

## **Promoting success for sustainability research in the Oceania region**

Workshop convened by the Impact Dialogues working group of the Network of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Organisations – Oceania. 14 June 2021 held online at the Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress 2021 (SRI2021)

### **Key outcomes:**

- Endorsement of the view that new leadership models were necessary for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary-led sustainability transformations
- Recognition that at times of crisis (such as the COVID pandemic) leadership reverts to traditional modes of operation despite the heightened importance of doing things differently
- Identification of, and agreement on, leadership principles is a relatively straightforward exercise – although there are tensions between some principles that may require careful navigation
- Acknowledgement of the important link between leadership principles and values, and work place practices and rituals. Ritual can be a key way to embed ways of working that support a change agenda

A video of the workshop is available at:

<https://attend.sri2021.org/meetings/virtual/tpgsoLsZ3LRcyz6W>

### **Aim of the workshop**

To identify and discuss the values and principles that will guide the future of leadership for sustainability transformations, and to develop the basis for a manifesto based on these principles”.

### **Attendees**

Crighton Nichols (facilitator), Derrick Armstrong, Gabriele Bammer, Ramona Boodoosingh, Cecile Dupoy, Iain Gordon, Sonia Graham, Allanah Ryan, Ken Taylor, Mina Vilayleck (SRI2021). Six others participated for part of the workshop.

### **Preparatory work**

A video of a keynote address by Chris Boone (Dean, College of Global Futures, Arizona State University, USA) provided background for the workshop. Available at: <https://nitro-oceania.net/activities/working-groups/impact-narratives-working-group/june-2021-workshop/>

A paper: “Creating leadership collectives for sustainability transformations” (Care et al Sustainability Science (2021) 16:703–708; <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-021-00909-y>)

### **Background**

NITRO-Oceania was established in 2019 and aims to promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research in the Oceania region. This is the third workshop in a series of three. The workshops each dealt with an aspect of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary organisational impact, coalescing around the following questions:

1. How do we best tell our story?
2. How do we plan impactful research?
3. What does leadership for impact look like? (Today's workshop)

### **Principles for sustainability leadership discussion**

What might a manifesto for leadership look like in sustainability transitions? What are the underlying principles?

Following a brief panel discussion, where participants could ask questions about the background resources of the authors of the papers mentioned in the preparatory work, participants were each asked to identify what they thought were the key principles to underpin sustainability leadership.

These included:

- The importance of having and articulating a vision
- Encouraging others to take calculated risks
- Integrity
- Empathy
- The "taking root" concept outlined in the careoperative paper.
- Creating welcoming open environment where people can share
- Honesty
- Respect
- Everyone has something to bring to the table
- Being patient
- Respecting knowledge that comes through listening
- Need safe space to change the way you think
- Political nous - understanding the group you are working with
- Courage to say the unpopular thing
- Respectful (can be in tension with courage)
- Check in with people we're working with
- (Knowledge) relationality
- Having something to offer
- Expertise - is it necessary for leaders to be world class leaders in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research?
- Importance of ritual. Rituals to articulate what is needed.
- Thought leadership is needed - people who will help you solve problems rather than solve problems for you
- Focus in transdisciplinary research is on the problem rather than the process and relationships (e.g. through ritual)

The group then identified tensions (shown in the screenprint below) and voted on which to discuss further, with agreement landing on "rituals."

World-class expertise in ITD, but need to use it for thought-leadership and support, not domination ♥	We are all writ equal but we are not writ the same ★✓✓	empathy, honesty, respect, critical self reflection
value of shared leadership ✓✓	the role of crises in paradigm shifts ♥♥♥	Can we determine a priori the "right" leadership for the right Perseverance
Ability to advocate for ITD in broader research policy and funding environments	rotational collective leadership	relationality ♥
Tension: shared leadership - hierarchical structures ✓	Subordinate our ego to the greater good ✓✓♥	leadership as a state of mind and a set of behaviours ✓
Tension: courage--respectful ♥♥♥	Courage to challenge the status quo ✓	incorporating ritual in meaningful way
leaders help us solve problems ourselves not to solve our problems ✓♥	incorporating relationality fully ✓✓	Rituals that ensure 1) checking in on everyone, 2) construction of safe space and 3) encourage people to respectfully disagree - so that avoid groupthink and encourage creativity ✓✓✓
taking time (slowing down) in fast-paced environment, 'short' project cycles ♥♥♥	Contributing to the whole	Tension: longer terms of leadership - rotating leadership
creating welcoming environment in competitive (academic) environment ✓✓✓✓	Prioritise collective rather than individual goals	creating a safe environment, inductive to risk taking ✓

## Rituals

Participants individually presented about useful rituals that they have seen in action, including:

- Checking in at the start of every session to see how everyone is going in their lives (an approach used by Indigenous Australians)
- Group process monitor - this person has the task of focusing on process and calling out instances where processes need to be addressed. While an individual is appointed to the role, it is a group responsibility, so anyone can call out processes that need to be addressed.
- Providing updates to the broader research group on a regular basis, not just when something important is happening
- Time for local and traditional rituals, including religious
- Building trust - providing a space to raise concerns, what isn't working, what we're struggling with
- Careoperative have been experimenting different meeting foci especially business, care, fun.

In follow-up reflection mention was made of the need to 'de-ritualise' some practices, such as performance appraisal. It is important that rituals are meaningful and support courageous conversations. It can be hard to keep rituals going during hard/tough times, e.g. redundancies. Rituals can normalise ways of behaving. What comes first? Values and principles or rituals?

## Wrap-up

Allanah Ryan provided the following synthesis of the discussions.

1. Geopolitical context matters
  - Covid-19 (fast)
  - Climate change (slow)
 This is our challenge.
2. Principles and values

There wasn't much debate - we're largely in agreement. We agree that inclusivity, care and reflexivity are important.

3. Practices and ritual

How are we going to do this work?

How do we position ourselves?

Need to recognise that how we position ourselves shapes what we bring

She ended with a quote from French philosopher of science Bruno Latour:

"The critic is not the one who debunks but the one who assembles."

We need to adapt the collective model to context.

This meeting summary is built on notes compiled by Sonia Graham.