Systems and change…

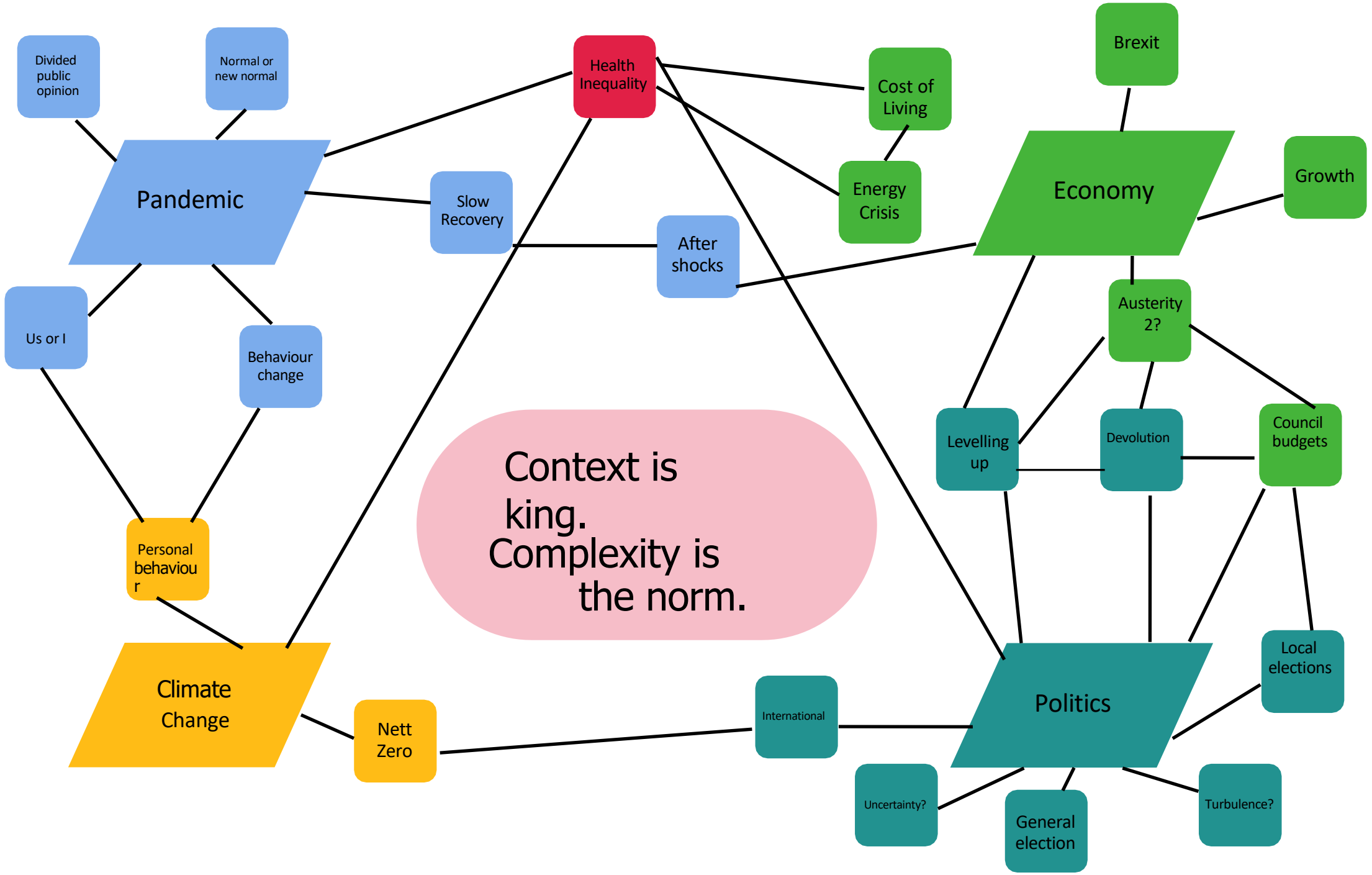
Framing the context- Karen Creavin

polycrisis

[poli-krai-sis] *noun*

the simultaneous occurrence of several catastrophic events

- **System** - financial, political, social
- **Climate**
- **Nature** - 6th mass extinction
- **Human wellbeing**


Divided public opinion
Normal or new normal
Pandemic
Us or I
Behaviour change
Personal behaviou r
Health Inequality
Slow Recovery
After shocks
Cost of Living
Energy Crisis
Brexit
Economy
Growth
Austerity 2?
Levelling up
Devolution
Council budgets
Context is king.
Complexity is the norm.
Climate Change
Nett Zero
International
Politics
Local elections
Uncertainty?
General election
Turbulence?

What is a system? Layers…

Language, myths, metaphors, stories, hierarchy of values, know how, assumptions, mindsets

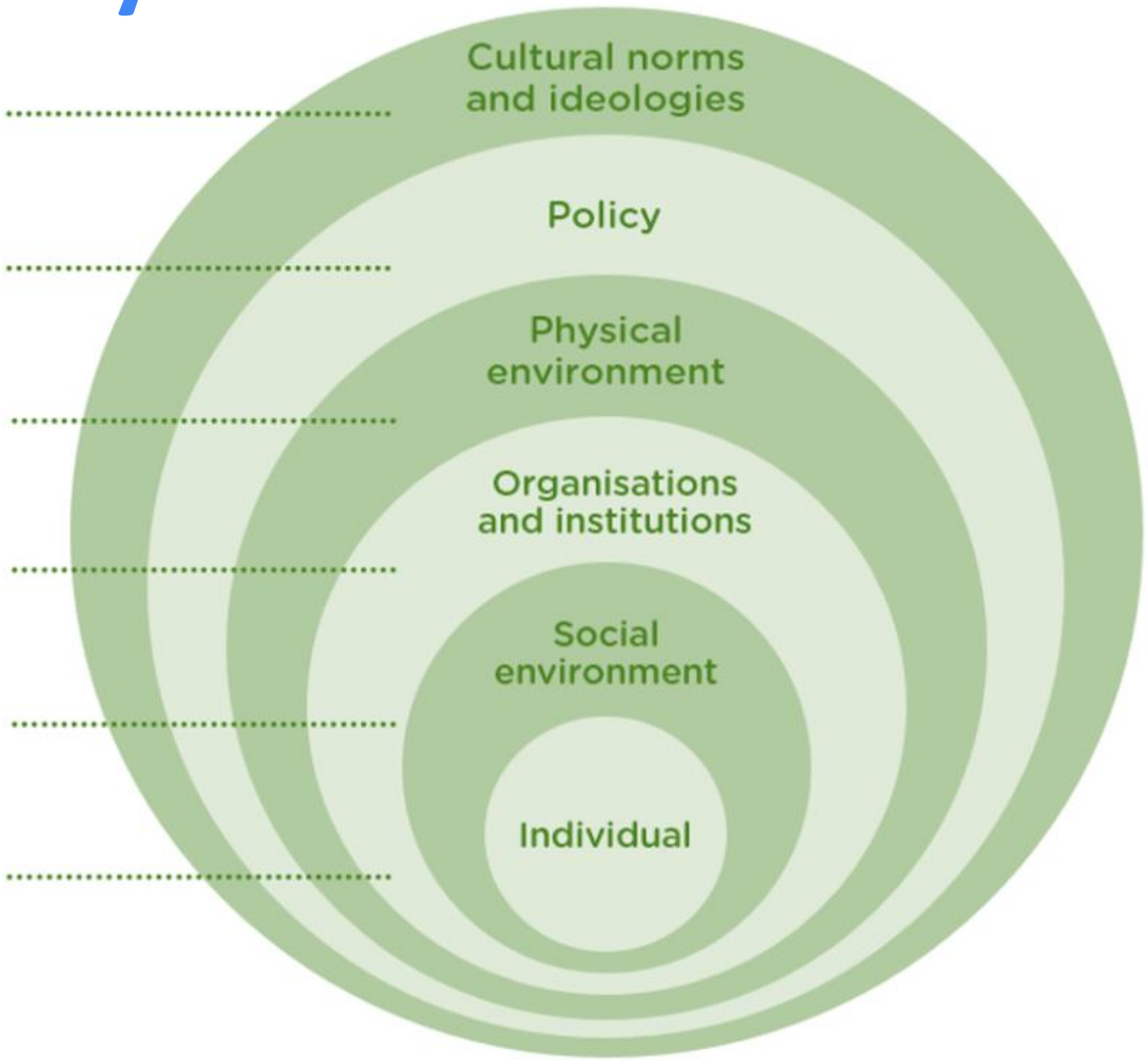
International and national guidance & laws, local laws and policies, rules, regulations, codes, times and schedules

Built environment, natural environment, green and blue spaces, transport networks, homes

Schools, healthcare, businesses, workplaces, faith organisations, charities, clubs

Individual relationships, families, support groups, social networks

Individual capabilities, motivations, opportunities, knowledge, needs, behaviours, physical and mental health and wellbeing



Activity:

How many systems have you interacted with today?

In pairs

How many systems have you interacted with so far today?

Think as expansive as possible?

List as many as you can

Join up with another pair

Do they have similar ones

How do they map together?

Can you draw their linkages or overlaps?

What does it tell you?

Three types of problem

Simple

Following a recipe

- The recipe is essential.
- Recipes are tested to ensure easy replication of success.
- No particular skill is required (though baking skills can increase success rate.
- Recipes produce standardised, predictable results each time.

Complicated

Sending a rocket to the moon

- Rigid protocols and formulas are necessary.
- Sending one rocket increases the chances of future success as elements are replicable.
- High levels of expertise in a number of fields are necessary for success.
- Rockets are similar so there is a high degree of outcome predictability.

Complex

Raising a child

- Protocols rarely help; launch experiments to discover what works.
- Raising one child provides experience but no guarantee of future success.
- Expertise is helpful but on its own is no guarantee of success.
- Every child is unique.

Source: Adapted from Glouberman S, Zimmerman B (2002). *Complicated and complex systems: what would successful reform of Medicare look like?* Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. Discussion paper 8.

Linear approaches work for complicated problems

You have a tool

You tackle the problem with your tool

But not complex ones...

For complex problems we need Systems Thinking

"Systems thinking is "contextual," which is the opposite of analytical thinking.

Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of a larger whole."

— **Fritjof Capra, The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision**

Rather than **‘understanding’ systems** how can we start to work with ways to name the complexity, so we can **see them more ‘fully’.**

Instead of looking at the parts of the system each in isolation (a reductionist approach) **systems thinking helps us understand behaviour emergent from component interactions.**

Even in a simple system there can be a number of subtle cause-and-effects that we have to deal with if we want to change or improve things.

"Knowing that there are no easy answers to truly complex problems, system leaders cultivate the conditions wherein collective wisdom emerges over time through a ripening process that gradually brings about new ways of thinking, acting, and being."

- Peter Senge, Systems Scientist

How can we start to understand systems better by creating some common language?

Some ‘rules of thumb’.

Myron’s Maxims

- **Myron E. Rogers**

People own what they help create

The heart of co-creation

Real change happens in real work

Doing beats theory

Those who do the work do the change

Those who do, know how to do

Connect the system to more of itself

Connections are the source of health in systems, and create the conditions for change. Make them visible

Start anywhere, but follow it everywhere

Work with what matters and engage with what shows up

The process we use to get to the future is the future we get

How we work together today generates how we work will be organised tomorrow

Myron’s Maxims

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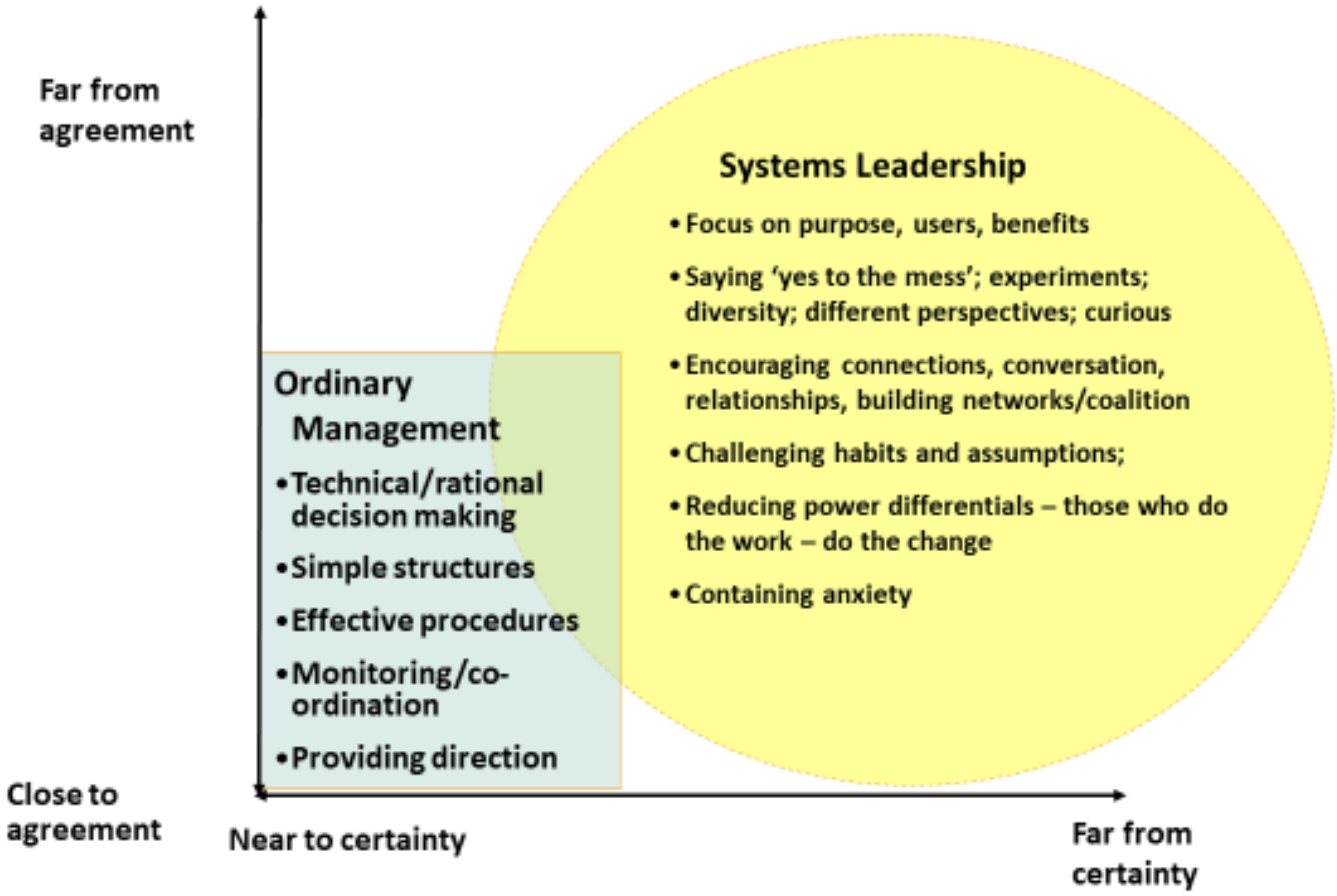
From agreement and certainty to complexity and uncertainty



After Ralph Stacey

From	To
Creating traditional management structures	Taking the time to build relationships, networks and trust around a shared purpose
Top-down delegation	Increased capacity for decision making across different part of the system
Command and Control	A focus on empowerment participation and co-creation
Centralised decision-making	Decentralised process where people collaborate to reach agreement
Leadership as defined by designated role or individuals	Leadership viewed as a collective active that anyone in the system can take up
Working towards set goals using pre-defined methods	Promoting flexibility and adaptable ways of working
Different teams working in isolation from each other	Encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing across all levels of an organisations
Telling others what to do and assuming we know what's right	Learning together as equals
Egotistical and territorial	Being humble and breaking down silos

From 'ordinary' leadership to systems leadership in complex, uncertain times

See systems change as a practice

“You're always practicing something.

So you're either practicing upholding the world as it is, or you're practicing shifting into the world as you want it to be.”

- **Adrienne Marie Brown - Emergent Strategy**

Some guides to help us deal with systems

System guides

How do they help

Hawk-

- Birds eye view
- Taking time to assess the situation
- Act with precision

Trees-

- Wood wide web
- Acting collaboratively
- Being the forest, not just a tree or a species

Trees use the network to share resources. Older trees (sometimes called hub or mother trees) will pass sugars to saplings for photosynthesis, especially needed when small trees are shaded by their taller neighbors. They also pull up water for young trees in times of drought. Trees also share information through the network. If one tree is attacked by insects or disease, it sends distress signals to other trees, allowing them time to bolster their defenses. And when old trees are dying, they dump all of their resources back into the network.

How do they help

[How Wolves Change Rivers (youtube.com)]

Salmon:

- Go against the flow
- Act from your nature
- Doing the seemingly impossible

“Systems don’t change unless they are put under undue pressure”

Helen Goulden - Young Foundation

System wisdom

“Systems don’t change easily. Systems try to maintain themselves, and seek equilibrium.

To change a system, you need to shake it up, disrupt the equilibrium.

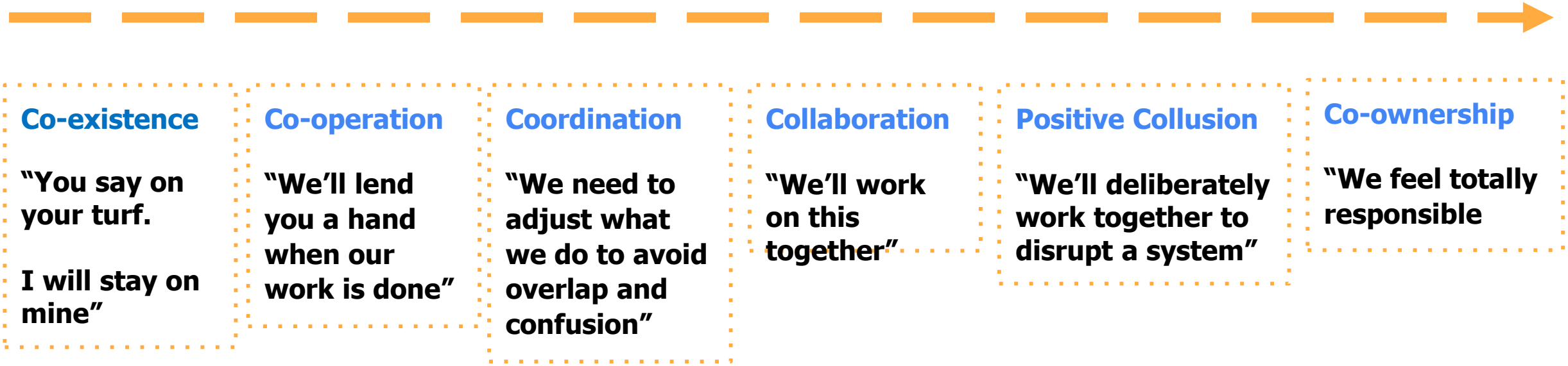
That often requires conflict.”

— Starhawk

Change is an inside job - it starts within us

"The work of systems change must come from within, from a place of personal transformation" - **Bioleadership Project**

Make the move from co-existence to co-ownership



Discuss:

where could you intervene differently?

which guide might have a lesson for you?

how do you fit within the continuum from co-existence to co-ownership?