

Complexity and Crisis Call for Shared Leadership and Empowered Teams

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Abstract It is a very well-known fact that firms are operating in a very volatile business environment. The success and failure of every type of organisation mainly depends on the quality of leadership, and the complexity of today's business environment makes leadership increasingly challenging. Many crisis management mistakes have been attributed to leadership failures. It is becoming almost impossible for any individual to possess all of the skills and abilities needed to competently navigate organisations through today's challenges. Complexity and crisis by their very nature call for looking at the leadership role from a new perspective and responding to the new reality differently to sustain a business.

Here, we will first explore the nature of complexity and crisis. By doing that, we illustrate the requirements of those situations in terms of leadership, and we move on to explain the concept of shared leadership and what is needed to apply it effectively. Since business culture is of vital importance in the effective application of shared leadership, we will delineate how leaders can create a culture that fosters empowerment for teams.

1 Introduction

Change has been with human beings since the beginning of history. What is different these days from previous years is the scale and pace of change. The scale of change is remarkable and the pace of change is incredible. These changes are occurring in the areas of technology, especially in communication technology, demographics, social/political changes and environmental changes (for an account of these changes, see Obolensky 2014). Recent research has predicted that the speed of current change is so fast that by the year 2025 people would see the equivalent of all the primary discoveries of the previous century (e.g. electricity, automobiles,

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space travel, the internet) in less than a week (Modis 2003, cited in Martin and Ernst 2005).

The first implication of these radical and rapid changes is that the business environment is far more shaky, volatile and unpredictable. This period has had the acronym VUCA, meaning volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, applied to it (Kail 2010; Mack and Khare 2016). A lot of work has gone into developing models to understand and make sense of these without much success. People have more and faster access to what is going on around, and information is flowing in vast quantities. These models do not help to foresee the future and plan accordingly, due to the steep speed of changes.

On top of these changes, businesses find themselves in crisis situations stemming from internal and/or external forces that intensify the hardship organisations have to deal with. It may be feasible to discern some signs of the internal dynamics that are likely to cause a crisis. It is hardly possible to know what kind of ‘things’ will happen that disrupt our business. We may continue our business operations and think that we are doing everything right, but one day we realise that we have lost, as the Nokia CEO confessed in a speech (Jawabra 2015).

By their nature, crises and complex challenges are unexpected and unique occasions and ask for knowledge, capabilities and approaches that currently do not exist or are unknown in the organisation. As such, these challenges create new demands for leadership. The speed of change and complexity in today’s business environment make leadership more and more difficult, placing unreal expectations on leaders (Yukl 2006). Evidently, it is becoming almost impossible for any individual to possess all of the skills and abilities needed to competently navigate organisations through today’s challenges (O’Toole et al. 2002).

In this chapter, we explore how leadership is changing in the light of increasing volatility, unpredictability and complexity, both in society and the business environment. First, we look at the nature of crisis and complexity, and, following this, we explore what is required and needed to cope with complexity and crisis situations. As a response to complexity, shared or distributed leadership will be offered as a good way of navigating through it. Lastly, we analyse the culture of organisation in terms of the effective application of shared leadership. Empowering teams are concomitant with the effective application of shared leadership in an organisation. We provide some guidelines on how to create a culture that fosters empowerment, accountability and a sense of ownership for employees.

2 The Nature of Crisis and Complexity

As mentioned above, the reality managers face today is quite different from the past. Therefore, approaches that work well in one set of circumstances but fail in others are the result of the changes that have occurred in the world. One size-fits-all leadership is not an effective way of providing leadership.

Snowden and Boone (2007) developed a model called the Cynefin framework that helps leaders to understand the nature of real-world problems and respond to them in a more effective way. The framework is based on how clear the relationship is between the cause and effect of a situation. It classifies the issues facing leaders into mainly four categories, namely simple, complicated, complex and chaotic. The authors see that complexity is much more common in the business world of today and requires usually counterintuitive approaches. According to the framework, each category calls for different approaches and actions. Simple and complicated domains assume an ordered context, where we can perceive the cause-and-effect relationships, and, accordingly, leaders can decide on the right solutions. On the other hand, complex and chaotic domains are unordered, where the cause-and-effect relationship is not perceptible right away. For these domains, there is not an easy right answer to pursue, and what is needed is based on emerging patterns.

Complexity can be seen as many interconnecting diverse agents affecting each other in an open interactive process that cannot be controlled, directed or fully predicted. The interactions among agents are nonlinear. These parts, for example, customers, suppliers, the economy, technology or competitors in a business environment, act on their own and on their behalf and at the same time affect each other. Also, these parts are not isolated, but rather, interdependent parts of a dynamic complex system. Yet how interactions are managed by agents to influence the behaviour of the whole system is not well understood (Surie and Hazy 2006). As complexity increases through multiple interactions of agents, the ability to understand and use information to plan and predict becomes more difficult.

The interactions among parts of the system are so dynamic that they imply continuous change. The world we live in is far more complex than hitherto, changing faster and more uncertain than ever before. These changes are occurring so quickly that leaders cannot keep up. Although they are in charge of the organisation and accountable for the results of the decisions they make, they are not in control anymore, even if they try hard to present themselves as if they are in control. In fact, since followers in the system are part of the change process and, on the ground level, are experiencing the challenges they face, they may know much more than the appointed leader.

Another important implication of these steep changes is the shift of power from one single entity to many interaction entities of the market as a whole. Single entities like governments, big businesses and religious organisations have still some degree of power, but their power is limited compared to the aggregate power of the markets. So power has not only shifted but atomised, and most of the leaders of organisations feel themselves not really powerful and to be held in the power of the markets (Obolensky 2014).

Complexity implies that challenges are caused by any part of the dynamic system, and any small change in a part can have an impact on multiple dimensions of the system. This interaction makes it difficult to study and understand in a comprehensive way. Crises that occur are also complex in their cause and effect. Traditional research tools fall short in their prediction of what will happen and when it will (Manson 2001) As a result, the reality changes that one person sees will

change due to position and speed. So, there will be many alternative, even opposing, views on how to interpret the nature of what is happening around. People from different levels read the situation differently, and all involved have a partial understanding of what is actually happening.

The foremost and distinguishing feature of crisis and complexity is the novelty of the situation. What we face that we have not encountered before is unique, though it may look similar to or comparable with previous experiences we have lived through. As a result, complex situations challenge our basic assumptions and paradigms and defy existing solutions and approaches, and they require a new perspective and approach (Martin and Ernst 2005). Complex challenges force us to take urgent and decisive action, yet because the individual or organisation does not know how to act, what is essential is the capacity to read and understand the situation and improvise the approach as the reality emerges.

Every crisis specifically affects the standard of life, behaviour and the decision-making process; it also directly affects all management processes. It is a threat to people and their property, evokes a sense of uncertainty and fear, threatens the function of systems in the organisation, creates the need to solve problems urgently, may trigger unexpected behaviour in people, such as panic, and creates a growing need for the cooperation of teams and information to circulate from inside and outside the organisation (Herrera 2011).

As mentioned above, in complex and chaotic situations, the cause-and-effect relationship is not clear, especially in chaotic cases. Turbulence and unpredictability are the main features of these cases. The natural outcome of these is that the challenge an organisation faces goes beyond any formal structures of authority. The command-and-control mode of leading may exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, chaotic cases call for immediate action: there will be many decisions to make and no time to think. The assumption that a heroic leader is in charge and will rescue people and compel them to adhere to a command structure may actually hinder immediate and effective responses (Snowden and Boone 2007).

Chaotic situations require five strategic tasks that are not associated with any one leader. The first is to understand what is occurring, which is difficult in many cases. The second is to take immediate and crucial decisions. The third is to interpret the event and actions for others. The fourth is to take urgent action to reestablish order. And the last is to learn and look for new ways of doing things differently. These actions can come from both formal and informal sources (Boin, Hart, Stern & Sundelius 2005).

Various styles of leadership are required at different stages facing a crisis and in different contexts. In a crisis situation, one paradox people experience is that they look for someone to take charge and coordinate the overall effort, which is necessary to prevent panic and give assurance to them. Yet people on the ground are able to see what is needed and react more quickly. What happens in reality that when crises overwhelm the capacity of formal systems and structures, new leadership takes shape and emerging leaders step into the void, playing critical and improvised roles in rescue and rebuilding efforts (Rego and Garau 2007).

The characteristics of complex challenges can be summarised as follows (Rego and Garau 2007, p. 45):

- Complex challenges go beyond an individual's leadership capability. They require the involvement and interaction of others.
- Complex challenges potentially have a significant strategic impact if they are not properly navigated.
- Complex challenges require novel solutions. When standard solutions are not working, they signal that something different is necessary.
- Complex challenges demand flexibility and agility on the part of the leader and the organisation.
- Complex challenges create a paradox between the need for reflection and the pressure to act.

Based on the arguments mentioned above, it can be concluded that leaders face great challenges in responding effectively. Challenges are different in nature and require different mindsets and perspectives. Given the complexity and unpredictability of the environment today, organisations will not survive long unless they have the necessary skills, abilities and creative people who comprise their social capital, even if people in leadership positions are highly gifted, intellectually minded and charismatic. Due to the different nature of challenges leaders face, people who are in charge will need to discern when to share power and when to use it on their own, when to turn to the wisdom of people around and when to follow their own guidance (Snowden and Boone 2007; Obolensky 2014).

When we face complex challenges, the imposition of the solutions from the top down will not work; instead leaders in formal positions allow solutions to emerge from the organisation, teams or community, depending on the context. Since our subject is complex challenges, we will look at the shared leadership approach as an effective response to increasing complexity and uncertainty and then move on the characteristics of creating a culture of empowered teams, which is the critical part in applying this approach.

3 Shared Leadership and Its Components

The traditional stream of leadership development prepares managers for an environment of certainty, whereas they now have to deal with increased complexity, uncertainty and turbulence (Mason 2007). The usual authoritarian, control-based leadership style, when applied in an unordered context, can lead to the destabilisation of relationships and behaviours (McElwee, cited in Mason 2007). Following same line of thought, Pearce (2007, p. 355) has pointed out: 'As organisations have steadily progressed into the knowledge economy we can no longer rely on simple notions of top-down, command-and-control leadership, based on the idea that workers are merely interchangeable drones'.

What is needed is a complex approach of leadership that involves transformation, facilitation or influence. And leaders establish the conditions in which individuals, groups and the system as a whole are encouraged to respond spontaneously to the changing environment (Fitzgerald and van Eijnatten, cited in Mason 2007). In other words, leadership in a complex and chaotic context should be natural and emerging, with leaders focusing on creating an internal environment conducive to co-creation, co-inquiry and co-evolution. Power should be distributed in a way that enables people make decisions autonomously, take risks and try out new ways of thinking. Managers must support this approach by providing timely and necessary information, and employees must control themselves. This process is called self-organising management (Mason 2007).

In searching for a new type of leadership to respond to the new reality and challenges of today, many people underline how the leadership role in organisations does not belong only to a single, central leader sitting at the top. As a result, leadership is accepted as a role 'shared' by individuals or teams at any level across the organisation. For this process, different names are offered in the literature that mainly refers to the same notion of shared leadership: shared leadership, collective leadership and distributed leadership are used interchangeably. Since it is not within the scope of this work to give a full account of how leadership has evolved over the years and what leadership theories are, we only consider here the concept of shared leadership and its components. Crevani et al. (2007) compiled a list of arguments in favour of shared leadership practices. The list can be seen in Table 1.

First of all, it should be emphasised that shared leadership does not deny the role of leadership. It only challenges the notion of a leader as one single individual sitting at the top of an organisation or the notion of leadership as something that is executed by any single individual. When we talk about leadership, we tend to think of a heroic, gifted individual achieving a desired target despite all the hurdles encountered along his/her way. The questions of whether we need leaders at all or whether leadership functions need to be fulfilled by people in managerial positions seems to need exploring.

Answers to these questions may change according to the definition of leadership. Leadership can be defined as having an impact, whether it be positive or negative or whether it has a narrow scope or a wider perspective. According to this definition, we not only need leadership but also leadership is inevitable. Moreover, we can claim that *everyone is a leader* in his/her influence area. We generally associate leadership with the positive and wider scope impact. What is important is the content and function rather than the magnitude. This definition also differentiates the process from the position. Leadership is a process not a position. At all levels in organisations, groups, communities or society, every single individual, regardless of their position, has a power or capacity to have some degree of impact on others or the system through interacting with other parts of the system. What is essential to understand here is that to create such an interaction process among people, the system as a whole must respond effectively to the changing environment and produce the desirable results by contributing to the best of every single individual's

Table 1 Summary of arguments in the literature in favour of shared leadership practices (for references, see Crevani et al. 2007)

Perspective	Arguments found in the literature
Individual perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing the lives of those who work in managerial positions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo leadership consumes people, and there is a risk of a high level of stress and anxiety • Enhanced balance of work requirements and personal responsibilities/private life • Better sense of security and stability in decision making and implementation • Enhanced possibility to learn having the co-leader as an example and as a feedback giver • More enjoyable work
Co-worker perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing the correspondence between employee expectations and actual organisational practices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are used to working in teams with some degree of shared leadership. When they rise to higher organisational levels, they are more likely to want to continue sharing leadership and resist traditional solo command • Expectation for co-leadership created by the experience of living in modern (at least Western) family models, where both parents participate in decision making, reinforced by experiences of working in teams • Young employees expect more democratic leadership in modern organisations
Organisational perspective (shared leadership as a way of enhancing leadership effectiveness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-person leadership cannot reflect and handle the environmental complexity facing most organisations. Several different competences, skills and roles are required • Communication between professions can be enhanced through mutual leadership • Shared leadership means that more parts of the organisation and different interests can be represented at the same time at a managerial level. One consequence can be facilitation of change processes • Both stability and change can be represented by a dual leadership, thereby facilitating organisational change • Lower risk for suboptimal solutions if the leadership of an organisation is truly shared by the management team • Less vulnerability in the case of leader absence or resignation • Co-leaders can have a larger span of control together and more time for their co-workers and for reflecting on the strategy and the basic values for their unit • Organisations can avoid losing young, interesting leader candidates because of stress associated with leader posts • Organisations can benefit from the cognitive and behavioural capabilities of a larger number of individuals
Societal perspective (shared leadership as a way of maintaining and increasing the legitimacy of leadership and management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When power is too concentrated, it may result in immoral and/or illegal actions taken by individual leaders struck by hubris • Shared leadership increases the possibility of including minorities into managerial positions, thereby increasing the legitimacy of leadership

ability at all levels (Lichtenstein et al. 2006; Kimsey-House and Kimsey-House 2015).

Following the line of thinking above, shared leadership can be defined as ‘a relational, collaborative leadership process or phenomenon involving teams or groups that mutually influence one another and collectively share duties and responsibilities otherwise relegated to a single, central leader’ (Kocolowski 2010, p. 24).

Carson et al. (2007, p. 1222) proposed that ‘shared leadership is facilitated by an overall team environment that consists of three dimensions: shared purpose, social support, and unified voice’. Wood (2005, p. 76) studied top management teams in churches with three or more pastors and determined that shared leadership involves four distinct dimensions: ‘joint completion of tasks, mutual skill development, decentralised interaction among personnel and emotional support’. He found that while ‘empowering team behaviors related positively with shared leadership’ (p. 64), surprisingly, team structure (horizontal) did not have a significant effect on shared leadership.

It seems obvious that shared leadership requires a specific approach and certain awareness to create the conditions in which individuals, teams and the system are facilitated to respond spontaneously and naturally to the fast changing environment and increasing complexity. Based on the literature research, some core components of shared leadership can be identified:

Embracing Complexity The first component is accepting complexity as a way of thinking and not something unusual that will go away. We are trained to think in terms of simple causation: A leads to B, B leads to C. The world of complexity is much more about playing and considering various simulations than it is about linear A to B planning. Entering the world of complexity, we must completely change our approach, envisioning multiple formal and informal connections, hidden potentials, latent tendencies, leverage points for initiating the chain-of-change and ways of empowering others (Praszkier 2015). Embracing complexity means that imposing a solution or order will fail; what is needed is to create an environment and experiments from which good solutions can emerge (Snowden and Boone 2007).

Scanning for Changes in the Environment As mentioned above, firms are open systems and always interacting with their environment; paying attention to changes and developments is of critical importance to being able to respond to the relevant ones. This is not the role of the leader sitting at the top of the organisation. On the contrary, at all levels, employees can sense and interact with the environment. ‘As they are merged or linked with each other, they help leaders to expand on their abilities to navigate through challenges. As they combine and recombine through individual and collective experience, they become organisational capabilities for leading through complexity’ (Rego and Garau 2007, p. 46).

Accepting Everybody as a Leader Since shared leadership is about distributing the power and functions of leadership among members and represents a shift away from the concept of a top-down approach, every individual has the potential to have

an impact on business and may be called upon to play certain functions at certain times (Drescher et al. 2014). Accepting everybody as a leader also means that leadership cannot only be done by being in front or at the top; there are other ways of leading, regardless of one's position in the organisation (Kimsey-House and Kimsey-House 2015).

Building a Creativity-Enabling Milieu Businesses in today's age of ecosystems need to be creative. Firms need to reinvent how they create, deliver and capture value, especially vis-à-vis the growing importance of increasing added value (Satell 2014, cited in Praszkiar 2015). Through creativity and innovation, organisations will be able to have the ability to find new ways to develop and apply novel strategies to complex business challenges.

Mastering Social Capital The essential component for triggering the process of change through empowerment is building social capital. Social capital is considered to be a critical factor in the ability to sustain bottom-up mechanisms (Fredette and Bradshaw 2012, cited in Praszkiar 2015). Trust plays a concrete role in creating social capital, facilitating interactions among members and producing more results, thus creating a productive cycle of higher trust yielding better results, which, in turn, reinforces trust levels. Trust levels are also very critical in terms of empowering employees to own matters and share the responsibility of leadership. Trust is also crucial for encouraging employees to take risks and try new things out with any fear of being judged.

Developing Social Empathy Social empathy in a relationship enables people to tune into each other's inner worlds, hidden dreams and desires, as well as pain. As a result, leaders may discover latent potential or dormant tendencies and identify potential leverage points that can be used for triggering the chain of change (Praszkiar 2015).

Loosening Structures: From Silos to Adaptive Systems In changing from top-down to bottom-up processes, the work organisation needs to shift. Most businesses are traditionally organised according to two basic themes—functions (marketing, finance, etc.) and hierarchy (top, middle and lower levels). This way of working is too slow and costly in comparison to the rapid changes in markets that require fluid and flexible structures. To unleash the potential of employees and be more responsive to the marketplace and complex challenges, what is needed is a complex adaptive system where teams are formed, perform and then disappear as the need arises. In this dynamic system, human resources policies and processes are clear, information is shared through sound and flexible technology and strategies are developed collaboratively and emerge in response to the external environment (Obolensky 2014).

All Around Feedback Loops Feedback is a critical process for learning and developing any behaviour and system. In functional organisations, feedback usually flows from top to down, mainly once or twice a year. Since changes are so fast, a one-way feedback, called 90-degree feedback, is not enough. Employees benefit

from receiving input not only from their managers or peers but also from outside stakeholders, like customers and suppliers, with whom they are in contact. If employees are going to be more responsive and agile in their actions, there needs to be a fluid and inclusive 360-degree feedback system (Obolensky 2014).

4 Creating a Culture of Shared Leadership and Empowerment

Organisational culture, which refers to shared values, norms and practices of behaviour, affect the successful implementation of shared leadership in an organisation (Angelle 2010). In a study of the banking sector, Erkutlu (2012) found that shared leadership could be developed in an organisation by creating a supportive culture where team members felt their input was valued and appreciated.

Before moving into how to create a culture of shared leadership and empowerment, some consideration of empowerment is necessary, including what we mean by empowerment and what the characteristics of the empowered teams are.

Empowerment means different things to different people. Therefore, it is important to clarify what we mean by empowerment at the outset. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) summarised the approaches to empowerment under two headings: the mechanistic approach and the organic approach. The mechanistic approach is about delegating decision making within a set of clear boundaries and scope. According to this approach, 'empowerment is a top-down process where senior management developed a clear vision and then communicated specific plans and assignments to the rest of the organisation' (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997, p. 38). The second perspective on empowerment sees it as being about risk taking, growth and change. For this approach, 'empowered employees would be entrepreneurs and risk takers, acting with a sense of ownership in the business' (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997, p. 38). Having considered these two completely different perspectives, Quinn and Spreitzer (1997, p. 39) concluded that 'the successful implementation of empowerment does not require a choice between the mechanistic or organic views. It requires something much more complex—integration of both views'. So the question is, how can organisations and communities embed empowerment into their cultures?

The main aim of creating such a culture is to establish a dynamic and a context where needed, and effective action can emerge or flow naturally in a highly complex and adaptive way from any individual at any level in the organisation, not from a particular assigned leader.

From the organic, bottom-up perspective of empowerment, managerial practices such as sharing information, providing structure and developing a team-based alternative hierarchy are not enough for effective implementation. After all these managerial practices, employees may remain hesitant about taking the initiative and remain risk averse. For the effective implementation of empowerment, employees

must feel themselves empowered. After many years making observations, Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) identified four characteristics of empowered people: having freedom and discretion (self-determination), feeling a personal connection to the organisation (meaning), being confident about their abilities (competence) and being able to have an impact on the system (impact).

Randolph (1995) participated in in-depth research conducted with ten forward-thinking companies from different industries with various level of success in their journey to empowerment. He found that there are three keys to empowering people and organisations to work in concert to get the job done: information sharing, creating autonomy through structure and letting teams become the hierarchy.

To integrate these two different perspectives and create a culture of environment, Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) offered four key levers for psychological empowerment in the workplace: a clear vision and challenge, openness and teamwork, discipline and control and support and a sense of security.

Clear Vision and Challenge For employees to feel empowered, they need to understand top management's vision for the business and the strategic direction of the organisation. 'Such a vision provides clear direction so that employees feel they have the capability to act autonomously in their work rather than wait for permission and direction from top management' (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997, p. 45).

For this purpose, the first step is to share information about the company's market share, growth opportunities and even sensitive financial information. Without this kind of information, people cannot see the impact they are creating for the organisation or where their work fits into the big picture. In this process, top management's role is crucial. Randolph (1995, p. 21) reported a company's endeavours for some time through various trainings and concluded that 'it was not until senior managers began sharing sensitive financial information about the company that the seeds of empowerment began to grow and the teams became truly self-directed'. Sharing information creates trust among employees towards the company and managers. The trust level of employees is critical regarding them taking risk by acting on their own. Especially with complexity and crisis requiring the trying out of new and unfamiliar things, employees must take risks and will only take risk in a culture of trust. Through trust, the growth of shared leadership is associated with increased group performance (Drescher et al. 2014).

Openness and Teamwork Empowered teams are very different from participative teams or semi-autonomous teams. 'They make decisions, implement them and are held accountable; they do not just recommend ideas' (Randolph 1995, p. 28). The business culture experienced by employees emphasises the value of human assets, where employees feel a sense of participation, flexibility, concern, creative problem solving and cohesive teamwork (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997). Through this openness and teamwork, employees feel empowered to contribute, learn, collaborate and work together for problem solving. By actively participating in a team and feeling valued and appreciated, team members are more likely to work collaboratively and develop a sense of shared responsibility and accountability for team outcomes (Kirkman and Rosen 1999).

Discipline and Control Changing from a top-down culture towards empowered teams is a gradual process. Therefore, paradoxically, people at the beginning wait for clear instructions and guidelines from the top management on what to do in an empowered way. Without ‘clear goals, clear lines of authority and clear task responsibilities, employees experience chaos rather than empowerment’ (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997, p. 46). Structural elements of empowerment create a clear vision and clarify the little picture, set goals and roles collaboratively, create new decision-making rules that support empowerment and establish new performance appraisal processes based on collaboration and continuous improvement (Randolph 1995). Although some sort of structure is needed for empowerment, ‘to run complex processes one need only simple rules. More than that, complicated rules may hinder the flow of necessary activity’ (Praszkier 2015, p. 39).

Support and a Sense of Security An easy way of understanding whether the system really wants empowered employees is to check whether employees feel a sense of social support from their managers, peers and subordinates (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997). During the empowerment process, teams need to learn new skills and to be encouraged and supported in making changes.

Empowering cultures are characterised as open, harmonious, trusting, safe, wanting everyone to excel, sociable and nurturing. In such a culture, employees assist one another through encouraging and appreciating individual and team contributions and accomplishments (Marks et al. 2001).

As noted earlier, non-linearity is one of the main characteristics of complexity, meaning that the mutual interactions of parts create results that are often heightened and thus nearly impossible to predict (Lichtenstein and Plowman 2009). Without any fear of being punished or blamed, employees go out of their routines and take risks in new situations. For these reciprocal interactions of agents to take place, leaders must create opportunities for various groups to meet and support employees. In this way, the leaders develop intimate and meaningful bonds among members throughout the organisation. Over time, this generates a kind of ‘relational space’, in which people get to know each other quite well in small groups (Bradbury et al. 2007). ‘Relational space’ refers to a certain high quality of interactions, reflecting a shared context of mutual respect, trust and psychological safety in the relationship (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000). As predicted by complexity theory (and managerial psychology), these rich interactions strengthen interpersonal networks, which help amplify the changes as they emerge.

5 Conclusion

Organisations and leaders in them face complexity, volatility, change, ambiguity and huge pressures in today’s business environment. The expectations of stakeholders of organisations are ever increasing. Competition in the marketplace is so harsh that it is getting more difficult to survive and prosper. Ecological concerns are

putting extra pressure on the business leader. Alongside these changes, organisations are becoming more decentralised: traditional command-and-control management has given way to polyarchy; power has shifted from one single entity or a small group of entities to the collective actions of many agents of the market. So how can we navigate our way through this complex situation?

Complexity science offers some tools and insights to leaders on how best to respond to the increasing unpredictability. There are no right or wrong solutions. In complexity, the cause-and-effect relationship cannot be predictable. It only emerges out of the interactions of many parts. Within each interaction, there is a potential for releasing creative energy, intelligence, initiative and positive change in the organisation. This suggests that responsibility to respond to complexity does not only belong to the formal leaders of the organisation but to every member in the system who can or actually should play an important role in the process. Shared leadership provides clear and unambiguous pathways, driving responsibility downward and making the organisation much more responsive, agile, flexible and adaptive at the boundaries.

‘This approach encourages all member to *be* leaders—to “own” their leadership within each interaction, potentially evoking a much broader array of responses from everyone in an organisation’ (Lichtenstein et al. 2006, p. 8).

This approach to change and leadership helps us to unite employees in finding creative solutions to the problems faced, achieving goals, supporting each other and respecting and appreciating diversity. Moreover, this creates a culture of openness, sharing, valuing each other, bonding, harmony and respecting diversity, where employees adapt and respond well to the challenges. Without such a culture, teams do not feel empowered or safe enough to take responsibility and risk, or own the outcomes of the work, and as a result the shared leadership approach fails to fulfil its promises to navigate the organisation through complexity and crisis times. It should be underlined that shared leadership is an ongoing and fluid process, requiring perpetual checking, nurturing and re-evaluation in order to be adaptive and responsive to an ever-changing environment.

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