LR4 Uncertainty & Complex Systems Transcript

This is video four in the module on leading remotely in a crisis, where you can engage everyone around a common purpose with positivity, solutions focus and systemic perspective. In this video we look at leading through uncertainty and in complex systems.

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Welcome back to the leading remotely module. This video is thinking a little bit more about how do we find our direction and make decisions and lead through uncertainty and these really complex situations. And the reason we're talking about this is because most of the issues that we face in general these days, not only in a crisis, and most of the challenges are not directly solvable problems. Especially because we're all part of a global system, and it has complexity within it at multiple levels, from global right down to a very local level. And the complex and interdependent challenges that we face when leading through an after a crisis are wicked problems. And the term wicked denotes resistance to resolution. Not that it is evil. So a wicked problem is a complex issue it depends on many factors, and they're difficult or impossible to solve, or fix, because you've got incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognise. And so it's hard to grasp exactly what is the problem, or how to tackle it.

So it's a bit like having a tangled mass of threads, which is what this picture is trying to show, and you just don't know which thread to pull first. Or should you pull at all on anything to untangle your situation. And if you pull on one thread, how will it affect other threads and then what overall and unanticipated consequences will that have?

So wicked problems are often paradoxes, and they have no single solution, and more than one viable and necessary outcome that you need to consider. So a classic example of a paradox is short term and long term. You can't focus only on activities that are good for the short term, because the chances are then that you're not going to survive in the long term. And equally if you only do activities that are good for long term, then the chances are you're not going to get through the immediate situation. So it requires a shift of mindset to thinking “And”. Short term and long term, not short term or long term. So all the activities that we need to do and what we tend to find where we've got a team or committee, and we've got diametrically opposite ideas and people arguing that theirs is the right answer, the chances are you've got a paradox here and we need to look at all of those answers: both ends of the spectrum, because we need to do things that satisfy both terms in order to have a viable outcome.

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So one of the ways to approach leading through these complex and systemic situations and wicked problems is not to try to solve these unsolvable problems, and instead focus on the solutions that you want to achieve. So this is not trying to solve the problems that are in the AS IS and our current environment systems but focusing on where do we want to be. What are the solutions that we want to achieve? Where do you want to be? And then you can come up with a strategy of how can you get there. so that's what we're going to be talking about for this next bit. And in order to do this collaboration is absolutely key for understanding these multiple different factors that play a part in our system, and sharing your questions and ideas to build this more complete picture of where we are, the environment and the systems that we're in, and come up with a more complete picture of where we need to be in order to find our viable and ideal future. And when we're in a crisis, one thing to consider is not only all the things that are bad, all the things that are changed, and all the things that you can no longer do the way that we used to do. Why not use this frame or perspective that this is an ideal opportunity to strategically reimagine your ideal future. There were things in the past that were brilliant but there were also things that weren't working brilliantly well, also.

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So let's take this opportunity as we’re leading through a crisis to think where do we really want to be? What is that destination that we were talking about? Like in the sailing example, where do we want to be? And what would be our ideal.

And then we also need to look at so where are we now, because we need to, to then address the gap, because we can only start from where we are. We come up with our ideal future and in order to get that we need to know where we are to begin with, in order to set an appropriate direction to and strategy to get to where we want to be.

So, this is really key now to actually face the brutal facts as Jim Collins would put it, in the book. Good to Great. And if you've not read it, that's a very useful book. So we need to face the fact of our current situation. How do we deal with the hand that we've been dealt right now? Because we are in a crisis, we are leading our staff remotely, they're at a distance, and maybe we're used to that or maybe we're not used to that. So we want to gain a deep understanding of what it is, where we are at the moment that involves things that are, you know, what we're doing, and also involves our environment, everything's around us and especially the things around us that we can't affect, but which do have an impact on us. So we can't ignore the environment around us even though we can't control it. It does have an impact on us and we ignore it at our peril. So what can we do to try to make advantage of that environment and work with it to go, go with the flow with it a bit like a surfer rides the wave, rather than trying to battle against it? So think about how do we do that.

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And one way to important way to do that is to get multiple perspectives at different system levels and positions. So remember to step back and look at things from that system level. Because very often the solutions you're looking for are somewhere else in the system, not necessarily in your immediate system but perhaps at a different level and perhaps further away than you imagine. And so it could involve collaboration with others.

The key here is to recognise what is within your control and what is not within your control and focus your actions on the things that are within your control. So notice your thinking patterns. So, we have, you’re perhaps familiar with the, I think, Stephen Covey wrote a lot about this - so focus on things within your control, start with the things that are within your control. And notice how you’re thinking patterns. Listen to the tone and direction of your conversations when you're considering the environment and the systems in which you operate, many of the issues that concern us as a leader, as a leader, are very far from our control. we have absolutely no influence over them whatsoever. There are some things that we can influence usually indirectly, and there's relatively few things that we have direct control over.

And so when we're focusing on things that are within our control. That creates a sense of empowerment and our language is all about the things that we can do. So for example, when in the sailing example, I told before, the things that we could control were how we navigate the boat, how we could take bearings and readings on distant lights, For example, or try to navigate with the stars and the sun when it was out, and how we set the set the angle of the sails, how we set the angle of the boat to the waves, all those are things that we can do, and control.

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When your focus is on the things that concern you. It creates a sense of helplessness. And this is so for example in sailing if. To begin with, I was focused on these enormous waves and the way the boat was responding to it or not responding to it. And I felt totally afraid and that creates a sense of helplessness because I can't do anything about the weather. I can't change the weather. I can't make the wind stop blowing so hard. I can't reduce the size of the waves. It’s impossible! Of course it's impossible! But often in working in life, we're so focused on all these things, and it's … these are barriers to anything that we can do and it creates a sense of complete helplessness not being in control. And that adds to the fear and anxiety, and the uncertainty of a situation. And as leaders we are responsible to reduce that anxiety and reduce that sense of helplessness.

And the way that we can do that is to recognise what are the things that we can do. This is a situation. it's not what happens to us that matters so much as, how do we respond to it. And the way that we respond is looking at what are the things that we can actively do within our control. And, and when we talk about the things that we can do, that creates a sense of empowerment that really raises the confidence of our people and the belief that there are things that we can do to manage through this and survive.

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And when we’re constantly coming up with the things that you can't do, and barriers, then recognise you're talking about concerned over which you have no influence. And that requires a different way to approach it they will need to look at some of the things that you can do in the meantime. So, in the sailing we couldn't do anything about the size of the waves, the fear was the waves would sink us. We could do things to change the way the boat was interacting with the waves, which meant that we were safer on the waves and we did not sink. so recognise the difference between our concern over the things we can't control and the concern of the things we can control which change the way that we interact with the things that we can't control. And that's what we need to think about when we're coming up to, to lead through these complex and uncertain, and difficult situations.

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So coming back to this, we then want to clarify our future ideal destination. Now, there'll be a lot of things to do about goal setting and all the rest of it. The purpose of this session is not to go into that, so I'm assuming that you will have ways of doing that. And the key here is to recognise: How will you know that you've got there? If you were to imagine someone had a magic wand and they made your ideal future happen overnight, how would you know that it had happened? What will be happening, what were you and other people be doing? What can you see? What can you hear? What is different? And how will you know that suddenly you have your ideal future? And... Apologies...

We are using the systems approach because we're avoiding looking at the cause of an issue in this, because in the system, there's no one single cause, because everything is interlinked, in there are multiple factors. So in order to get to our future we're not going to look back and say well what's the problem, what's the barrier that's preventing us being there at the moment. Instead we're looking at, well what's our ideal future and what could we possibly be doing?

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So when we're feeling stuck we can ask, well, what level of the system, am I thinking at? When are the things that I'm… when, when do we already get a little bit towards this ideal future? And how do we recognise what's happening there? So when, when things go well, do we have a way to review it and understand what made this go well in the way that we wanted so that we can apply that to other situations and make it go well more often?

And keep in mind that the possibilities to reimagine your future desired state, this ‘TO BE’, it lies in the interactions within the environment and the systems. It’ll be between different levels of the system. It’ll be between different people or different organisations. It could be in the way that you interact with your surroundings. It may not be internal to your team, your organisation. It could be wider within the sector, you know, even unrelated people or other parts of the wider system. So that’s, when you're feeling stuck think what level of the system am I looking at? What does it look like from another position? What new information does that give us?

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That’s why it's worth getting lots of different perspectives from different people. So we understand wider what is this environment and the systems, and then we look more widely for these links and more widely than it seems natural at first.

And that means that we can change the actions that we're doing now from what is not working to actions that lead to our new possibilities. So as I mentioned, we've already reviewed what's already working: when you already achieve steps to do this, how can you do more of that? What are you going to keep on doing this the same because it's working well? What do you actually stop? What needs to be done differently? There's lots of questions you can go into in that direction.

And we also need to recognise what is at stake if we don't do these changes. So it may not be that we just go back to the old normal. Perhaps there is no old normal anymore. What's at stake? What do we stand to lose? what's the cost of as not making these positive changes. How do we help people realise the value in moving towards our new ideal future? How do we bring everybody on board to do that? So really recognising what's at stake and what there is to lose if we're not making the changes that we're recognising.

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 So I'll invite you to think about how can you use this sort of approach in how you're coming up with the direction - where you want to be? In recognising to what extent are the challenges that you're facing at the moment as a leader, really these sort of rather wicked problems or paradoxes? What are the two aspects, or more aspects of the situation in the paradox that you're in, where you need to come up with a viable solution for both ends of the scale? So whether it's short and long term, whether it's managing and leading, lots of these different things. So look at your situation if you're feeling stuck and think, what kind of problem is it? And actually, rather than analysing all of the problem, ask what is the future? What are the things that I need to solve / satisfy in order to create the new future and how do we do more of what's already working? And see to what extent this approach in this perspective can help you get new insights to create a better strategy for leading through this potential crisis. and thinking about drawing on what we've touched on in the managing remotely session to think about how do we then apply the aspects of virtual distance as well within our thinking, because that adds to the system and environment that we are working within, and how we would like it to work.

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So that's something to brainstorm for yourself discuss it with colleagues, and if you're working through these videos with colleagues, and then we'll come back to the next video which is about looking at how we can be that beacon of hope and confidence as a leader.

15:58