UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE
INSTITUTE FOR
SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP

Leadership for a sustainable future

Supporting report

About the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL)

CISL is an impact-led institute within the University of Cambridge that activates leadership globally to transform economies for people, nature and climate. Through its global network and hubs in Cambridge, Cape Town and Brussels, CISL works with leaders and innovators across business, finance and government to accelerate action for a sustainable future. Trusted since 1988 for its rigour and pioneering commitment to learning and collaboration, the Institute creates safe spaces to challenge and support those with the power to act.

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1. Introduction to the supporting report

The purpose of this supporting report is to provide insight into the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership's (CISL's) emerging thinking on leadership for a sustainable future. It accompanies CISL's new leadership framework: *Leadership for a Sustainable Future.* The particular focus of this supporting report is to provide background to the framework, insight into the methods used, explanation for its component parts, and supporting literature for further reference.

Through proposing a deeper understanding of how leadership works than is evident in many contemporary leadership models, this report reflects on the limitations of dominant ways of thinking about leadership in society. It applies this richer insight around how leadership works to the task of identifying the characteristics of leadership that could work for a sustainable future, and identifies currently under-developed leadership capacities that can be nurtured at every level to achieve this purpose. This lays the foundation for a framework designed to help individuals and collectives (teams, projects, organisations and beyond) reflect on and evaluate their own and others' leadership practice. The framework serves as a lens through which current leadership approaches can be assessed, identifying what is fit for purpose, and provides a foundation for exploring how leadership interventions can be better aligned with a sustainable future.

2. Background to and justification for the framework

The last century has seen unprecedented development and increased global prosperity, with science and technology having a profound impact on human life and quality of living. At the same time, there is also overwhelming evidence that the impact of population growth, increased economic activity and the associated impacts of consumption from the 1950s until the present day – referred to as the 'Great Acceleration' (Steffen et al. 2015) – is now clearly discernible at the earth system level, in unprecedented rates of ocean acidification, terrestrial biosphere degradation, tropical forest loss, increasing greenhouse gas levels and associated global temperature increases (Steffen et al. 2015). In 2015, the International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme (IGBP) concluded that "the past 60 years have without doubt seen the most profound transformation of the human relationship with the natural world in the history of humankind" (IGBP 2015).

Moreover, there is mounting evidence that many social system thresholds are also being breached. There has been a notable rise in protectionism, populism and social polarisation, with growing divergence in individual cultural, political and spiritual values (Ipsos 2020), which many commentators attribute to growing inequality (Engler and Weisstanner 2021; UNDESA 2020; Stanley 2022). The benefits of prosperity and quality of life are also far from equally distributed. Current disparities in both income and wealth are extreme (Stanley 2022). Globally, the richest 10 per cent today take home 52 per cent of all income, while the poorest half get just 8.5 per cent (World Inequality Lab 2022). Global wealth appears to be even more unequally distributed than global income, with the world's richest 1 per cent (those with more than $1 million) owning 45.8 per cent of the world's wealth (Credit Suisse 2022). Profound inequalities in access to opportunities persist in both developed and developing countries based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status (UNDESA 2020). While there has generally been a trajectory of lifting people out of poverty over the last century, the World Bank estimated that the pandemic led to 97 million more people being in poverty between 2019 and 2020, representing a historically unprecedented increase in global poverty (Mahler et al. 2021). The interaction of multiple systemic risks – including the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict – is intensifying the pressure[1] and threatens the long-term stability of society, nature and climate.

A growing number of voices (eg McPhearson et al. 2021), including CISL's as an institution, are calling for a radical shift in the systems and practices that dominate society and the economy if we are to secure a sustainable future. In particular, we need a rewiring of how key economic actors – governments, business and finance – operate to create long-term value for all within the earth's natural limits.

Recent years have seen increased action to transform unsustainable systems and practices. Technological, legal, political, financial and socio-cultural solutions are central to this effort and do exist, yet progress remains deeply inadequate. In part, this is because more attention needs to be paid to the leadership capabilities and qualities required at an individual and collective level to make fundamental and sustained progress towards a sustainable future (IDG 2021; Wamsler et al. 2021). CISL's purpose is to activate leadership globally to transform economies for people, nature and climate. We recognise the need to experiment with diverse, creative and bold ideas in order to provide stretch and ambition to achieve this aim. As an academic institution, we are committed to drawing from and contributing to research and evidence that builds confidence and credibility for those wanting to take bold action to achieve a sustainable future.

Effective activation of leadership for a sustainable future means having a deep understanding of how leadership operates. The practice of leadership across the globe – to make an obvious point – is a highly diverse phenomenon. We see a range of characteristics, styles, strategies and skills at work, and individually and collectively we make judgements about how effective we understand this leadership to be. In making those judgements, we draw on particular assumptions about how leadership works and what 'good' looks like – assumptions that are shaped by the leadership models we have encountered through popular media and literature, formal education, dedicated leadership training, and lived experience in organisations and communities.

The starting point for this work is that many dominant ways of thinking about leadership fall short in providing an adequate insight into how leadership works. Specifically, they tend to default to an understanding of leadership that focuses disproportionately on personal purpose, charisma and skills of an individual 'leader' as well as their approach to engagement with others. These are valuable qualities and behaviours, but alone they privilege a particular and

highly individual understanding of leadership. Contemporary models have also tended to be curiously silent about the ultimate purpose of leadership. Leadership effectiveness is often discussed in terms of improved collaboration, employee motivation, readiness for change and ability to innovate for instance, but without explicit reflection on the ultimate ends to which these more 'intermediate' aims are applied. At a practical level, without explicit reflection on the ultimate purpose of leadership and its contribution to desirable societal outcomes, goals like commercial performance, growth potential and financial returns tend to be elevated (explicitly or implicitly) to the status of ultimate measures of success within organisational settings. This is not to say that good financial management is unimportant, but the absence of explicit reflection on what it ultimately is in service of means that organisational performance risks being inadequately aligned with positive outcomes for people, nature and climate. Finally, many contemporary leadership models prioritise content over context, offering generic insights into leadership skills and behaviours, disembodied from the rich cultures, places and history in which all leadership is embedded.

The result is that many contemporary leadership models are not suited to the complex and uncertain reality in which individuals, communities and organisations operate; nor are they in service of a future that delivers long-term wellbeing for people, nature and climate. Leadership development and training that draws on such models therefore is not equipping individuals or organisations with the capabilities to contribute to change for a sustainable future.

In contrast, CISL's framework uses a broader and richer understanding of how leadership works in practice and applies this to the task of identifying the characteristics of leadership that could work for a sustainable future in specific contexts. Research has shown with increasing clarity that there are multiple lenses through which leadership can be understood. Leadership is increasingly seen as not simply a set of capabilities possessed by an individual or a position held but also:

- a process – a dynamic, collective and creative process of influence that shapes behaviour and organisational culture
- requiring a purpose – a clear, meaningful goal that inspires leaders and followers to operate in service of specific ends
- place or context specific – embedded in and shaped by particular times and places, at both a broad level, eg economic and social trends, and more specifically, eg local cultures and values.

Paying attention to the **why** (purpose), **how** (process) and **where** (context) of leadership, as well as **who**, can help develop our understanding of leadership as:

"a dynamic social process within a specific place (context), which maximises the contribution of others towards the achievement of a meaningful purpose".

Beginning with this understanding, the first ambition of CISL's leadership framework is to explore and articulate the nature of the leadership that supports and works for a sustainable future. The aim is to identify the leadership characteristics – in terms of purpose and principles – that emerging evidence suggests have potential to achieve positive outcomes for people, nature and climate. It is important to note that these are expressed as characteristics of leadership, rather than defaulting to the leader as a person, reflecting a more relational and collective understanding of leadership.

The second ambition is to unpack what these leadership characteristics might mean for specific agents of leadership. Agency here is understood at the personal level but also the collective level. The interactions of individuals at a multiplicity of scales – from teams to projects to organisations and broader social movements – bring energy and agency. The framework therefore identifies capacities – expressed as mindsets and practices – that might be cultivated and expressed at all levels, which will support the nature of leadership required for a sustainable future. The focus is on expanding leadership capacity. It is not about abandoning traditional leadership skills but directing attention to the capabilities that have historically been under-explored and are emerging as critical for leadership in the 21st century.

The final ambition of the framework is to ensure that any understanding of the characteristics and capacities of leadership for a sustainable future is rooted in context, or place, paying adequate attention to how geography, history and culture shape their expression and particular manifestation. As such, the framework is designed to be applied in ways that explore how the purpose and principles of leadership 'knit together' in different contexts and cultures, and how the identified mindsets and practices are expressed and applied in different situations.

The resulting framework is designed to help individuals and collectives (teams, projects, organisations and beyond) reflect on and evaluate their own and others' leadership practice.

Identifying particular mindsets and practices provides a starting point for leadership development interventions, particularly at the collective level. Drawing attention to the importance of place reminds agents of leadership to pay at least as much attention to context as to content as they apply the framework in practice.

Thoughtful practitioners embrace at least one of these dimensions – process, purpose and place (context) – in their work, and CISL has drawn from and been inspired by these insights. The particular value of this framework is that it brings together the relational nature of leadership, the importance of purpose, and the significance of place and context into a comprehensive yet accessible approach, designed to be used by individuals and groups at every level.

This report now sets out the underpinning method for the development of the framework, justifies the component parts of the framework, and provides an overview of the foundational thinking and emerging evidence base for each of the component parts.

3. Method

The framework was developed during a two-year iterative process, blending extensive literature review with rounds of consultation and review with academics and leadership development practitioners. It represents a fusion of academic and practitioner-based insights.

The starting point for the work was CISL's existing publication *Rewiring Leadership: The future we want*, *the leadership we need*, which made the case for a purpose-driven approach to leadership and identified specific thinking, values and practices expressed in the Cambridge Impact Leadership Model (CISL 2018). Feedback collected from over 100 respondents from diverse geographies and sectors, with responsibility for leadership on sustainability in their organisations,[2] suggested that the call for purpose-driven leadership was timely and important, that the emphasis on continual reflection and (un)learning was critical, but that there were some capabilities not covered by the existing thinking, values and practice. At the same time, a small working group within CISL tasked with evolving the leadership content for the organisation felt that more could be done to ground the leadership work in a richer understanding of existing research and practitioner insights, with a view to translating it into practical insight and recommendations for those practising leadership.

The small working group from CISL and its wider network used an early literature review of 60 publications combined with tacit knowledge of leadership development and practice for the last two decades to identify 12 potential characteristics of leadership for a sustainable future. These were then tested – along with questions about the broader leadership context pre- and post-COVID – through a survey distributed to senior organisational leaders from CISL's global network and through a targeted LinkedIn campaign.

Over 40 survey responses were elicited (from organisations representing 20 sectors and multiple geographies), and the results then informed a second literature review of a further 300 publications (representing an extensive, if not exhaustive or systematic, study). The aim of this literature review was three-fold: (i) to use a broad range of leadership research to inform the core component parts of the leadership framework from a structural perspective; (ii) to access a broad range of both academic and practitioner insights into the leadership characteristics and associated leadership capabilities showing some potential to achieve outcomes for people, nature and climate; and (iii) to begin to pull together the emerging evidence

base for these characteristics and capabilities being associated with 'effective leadership', ie a credible contribution to the field, or contributing to a 'sustainable future', eg through pro-environmental or pro-social behaviours.

On this last aim it is worth noting that, as we were deliberately interested in departures from traditional ways of understanding leadership, the evidence base is more emergent and less robust than for more established theories. For instance, Begg concludes that "most of the leadership industry is based around individual level parameters of development and impact" (2020, 6), while more collective and systems-based approaches represent a more recent understanding of leadership, which is also harder to research. As such, we were looking for broader datasets, case studies and even more local anecdotal evidence – what Begg (2020, 20) refers to as "portraits of leadership at work" – that provide signals and indications that the identified characteristics and capabilities are worthy of further exploration and testing in the future.

The review was used by the working group to confirm the structural components of the leadership framework, and refine the 12 principles into seven, each accompanied by supporting mindsets and practices that could be applied at a range of levels from the personal to organisational and beyond.

Feedback was gleaned from two internal stakeholder groups (with leadership development experience across a range of sectors and geographies), testing with mid-career and senior professionals from a range of sectors and geographies on various CISL programmes, and an initial round of peer review with selected external academic and practitioner contacts. This feedback prompted further refinement of the seven principles into a purpose and four principles, each with supporting mindsets and practices, with attention being paid to the importance of place (context). A further round of peer review with an extended group of academics and practitioners prompted further enhancements.

The work remains an iterative process as we seek to stress-test the leadership framework in various contexts as well as continue to gather and contribute to the evidence base, and refine the thinking.

Before we turn to an explanation for the chosen structure and component parts of the framework, the following section sets out a summary of the review of leadership research, which strongly influenced these decisions.

4. Understanding leadership: a review of the literature

The first key building block in developing CISL's leadership framework was to establish a robust understanding of leadership as a phenomenon. Leadership scholarship and research over the last half century sheds light on the range of 'mental models' held about leadership. Senge (2006) describes mental models as "deeply held internal images of how the world works … images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting". As Senge notes, we are not always consciously aware of our mental models nor the effects they have on our behaviour. Different mental models of leadership can have a profound impact on our expectations of leadership, how we make sense of leadership effectiveness (or otherwise) and how we seek to develop leadership capacity. Pursuing a sustainable future requires us to examine critically the mental models of leadership that have dominated in previous generations and consider (a) whether those traditional mental models accurately reflect and offer sufficient explanatory power for how change happens, and (b) whether alternative mental models offer more promise for leading change effectively in the complex reality of today's societies.

4.1 The who of leadership: leadership as person and position

For many people, it is natural to gravitate towards a mental model of leadership as the individual leader: the **who** of leadership. As such, when we look to make sense of change, we look for the visible 'hero' (or 'villain') and our efforts to nurture leadership focus on interventions at the individual level, seeking to identify the traits, mindsets, charisma or influence mechanisms employed to 'transform' followers, which equip those individuals to have impact. There is a multiplicity of insights here, not least the charismatic or transformative schools of leadership theory (epitomised by the work of James MacGregor Burns, Bernard Morris Bass, Robert House etc), which have profoundly shaped leadership scholarship and indeed practice over the last 50 years. But a focus on the **who** of leadership can reinforce a heroic model of leadership, often paying limited regard to context. Scholars describe the 'romance' of leadership (Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich 1985) where followers over-attribute success or failure to an individual, rather than recognising more complex dynamics at play.

In light of this, other leadership scholars argue that there are multiple lenses through which leadership can be understood, which provide a richer understanding of the dynamics of leadership and how it plays out in specific contexts. This is not to diminish the role of individuals; rather it is to better inform what capacities individuals might need collectively to exercise leadership, and indeed to embrace a broader understanding of agency beyond the individual that embraces a collective energy and dynamic. Grint (2010) identifies four ways of understanding leadership: as person, result, position and process. Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011) add 'purpose' as a dimension and Jackson and Parry (2018), after rebranding 'result' as 'performance', add 'place' – meaning the temporal and geographical context in which leadership plays out. Building on these helpful insights, we argue that by paying attention to the **why** (purpose), **how** (process) and **where** (place – both time and space) of leadership, as well as **who** (person and position), we can develop a much richer and multi-faceted understanding of leadership.

4.2 The why of leadership: leadership as purpose

The concept of purpose has gained considerable traction in the last few years. As a field in leadership research however, it is relatively new. With some notable exceptions grounded in business ethics, and the work of Greenleaf (1977; 2015) on servant leadership and Burns (1978) on transformational leadership, Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011) conclude that "the nature and manifestation of societal purpose in leadership practice has been generally and regretfully overlooked" (320). Beerel (2021) likewise concludes that "many contemporary leadership books focus on 'how' to be a certain type of leader without any acknowledgement of the goal or purpose of leadership" (83). She observes that there is often confusion between the means and ends of leadership: "Instrumental means, such as being empathetic or collaborative, are frequently substituted for terminal ends, such as a purpose or goal" (83). Without defining this purpose or goal however, it is impossible to adjudicate effective performance. As such, Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011) argue for a focus on leadership as purpose. Indeed some commentators have taken this further to propose that "common purpose, rather than any particular individual, is the invisible leader that inspires leaders and followers to take action on its behalf" (Hickman and Sorenson 2013, 1).

At one level, purpose can simply mean a sense of direction, alignment and commitment (CCL 2020), whatever the collective goal might be. Beerel (2021) explores the prime purpose of leadership as initiating or directing movement. More profoundly though, Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011) draw on the work of the moral philosopher MacIntyre (2004) to explore purpose in light of the Aristotelian notion of 'telos' – contributing to the good for humankind. It is this sense of purpose applied to organisational leadership that is reflected in the work of Ebert, Hurth and Prabhu (2018) who define organisational purpose as "its meaningful and enduring reason to exist", the later work of Kempster and Jackson (2021) who examine the leadership responsibility of organisations to realise value for all stakeholders, and the work of Hurth and Vrettos (2021) who coin the term "meta-purpose" to describe the broader societal purpose for organisations. No doubt these are complex and contested areas. In seeking to explore what is 'worthy' (Kempster, Jackson, and Conroy 2011), these debates are inherently moral, and scholars are right to be attuned to asymmetric power dynamics that have privileged certain groups in defining purportedly universal notions of the 'good' at the expense of other understandings, which then necessarily shapes what constitutes effective leadership 'performance' and for whom. This is why the context or 'place' of leadership is a fundamental part of any discussion about purpose. Nonetheless, the **why** of leadership is a critical – if not the critical – question that needs to be asked and addressed.

4.3 The how of leadership: leadership as process

Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) argue that "it is in following that leadership is constructed" (572) and this has spawned a whole field of leadership studies around followership and, perhaps more significantly, a shift away from leadership being about 'leaders' and more as a dynamic process of leading and following. By focusing on this 'how' of leadership, our mental model shifts to consider leadership "not as a trait or behaviour of an individual or follower, but as a phenomenon generated in the interactions among people acting in context" (Fairhurst 2007; quoted in Jackson and Parry 2018, 56), ie what goes on in the "spaces" between those included in the practice of leadership (Kennedy et al. 2012). Complexity leadership theory for instance focuses on complex relationships and network interaction (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009), arguing that sometimes unexpected outcomes "emerge from a synergy of social interactions within a complex environment" (Towler 2020). Such insights are a notable departure from traditional models of leadership, the latter of which are deemed "insufficient for understanding the dynamic, distributed, and contextual nature of leadership in organizations" (Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009, 631). They can also have profound implications for leadership development which, as Drath et al. (2008) observe, becomes less about "[h]ow can individuals develop the requisite skills, knowledge, and behaviour to influence and lead others?" and more about the "developmental processes in which the whole of a collective engages: …that is, the development of a leadership culture…the capacity for a collective to create shared commitment, learn from its own conflicts, and engage in dialogue" (649). In short, the **how** of leadership is understood as a dynamic, collective and creative process.

4.4 The where of leadership: leadership through place (context)

Acknowledging the challenges inherent in agreeing the purpose and goal(s) of leadership emphasises the importance of context – the **where** of leadership. As Kempster and Jackson (2021) note, there is a very close relationship between purpose and place. This is in part about geography: "the process by which people draw meaning and ownership, energy and commitment because of a strong sense of alignment with the place in which they live and work" (Kempster and Jackson 2021, 50; see also Jackson and Parry 2018), and in part about time and history, for example the historical dynamics that have led to a particular contemporary situation or issue. Jackson and Parry (2018) credit Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002) with identifying the need to recognise and theorise context in leadership.

A helpful definition is that offered by Rousseau and Fried (2001, 1) who describe how "[t]he term 'context' comes from a Latin root meaning 'to knit together' or 'to make a connection'". Liden and Antonakis (2009) suggest that context is best understood as "milieu – the social and physical environment – in which leadership is observed" (1,587), or as McManus and Perruci (2015) argue, the environmental context shaped by cultural values and norms. One key outworking of an appreciation of context therefore is to move towards what Jackson and Parry (2018) refer to as a more "cultured" understanding of leadership. It is of course possible to approach culture in a rather static, 'essential' way, and studies like the World Values Survey every five years, and the 2004 Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research project, have been accused of straying into "cultural essentialism", even "potential racism" (Dervin, Moloney, and Simpson 2020). A more nuanced appreciation therefore of the **where** of leadership might involve "cultural sensemaking" with a strong emphasis on context and cultural history (Osland and Bird 2000) in order to understand how and why leadership operates as it does.

Johns (2006) articulates context as operating at two levels: the omnibus context, which tells a 'story' that describes broad features of the situation – the what, who, where, when and why; and the discrete context, which refers to the particular contextual variables that shape behaviour and attitudes, including the task context, the social context and the physical context (quoted in Mainemelis 2019). In short, context is multi-faceted and requires both focused investigation to produce "thick description of its essential properties" (Rousseau and Fried 2001, 7) and a broader sense of which fundamental dimensions might explain variation in how leadership is practised (Mainemelis 2019).

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With these insights in mind therefore, CISL's leadership framework starts with an understanding of leadership as:

"a dynamic social process within a specific place (context), which maximises the contribution of others towards the achievement of a meaningful purpose".

This understanding acknowledges the part that agents (individual or collective) play in leadership but also emphasises several other dimensions: leadership as a social process, a sense of collective movement, the significance of purpose and direction, the achievement of results or impact, and the importance of time and place (context) in understanding how leadership dynamics play out, or as Kempster and Jackson (2021, 47) neatly summarise: "leadership for what, why, where, for whom and how". This richer picture of leadership is a notable departure from traditional understandings of leadership as primarily embodied in the leader, and lies at the heart of this leadership framework.

5.   Overview of component parts of the leadership framework

Having recognised the value of understanding leadership as more than a person and position – but also process, purpose and place (context) – it is important that CISL's leadership framework does not default to immediate identification of traits and behaviours at an individual level. The following key components are therefore adopted:

Purpose: An ultimate goal for leadership, providing direction, meaning and accountability.

Principles: The core characteristics of the leadership showing most potential to work for a sustainable future. While interconnected but not mutually exclusive, each reflects an area of sufficient distinctiveness and conceptual integrity to warrant its own label. This also serves a pedagogical purpose in helping to make sense of a complex landscape. The four principles identified are: connected, collaborative, creative and courageous.

Together the purpose and principles comprise the nature and characteristics of leadership as a collective phenomenon that could work for a sustainable future. These two components are a specific response to understanding leadership as purpose and process, or the 'why' and 'how' of leadership.

The framework then unpacks what these leadership characteristics might mean for the interactions of individuals at a range of scales – teams, projects, organisations and beyond. Although leadership is a collective phenomenon, there are nonetheless agents – individual and collective – who activate such leadership. The framework therefore also identifies the capacities – expressed as mindsets and practices – that might be cultivated at all levels, which will support the characteristics of leadership required for a sustainable future. The focus is on highlighting those capacities that have historically been under-developed but are emerging as essential for a sustainable future, rather than providing a comprehensive list of every potential leadership capacity.

Mindset: A way of thinking and being, which incorporates knowledge, attitudes, values and emotions, at an individual or collective level. This builds on the insights of Reed and Stolz (2013, 6) who define mindset as "the internal lens through which you navigate life", while Rimanoczy (2013) suggests this "way of thinking and being" – or what Dweck (2006) refers to as a "personal paradigm" – is formed by "emotions, tacit and explicit knowledge".

Practices: The skills (specific capabilities) and agency (the capacity to act), both individually and collectively. Mindsets inevitably affect behaviour, a relationship evident in multiple contexts (eg Gomes, Moreira, and Ometto 2022; Crick 2021; Kouzes and Posner 2019) although the relationship is neither completely straightforward nor linear (see for example Paxton and Van Stralen 2015; Güntner, Schaninger, and Sperling 2018). It is possible, however, to identify particular leadership practices (Reed and Stolz 2013, 6) that are likely to flow out of – or at least be consistent with – different leadership mindsets.

These components are a specific response to recognising the continued importance and agency of the 'who' of leadership, but broadening this out to include collective agents as well as individuals who activate the process of leadership.

The final component reflects the understanding that the purpose, principles, and supporting mindsets and practices will inevitably manifest themselves in specific ways in different contexts and places. The term 'place' is used here in the broadest sense – beyond simply geography – to reflect the multiple ways in which leadership is situated.

Place: The various dimensions of context at both a broad and detailed level, over space and time, which shape how and why leadership is practised.

This component reflects an understanding of leadership as place (context) and the importance of the 'where' of leadership.

Together, these components comprise CISL's Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework, as laid out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework

Purpose
An ultimate goal for leadership, providing direction, meaning and accountability.

Principles
The core characteristics of leadership showing most potential to work for a sustainable future.

Connected
Leadership that navigates the complexity and connectedness of life and nurtures the relationships that underpin the systems on which we all depend.

Collaborative
Leadership that is inclusive and works in alliance with others across boundaries to achieve collective change.

Creative
Leadership that experiments and innovates with curiosity, optimism and purpose.

Courageous
Leadership that knows the values that it stands for and nurtures the courage, integrity and resilience to pursue societal good.

Place
The various dimensions of context at both a broad and detailed level, over space and time, which shape how and why leadership is practised.

6. Supporting literature and evidence

This final section seeks to pull together some of the supporting literature, underpinning theory and emerging evidence base for the purpose and four principles, associated mindsets and practices, and the importance of place (context) that together comprise CISL's leadership framework. The potential range of sources is vast and therefore the following does not in any way claim to be an exhaustive or even systematic review, although it was extensive to the extent that it engaged with over 300 references and data points. It represents a starting point regarding the supporting foundation and evidence base for the leadership framework.

6.1 Purpose: leadership in service of a sustainable future

Leadership that is in service of and accountable for achieving a sustainable future.

The exploration of leadership scholarship unpacked in section 4 made the case for the **why** of leadership being a critical – if not the critical – question that needs to be asked and addressed. If leadership is not consciously in service of something and/or for someone, it is hard to determine the nature of the leadership required, the skills and capacities that might enable that leadership, or how one might evaluate the performance of such leadership. As Kempster and Jackson (2021) argue, there is a need to consider the *responsibilities* of those who lead, giving primary attention to what they seek to achieve, why, for whom and where.

CISL's framework is premised on leadership ultimately in service of a sustainable future. This represents the 'meta-purpose' (Hurth and Vrettos 2021) – an articulation of the 'ultimate ends' or 'ultimate good' to which all leadership should be aligned and against which it will be held accountable as the measure of its effectiveness. CISL's framework is also premised on an understanding of leadership being *purposeful* in nature, ie consciously shaped and directed by this meta-purpose and comprising a strategic contribution to this 'ultimate good'.

Picking up first on the idea of a meta-purpose, a number of contributions have emerged seeking to articulate this 'ultimate end' in a meaningful and accessible way. Examples include 'thriving' (Visser 2022; Raworth 2017), 'flourishing' (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman 2013), 'regenerative' (Kempster and Jackson 2021; Visser 2022), 'the wellbeing of all that is alive, now and in the future' (Beerel 2021), and 'long-term wellbeing for all people and planet' (Hurth and Vrettos 2021). This latter definition is the one adopted in the global standard for *Purpose-Driven Organisations*, PAS 808 – a guidance document produced by the British Standards Institution (BSI 2022).

In seeking to articulate such 'ultimate goods', it is important to recognise that all language carries meaning and references beyond itself, and that care must be taken to interrogate the cultural assumptions that shape our understanding of such terms and not assume they are universally held. This is why – as Kempster and Jackson (2021) argue – 'where' and 'for whom' are also important complementary questions to ask, as what is deemed 'good' gains practical meaning in specific circumstances, grounded in different value sets, worldviews and cultural contexts (CISL 2016). Nonetheless, the very task of considering the 'ultimate ends' (and indeed the ultimate means that enable the meeting of those ends) when for so long decisions about the purpose and functioning of economies, societies, governments and organisations have neglected these questions (Hurth and Vrettos 2021, building on the work of Daly 1973), is a crucial and valuable exercise. Indeed, simply asking the question about the ultimate desired 'end' of leadership represents a radical and profound departure from traditional approaches to leadership development that pay scant attention to the 'why'.

In this paper, the shorthand 'sustainable future' is proposed as a meta-purpose for leadership. While acknowledging that sustainability is a contested concept (Jacobs 1999), in line with the international standard ISO 37000:2021 on governance of organisations, we use sustainability to mean a "state of the global system, including environmental, social and economic aspects, in which the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (ISO 2021). As the global standard for Purpose-Driven Organisations PAS 808 states, 'sustainability' can be treated as an expression of the ultimate goal of society as a whole (BSI 2022, 6). Sustainability reflects a long-term perspective, which seeks to protect and restore the natural and social systems on which all wellbeing for everyone is based. There is growing acceptance that thriving economies and societies are critically

dependent on a foundation of both natural capital and systems (the world's stock of natural resources and stable earth systems) and human and social capital and systems (flourishing communities and strong, resilient social institutions) (see Hurth and Vrettos 2021). One of the more accessible presentations of this idea has been the 'doughnut' model articulated by Raworth (2017): an ecological ceiling informed by the work of Rockström et al. (2009) and updated by Steffen et al. (2015) on planetary boundaries which aimed to define the environmental limits within which humanity can safely operate; and a social foundation below which lie shortfalls in wellbeing, such as hunger, ill health, illiteracy and energy poverty (Raworth 2017).

In embracing this understanding of sustainability, this framework uses 'sustainable future' as an umbrella term for both ecological health and concerns for social justice. As the global standard PAS 808 argues, this is about achieving wellbeing for everyone – not just a few – now and for future generations (BSI 2022). It is worth acknowledging that traditionally 'environmental sustainability' has been conceived of as a desirable social objective alongside (rather than integrated with) 'social justice' (Dobson 1999) and that some sustainability discourses have neglected critical dimensions of justice and fail to reflect the multi-layered nature of the concept (eg Wijsman and Berbés-Blázquez 2022; Menton et al. 2020; Lele 2017; Agyeman 2008; Agyeman and Evans 2004). As such, when articulating 'a sustainable future' as a meta-purpose for leadership, we do so aiming to reflect on the "power dynamics, complex interactions among injustices, and … different 'senses of justice'" that have implications for sustainability (Menton et al. 2020, 1633). This may involve addressing the historical injustices that underpin the foundations on which purposeful leadership for a sustainable future is built, in order to ensure that we are pursuing a good life for all within environmental limits (Hickel 2019; O'Neill et al. 2018) – a goal that is increasingly recognised will take deep transformations to safeguard both human and planetary health (Fanning et al. 2022).

Having identified a meta-purpose for leadership, we now turn to the idea that leadership for a sustainable future will be inherently *purposeful* in nature, ie consciously shaped and directed by this meta-purpose and comprising a strategic contribution to this goal. The whole construct of purpose is that it provides clarity, authenticity and meaning: "a meaningful and enduring reason to exist…, a clear context for daily decision making, and unifies and motivates relevant stakeholders" (Ebert, Hurth, and Prabhu 2018, 4). This includes both inspiration (unlocking creativity and opportunities) and guiding (ensuring the mission and resulting strategy are directed) (ibid).

In a business context, work undertaken by the British Academy into the Future of the Corporation, led by Professor Colin Mayer, describes how a business purpose "identifies how the company assists people, organisations, societies and nations to address the challenges they face, while at the same time avoiding or minimising problems companies might cause and making them more resilient in the process" (British Academy 2019). In a similar vein, CISL's existing publication *Rewiring Leadership: The future we want, the leadership we need* argues that an organisation's purpose needs to be relevant to the nature and scale of the challenges faced by the global economy and society, ie aligned with a meta-purpose of a sustainable future. As the report articulates, for businesses, this will require not simply reacting and adapting to the changing context, but being proactive and effective in transforming their organisations, sectors, value chains and whole economies, to align commercial success with the ultimate goal of delivering positive social and environmental outcomes (CISL 2018). CISL's *Rewiring the Economy: Ten tasks, ten years* (CISL 2017) sets out more detail on what such systemic economic transformation would involve.

Much current leadership practice is focused on accelerating organisational performance (and specifically for those areas for which individuals have particular responsibility and are rewarded to deliver on) by engaging with people and resources to deliver positive outcomes for that organisation and its stakeholders. Purposeful leadership for a sustainable future requires leadership that assists people, organisations, societies and nations to address the challenges they face, through contributing to necessary systemic change, and driving organisational performance and success in line with this. For business leadership, this means finding ways to perform commercially while meeting society's long-term needs in a sustainable way and therefore contributing to the ultimate end of a sustainable future. Such an organisational purpose will also be holistic (relevant to all aspects of an organisation's work), authentic (with full alignment between stated purpose and commercial decisions), central to guiding strategy and actions (shaping decisions and navigating dilemmas) and owned across the organisation (CISL 2018; see also CISL 2020). In short, within the concept is the idea that all available resources – from strategy to data to finance – are oriented towards delivering impact towards the articulated purpose, disclosing progress along the way against evidence-based goals (ibid).

The same principles are equally relevant to individuals in terms of orienting passion, energy, skills and abilities to a worthy ultimate end. As holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl is renowned for arguing, "[s]uccess, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of

one's personal dedication to a cause greater" (1959, 12). Connecting to this cause, articulating your purpose and finding the courage to live, it is the single most important developmental task you can undertake as a leader (Craig and Snook 2014). Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr, the American physician and poet, is quoted as saying that "most of us go to our graves with our music still inside us, unplayed" (ibid). Chavez and Palsule (2019) argue that nurturing purpose is a continual task for leaders in every part of an organisation – developing a "line of sight" between an individual sense of purpose and a broader organisational purpose.

One helpful way of understanding purpose is as "an optimal strategic contribution" (Hurth and Stewart 2022) to a meta-purpose of sustainability. This reflects the idea that purpose is not a one-off definition but a "living, breathing idea" (Chavez and Palsule 2019) which evolves over time depending on opportunity and context. Purposeful leadership at an individual, organisational or broader scale will do the hard work of determining how it might best contribute at any one moment in time, based on the specific context, available resources, particular opportunities and needs, and then orient all its other characteristics and properties to serve a sustainable future through this strategic contribution.

We now turn to explore the four principles, characterising the nature of leadership with potential to contribute to a sustainable future. These four principles reflect an understanding of leadership as a dynamic, collective and creative process, with the associated mindsets and practices being applied at every level, individual and collective.

6.2 Principle 1: Connected leadership

Connected leadership is leadership that navigates the complexity and connected-ness of life, and nurtures the relationships that underpin the systems on which we all depend.

6.2.1 Underpinning thinking

There are a number of related bodies of literature and research that underpin and inform the principle of connected leadership. A key area is the topic of systems and systems thinking. A systems perspective stands in contrast to mental models emerging during the industrial age that have sought to reduce complexity by fragmenting and compartmentalising systems and processes, and pursuing efficiency, predictability and control. While it is worth noting that there are a

number of different schools of systems thinking, ranging from the classic work of Senge (2006) and Meadows (1999) on systems archetypes and leverage points, to the deep evolutionary approach of living systems (Miller 1978),[3] the practitioner Acaroglu (n.d.) summarises that systems thinking involves a shift in mindset away from a linear, structured "mechanical worldview" to a "dynamic, chaotic, interconnected array of relationships and feedback loops". Rather than analysis, which is the breaking down of complexity into manageable components, the goal of systems thinking is synthesis – understanding the whole and the parts at the same time, along with the relationships and the connections that make up the whole (ibid). As such, systems thinking looks to identify patterns of behaviour over time and understand the underlying structures and dynamics that influence those events and patterns (Goodman 1997). It also involves seeing a situation more fully and acknowledging that there are often multiple interventions to a problem (ibid).

Applied to leadership, a systems perspective encourages an understanding of leadership "not only as position and authority but also as an emergent, interactive dynamic—a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating" (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007, 299). While literature around systems thinking, complex adaptive systems and its relevance for leadership has been emerging for the last 40–50 years (at least), it has historically remained largely at the edge of mainstream leadership thinking. In recent years however, such theories are gaining attention and traction because of their increasing relevance for contemporary leadership challenges. It is increasingly recognised that pursuing a sustainable future requires addressing what Rittel and Webber (1973) refer to as "wicked problems", for example poverty, climate change and inequality, where root causes are uncertain because of the social complexity of the issue, where stakeholders hold different values around the challenges, and where collective action is often needed across several sectors to create transformative change (Steidle 2021). As Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) observe, systems leadership is well suited to complex challenges that require collective action, where no single actor is in control. In an organisational context, Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) argue that a systems mindset is fitting for the 'knowledge era', in which "the rapid production of knowledge and innovation is critical to organizational survival" (299) and where complexity is occurring on multiple levels and across many sectors and contexts, with many organisations ill prepared to respond (Uhl-Bien and Arena 2017). Seeing the world through the lens of relationship and interconnection is a wholly appropriate mental model for responding to such complexity.

Building on this, an emerging area of work around 'regenerative' thinking is premised on the importance of (inter)dependency, seeing the world as "built around reciprocal and co-evolutionary relationships, where humans, other living beings and ecosystems rely on one another for health, and shape (and are shaped by) their connections with one another" (Warden 2021). As such, regenerative thinking argues that addressing the interconnected social and environmental challenges we face is dependent on rebalancing and restoring these relationships (ibid). Much of this work is to be found in the practitioner space, although the concept of regeneration has a heritage in development, design, architecture and manufacturing (see Morseletto 2020 for a summary). Applying the concept to leadership and drawing on a living systems approach, practitioners Hutchins and Storm argue that the last couple of centuries have been characterised by fragmentation and disconnection – a "journey of separation" (2019, 5), and their regenerative leadership thesis is premised on a "journey of reconnection" (20) reintegrating imbalances within and around us, a thesis that they apply to: the perspectives of the left and right brain hemispheres (drawing on the work of McGilchrist 2012); the inner (mind) and outer (matter) aspects of self; feminine and masculine; and humanity and nature.

The theme of reconnection has also been at the heart of a growing movement that Palsule and Chavez (2020) refer to as the 'rehumanising' of leadership. Much of this movement has been apparent in the practitioner space, although the emerging evidence base includes academic contributions. Reflecting on the industrial age, renowned leadership expert Margaret Wheatley (2005) observes that "when we conceived of ourselves as machines, we gave up most of what is essential to be human. We created ourselves devoid of spirit, will, passion, compassion, even intelligence" (19). In response, she offers an invitation back to the 'nobility of leadership', "[leading] people back to an understanding of who we are as human beings, to create the conditions for our basic human qualities of generosity, contribution, community, and love to be evoked no matter what" (Wheatley 2017, 38). Such an approach focuses on the quality of relationships, love rather than fear as a driver of behaviour, and service over selfishness. Hofmann (2020) picks up on these themes directly in her exploration of love-based leadership and its role in unleashing human potential, and being human in a world that seems to bow down to the power of money.

The desire to 'rehumanise' leadership and encourage reconnection between people, and with people and nature, is reflected in a growing interest in leadership traditions from diverse cultural contexts, along with spiritual and traditional wisdoms. For instance, Chen and Miller (2011) explore relational leadership

through traditional Chinese thought, in which all entities are understood to exist within the context of one another and in which integration, balance and harmony are valued over distinction and comparison. Their paper examines how this relational mindset shapes interpersonal relationships, communication and temporal considerations. In a Sub-Saharan African context, Sobande (2021) explores the contribution of the African concept of 'ubuntu', which Desmond Tutu, former Emeritus Archbishop of Cape Town, described as: "the essence of being human; it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours".

The desire for reconnection and rehumanising is also reflected in a growing interest in the role of the humanities – philosophy, theology, art, literature, anthropology and history – in informing leadership, alongside more technical skills (Drake 2020; Madsbjerg 2017). Such insights explore the richness, texture and patterns of human experience, providing the opportunity to "climb into different worlds in time and space" (Drake 2020, 6) and developing the empathy, cognitive flexibility and curiosity to see the world from a range of perspectives (Madsbjerg 2017). These approaches emphasise the importance of bringing back meaning and purpose into leadership (Palsule and Chavez 2020).

These approaches also highlight the significance of context and place in shaping such meaning and purpose (Jackson and Parry 2018). The importance of place threads its way through all the above trends regarding the importance of connectedness. In understanding the process of globalisation, Murray and Overton (2014) conclude that "geography be taken more, not less, seriously" (11). Andersson (2021) reflects on how place offers a meaningful lens through which people can connect with the idea of systemic change, concluding that: "[a]lthough our globalised economy — where we have the opportunity to travel to and live and work almost anywhere — has diminished our potential to be connected to place, we humans can still best experience intimacy, connection, consideration and caring for our natural surroundings from a perspective of place". In their work on designing regenerative cultures, Wahl, Orr and Leicester (2016) reflect on the importance of place-based knowledge: "unique cultural expressions, informed by a sense of place and a deep reciprocity with the unique ecological, geological and climatic conditions of that particular place", arguing for approaches that are both locally adapted and globally connected. Billick and Price (2011) similarly advocate place-based approaches in contributing to ecological understanding. From a human perspective, Jackson and Parry (2018) conclude that "[o]ur hopes,

our fears, pain and joys are tied up in places, real or imagined. It's fundamentally human to develop a sense of belonging to a place" (89). Malpas (2006) argues that place is where we find and understand ourselves. In short, in seeking to reconnect with humans and nature, place matters.

6.2.2 Supporting mindsets and practices

Applying this underpinning thinking to the development and practice of leadership, a number of mindsets and associated practices for connected leadership have been identified. First, there is the systems mindset that **embraces the big picture and appreciates the interconnections and relationships between the parts of the whole, seeking insights from multiple perspectives**. Applied at both an individual and organisational level, Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) define 'systems leadership' as an approach that reflects a deep understanding of system dynamics. Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) identify the ability to "see the larger system, building a shared understanding of complex problems" as one of three core capabilities exhibited by systems leaders, while Visser (2022) defines a systemic and holistic thinker as having "the ability to appreciate the interconnectedness and interdependency of the whole system, at all levels, and to recognize how changes to parts of the system affect the whole" (281). Having a "keen sense of being connected with and/or being a part of a larger whole, such as a community, humanity or global ecosystem" is one of the core inner capacities identified through the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) (IDG 2021), as is "understanding of and skills in working with complex and systemic conditions and causalities". In a similar vein, Rimanoczy (2020), whose work informs the Global Compact Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, argues for a systems perspective that "sees the whole" and considers both diversity and interconnectedness, while the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and Russell Reynolds Associates (2020) call for "multilevel systems thinking [that] enables leaders to recognize and understand the complex links across the multi-layered ecosystems they operate in" (13).

Another dimension central to the systems mindset is the approach to complexity, which sees it as something to be "celebrated" rather than controlled, as "that's what makes the world interesting, that's what makes it beautiful, and that's what makes it work" (Meadows 2004). As such, in her classic paper *Dancing with Systems*, Meadows advocates listening to the "beat of a system", paying attention to the way a system behaves and its underlying patterns and structures (ibid). In a similar vein, Westley, Zimmerman and Patton (2007) apply complexity theory to the phenomenon of social innovation, arguing that social innovators

are "adept at seeing … patterns in the interactions around them", can therefore "home in on key simple rules" (43) and then seek to shift these basic rules to encourage a new pattern of interactions. As Rimanoczy (2020) summarises, such an approach is about seeking patterns, flows, processes and feedback loops.

The ability to **see patterns and underlying structures** lays the foundation for **navigating and making sense of complexity**, in order to provide meaning and direction for others. A key concept here in the literature – applied at both an individual and organisational level – is that of sensemaking. At its most basic, sensemaking is about "making something sensible" (Weick 1995, 16). Ancona (2012) describes sensemaking as a key leadership capability for today's complex and dynamic world. Acknowledging that leadership is a notoriously slippery concept, Pye (2005) identifies a fundamental task in the management of meaning, specifically meaning that as Beerel (2021) argues it is plausible and sufficient as opposed to accurate and complete – Madsbjerg (2017) likens it to following a North Star rather than a global positioning system (GPS) – and crucially, desirable. As Smircich and Morgan (1982) argue, to sense make is "to manage meaning in a way that individuals orient themselves to the achievement of *desirable ends*" (262; *emphasis added*). These authors advocate that leadership involves a process of defining reality in ways that resonate, interpreting the significance of the issues, and grounding subsequent action. Put simply, "[s]ensemaking focuses on the question: 'What is the story here?'" (Beerel 2021, 146), echoing the language used in the IDGs around "skills in seeing patterns, structuring the unknown and being able to consciously create stories" (IDG 2021). **Creating these stories that make sense of complexity and bring clarity, meaning and direction for others** is an important leadership capability. From a practitioner perspective, Saltmarshe (2018) argues that stories play a vital role in helping us see systemically – looking at the elements, interconnections and wider purposes of systems – and acting systemically.

Sensemaking can be applied at a range of scales, from global problems through to why a team is not functioning, and can be done by individuals or as an organisational (or indeed pan-organisational) process. Ancona (2012) argues that sensemaking can be broken down into three core elements: exploring the wider system, creating a map of the current situation, and acting to change the system to learn more about it. These elements build on a range of practices identified by Weick (1995) that equip both individuals and organisations to develop their capacity for sensemaking: seeking out many sources of data – quantitative and qualitative – involving others, moving beyond stereotypes, being sensitive to those parts of the organisation closest to the front line (which Westley, Zimmerman and Patton (2007) describe as "local sensors"), creating a map or story that

emerges rather than forcing old frameworks, asking new questions, using images, metaphors and stories, understanding personal impact on the system, and being open to improvise, reinvent and explore. While not a new idea, practising leadership in a way that prioritises relationships, interconnections, complexity, and seeing the whole as well as the parts, rather than simply seeking to deconstruct, break down and analyse, would represent a radical departure from many of the skillsets nurtured through traditional leadership development and practised in contemporary leadership.

Another related critical mindset for connected leadership is an understanding and **appreciation of our critical dependency on each other, wider society and nature for thriving economies, lives and places**. In its work defining a global standard for *Purpose-Driven Organisations*, PAS 808 is premised on the underpinning worldviews that humans are dependent on and connected with nature, and that humans are inter-dependent. These worldviews are based on the understanding that flourishing natural and social systems provide the essential or "ultimate means" for the achievement of long-term wellbeing, equality, equity and citizenship (the "ultimate ends") (BSI 2022, 8). From these worldviews then flow organisational values for creating "deep and **nurturing relationships** between humans and nature" and "between stakeholders and with society" (15), and organisational practices that build **empathy**, compassion and kindness towards both nature and the lives of others as a decision-making guide (ibid). Indeed, PAS 808 advocates building enough resources into planning for acts of human kindness that support the wellbeing of others, creating the space to give without the need to receive, outside of organisational strategy and without the need for justification (ibid).

The importance of empathy, compassion and kindness towards both nature and other humans at an organisational level (as expressed in PAS 808) is mirrored in literature exploring connection at a more personal level or with individual 'leaders' in mind. In a recent paper by Ryan et al. (2023) exploring principles for regenerative business, empathetic leadership is at the core. The authors draw on the work of Gibbons (2020) to explore the idea of 'inner sustainability', connecting people with their inner-selves, with others and with nature. In the context of nature, Edwards and Bekoff (2019) explore the power of developing an emotional connection to nature and integrating nature into daily living. They argue that this connection, which often starts during our childhood, plays a critical role in how we care for the natural world later in life. In a similar vein, Rimanoczy (2020) and her work with the Global Compact PRME explores "oneness with nature" as a powerful experience that can shape behaviours leading to a more harmonic relationship with each other

and all beings. Informed by the work of renowned systems thinker Fritjof Capra, Barlow and Stone (2011) explore the importance of **learning from living systems** for leadership. Implicit in many ecological learning programmes is a sense of place (Thomashow 2001). Adams et al. (2017) argue that place is central to nurturing a sense of ecological identity, individually and collectively.

In terms of building human connectedness, research equally points to the centrality of compassion and empathy in a range of domains – in families (eg Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg 2009), education (eg Hart and Kindle Hodson 2004), healthcare (eg Bramley and Matiti 2014) personal wellbeing (eg Seppala, Rossomando, and Doty 2013) and resilience (eg Peters and Calvo 2014), although it is worth noting that there are cultural variations in how and when it is expressed (Goetz, Keltner, and Simon-Thomas 2010). Over the last few years, there has been something of an 'empathetic turn' in leadership, and its importance particularly in the context of business, where traditionally as a 'soft skill' it has arguably been overlooked (CCL 2023). Reflecting on the impact of the pandemic, research commissioned by McKinsey proposed that four qualities – awareness, vulnerability, empathy and compassion – are critical for business leaders to care for people in crisis and set the stage for business recovery (D'Auria, Chen Nielsen, and Zolley 2020). In his seminal work on emotional intelligence, Goleman distinguishes between cognitive empathy (knowing how other people think and feel), emotional empathy (feeling another person's emotions) and empathic concern linked to compassion (which moves us to help another person). Each has its strengths and liabilities, and Goleman argues that 'focus' or 'attention' – our ability to attune to other people – is key (Goleman 2013). In a similar vein, Ekman's research on compassion distinguishes between emotion recognition (knowing how another person is feeling), emotional resonance (feeling someone else's pain), familial compassion, global compassion (extended to everyone in the world), sentient compassion (extended to other species) and heroic compassion (compassion that comes with a risk) (Ekman 2010). Without a doubt, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of empathy and compassion is needed in order to avoid some of the acknowledged pitfalls of fatigue, emotional overload, or bias towards those with whom there is 'natural' affinity. Nonetheless, leadership premised on nurturing fundamental connections with humans and nature, through a nuanced understanding of empathy and compassion, and rooted in the importance of place, would certainly represent a radical departure from traditional approaches to leadership, which are often disembodied and disconnected from context and relationship.

Two of the most highly cited practices for building connection, and demonstrating compassion and empathy, are **deep listening and authentic engagement**. Otto Scharmer (2020) describes listening as at the source of all great leadership. Listening, without an agenda and in a way that gains understanding of the world through someone else's eyes, is paramount. Practitioner Adam Kahane (2007) describes four ways of talking and listening, based on the work of Scharmer:

- downloading: repeating the story that is already in our heads
- debating: clashing of arguments, putting ideas forward and judging them objectively as in a courtroom
- dialoguing: listening to another with empathy and listening to ourselves with self-reflectivity – the root of the potential for change and creativity
- presencing (generative dialoguing): "communion" between those involved to truly understand that they are radically connected.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL 2023) argues that teaching listening skills is a key means by which organisations can nurture empathy and compassion, along with encouraging genuine perspective taking by putting yourself in the shoes of another.

Listening is also a critical component of the sorts of conversations that Jay and Grant (2017) argue can help create pathways through gridlock and polarisation. The authors also advocate dynamic authenticity, which they describe as "striving to be consistent with the world you want to create and being honest about your inconsistencies" (33) and being open and vulnerable about what matters personally, as ways of opening up the space for generative dialogue. Vulnerability is also core to Brené Brown's work on authenticity, connection and courage (Brown 2010). A number of these authors have in mind 1:1 conversations, but many of these principles apply also to organisations behaving themselves in this way through organisational listening (Macnamara 2015), humaneness (Leberecht 2015) and authenticity (Goffee and Jones 2015), and certainly in nurturing organisational cultures that promote these kinds of interpersonal relationships.

Finally, truly connected practices are those that not only nurture the relationships that sustain life and flourishing but also, as PAS 808 asserts, seek then to act to protect the very basis of those relationships through **building key impacts and dependencies – human, societal and nature – into robust economic and organisational decision-making** at every level (BSI 2022, 15; see also Mohr

and Thissen 2022). This is where empathy and compassion as relational qualities translate into practical action and impact, and where this principle directly links back to an ultimate leadership purpose in service of a sustainable future.

Connected mindset

- Embraces a big-picture, systems view that appreciates the interconnections and relationships between the parts of the whole and seeks insights from multiple perspectives.
- Sees patterns and underlying structures that help navigate and make sense of complexity.
- Appreciates our critical dependency on each other, wider society and nature for thriving economies, lives and places.

Connected practices

- Create stories that make sense of complexity, bringing meaning and direction for others.
- Foster nurturing and empathetic relationships with both humans – through deep listening and authentic engagement, and with nature – learning from living systems.
- Build key impacts and dependencies – human, societal and nature – into robust economic and organisational decision-making.

6.2.3 Emerging evidence base

Given the emerging interest in systems and systems leadership however, there is a parallel growing interest in measurement and evaluation tools informed by systems thinking, many of them based around narratives, evident in the work of Forum for the Future and the School of System Change,[4] the Systems in Evaluation TIG (Topical Interest Group) of the American Evaluation Association,[5] and The Colebrooke Centre for evidence and implementation.[6] We might expect therefore to see fresh approaches to evaluating systems leadership (or indeed systems evaluations of leadership) emerge over the next few years.

Correlation with 'effective' leadership

Case studies: Exploring the application of complexity leadership theory to organisational success, Uhl-Bien and Arena (2017) cite a range of organisations from Google to the Mayo Clinic to W. L. Gore who have designed 'adaptive' space into the system and benefitted from enhanced employee engagement, bolder action and innovation. More anecdotally, exploring the role of deep connection with nature in an organisational context, Hutchins (2022) details the case study of Vivobarefoot, which undertook an immersive, company-wide development process based around regenerative leadership principles and reported back on some of the resultant shifts in behaviour: "…tak[ing] responsibility for adult-adult interactions, sharing in authentic and respectful ways, genuinely listening to each other, and becoming more creative and entrepreneurial in our outlook" (185). Speaking more to the human side of connected leadership, using examples from car manufacturing to life insurance, Madsbjerg details companies that have benefitted (including commercially) from leadership that seeks to understand "real people in the rich reality of their worlds" (2017, 5).

Broader datasets: A number of studies have sought to establish the importance of compassionate leadership for promoting belonging, trust, understanding, mutual support and inclusion, and relatedly quality of outcome, particularly in the context of healthcare (eg The King's Fund 2022; West 2021; Trzeciak and Mazzarelli 2019). Practitioner research by Catalyst, a global non-profit looking to build workplaces that work for women, based on surveying nearly 900 US employees, found that empathy is an important driver of employee outcomes such as innovation, engagement and inclusion – especially in times of crisis (Van Bommel 2021). The Center for Creative Leadership undertook an even more extensive survey of 6,731 managers in 38 countries (albeit back in 2007) and found that managers who practise compassionate leadership and leaders rated as empathetic by their team are viewed as better performers by their bosses (Gentry, Weber, and Sadri 2016).

Correlation with a sustainable future

Case studies: Examples of case-based evidence for systems leadership tend to be associated with grey literature, including evaluation of the World Economic Forum (WEF) New Vision for Agriculture initiative, and the 2030 Water Resources Group (Jenkins, Gilbert, and Nelson 2018). Further practitioner case studies involve retrospective analysis of historic (recent or further back) examples of social change and innovation, for example the work of Westley, Zimmerman

and Patton (2007), who examine cases such as AIDS prevention in Brazil or tackling gang warfare in downtown Boston through the lens of complex adaptive systems, or Forum for the Future's analysis of the civil rights movement through a systems lens (Bautista 2021). Other practitioner research takes the format of live experiments, seeking to apply systems leadership principles in the design of initiatives to tackle sustainability challenges, such as the Sustainable Food Lab, the Sustainable Shipping Initiative or the Finance Innovation Lab. In terms of academic research, Prigge and Whatley (2016) explore regenerative leadership in the context of viticulture, using a case study of a leading California winery and vineyard, while Konietzko, Das and Bocken (2023) use a combination of literature review, interviews and focus groups to conclude that organisations with regenerative business models focus on planetary health and societal wellbeing, creating and delivering value at multiple stakeholder levels through activities promoting regenerative leadership, co-creative partnerships with nature, and justice and fairness.

Broader datasets: A range of datasets demonstrate that emotional connectedness to nature is among the strongest predictors of pro-environmental behaviour for children, adolescents and adults (eg Cheng and Monroe 2012; Kals, Schumacher, and Montada 1999; Krettenauer 2017; Mackay and Schmitt 2019). Research by Wang et al. (2022) established a causal model between empathy and connection with nature and pro-environmental behaviour. The relationship between empathy and pro-social behaviour has been extensively researched, and although they are keen to note that empathy is not the only driver of pro-social behaviour, and that empathy and pro-social behaviour should not be conflated, Decety et al. (2016) conclude after an extensive systemic review that "[i]t is generally believed that empathy shapes the landscape of our social lives by motivating prosocial and caregiving behaviours, inhibiting aggression, and facilitating cooperation between members of a similar social group" (1).

At an organisational level and relating both to economic and positive social and environmental outcomes, a recent empirical contribution is that of Leah and Laszlo (2022), who sought to explore the impact of purpose and connectedness on firm performance. The research used a survey of 322 leaders at different levels of the organisation across multiple industry sectors, based on previous research that identified a qualitative relationship between leader consciousness, purpose, culture and business performance (see for example Malnight, Buche, and Dhanaraj 2019; Boyatzis and Rochford 2020). The results showed a strong direct relationship between the recognition and articulation of a greater purpose for the business and the achievement of positive social and environmental outcomes,

and a smaller but significant correlation between greater purpose and positive economic outcomes when mediated by relational climate. Leader consciousness of connectedness (which the authors define as a sense of oneness manifested by an implicit understanding of how one's attitudes and actions affect all life on earth) was found to have a significant direct effect on positive social and environmental outcomes, as well as on relational climate, which mediated the effect on positive social and environmental outcomes, as well as economic performance.

6.3 Principle 2: Collaborative leadership

Collaborative leadership is leadership that is inclusive and works in alliance with others across boundaries to achieve collective change.

6.3.1 Underpinning thinking

There are a number of related bodies of literature and research that underpin and inform the principle of collaborative leadership. First of all, there is work around the concept of inclusion and inclusivity. There has already been some discussion earlier in this paper when introducing leadership purpose in service of a sustainable future about the need to ensure that equity and justice dimensions are given due weight and attention in articulating the 'ultimate end' of leadership. Like the concept of justice, inclusion is a contested and contextual concept (Mirzoev et al. 2022) but it is relevant to this particular principle given its emphasis on "improving the terms of participation in society for social groups that experience disadvantage" (ibid, 4), not only in terms of opportunity, employment and income, but also in terms of recognition, participation and voice (UNDESA 2016). Accordingly, an inclusive approach is one which brings multiple, diverse perspectives to the table and creates environments where everyone feels empowered to influence decision-making, enabling connection, collectivity and collaboration, and contributing to social equity (Tapia and Polonskaia 2020). Visser (2022) links this explicitly with the need for collaborative leadership, arguing that being inclusive means that "collaboration and participation are the default mode of leadership, including building commitment through dialogue and consensus" (284).

A second and related field of study is around the dynamics of power. Mir et al. (2020) and Uzochukwu et al. (2021) suggest that social exclusion is driven by unequal power relationships interacting across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. Power is "woven into what we take for granted and the rule systems that appear to constitute the 'natural' running of day-to-day procedures"

(Jackson and Parry 2018, 81). Particularly relevant to leadership is recognising "the way in which social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in our social and political context" (ibid, 85). As such, an inclusive leadership is not simply about celebrating diversity in teams and organisations – though it is not less than this – but it is also about watching out for systemic bias and exclusion, and seeking to address structural barriers to participation and engagement.

Thinking about leadership as contextual, it is important to note the significance of place (both in terms of time and space) to issues of inclusion and justice. There are clear geographies of inclusion and exclusion, justice and injustice (see for example the classic work of Harvey 1997), with economic, social, cultural and environmental factors playing out unevenly across space. Silver (2015) argues that social exclusion and inclusion are context-dependent concepts in at least three senses: the ideal of inclusion varies by country and region; different places have different histories, cultures, institutions and social structures, which influence the economic, social and political dimensions of social exclusion and the interplay among them; and context – where one lives – shapes access to resources and opportunities. She concludes that "[b]ecause ideas and institutions persist in place, inclusion is spatially uneven" (21). The importance of time and history is especially relevant for contextualising discussions around contemporary inclusion and exclusion. For instance, in reflecting upon the historical colonial and imperial dynamics that have led to systematic resource extraction from the global south, Acosta (2013) considers that "[t]here is no doubt that audacity, with a large dose of ignorance and well-programmed amnesia in society, goes hand in hand with arrogance" (62). As such, any efforts to address entrenched unequal power dynamics and move towards more inclusive recognition, participation and voice will need to pay close attention to the significance of context, history and place. Equally, as Light and Smith (1997) argue, place "is a satisfying, humane, and responsible way by which to approach larger questions of … social justice".

A third area of research and practice is around the importance of collaboration, not only as the logical outworking of inclusion, but also because the systemic nature of contemporary leadership challenges – whether purely at the level of organisational success or more broadly in terms of achieving a sustainable future – requires co-operation across boundaries and collective action. De Meyer (2009) identifies a number of forces driving the need for collaboration in business: growing internationalisation of organisations (globalisation), the fragmentation of value chains, the creeping increase in knowledge workers, the demands that civil society puts on companies to be drivers of social change, the diffusion of

sources of knowledge production and innovation, the increasingly networked nature of multinational organisations, the increasing need for risk management in a world where the gradual reduction of borders and trade barriers has led to an increasing level playing field for companies, and the role of information and telecommunication technologies in networking (4–5). Organisations are increasingly complex and more distributed, with complex supply chains and strategic partnerships, resulting in what Lang (2019) refers to as "complex, connected ecosystems emerging across the business landscape".

Looking more broadly beyond mere organisational effectiveness, collaboration and co-operation are heralded as essential leadership capacities for delivering on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over 20 years ago, Tennyson and Wilde (2000) observed that: "the 21st century demands leaders who demonstrate accountability for their decisions and actions, concern with sustainability and cooperation, a desire to bring people together across traditional boundaries and effectiveness in convincing others to work together for a common purpose, and to build lasting working relationships". This sentiment is now firmly embedded and institutionalised in Goal 17 of the SDGs, which specifically articulates the ambition to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development", arguing that "[t]he Global Goals can only be met if we work together" and "[to] build a better world, we need to be supportive, empathetic, inventive, passionate, and above all, cooperative" (The Global Goals n.d.). Commentators note that "the scale, scope and complexity of the economic and social transformation to come will be such that no one sector – government, business, civil society or academia – will be able to manage the transformation alone. We're going to need some surprising alliances that bring different sectors together if we are to overcome its challenges" (Albrectsen 2017).

At the core of collaborative leadership is the belief that the outcome of working together is greater than the sum of its parts or, as practitioner Hurley (2011, 5) argues in his white paper on collaborative leadership, "[i]t's grounded in a belief that all of us together can be smarter, more creative, and more competent than any of us alone, especially when it comes to addressing the kinds of novel, complex, and multi-faceted problems that organisations face today". In a similar vein, Collavo (2023) links collaborative leadership with the systems literature, arguing that systems leaders are those that, instead of devising a specific solution to realise social impact themselves, empower others to bring about change, mobilising them and co-ordinating them to achieve more together than they could do alone.

6.3.2 Supporting mindsets and practices

Applying this underpinning thinking to the development and practice of leadership, a number of mindsets and associated practices for collaborative leadership have been identified. Collaborative leadership is supported by a mindset that **actively welcomes and values different people and perspectives, parks ego and self-regulates own contribution to ensure the inclusion of others**. Leadership practitioner Julia Middleton (2014) highlights the importance of cultural intelligence in leaders – those who:

> "don't shy away from difference; they gravitate towards it. They prefer to be in a world that is heterogenous, rather than homogenous. They don't see heterogeneity as threatening; they see it as creative, exciting, inspiring and enriching" (12).

In a similar vein, De Meyer (2009) reflects that collaborative leadership is about "understanding that others have capabilities and are prepared to share these with you in order to achieve change and innovation, and this on the condition that you work on an equal basis with them … It requires being prepared to recognise peers' contribution" (19). As the UNGC and Russell Reynolds Associates (2020) succinctly put it, sustainability leaders "do not manage stakeholders, they include them" (13). In identifying core capabilities for systems leadership, Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) talk about working to really hear and "appreciate emotionally as well as cognitively each other's reality" (28). In the IDGs, it is expressed as the "willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and collectives with different views and backgrounds" (IDG 2021). Underpinning such a mindset is the confidence and humility to be open to the wisdom and expertise of others (Hurley 2011). Kahane (2017) similarly draws attention to the importance of parking ego and self-centredness, where we arrogantly overestimate the correctness and value of our own perspectives and actions, and underestimate those of others. Though a number of these writers have individuals in mind when exploring such mindsets, they can equally be applied at an organisational level and beyond organisational scale. PAS 808 for instance, in exploring the worldviews, principles and behaviours governing purpose-driven organisations, asserts the importance of organisational humility, recognising that an organisation, and any actor in it, can only partially understand the best way to achieve the purpose and that it relies on those around them to make the best decisions (BSI 2022, 16).

As well as appreciating diversity and creating the space for others, practitioner insights suggest that collaborative leadership is about bringing these others together and supporting "collective achievement" (Hurley 2011). Collaborative leadership is **committed to the power of collective agency and unlocking the potential of working towards a shared purpose and solutions**. Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) talk about leadership that seeks to develop, support and co-ordinate action among networks of diverse stakeholders, mobilising multi-stakeholder coalitions and alliances with the explicit goal of system transformation. Such an ambition necessarily requires a distinct set of practices. Practitioners Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2021) explore the practice of "systems convening", which supports the "learning that brings people together across different practices, different institutions, different goals, different cultures, different loyalties" and enables the "conversations and learning across these boundaries that are needed to make a difference" (21).

Collaborative leadership is therefore about **the capacity to span boundaries, foster exchange and mobilise diverse actors to contribute to collective action**. Gladwell (2000) uses the term "connector" to describe individuals who have many ties to different social worlds and who are able to link people, ideas and resources that would not normally bump into one another. In an organisational context, Ansett (2005) refers to the essential role of "boundary spanners", who "serve strategic roles in organisations by gathering critical information, obtaining feedback and perceptions from the external environment through their stakeholder networks and then interpreting and translating that information back into their organisation" (39). Key skills associated with such boundary spanners include empathy, open-mindedness, active listening, strong communication skills, strong abilities to synthesise information, emotional maturity and integrity. These skills are echoed in the IDGs, which argue for the "ability to really listen to others, to foster genuine dialogue, to advocate own views skillfully, to manage conflicts constructively and to adapt communication to diverse groups" (IDG 2021). While often talked about at the individual level, boundary spanning as a concept emerged in relation to organisational dynamics and innovation processes (Tushman 1977) and can be used to describe an organisation's efforts to establish connections both within and outside the organisation, or indeed the dynamic of a community in which "relevant stakeholders are well-networked and well-coordinated around shared interests and the common good" (Dreier, Nabarro, and Nelson 2019, 14).

Insights from systems dynamics are also relevant here for understanding this practice of convening or, as the IDGs express it, "inspiring and mobilizing others to engage in shared purposes" (IDG 2021). Echoing seminal work by Otto Scharmer from the MIT Presencing Institute on the shift from 'ego-systems' to 'eco-systems' (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013), commentators have characterised collaborative leadership as moving from 'me-based' ego-systems based on top-down control and command, independent silos, territoriality, power struggles, self-interest and blame, to 'us-based' eco-systems based on influence, conversation, partnership, mutual empowerment and support, joint knowledge development and mutual accountability (Hurley 2011).

Systems insights also emphasise that developing a collective understanding of the system involves mapping its elements and dynamics, with a particular focus on the role of power, and identifying who is advantaged or disadvantaged by those dynamics (Dreier, Nabarro, and Nelson 2019). Practitioners Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2021) also highlight the importance of "power work" in the practice of systems convening – dealing with established hierarchies and power, strategising how to work with formal and informal power relationships, and developing enough "political savvy" (26) to both leverage and counteract these power dynamics. Collective leadership therefore **recognises the impact of power and privilege, opposing those dynamics that exclude or diminish certain people or groups**. Part of this mindset involves acknowledging, understanding and addressing the implications of privilege. Privilege is "having an unearned benefit or advantage one receives in society by nature of their identity" (Global Citizen 2015). As Catlin (2020) notes, "[d]ue to our race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, ability, religion, and more, all of us have greater or lesser access to resources and social power". There are forms of everyday privilege that are easy to take for granted, and which necessarily shape our experience and decision-making. These power dynamics and privileges exist at the most personal level in inter-personal relationships, right up to the most strategic level of international institutional partnerships, for example the legacy of post-colonial relationships and structural inequalities between countries (Kajumba 2023) or the epistemic injustice within research that privileges modern Eurocentric knowledge (Gebremariam 2022).

Understanding and leveraging existing relationships of power and removing barriers to inclusion is therefore critical and involves several related practices. A range of practitioner insights are relevant here. One practice is creating what Arao and Clemens (2013) refer to as "brave spaces" for exploring such power dynamics and how they play out in particular contexts. In an organisational context, CISL (2018) acknowledges the importance of surfacing worldviews and understanding the implications for judgement and decision. While this

process may not elicit easy answers, it does at least respond in part to the need for recognition, voice and participation, all of which are important dimensions of inclusion. Significantly however, it is important to acknowledge how power dynamics are at play even in shaping such discursive space. In exploring the phenomenon sometimes referred to as 'speaking truth to power', Reitz et al. (2019) argue that speaking up is "both relational and systemic rather than simply a matter of individual courage", influenced by "our perception of relative power, status and authority", and sitting within "socially constructed systemic patterns of 'labelling' ourselves and others" (15). Reitz and Higgins (2019) then examine how those 'in power' (individually or organisationally) can listen to truth, through recognising 'advantage', developing awareness of our own and others' perception of power and the effect it has on our speaking and listening, reducing power distance, and learning about unconscious bias and its effect. Also critical is the action required to challenge debilitating and diminishing power dynamics and removing barriers to inclusion. At an individual level, Catlin and McGraw (2021) describe becoming an "ally" in cultivating an environment where others feel welcome, respected and supported. McCaslin (2008) explores the idea of the 'potentiator', an individual who acts as a guide, catalyst or initiator for the maximisation of human potential in another. Visser (2022) advocates embracing democratic approaches, coaching, and nurturing a culture and structure that ensures peer support, provides encouragement, and recognises achievement. Organisationally, PAS 808 advocates organisational practices that actively seek to "level up", supporting those who face barriers of opportunities, including actively seeking their opinions in decision-making (BSI 2022, 14). Such 'power work' is essential for realising the potential of collaborative leadership. In this sense, while collaborative leadership might appear to be in keeping with existing mainstream approaches to leadership, approaches that park ego, truly embrace inclusion, challenge unequal power dynamics, and are sensitive to collective movement rather than desiring control, would represent a radical departure from traditional leadership approaches.

Finally, but in a different vein, literature points to the importance of being clear and accountable when undertaking collaboration (with that clarity and accountability scrutinised through the power lens above). Collaborative leadership is not a panacea. De Meyer (2009) notes that "the transaction costs of collaborative leadership can be pretty high … and one needs to recognise that in the short term, collaborative leadership is not always the fastest" (18). *The SDG Partnership Guidebook* reinforces this point when it argues that "given the time and challenges involved in partnering, the primary driver … must be that, by

combining our resources, we can deliver far more than we could alone: i.e. the partnership must be able to deliver more than the sum of its constituent parts", creating net value for each and every partner, otherwise the partnership fails to create enough value to be worth the effort (Stibbe and Prescott 2020, 34). As such, effective collaborative leadership **encourages collective clarity on purpose, roles, responsibilities and decision rights, systems and processes, and accountability for results**. Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) advocate "backbone support", that is "clearly designated coordinators or facilitators whose role includes both facilitation of multi-stakeholder collaboration within the initiative (including building alignment, securing commitment, troubleshooting, and supporting ongoing collaboration); and the practical aspects of project management to support initiative activities" (15). These co-ordinators may be individuals or institutions serving as facilitators, but their role in establishing a clear shared purpose, crafting agreements for engagement and accountability, clarifying roles and decision rights, creating systems and processes for communication and co-ordination, and ensuring accountability for results are all essential practices when it comes to effective collaboration (Hurley 2011).

In short, while it is widely accepted that collaboration is a prerequisite both for organisation success in a complex world, and for making progress on a sustainable future, the distinctiveness of collaborative leadership in this framework is that it is: sympathetic to systems dynamics in how it operates; sensitive to and seeks to challenge power and privilege in order to be genuinely inclusive; and co-ordinated with clarity in order to ensure that the potential benefits are realised.

Collaborative mindset

- Actively welcomes and values different people and perspectives, parks ego and self-regulates own contribution to ensure the inclusion of others.
- Is committed to the power of collective agency and unlocking the potential of working towards a shared purpose and solutions.
- Recognises the impact of power and privilege, opposing those dynamics that exclude or diminish certain people or groups.

> ### Collaborative practices
>
> - Build the capacity to span boundaries, foster exchange and mobilise diverse actors to contribute to collective action.
> - Understand and leverage existing relationships of power in particular contexts and remove barriers to inclusion.
> - Encourage collective clarity on purpose, roles, responsibilities and decision rights, systems and processes, and accountability for results.

6.3.3 Emerging evidence base

Correlation with 'effective' leadership

Case studies: Given the broad acceptance of collaboration as a prerequisite for business success, case studies abound, across multiple geographies, domains and sectors. Multiple illustrative cases are used in articles and reports that link collaboration to more effective innovation (eg WP Creative Group 2021). Interviews with business executives and Human Resources (HR) leaders (for example work by Humanyze 2021) informally draw out the business benefits of collaboration, linking it with employee success, improved employee retention, and even greater customer satisfaction, improving overall business performance. Such commentaries however tend to be largely anecdotal in their supporting evidence.

Broader datasets: Broader datasets also support a correlation between collaboration and organisational performance (eg Carr and Walton 2014), and between diversity and organisational performance (Dixon-Fyle et al. 2021). It is worth noting, however, that this is not the same as saying that collaborative *leadership* supports better business performance, or indeed that diversity is necessarily equated with an inclusive culture. In terms of exploring the link between collaborative and inclusive *leadership* and business outcomes, most research is perception based, for example a survey of talent leaders that shows full or near consensus that inclusive leaders help organisations to innovate and capitalise on new business opportunities (Korn Ferry Institute 2019); an employee survey that suggests a link between diverse leadership teams and greater innovation potential (Lorenzo et al. 2018); or observation of executive training exercises that suggest that cognitively diverse leadership teams solve problems faster (Reynolds and Lewis 2017). Deloitte (2015) undertook an extensive survey of over 3,700 respondents across their workforce, exploring the impact of different generations on understandings of diversity and inclusion, concluding that millennials (who will make up 75 per cent of the workforce by 2025) are unique in viewing cognitive diversity as essential for an inclusive culture, and valuing inclusion as a critical tool that enables business success. There are also peer-reviewed studies that point to the relationship between inclusive leadership and team innovation (Ye, Wang, and Guo 2019), employees offering their full potential (Tran and Choi 2019), and employees adopting citizenship behaviours (Younas et al. 2021). Randel et al. (2018) propose that this is because inclusive leaders facilitate belongingness (sharing decision-making, supporting individuals as group members, and maintaining equity and justice), value uniqueness (encouraging diverse contributions and supporting contributions), and can develop followers' perception of being insiders (inclusion).

What is perhaps most interesting in this field, however, is emerging work that seeks to clarify the conditions under which collaboration is most effective rather than pursuing it as a guaranteed benefit, for example work by Cross et al. (2016; 2021) on collaborative overload (the sheer volume of teamwork, the demands presented by 'cognitive switching' between tasks, and 'top collaborators' becoming institutional bottlenecks), and how it threatens organisational productivity. Such insights point to the importance of clarity in purpose, roles and responsibilities as part of effective collaborative leadership.

Correlation with a sustainable future

Case studies: Given the broad acceptance of collaboration as a prerequisite for (in this case) sustainability outcomes, once again case studies abound across multiple geographies, domains and sectors. The *SDG Partnership Guidebook* starts with the assumption that "[a]ll of the ideas, people, technologies, institutions and resources that are required to achieve the SDGs are already available, and the task is how do we engage them and combine them in new and transformational ways?" (Stibbe and Prescott 2020, 8), with collaboration then positioned as a means of connecting those dots and delivering impact. What is potentially most interesting though are those case studies exposing the power dynamics at work in partnerships at a range of levels (eg Wallerstein et al. 2019; Gebremariam 2022), those cases looking at collaboration from a systems perspective, for example the cases unpacked in a report by Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) including the We Mean Business Coalition, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the Every Woman Every Child initiative, and those case studies exploring the conditions under which collaboration is effective (eg Nidumolu et al. 2014). All three of these fields are emergent, but as they gain traction we can expect to see further evidence and insight into what genuinely inclusive and collaborative leadership involves.

Broader datasets: Plummer et al. (2022) note that much of the research evaluating the relationship between collaboration and sustainability outcomes is case-based, noting that it remains difficult to gauge whether progress is being made towards sustainability through these transdisciplinary partnerships, and calling for more attention to be paid to developing evaluative approaches. Research by Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) analysing 340 partnerships for sustainability noted that 211 of them failed to achieve their objectives or became inactive soon after their start, supporting the thesis that collaboration can be challenging and requires leadership at all levels. The work identified nine building blocks that increase the likelihood for success: leadership, partners, goal-setting, funding, management, monitoring, meta-governance, problem-structure and socio-political context. Mariani et al. (2022) use evidence from four European initiatives to explore the roles and mechanisms that collaborating actors use to facilitate the pursuit of sustainable development, including being cultural spreaders, enablers, relational brokers, service providers, and influencers.

6.4 Principle 3: Creative leadership

Creative leadership is leadership that experiments and innovates with curiosity, optimism and purpose.

6.4.1 Underpinning thinking

There are a number of related bodies of literature and research that underpin and inform the principle of creative leadership. First of all, there is a huge breadth of literature around creativity, innovation and its role in the economy and society at large and at organisational level. Creativity and innovation in any organisation are vital to its successful performance (Anderson, Potočnik, and Zhou 2014); they drive progress and allow organisations to maintain competitive advantage (Zhou and Shalley 2003; Anderson, De Dreu, and Nijstad 2004). More broadly, Boyles (2022) argues that creativity is necessary across all industries because it accompanies innovation, increases productivity in providing the space to work smarter instead of harder, allows for adaptability in the face of disruption, is necessary for growth as it avoids 'cognitive fixedness', and is an in-demand skill because every industry has complex challenges that require creative solutions. The literature in this field is acknowledged but is not explicitly explored in detail here as there are more pertinent fields that are more directly tied to the idea of creativity and innovation in service of a sustainable future.

It is to this second area of literature that we now turn. Brem and Puente-Díaz (2020, 1) conclude that "the interaction of creativity, innovation and sustainability is gaining momentum, but a lot more research is necessary". Former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, Hans d'Orville, argues that creativity is at the heart of sustainability, a "special kind of renewable resource and human talent" that "harnesses the power to create, connect and inspire" (d'Orville 2019, 65). Some of this attention is focused on the 'creative sector', for example the role of design as a key dimension of creativity and a major component of culture (eg the UNESCO Creative Cities Network), or on cultural and creative industries in distributing cultural goods, services or activities that convey ideas, symbols and ways of life (eg the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD's) *Creative Economy Outlook 2022*). Yet the 'creative' principle in CISL's framework embraces a broader understanding of creativity as a dynamic process operating at a range of scales involving, as the IDGs articulate, the "ability to generate and develop original ideas, innovate and being willing to disrupt conventional patterns" (IDG 2021).

This idea of creativity as a dynamic process is supported by insights from a third area (and one with which we have already engaged): systems and complexity leadership theory. This is a rich and currently under-explored territory for informing our understanding of the role that creativity plays in leadership, but perhaps two aspects are worth brief mention. First of all, there has been a growing interest in the concept of resilience, adaptability and transformability (Walker et al. 2004). While there is much discussion on the topic, a key contribution of Holling and Gunderson (2002) is that "adaptive cycles" of birth, growth, death and renewal are core to the resilience of socio-ecological systems, meaning that both creation and destruction (as with the classic work of Schumpeter (1942) in relation to innovation) are an integral part of system dynamics. Second, when most authors explore the idea of systems leadership, there is usually an emphasis on generation and creation viewed through the lens of emergence. The combination of elements in any system and the interactions between them creates its own impetus, or what practitioners Westley, Zimmerman and Patton (2007) refer to as "the energy to create transformation … waiting to be tapped" (128). In short, adaptation and emergence are key system dynamics which give rise to creativity and innovation. As Towler (2020) concludes, within complexity leadership theory, "whenever an event takes place and people react and adapt to it, innovation and creativity can take place". Leadership that is informed by such system dynamics will therefore be creative in nature.

A fourth related concept and field of study is around learning and its role in creativity, innovation and transformation. For instance, in the context of sustainability, Laininen (2019) argues that genuinely transformative change comes from deep learning that "transforms our existential understanding and conceptions about the interdependence of humans and nature, the essence of humanity, fundamentals of wellbeing, and the role of economy in our world and daily lives" (180). At a personal level this requires a willingness to 'unlearn' as well as learn: "not about reframing or reconstructing our current thinking but moving away from our existing mental structures towards a position which enables a fundamentally different way of seeing the world" (ibid, 177). A similar typology has been proposed for learning at the organisational level. Based on the classic work by Argyris (1977), single loop learning is about making adjustments to correct a mistake or a problem, ie doing the things right; double loop learning is about identifying and understanding causality and then taking action to fix the problem, ie doing the right things; while triple loop learning goes even deeper to explore our values and the reasons why we even have our systems, processes and desired results in the first place.

A penultimate area for discussion here relates to the role of constraints and limits in the creative process. Creativity and innovation per se may not lead to sustainable outcomes. The European Environment Agency (EEA) (2021) reflects that:

> "Innovation clearly has tremendous potential to transform society. But market forces and public policies have, so far, failed to channel that potential towards sustainability. There is a growing sense that far too much human and financial capital is invested in creating wasteful or actively harmful products (eg sophisticated weapons or financial instruments) rather than addressing society's most important challenges."

Moreover, innovation may lead to unintended consequences (such as the 'rebound effect' from introducing more energy-efficient technologies) or lock-in/path dependency because of investment in infrastructure. The EEA therefore promotes balancing creativity with precaution, taking a systemic approach, ensuring democratic governance (and public engagement) and promoting diverse innovations. We might add to this the importance of deploying creativity and innovation in service of a greater purpose – that of long-term wellbeing for all – rather than as an end in itself. Frugal innovation is a relevant contribution here – the art of overcoming harsh constraints by improvising an effective solution, using limited resources. Rather than innovation for the sake of innovation, Prof Jaideep

Prabhu, quoted in Jolin (2018) describes frugal innovation as "about identifying an unmet need and then figuring out: 'Is there a technology already around that I can use to produce an affordable and accessible solution for this unmet need?'". While there are multiple definitions and the concept is somewhat under-theorised, Hindocha et al. (2021) conclude that scholars do agree that the characteristics of frugal innovations are different from those of mainstream innovations and share the basic principles of cost or affordability, functionality, accessibility and sustainability, ie "the idea that more value can be achieved using less expenditure while using the resources available".

Finally, the concept of frugal innovation points to the importance of context in understanding the dynamics of creativity and creative leadership. Much of the foundational thinking for frugal innovation is shaped by the idea of a resource-constrained context, which provides the impetus for new thinking and experimentation. There is clearly a geographical dimension to creativity, evident in research into creative clustering, creative place-making and creative cities. For example, see Casadei et al. (2023) and Chapain et al. (2010). Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi (2016) conclude that there is not a one-size-fits-all for creative clusters and local context matters. More pertinent to the practice of leadership, Mainemelis et al. (2015) argue that creative leadership is unusually complex and its manifestations vary according to the context in which it is enacted. Moreover, creative leadership can be seen (at least) through the lens of the 'creative leader' (or entrepreneur/intrapreneur) as the source of creative thinking and behaviour, a focus on fostering the conditions that nurture the creativity of others (eg employees), and/or the process of creative synthesis in collaborative settings (ibid). Context shapes the dynamics of each of these manifestations of creative leadership, in terms of elements of social structure, the nature of work, cultural norms, organisational characteristics, prevalence of social networks and specific relational dynamics, to name but a few dimensions. Indeed, at an individual level, research by Drake (2003) points to the importance of place and locality in providing creative 'stimuli' and a "resource of prompts, ideas, signs or 'raw materials' that can act as a catalyst".

6.4.2 Supporting mindsets and practices

Applying this underpinning thinking to the development and practice of leadership, a number of mindsets and associated practices for creative leadership have been identified. A creative mindset **nurtures a humble, open curiosity and a willingness to disrupt and adapt**. At an individual level, in a piece produced by the Royal Society of Arts Social Brain Centre on the role of curiosity in moving to

a more sustainable energy system, Rowson et al (2012, 3) conclude that "curiosity is dually important for innovation, first in its link to creativity and divergent thinking, and second in its role as an intrinsic motivator to sustain interest in a given area". Brans et al. explore the role of intrapreneurs (those 'dreamers who do' working in back offices and boardrooms harnessing organisational assets for impact), describing them as "independent and generative thinkers" who, confident in their thinking about what is possible, "enjoy challenging the status quo" (2020, 20). One of the key mindsets identified in the IDGs is "having a basic mindset of curiosity and a willingness to be vulnerable and embrace change and grow" (IDG 2021).

Organisations can also nurture and exhibit curiosity (Gino 2018) that is equally linked to creativity and innovation (Walsh 2022). For individuals, organisations and beyond, this mindset is expressed in leadership practices around what Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) describe as "looking and learning": **seeking information, asking questions, listening to feedback and engaging in reflective practice, learning and unlearning**. PAS 808 talks about the organisational practice of "continual learning", creating ways of sharing and responding to insights at all levels of the organisation and the systems it is nested in (BSI 2022, 17). In a similar vein, in a webinar exploring future enterprise, Professor Steven Eppinger recommends formalising time for "curious enquiry" prioritising questions over answers, while Professor Marek Kowalkiewicz advocates "aimless" (rather than "pointless") exploration as part of learning and discovery (Walsh 2022).

A creative mindset also **appreciates the emergent nature of creativity, and the importance of harnessing creative tension**. Emergence is an important theme in systems and complexity leadership theories. The dynamic is therefore less about seeking to control and orchestrate, and more about sensing emergent movement and energy. Westley, Zimmerman and Patton talk about how social innovators influence their context while it simultaneously influences them in an "endless to and fro" (2007, 130). They talk about the emergence of 'moments of flow' – or what Durkheim (1965) calls the "collective effervescence" of the patterns of interaction that occur between people – as a way of understanding how momentum builds in social transformations. As they conclude, effective social innovators "recognise and ride social flow" (2007, 155). Systems and complexity leadership theories also recognise the importance of creative tension for the generation and emergence of new ideas. For instance, at an individual level, Brans et al. describe intrapreneurs as those "able to reconcile seemingly opposable tensions by finding new and creative solutions and opportunities" (2020, 20). In a more discursive vein, both Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) and

Jay and Grant (2017) speak about the importance of 'generative conversations' that use the generative power of tension to co-create an innovative future. Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) likewise recognise the creative value of tension, reflecting on how it can be used to foster productive interactions. This might involve playing devil's advocate or addressing the "elephants on the table" that others try to ignore (Parks 2005). It might involve recognising when a group is bogged down by the consensus that comes from lack of diversity, and exposing the group to new perspectives, bringing in other people and ideas as necessary (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey 2007). Rimanoczy (2020) and the PRME work suggests that creativity is fuelled by not being overly dependent on "rational wisdom", which privileges efficiency over creativity; instead embracing alternative ways of knowing, to include intuitive knowledge, non-verbal and non-rational understanding, deep wisdom, body knowledge and aesthetic perceptions.

In order to facilitate such interactions organisationally, Arena and Uhl-Bien (2016) explore the importance of enabling 'adaptive space' that exists in the interface between the operational and entrepreneurial space, embracing rather than stifling the dynamic tension between the two. In short, practising creative leadership **enables generative conversations that use the creative value of tension to surface new ideas and innovative solutions**.

A creative mindset also **understands experimentation and 'failure' as an essential part of learning and growth, is willing to take thoughtful risks and is open to new possibilities**. A growing seam of learning research points to the importance of 'failure' in the creative process, although as Lewis (2015) points out, "[t]he word failure is imperfect. Once we begin to transform it, it ceases to be that any longer" (11). Manalo and Kapur (2018) for example explore the role of failure in promoting thinking skills, creativity and learning, while Smith and Henriksen (2016) focus on failure as a means of heightening creativity, or coming to a better understanding of the creative process. Dweck's (2006) work on the growth mindset is probably one of the most renowned education theories on responding positively to challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism and the success of others, although more recent work including that from Dweck herself (Severs 2020), points to the complexity of the concept (beyond the caricature that it focuses on effort rather than ability) and the need to translate it effectively into learning strategies. At the organisational level, the concept of psychological safety is relevant – "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" based on the understanding that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes" (Edmondson 1999). PAS 808 (BSI 2022) talks about the organisational

practices of admitting mistakes, owning failures with pride, and explaining and using information about them to improve, and welcoming the failures of others and using the information to improve. Based on Edmondson (1999), other key practices include measuring current levels of comfort, training for fearlessness by welcoming challenge, leading by example and being willing to be wrong, encouraging reflection and learning not to blame, experimenting and staying curious, and listening actively and asking good questions.

A creative leadership practice is therefore one that **builds psychologically safe learning cultures that support purposeful experimentation and risk-taking**. Experimentation is a recurrent theme throughout the literature on leadership for sustainability. Ancona (2012) talks about the importance of action as a key sensemaking tool, specifically in the form of learning from small experiments. Weick refers to the process of "acting thinkingly", which means that people simultaneously interpret their knowledge with trusted frameworks, yet "mistrust those frameworks by testing new frameworks and new interpretations" (1995, 412 quoted in Ancona 2012). This is a theme echoed by Brans et al. (2020) in their description of intrapreneurs relying more on trial and error than on logic and reasoning. Progress is iterative, allowing for emergence. At the organisational level, Weissbrod and Bocken (2017) draw on entrepreneurship theory and 'start-up thinking' to argue that experimentation has been highlighted as the most important innovation capability to succeed in radical innovation activities for sustainability because it helps organisations to overcome inertia. At the system level, Sengers et al. explore the centrality of experimentation to sustainability transitions, where experiment is defined as "an inclusive, practice-based and challenge-led initiative, which is designed to promote system innovation through social learning under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity" (2019, 153).

Experimentation requires a degree of risk-taking. As Catmull (Catmull and Wallace 2014) – co-founder of Pixar – concludes, "[m]anagement's job is not to prevent risk but to build the ability to recover". The UNGC and Russell Reynolds Associates argue that for disruptive innovation to take place, organisations need to "make bold investments that test the limits of what is possible" (2020, 14). At the same time, PAS 808 cautions that "we also need to take care not to inadvertently make things worse" and advocates that while we should act with urgency and boldness in creating positive change, this should be tempered "with prudence towards potential effects" (BSI 2022, 17). This principle of care is important therefore for creativity and innovation, especially in the context of sustainability, with a need for experimentation and risk-taking to be purposeful rather than reckless. Practising innovation with frugality and care means using

environmental, social, economic and contextual constraints as a stimulus for creativity, and thus "finding opportunity in adversity and reframing the problem, doing more with less rather than defaulting to asking for more" (Ahuja, quoted in Sorrells 2015). Certainly, leadership that holds in creative tension the paradoxes of curiosity and safety, risk-taking and care, experimentation and constraints, would represent a different kind of learning and innovation from traditional approaches.

Creative mindset

- Nurtures a humble, open curiosity and a willingness to disrupt and adapt.
- Appreciates the emergent nature of creativity, and the importance of harnessing creative tension.
- Understands experimentation and failure as an essential part of learning and growth, is willing to take thoughtful risks and is open to new possibilities.

Creative practices

- Seek information, ask questions of the particular context, listen to feedback, and engage in reflective practice, learning and unlearning.
- Enable generative conversations that use the creative value of tension to surface new ideas and innovative solutions.
- Build psychologically safe learning cultures that support purposeful experimentation and risk-taking.

6.4.3 Emerging evidence base

Correlation with 'effective' leadership

Case studies: Edmondson's work on psychological safety is based on extensive case study research and multi-method field work on team learning and efficacy across a range of sectors and industries (1999; 2012; 2018) One of the most oft-quoted cases around psychological safety is that of Project Aristotle at Google, led by Julia Rozovsky, which concluded that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work (Duhigg 2016). There are also anecdotal case studies exploring creative leadership in organisations, albeit largely in the creative or tech sectors, eg Pixar (Mahajan 2021) and Apple (Podolny and Hansen 2023).

Broader datasets: The empirical base for establishing a link between creativity and business performance tends to rely on proxy measures for creativity, such as research by McKinsey (Brodherson et al. 2017) which used a measure based on annual awards given for advertising and marketing excellence to establish correlation between creativity and financial metrics. Other studies have sought to establish the link between entrepreneurial orientation/competency (whether of individual leaders, eg start-up founders, or at an organisational level) and business performance, but the findings have been inconclusive, largely because the relationship is often mediated through other variables, whether learning orientation (Wang 2008), managerial power (Davis et al. 2010) or the performance of functions such as research and development (R&D), marketing and production (Rezaei and Ortt 2018). That said, survey research with over 3,000 employees by Gino (2018) into the role of curiosity in leadership suggests that curiosity is linked with fewer decision-making errors, innovation and positive changes in both creative and non-creative jobs, reduced group conflict, and more-open communication and better team performance. In a similar vein, research by behavioural expert Diane Hamilton that lies behind the Curiosity Code Index concluded that curiosity can enhance employee engagement, emotional intelligence, innovation and productivity.

Correlation with a sustainable future

A systematic review of 80 papers by Arshad et al. (2023) on leadership and innovation research concluded that leadership is regarded as a key factor influencing green innovation and sustainable innovation, with particular reference to a nascent field of research exploring the relationship between 'green transformational leadership' and 'green creativity' (eg Mittal and Dhar 2016; Liao and Zhang 2020; Al-Ghazali et al. 2022). Other relevant bodies of research will overlap with building the evidence base for connected leadership and collaborative leadership – exploring the generative potential of systems approaches to leadership for sustainability outcomes.

6.5 Principle 4: Courageous leadership

Courageous leadership is leadership that knows the values that it stands for and nurtures the courage, integrity and resilience to pursue societal good.

6.5.1 Underpinning thinking

There are a number of related bodies of literature and research that underpin and inform the principle of courageous leadership. First of all however, it is worth noting the conclusion of Beerel (2021) that few leadership books even mention the topic of courage, despite her view that it is the most important trait of an effective leader. It is worth acknowledging from the outset therefore that a specific focus on courage – and more specifically moral courage – represents an important departure from the leadership approaches that have dominated over the last few decades. That said, Alzola (2015) notes a growing recent interest in courage as a virtue (following Aristotle), with the emergence of contemporary virtue ethics, applications to organisational studies of 'positive psychology' (a movement focused on the study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to flourish) (Peterson and Seligman 2004) and the centrality of character and virtue concepts in business ethics (eg Moore 2005). Courage therefore taps into the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership, and a field of work around moral reasoning and moral development.

Drawing on Kohlberg and Kramer (1969), Beerel (2021) explores development of moral judgement and higher levels of moral reasoning, moving beyond fear and self-interest as drivers for moral behaviour (Level 1), to conforming to social norms and seeking approval (Level 2), to the internalising of certain values and ethical principles that then shape ethical sensitivity and encourage continuous inquiry into whether certain norms, rules or even laws advance flourishing of life and wellbeing (Level 3). Values are therefore core to moral development, as Daeg de Mott (1998) argues in her examination of Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning: "Moral development involves the formation of a system of values on which to base decisions concerning 'right' and 'wrong,' or 'good' and 'bad.' Values are underlying assumptions about standards that govern moral decisions".
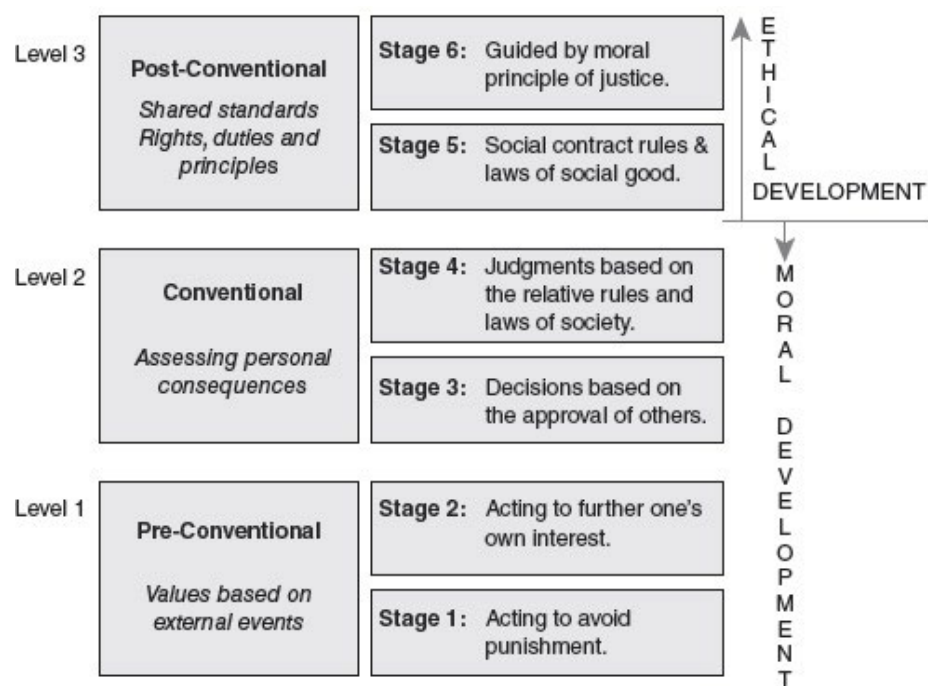
Level 3	**Post-Conventional** *Shared standards Rights, duties and principles*	Stage 6: Guided by moral principle of justice.
		Stage 5: Social contract rules & laws of social good.
Level 2	**Conventional** *Assessing personal consequences*	Stage 4: Judgments based on the relative rules and laws of society.
		Stage 3: Decisions based on the approval of others.
Level 1	**Pre-Conventional** *Values based on external events*	Stage 2: Acting to further one's own interest.
		Stage 1: Acting to avoid punishment.

Figure 2: Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, in Beerel (2021)

Interestingly, Level 3 would go beyond what PAS 808 (BSI 2022) describes as the "rules about the right way to create long-term wellbeing based on international and long-standing human norms of what is right" (16), recognising that "there are conflicting views and opinions and to uphold society in a fair manner requires consideration, adjustment and due process" (Beerel 2021, 329). This position acknowledges that moral judgements are embedded within specific contexts, shaped by the who, what, where, when and why (Schein 2020), and that the process of moral reasoning – while principled – is also inherently embedded and contextual in its application.

As Brown and Treviño (2006) observe, drawing on the work of Turner et al. (2002), "individuals who operate at higher levels of moral reasoning are more likely to make principled decisions, demonstrate concern for the rights of others, and value fairness as the foundation upon which relationships are built" (605). This highlights the importance of an 'other-orientation' (rather than self-orientation) to

courage. As Aristotle argued, what mattered more than the absence of fear or even overcoming fear, was *what* was feared and *why* that fear was overcome. For Aristotle, the highest form of courage was facing the greatest fear for the most selfless reason (Beard 2019). This orientation towards serving the good or 'wellbeing' of others is at the heart of the concept of purpose, according to Hurth et al. (2018). The authors quote positive psychology interpretations that the key source of human meaning is to serve a cause that is greater than oneself (see for example Frankl 1988; Schnell 2009). It is also at the heart of the classic work of Greenleaf (1977) on servant leadership, which "focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong", which he applied to both individuals and institutions. A similar sentiment is expressed in work around the concept of stewardship, which Hernandez (2008) describes as directing one's work towards others, "specifically for something larger than self". Threaded through these ideas is the concept of accountability. PAS 808 argues that "ethical behaviour includes being accountable to society as a whole" (BSI 2022, 16). There is a whole body of work on the changing landscape of corporate accountability, but for now it is worth noting that there is a growing emphasis on organisations being held accountable for delivering on a broader societal purpose through both voluntary initiatives and the changing regulatory and legal context, driven by pressure from various stakeholders.

If one aspect of courage is the moral or ethical dimension, another aspect is the internal capacity to endure and persevere in the face of resistance and challenge. This is particularly relevant for leadership for a sustainable future because the reality of pioneering change in the face of complex, 'wicked' challenges like climate change, social inequality and ecosystem destruction can be one of frustration, grief, anger and disillusionment, thus requiring particular personal resilience and perseverance. While these sentiments are often felt at an individual level, collective disillusionment is also an observed social phenomenon (Knott 2020). A relevant body of literature for understanding personal resilience and perseverance is self-leadership – the management of personal ethics, character, principles, purpose, motivation and conduct (Waldrop 1996). The concept of self-leadership first emerged from organisational management literature by Charles C Manz (1983) and refers to the practice of understanding who we are, what we do, why we do it, and how we do it (Neuhaus 2020). Du Plessis (2019) describes self-leadership as "the capacity to identify and apply one's signature strengths to initiate, maintain, or sustain self-influencing behaviours". She sets out a theoretical foundation for self-leadership drawing from positive psychology, which embraces strength-based decision-making and recovery, purposeful vision and authentic engagement, abilities and talents, and high-quality connections.

While self-leadership is mainly applied at the individual level, we ask whether the central concepts might be applied at an organisational or beyond-organisational level. Among other dimensions, Neuhaus (2020) identifies self-knowledge and self-awareness, constructive thought and decision-making, planning and goal setting, optimising motivation, and embracing failure and cultivating grit as core competencies of self-leadership, which we would argue could be applied at a collective level. Indeed, Ugoani (2021) argues that cultivating a culture of self-leadership is associated with organisational success, as developing a sense of self-worth, influencing the behaviour of others to achieve goals, developing other people as leaders, and creating a strong connection between management and employees are understood to be positively linked with reduced employee turnover rates, increased productivity and improved employee satisfaction.

6.5.2 Supporting mindsets and practices

In applying this underpinning thinking to the development and practice of leadership, a number of mindsets and associated practices for courageous leadership have been identified. Bringing together the literature on moral reasoning and the 'other orientation' of courage is the concept of 'moral courage', which Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007, 135) define as "the ability to use inner principles to do what is good for others, regardless of threat to self, as a matter of practice". Beerel describes the need for leaders with "personal moral courage, an ability and interest in mentoring and coaching others, and a commitment to enabling employees to give voice to their moral sentiments and deeply held values … without fear of personal, negative consequences" (2021, 331). Visser argues that "ethical convictions give us a pathway through an age of obfuscation, where truth is turgid, morals are malleable, and compromise is common-place" (2022, 293). While much of the literature on moral courage assumes an individual focus, Howard-Grenville (2021) argues that, like caring, courage is a community and not solely an individual effort. Worline (2012) summarises research that reinforces the necessity and value of courage as a fundamental pattern of action in organisations. Serrat applies the concept of moral courage to organisations, arguing that it:

> "…helps cultivate mindful organizational environments that, among others, offset groupthink; mitigate hypocrisy and 'nod-and-wink' cultures; educate mechanical conformity and compliance; bridge organizational silos; and check irregularities, misconduct, injustice, and corruption … More profoundly, moral courage consolidates the trust, enshrined in formal contracts, oral contracts, and psychological contracts, that organizations depend on" (2011, 2).

Courageous leadership therefore **has the moral courage and sense of accountability to pursue societal good wherever possible**. Detert (2022) reflects that good leadership is about courageous action to defend core principles, even when it costs something significant – potentially even one's own popularity or standing in the short run. The UNGC and Russell Reynolds Associates reflect on the importance of "long-term activation", arguing that it "requires a great deal of courage and resilience to stay the course in the face of setbacks and to make decisions that may be unpopular with short-term oriented stakeholders" (2020, 14). In saying this however, it is important to acknowledge that the 'right' or 'moral' choice is not always evident. Judgements on what is 'fair', 'just' or 'good' are notoriously contested, characterised by perceived or real clashes in deeply held values. Such ethical dilemmas – which Western Governors University (WGU 2021) describes as paradoxes that come up when there are two or more options, but none of them are the best ethical or moral option – are commonplace in contemporary organisations (de Nanteuil 2021), and courageous leadership may sometimes involve **owning the consequences of challenging decisions** in specific contexts.

Such decisions are helpfully informed by the cultivating of ethical convictions and values. Schein and Schein (2016) explore the deeper psychological motivations of sustainability leaders and how ecological worldviews are developed and expressed. They argue that there are at least half a dozen significant life experiences that help nurture the mental patterns that deeply committed sustainability leaders appear to exhibit, ranging from early childhood experiences of family, of nature, of teachers in classes; to internships in developing countries and seeing poverty and environmental degradation first hand; to experiences connected with religion and spirituality. Organisationally, creating safe spaces to surface moral issues and values in particular contexts, and explore these without fear of negative personal consequence, is essential for establishing an ethically aware and value-based culture. By **considering ethical and moral dimensions in a systematic, transparent and collective way, and surfacing the implications for key decisions**, there is greater clarity, transparency and accountability. Finally, there is wisdom in the philosophers of old for cultivating courage. Thinkers as far back as Aristotle (350 B.C.E.) have emphasised the importance of **practising brave acts in the smaller things to build moral courage and confidence**:

> "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."

Courageous leadership also **withstands challenge, is comfortable with discomfort, and perseveres and grows in the face of setback**. Courage along with confidence, hope, optimism and resilience are collectively referred to as psychological capital (Bockorny and Youssef-Morgan 2019), and such capital is nurtured in a number of different ways. One contribution is that of the entrepreneurial mindset, which Ireland (2003) defines as a growth-oriented perspective through which individuals promote flexibility, creativity, continuous innovation and renewal. Mooradian et al. (2016) looked at a combination of grit and innovativeness as drivers for entrepreneurial success. They found that consistency of interest, perseverance of efforts and ongoing innovation had a positive relationship with entrepreneurial performance and that grit had a positive relationship with innovativeness that opened additional areas for future study. This closely aligns to the importance of sustained effort, highlighted by Dweck (2006) with respect to the growth mindset unpacked as part of the creative principle.

A second important contribution is an understanding of the role of **purpose- and values-based confidence** in courage. Kraemer (2011) suggests that true confidence is the key to being able to live personal values and convictions. Moreover, "confidence grows, in part, as we understand our core values and increasingly align our actions with those values" (Peregrym and Wollf 2013). According to Gillian Secrett, purpose gives leaders clarity and in turn this helps "build courage, resilience and energy to enable leaders to innovate and pioneer new ways of thinking and doing, to create new solutions and business models" (2022). Research by Duckworth et al. (2007) confirms the role of passion and purpose as core determinants of 'grit'. Grit is defined as passion and perseverance for long-term and meaningful goals – the ability to persist in something you feel passionate about and persevere when you face obstacles (ibid). This is due to passion being based not on intense emotions, but on having direction and commitment, ie purpose.

Finally, courageous leadership is **vulnerable, authentic, open and humble, and able to self-evaluate and adapt accordingly**. Brown (2018) defines a courageous leader as someone who leans into difficult conversations, who shows up with vulnerability and does not hide, even if things are uncertain and challenging. Detert (2022) echoes this, arguing that courageous leaders display openness and humility. He argues: "Pretending to be fearless no matter how good the reasons to be afraid, or acting like a know-it-all no matter how obvious it is that neither you nor anyone else has all the answers, isn't impressive. It's dangerous — for yourself and for those who depend on you". Applying this to organisations, as has been explored under the creative principle, psychologically

safe working cultures are those where vulnerability is practised, fears are articulated and trust enhanced. Detert (2022) adds that courageous leadership is about creating safer working conditions where courageous action is not routinely called for, rather than trying to make everyone else a superhero.

Courageous leadership therefore **undertakes regular self-reflection and examination, informed by feedback**. Silvia and O'Brien (2004) describe self-awareness as being able to focus attention on oneself and self-evaluate – a prerequisite of self-control and self-regulation (Neuhaus 2020). As Korver (2016) notes, it requires cognitive, behavioural and emotional development to refine your "self-awareness, empathy, openness, ability to develop trust, and respect for differences". Hougaard, Carter and Afton (2018) consider self-awareness as "the starting point for leadership" and define it as "the skill of being aware of our thoughts, emotions, and values from moment to moment". Rimanoczy (2020) considers self-awareness and reflection as critical principles for nurturing a sustainability mindset. Drawing on historical insight and interviews with contemporary leaders, Kethledge and Erwin (2017) argues that the practice of solitude is a vital leadership practice, especially in today's hyper-connected, hyper-social context. As Blaise Pascale, the renowned 17th century French mathematician, physicist and philosopher once argued, "all of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone" (Burkeman 2014). Dreier, Nabarro and Nelson (2019) promote the importance of standing still and reflective practice as a core capability for systems leadership. While having immediate application at a personal level, the practice of self-examination – including carving out time and space for thinking and reflection – is equally applicable to organisations, and indeed is linked by many commentators to organisational learning and creativity. Høyrup (2004) for instance is one such author who explores the importance of reflective practice in organisational learning.

Courageous mindset

- Has the moral courage and sense of accountability to pursue societal good wherever possible, and own the consequences of challenging decisions.
- Withstands challenge, is comfortable with discomfort, and perseveres and grows in the face of setback, through a purpose and values based confidence.
- Is vulnerable, authentic, open and humble, and able to self-evaluate and adapt accordingly.

> ### Courageous practices
>
> - Consider ethical and moral dimensions in a systematic, transparent and collective way, surfacing the implications for key decisions.
> - Practise brave acts in the smaller things to build moral courage and confidence.
> - Undertake regular self-reflection and examination, informed by feedback.

6.5.3 Emerging evidence base

Correlation with 'effective' leadership

Broad datasets: There is a growing area of scholarship exploring the relationship between psychological capital (courage, confidence, hope, optimism and resilience) and business outcomes, especially in the field of entrepreneurial studies (eg Baluku, Kikooma, and Kibanja 2016; Baron, Franklin, and Hmieleski 2016; Chen et al. 2017; Sarwar, Nadeem, and Aftab 2017). In a similar vein, research suggests a positive correlation between self-leadership and employability, job satisfaction and performance. According to Dondi et al. (2021) undertaking research on behalf of McKinsey, self-leadership skills such as adaptability, coping with uncertainty, synthesising messages and achievement orientation were the top four indicators of employability, while self-confidence and coping with uncertainty – both self-leadership skills – correlate with job satisfaction. Research by Inam et al. (2023) revealed that in the presence of self-leadership, employees' work engagement, commitment to the organisation and overall work performance elevated significantly.

Correlation with a sustainable future

Broad datasets: Since pursuing a sustainable future has inherent moral implications (representing as it does a teleological construct of the 'good life'), data corresponding to moral courage is captured under this heading, although it could equally apply to the 'effective leadership' category above. Sekerka et al. (2009) single out professional moral courage as a key determinant of organisational performance. Hannah et al. (2011) carried out a four-month field study in a military setting on the relationship between authentic leadership, moral courage, and ethical and pro-social behaviours, concluding that authentic leadership (demonstrating moral perspective, self-awareness, and establishing transparency and openness with followers) was positively related to followers' displays of moral courage, which in turn influenced ethical and pro-social behaviours on the part of followers.

6.6 Place: the importance of context

Throughout the exploration of purpose, the four principles and the associated mindsets and practices, there has been a continuous reflection on the importance of place and context. Place is used in its broadest sense – beyond simply geography – to encompass the historical, cultural and other contextual dimensions at a broad and local level that 'situate' leadership.

The case for articulating a core *purpose* for leadership – leadership in service of a sustainable future – comes with the acknowledgement that there is no universal definition of a sustainable future and that questions about 'why' need to be accompanied by questions about 'where' and 'for whom' because what is deemed 'good' gains practical meaning in specific circumstances, grounded in different value sets, worldviews and cultural contexts. Equally, leadership that is *purposeful* and represents an optimal strategic contribution to a sustainable future will require continual reflection on the particular opportunities and context for action, which will shape those decisions around individual, team and organisational purpose.

Place in the broadest sense is core to all the principles. For *connected* leadership, the richness and diversity of human experience is rooted in different cultures and contexts, which shape the dynamics of human interaction with ecology and nature. When exploring *collaborative* leadership, it is recognised that there are clear contexts – geographical and otherwise – of inclusion and exclusion – with place, culture and other contextual factors shaping our ideals of inclusion. At the same time, different histories, cultures, institutions and social structures affect the dynamics of exclusion and need to be taken into account as we seek to leverage and challenge existing power dynamics. Emerging research suggests that context is key to understanding *creative* leadership – understanding the structural and social dynamics that stimulate and shape innovation and creative thinking. The moral reasoning and ethical sensitivity core to *courageous* leadership equally needs to be contextually embedded if it is to truly grapple with the realities and complexities of contemporary decision-making.

CISL's framework has therefore set out some of the ways in which our understanding of leadership needs to be as much about context as about content. This marks just the starting point for this critical dimension of the work. Having set out a proposition for the characteristics and capacities of leadership for a sustainable future, our ambition is to stress-test these ideas in different contexts (geographically, culturally and organisationally), exploring how the purpose and principles are manifested in different places, building a richer database of case studies and empirical evidence, and refining our thinking based on these insights.

7. Closing reflections

CISL's new leadership framework starts with the proposition that we need leadership oriented to a core purpose – in service of a sustainable future – and that we need leadership that is connected, collaborative, creative and courageous in nature, rooted in particular contexts and places. We propose that such leadership needs to be demonstrated at all levels – from the individual to team, project, organisation and wider collective endeavours – and have distilled a series of mindsets and associated practices that have historically been under-developed and that we believe should be nurtured to build capacity to lead change for a sustainable future.

In identifying the purpose and four principles, we recognise that the boundaries between them are blurry. There are common threads. For example, insights from systems and complexity leadership theory weave their way through almost all principles. There are dependencies and interactions between the principles. For example, insights from creative leadership will likely enable collaborative leadership to flourish, while connected leadership provides a foundation for collaborative, creative and courageous leadership. While not arguing for hard lines between these ideas, it is useful from a pedagogical point of view to provide a degree of organisation in order to 'make sense' of a complex landscape that also helps orient leadership development activity.

As detailed in section 6.6 around place and context, CISL's intention is to further explore, understand and contribute to the emerging evidence base, to stress-test how this leadership purpose, principles and their associated mindsets and practices can contribute to a sustainable future, and how they work in different contexts and at different levels from the individual to the collective. There appears to be sufficient emerging evidence to warrant a serious exploration of purposeful leadership that is connected, collaborative, creative and courageous, and the part it might play in building the types of individuals and organisations that contribute to a sustainable future. Whether it is necessary and/or sufficient for making a material difference in terms of impact on society, nature and climate is a key question to explore.

In short, future exploration will test the effectiveness of the framework as a useful foundation, anchor and/or device for steering leadership development. In addition, the intention is to examine *how* these capabilities might best be developed individually and collectively. The ambition is the creation of practical recommendations, resources, learning/diagnostic tools and case studies. CISL's unique contribution is to bring together relevant theory, pioneering research and practical insight, providing a credible blend of ambition and application. We hope that this work will help build the collective leadership capacity that we need in service of a sustainable future.

Endnotes

1   See for example research from the World Bank Group exploring the relationship between the pandemic and inequality (The World Bank 2021), an emerging evidence base regarding the relationship between climate and conflict (Burke, Hsiang, and Miguel 2015) and research by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on climate and inequality (Islam and Winkel 2017).

2   Drawn primarily from the University of Cambridge graduate and online courses. Respondents were asked to review and provide feedback on the *Rewiring Leadership* publication and Cambridge Impact Leadership Model (CISL 2018).

3   Midgley (2007) argues for there being three major developments in systems thinking: "hard", "soft" and "critical" systems thinking.

4   The School of System Change now works in partnership with Forum for the Future, developing personal and collective agency to cultivate change in the world with a multi-method approach to systems change learning (School of System Change n.d.).

5   The Systems in Evaluation Topical Interest Group (SETIG) was a community created within the American Evaluation Association to provide a forum for ongoing conversation about the use of systems thinking and systems theory in evaluation, with a range of resources available to members (American Evaluation Association Connect n.d.).

6   The Colebrooke Centre for evidence and implementation applies an implementation science lens to improve results in the field of child and family services to support a shift from individually effective programmes to effective whole-systems (Colebrooke Centre for evidence and implementation n.d.).
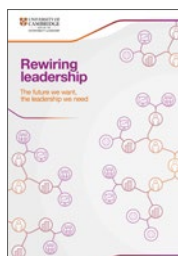
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