


Figure 4. Engagement factors

Dialogue and discussion

Dialogue, the *exploration of ideas*, is critical to developing new solutions. As communities look toward revitalising, their health, be it economic, environmental, safety, or education, there is value in a diverse group of people coming together to explore the issues. By suspending assumptions and

listening intently to others new insights and options emerge. This act of “thinking together” contributes to efforts more in alignment with community needs.

Discussion follows dialogue as people come to a *conclusion or decision* about the best actions to take. Without dialogue, the options for discussion are limited and do not support the movement to a learning environment (For a more detailed reading on this see: *Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together*, William Isaacs 1999).

Whole-systems approach

Answering the question, “How do communities build and sustain more results with more people in more places?”, used to mean investing in new projects and all the start up efforts that come with them. Today, greater sustained success is found when whole-systems approaches are used in practical and realistic ways. A whole-systems approach builds on the interconnectedness of individuals and groups within communities.

Whole-systems approaches utilise all systems available to the members of the collaboration with potential for creation, modification, and reinsertion (Zohar 1997). This approach accomplishes two critical outcomes: It brings maximum experience and wisdom to the table, and in remarkably short time, turns those resources into action. It creates newly aligned systems, goals, roles, and procedures for sustainable results. It accelerates servant leadership, the commitment to and ownership of change by involving a diversity of people in decisions. And, it builds on the good work that is already happening.

Force field framing and reframing

Groups that continually examine the forces working for and against their efforts find themselves in a better position to make adjustments. Generally, four different force fields influence the ongoing work of any collaborative effort:

- supporting forces, e.g. key leaders showing support for the work
- non-supporting forces, e.g. community apathy
- the past, e.g. old guard leadership willing or unwilling to support new efforts
- emerging trends, e.g. 20 per cent population growth projected over 10 years.

Using force fields help to frame and reframe strategies. This process helps individuals and groups identify paradoxical forces, new leverage points, build a sense of value, develop capacity, strengthen leadership, and deepen the level of understanding.

Moving from A to B

An old proverb states, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Moving from A to B provides a process to reach agreement on the end result. “A” represents the current

situation, issue or problem while “B” represents the desired condition, outcome or result (Loftquist 1983).

By using dialogue and skillful discussion, a group can reach some kind of shared understanding of the current situation. This process bridges the many perceptions and individual realities among a diverse group of people. Describing the current situation takes into account the many beliefs and values of the group.

Through dialogue and skillful discussion, establishing B not only builds a shared vision of the future, but begins to frame the strategies and flexibility needed to make positive change. This could be compared to flying between Portland, Oregon and Tokyo, Japan. Though a flight plan is filed for the trip, there is an average of 464 adjustments in the flight plan on each flight. As new information, trends, incidents, resources, etc. emerge while trying to reach “B”, it is critical for collaborative efforts to be flexible enough to adjust their flight plan.

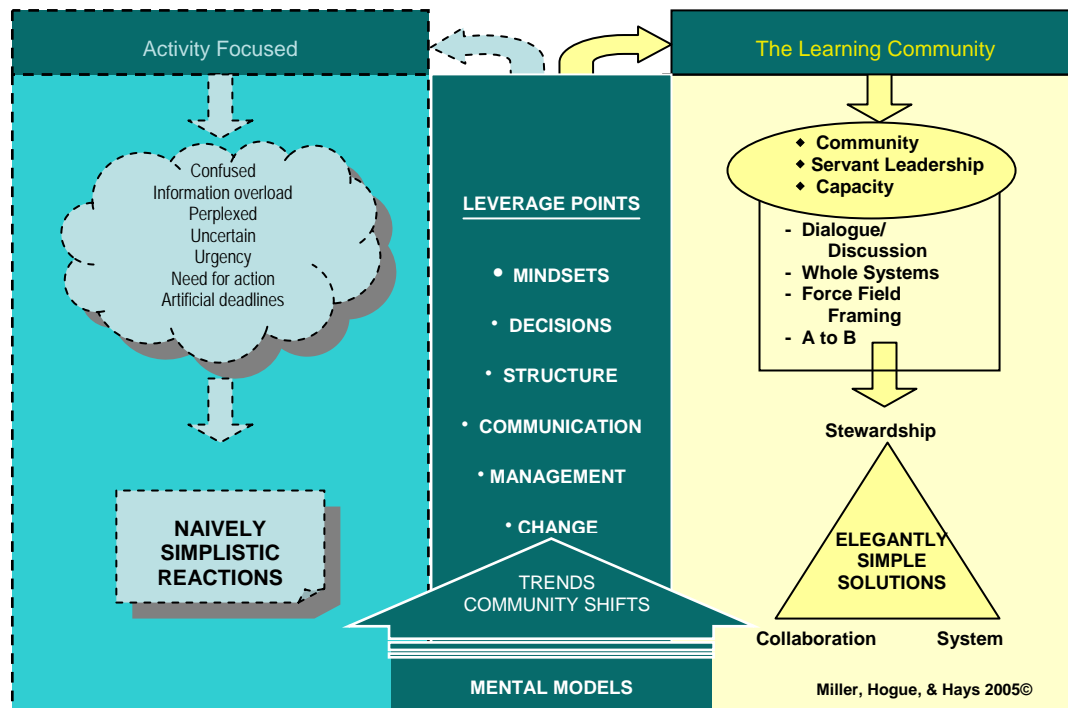
Conclusions

Today, efforts to address complex issues need to shift to a culture of learning. The increasing pace of change calls for a broader approach in building and sustaining a culture of learning among communities, funders, policy leaders and all those affected. This new culture of continuous learning calls for embracing systematic approaches. These approaches require routine examination of global and local trends, determining how they impact the community, and developing new and/or improved ways to define and implement solutions. Developing new systems requires a fundamental shift in organisational structure and design. This brings forth the leverage points that will contribute either to the success or failure of efforts. These leverage points include mindsets, decision-making processes, structure of the collaboration, communication patterns, management styles and willingness to accept change.

Generating leadership that cultivates an environment of learning and systematic solutions comes from a core of stewardship. The underlying value of stewardship, placing service above self-interest, carries the intent to reach a solution regardless of funding limitations, limited policy supports, lack of understanding, and who gets credit. Integrating a sense of stewardship among all partners brings about new levels of communication, mindsets, and management. This shift places new demands on funders to be accountable for their investments and the successes they can bring.

The Core Principles contribute toward a learning community and can shape a new working environment. This environment may use the public library, internet search engines, cellular telephones, conference calls, or focus groups to learn about emerging trends impacting communities. The fundamental tasks of planning, implementing and making mid-course adjustments routinely occur in dialogue and discussion sessions rather than “a leader” telling others what to do. Appreciative Inquiry (AI), asking positive questions so new images of the future can be generated, is becoming a commonly used approach. These powerful images — of ourselves, our organisations, our

communities, and the world — can inspire action and innovation. Dr David L Cooperrider says, “AI asks us to pay special attention to "the best of the past and present" — in order to "ignite the collective imagination of what might be" (2001).



The benefit of the appreciative inquiry approach is that it moves us from a problem solving orientation to something more creative. This generative orientation creates a new energy and taps the passions and energy of community members. It also provides for more latitude in looking at communities from a systems perspective and looking for the deeper root causes rather than addressing symptoms.

As collaboration and systematic approaches move communities toward a learning orientation, individuals, groups, and organisations bound by traditional methods of problem solving will become increasingly frustrated and less effective in finding solutions. As funders, policy makers, and community members increase their investment in reaching positive outcomes, they will find themselves realigning how they do business. They will realise that no two communities or their collaborative efforts are the same, but may in fact be based in common cores of stewardship, sense of knowing and believing in community, and serving as servant leaders to build the capacity to create and sustain elegantly simple solutions.

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Additional resources

There is no one “best” resource to support the work of individuals and groups in community based and inter-organisational collaborative work. The following is intended to provide the reader with as many useful resources that the writers of this document are aware of.

Collaboration Framework ... Addressing Community Capacity: designed to help individuals and practitioners who are starting or need help strengthening a collaboration to achieve clearly defined outcomes; <<http://crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/framework.html>>.

Community-Based Collaboration: Community Wellness Multiplied: a resource which explores and explains the process by which citizens, agencies, organisations and businesses make formal sustained commitments to collaborate to accomplish a shared vision or purpose; <<http://crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/wellness.html>>.

Building Coalitions: a series of fact sheets on coalition formation and maintenance; <<http://ohioline.osu.edu/lines/COALL>>.

Makesfive: "Provision of partnership development and strategic thinking services to private and public sector organizations"; <<http://www.makesfive.com/>>.

Collaboration: Harnessing the Power of Collaboration. Website with links to additional resources; <<http://www.albrycht-mcclure.com/thering/ringzine12.html>>.

Community-Based Collaboratives Research Consortium: The CBCRC is a network of researchers, community collaborative groups, agencies, facilitators and environmental organisations interested in learning about collaborative approaches to natural resources management; <<http://www.cbrc.org/index.html>>.

CollabTools: Collection of sites with vendors of collaboration tools (mostly electronic); <<http://www.voght.com/cgi-bin/pywiki?CollabTools>>.

Collaborative Communities: The website will serve as a resource for civic leaders who are working to build a more collaborative, more inclusive and more effective civic culture in their community; <<http://www.collaborativecommunities.org/>>.

The Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health at The New York Academy of Medicine helps partnerships, funders, and policy makers realise the full potential of collaboration to solve complex problems related to health or any other area; <<http://www.cacsh.org>>. Their project **Pathways to Collaboration** is about "cutting edge" partnerships; <<http://www.pathwaystocollaboration.net>>.

3CE (Coalition for Cooperative Community Economics): This is the initial phase of a possible project to develop an encyclopedia of social innovation that empower people at the grassroots and promote community self-reliance and solidarity; <<http://www.bee-leaf.com/Directory.html>>.

The Institute for Community Research (ICR) uses the tools of research to build community capacity and foster collaborative community-based partnerships. We are helping communities locally and globally to ask better questions and get better answers about the complex problems they face; <<http://www.incommunityresearch.org/>>.

Community Toolbox: The Tool Box provides over 6000 pages of practical skill-building information on over 250 different topics. Topic sections include step-by-step instruction, examples, check-lists, and related resources; <<http://ctb.ku.edu/index.jsp>>.

International Association for Public Participation is an association of members who promote and improve the practice of public participation decisions that affect public interests in nations throughout the world; <<http://www.iap2.org/>>.

Partnership Assessment Tool: Assessing Strategic Partnerships - a Partnership Assessment Tool. The purpose of this tool is to provide a simple, quick and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of partnership working; <http://www.integratedcarenetwork.gov.uk/inthelp_theme.php?id=1>.

Building Effective Partnerships: Lessons from the Adult & Community Learning Fund. Briefing Sheet 14. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). October 2000; <http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/default.htm>.

Partnership Self-Assessment Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Creating and Maintaining Successful Partnerships. East Leeds Primary Care Trust (UK); <http://www.haznet.org.uk/hazs/hazmap/leeds_partner-tool.pdf>.

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Effective Collaboration (2nd ed.) **Strategies for Pursuing Common Goals**. This is a practical resource with guided exercises to assist groups in thinking and working through the multiple issues that successful partnerships must address; <<http://www.rmleadership.com/books.cfm>>. RM Leadership is now out of business. If interested in this resource, contact the authors of this list. ISBN 1-929149-11-5

In Pursuit of Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Public Sector: What is the contribution of theory and research? Hudson B, Hardy B, Henwood M & Wistow G 1999, *Public Management*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 235-60.

Connective Leadership: Managing in a Changing World (Jean Lipman-Blumen). A solid work of research that documents the styles of leadership that are necessary in successful collaborative works. ISBN: 0195134699. Oxford University Press. (1996, 2000); <<http://www.achievingstyles.com/>>.

Leadership for the Common Good Fieldbook: Tools for Working in a Shared-Power World. (Barbara C. Crosby, John M. Bryson and Sharon R. Anderson). Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Packaged on a CD, this is a collection of tools, exercises, Power Point presentations and handout masters; <<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/citizenship/DH8118.html>>.

From the Wilder Foundation: **Collaboration Handbook, Collaboration: What Makes It Work**, 2nd Edition, **The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, Community Visions, Community Solutions: Grantmaking for Comprehensive Impact, The Nimble Collaboration**; <<http://www.wilderpubs.org/index.cfm>>.

Targeted Community Action Planning Toolkit. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The "Toolkit" guides community planners through a process that includes mobilisation, assessment, planning, and implementation; <<http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/tcap/203300.pdf>>.

Changing Roles, Changing Relationships: The New Challenge for Business, Nonprofit Organisations, and Government. Independent Sector et al. (2000). All three sectors have a keen interest in human investment that will yield productive workers and responsible citizens. This requires investing in child care, education, health care, and jobs; <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/leadership/3sector_background.html>.