

Stewarding Intentional Systems Transformation; & Exploration Associated Complex Dynamics for Success

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Context and Approach:

- Changing the way the public sector works is essential if we want real progress in complex social issues. We need to focus more on how people and systems develop over time and in relationship to each other.
- People are our greatest resource. Human potential is incredibly powerful but often overlooked in solving complex problems.
- Good leadership requires a mix of knowledge and constant learning. This can't happen if people are treated like parts in a machine.
- Traditional science alone isn't enough to guide change in complex systems, even though it's still our default approach.
- This project is about better understanding what actually makes change happen—by studying our own work and comparing it with what others have already discovered but few are fully using.
- We're especially interested in what truly makes a difference in transformational change, how leaders grow into effective system stewards and how to best support that growth.

Planned Activity:

Research:

This work builds on our efforts in place-based collaboration and system-wide development (like in Hywel Dda) and supports wider goals of our Bevan Fellowship. We want to step back and study how we ourselves are learning and changing as leaders of transformation. Key questions we're asking include: What motivates us to change systems? What skills are we building? How do we track and reflect on our growth? How do we learn with others? Our aim is both to become wiser and more effective, and to make our internal approaches visible and shareable with others.

Leadership:

We want to compare our way of leading to both traditional and newer leadership models. Our focus is on deep thinking and awareness—not just of what we do, but how we think, learn, and relate. We aim to build a more advanced kind of understanding (called dialectical thinking) that embraces complexity, helps us understand systems deeply and connects how we think (epistemology) with the realities we face (ontology). We draw on big-picture thinking from philosophy and science, especially a framework called Critical Realism.

Education/teaching :

Human brains have much more potential than science can currently explain. Focusing too much on technical and analytical thinking can limit our growth. True learning requires reconnecting our minds and hearts—thinking and feeling together—and moving beyond the false split between facts and values. Learning should be an active journey where we grow in identity, purpose, and relationships—not just gathering facts.

Progress to date:

- We've been exploring relevant research for over 15 years.
- Our findings go beyond standard science, moving into more complex, flexible, and big-picture ways of understanding.
- We're studying how we think about thinking itself, including practices like mindfulness that move beyond words and logic.
- We're also deeply examining how human abilities develop over a lifetime.
- We've looked at many existing models (like Theory U, Human Learning Systems, Deming's work, and others) including our own relational trust model and are actively reflecting on how they align with our experiences.

Early Reflections:

- This whole area is full of paradoxes and we're still in the process of discovering how best to support real, lasting change.
- Complex models are helpful but often misunderstood. A big challenge is how to explain ideas that require a higher level of understanding than most people currently have.
- Adult development happens in stages, and this has big implications for how we approach change in organisations and society.
- Developing deep thinking (dialectical thinking) takes time and effort, but we believe it's essential for meaningful change.
- Progress may be slow for most, but we need leaders who can model and promote approaches based on relationships, dialogue and trust.
- In the long term, society needs to support these ways of thinking from a young age.

