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# The importance of engagement and transparency in unknown times: Leadership practices for journeying through crisis

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## Introduction

Tēnā koutou katoa  
Ko Rangitoto tōku maunga  
Ko Thames te awa, nō Rochford, England  
ahau  
Kei Tāmaki-makau-rau, Aotearoa tōku  
kāinga ināianeī  
Ko Howard Youngs tōku ingoa  
No rēira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā  
koutou katoa

Greetings to you all  
My river is The Thames  
My mountain is Rangitoto  
I was born in Rochford, England  
I now live in Auckland, New Zealand  
  
My name is Howard Youngs  
Therefore, greetings to you, greetings  
to you,  
greetings to you



# Introduction

The intention of my presentation and paper is provide some tangible hope.

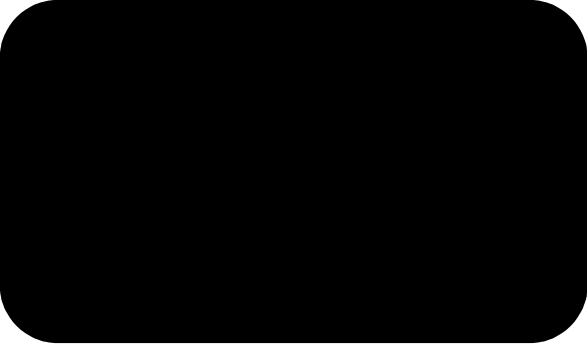
We have all experienced disruption, some of us have experienced grief, loss and perhaps some loss of hope. Research studies are now revealing the extent of the pandemic on student and staff well-being, as well as staff workloads.

In the season of this global pandemic and the wicked problems associated with it, learning needs to be embedded in care and encompass knowing how to engage with paradox. This is not just student learning, but learning for all.

We usually responded with Emergency Response Teaching (ERT) not true Online Distance Learning (ODL) and this created in some places issues of inequity.

Three points:

- Engaging with paradox in leadership practices
- Engaging through organizational learning in leadership practices
- Engaging through resilience and well-being in leadership practices



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## Engaging with paradox

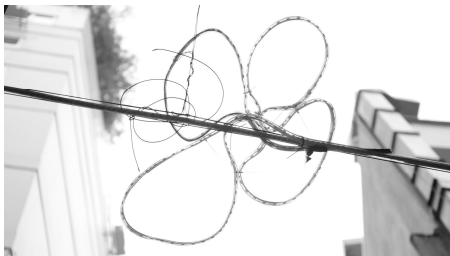
Paradox is present when there are two or more elements in play that appear contradictory. For example, how HEIs manage an income drop “and” create opportunities to retain, care for and develop all staff?

There is a need to draw on what has been learnt in crisis management research.

Wardman (2020) explains why crisis management research rejects “mechanistic hierarchical formulations of ‘leader-follower’ relations ... [and] ‘decide-announce-defend’ (DAD)” (p.1095) practices, in favour of pluralistic leadership characterized by shared clarity of direction, adaptability, transparency, partnership, empathy, meaning making, and the addressing of concerns.

Pluralistic leadership in times of uncertainty bring to the fore the need of sensemaking. Sensemaking is a continual redrafting of the emerging narrative as comprehension grows, rather than striving to get things done right (Weick et al., 2005).

Conditions conducive to growing resilience may be facilitated “by investing in organizational learning through constructive interactions” (Giustiniano et al., 2020, p.974)

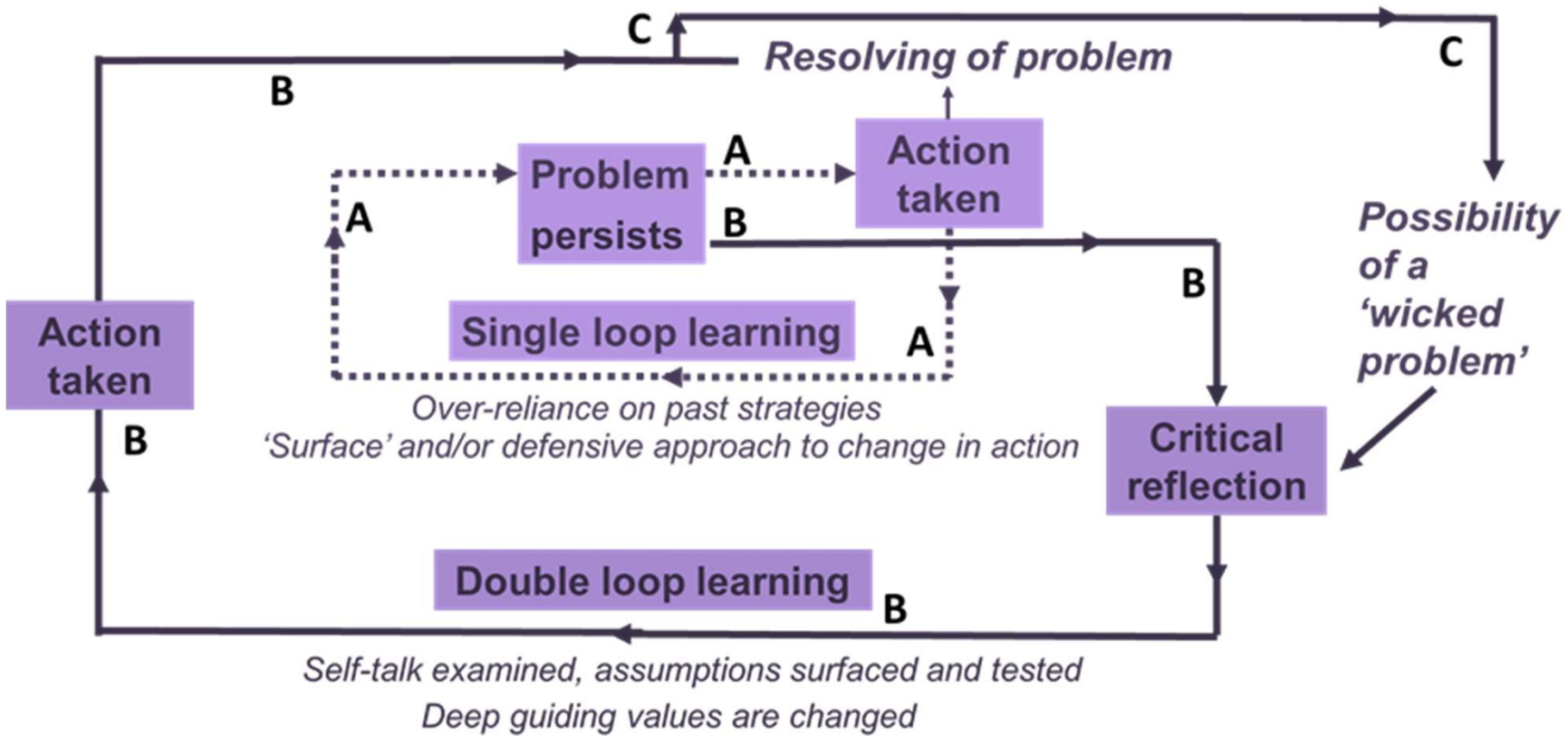


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# Engaging through organizational learning

Organizational learning encompasses collective learning across an organization, learning in teams and groups, learning that may occur in the relational space between two or more people, and the individual learning that may occur in us as we reflect in and on practice.



## Engaging through resilience and well-being

“Grief experts have suggested that emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic are very similar to grief” (de Jong et al., 2020, p.1 of 6)

If well-being is a guiding value of the HEI, then it must be careful to not quickly embrace an austerity program that involves the reduction of staff. An alternative approach, could involve the following questions:

- “What is it that we’ve missed that we want to bring back in?” (Netolicky, 2020, p.394);
- “What is it that has been removed that we do not want to return to?” (Netolicky, 2020, p.394);
- In our current plan (operational and strategic) how can we include processes, initiatives and systems we want to have less of?
- What ideas regarding new opportunities are sitting latent across HEI staff and students?
- How can we adjust our quality assurance processes, measures and expectations so that any culture of perfection and non-reporting of error (areas for development) are intentionally dismantled?
- How can we further develop an online (Burke & Larmar, 2021) and when campuses re-open, a face-to-face pedagogy of care for students and lecturers?
- How as responsive organizations in our communities can HEIs provide bridges to education especially to those whose lives have been damaged through the pandemic?



# Engaging through resilience and well-being

“Grief experts have suggested that emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic are very similar to grief” (de Jong et al., 2020, p.1 of 6)

For those who have experienced grief and trauma, finding meaning is a central theme in the literature that focuses on these areas (de Jong et al., 2020). Finding meaning involves the threading together of coherence, purpose, and significance, where the opposite of these respectively are:

- Uncertainty and incomprehensibility;
- Aimlessness and loss of direction; and,
- Absence of [personal and collective] value. (Martela & Steger, 2016)

Therefore, if HEIs are intentionally going to (re)build resilience and well-being for staff and students, then they will be asking:

1. Where is uncertainty and incomprehensibility most apparent?
2. Where are staff and students possibly experiencing a loss of direction and purpose?
3. How can staff and students experience being valued in and by the HEI?



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HEIs do have a vital role to play in and through this pandemic. People in HEIs can still change lives for the greater good, as long as those people also look out and care for each other.

He aha te mea nui?

He tangata  
He tangata  
He tangata

What is the most  
important thing?

It is people,  
it is people,  
it is people



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