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COMPLEXITY | LEADERSHIP | TRUTH

Developing leaders who can make sense of complexity

Complexity Leadership Lab: Making Sense of Complexity

OVERVIEW

The Complexity Leadership Lab is a foundational two-day learning experience designed to strengthen leaders' ability to make sense of complex leadership challenges (e.g., organisational, social, cultural, and political). Introducing key concepts, research, and practices from complexity leadership, the Lab engages participants in deep self-reflection, dialogue, and exploration of real-world challenges. Through this process, leaders develop practical approaches to making sense of complexity and begin strengthening their capability to lead self, others, and systems in complex conditions.

The Lab equips leaders with foundational knowledge and establishes a shared language for ongoing development, and serves as a prerequisite for the 10–12 month Complexity Leadership Program. The Complexity Leadership Lab is facilitated by Aiden M. A. Thornton, PhD, a leading expert in complexity leadership (aidenmathornton.com/#about).

The Problem

Many contemporary leadership challenges are truly complex. They are difficult to define clearly, driven by multiple interacting factors, shaped by competing perspectives, and resistant to tried-and-tested solutions. Despite this, many leadership development approaches do not foster the leadership capabilities required to navigate these complex conditions. As a result, there is a gap between the complexity of leadership challenges and leaders' capability to navigate them.

What Makes It Different

- **Real work, not case studies:** Leaders work on real challenges that matter to them and their context(s).

- **An exploration of complexities across multiple domains:** This includes intrapersonal, interpersonal, systemic, and foundational complexities.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the Lab, leaders will have:

- Understood what complexity is and why it matters for leadership
- New insights about their current complexity leadership capabilities and development priorities
- A sense of the complexities they are currently contending with
- Started to develop capability in making sense of complex leadership challenges
- Started to identify one or more complexity leadership practices to develop in the future

- **Based on cutting-edge thought leadership:** Conceptual tools, scientific research, practical application.

- **Focus on sensemaking:** Focuses on how leaders think about complex leadership challenges, not just what they do.

To discuss running a Complexity Leadership Lab, please get in touch at aidenmathornton.com/#contact

Illustrative Example of Lab Design

Typically adapted to the unique needs of the cohort

Duration: 2 days

Audience: Middle leaders, senior leaders, executives, high-potential leaders

Format: In-person preferred, can be delivered online over several modules

Number: Typically suits groups of 10–20 leaders

Price: Typically priced per head, with a sliding scale for NGOs, public sector, and private sector organisations

Sample Agenda

Pework

- Complexity leadership capabilities survey
- Reflection on current complex challenges
- Integrative Leadership Sensemaking Profile (ILSP) and individual debrief (optional)

Day 1

- Expectations and framing
- Why complexity leadership matters
- Introduction to systems and complexity
- Exploration of multiple complex systems
- Identifying different domains in which leaders experience complexity
- Beginning to make sense of complexity
- Selection of priority issues for deeper exploration on Day 2

Day 2

- Reflection on Day 1 insights
- Review of complexity leadership capabilities including strengths and development opportunities
- Deep dive into selected challenges from Day 1 using semi-structured thinking tools
- Fishbowl group coaching sessions
- Synthesis, collective sensemaking, and next steps
- Deliberate daily practices to build complexity muscles over time