

# Facilitating Dialogue Through Leadership

Insights from a Leadership Lab, designed and facilitated by Kym Goodes and Tasmanian Leaders in partnership with the Tasmanian Policy Exchange, University of Tasmania, September 2025, Hobart



*Constructive dialogue does not emerge by accident; it requires intentional leadership, supportive institutional practices, and spaces where diverse perspectives can be heard and considered.*

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# Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Purpose of this paper	5
Key themes from the Dialogue Leadership Lab	6
What is effective dialogue?	6
What leadership is needed for effective dialogue?	7
The Tasmanian Leaders' Dialogue Leadership Lab	7
What's the problem?	8
Shifting politics but political stalemate	8
Polarisation	8
Power and exclusion	10
Doing nothing	10
The way forward: key insights	11
1. Principles for effective dialogue	12
2. Practices for effective dialogue	14
3. What attributes should leaders bring to dialogue?	16
4. How leaders can enable effective dialogue in practice	18
Facilitating effective dialogue in Tasmania: a leadership imperative	23
An invitation to continue the conversation	24
About Tasmanian Leaders	24
About the Tasmanian Policy Exchange	24
About lead author Frieda Moran	24
About our previous Leadership Labs	24
References and further readings	25

# Executive Summary

Dialogue is a form of communication used to explore, to make sense of an issue, or to inform decision making. From every day familial settings to civic arenas, it can help us understand a different perspective or lived experience, enable deeper understandings and allow collaborative action. Dialogue helps build trust within and across individuals, sectors, and communities, with the potential to enrich societies. Leaders play a key role in ensuring difficult conversations are being had, that we move beyond entrenched positions, and that diverse voices are heard.

Principles for constructive dialogue were developed, including striving for coherence rather than consensus, taking a holistic view of issues, intentionally including diverse voices, taking a positive and constructive approach, encouraging creativity, and considering the interests of future generations.

Practices and structures that support dialogue were identified, including intentional facilitation, safe and neutral spaces for conversation, improved access to information and participatory decision-making approaches.

And finally, the attributes that enable leaders to foster strong dialogue were identified including integrity, humility, curiosity, courage, and the capacity for deep listening.

Together, these insights suggest that facilitating dialogue is a core leadership capability. Constructive dialogue does not emerge by accident; it requires intentional leadership, supportive institutional practices, and spaces where diverse perspectives can be heard and considered.

Tasmania has a particular context that weakens the potential for, and the quality of, dialogue. On the one hand, Tasmania is seen as closely connected. On the other hand, this masks diversity and exclusion beyond the usual circles of connectivity, many of which operate with little connectivity to others. This creates a paradox in which strong connectivity, trust and collaboration across communities and sectors function as important strengths, while also constraining dialogue and obscuring the exclusion of many. People may hesitate to raise difficult issues, challenge prevailing views or speak across difference when relationships, reputations and opportunities feel at stake. Strengthening the capacity for constructive dialogue is therefore an important leadership task for Tasmanians.

This paper forms part of Tasmanian Leaders' broader effort to deepen understanding of leadership in Tasmania and contribute to thinking about the leadership needed to create a better future for our island state. It builds on previous Leadership Labs and corresponding papers exploring belonging, complexity and polarisation, extending this body of work by examining dialogue as a critical capability for leadership and collective decision-making in Tasmania.

The 2025 Dialogue Leadership Lab was designed and facilitated by Kym Goodes (3P Advisory) with the support of the Tasmanian Policy Exchange at the University of Tasmania and Nekon Pty Ltd.

# FACILITATING DIALOGUE THROUGH LEADERSHIP:

## A discussion paper for Tasmanian Leaders

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*Dialogue is the connective tissue of a healthy society. It allows us to surface difference without division, test ideas without entrenchment, and move from competing interests toward shared understanding and collective action. As this paper explores, when dialogue works well, it strengthens trust, belonging and legitimacy. When it breaks down, polarisation hardens, voices are excluded, and difficult problems remain unsolved – making the role of leadership in shaping dialogue critical.*

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Tasmania, like many places, is experiencing increasing strain on its capacity for effective dialogue. Complex challenges – such as climate resilience, housing affordability, education outcomes, health and wellbeing, economic transition, and intergenerational equity – require collaborative approaches that cut across sectors, politics and communities. Yet many conversations in the state are constrained by fear, power imbalances, entrenched positions and a reluctance to speak openly in closely connected environments. These dynamics limit participation, reinforce silos, and contribute to stalemate and inaction.

This report explores dialogue not as a soft skill or optional add on, but as a core leadership capability – one that must

be intentionally cultivated if we are to navigate complexity and shape a more just, resilient, and prosperous future.

### ***Purpose of this paper***

This paper presents insights generated through the 2025 Dialogue Leadership Lab, convened in Hobart in partnership with Kym Goodes (3P Advisory) and the Tasmanian Policy Exchange at the University of Tasmania. Thirty Tasmanian Leaders' alumni from across government, industry, community organisations, education and civil society came together to examine how dialogue currently operates in Tasmania, what constrains it, and how leaders can enable more effective, inclusive and courageous conversations.

#### ***Why this matters***

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Tasmania needs better dialogue. More courageous conversations, more diverse voices and greater capacity to move beyond entrenched positions.

#### ***What gets in the way***

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Stalemate, polarisation, exclusion and fear can shut down dialogue and reinforce inaction.

#### ***What helps***

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Clear principles, practical structures and strong leadership habits can enable more constructive and inclusive dialogue.

Participants shared lived experience, tested assumptions, mapped power and exclusion, and designed practical strategies for strengthening dialogue in both formal decision making settings and everyday leadership contexts. Their reflections are further explored here through insights from literature on leadership and previous Tasmanian Leaders' Leadership Labs focused on belonging, complexity and polarisation.

Together, these perspectives form the basis of this paper.

### **Key themes from the Dialogue Leadership Lab**

A key contextual theme was the idea that Tasmania is small and connected, yet also decentralised and diverse. Close networks can foster care, trust and cohesion, but they can also create real or perceived pressure toward conformity. This creates a paradox: dialogue can be amplified within overlapping circles of connection, while also being constrained within them. In this way, the closeness of Tasmanian networks can mask the full diversity of perspectives. Constrained dialogue can be deeply consequential to how a society functions, the trust we have in our leaders, how well we deal with the here and now, and lean into the future.

Effective dialogue in Tasmania needs leaders at all levels to step into this tension with courage, strategy and ethics, and depends on how people show up in conversation across all parts of society. It is as vital in Tasmania's big debates as it is in our daily lives. When dialogue is constrained in a board room, between an executive team, elected officials and the public service, or within a family, a school, a sports club, or in the community, the consequences are real.

Dialogue is complex.<sup>1</sup> It is often hard to do well, perhaps because it makes what is invisible and unspoken visible. It is essential to a healthy society because

it provides insight and understanding and enables change. It helps build trust within and across individuals, sectors, and communities, which is essential for a resilient, just and robust society.

Nelson Mandela's words remain acutely relevant today: "...the best weapon (for societies and individuals) is to sit down and talk".<sup>2</sup>

### **What is effective dialogue?**

"Dialogue" can refer to any kind of conversation. In this paper we draw on the definition from the Nobel Peace Center, which describes effective dialogue as:

*"a method to improve communication between people, to resolve conflicts and to shed light on an issue from different points of view. An inclusive process, it can help us find new solutions. You cannot win a dialogue, and there should preferably be no losers".<sup>3</sup>*

Effective dialogue relies on well-designed processes, grounded in trust in the "system or process and one's role in that process or system".<sup>4</sup> Often trust can be shaky when formal dialogue is required, making the design and facilitation of the process critical in creating sufficient trust to progress the matters being discussed. The process underpinning effective dialogue is conversational, defined by scholar Joseph A. Raelin as a "mutually constructive exchange".<sup>5</sup> Effective dialogue requires that those participating "desire to listen and learn".<sup>6</sup>

An aim of effective dialogue is to enable deeper, more nuanced understandings of an issue and support collaborative action towards a mutually satisfactory outcome. In its absence, misunderstanding, partisanship and conflict can flourish.

## What leadership is needed for effective dialogue?

Leadership plays a central role in creating the conditions for meaningful dialogue. We need leaders to – returning to Raelin – “make easy” these conversational exchanges by offering a neutral stance on the subject at hand, aiding participants to scrutinise “their values, assumptions and choices”, allowing equal opportunity for expression, setting



Figure 1: Architecture for Effective Dialogue

aside internal organisational and external power dynamics, and enabling the “open sharing of information and transparency of decision processes”.<sup>7</sup>

To better foster constructive dialogue across difference, three key dimensions for leaders were identified during the *Leadership Lab*:

1. Have courageous conversations;
2. Include more diverse voices; and
3. Move beyond entrenched positions.

To assist progressing these three key dimensions, we have developed an architecture for effective dialogue (*Figure 1. see left*), which also forms the structure of this paper.

Issues explored at the *Dialogue Leadership Lab*, within this architecture, are presented in this paper. These include factors constraining dialogue in Tasmania, principles and practices that can support more constructive dialogue, and the qualities leaders need to facilitate effective dialogue. The paper also offers examples of dialogue interventions and reflects on what these insights mean for leadership practice.

But first, what did the *Dialogue Leadership Lab* look like on the day?

### *The Tasmanian Leaders' Dialogue Leadership Lab*

The 2025 Dialogue Leadership Lab was a one-day workshop and part of the ongoing Tasmanian Leaders' Labs series. These annual events aim to identify and highlight critical opportunities for impactful leadership in Tasmania, and to foster collective engagement for greater influence. The Leadership Lab process and outcomes contribute to the understanding of where leadership can have the greatest effect on our social and economic wellbeing.

The 2025 Lab was co-designed with and facilitated by Kym Goodes, Director of 3P Advisory, with support from the Tasmanian Policy Exchange at the University of Tasmania.

The structure of the workshop involved discussion and activities in small groups and across the broader group and included:

- **Scene setting:**  
Led by Professor Gabrielle Appleby, Kym Goodes and Professor Richard Eccleston, focusing on integrity and the role of leadership in fostering meaningful dialogue.
- **Personal reflection:**  
Through a facilitated process, participants shared their lived experiences of the barriers they have faced, and what they needed to stop and start doing to show leadership in enabling inclusive dialogue.
- **Collective sense-making:**  
Participants used echo chamber mapping to identify which issues are most constrained in Tasmania, who tends to dominate, and who is typically excluded from dialogue.
- **Practical design:**  
Participants developed dialogue strategies or “blueprints” to tackle critical issues facing Tasmania, along with leadership strategies for everyday contexts.

## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

### *Shifting politics but political stalemate*

We are witnessing a shifting political landscape in Tasmania. Minority governments appear increasingly common and, while this form of government need not be a bad thing (think collaboration, negotiation, innovative models of governance), some

have wondered whether Tasmania is becoming increasingly ungovernable, given ballooning debt and looming budget cuts.<sup>8</sup> One commentator has even suggested that we are on our way to becoming a failed state.<sup>9</sup> A number of issues are at a political stalemate, including budget repair, renewable energy projects, and local government reform.<sup>10</sup> The apparent complexity of the state's challenges, combined with the perceived inability of our leaders, systems, and structures to resolve them, can be overwhelming.<sup>11</sup> Perceptions of government inaction and inertia contribute to public dissatisfaction and the erosion of trust and apathy.

Participants of the Leadership Lab described the current state of civic dialogue in Tasmania in overwhelmingly negative terms (see text box opposite) and identified three systemic issues at civic level that could be improved through intentional dialogue and leadership.

### *Polarisation*

Division and polarisation appear to be intensifying in Tasmania, as well as globally.<sup>12</sup> As participants in this and previous Labs have explored, differences of opinion and debates are inherent to healthy democracies, and are also part of effective leadership in organisations, teams and communities.

The challenge arises when disagreement hardens into binary and entrenched positions. At that point, polarisation can begin to damage social, organisational and institutional relationships, narrowing the space for thoughtful exchange and collective problem-solving. At its extreme, polarisation can manifest through the personalisation of criticism, the exclusion of perceived adversaries from discourse, the undermining of institutional legitimacy, and the erosion of norms of respect, tolerance and moderation.<sup>13</sup>



Building on previous Tasmanian Leaders' work, we know intentional leadership can help to ensure people feel heard and valued, encouraging mutual respect regardless of differing views.<sup>16</sup>

### *Power and exclusion*

At an everyday level – from the family unit to the workplace and board rooms – constrained dialogue has consequences both for individuals and societies. People are, or feel, pushed out of conversations when they attempt to discuss difficult subjects and hard truths. Participants described a fear of speaking up and out – worrying about confrontation, conflict, loss of face, positions, reputations, personal income, organisational funding and/or relationships. And as we know, these concerns are not misplaced.

Too often, our conversations reinforce hierarchies of power. The same voices dominate, resulting in a lack of diverse perspectives, resentment among those who do not have the opportunity to speak up, and inertia when agreement or action repeatedly fails to occur. Decisions are then made without the right information at hand.

Some groups may lack the resources, confidence, language, platform, or political and social capital needed to access or be heard in certain forums. In the discussion on education, this included reflection on the barriers faced by Tasmanians with low literacy when navigating complex systems, speaking up, or feeling represented in decisions that affect their lives. As explored further in the sections that follow, facilitating dialogue effectively and ethically requires an inclusive approach that accounts for people's different needs, capabilities and ways of participating.

It is not only about who participates, but also how information is communicated.

Media reporting can present polarised views of an issue. While this may be intended to achieve balance, it can effectively exclude the less attention-grabbing perspectives of those who are undecided, who agree in principle but are hesitant to speak up, or who would like to see more nuance or a variation of a plan. The exclusion of this 'middle-ground' sentiment contributes to the polarisation of debate.<sup>17</sup> One participant highlighted the limits placed on public servants' ability to participate officially in public debate beyond formal processes such as budget estimates and question time. This is despite their deep knowledge of specific issues, access to relevant factual information, and professional experience in impartiality.<sup>18</sup>

Tasmania's strengths can simultaneously be its weaknesses. In a small state, community is strong, but this can make people reluctant to speak out or up, for fear of contradicting or offending. As the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings heard, the price of silence can be devastating.<sup>19</sup>

### *Doing nothing*

Participants discussed how Tasmania seems to be experiencing political gridlock. If we do not take effective action on the complex challenges facing our state – such as climate resilience, housing affordability, health and education outcomes, and inequality – the situation is likely to continue to worsen.

Choosing to do nothing has consequences – often negative and sometimes significant. Kicking the can down the road for future generations on any given issue can lead to greater social inequity, systemic failure and catastrophic environmental outcomes.

Tackling the root causes of social and environmental issues as early as possible can minimise avoidable costs and lead to better outcomes.<sup>20</sup> As explored later in this paper, there are growing calls and initiatives to embed consideration of future generations in governance processes, both in Australia and internationally.

Participants also discussed how the consequences of inaction are not limited to large-scale issues. They are also evident in the small moments in workplaces and personal lives, when choosing not to enter dialogue can have negative ramifications: when we avoid that hard conversation, or provide tough feedback, or do not ask for what we need, or fail to stand up for inequity when we witness it. In these instances, issues can fester, escalate and contribute to poor relationships and workplace cultures.

These challenges are formidable, but surmountable. Tasmania has many strengths to build on, and there are individuals and groups already working to find alternative solutions and new approaches. What is clear is that Tasmania needs good leadership at all levels to facilitate robust dialogue and enable progress.

## **Leadership Lab poll:** *Whose voices are most often missing from civic dialogue in Tasmania?*

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*Children and young people*

*Regional voices*

*Aboriginal Tasmanians*

*Recent migrants, migrant workers*

*People living with disability/ies*

*Lower income/ income supported households*

*Those with neurodiversity*

*Those who want to move here, move away, who left*

*Industry insiders and critics*

## **THE WAY FORWARD: KEY INSIGHTS**

The Lab explored ways to build a more constructive culture of dialogue in Tasmania. Participants and research agree that a vital function of effective leadership is in facilitating meaningful and inclusive dialogue.<sup>21</sup> Leaders play a key role in ensuring difficult

## **Leadership Lab poll:** *Which issues are most constrained by poor dialogue in our state?*

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*Climate action*

*Social inequity*

*AFL team and stadium*

*Educational outcomes*

*Future generations*

*Government inefficiency*

*Youth justice*

*Health and wellbeing*

*Political transparency*

*Housing*

*Food security*

*Population*

*The economy*

*Energy*

*Salmon farming*

*Arts and culture*

*Water security*

*Forestry*

conversations are being had, that we move beyond entrenched positions, and that diverse voices are heard.

Dialogue for the “purposes of mutual exploration, decision making and shared action” requires participants to listen with compassion, respect and curiosity, and to seek to understand others’ perspectives.<sup>22</sup> The ideas that emerged from the Dialogue Lab can be categorised into four key areas: the principles that drive meaningful dialogue, the “infrastructure” that can help scaffold conversations, the individual attributes required of leaders to meaningfully facilitate dialogue, and finally, how these insights can be put into practice.

## 1. Principles for effective dialogue

### Coherence

Within any group of people, differences of opinion are both inevitable and desirable. We are individuals with distinct experiences, understandings and interests. Indeed, questioning and dissent can lead to more thoughtful and better outcomes. Agreement is not a given and dialogue “does not necessarily mean accepting the opinions expressed, but it does require respect for the person expressing the statements and attitudes”.<sup>23</sup>

Participants recognised that dialogue will not always result in agreement, and that the aim should be “coherence not consensus”. Living well together in a place does not require universal agreement on every decision. Rather, it requires a process of dialogue that is consistent, reasoned and respectful, bringing together people, perspectives and relevant information through “mutually constructive exchanges”.<sup>24</sup> What matters, then, is not full agreement

on the outcome, but confidence in the integrity of the process.

### Holistic

Dialogue must look at the whole picture, bringing together all relevant parties and information, examining issues from multiple perspectives, including those that may be contradictory, and lean into paradox. The Lab discussion on education identified the need for a holistic approach described in research terms as one based in transformationalism – that is, re-examining everything that we do.<sup>25</sup>

This means stripping the issue back to its very foundations, asking “for what is education needed?”, and broadly, “what does educational success look like?”. How then, can success be defined and measured? Participants agreed that education extends beyond the conventional school years for ages 5-18, encompassing childcare, home environments, and pathways for retraining and lifelong learning.

Participants of The Lab also proposed practical strategies that can encourage those engaged in dialogue to step outside their own ‘bubbles’, to gain a more complete understanding of an issue and engage with a broader spectrum of perspectives. Those focused on delivering better outcomes for future generations (see inset box, page 17) proposed a creative scenario exercise in which each person drew a card describing an alternate lived experience and then reflected on how that perspective might shape a different understanding of reality.<sup>26</sup>

Practical strategies – whether a scenario exercise or questions such as those described above – can help leaders develop a comprehensive approach to dialogue. Enduring and impactful organisations from around the globe utilise varying approaches and

methodologies to foster holistic and nuanced dialogues.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Inclusive and diverse***

Appleby's pillars of integrity, shared at the opening, reverberated throughout the day. Participants were unanimous in stressing dialogues should be inclusive, seeking the views and participation of all facets of Tasmanian society – "including the mountains and the trees", as the group examining political transparency told. Leaders must be intentional in bringing to the table those facing social and economic inequality, minorities, those who are neurodivergent, recently arrived migrants, people with disabilities and others too often excluded.

Indigenous traditions also offer important insights into dialogue. Practices such as yarning circles and other culturally grounded forms of collective conversation emphasise listening, relationship, storytelling and respect for place; these practices provide valuable models for inclusive and reflective dialogue.

Leaders should not only invite these voices to the table but also ensure that all participants have equal opportunities to express their perspectives. Diversity is a strength. This means, for example, that to understand how education serves Tasmania, we need to hear from children who dropped out in grade eight just as much as from school principals and high achievers. Equally critical to fostering an inclusive approach is transparency around the process for selecting who participates in such conversations.

### ***Solutions-focused***

An intentional approach means starting with an achievable and positive agreed premise. This does not mean that the dialogue in question must arrive at a definitive 'fix', but have goals such as developing shared meaning, or being

an exercise in perspective taking. Structured dialogues should aim to be constructive, starting with hope and building on positive aspects and inherent advantages. Deficits can be overwhelming, seemingly ingrained or unchangeable. Starting with a strengths-based approach, however, allows us to recognise and leverage capacities and capabilities of individuals, groups and the collective – and of place. It is, as Lab participants discussed, the "where do we want to be and how do we use our strengths to get there?" approach, rather than "this is wrong and that won't work...". It is essential to remain hopeful, to celebrate achievements, practise positive reinforcement and build on success.

### ***Creative and Innovative***

Workshop participants called for a more "entrepreneurial" approach to tackling Tasmania's persistent problems. This was understood not as a personal attribute or philosophy, but as a culture that respects and rewards innovation and experimentation. They positioned creative thinking as critical – not only in terms of *solutions* to challenges, but also in the *ways* we do dialogue or include segments of the community, in *how* we try to understand the perspectives and experiences of others, and *how* we harness our collective strengths and think about opportunities for building relationships or for improving Tasmania.

Disrupting traditional structures may be uncomfortable, as the discussion on education made clear, but the same old ways are not working. Participants called for more experimentation, greater willingness to take thoughtful risks, and openness to alternatives not yet tried in Tasmania.

At the same time, participants recognised that innovation does not always require reinventing the wheel. Constant change and restructuring can

themselves create additional workloads, inconsistency and confusion.

### *(Far) forward-thinking*

Workshop participants called for a reflective and future-focused approach to dialogue. This means acknowledging and addressing the past, while using those insights to shape the future. Such an approach encourages the long-term thinking needed to move beyond political cycles and patterns of short-term solutions and funding uncertainty.<sup>28</sup> A shared understanding of what success looks like, and where we hope to be in decades to come, can help support the difficult conversations required to get there.

In Wales, this kind of thinking has resulted in legislation appointing a Future Generations Commissioner (see inset box page 17), and there have been calls for the establishment of a comparable Act in Australia.<sup>29</sup> The University of Tasmania has recently adopted a similar approach, making a long-term commitment to working with the Tasmanian community to achieve ambitious health, education, climate and productivity outcomes by 2050.<sup>30</sup>

While the principles outlined in this section describe the conditions for good dialogue, leaders also need practical structures and tools to support it.

## **2. Practices for effective dialogue**

What are the practices and “infrastructure”, or the mechanisms and tools, needed to support a robust, productive, ethical and inclusive culture of dialogue in Tasmania? In designing practical strategies (dialogue ‘blueprints’) for tackling challenges that Tasmania faces, workshop participants identified a range of tools, consistent with scholarly

research, that can support effective dialogue.

### *Facilitation and intentional scaffolding*

Participants recognised that good dialogue does not thrive in a vacuum. Whether seeking to create a collective vision for Tasmania, a community board addressing educational outcomes in their region, or a small team navigating workplace conflict, the group agreed that dialogue benefits from being intentional, structured and facilitated.

Constructive dialogue benefits from frameworks and agreed ground rules. Establishing purpose, boundaries and objectives allows disagreement to be worked through, rather than becoming a roadblock or glossed over, which can contribute to dissatisfaction and distrust.

Skilled facilitators can guide dialogue processes in ways that help stimulate ideas, ensure conversations are respectful and create the conditions for all voices to be heard in beneficial exchanges.<sup>31</sup> Participants expressed a desire to strengthen capability in this area, recognising that effective facilitation draws on the many leadership attributes discussed below and can be applied and practiced in everyday settings. Processes and facilitation are particularly important in navigating tensions in spaces where power imbalances exist.

### *Creating safe spaces*

While structure and facilitation aid dialogue, participants emphasised where dialogue occurs also matters. Research supports the importance of place, as “social processes and structures and material process and structures are... mutually enacting”.<sup>32</sup> Dialogue thrives in spaces outside of usual contexts – that is, on neutral ground, or what Kurt April calls “special places”.<sup>33</sup>

To avoid hierarchies and loaded histories of particular spaces, dialogue best takes place where individuals and parties are on more equal footings. This might mean moving conversations from the kitchen to the fire pit, from the office to a picnic bench, or from the board room to a yarnning circle or a “dialogue common room”.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, “dialogue can take place wherever people are treated with respect, openness and curiosity”.<sup>35</sup>

### *Shaking up decision making*

Reflecting on Tasmania’s seemingly entrenched social issues, division and barriers to constructive dialogue, participants called for investment in innovative models of dialogue, governance and decision making. Ground-up approaches supporting grassroots initiatives and co-design with communities were emphasised as good practice. It was suggested that establishing durable de-centralised bodies, such as deliberative boards comprised of and appointed by the community.

Participants noted that many issues need to be tackled outside of political cycles, with collaboration across political divides to ensure initiatives and approaches are supported and enduring. Involving everyday people in decision making can generate fresh ideas, empower communities and encourage public trust.<sup>36</sup> Although criticisms exist, models such as citizens’ juries and community panels can help foster inclusivity, considered and informed thinking, and cultivate common ground.<sup>37</sup>

In everyday personal and community arenas including workplaces, dedicated forums for dialogue might follow a community of practice model, encouraging honest reflection on methods, frustrations, successes, and attitudes. Devoting time and space for dialogue in regular and planned formats

also builds trust and belonging in the collective.<sup>38</sup>

### *Documentation and sharing information*

Narratives and stories matter. How information is shared can make or break a project and poor communication can also fracture communities.<sup>39</sup> Participants reflected on how the stories we share can mask the real issues, and acknowledged that narratives are also how we make sense of overwhelming amounts of information and differing perspectives. Accessible and comprehensive communication (and for formal dialogues, strategies) are critical tools for leaders in facilitating productive dialogue – not propaganda, but honest and clear messaging to aid sensemaking and shared meaning.

Relevant information must be made publicly accessible, not only to inform dialogue and decision making, but also to demonstrate how and why decisions were made. As part of an inbuilt process of transparency and reporting, participants insisted there must also be space for feedback. Leaders should explain, for example, what the consequences are if action is not taken; acknowledging, for example, “there are risks but if we don’t get this right and don’t take action, we know the costs and problems are real, and there will be flow on effects”. Perhaps, as Gabrielle Appleby suggested, our freedom of information system should be turned on its head – a system where information is by default available, and the onus is on governments to intentionally withhold or redact only legitimately sensitive information.

The tools and structures of dialogue, whether a collective vision or a citizens’ jury, should be dynamic, allowing for flexibility and iterative improvement, with living documents to “collect, playback and build on”.<sup>40</sup>

While the outcomes of dialogue may be documented, dialogue itself is often most effective face-to-face. At the same time, digital communication technologies — including emerging tools such as artificial intelligence — are increasingly shaping how information is shared and how conversations unfold. These tools can broaden participation and accelerate information exchange. They can also amplify misinformation, misunderstanding and polarisation. This reinforces the importance of thoughtful facilitation and strong dialogue practices.

### **A guiding vision**

Workshop participants repeatedly spoke of the need for a shared vision for Tasmania's future, arguing that dialogue is strengthened when people have a common horizon to work towards. One participant declared, "*we need a compelling narrative for us moving forward*". Once we establish what we want our shared future to look like, it was reasoned, we can work out how to get there. What do we want our state to look like in ten or thirty years? What do we hope our state will look like for our children and their children?

Long-term plans have potential to motivate, provide momentum and collectively identify a path forward.<sup>41</sup> They shift the focus from immediate, personal gain, to our responsibilities for future generations. Practically, they can also function as mandates and guides for assessing individual initiatives and projects i.e. "does this project act in accordance with our shared vision?".

And it is a call echoed in the wider community: "It's about intergenerational agency. We need to create the structures, trust and opportunity for people of all ages, backgrounds, and lived experiences to help steer our collective future".<sup>42</sup>

This is, of course, a chicken and egg scenario – we will need good dialogue

to produce a shared vision. But a vision and process for such a living document could be a platform and springboard for shaking up how we practice dialogue and collective decision making in Tasmania.

### **3. What attributes should leaders bring to dialogue?**

Even with strong principles and supportive practices, dialogue ultimately depends on the behaviours leaders bring to the conversation.

So how can Tasmanian leaders escape echo chambers, shake up existing narratives and create positive change? For the participants of The Lab, this meant moving away from passivity, assumption, and silence, toward intentional, courageous, and creative leadership. These attributes underpin effective facilitation as a core leadership capability – at all levels of life and society.

#### **Acting for the greater good and empowering others**

Facilitating effective dialogue requires leaders to act with integrity, putting aside personal interests to ethically act for the greater good.<sup>48</sup> As researchers have recognised, we have the "opportunity to shift away from outdated notions of leadership as being inherently autocratic and power-based, towards a more nuanced understanding of leadership processes of community and culture development and collective action".<sup>49</sup> Facilitating dialogue is a role that can be actively practiced in all spheres of our lives – good leadership critically connects individuals to one another and fosters the "ennobling of others and contributes towards the common good", whether in the workplace or in parliament.<sup>50</sup>

One of the strongest themes of The Lab was the ambition of the participants in empowering quieter voices. This might

## Talkin' bout my (future) generation

There are many international examples of innovative methods of fostering and facilitating effective dialogue and creating collective visions.

Collective visions can be both the product of a process of dialogue, and can be used as a guide for future dialogues. Innovative and participatory models of decision-making support their creation, but projects need to be carefully designed. Long-term visions can be derailed by issues such as onerous reporting requirements, perceptions of undue influence by certain groups and the dilution of aspirations, a lack of inclusion and diverse perspectives, and a lack of accountability. Too often, plans simply lose momentum.

A structured program of dialogue was successfully used to produce a shared vision for the Welsh nation. “The Wales We Want” conversation engaged thousands of people about what they wanted Wales to look like for their children, grandchildren and future generations. Independent facilitation ensured an inclusive approach which bridged political divides.

The program resulted in landmark legislation. The *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act* was enacted in 2015, requiring public bodies to “act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are being met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. A commissioner now works to meet this goal. Five ways of working are promoted: long-term, integration, involvement, collaboration and prevention – “promoting a holistic approach to sustainable decision making”.<sup>43</sup>

Tasmania has had some experience in producing whole-of-community and long-term visions, such as *Tasmania Together* and the Covid-era *PESRAC Final Report*, both receiving mixed responses at the time and upon reflection.<sup>44</sup> More recently, there have been pushes in Australia to establish an Act similar to Wales’s by groups coordinated through the Intergeneration Fairness Coalition, such as *Foundations for Tomorrow*, a team of federal parliamentarians working together across the political spectrum.<sup>45</sup>

There are other notable examples from across the world of organisations utilising innovative models to promote effective dialogue, lessen societal division, and foster future thinking. In the United States, grassroots civic renewal movements (CRMs) such as *Braver Angles*, the *Public Conversations Project* and the *Public Dialogue Consortium* have aimed to bridge political division, renew civic culture, and strengthen democracy, equipping individuals and groups to further these goals by enabling meaningful dialogue and encouraging collaborative action.<sup>46</sup> In Denmark, independent think tank the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies has created a ‘futures barometer’ as a tool for individuals and groups to understand Danes’ hopes, concerns and expectations for the future, and to harness these insights in making decisions.<sup>47</sup>

mean intentionally bringing others into conversations, speaking up or out above dominant voices or holding space for others. It demands emotional intelligence and good listening. It might mean transferring or letting go of personal power, foregoing personal interests or being prepared to fail.

### ***Listening with respect and compassion***

Whether it is called real, deep, active, or empathic listening, leadership requires a willingness to listen, a desire to understand, be curious, adaptable

and open to change, and be able to sit with discomfort and silence. There are hard truths that might be unpalatable but need to be acknowledged to handle issues in the best way possible. Trying to be “comfortable in discomfort” was a leadership capability necessary in facilitating effective dialogue that workshop participants highlighted, one requiring courage and vulnerability, humility, openness and honesty.

Researchers Gerard and Teurfs summarised the key skills for dialogue as: suspending judgement, identifying assumptions, listening, and inquiring and reflecting.<sup>51</sup> In dialogue, everyone’s beliefs are equal. Where these beliefs are harmful to others, they must be questioned to understand their origins.<sup>52</sup> Asking questions, vigorously challenging our own personal perceptions and beliefs, and seeking to understand opposing opinions will help us understand the experiences and needs of others, and collaboratively find best possible paths forward.

Whether in the workplace, the home or the broader community, good leadership and “real listening means being challenged. It means hearing that what works for us might not work for others. It means rethinking what we measure, what we value, and who gets to decide... it means courage to listen deeply, to be challenged, to be uncomfortable, and to act”.<sup>53</sup>

### *Making the tough calls*

Dialogue may not always result in agreement, and facilitators will need to manage tensions and show leadership in moving forward. Not every decision made will benefit all; indeed, some might necessarily disadvantage a person or group. Participants recognised they should be prepared to make challenging calls and must demonstrate that they have considered how a decision might affect certain individuals and what can

be done to mitigate potential negative impacts. A central part of good leadership is understanding and communicating necessary trade-offs.

### *Growth mindset*

Tasmanian leadership researcher (and contributing author) Toby Newstead and her colleagues recognise that there is not an ideal outcome, “perfect” state or endpoint of good leadership, but rather it is a continual process: “excellent leadership evolves from continual learning, active reflection, and the persistent cultivation of good habits”.<sup>54</sup> Our capabilities as facilitators can be practiced and developed, as workshop participants did on the day, and vowed to continue doing in their daily lives. It is ongoing intentional and everyday actions and practices that foster good leadership and dialogue.

Participants also explored how these ideas might be applied in practice by designing dialogue interventions for key Tasmanian challenges.

## *4. How leaders can enable effective dialogue in practice*

Constructive dialogue does not happen by accident. It is shaped by the conditions leaders create, the behaviours they model and the structures they put in place. As this report has shown, dialogue in Tasmania is often constrained by fear, power dynamics and entrenched positions. Leaders therefore have a critical role in creating the conditions for more open, inclusive and productive conversations.

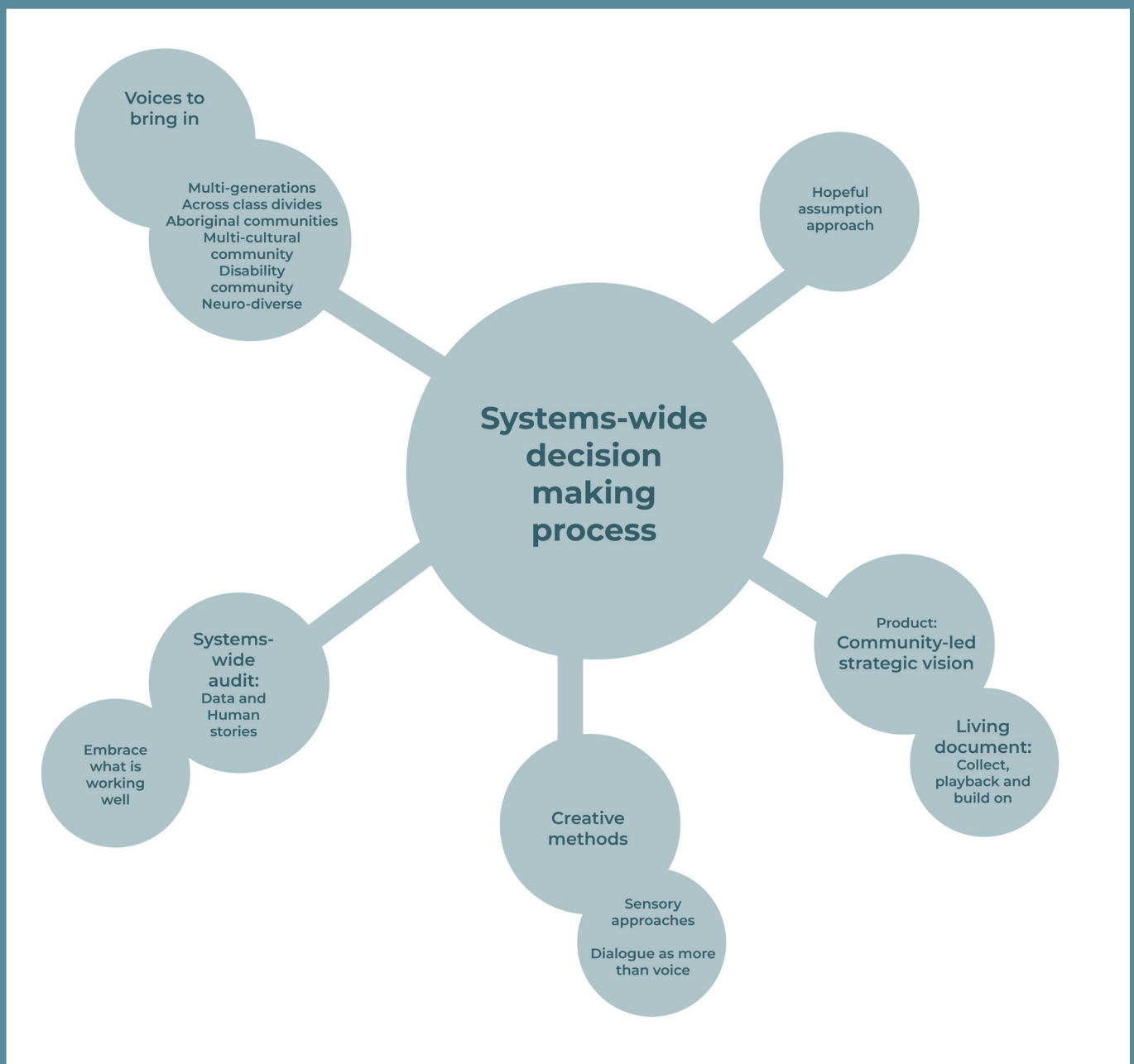
### *Shape the conditions for contribution*

Dialogue improves when people believe it is safe and worthwhile to contribute,

# Dialogue interventions: protecting the interests of future generations

Leadership Lab participants examined key issues confronting Tasmania to develop a “dialogue intervention blueprint”. After identifying current narratives and myths around a specific issue, dominant and absent voices, and what information was missing, groups developed a dialogue intervention strategy.

Discussions explored housing, education, political transparency and economic development, but perhaps the issue that best encapsulated the concerns and aspirations of the day focused on future generations, and ensuring the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We know we need to take drastic action now to raise the voices of young people and avert a crisis of intergenerational justice.<sup>55</sup>



It is an issue that spans climate and the environment, education, food, housing, economy, culture and the arts, health, social equity, water and energy, infrastructure and population. The story we are told is: “Don’t worry, we’ve got you... We’ve got a big, strong plan” – but no one knows the plan. Participants agreed that this story can be a mask for no vision, no structure, and no compelling narrative.

The current conversation was said to be dominated by sitting members of parliament; Tasmanian-owned organisations (for profit or not); the University; and industry sector bodies (both commercial and community). While individual organisations might have long-term plans, visions for Tasmania are sectorial, siloed, fragmented and self-interested. So, what to do about it?

Participants argued the issue requires a “collective not individualistic” approach, “owning the instability” and creating a system-wide decision-making process to develop a community-led strategic vision for Tasmania.

Creativity was considered particularly important. Including creative thinkers and utilising creative processes such as transformative scenario can help people consider different perspectives and positively influences future possibilities.<sup>56</sup> Creativity, as some pointed out, should be recognised “as infrastructure”, rather than being treated as a “luxury”.

The intended output of the dialogue process was a shared understanding of what we think Tasmania should look like for our future generations. Workshop participants called for a living document with granular data and our stories, that maintains momentum and remains active and public in real time to guide the decisions we are making today.

and when they are expected to do so. In tightly connected environments, where relationships and reputations carry weight, this cannot be taken for granted. Leaders must actively reduce the interpersonal risk of speaking up.

This happens less through formal statements and more through consistent behaviour. Responding with curiosity rather than judgement, acknowledging contributions and showing that different perspectives are valued all help build trust. Leaders role modelling taking risks (see Principles for effective dialogue section) themselves helps establish a norm. Over time, this creates the conditions for more honest and meaningful exchanges.

### ***Be clear about purpose and intent***

Dialogue is most effective when participants understand what they are there to do. Without clarity, conversations can drift, become dominated by a few voices, or avoid the issues that matter most.

Leaders should be explicit about the purpose of the dialogue, whether it is to explore, to make sense of an issue, or to inform decision making. They should also set expectations for how people will engage. Importantly, the aim is not always agreement. As highlighted in this report, the goal is often coherence rather than consensus. In other words, people may

not all agree, but they can still develop enough shared understanding to move forward.

### ***Design for inclusion, not just attendance***

Who is in the room, and who is not, fundamentally shapes the quality of dialogue. Inclusion is not achieved simply by inviting a broader range of people. Leaders must also consider whether participants are genuinely able to contribute.

This requires attention to power dynamics, confidence, access to information and the format being used. Practical steps might include providing context in advance, using smaller group discussions, or actively inviting perspectives that are less frequently heard. Inclusion is not passive. It must be designed.

### ***Work with difference, not against it***

Diverse perspectives are essential when navigating complex issues, but they can also create tension. When disagreement becomes personal, dialogue narrows and positions harden.

Leaders need to keep the focus on ideas rather than individuals. They can do this by modelling how to challenge thinking respectfully, acknowledging the legitimacy of different viewpoints, and reinforcing that disagreement is a necessary part of good decision making. When held well, difference becomes a source of insight rather than division.

### ***Listen to learn***

Listening is central to dialogue, but it requires discipline. It involves suspending immediate judgement, being open to having your own assumptions challenged, and seeking to understand the experience behind another person's perspective.

Leaders can demonstrate this by asking open questions, reflecting back what they

have heard, and allowing space for others to think and respond. This signals respect, deepens understanding and encourages wider participation.

### ***Stay present in discomfort***

Many of the issues facing Tasmania, including climate, housing and social inequity, are complex and contested. Dialogue in these areas will often involve uncertainty, tension and competing priorities.

Leaders must be willing to stay with that discomfort rather than closing it down too quickly. This means holding space for unresolved questions, resisting the urge to jump straight to solutions, and helping others remain engaged when conversations become difficult.

### ***Use simple structures to support dialogue***

While dialogue benefits from openness, it also requires some scaffolding. Without structure, conversations can become repetitive, unfocused or dominated by a small number of voices.

Leaders can strengthen dialogue through simple practices such as setting clear questions, breaking into smaller groups, using prompts to explore different perspectives and capturing key insights as they emerge. These structures help balance participation and support progress.

### ***Connect dialogue to action***

Dialogue that does not lead anywhere can reinforce cynicism and disengagement. People need to understand how their input will be used and what happens next.

Leaders should be transparent about the scope of the conversation, the decisions being informed and the trade-offs involved. Closing the loop by sharing outcomes, explaining decisions and

acknowledging contributions helps build credibility and encourages ongoing engagement.

### *Lead as part of the system*

Leaders are not outside the dialogue. They are part of the system shaping it. Their willingness to be open, to admit uncertainty and to learn alongside others sets the tone for the whole group.

Enabling effective dialogue is therefore not a one-off intervention. It is an ongoing leadership practice embedded in meetings, decision making processes and everyday interactions.

Taken together, these practices reinforce a central insight of this report. Dialogue does not improve on its own. It improves when leaders intentionally shape the conditions, behaviours and structures that allow people to think together more effectively.



Figure 2: Dialogue Lab

## FACILITATING EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE IN TASMANIA: A LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Dialogue requires time, patience and practice, but it helps us understand where we have come from and where we might go together. Listening openly to others' lived experiences, perspectives and beliefs without judgement lessens divides and encourages compassion and belonging. Good dialogue can have a ripple effect, with the power to (over the long-term) improve communication in a wider society. It has the potential to help us collectively address some of Tasmania's most persistent problems and anticipate new issues, to improve our work and personal lives.

This report is a part of a broader Tasmanian Leaders' pillar of work to effect positive change in Tasmania. This project intends to do more than provide insights: it wants to motivate action.

Positive cultures of dialogue will not happen organically – facilitation of dialogue needs to be embedded in leadership development, within organisational systems and actively practised by individuals. It can change the world, but our practice and skills must start at home and in the everyday. The principles and practices of dialogue should be applied and reflected on in our familial relationships, exercised in our workplaces, and as a community, used systematically to become a valued part of our civic culture.

Workplaces, organisations and governments can implement infrastructures and develop tools that encourage and insist on dialogue – whether “dialogue common rooms”, revolving who leads meetings, rethinking engagement practices or establishing communities of practice.

Leaders must intentionally foster dialogue with inclusive and diverse participation that is holistic, hopeful, forward-thinking, and

creative. Participants were adamant that they had a role to play in facilitating and opening up dialogue around constrained issues by:

- Seeking understanding through active, empathetic listening, respectful questioning, and challenging one's own perceptions.
- Amplifying voices, including one's own, with confidence and courage, especially in spaces where change is needed.
- Developing a reflective approach to personal leadership (and facilitation) skills, building deep and informed understandings of issues, and intentional communication.
- Having the courage to challenge entrenched ideas and systems, embrace creative risk, and encourage transformative change.

But it should also be remembered that responsibility should not only fall on individuals, but that organisations and institutions – such as Tasmanian Leaders and the University of Tasmania – also have a role in providing opportunities for developing these skills in leadership programs.

It is often joked that in Tasmania, our six degrees of separation is actually only two degrees – and while this trait has drawbacks, it can be a real strength. Our closeness makes it easier for us to connect with others and make things happen. Let's find our voice, use our collective wisdom and experiences to harness our strengths, and initiate some courageous conversations.

## AN INVITATION TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

It is hoped this report is the beginning of a rich and constructive dialogue, furthered through future Tasmanian Leaders' Leadership Labs. We invite leaders to further the conversation by reflecting on the following prompts:

- What are the opportunities for fostering a brave, inclusive and effective culture of dialogue in Tasmania?
- How can Tasmanian leaders intentionally foster good dialogue practices in the many arenas of their everyday lives?

- What practical strategies can leaders use to empower quieter voices in Tasmania?
- What have we missed? Are there models, tools or strategies from elsewhere our leaders and state should consider?

If something here resonates or challenges you, we would love to hear your thoughts. Have ideas for future topics?

Please get in touch:  
[info@tasmanianleaders.org.au](mailto:info@tasmanianleaders.org.au)

### ABOUT TASMANIAN LEADERS



Tasmanian Leaders is a place-based leadership development organisation that builds leadership capacity and connection across Tasmania. Through programs, research and social impact initiatives, it supports people at different life and career stages to lead with greater purpose, influence and impact. Its work includes the flagship Tasmanian Leaders Program, initiatives that broaden access and inclusion, and research that contributes to thought leadership on leadership in Tasmania. Its growing network of more than 1,000 graduates continues to lead and contribute across the state.

### ABOUT THE TASMANIAN POLICY EXCHANGE



The Tasmanian Policy Exchange is an agile team of researchers at the University of Tasmania focused on the big issues shaping Tasmania's future. It works with government, industry and community partners to produce rigorous, independent evidence and policy analysis, and supports University researchers to make timely and informed contributions to policy debates. Its work spans themes including democratic engagement and good governance, sustainable development for communities, the transition to a zero-emissions future, and other critical Tasmanian policy challenges.

### ABOUT THE LEAD AUTHOR

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### ABOUT OUR PREVIOUS LEADERSHIP LABS

Tasmanian Leaders' recent thought leadership has consistently explored the conditions required for effective leadership in a complex and changing environment.

Our work on belonging highlighted the critical role of psychological safety, identity and connection in enabling people to contribute meaningfully.

Our exploration of complexity examined how leaders navigate uncertainty, competing priorities and systems that do not respond to simple solutions.

Our work on polarisation surfaced the risks of entrenched positions, exclusion and breakdowns in trust, and the role leaders play in either reinforcing or bridging these divides.

Together, these strands of work point to a shared insight. Leadership is not only about direction or decision making. It is about creating the conditions where people can think, engage and act together. This paper builds on that foundation by focusing on dialogue as a core leadership capability that brings these elements together in practice.

Facilitating Dialogue is part of Leadership in Action and Research, proudly supported by



## References and further readings

These references provide supporting material and further reading that informed this discussion paper. They draw on Tasmanian Leaders' previous thought leadership work on belonging, complexity and polarisation, alongside relevant academic and policy research. While not required for understanding the main propositions of the paper, they offer additional context for readers interested in exploring these challenges in greater depth.

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<sup>5</sup> Raelin, "The manager as facilitator of dialogue", 820.

<sup>6</sup> Heath et. al., "The processes of dialogue", 355, 350.

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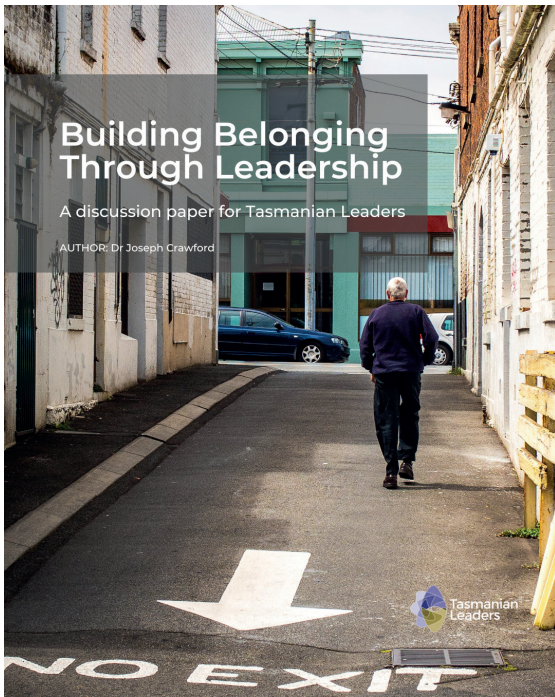
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## RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS TO INSPIRE ACTION

Tasmanian Leaders offers a range of proven social impact initiatives which support the wider Tasmanian community to thrive. In 2024, we launched Leadership in Action and Research, a reinvigorated pillar of our work aimed at generating collective action, and amplifying the adaptive capacity within our organisations and communities, with our graduates leading the charge. It is to help us think and act differently for the benefit of Tasmania.

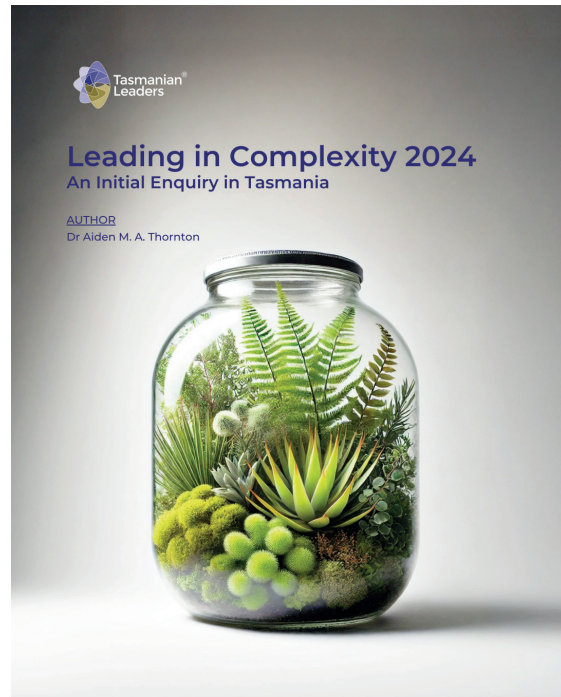


### ***Building Belonging Through Leadership (2025)***

**Dr. Joseph Crawford**

Authored by leading organisational behaviour academic Dr Joseph Crawford, *Building Belonging Through Leadership* reveals that belonging isn't a soft sentiment, it is the foundation of effective leadership. It shows how leaders can create cultures of safety, trust and shared purpose that help people and organisations thrive.

Drawing on insights from an in-person workshop and consultation with leaders from across Tasmania including; managers and board directors from sectors spanning construction, not-for-profit, education, arts, government, and business, the report introduces the *Tasmanian Belonging Framework*, synthesising four dimensions of belonging. Recommendations include practical strategies for leaders to build belonging, shaped by diverse perspectives and stress-tested across sectors, making them both contextually Tasmanian and broadly transferable.



### ***Leading in Complexity 2024 : An Initial Enquiry in Tasmania (2024)***

**Dr. Aiden M.A. Thornton**

*Leading in Complexity 2024: An Initial Enquiry in Tasmania* by complexity leadership expert Dr. Aiden M. A. Thornton delves into the distinctive challenges and opportunities for developing leadership within the Tasmanian context. Through an in-person workshop and survey, the report draws on the experiences of dozens of leaders across multiple sectors, to illustrate the challenges of leading productively and inclusively in today's environment.

The report explores 14 essential complexity leadership skills ranging from self-awareness and resilience to systems thinking and digital competency. Recommendations include embedding these skills into educational and leadership programs, fostering collective leadership development, and establishing conflict resolution frameworks to address polarisation and competing priorities.



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