

HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP: ENABLING RESILIENCE BY UNDERSTANDING COMPLEXITY



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Introduction

Healthcare systems exhibit features of both Hierarchical and Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). Fundamental to skillful Health Care Leadership is a deep understanding of how these systems function and intersect in the delivery of high quality health care. Leadership within a complex environment is based upon the application of complexity theory within the study of organizational behaviour, and to the practice of leadership. Such leaders view the hospital or health service as a CAS composed of heterogenous agents that interact or affect each other, generating novel behaviour that emerges within the system. Understanding complexity fosters greater understanding of Resilient Health Care. Health Care Leaders value resilient qualities in their teams, defined as the capacity to overcome errors and adversity, often in challenging and chaotic situations, to achieve a positive outcomes for the patient.(Braithwaite, 2018) What is less defined are the leadership qualities that enable resilience in CAS, which by definition have no traditional or overarching leadership structures. This challenges the clinical leader to create an environment in which performance and resilience can occur within the team.(Braithwaite, Wears, & Hollnagel, 2015) Rather than exerting control, they influence organizational behavior through the coordination of networks and interactions.(Brown, 2011)

We propose these Simple Guidelines for Leading in Complex Organizations:

Foster network construction. Enrich current, and forge new networks, within and external to the organization. By enhancing open communication and information flow, these provide a structure for emergence and innovation, enabling adaptation and resilience.

Foster System Enablers and Catalysts. Create an environment that fosters network development, inter-agent respect, trust and collaboration. Such leaders display advanced negotiation skills that encourage value growth through alignment of shared interests.

CEO of Self. Leaders demonstrate philosophies that align with those of the organization. They promote an attitude of excellence and practice rituals to enhance personal resilience.

Nurture seeds of emergence. Leaders recognize the need to create psychological safety and caring, so ideas can be tested without risk, and new approaches enhanced by fostering connections between agents of knowledge. By promoting discretionary effort and adaptive creativity, organizational resilience and is enhanced through out the system. Catalyzing the linkages between knowledge nodes within the organization creates the potential for learning and transformation.

Systems Thinking. Leaders must constantly monitor the interactions within the complex and hierarchical systems and adjust their thinking and leadership style accordingly. Timely response to perturbations enables resilience. Leaders must be wary of introducing constraints and barriers to processes and networks.

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Minimize WAI vs WAD. Leaders much ensure the mental maps of system performance are aligned to the coalface reality of everyday work rather than imagined by distant agents. This allows for planning of operations and procedures that maximizes system potential and resilience in complex and chaotic environments.

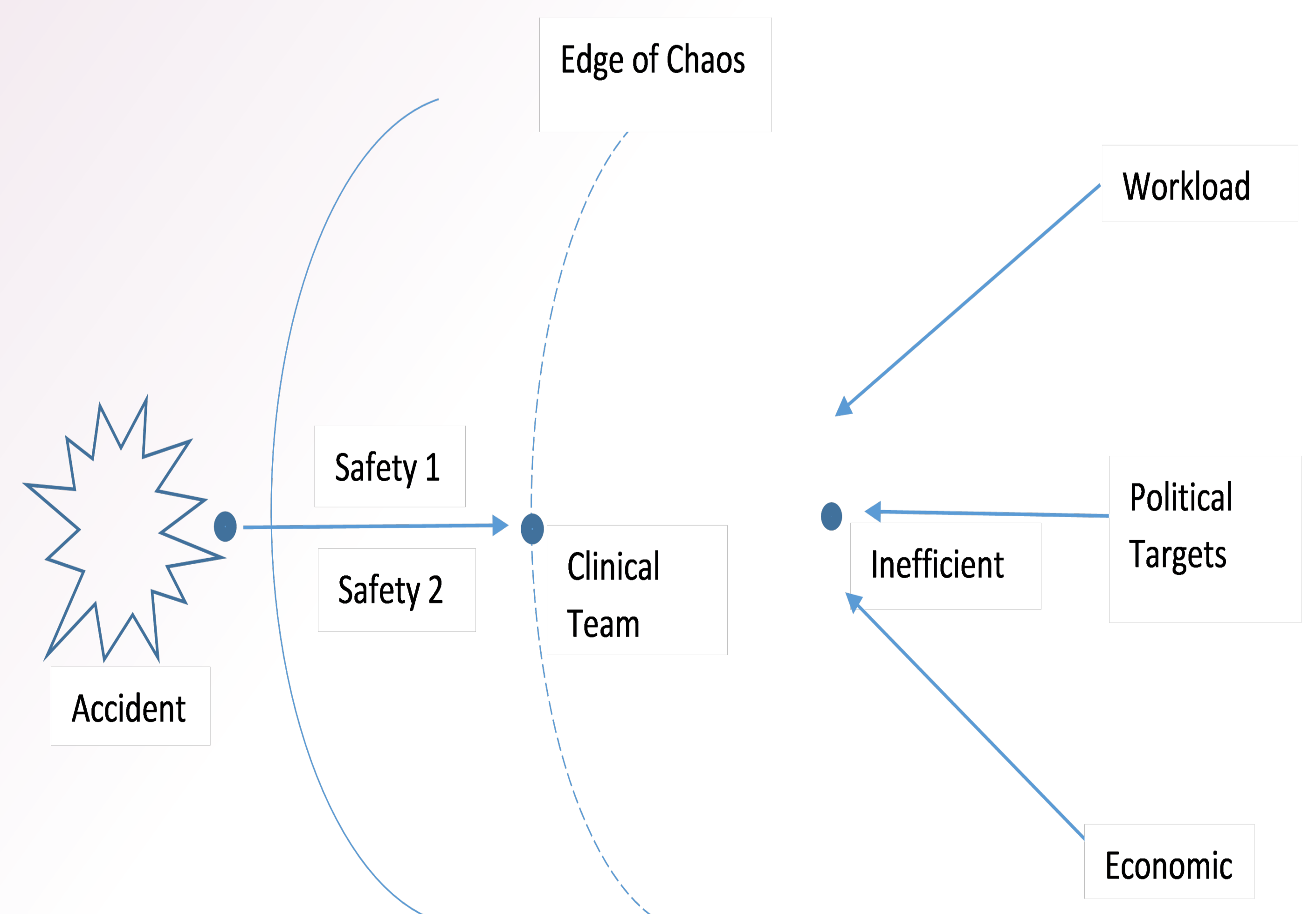
Promote Simulation Training. Leaders recognize that for team improvement and accident potential reduction, simulation of complex and chaotic scenarios allows a safe environment to learn and prepare for real life. Further, unexpected linkages and consequences from the event can be explored with relevant stakeholders, minimizing harm propagation.

Legitimate Power. When an outcome is paramount to networks and relationships, leaders need to be fair and reasonable, listen well and be transparent in processes.

The Clinician Leader

To promote Complexity Leadership understanding for the clinician, we have modified the model of 'Edge of Chaos' to better define the Australian context and hypothesize that by better understanding the interactions of the various elements, clinical leaders will be better placed to develop teams and processes aligned to Work as Done rather than Work as Imagined, enabling resilience.(Braithwaite, 2018)

Successful clinical leaders help create order from potential chaos by planning for operations in such environments, exhibiting plans for 'Work as Done' rather than 'Work as Imagined'. Previously we have described 10 resilient traits in high performing clinical teams, and propose that **COHESION** is the most highly valued trait when operating in the 'Edge of Chaos' zone, a condition inherent to CAS.(Lane, 2015) High functioning teams in complex environments rely upon a deep sense of trust and co-operation between members to achieve optimal performance in adversity, nurtured by leaders who display care and compassion for their team. (Sinek, 2014) Indeed, it is the relationship between team members, and their capacity for psychological ownership, that drives performance.



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