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THE ECOLOGY OF WISDOM

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Abstract. *This is the first of two papers concerning wisdom as an ecosystem appearing in sequential editions of Management & Marketing journal. The notion of wisdom as an ecosystem, or "the wisdom ecology," builds on work by Hays (2007) who first identified wisdom as an organisational construct and proposed a dynamic model of it. The centrepiece of this paper and the companion part to follow is a relationship map of the wisdom ecosystem (the Causal Loop Diagram at Figure 1). This first instalment provides background on wisdom and complex adaptive systems, and introduces the wisdom ecosystem model. The second instalment, "Mapping Wisdom as a Complex Adaptive System," appearing in the next edition of Management & Marketing, explains systems dynamics modelling and discusses the wisdom ecosystem model in detail. It covers the four domains, or subsystems, of the wisdom ecosystem, Dialogue, Communal Mind, Collective Intelligence, and Wisdom, and walks readers through the model, exploring each of its 24 elements in turn. That second paper examines the relationships amongst system elements and illuminates important aspects of systems function.*

Keywords: causal loop diagramming, complexity, dialogue, organisational learning, systems dynamics, wisdom.

1. Orientation to the Wisdom Ecosystem Series

This paper introduces the notion of organisational wisdom as an ecosystem. It builds on work by Hays (2007) who first identified wisdom as an organisational construct and proposed a dynamic model of it. The ecological perspective presented here adds to Hays' 2007 preliminary model, revealing organisational wisdom to embody a complex adaptive system that evolves, given supportive conditions. When thriving, the wisdom ecosystem will learn, develop, and adapt in correspondence with changing environmental demands and opportunities. As such, it will be more resilient and responsive than organisations that have not attained or been capable of sustaining wisdom. At higher levels of functioning, the system will become conscious of itself as wise, and will be capable of anticipating and preparing itself for impending changes in the environment.

This paper and its companion part to follow identify elements critical to the learning, development, adaptability, and consciousness of the wisdom ecosystem and their complex interrelationships. As resilient as it might be, an ecosystem is also in delicate balance, making it potentially vulnerable. Neglect of or abuse to a key element (node) or subsystem can gravely impact an organisation's wisdom capabilities.[1] Leaders must, then, act as stewards of the organisational wisdom ecosystem, much as enlightened leaders show concern for and protect the environment-our global ecosystems. Understanding wisdom ecosystem elements and

their relationships can provide leaders with the knowledge of where and how to intervene to return a flagging system to health and keep it flourishing.

The centrepiece of this paper is a relationship map of the wisdom ecosystem (the Causal Loop Diagram at Figure 1).

There are four major parts or „domains" of the ecosystem map: (I) Dialogue, (II) Communal Mind, (III) Collective Intelligence, and (IV) Wisdom. Each of these subsystems is vital to organisational wisdom and the overall wisdom the system manifests. „Mapping Wisdom as a Complex Adaptive Ecosystem", the second of two companion papers, examines each of these subsystems, their relationships, and their potential synergies. This first paper provides background on wisdom and complex adaptive systems, and introduces the wisdom ecosystem model. This same Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) provides the continuity across this paper and its companion to follow.

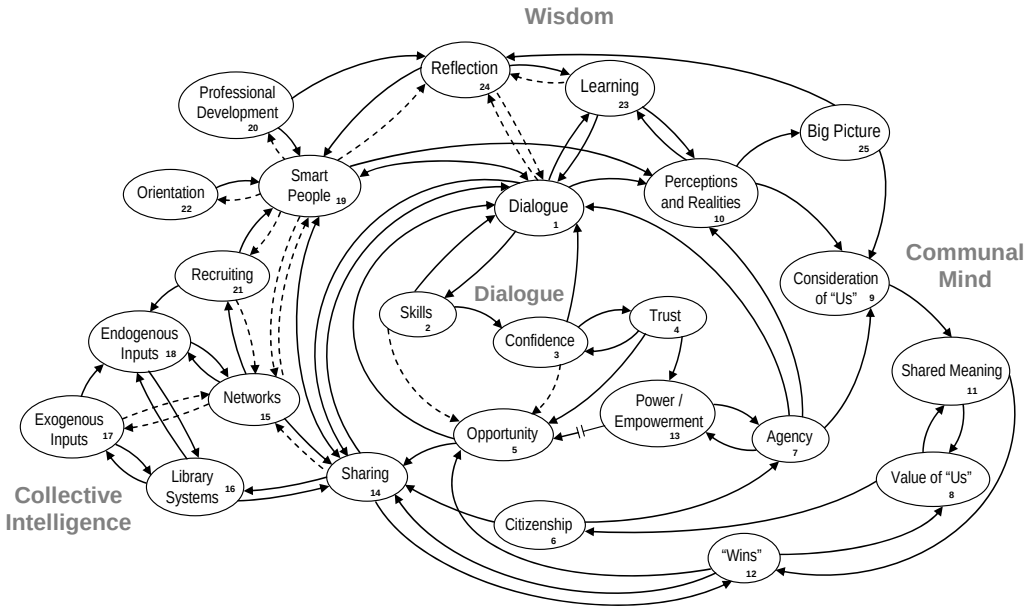

Figure 1. The Wisdom Ecosystem, showing the four subsystems, Dialogue, Communal Mind, Collective Intelligence, and Wisdom, and each of the 24 elements

2. Contextual background

There has never been such urgency and potential to seize opportunities and solve problems of global consequence as exists right now. The interconnectedness of all life and all things was once only a spiritual notion reflective of simpler times and

observed in mans intimate relationship with nature. It is now dramatically revealed in global crises and other worldwide phenomena, and appreciation of this fact is growing. Nonetheless, we continue to consume and endanger our planet in ways that simply are unsustainable. Our disregard for nature and the future of mankind is not because we are uninformed, uneducated, or unintelligent. The „system" drives our behaviour (Husted, 1993). The system, however, is not something „out there", beyond our control and intent to victimise us-a system that seems chaotic and spinning out of control. In all fairness, the system operates perfectly. Its elements and their relationships precisely predict its behaviour. We are integral parts of the system. If we want change we must first understand the systems in which desired change is embedded and change them (Husted, 1993).

These two papers on the wisdom ecosystem provide guidance that will help readers come to better understand the systems in which they live and work, and thus begin to act more wisely and effectively in and on the world. They apply concepts of systems and complexity theory to dynamics of organisational learning and change. Causal Loop Diagramming is used to present a complex model of those dynamics, conceived here as the Wisdom Ecosystem (see Figure 1). The two terms making up the name of the model indicate that wisdom is a characteristic and product of a set of mutually-supporting factors, conditions, and relationships – the ecosystem. Thus, this series is concerned with the nature of wisdom and the environments that both depend on and enable it. The direct application is organisations and institutions, but with minor modifications the model can be scaled down to the team or work group level or up to communities and even societies. As a starting point, it is taken as given that organisational wisdom is both desirable and possible.

The Wisdom Ecosystem model and the foundations on which it is based are covered thoroughly later in this article and its companion to appear in the next edition of *Management & Marketing.* Briefly, the model incorporates four key concepts: Dialogue, Communal Mind, Collective Intelligence, and Wisdom. This appears to be the first time that these ideas are brought together.[2] They are usually dealt with separately in the literature, if at all. Each of these constructs is shown to be essential, but individually insufficient to promote organisational resilience or sustainability. Working together, however, they afford organisations the capability to learn and adapt: to make the most of what they know and can do; and to reveal and overcome limitations in knowledge, skill, or performance.

The Wisdom Ecosystem and the ideas comprising it were in some respects presaged by McElroy (2000) almost ten years ago. He wrote of a confluence he was observing at the time, an „unfolding convergence of knowledge management, organizational learning, and complexity theory" (p. 195). He noted that each of these streams had much to gain from the others, and predicted the increasing recognition of the synergies to be purchased by their amalgamation. While here we are talking about Collective Intelligence, Communal Mind, and Wisdom, rather than knowledge

management, organisational learning, and complexity, the parallels are striking and significant. This is especially evident given that this series is less about wisdom than it is the complex dynamic system in which wisdom dwells. These streams, too, have much greater potential jointly than independently.

3. Wisdom as living complexity

3.1. A new way of thinking; A new way of acting

The intent of this series is to promote a new way of thinking about work, and how and why things work as they do. Outmoded views impede learning and change. Brodbeck (2002) asserts that:

Management today now needs to see the world anew, which requires a different or higher level of human consciousness and awareness as a basis for reshaping organizations to better fit their changed environmental settings… an anti-reductionist stance through a systems-theory approach and complexity" (p. 33).

Shelton and Darling (2003) agree, avowing that:

If leaders are to create authentic learning organizations, they must adopt a new way of viewing reality… a new way of thinking about organizations" (p. 353).

In accord with the position taken here, these authors posited that the "new science" theories of complexity, chaos, and quantum mechanics could provide the foundation for a more contemporary and relevant way of thinking. They identify and describe seven „quantum skills" that alleviate learning impediments; each having relevance to the Wisdom Ecosystem:

- intentional *seeing*
- [vibrant] vital *feeling*
- paradoxical *thinking*
- responsible *acting*
- intuitive *knowing*
- abiding *trust* in life's processes
- relationship *being*

It would come as no surprise to hear that these notions sound alien. They have not, yet, become part of the traditional management and organisation lexicon and thought. That is the point. The tried and true may no longer suffice. If the wide-ranging literature reviewed for this series is at least suggestive, then a new day may be dawning; and with it new ways of thinking, acting, and being *organisational.* There has been a burgeoning interest in complexity, chaos, emergence, and self-organising systems, at least in the twenty-some years the author has been observing the phenomenon. This upsurge has been stimulated by influential scholars such as Gleick (1987), Stacey (1995), and Wheatley (1999), amongst others. Who knows where it may lead or where the trend will next turn?

For the present, it would seem that complexity and its friends have considerable intellectual appeal, if not emotional. Yet, they have gained less practical ground (Brodbeck, 2002). It is hard to apply an idea such as chaos in the organisational context. Who wants it? Most people think there's too much chaos and ambiguity already! And as far as emergence and self-organisation are concerned, many managers have a hard enough time managing existing systems. It is not hopeless, however. Complex adaptive system modelling using Causal Loop Diagramming is one practical method that represents and fosters such progressive thinking. This series presents a rare tutorial on developing and using CLDs (see „Mapping the Wisdom Ecosystem" in the next release of *Management & Marketing*).

Every organisation can perform more effectively, ethically, and sustainably. Innovation and change, however, sometimes seem monumental or even insurmountable. Too often, our best efforts seem to go nowhere. Worse, they sometimes have unanticipated and undesirable effects (Argyris, 1986; Tucker et al, 2001). The Wisdom Ecosystem model at least partially explains complex organisational dynamics concerning performance, learning, and change. Parts of the model (*the map*) will surely resonate with many readers, helping to illuminate familiar phenomena that often go unexplained. More importantly, however, the tool and process put forward (*for mapping*) will equip readers to develop and implement change agendas and solve complex problems that have proven stubborn in the past. Being able to work effectively within and upon complex systems requires wisdom, which entails, amongst other things, consideration of consequences, long-term and far-reaching (Hays, 2007).

3.2. Wisdom

Wisdom is used here in a general sense. No particular stance or philosophical view of wisdom is taken or directly advocated. It is beyond the scope of this series to go into depth about wisdom or the various ways it has been conceived through the ages or from the perspective of alternate world views. The author is not a philosopher and claims no expertise on wisdom. If a personal or professional view on wisdom were to be put forward from the author, it would be that wisdom is a practice, discipline, state of mind, and way of life-a process of becoming.[3] This is in no way to dismiss scholarly pursuit of wisdom or erudite accomplishment. It is merely to observe that wisdom is, more than anything, a way of thinking and acting in accord with thought. It is less about how much one knows than it is about how one lives, given what one does and does not know.

This series, and especially the portrayal of ecological wisdom, is not *about* wisdom in the academic sense. Many readers attracted by the title, abstract, or key terms would know much more about wisdom than articulated here. This series attempts, instead, to make wisdom practical and accessible to teams, organisations, and communities; to convey a tool and process that teachers, leaders, practitioners, and

activists can all use to bring out the wisdom in others, in collectives. The two papers in the wisdom ecosystem series attempt to frame [organisational] wisdom as both possible and necessary, and explain how it arises (or is impeded). This is achieved through examining the dynamic interaction of features common to or desirable for organisations. These collectively are termed the Wisdom Ecosystem. Within this ecological context, wisdom is understood to be the product of numerous factors (intelligence, knowledge, experience etc.) operating synergistically, with the result being greater than any of the individual constituents alone or additively (Gibson, 2008).

The study of wisdom is a daunting endeavour. Truly, the more you learn about and are exposed to wisdom and what is said about it, the more you realise how little you know… how much more to learn there is. It is, however, useful to have a context for wisdom applied, foundations upon which the student can further build. Views on wisdom are vast and as varied as the sources conveying them, and there are many worthwhile articles and books on the subject. Hays (2007) puts much of this into perspective and provides good contextual background and a solid review of the literature. Other relevant sources with wider applicability to the wisdom ecosystem include: Bierley, Kessler, and Christensen (2000); Bonn (2005); Dey and Steyaert (2007); Miguel (2002); Nonaka and Toyama (2007); Rowsell and Berry (1993); Sternberg (1998; 2003); Stevens (2000); and Weymes (2004). Korak-Kakabadse, Korak-Kakabadse, and Kouzmin (2001) present a highly-complementary treatise in their masterful paper on wisdom and leadership renewal, addressing amongst other topics dialogue, trust, and empowerment, each included in the model put forward in this series.

Drawing on these and other sources and at least a decade of study, contemplation, and observation, the author has synthesised principles concerning wisdom, including those codified for this series on the Wisdom Ecosystem (see Appendix 1). Some of these principles are woven into the wisdom subsystem portrayed at the top of Figure 1. (The wisdom and other subsystems are described at length in „Mapping the Wisdom Ecosystem", the second paper in this series). This *life's-work* dovetails with the author's research in teamwork, collaboration, and Communities of Practice. It seems the notions of wisdom and group learning and performance were destined to intertwine.

The main point to remember, here, is that we are concerned in this series with *collective* wisdom, not individual. This comes out strongly in the second paper that deals with Dialogue, Communal Mind, and Collective Intelligence all cooperative endeavours. We are interested in the way teams, groups, communities, and organisations engender, elicit, and exploit wisdom. The ecosystem model shows that collective wisdom is at least theoretically possible, and what practical steps need to be taken to promote it.

Intelligence is necessary, but insufficient in enabling creativity and innovation, complex problem-solving, or responsible decision-making. Wisdom is what allows individuals, groups, organisations, and even societies to solve the most challenging problems in ways that serve the greater good. Wisdom resides as a

potential within us all, but it often and unfortunately remains latent. There are many reasons for this. As we begin to understand and remove the impediments to wisdom, we will begin to see individuals and organisations expressing greater concern for others and our planet-that is, acting more wisely in and on the world.

As with intelligence, wisdom is often thought to be something with which only extraordinary individuals are endowed. However, if we can accept that intelligence is something that can be collective, then it stands to reason that wisdom can as well. This is not to say that wisdom is always apparent in those around us or widely recognised as a pervasive individual quality, much less an attribute of groups, organisations, or societies. That wisdom is seldom observed is not, itself, an indictment. We may simply fail to recognise it in ourselves and others. This comes as no surprise given the fact that the wise are held to be few and far between, and the exemplars are often „bigger than life." At the same time, wisdom may be impeded or suppressed by the systems in which we live and work. We would like to think that wisdom transcends the motivations and constraints of our surroundings, but this is not always so. This is why understanding *system* or organisational dynamics is so important. We may need to liberate and nourish wisdom.

Wisdom is not cleverness. The sly fox is cunning, but not wise. Our organisations, institutions, and nations may be led by clever individuals and teams, politically astute and comfortable wielding power, but escapades, debacles, and corruption, crimes, and other misdeeds provide strong evidence that our leaders do not always act wisely. Dubious ethics, self-serving values and mores, ambiguous laws, and inconsistent enforcement go part way in accounting for transgresions and indiscretions, but do not explain what drives us to do the right thing.[4]

It can be that our world is just too complex and chaotic to understand and deal with. Jerome Wiesner, President Emeritus of MIT is quoted by Bettis and Prahalad (1995) as remarking: *„Some problems are just too complicated for rational, logical solutions. They admit insights, not answers"* (p. 9)

This may be the case with some problems and situations, but many threats and challenges are within the realm of solution. Systems thinking helps us understand the complexity of problems and opportunities, and informs us where to intercede with the greatest probability of success. Systems thinking and its tools are clever, but not merely. Their use can elicit wisdom and if used wisely can promote elegant, ethical, and sustainable solutions to seemingly intractable problems. The Wisdom Ecosystem CLD (Figure 1) may not completely explain all organisational wisdom and its dynamics, but it substantially contributes to a more enlightened understanding of that phenomena.

3.3. Bringing Wisdom to Bear

Complex problems exhibit certain characteristics (Bronner, 1993). There is seldom one right answer, though there might be many partial solutions from which to choose. The problem may have hitherto been unyielding to attempts to solve it. It may

appear to have been solved only to later resurface. Solution attempts may also produce unintended, unexpected consequences or permit the arising of other latent problems (Husted, 1993). Such dormant problems exist in the system as potentials of which we are unaware or judge insignificant, masked by routine behaviour (operations) or attenuated by what appear to be more pressing problems. Problems of this nature have been called „wicked" or messy (Calton and Payne, 2003; Christis, 2005; Gold, 2001; Vennix, 1999; Walker, et al, 2008; see also the APSC report (2007): *Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective*).[5]

Being able to work effectively within and upon complex systems requires more than intelligence, knowledge, and experience (Snell, 2001). These attributes are sufficient when encountering typical problems and conventional situations, but not in confronting the new and unexpected (Keating, et al., 2001). It is not obvious what effects strategies based on existing intelligence, knowledge, and experience will have on unprecedented problems. And, it is a mistake to assume their pertinence and potency. Known solutions to unknown problems are as likely to fail or exacerbate the problem as they are to succeed. This is where wisdom comes in, and the greater the capacity for wisdom the better for all concerned.

Great wisdom capacity implies, amongst other things, widely dispersed or distributed wisdom and the capability to draw on and focus it. This is not the wisdom of the elite or that attributed to the occasional great leader, but the wisdom of the many (Surowieki, 2004). Diffused wisdom is substantively more and qualitatively different than, say, Collective Intelligence or Knowledge Management. It is not merely being smart or having wide access to information. It is a way of thinking and acting that more often than not will produce better decisions, strategies, and other outcomes.[6]

Manifest organisational wisdom would, for instance, recognise that a problem is new and different, and that it might be *unwise* to respond conventionally to it as if it were a typical challenge. Lyles (1994) refers to this capacity as discrimination, skills that help the organisation „…to assess the differences among situations, in order to identify future actions" (p. 24). Scharmer (2001) identifies it as „self-transcending knowledge," the ability to see and make use of new and emerging opportunities and situations before they fully come into being. Self-transcending knowledge or „precognition" comes about through generative dialogue, the fourth and highest level of thinking and interacting, according to Scharmer. The wise organisation would no more likely have a ready response or solution than its less wise counterparts. But it would have the capability to *come to understand* the problem system and, thus, to respond in a more reasoned way, all things considered.

Wisdom is about recognising and overcoming the limits of knowledge and intelligence. While both are useful differentiators, neither, per se, guarantees effectiveness, certainly not at the organisational, national, or global levels. It is how you use them that matters. For this reason, practical wisdom is often prescribed (Fowers, 2003; Gibson, 2008; Nonaka and Toyama, 2007; Osbeck and Robinson,

2005; Roca, 2008). In practice, however, what appears to make sense at the time (or in the moment) is unwise when weighed against long-term consequences and considering the bigger picture. Sometimes the wisest *immediate* course of action is pause. As leaders, this may require courage and strength given the demands from constituents to "be decisive" and to "take charge" or stay in control.

Wisdom is also about learning, thus is less a measure of accumulated experience than it is about increased capacity to learn, including the necessity to *unlearn* (Akgün, et al., 2007; Bettis and Prahalad, 1995; Cegarra and Moya, 2005; Gharajedaghi, 2007; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986; Sinkula, 2002; Yeo, 2007). It is not merely a platitude to assert that „wise is she who knows she does not know." Sternberg (1998) is amongst those who assert that an important indicator of wisdom is the recognition of the limits of ones knowledge, fallibility, and approaches to problem-solving. Much is unknown and perhaps unknowable; adaptive systems are continually in a process of becoming-evolving and becoming more knowing (Pickering, 2004). Much of what we do know is in need of revision; much of our current knowledge and skill inhibit us from learning and progressing (Argyris, 1991; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). This applies not only to individuals, but equally to teams, organisations, and societies.

The important point, here, is that many organisational and institutional systems have the potential to cultivate and display wisdom. Few do. It seems we are intent on dumbing ourselves down, or at best to accept mediocrity in thought and act. Corporate survival may be at stake. Many global problems could be alleviated by concerted efforts. And, the world could certainly stand to gain from more organisations acting wisely. How, then, can we begin to address these huge challenges?

The wisdom ecosystem provides one possible way forward. It insists that we have the wherewithal to make a positive difference in the world, and explains what is holding us back. Limitations are not [merely] self-interests, stupidity, apathy, resistance, or lack of resources, as we often assume, but continual counterproductive and competing efforts and initiatives, many of which seem at face to be precisely what we need. The primary explanation of this insidious behaviour is lack of system understanding and appreciation of the way the system operates. Repenning and Sterman (2001) undertake this issue in their incisive exploration of insidious organisational dynamics: the capability trap ("better before worse") and working harder versus working smarter. [7]

3.4. Wisdom, Systems and Complexity

While simple, closed systems exist (Jankowicz, 2000), those of concern, here, are by definition complex. Complexity refers to the plurality of components comprising a system and their interrelationships and intermingling of influences, large

and small. The more complex the system, the greater and sometimes less obvious the relationships amongst elements. A simple analogy provides considerable value in understanding system dynamics. Our solar system comprises a number of familiar elements: the sun, planets, and moons. Each exerts influence on the others and is held in place by these influences. The system will continue as it is, planets orbiting the sun, moons orbiting those planets, until some cosmic event disrupts it. It works pretty much perfectly as it is.

Organisational systems work pretty much the way they are designed as well, whether we like the way they operate or not (Husted, 1993; Svyantek and DeShon, 1993; Weetman, 2009). The human element may add a bit of drama, intrigue, humour, and passion, but organisational systems can be mapped as well, and system behaviour, or dynamics, at least partly explained and predicted. The capability to know ourselves exists, but we seldom go there. The maps of complex systems are messy-tangled webs of components hanging together, the spaces surrounding them uncertain, and the mutual influences, or interdependence, amongst elements many, diverse, and obscure. It is not surprising that we infrequently venture into the unknown. There are few tools available to help us make sense of the jumble, and little guidance to assist in our exploration.

As human beings we possess the capability to fathom complex systems. Sadly we are driven to seek simplicity (Calton and Payne, 2003). It is much easier to defend a relationship between two variables than to explain multiple elements in systems within systems. We feel more confident when we think we understand a problem and its causality. Finally, we are more likely to receive approval and funding to work on a problem where B is assumed to cause W – It is black and white (see Fowers, 2003, who, in differentiating knowledge and wisdom, discusses the x and y problem). It is unfortunate that simple solutions for complex problems are fated to fail, as so many unsuccessful projects and initiatives bear out (Ahn, et al., 2004; Cooksey, 2003; Gill, 2007). Solutions that first come to mind or seem obvious are probably ill-conceived and have not considered the fullness of complex systems (Sice and French, 2006). This insidious process is, itself, an expression of problem dynamics embedded in a complex system. Prahalad and Bettis (1986) and Bettis and Prahalad (1995) have explored this at length in their work on dominant logic. Tucker, et al. (2001) demonstrate the profound effects the system has on influencing problem-solving and, thus, learning and change amongst medical staff.

Embeddedness is an important systems principle: problems cannot be isolated from the systems in which they are located, or *embedde*d; the system, itself, is nested within a larger context that must also be understood and, perhaps, changed, for viable problem resolution (Devine, 2005; Keating, et al., 2001). This explains why holistic approaches to problem analysis and intervention are more likely to succeed in complex environments than more formulaic ones (Clayton and Gregory, 2000; Sice and French, 2006), while also accepting that problem diagnosis or analysis is more challenging.

Not all systems are problematic, *per se*. Wisdom is embedded in a complex system. This means the way it is expressed and operates is a function of interrelationships amongst elements of its system (Gibson, 2008) – in this case the corporate context. The conception of wisdom as embedded in a complex system is nascent. Tywoniak (2007) clearly frames knowledge (or knowing) as a complex system and process, especially in her second of four knowledge dimensions, „common" – where knowledge is generated in an interactive, intersubjective environment. Nonaka and Toyama (2007) employed the idea of wisdom as a system (or embedded in a system) in their fascinating work on phronesis (practical wisdom) in strategic management. They note that fostering and transferring practical wisdom is an important way to create organisational resilience. Rowsell and Berry (1993) should also be acknowledged for their pioneering work on systemic wisdom. While they linked systemic wisdom to servant leaders, it is clear that they saw the leader's task as creating conditions for healthy systems, including minimal imposed control and dynamic mechanisms to promote robust interaction and enquiry, the emergence of meaning, and the likelihood of transformation. It is likewise worth noting that the enterprise has been described as „a learning system" (Argyris and Schön, 1977; Nevis, et al, 1995; Revans, 1982).

One way of conceiving wisdom organisationally is the Wisdom Ecosystem. This ecosystem comprises all the factors whose relationships compound to explain and predict if and how wisdom arises and is displayed. In presenting his heuristic model of practical wisdom, Gibson (2008) posits that „wisdom results from its *enabling elements operating as a whole and in concert* rather than individually or sequentially" (p. 531; emphasis added).

Ostensibly similar to the Wisdom Ecosystem suggested here was the conception of organisational wisdom put forward by Hays (2007). His was the first attempt to dynamically model organisational wisdom built on manifold elements. The variables included in his model and their interrelationships were strongly supported and appear reasonable. His Causal Loop Diagram and those of other researchers provide solid precedent for the model proposed here. A major departure from previous models of organisational learning and wisdom, however, is the ecological paradigm embodied in the Wisdom Ecosystem. By paradigm, here, is implied an encompassing framework for understanding and conceiving. A paradigm is like a set of lenses or filters operating usually outside of our consciousness. They are the result of the fundamental values, assumptions, and beliefs we have, and serve to colour or limit what we perceive. We all have them. Organisations have them. And we seldom realise how they influence our thinking.[8] Since they influence how we think, they also influence how we act. Use of the ecological, organismic paradigm or metaphor[9] is reasonable and generative given the *living environment* in which wisdom arises and is expressed.

The basic premise is that elements in the system co-exist, co-depend, and co-evolve. The ecological metaphor, explain Fleckenstein, et al (2008) "conceives of

activities, actors, situations, and phenomena as interdependent, diverse, and fused through feedback" (p. 388). Binbasioglu and Winston (2004) clarify the dynamics of balancing and reinforcing feedback loops in understanding unintended consequences. In another application of feedback and unintended consequences, McKinley and Scherer (2000) stress the self-reinforcing problematic behaviour of organisational restructuring. Such complexity unified by feedback loops is clearly evident in the Wisdom Ecosystem presented here. What may not be as obvious is that that no single element can meaningfully exist on its own; nor could it sustain itself. All factors are vital. In ideal circumstances, they work in harmony. An ecosystem is, in a sense, all for one and one for all. As Hearn and Pace (2006) note: „the overall health of the ecosystem will determine the fate of the individual players" (p. 62) irrespective of their individual strengths.

The balance that sustains life in an ecosystem can be delicate. What happens to one influences the other; what one does impacts the system and the individual elements within it (Fleckenstein, et al, 2008). This highlights the lack of wisdom inherent in and unsustainable nature of self-serving acts and the thoughtless pursuit of ends with little regard to means or consequences. Wisdom can flourish in certain healthy environments, whereas under impoverished or offensive conditions it will wither and perish. If this series can promote a new ecological way of thinking in organisations and stimulate more deliberate care in cultivating conditions wherein wisdom can flourish then it will have served a valuable purpose.

As noted earlier, one aim of this series, largely through discussion of the ecosystem model and its dynamics, is to explain organisational wisdom, and to demonstrate that it exists or is at least possible, and how it works. A second major objective is to showcase the value of Causal Loop Diagramming (CLD) as a means for „mapping" and understanding complex systems and to help readers learn the process of developing such maps. The link between wisdom and Causal Loop Diagramming is direct and deliberate: more thoroughly understanding a problem system can lead to more effective and positive interventions (solutions). This is tantamount to wisdom-acting in and on the world in ways that produce the greatest good for all stakeholders and least possible harm to the planet, given the fullest possible understanding of „the way things are" and considerations of the long-term and far-reaching consequences and implications of our actions (Hays, 2007).

4. Concluding remarks

This paper introduces a model of the Wisdom Ecosystem. That model, built around the Causal Loop Diagram comprising Figure 1, represents a complex adaptive system. By definition, a complex adaptive system interacts with its environment in a co-existence of mutual influence (Espinosa, et al, 2007; Hall, 2005; Jankowicz, 2000; Pickering, 2004; Stacey, 1995). Focusing on the Wisdom Ecosystem, itself, Figure 1

appears relatively contained, having minimal points of interaction with the external environment. The Collective Intelligence subsystem serves as the primary interface. Recruiting (21) in the Wisdom subsystem offers a potential point of exchange with the environment, in addition to being the gateway for „new blood." A complex adaptive system will survive to the degree that it adapts to its environment-it evolves (Montuori, 2000). It is not only responsive and resilient, however, but also shapes its environment (if only imperceptibly). A complex adaptive system learns… or perishes.

The notion of the organisation as a complex adaptive system is not new, though the idea of the organisation as a conscious organism acting wisely in and on the world is only just beginning to take hold. The view of the organisation as rational and mechanical has serious limitations, especially in an unpredictable and unstable environment. This has been persuasively argued by Catton and Dunlap (1980); Shelton and Darling (2003); and Yoon and Kuchinke (2005).[10] No matter how well engineered, the precision organisation fails in fluid, dynamic circumstances. An exception to this is when procedures aren't followed to the letter; that is when people behave spontaneously. This behaviour at „the edge of chaos" is thought to be what enables a complex adaptive system to adapt, evolve, and learn (Gleick, 1987; Rowsell and Berry, 1993; Svyantek and DeShon, 1993).[11]

The model put forward here tries to portray the complex, fluid, and dynamic nature of an organisation that proactively learns and adapts. The features may not be absolutely correct, and despite the attempt to develop an encompassing model, additional variables may be needed. As complete and complex the model, even it might not tell the whole story of the Wisdom Ecosystem. But the model is a genuine attempt to capture and depict the elements and their relationships as a living, breathing complex adaptive system. There is plenty there to think about, and ample material to examine more thoroughly.

The term ecosystem was incorporated because it invokes the notion of a diverse, thriving community whose members are mutually interdependent, working in harmony, concerned with continuity and welfare, and interacting continually with the environment. It can be instructive to conceive of a group or an organisation as an ecosystem. One need only look at the consequences of one species disappearing on the rest of its ecosystem to appreciate the vital significance of each element in the Wisdom Ecosystem. An inherently wise system is one that is both resilient and does minimal harm to the environment. A truly wise organisation will be the one that contributes positively to the world while sustaining itself.

The notion of organisations as living systems or as ecologies has been increasing, as a spate of scientific papers reviewed for this series attests.[12] These new ways of conceiving of and studying organisations have profound implications for research and practice, not least of which include the way we structure organisations and approach change. While it might be impossible to determine what is leading to what, it is clear that consciousness of systems thinking, chaos, and emergence is

increasing at the same time that organisations are flattening, decentralising, and empowering. There are many parallels and connections between the two distinct sets of phenomena. Fundamentally, both express the need for resilience, re-ordering, and adaptation; to learn: to respond, evolve, and anticipate changes in the environment. Central capacities enabling such responsiveness are communication and internal variability and interpretation, qualities proscribed or hampered by formal hierarchies, bureaucracies, and centralisation-structures currently being compensated for, if not overcome by almost universal access to and unimpeded flow and exchange of information.

Until this series and the work leading up to it, there was no Wisdom Ecosystem as a concept in the scientific literature. There was, however, in reality, always a Wisdom Ecosystem, at least potentially. It was right there in front of us, embedded in and often subverted by the systems with which we are more familiar and, perhaps, even take for granted. In some respects it was not in front of us, but rather part of us. We are the system. This explains why we don't see certain things.[13]

Figure 1 is a major step forward in conceiving wisdom as a system. However, it should be noted that the process of developing a Causal Loop Diagram to map a complex adaptive system is as important if not more so than possessing a completed map. Readers may choose to discard Figure 1 and develop their own maps that might better describe their wisdom environments. Guidance for constructing CLDs is provided in „Mapping the Wisdom Ecosystem." While it takes a measure of skill and thought, anyone can do it. The result is a deep understanding of and appreciation for the system mapped. What better way to develop and demonstrate wisdom? Moreover, mapping a complex system as a group builds team and teamwork skills, in addition to the collective capacity to solve tough problems.

This and its companion paper in the wisdom ecosystem series take as starting point that human beings are inherently brilliant. We possess the ingenuity to solve most problems, create and appreciate beauty, and cultivate environments in which people and ideas can flourish. While we have vast potential, we limit ourselves and each other. Our individual behaviour towards one another, the systems we employ, and the institutions we build all work – unintentionally – to dampen our creativity, courage, and collaboration. On the one hand, rhetoric asserts the need for learning, change, cooperation, and the highest standards of ethics; on the other, learning is punished or, at best, unrewarding; change produces few real and meaningful outcomes; competition reigns; and ethical behaviour seems to be mechanical and contractual as opposed to the embodiment of virtue.

Coming to understand wisdom in ecological terms is a crucial departure from conceiving wisdom as an exclusive attribute of a rare minority. Wisdom can be a collective phenomenon and, as such, can be more influential and efficacious than the wisdom of the few. We are at a juncture in our evolution, if not our very continued existence, where wisdom is called for as never before. Mistakes of the past may still

be reversible, but continued errors in judgement concerning how we care for one another and our planet will seal our fate. Wisdom is as precious as the living systems in which it dwells.

Framing wisdom as an ecosystem is also a critical step toward understanding how and when wisdom may arise, or what might be impeding it. Wisdom occurs within a delicate and complex system-a web of both organic and inanimate features working in concert. It can and does emerge by chance and in some cases against all odds. But we can no longer depend on another leader or nation to save us. Fortunately, wisdom can be nourished and nurtured to the benefit of the organism and its larger environment. The Wisdom Ecosystem introduce here is a working model of the elements of wisdom and their interrelationships. Some elements may be more important than others, but all serve to enable wisdom. If all present and working in harmony, wisdom develops and emanates. If elements are removed, neglected, choked, or undermined in any way, the overall capacity of the system to think and act wisely is diminished. This is the nature of ecosystems.

There are no shortcuts to organisational wisdom. Great care and effort may be needed to reverse bad habits and begin cultivating the conditions wherein wisdom can flourish. This is, however, no justification for hesitation. The time is now. The best news is – as the Wisdom Ecosystem reveals – that wisdom is within our grasp. Most organisations and communities have within them already the potential for wisdom. Their features may differ, and how they mobilise and adapt various elements and arrangements may require ingenuity and experimentation, but not blindly! The map has already begun to take shape. It affords guidance and a measure of safety to those ready to embark upon their own journeys to wisdom. Much more about the map and map-making await in the next issue of *Management & Marketing.*

Notes

[1] Nodes (with respect to Causal Loop Diagrams) are explained in the second paper in this series. Briefly, nodes are elements that have multiple linkages to other elements and subsystems of the ecosystem. An example from Figure 1 is Dialogue, Item 1. Subsystems, here, are Dialogue, Communal Mind, Collective Intelligence, and Wisdom.

[2] The author acknowledges Hearn and Pace (2006) amongst others who have adopted or applied the idea of business and value ecosystems and „ecology thinking," and McElroy (2000) who brought together knowledge management, organisational learning, and complexity.

[3] Pickering (2004) writes on the ontology of unknowability and that adaptive systems are always in a process of becoming.

[4] Kunsch, et al, 2007, explore the dynamics of bad and good decisions in their insightful paper on ethics and sustainability.

[5] It is interesting to note that Fleckenstein, et al (2008), have proposed use of an ecological metaphor „as a way of knowing that is congruent with the complexity and messiness of twenty-first-century meaning making" (p. 389). Their insightful paper on research writing richly and innovatively entertains much of value complementary to this current work.

[6] While Collective Intelligence is usually discussed positively (it is a good thing and we want more and better), Weetman (2009) reminds us that Collective Intelligence may serve the interests of the „system" reinforcing the status quo instead of leading to significant learning and change. This inherent and disturbing possibility suggests an important distinction between intelligence and wisdom. The intelligent system may be self-serving. The wise one is not. CI is discussed in more detail in „Mapping the Wisdom Ecosystem."

[7] There is also the unproductive belief that „the system is as it is" and is immutable. This has the unfortunate effect of making people feel powerless. Some may try to find ways to beat the system or create a counter-culture or parallel system-organised crime and criminal careers come to mind. The politically savvy and otherwise clever cope by learning to „play the game", to use the system to their advantage. While some minority may be served in these situations, such behaviour is generally unwise, unhealthy, and unproductive.

[8] Johnson and Macy (2001) explain that organisational paradigms „define what is known and understood as real and possible" (p. 322). They place organisations solidly in interdependent relationships with society and nature, advocating "socioecological responsibility", that is movement in business paradigms towards more ecological ones—it's our only choice in the long run. Stead and Stead (1994) discuss the economic myth associated with the mechanistic, scientific paradigm, and present alternative paradigms based on living systems for more enlightened, sustainable organisations. See, also, the „shift of mind" footnote.

[9] See any of the following for useful and interesting perspectives and applications: Bonn (2005); Catton and Dunlap (1980); Devine (2005); Fleckenstein, et al (2008); Hearn and Pace (2006); Johnson and Macy (2001); Ruth (2006); Yanitsky (2007). See, also, Hall (2005) who covers the biological nature of knowledge (and autopoiesis) in learning organisations

[10] See also Dey and Steyaert (2007) and Weymes (2004) who tackle this issue more philosophically, the former in terms of education and the latter in terms of management theory (individual freedom versus organisational requirements).

[11] See also the second paper in this series for additional references and more on this topic.

[12] See any of the following: Bonn (2005); Catton and Dunlap (1980); Devine (2005); Fleckenstein, et al (2008); Hall (2005); Hearn and Pace (2006); Kunsch, et al (2007); and the second installment in this series.

[13] Clients the author has worked with often have little success changing their organisations until they come to see that they are the culture or system. They may need to „step out of themselves" to see how things really are and what will be required to shift them. Sometimes the first shift needed is one of personal perspective; sometimes one has to change oneself in order to change the system.

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APPENDIX 1 – Wisdom principles related to the Wisdom Ecosystem

Collective intelligence is the product of effective communications. It *is* the power of the collective, and a measure of the effectiveness of the communications and interactions amongst the collective.

The „communal mind" represents shared thinking, the metaphorical united brain or CPU of all concerned (employees, stakeholders, team). It does not mean one view, but the gathering and equal consideration of the views of all using the power of the collective to distil the many and diverse views into one or more conclusion, decision, or course of action.

Collective intelligence is evidenced by the variety of ideas generated and / or entertained by a group and the way those ideas are capitalised upon to produce tangible products and services.

Collective intelligence and the communal mind do not depend on and, in fact, may be undermined by directive leaders (as in the executive brain that tells the body what to do). They are not controlled, but allowed. Employees and stakeholders are seen as different but equal brains all internetworked-the collective or communal neural system.

Every communication and interaction can be enhanced, that is, become more effective, meaningful, or fulfilling.

Every communication or interaction can and should stimulate positive learning and growth of all involved. If everyone commits to their own learning and to that of others, there will be fewer power contests and unhealthy competitions, and fewer communications and interactions directive or advocative in nature and more showing empathy, compassion, and care.

Wisdom cannot be taught, but it can be learned and developed. Wisdom can be inspired or otherwise catalysed. Conditions can be created such that wisdom is more likely to ensue.

People resist or dismiss what they're told; they embrace what they discover.

People need latitude to explore and experiment; if they are given too little room to manoeuvre they will not learn and develop.

People expect, even demand direction and structure; however providing them is counterproductive. The more people are told what to do, the more they become dependent, passive, or compliant and fail to develop crucial skills, habits, and attitudes of self-direction.

Many of the problems we see in communication, interaction, and initiative are a result of lack of trust, in one or both directions. The single most important task in organisations concerned with viability is the cultivation of trust.

Power and authority [differences] will always exist; their unproductive consequences must be understood and minimised for collaboration to be its most successful.

Effective collaboration hinges on finding a balance between diversity and consensus.

Effective leaders facilitate and promote conversations and collaboration; they create environments wherein effective Dialogue and collaboration are possible and sought-after. They do not necessarily lead directly (as in telling or selling), but support.

Dialogue is inherently empowering and equalising. The greater the shared skills in Dialogue, the more voices are heard and the greater the Dialogue; the greater the Dialogue, the greater the shared and potential power of those in Dialogue. The greater the shared power and potential of those involved, the more likely effective strategies can be put in place and positive change will be achieved.

Dialogue is about cultivating capability, individual and group, and developing community (where community is a group of people united by shared understanding and common purpose and aspirations).

Wisdom is about choices, informed choices along with a weighing of pros and cons, making the best choice all things considered. Such choices can be quite difficult and may involve dilemmas. Wisdom does not make answers easier, though likely better.