Unleashing Freedom in Chorus – Teaching Notes

A Teaching Case on Freedom-based Leadership in Community Sector Organisations

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School of Business and Law

> *"But here's the truth: Self-management is messy. It's not a product. It's not a process. It's not something you simply "implement."*
>
> *It's a journey. A constant negotiation between autonomy and alignment. Between freedom and responsibility.*
>
> *And if you're not regularly rethinking that balance, then you're not doing self-management. You're just performing a script."*
>
> *Joost Minnaar, Corporate Rebels Newsletter 10 July 2025*

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Introduction to the Teaching Notes

This teaching notes document has been created to assist academics who wish to use the case study in their courses. The authors believe that the case study can be of value in both undergraduate and postgraduate organisational behaviour and management and leadership courses which include behavioural and structural ways of leading and managing within organisational settings.

It is important to note that self-organising is inherently dynamic so by the time you are reading this teaching case, the model will most likely have evolved or matured.

This document is not intended to be prescriptive and so does not provide session plans or PowerPoint slides. The main features of this document are:

- Academic and grey literature which might help support use of the case study
- Additional quotes from interviewees which help highlight the key points the case is addressing
- Suggestions for some additional discussion questions and activities specific to certain aspects of the case. The 2 types of activities are shown as:

	Activities where students individually or in teams are asked to do some type of research to explore a concept more fully.
	Reflection points where students are asked to individually reflect on their reactions to some concept or idea.

Introduction to Self-managing Organisations

Addressing the complex challenges facing our organisations and societies requires freeing up the innovation potential of increasingly diverse workforces (Duchek, *et al.,* 2020; Hundschell, *et al.,* 2022). Untapping this potential is a critical role for leaders who can transform organisational effectiveness through building trust and capitalising on human capabilities while drawing on more freedom-oriented structural forms and ways of working (Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Nobles, 2019).

Such forms are increasingly being referred to as self-managing organisations or liberated companies (Gagné & Hewett, 2025; Getz & Arnaud, 2024), with operations guided by a variety of models such as holacracy and sociocracy as well as tailored organisational operating models (Rotterdam School of Management, n.d.). Practitioner and academic sources suggest the existence

of some 1,000 organisations operating in this way globally[1] (Gagné & Hewett, 2025; Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Corporate Rebels, 2024) in all different parts of the globe (Minnaar, 2025) and in sectors as varied as pharmaceuticals, automotive manufacturing and police services (Goeser, 2025).

Such organisations are characterised by high levels of employee autonomy, freedom, and trust, and by individuals and teams setting their own goals and taking the responsibility to take the necessary actions to achieve them (Gagné & Hewett, 2025; Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Koistinen & Vuori, 2024). Essentially this entails "distributing authority, reducing hierarchy in decision-making, and giving people the chance to initiate change when justified" (Rotterdam School of Management, n.d. p. 6) which requires a coherent and inspiring visions as an aligning focus (Gagné & Hewett, 2025; Getz & Arnaud, 2024). Advantages of self-management are reported to include a range of individual and organisational benefits including heightened job satisfaction, well-being and motivation and greater effectiveness, efficiency, and overall performance (Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Koistinen & Vuori, 2024).

Despite the numerous reported benefits of self-management, and market conditions and new ways of working which would suggest fertile ground for self-management, barriers to sustainable change seem to be perpetuating hierarchical authority as the dominant way of working (Lee, 2024). Sustainably transitioning to self-management requires both structural and behavioural change including the adoption of a leadership style with less explicit authority over other employees (Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Koistinen & Vuori, 2024). Getz & Arnaud (2024) argue that a range of incremental and radical approaches to leadership are necessary in such contexts. These include relational, distributed, and collective leadership as well as transformational, values based, and authentic leadership focussed on transforming individual leaders and the organisation.

This case study explores the leadership required to sustainably transform organisations from command-and-control organisational dependency so that the transformations they have led are not undone when their tenure ends. The case study draws on insights gained from conducting interviews with employees and stakeholders (see Appendix 1), conducting observations of meetings in the organisation, reviewing a wide range of company internal and publicly available documents as well as insights from academic literature. The research team would like to acknowledge the willingness of people within the case company to actively engage in this project and share their insights.

> Do an online search (with or without CoPilot or some other Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) platform) to find examples of self-managing organisations or liberated companies. Collate your findings into industries, countries, and any other categories you find useful for analysis. Discuss your findings with a peer, do you see any patterns in your analysis?

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[1] The Corporate Rebels have created a data base of self-managing organisations and are writing case studies about these organisations. At this link you can find case studies of 50 organisations: https://www.corporate-rebels.com/blog/50-case-studies-of-self-managing-organisations?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

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Chorus's Story – How do you Feel?

The case organisation, Chorus, is a for-purpose organisation with over 700 employees and volunteers providing services in the aged care, disability and mental health sectors across Western Australia (WA). Chorus Australia Limited is an unlisted Australian Public Company registered as a charity.

Reflection point	After reading Chorus's story in the case study, spend a few moments reflecting on how you feel about Chorus? Jot down 3-5 words which capture these feelings. Share your words with a peer and discuss similarities and differences in your reactions. Can you see yourself working in such a workplace? Why? Why not?

Chorus's Operating Model (the Onion-Ring)

From a systems thinking perspective, strategy and structure are inextricably linked without one having precedent over the other (Kühl, 2023). Chorus's structure, embedded within its operating model aligns with a systems thinking approach. Their operating model is designed with multiple lenses all of which are closely linked to the organisation's strategy:

Lens	Intent
Relationships: who we are and how we connect	The intent is that Chorus as an organisation is highly porous. People and relationships flow dynamically within, around and across Chorus and local communities.
Work: what we do and how (and where) we do it	Provides a work structure outlining how ongoing and project-based work is undertaken by people across the organisation in alignment with their expertise, passion and / or development.
Accountability: agreements we make, results we embrace	Chorus defines accountability as an agreement made between people which includes undertakings about outcomes and/or behaviour, and an understanding of positive and negative outcomes which may arise. Agreements provide clarity about both what and how work is done at Chorus and are considered critical given the non-hierarchical structure.
Authority: who makes decisions, and how	Authority at Chorus describes the formalised permission to make a decision, set a goal, create or change a Play[2], impose a sanction, or execute a transaction. There is a strong bias towards collective and consent-based decision-making while

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[2] Plays at Chorus are the "how" of doing work, they represent the recommended way of doing the work in alignment with Chorus Standards. Plays are collaboratively developed and collectively held in a Playbook available to all Chorus employees on the intranet (SharePoint). An example of a Play is the "Recruitment Play".

	being sensitive to the regulatory compliance requirements and alignment with organisational values.

Further detail about how relationships, work, accountability, and authority are operationalised featured in the case study in the section on the onion-ring model.

The quotes below are some further quotes which illustrate aspects of the operating model in addition to the story and quotes used in the case study.

What Chorus people say about relationships:

It is readily apparent when talking to people within the organisation and when observing people at work that relationships are critical to the achievement of the organisation's vision and in creating a caring and supportive environment. As CEO and Strategic Coach, Dan Minchin said:

> "A thriving community is made-up of a whole lot of thriving relationships and the word thriving is all about growth and development. And so, it's just like these are like fractals and in the heart of it is this quality relationships. And so, this is why we spend so much time investing in the quality of the relationship in the Local team or the quality of the relationship within the enabling part of Chorus" (INT.S1)

How this makes people feel is echoed in the following illustrative quotes:

> "you have numerous support networks and places to go, not just individual people .... you have a really broad support network that is scattered across the organisation, and everyone really works to make sure that everyone is safe and supported no matter where you are." (INT.L7)

> "everybody appears to have each other's back in the sense of just looking out and that caring sort of what's going on with one another within the Locals within each squad and stuff like that and making sure each person is OK." (INT.E1)

> "you know that we are relational, but that's really important, it's at the foundation of Chorus. So, we work really hard on that. If I think about my day-to-day for example, you know I've spoken now to four different enablers for various reasons and they were available to me, they made themselves available to me and throughout the busyness of things. I will have people, other leads make contact with me for various reasons, and I will try and make myself available for that, even if it's just brainstorming or if it's debriefing." (INT.L8)

What Chorus people say about how work is organised:

"So, it's how do we attract the right people and get people who will really thrive in this this way of working? And then how do we onboard them in a way that really supports them getting their head around this, you know really different structure and how they can thrive in within that and flourish within that." (INT.E4)

"we've had a recent audit, and they looked at the structure and they're like "we get this, this is amazing, this is awesome, like we haven't seen this, and we can see how you're working." And you know, like everybody's responsible, everybody's responsible for everything that happens...... that kind of a structure where it's a supportive environment rather than an environment that's saying, here's the deep end, I will push you and then you can learn to swim on your own. But here we're like this is the deep end, we've got the floaters and I'll be in there with you anyway." (INT.E2)

"I'm seeing real solid stuff come out of it, real growth where you can see, oh, we were contributing to that. This thing has happened as a result of the thing that we workshopped at R'PER. The swarms are people, groups of people getting on and making projects happen, you know. So, it's gone from being quite a clunky kind of time-consuming thing to kind of becoming more collaborative, more transparent, I think for me there's been a little bit of a switch flip to go, OK I get it now." (INT.L4)

"I think it's because the way it's structured now, like you know, you can join these forums and swarms, and they are getting more people involved if they want to. And it's and it's getting a lot clearer now with your like your responsibilities. Your roles and what have you, because you got you got the job canvases that are out. So, like they're like job descriptions or whatever role descriptions. And you got the team agreements. So, they are putting a lot of things in place, which is a bit more structured and also giving people the autonomy as well to run the Local how they feel they want to run the Local but within the guidelines." (INT.L6)

What Chorus people say about accountability and authority:

In traditional/hierarchical organisations, decision-making authority is often bundled with accountability (Wang, 2023). In Chorus authority is not considered the same as accountability and describes the formalised permission to make a decision, set a goal, create or change a Play, impose a sanction, or execute a transaction. Illustrative quotes about how this works in practice include:

> "we need to get better at that. I think there's a real opportunity to make those agreements more active parts of the Local. There's certainly the structure there and the capacity there for us to be able to use them more proactively. But look, sometimes the busyness of everyday work can get on top of that really important foundation, right. And that that does happen in reality." (INT.L8)

> "we're in community services, there are some not non negotiables, but ultimately even if somebody wanted to broaden that or test that to see what flexibility there might be because they felt that a customer needed it or something of that nature, they could reach out again number of different areas of the business to get some consensus or they can make a proposal to a forum ..... and anybody in the organisation can put forward a proposal to have a decision made by a forum." (INT.E6)

> "sometimes if I have to make those decisions because of what's going on at that time, I can make that decision and I know that I've made the right decision. And if I have made the wrong decision, then I know that that can be, it's not going to be, I'm not going to be punished for it, it's going to be it's like a learning curve and then you can

> say, well, OK, that didn't work, let's try this, so, I feel empowered to do that too."
> (INT.L2)

Listen to the podcast interview "Becoming Deliberately Developmental" on The Developmental podcast[3] where Donna Trebilcock, Enabling Leader – Coaching and Organisational Development at Chorus provides insights about the organisations operating model. Consider your initial reaction after you'd read section in the case study on the "Onion-Ring Model". With this new information from this section and this podcast, are you more or less likely to seek to work in or create such a workplace? Why? Why not?

Approach to Leadership – What the Literature Says

Freedom-based leadership represents a fundamental departure from traditional hierarchical models by empowering employees with autonomy, responsibility, and purpose. This leadership approach is grounded in the belief that individuals are naturally self-motivated and capable of aligning their interests with those of the organisation when provided with the right environment (Nobles & Staley, 2009). Freedom-based leadership distributes power, fosters trust, and encourages initiative (Nobles & Shipper, 2023; Getz, 2009). This leadership approach recognises employees as partners in achieving organisational success, granting them decision-making freedom to unlock their potential and create an engaged workforce (Dierksmeier & Laasch, 2021; Desai, 2009).

Getz (2009) describes "liberating leadership" as a catalyst for transforming conventional organisations into initiative-freeing workplaces, where employees act with autonomy and shared ownership. Research shows relational leadership styles including transformational leadership (McCombs & Williams, 2021), inclusive leadership (Choi et al., 2017), and servant leadership (Wang et al., 2022) enhance psychological safety, though they don't focus specifically on freedom-based management. Collective leadership theories provide insights into freedom-based approaches through shared and distributed leadership (Ospina et al., 2020), offering a frame to explore unleashing freedom. Together, these perspectives illuminate the potential of freedom-based leadership to unlock creativity, foster trust, and sustain high performance by treating people as intrinsically equal and capable.

Our framework of freedom-based leadership comprises eight key principles adapted from Nobles and Staley's principles (2009) and Carney's and Getz's steps for building a freedom-based team, Our framework includes: (1) Empowerment, (2) Respectful Relationships, (3) Trusting Relationships,

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[3] Podcast available at:
https://open.spotify.com/episode/63WJcZ0CwsC4EPqSr1a8WU?si=TFIqvm_IRMKdsWCRqwiz5g&nd=1&dlsi=8f6b56acd8d14a17. The description of "The Chorus Experiment" starts at 23 minutes.

(4) Shared vision, (5) Accountability and Responsibility, (6) Humility, (7) Guardian of the liberated teams, and (8) Shared beliefs and values.

The table provided in Appendix 2 illustrates how various relational and collective leadership styles align with the eight core principles of freedom-based leadership, as evidenced in existing literature.

Leximancer analysis on the extant literature also highlighted these linkages between various collective and relational leadership styles and the eight core principles of our freedom-based leadership framework. A summary of Leximancer analysis is presented in the following Leximancer concept maps.

Figure 1: Collective leadership styles (distributed and shared leadership)
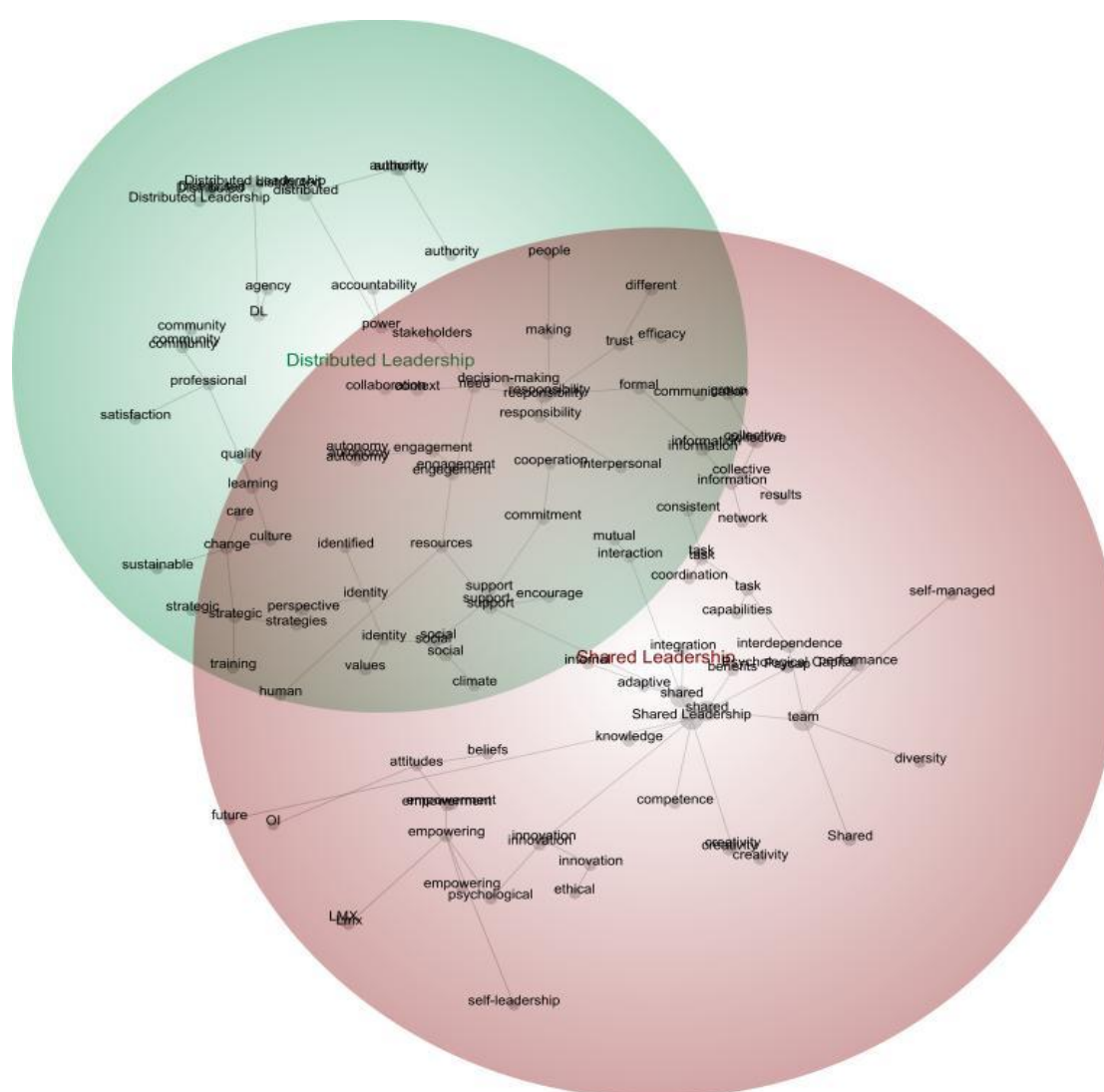
The Leximancer concept map illustrates the relationship between collective leadership (i.e., distributed, and shared leadership) and their alignment with the core principles of freedom-based leadership. It shows a clear overlap between the two approaches, particularly around autonomy,

engagement, accountability, responsibility, and trust. These themes relate closely to principles such as self-management, transparency, and mutual respect. The map also highlights empowerment, competence, creativity, and ethical decision-making, reflecting the principles of personal growth, integrity, and purpose. Shared leadership extends to ideas of self-leadership, diversity, interdependence, and psychological empowerment, reinforcing inclusion and collective agency. Distributed leadership emphasizes collaboration, stakeholder involvement, social support, and learning, which connect with sustainable impact, community building, and continuous development.

Figure 2: relational leadership styles (transformational, inclusive and servant)
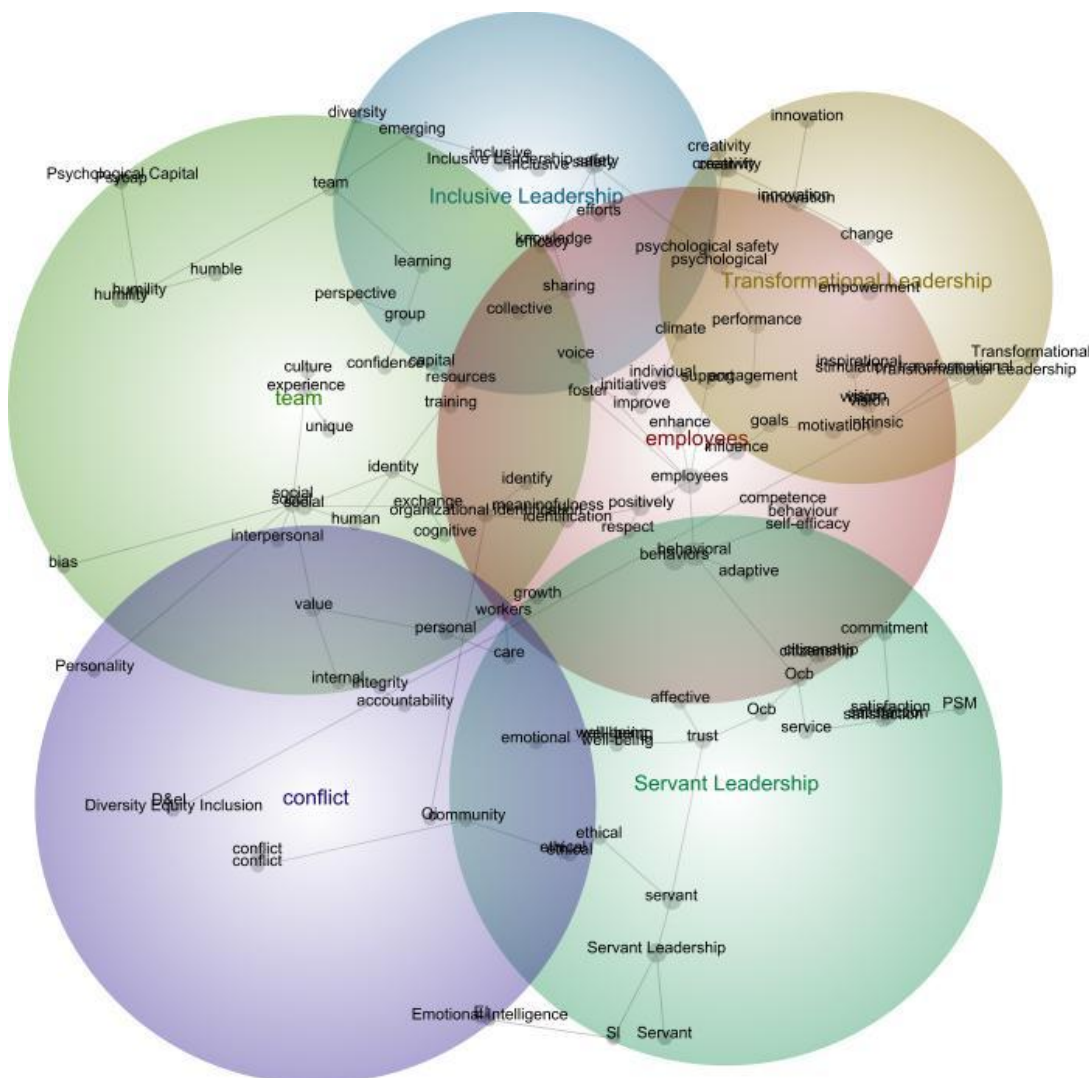
The themes in the concept map highlight a strong relationship between relational leadership styles (transformational, inclusive, and servant) and the core principles of freedom-based leadership. Concepts such as trust, voice, psychological safety, and emotional well-being reflect the principles

of dignity, wholeness, and trust, showing how these leadership styles create environments where individuals feel safe, valued, and respected. Engagement, empowerment, and intrinsic motivation relate closely to self-management and purpose, indicating that these leaders encourage autonomy and help individuals find meaning in their work. Care, ethical behaviour, and accountability support the principle of responsibility, while diversity, inclusion, and transparency directly connect with fairness and openness.

What's Most Important in Leadership in Chorus?

Literature suggests that organisations transitioning to self-management require both structural and behavioural change including the adoption of a leadership style with less explicit authority over other employees (Getz & Arnaud, 2024; Koistinen & Vuori, 2024). It's clear from the Chorus operating model that both aspects are a work in progress towards the sustainability of this way of working in the community sector. Getz & Arnaud (2024) argue that a range of incremental and radical approaches to leadership are necessary in such contexts. These include relational, distributed, and collective leadership as well as transformational, values based, and authentic leadership focussed on transforming individual leaders and the organisation which aligns with the literature review presented in the previous section. The research team developing this case study examined how these styles related to Nobles' and Staley's principles of freedom-based leadership (2017) and Carney's and Getz's steps for building a freedom-based team (2018) and which of these were seen as qualitatively important within Chorus. The leadership practices and behaviours which most stakeholders saw as critically important to sustainably embedding freedom-based principles within a community sector organisation were empowerment, accountability, and responsibility, and trusting and respectful relationships. The case study focusses on these aspects in the sections on:

- Freedom-based leadership principles
- Empowerment and accountability
- Trusting and respectful relationships.

The quotes below are some further quotes which illustrate aspects of leadership within Chorus in addition to the story and quotes used in the case study.

Empowerment and Autonomy

Literature supports the importance of employee autonomy and empowerment for employee performance and thriving and the role of leaders in enabling such states (Slemp *et al*., 2018). Unfortunately, both empowerment and autonomy are regularly given lip service in traditional hierarchical organisations due to those in senior positions holding on to power and overusing their formal authority.

Strategic stakeholders within Chorus recognise the need for leaders to refrain from resorting to formal authority when aspiring to create empowering and autonomous workplaces, with one stakeholder stating that:

"probably empowerment of employees and for me, you can't empower someone, but you can un-empower yourself. Yeah, that that is the big one, is the un-empowering of and I suppose that links into the absence of the use of formal authority." (INT.S5)

Some positive outcomes for individuals of feeling empowered and able to work with autonomy are illustrated in the following quotes:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"It's really empowering to know that even if I make a decision or we make a decision that turns out to be incorrect, there's no judgement. Were you learning from that and with learning also comes power. So, you learn, and you grow and you, as long as learn from mistakes, it's really important." (INT.L1)
	"So, it's very empowering for me to know that I've got all that info and I didn't realise how much information I've got until I'm sitting here and I'm helping everybody do different things." (INT.L2)
Enabling	"the empowerment that I myself that I have felt is allowing to think further out-of-the-box. Like there's almost no box, there's no limit and it allows you to look within the full scope of the company and you know it also allows you to develop your own skills." (INT.E1)
	"I think I can confidently say that all employees have that freedom and that opportunity of empowerment. We have autonomy in what we do, that in itself is empowerment as it empowers us to sort of know that we should be the best that we can be at and I'd like to put it in a way without it sounding a bit off the issue but to me, having the autonomy, it just means that they trust me to do what I'm doing and they know that I'll do it to the best of my capabilities." (INT.E2)
	"I think staff are highly empowered at Chorus. I think we still at the phase where some people are still yet to understand what that might mean for them and how to, I guess, embrace that empowerment. So, like basically all of us have grown up in, you know, working and existing within hierarchies, and so for some people, it comes a little bit more naturally to embrace that empowered way of working and for others, it takes a little bit more support to kind of get their head around what could that look like? What could that sound like? But I think in terms of overall the levels of empowerment are very high, of Chorus."

Accountability and Responsibility

The high levels of empowerment and autonomy described above in turn lead to increased responsibility and accountability, which is common in self-managing organisations (Rotterdam School of Management, n.d.) with these components seen as interrelated aspects of self-management (Getz, 2009; Koistinen & Vuori, 2024), and as features of distributed leadership (Dierckx et al., 2008). Within Chorus, accountability is defined as an agreement made between

people which includes undertakings about outcomes and/or behaviour, and an understanding of positive and negative outcomes which may arise.

Strategic stakeholders within Chorus stress how central accountability and agreement making is to the way of working and being within the organisation, due to the strategic focus of building community connection through relationships, with CEO and Strategic Coach, Dan Minchin stating:

> "I think it's really high and I feel almost back to your starting point about the quality of the relationship. I almost believe that one of the absolute founding ideas was that the organisation will be more effective when people feel a much higher sense of accountability to themselves, to their colleagues, to the people with whom they've made agreements." (INT.S1)

This commitment to accountability and responsibility as part of honouring relationships was evident with other stakeholders too as illustrated in the following quotes:

> "we're accountable for our actions and we're responsible for what our role is. So, my role as customer partner is to make sure that the customers are serviced correctly meeting all their needs. And because I do work with the team closely for rostering and services, making sure that everything is that they're looked after, the team is looked after and I'm held accountable if team was to fall down or things weren't delivered in a timely manner to our customers." (INT.L3)

> "The team agreements is a big part of that, so that's just sort of like how do we hold each other to account? Like if you're if someone within the group is not doing the work or sharing the load or, you know, shaking up coverage of, you know, absences and things like that, then how do we like, hold each other to account." (INT.E3)

Interviewees suggested that accountability and responsibility were maturing and becoming part of the culture within Chorus as the following quotes illustrate:

> "I think for people coming on board to Chorus now, it's really clear, really transparent and really easy to understand what that accountability is and it's easy to onboard someone knowing because you've talked about it right from the very beginning from you know first screenings." (INT.L4)

The personal change and growth required to mature in this way, and accept the accountability and responsibility required to ensure the success of autonomous ways of working, was recognised by stakeholders across the organisation. One strategic stakeholder in recognising the ongoing work required to fully embed this into the ways of knowing, doing and being stated that:

> "we're really working hard on agreement language, we're working hard on using consent-based alignment decision-making, we're working hard on how do we have conversations together about what are we going to do when somebody doesn't keep that agreement?" (INT.S2)

And an enabling stakeholder acknowledging the personal transformation this requires:

"that sort of transition from going from either someone telling me what to do or I was the one that was driving the outcomes, and I was telling people what to do, to making the work visible and transparent and then taking accountability for it, which also means being willing to fail, being willing to share when you maybe can't get something done. That's a in my view, it's a big, big change, it requires a lot of change in who you are." (INT.E3)

Trusting Relationships

The above sections demonstrate how important leadership practices which enable empowered employees to work with autonomy and take responsibility for their work and accountability for their actions are within Chorus. The quality of relationships is central to these outcomes and Chorus people spoke about how important trusting relationships and feeling trusted were to this way of working. This interconnection between these concepts and how central they all are to sustainably embedding freedom-based principles within Chorus is illustrated within the following quotes:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"very high given the fact that we work on our own, we are responsible for the day-to-day running of the business, in each hub. There's a lot of trust given because it's even though we're not-for-profit, we still have to make money to survive. And I think we're given the trust to run the business. (INT.L3)
Enabling	"there's no blame game, it's more about this is the way it is, and we trust you didn't do it on purpose. We trust that you did your best to mitigate the incident or the complaint, but it didn't happen. We trust you had the right conversations with the people, so you know if authorities were involved, we trust you did that. If it was a complaint, we trust that you really try your best to give the answer or to help them solve the complaint." (INT.E2)
	"I think within the enabling team I see mostly, I think there's a few little exceptions in there, but mostly I see very high levels of trust. And then there's certain Locals again, where they're highly empowered and those trust levels are really high because they've learnt to have those conversations with one another, they've got strong agreements. Everybody kind of has a good sense of what their role is, but also when they can step in and help and that trust is really critical to their success." (INT.E4)
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"we also do this WOW survey, we've had three now, so we've got a bit of data that kind of tells us a little bit about what's going on across the system and where people sit in terms of their sense of safety and security, and you know whether they have a sense of being seen and trusted in in their work environment.....I think that is I think people are willing to clean up their messes and that for me is a really good indicator that trust exists." (INT.S2)

The above quotes suggest that trusting relationships and a sense of being trusted help contribute to Chorus being a great place to work with a strong sense of psychological safety where skills in having conversations are valued for how they contribute to levels of trust and transparency. Such

relationships are also underpinned by Chorus values, including the value of respect which is discussed next.

Respectful Relationships

The leadership styles reviewed earlier (see Appendix 2) point to the connection between relational leadership styles and the cultivation of mutual respect, due in part to demonstrating concern for employee well-being and the creation of psychological safety. Respectful relationships were qualitatively important within Chorus, particularly in shaping how Chorus people show up in their daily interactions with others as illustrated in the following quotes:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"Oh, I think everyone in the organisation is very respectful for one another and it is respectful, is one of the Chorus values that everybody does follow. I yeah, I've not come across anyone who's not been or who's been disrespectful.' (INT.L6) "I think that we all value being relational, I think that's really important. We all value being respectful if I think about what's sort of innately in our agreements, you know, respect, being relational." (INT.L8)
Enabling	"from the entire time of working at Chorus have felt like you, you know, opinion mattered. Like wasn't just a tick-and-flick. It was and people were making an effort to ask. I think one thing to me that denotes respect is, I guess it's quite aligned to integrity and like what you do, so for me, I define integrity is what you do when no one's watching, right? So, I think I see that still happens. You know, like if somebody goes on leave, then they wait for you to come back and ask you or they check in... It's actually, you know sort of holding space for other people and understanding sometimes that slows things down." (INT.E3)
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"We are here for our customers, and the board is here also for our employees. So, we respect we treat them with respect by the way we treat them and then subsequently, each individual staff member does the same for each of the customers." (INT.S3)

It is clear from interviewees that the respectful nature of relationships within the organisation aren't accidental with several stakeholders referring to the importance of difference mechanisms within the organisation in helping shape this way of showing up. Agreements were mentioned as helping build respectful relationships as illustrated in the following quotes:

> "We've recently introduced team agreements as a more structured way to have a conversation within a team, so the team might be a Local or it might be a squad, or it might be a forum ... and that's helping to build a little bit of structure around what do I mean by respect and what do you mean by respect?" (INT.E3)

Other mechanisms within Chorus which were seen to be contributing towards respectful relationships included working in swarms and forums which was seen by one stakeholder as building respect through increasing confidence:

> "it [working in swarms, forums etc] encourages open communication and it just builds confidence...... I think the more confidence you have, the more I'll say more respect you have for your role and the people who work at Chorus so confidence as in knowing what your job role is and what's and what's expected of you as well." (INT.L6)

Unleashing Freedom and Creating Possibilities through Leadership

While the transformation of Chorus from a traditional hierarchical organisation to a self-managing organisation is continuing, the organisation seems to have reached a level of maturity where there is a clear and evolving sense of what type of leadership is required to help achieve the strategic aspirations of being a community connector underpinned by strong relationships which value what it is to be human and help people to thrive and feel they belong.

All the eight elements of our framework of freedom-based leadership, noted in the literature review, were evident in the insights shared by interviewees and from our observations of team meetings and review of the literature. As outlined above, the four which felt qualitatively most important to sustaining the Chorus operating model were empowerment and autonomy, accountability and responsibility, trusting relationships and respectful relationships. It is important to note however that viewing each of these elements in isolation is a bit like looking at a pile of recipe ingredients and expecting to see, feel and smell the delicious recipe they collectively contribute to. These elements, when artfully combined help people to feel valued and able to add value which is the true essence of inclusion and belonging. This feeling is captured by one enabling stakeholder who said:

> "I'm hoping that Chorus, even through this piece of research of yours, is that a lot of organisations learn that this is the right way to do things, because making a human feel valuable, is the best thing an organisation can do, and they can only do it when they don't treat you like little children" (INT.E2)

Being treated as an adult and as an equal, doesn't happen in highly centralised hierarchical organisations where power sits at the top and distance is reinforced both through structures and behaviours. This was seen as important to another enabling stakeholder who said:

> "if I had to leave, like, if they had to make me redundant and I had to go somewhere else, I would just automatically look for the CEO and be going to why can't I talk to them? Just you know, I would not like to work back in the style of having barriers to my leaders." (INT.E1)

Collectively these elements contribute to a strong growth and development culture where people are trusted to "have a go" and learn from the multitude of opportunities they are presented with.

The strongly supportive environment, which creates a deep sense of psychological safety means Chorus people feel comfortable in "having a go" knowing that "you can take risks and not be judged for it, knowing that you know you can you say yes I made a mistake, and you will get the support"

(INT.E2). This is further evidenced by signs of maturing comfort with discomfort and change as evidenced by the following quote:

> "I just love Chorus and it's been sticky, and I can understand why people get to a point at Chorus, and think, oh, they keep changing things. The reason they're changing, it's because we have to evolve and we have to move forwards, otherwise we're never going to get to where we're going. ... I hope I'm here till I retire." (INT.L2)

This commitment to helping Chorus people to continuously grow and become the best version of themselves is enacted both in day-to-day ways of working and in more formalised programs as noted by one enabling stakeholder:

> "The next thing that we're looking at is we're putting together a new leadership development framework, which will include both horizontal and vertical development[4], we'll be looking at those adult stages of development and how we can bring people together to understand the stage that they might be at in their own development and how that shapes their view of the world and their level of consciousness, how they might solve problems and what are the gifts in that." (INT.E4)

The significance of these leadership practices is further supported by Chorus's Group Work on Wellbeing (WOW) report which showed that factors such as meaning and purpose, autonomy, competence, trust and belonging and supportive relationships all contribute to high well-being within the organisation. The following quote from an enabling stakeholder demonstrates how this contributes to ways of working and being in Chorus:

> "I think some of the strongest evidence for shared commitment comes through our (Work on Wellbeing) WOW survey and I think from the perspective of do people find meaning in their work, does it make a difference for them? Do they show up because it's important that people in the community have the support and care that they need? Absolutely. We're well up into the high 80s in those sorts of meaning making, why do we show up for work? Why do we show up for my team? That's very evident In our WOW survey. So, I think that that is very, very strong." (INT.E6)

Another key factor underpinning the high levels of empowerment and autonomy, accountability and responsibility, trusting relationships and respectful relationships is transparency. It is impossible to act with autonomy and a sense of responsibility and to trust people and the system without high levels of transparency and this came across as an organisational strength with many stakeholders referring to it as illustrated in the following quotes:

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[4] Horizontal development is traditional talent development while vertical development is about developing greater wisdom, and clearer insights. https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/developing-talent-youre-probably-missing-vertical-development/

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Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"It's all out there for everybody to see, and because you've got that transparency, there's no one making up stories about, oh, you know, this is going to happen or that's going to happen because it's out there and we can see what's going on and we can see who's doing what and why they're doing it? You know, and that's been extremely important is the transparency because you know, we used to talk about "they" in the backroom making all the decisions, but "they" is all of us now." (INT.L1)
	"the trust wasn't there, but now I feel the trust is there. Now it's better because of the transparency and because people know what's going on within the organisation." (INT.L6)
Enabling	"if there's an issue that's flared up, we try to make sure that we uncover it, we talk about it. You obviously don't poke the bear, so to speak, but we will work very hard to resolve those issues openly and collaboratively, so there's a lot of effort put in. Again, communication is as transparent as absolutely possible. The only time it's not transparent is where confidentiality is a risk for example." (INT.E6)
External stakeholder	"There's lots of different ways it's being communicated as well because they have forums and things, they have online meetings where those are recorded and people have access to them, anyone can access anything. You know, there's almost no secrets." (INT.M1)

Leadership role modelling was another aspect which was frequently mentioned as being important to shaping how leadership is practiced in Chorus and sustaining the freedom-oriented operating model as illustrated in the following quotes:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"He has always shown a willingness to go whoops; I made a mistake. Sorry everybody, I will try and fix that or make sure I don't do it again, learn from that. He's never been shy to do that. So, I think yeah, that gives everyone permission to say, oh, I made a mistake, so that's really positive." (INT.L4)
	"I think the fact that Dan is so willing and open to be wherever he is needed and to support and that he goes out and does services … And I think that really brings a whole new level and it's the same with the strategic team as well. They all still do services and pitch in, and they want to know about the Locals and travel to the Locals and sit in the Locals and want to know what the day-to-day life looks like, where they can best assist and understand that. And I think they role model that really, really well." (INT.L7)
	"And just this in a belief that everybody has something to contribute and you know, I think, Dan, we should mention Dan here as well because he's a

|	
	phenomenal CEO, he really is. I don't know, he just has this ability to be able to get down on anyone's level and not to feel hoity toity you know. He's just very easy to speak to." (INT.L8)
Enabling	"they are totally approachable, so I know if I've worked anywhere else before you couldn't get to the CEO or any of those people because they had their barricades, their secretaries, their personal assistants, all barricading them. They don't work like that. They're hot desking. They're all over the place." (INT.E1)
	"he will put it out there and say like, I'm sorry, I acknowledge this, and you know this was not done right and lessons learned for me. And I think when people see that, they realize that actually you know, this is what you need to be like. He's leading by example. And that kind of trickles down to even what we call the Local leads, or the commitment leads like they have the lead role attached to them, but they don't act like they're leading and in many swarms and squads, they will say whilst I'm the lead, remember I'm just a lead of this swarm, I'm not the manager or the person you need to be reporting to about it." (INT.E2)
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"there was one situation where Dan made a call and went and did something that he needed to have taken to a forum and the system responded immediately like people were pissed, like and it was obvious, and he got held, he got fried. And you know, literally, and we're in a R'PER meeting, there's 50 people in a room and he's standing up and going, I apologise, that was not OK that I did that. And he's not done it since." (INT.S2)

These quotes collectively point to the highly relational nature of leadership within Chorus and how those in leadership positions actively seek to show up as the leaders they feel are necessary to achieve the organisation's strategic aspirations. In doing so they are acting with humility and showing a commitment to their own personal growth both vertically and horizontally which seems to be actively embraced by most Chorus people.
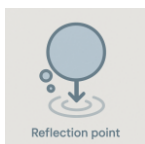
Reflection point	Now you've read about what the literature says about leadership required in self-managing organisations and how this is practiced within Chorus, take some time to reflect on how you might grow into such leadership. Use the template provided in Appendix 3 to record these reflections and potential actions.

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What are the Key Challenges in Ensuring Sustainability of the Operating Model?

While the operating model has clearly matured over the years and continues to evolve in response to business and community needs, several challenges emerged from the interviews with different stakeholders. Key challenges included:

- Adapting to new ways of working
- Fit with outside world
- Board alignment
- Operational challenges
- Alignment on vision

These challenges are incorporated into the case study and are discussed further below with some additional discussion questions.

Adapting to New Ways of Working

Stakeholders across the organisation, from those working in Local teams and enabling functions to those operating at a strategic level indicated that while many people had adapted and were thriving within the Chorus operating model, some were still struggling to adapt away from hierarchal ways of working. The following quotes illustrate some of these challenges:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"one of the challenges we deal with is that somehow there's this, I sometimes hear in the system, this imagined world where we should just get rid of all these people who are being too bossy and, you know, go recruit these other unicorns who are somehow or other already to do, you know, self-organising like, there's this wad of people out there who just are naturally able to do that rather than no, no! This is what self-organising looks like, it looks like people, wherever they are on their journey, dealing with what the next piece of development is for them and other people and struggling through the challenges of it, and struggling through that is, you know, because more human does usually mean more messy." (INT.S2)
	"it's been other ways in the organisation, we didn't start out in this way, so you're having to unlearn how you've done things you know, and how things might so. So, the, the traditional or the formal way of working might have worked really well for that person and their team and the type of work that they were needing to get done. And so that you know, I can think of examples of people for whom their entire, just everything around them changed their role, their structure, just everything. And so, it's very unsettling, can be very unsettling and can take a while to work out where you know, how you interact with the system." (INT.S5)

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External stakeholder	"My impressions are that there's a vast amount of that autonomy or that freedom for people to make decisions and to do things, but depending on the Local that I'm working with, I see a wide range of engagement with that.... The reason I say that, is a lot of the people I think are limited by their own mental restrictions or previous structures that they've worked with........ my observations are a perception, and I really want to emphasise that, of punishment or some sort of consequence if something goes wrong. And again, I think that's a legacy from previous employers or previous managers that they've worked with outside of the Chorus structure" (INT.M1)

"the paradox of it all is that people who are usually in a leadership role have to be willing to give it up. Now actually what I think is, you're not in in the big scheme of things, you're gaining far more than you're giving up, but you've got to take that leap." (CEO and Strategic Coach, Dan Minchin)

Discussion questions – new ways of working

1. Why do you think that it may be difficult for some people to let go of working in a more traditional, hierarchical manner?
2. What supports do you think would assist in making such changes?
3. How might this differ for new and existing employees and across different roles or functions?
4. How do you see the governance structures helping or hindering adoption of new ways of working?
5. How essential do you see embracing new ways of working to the sustainability of the Chorus operating model?

	One strategic stakeholder expressed a view that this way of working doesn't suit all people. Given that we rarely, if ever, question whether some people don't suit traditional hierarchal ways of working, this idea may be useful to explore. As a class or in small groups debate the statement *'this way of working doesn't suit all people,'* with half of the participants taking each side of the debate. Following the debate, it might be useful to summarise key points from both sides and see if a consensus can be reached.

Fit with the Outside World

Some stakeholders working in enabling and strategic roles spoke of challenges which arise from key external stakeholders not understanding the Chorus operating model. This creates some tension between demonstrating compliance and getting access to funding due to the regulators and funders unfamiliarity with anything other than a traditional organisational structure with accountability attached to hierarchical positions. Given the complexity of the operating environment, due to

working across 3 highly regulated sectors, this provides challenges for Chorus to maintain its license to operate. The following quotes illustrate some of these challenges:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Enabling	"I think if they said tomorrow, they're going to take away the lead part, because I know I've heard that floated a couple of times, yeah, cool, no problems. But there is some that will be very, like really challenged by that. I think sometimes they're really challenged by it because they're worried about what does that say to an external person about who I am?" (INT.E3)
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"So, lots and lots of conversations about with auditors, so the various accreditations that we have, so national standards for disability and mental health and aged care, auditors really struggle with this, you know, we don't have a performance management system, you know, a traditional performance management system. So, there's been a lot of work around how do we you know go about talking about the system to show, that's how we do this here." (INT.S5)

In addition to challenges of demonstrating compliance and getting funding, this tension relating to how the outside world can be problematic for people who choose to leave the organisation as one enabling stakeholder indicated:

> "I think for a lot of our staff we need to support their translation to other organisations as they go, to actually do that because it doesn't have that traditional "I had 10 people in my team, I was a manager you know this group of Locals", so when they go out, it's very difficult for them to explain that context of leadership through influence or stewardship versus eight people reported to me and this is what it looked like. So, I think that's still a space when there's so few organisations operating that way that we need to put that effort into helping people at Chorus know how to make that translate into other worlds if they choose to go there." (INT.E6)

Discussion questions – fit with outside world

1. Why do you think that external auditors might struggle with signing off on a compliance audit due to the Chorus operating model?
2. Do an online search (with or without CoPilot or some other GenAI platform) to see if you can find examples of organisations operating through self-managing/self-organising principles in highly regulated sectors. See if you can determine how they have handled explaining the operating model to regulators, funders, or other high impact stakeholders.
3. Int.E3 said "what does that say to an external person about who I am?" If you were working in a self-managing organisation such as Chorus but were applying for a managerial role in another more traditionally operated organisation, how would you explain what this says about you?
4. How essential do you think "translating" the Chorus operating model into language which helps ensure external stakeholders better understand how work is undertaken to ensure clear accountabilities for service delivery, to the stainability of the model?

5. If you were a potential customer who wanted to secure the services of Chorus to provide support to a family member (in any of the 3 sectors they operate in), what questions would you have about the way Chorus operates?

Board Alignment

A further challenge identified by stakeholders in both enabling and strategic roles concerned the difficulty of sustaining alignment among board members and senior leadership, particularly in contexts of leadership and board member turnover. This challenge includes keeping board members sufficiently informed and assured of compliance, performance and sustainability to support their alignment to an operating model, given the regulatory environment, and where there is little or no precedent within the sectors the organisation operates in.

The following quotes illustrate some of these challenges:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Enabling	"he's in that, you know, challenging position where he does have the board who are healthily sceptical and sometimes not fully convinced that this way of working is going to be successful. So, that puts him in a really challenging position, you know." (INT.E4)
Strategic (Executive Coaches or Board)	"So, we don't know what we don't know, and we certainly get stats, but I'm not absolutely convinced yet. We certainly don't get the information, sufficient information on well-being of staff. We're just starting to look at why people leave, we're starting to reduce our you know, percentage of people resigning and all the rest of it, employee turnover, it's starting to go down. Every time we make a major change that goes up. So, I hope we don't have, you know, we've got to go slowly, slowly. Yeah, so I'm sort of saying no, I don't think we are getting sufficient information. I'm not sure what information it is that we need." (INT.S3)
	"in December of last year, we had two new directors start, and the intent is to gain more directors. The understandings built up in the board over that time and the immersion in developing it in a practical sense is known to the founding directors, but it's not known to the new directors because they weren't part of it. So, they only know what they've read, or someone's told them sort of thing. So, as that number of new is becomes greater than the founding, there's a risk, and that risk is that the concepts will be lost, and the desires will be lost. And so, one of the risk mitigation strategies that we are currently working on is how do we preserve the freedom-based leadership concept so that it can't be overturned because it would be really easy for a board to just say yeah, look you know it's not delivering financially, you know, workers compensation claims are up. You know, we've got people leaving, retention is low all of those things. So therefore, you know this this is not working, let's change it." (INT.S4)

Discussion questions – board alignment

1. The Australian Institute of Company Directors advise that the role of the board of directors "includes governing, directing and monitoring an organisation's business, affairs and operations in two broad areas of director responsibility." These areas of responsibility are overall organisational performance and overall organisational compliance/ conformance.[5] Given these responsibilities, how would you advise Chorus to ensure there is a clarity of understanding of the Chorus operating model between board members and senior leaders and what recommendations can you make to ensure board members are sufficiently informed to support their alignment to the operating model.

Operational Challenges

Chorus people working in Locals faced some challenges which did not appear to impact those working in other areas significantly. These included concerns about the difficulties of freeing people up to work on collaborative projects given the critical importance of customer service delivery taking priority.

The following quotes illustrate some of these challenges:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"So the number of times that everybody gets to meet together altogether is very rare, so it's whether or not that is the best structure, I think you know is still up in the air, but the theory is good but the practicality isn't always there when you have people that are expected to be out with customers and you know, running a Local with a very small FTE and whatnot. It's not always practical, but I guess the from the human point of view, you're getting real people who are on the ground involved in these things." (INT.L5) "I think that it helps, like I say, because it gives everybody an opportunity to voice anything they want to bring up, however I think with the timing and how often we've got to go to these forums and meetings and things, there's too many of them, and we're not able to structure our day BAU because we've got to attend all these meetings." (INT.L6) "we need to get better at that. I think there's a real opportunity to make those agreements more active parts of the Local. There's certainly the structure there and the capacity there for us to be able to use them more proactively. But look, sometimes the busyness of everyday work can get on top of that really important foundation, right. And that that does happen in reality." (INT.L8)

Discussion questions – operational challenges

1. Chorus's operating model includes dynamic, connected, and collaborative relationships with agreements providing clarity about both what and how work is done and with decisions being made collectively using consent-based decision-making. The model is

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[5] For details refer to "The role of the board of directors": https://www.aicd.com.au/board-of-directors.html

operationalised via a range of governance structures including teams, hubs, forums, squads, and swarms all of which require time commitments to function effectively.

  a. How would you prioritise a decision about whether to go out to deliver a service to a customer or to participate in a swarm meeting which was finalising some recommendations about how the organisation can deal with customer complaints?

  b. Do an online search (with or without CoPilot or some other GenAI platform) to see if you can find examples of organisations operating through self-managing/self-organising principles which have developed sustainable ways of freeing up time and space for collaborative projects for people across the organisation.

Alignment on Vision

A further challenge was identified by Chorus people working in Locals, and was also commented on by an external stakeholder, but was not raised by those working in other areas. This challenge involved alignment on vision.

The following quotes illustrate some of these challenges:

Function	Illustrative quotes
Local team	"So, there's still a lot of grey areas there where we're a little unsure. So, I believe that will come in time. But yeah, it's still this is something that we're still working on. I think the commitment's there. But the understanding's not quite there yet, and that's something we're working on." (INT.L1)
	"I'm thinking that is, that is not the way that they wanted it to happen. They've got their vision of what they wanted in the community, but I just don't think that the connection is there with each Local to actually be able to manage that. So, I think it's been missed." (INT.L2)
	"The more that that becomes, you know, stronger, then the more time we have to build connections to talk with each other, to understand, and to get involved in that community building and the rest of the stuff, the big picture about what Chorus is all about." (INT.L4)
	"So, I think we still have a little bit of work to do in regards to having everybody within the organisation really understanding the vision and the work that's going into the outcome of that. And again, I think it's about your exposure. So, the more that if you're a traditional frontline worker, the more that you can be involved in those sorts of opportunities, the more you're going to have an understanding of that. I try really hard in our Local meetings to make sure that people are aware of that." (INT.L8)
External stakeholder	"there's not enough clarity I think with anyone in the organisation to be able to say, this is ultimately what we want to do there. There is a lot of, well, let's make it up as we go along, or let's explore this and see if that comes to fruition, and from a more higher level observation that probably is the vision... the vision is let's explore and let's see what works, and let's not fixate on something that might be a dead end. Let's keep our options open, but I don't

think a lot of people have the capacity to sort of hold that clearly in their head." (INT.M1)

Discussion questions – alignment on vision

1. Why do you think it is important that people throughout an organisation have both a common understanding of and commitment to that organisation's vision?
    a. Do you think this is more or less important in an organisation like Chorus which is operating in a non-traditional way? Why?
    b. How essential do you think this understanding and commitment to the vision is to the stainability of the model?
2. Why might this challenge be apparent in the Locals (direct service delivery to customers) and not in other parts of the organisation?
    a. Do an online search (with or without CoPilot or some other GenAI platform) to see if you can find examples of organisations that have successfully embedded vision alignment in "frontline" service functions.

Conclusion

It is clear from talking to people at Chorus, observing meetings and reviewing internal and external documents that the Chorus operating model with its structural and behavioural features is maturing in embedding self-managing and freedom-oriented principles into the organisation's culture and the ways of knowing, doing and being of Chorus people.

It is also clear that this is a dynamic and never-ending journey of growth and evolution which is dependent on freedom-oriented principles informing relational and collective leadership practice from those who assume leadership responsibility within the organisation, in a way which restrains from exercising formal authority and celebrates humanity. Chorus people are embracing this hard but rewarding journey and pioneering these new ways of working in the Australian community sector.

> *"what to do is not hard, it's showing up and doing it is really, really hard, it's exhausting, you are rowing upstream all the time. It's very hard and I think that's the sort of paradox in a way. Is that like getting the technical solution down on a page, is not hard. Showing up and doing it every day and then every year, I'm sure every Chorus person you speak to would talk about it being kind of all-consuming and exhausting at the same time as being rewarding and enriching." (CEO and Strategic Coach, Dan Minchin)*

This teaching case study was developed to help raise awareness in future organisational leaders that there is a feasible and viable alternative to traditional hierarchical ways of designing and leading organisations. It was also developed to get help understand how leadership can enhance the sustainability of such an operating model. It is important to heed advice from professionals who have been supporting organisations in such transformations that there is no set formula to achieve this. Lisa Gill, Trainer and coach with Tuff Leadership Training and host of the Leadermorphosis podcast which explores self-managing and progressive organisations, when hosting an event to

explore the state of the self-management movement, said "there is no one 'right' model" and quoted Joost Minnar, one of the founds of the Corporate Rebels:

> "So what's the "best" model for self-management? That's the wrong question. Each has its strengths. Each fits a different culture, context, or industry. The real power comes not from choosing the right relational model, but from understanding which one you're in, and being honest about it." (Gill, 2025)

Good luck to those of you who are willing to give this a go and to help transform our workplaces in ways which humanise them. This teaching case is full of resources which can help equip you with the courage to embrace this journey in an informed way.

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Other Resources

More about Chorus

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More about Self-Managing and Progressive Organisations

Corporate Rebels: https://www.corporate-rebels.com/

Dutch Based organisation on a mission to make work more fun. They have a "bucket list" of Global workplace pioneers they've visited and blogged about. Their insights have been distilled into an extensive collection of blog posts and 2 books. This is a great resource if you want to be inspired by progressive organisations around the globe.

Semco Style Institute: https://semcostyle.com/

Ricardo Semler and his company Semco gained international recognition for the groundbreaking alternative approach to management and organisation they embodied as first written about in Semler's seminal book "Maverick" late last century. The Semco Style Institute (SSI) was built upon

this foundation, and its mission is to shape the future of work. The site includes articles and blog posts with inspiration for helping organisations achieve more impact and better performance, with employees who are happier and more engaged.

Management Innovation eXchange (MIX): https://www.managementexchange.com/

An open innovation project aimed at reinventing management for the 21st century.

Leadermorphosis podcast: https://leadermorphosis.co/

Podcast hosted by Lisa Gill which aims to inspire and embolden listeners to start experimenting, and act their way into a more decentralised, more human future of work.

100 Books on Progressive Organizations and Good Management: https://www.corporate-rebels.com/blog/100-books-on-management?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=%F0%9F%A4%9F%20100%20Books%20on%20Progressive%20Organizations%20and%20Good%20Management%20-%2012513795

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interviews Conducted

INT.E1	**Enabling**
INT.E2	Enabling
INT.E3	Enabling
INT.E4	Enabling
INT.E5	Enabling
INT.E6	Enabling
INT.L1	Local
INT.L2	Local
INT.L3	Local
INT.L4	Local
INT.L5	Local
INT.L6	Local
INT.L7	Local
INT.L8	Local
INT.M1	Stakeholder (miscellaneous)
INT.S1	Strategic (CEO, Dan Minchin)
INT.S2	Strategic
INT.S3	Strategic
INT.S4	Strategic
INT.S5	Strategic

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Appendix 2 - Principles of Freedom-Based Leadership and Leadership Styles

	Relational leadership			Collective leadership	
Principle/theme	**Transformational leadership**	**Inclusive leadership**	**Servant leadership**	**Distributed leadership**	**Shared Leadership**
Empowerment	Transformational leadership provides empowerment and Freedom to followers to pursue new and controversial ideas without fear of punishment or ridicule. It empowers individuals by fostering autonomy, modeling vision-driven behavior, and motivating others to lead and excel (Ahangar, 2009; McShane & Von Glinow, 2015). Transformational leadership also fosters employee self-development and growth through a clear vision, supportive leadership, and four key behaviours: intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealised influence (Bass & Riggio, 2006).	Inclusive leadership creates and appreciates diversity in teams and ensures team members feel empowered and appreciated. It enhances employees' psychological empowerment by valuing employee input, being accessible, and fostering meaning, competence, and self-determination at work (Randel et al., 2018). Inclusive leaders empower employees by delegating authority, encouraging initiative, and fostering a collaborative environment where employees feel control and impact (Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Hollander, 2012).	Servant leadership encourages personal development and enables followers to solve problems themselves. Servant leadership is strongly associated with employee empowerment by fostering autonomy, personal growth, and support, leading to increased psychological empowerment, organisational commitment, engagement, satisfaction, and proactive behaviours (Yang et al., 2019; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Bao et al., 2018; Farrington & Lillah, 2019; Ye et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2017; Elche et al., 2020).	Distributed leadership empowers individuals to enhance their job efficiency, meaning, and effectiveness within the organisation. Distributed leadership, through shared responsibility and role exchange, promotes professional growth and encourages innovative contributions from employees at all levels, challenging traditional seniority-based cultures (Fan et al., 2021). It also fosters proactive problem-solving and encourages employees to adopt innovative ideas and approaches (Dongxian & Batool, 2024). Responsibility, a key element of distributed leadership, predicts psychological empowerment by increasing employee autonomy, support, and ownership, thereby strengthening their sense of empowerment (Dierckx et al., 2008).	Shared leadership reflects behaviors that empower team members, such as equality in decision-making and shared accountability. Shared leadership enhances empowerment by distributing influence and decision-making across team members, fostering a sense of ownership, autonomy, and collective responsibility (Edelmann, Boen, & Fransen, 2020).
Respectful and trusting relationships	Transformational leaders build trust, admiration, and respect by showing genuine concern for followers' personal feelings and consistently demonstrating integrity and care (McCombs & Williams, 2021; Yuan et al., 2022). They foster strong trusting relationships with employees by demonstrating genuine support, encouragement, respect, and concern for their well-being (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Yap & Badri, 2021). They are responsible to build trust through employees' evaluations of the leader's treatment, which shapes their emotional response and strengthens organisational citizenship behaviours within a social exchange framework (Yuan et al., 2022). Transformational leadership has also been proved to promote a safe and open work environment by encouraging intellectual stimulation and inviting followers to question assumptions and express their ideas freely (Potnuru et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2019).	Inclusive leaders build trust through psychological safety by valuing team diversity and fostering mutual respect and interpersonal trust among team members (Siyal, 2023; Siyal et al., 2023). Inclusive leadership creates a supportive environment by promoting open communication, listening to employee needs, and fostering psychological safety, which in turn encourages employees to go beyond their formal roles (Lee, 2022; Korkmaz et a., 2022; Qi & Liu, 2017). Inclusive leaders build trust through fair treatment and high-quality, reciprocal interactions with employees, which positively influence subordinate behaviour and team dynamics (Jia et al., 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022; Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). By fostering openness and encouraging knowledge sharing and creativity, inclusive leaders cultivate a supportive team climate and strong mutual relationships (Jia et al., 2022; Javed et al., 2019a; Javed et al., 2019b)	Servant leadership is grounded in trust and service, with its influence stemming from relationships built on these principles; trust is central to its legitimacy, emerging when individuals genuinely experience being served by their leaders and institutions (Greenleaf, 1998). Through humility and stewardship, servant leadership builds trust and strong leader–follower relationships rooted in empathy, respect, and loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2023; Van Dierendonck, 2011). It fosters trust in the organisation, which in turn reduces employees' intention to be late and enhances their creative and service recovery performance (Karatepe, Ozturk, & Kim, 2018). Servant leadership cultivates trust and respect by prioritising employee well-being, offering support and resources, encouraging open communication, and fostering psychological safety, creating an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to grow (Eva et al., 2019)	Distributed leadership fosters trust and respect by promoting shared responsibility, enhancing trust in leaders and colleagues, and encouraging collaborative relationships (Harris, 2013; Kavgaci & Ozturk, 2023). Distributed leadership involves all members collaboratively, promoting cooperation and trust rather than competition. Trust plays a crucial role in enabling distributed leadership, supporting collaborative learning communities, and enhancing organisational resilience during change (Yang et al., 2020). Distributed leadership is a key predictor of organisational trust, as it fosters a collaborative culture where leadership is shared, positively influencing trust in colleagues and administrators and supporting positive change (Canterino et al., 2020; Kavgaci, H., & Öztürk, A. 2023; Quek et al., 2021)	Shared leadership is embedded in a culture of unity, trust, and mutual respect among team members, fostering an environment conducive to change and innovation (Cox et al., 2003; Huelsheger et al., 2009) Shared leadership is closely linked to trust, influencing motivation, professional learning, and has been shown to foster trust even in virtual communication settings (Wu et al., 2020; Malhotra et al., 2007; Robert & You, 2018). It fosters initiative by encouraging mutual support among team members, with psychological safety playing a key moderating role in reducing fear of failure, thereby enabling employees to take ownership and drive positive change (Newman et al., 2017; Han & Gupta., 2018).

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Principle/theme	Relational leadership			Collective leadership	
	Transformational leadership	**Inclusive leadership**	**Servant leadership**	**Distributed leadership**	**Shared Leadership**
Shared vision	Transformational leadership fosters a shared vision by inspiring others with a clear sense of purpose and direction, motivating collective commitment to future goals (Chai et al., 2017; Ross & Gray, 2006; Koo & Lee, 2022). It is strongly linked to shared vision, as it inspires team members through articulating an inspiring future, modeling core values, and fostering emotional commitment to organisational goals (Chai, Hwang, & Joo, 2017). Green transformational leadership (an evolving concept in the contemporary organisations) has proved to enhance frontline employees' green innovative behaviour through green knowledge sharing, with the effect strengthened by a strong green shared vision that reinforces both knowledge sharing and innovation outcomes (Al-Husseini et al., 2021).	Inclusive leadership reinforces the organisation's mission by clearly communicating the value of inclusion as integral to its vision and goals. Inclusive leadership supports synergistic and collaborative practices by promoting self-awareness, articulating a shared vision, building strong relationships, and driving positive change (Ashikali, 2023; Ashikali et al., 2021; Byrd, 2022)	Servant leadership supports the development of a shared vision by emphasizing the importance of creating a clear and compelling direction for the future, grounded in core values such as care, collaboration, and community-building. Servant leaders inspire and engage followers through stewardship and persuasion, encouraging collective ownership of the vision and aligning individual contributions with the broader organisational purpose (Chen et al., 2015; Eva et al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2012)	Distributed leadership strengthens the formation of a shared vision by engaging employees in collaborative decision-making, fostering mutual trust, and encouraging a sense of collective responsibility, which motivates them to align their efforts toward common goals (Canterino et al., 2020; Torres, 2019).	Shared leadership is driven by shared vision by aligning team members around common goals, fostering collaboration, and enhancing team learning processes that drive performance (Somboonpakorn & Kantabutra, 2014). Shared leadership and shared vision are dynamically interconnected, with shared vision emerging through continuous interaction between leaders and team members, adapting over time based on team responses and reinforcing collaborative leadership practices (Berson et al., 2016; van Knippenberg, 2020).
Accountability and responsibility	Transformational leadership fosters a stronger sense of accountability and responsibility in employees, encouraging deeper engagement with work tasks, which promotes idea generation and enhances performance (Kuo et al., 2022). Transformational leaders help create a strong culture of accountability by encouraging open communication and responsibility across all levels—downward, upward, and especially among team members—which helps strengthen overall accountability in the organisation (Harrison, Chen, & Jiao, 2025).	Inclusive leadership strengthens accountability and responsibility by fostering self-awareness and empathy, which encourage leaders and team members to take ownership of their actions and contribute to inclusive, high-performing organisational cultures (Haq et al., 2024). Accountability is a core component of inclusive leadership, as inclusive leaders take personal responsibility for fostering diversity and equity, respond decisively to bias, and set clear standards for themselves and their teams to uphold an inclusive environment (Hussain et al., 2023; Ferdman et al., 2020).	Servant leadership demonstrates a strong link to accountability and responsibility, as leaders actively take ownership of their actions, set clear expectations, and balance care with a commitment to organisational goals and ethical conduct (Ragnarsson, Kristjánsdóttir, & Gunnarsdóttir, 2018).	Distributed leadership creates a strong connection between shared responsibility and accountability by allocating leadership roles across school staff; however, it can also reinforce centralized control, requiring teachers to be accountable for decisions they may have limited power to influence (Holloway, 2021). Distributed leadership fosters accountability and responsibility through pragmatic distribution, where leadership tasks are negotiated based on situational needs, and incremental distribution, where individuals gradually assume responsibility as they build experience and trust (Xu et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2014)	Shared leadership is deeply rooted in accountability and responsibility, as it empowers individuals closest to the work to lead improvement efforts, emphasises role-based intrinsic accountability, and fosters a culture of ownership, equity, and partnership within decentralised and collaborative structures (Jackson, 2000; Porter-O'Grady & Krueger Wilson, 1995; Spooner et al., 1997).
Humility (losing ego)	Transformational leaders demonstrate humility, distinguishing themselves from narcissistic or pseudo-transformational leaders by prioritizing collective goals over self-promotion (Hoption, Barling, & Turner, 2013).	Inclusive leadership is defined by a blend of humility and courage as leaders challenge the status quo at all levels, create psychological safety for dissent, and encourage risk-taking to drive innovation and equity (Malik, 2023). Inclusive leadership is primarily driven by leaders' humility and supported by a flexible organisational culture, with top management playing a key role in enabling inclusive practices by shaping norms and empowering managers across levels (Ashikali, 2023).	Servant leadership, grounded in humility and stewardship, fosters high-quality relationships and trust between leaders and followers (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership is expressed through acknowledging one's limitations and actively seeking input from others, reinforcing humility, collaboration, and mutual respect in leader–follower relationships (Eva et al., 2019; de Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2022; Hunter et al., 2012)		Shared leadership is fostered through leader humility, which encourages team members to both step into leadership roles and support one another's contributions, creating a collaborative and dynamic leadership environment (Chiu, Owens, & Tesluk, 2016).

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Principle/theme	Relational leadership			Collective leadership	
	Transformational leadership	**Inclusive leadership**	**Servant leadership**	**Distributed leadership**	**Shared Leadership**
Guardian of the liberated team (absence of the use of formal authority)	Transformational leaders act as guardians of liberated teams by encouraging independent thinking and applying their own ideas thoughtfully, rather than imposing them uncritically (Eisenberg, 2019; Nazir & Shah, 2014). Transformational leadership encourages decision making in virtual teams by fostering collaboration, trust, and adaptability, key elements that enhance performance in culturally diverse and geographically dispersed team environments (Davidaviciene & Al Majzoub, 2022).	Inclusive leadership, through equitable and diverse decision-making, acts as a guardian of liberated teams by empowering all members to contribute, challenging bias, and fostering a culture of shared ownership and innovation (Karimi & Khawaja, 2024). Inclusive leaders foster shared decision-making by creating a sense of belonging, encouraging all team members to voice their opinions and engage in constructive debate, which strengthens collaboration and leads to more integrated, effective decisions (Arnold et al., 2000; Nishii, 2013; Randel et al., 2018).	Servant leadership, by prioritising followers' growth and well-being, fosters self-management and independent decision-making by instilling values such as empathy, responsibility, and ethical reasoning, enabling individuals to act autonomously while aligning with collective goals (Linuesa-Langreo, Ruiz-Palomino, & Elche, 2016). Servant leadership promotes self-management and independent decision-making by prioritising follower well-being, encouraging participation in decision processes, and fostering autonomy, especially evident in crisis contexts like the Covid-19 pandemic, where leaders built trust and empowered teams to act responsibly (Asamoah & Bigodza, 2025).	Distributed leadership strengthens collaborative decision-making by leveraging diverse perspectives, fostering shared influence, and building trust within teams, creating conditions where group decisions are more informed, inclusive, and effectively implemented (Park & Datnow, 2009). Distributed leadership supports liberated teams by decentralising authority and promoting inclusive decision-making, where multiple actors contribute their perspectives and expertise (Chitpin, 2020)	Shared leadership promotes equal participation by ensuring that all team members, regardless of formal roles, have an equal voice in decision-making and actively contribute to problem-solving (Han et al., 2018). Shared leadership enhances team functioning by distributing leadership behaviours among members, which leads to reduced conflict, increased consensus, and higher levels of trust and cohesion within decision-making teams (Bergman et al., 2012).
Shared beliefs and values	Transformational leadership articulates a compelling vision, aligning team goals with organisational ideals, and inspiring collective commitment, thereby shaping a unified sense of purpose and identity within teams (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Senjaya & Anindita, 2020).	Inclusive leadership is critical for hybrid teams, as it fosters shared values of trust, psychological safety, and equity across remote and co-located members, ensuring all team members feel valued and included, which enhances collaboration, performance, and well-being (Hincapie & Costa, 2024).	Servant leadership cultivates an ideology-based culture that subtly aligns team members around shared values of service, inclusion, and purpose, which in turn enhances employees' sense of meaningfulness, diversity-valuing behavior, and community citizenship (Fatima, Abbas, & Hassan, 2023). Servant leadership cultivates shared beliefs and values by fostering trust, cohesion, and a collective commitment to service within teams and their broader communities, laying the foundation for a strong serving culture and unified purpose, even in extreme environments (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021).	Distributed leadership reflects and reinforces shared values and beliefs through the organic distribution of leadership roles, where responsibilities are assumed collaboratively in alignment with the organisation's cultural norms (MacBeath et al., 2004). Distributed leadership supports the creation of a shared culture by encouraging leadership development across all organisational levels, fostering a common language, open communication, and accountability, key to aligning values and building trust over time (Turregano & Gaffney, 2012).	Shared leadership is essential for culture change, as it fosters collective ownership, engagement, and trust across all levels of an organisation, enabling deeper, more creative problem-solving and embedding new values and practices into everyday operations (Kezar, 2023).

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Appendix 3 – Growing my own Leadership to Unleash Freedom

Purpose: to think broadly and deeply about how you might show up in the world with an approach to leadership that unleashes freedom and creates possibilities, and the skills, knowledge and dispositions that you will need to develop so you can confidently and skilfully practice such leadership.

Knowledge: What do I need to know to practice such leadership?	**Skills:** What will I need to do to practice such leadership?	**Dispositions:** What will I need to be to practice such leadership?

Next consider:

- How might I develop these knowledge, skills, and dispositions?
- What support do I need to help me develop my leadership?