PREFACE

This book is intended for people who are concerned with improving organisational processes and practices. It is written for people who work for, in, or with organisations, and people who own, direct or have responsibility for managing organisations. In writing this book I seek a balance between being overly theoretical, and therefore at risk of boring those with whom I most want to communicate, and writing in a superficially popular, faddish style, which to my mind is grossly disrespectful of practitioners. I want to achieve a balance between theorising and exploring experiences.

I come from a transdisciplinary background that transverses education and learning, music, human geography, environmental science, organisation studies, psychology and philosophy, to name probably the most dominant areas of experience, and I have been delighted to find in the complexity sciences principles that are applicable and useful across all of these disciplines. Engaging with the ideas and language of what my colleagues and I at first referred to as chaos theory and what we now describe as the complexity sciences, I have found a rich source of models and images that have helped me to make breakthroughs in my understanding of and ways of engaging with these disciplines and beyond.

My experiences in organisations constantly remind me of complexity principles. Over time this has inspired me to work with these principles in organisational settings – where I am continuously refining and developing my thinking (theorizing). Some of my writing here is a reflection of this cycle.

Two overriding assumptions guide me in introducing a complexity approach to organising and studying organisations. The first is that, at a most basic level, it seems human life is totally bound up with collectives of various kinds. Reflecting on organisations and processes of organising, therefore, inescapably requires us to ask fundamental questions about what it means to be human and about the nature of human society. My second assumption is that we are all theorists of one kind or another. We tell others and ourselves stories about what has happened, what will happen and why. Unfortunately, many of us have learned to accept other's theories as our own, and find ourselves repeating explanations of what are just the dominant ideas of the collectives of our experience.

In my introduction to a complexity theoretical perspective I will, therefore, take readers into a little philosophical reflection and present a challenge to dominant organisation theories and the assumed correctness of many familiar practices. While some may think of theory as cold or irrelevant, theory in my experience guides everyday practices. In theorising I am attempting to bring some sophistication of thought to what, at times, have become routine and repetitive processes. For me, theorising is exploration. Often this exploration becomes hopeful of

generating useful and productive insights. At times theorising is an intellectually rewarding activity, and it is in this frame of mind that I am reminded of D. H. Lawrence's poem 'Thought' (Sagar, 1972):

THOUGHT
Thought, I love thought.
But not the jiggling and twisting of already existent ideas
I despise that self-important game.
Thought is the welling up of unknown into consciousness,
Thought is the testing of statements on the touchstone of the conscience,
Thought is gazing on to the face of life, and reading what can be read,
Thought is pondering over experience, and coming to a conclusion.
Thought is not a trick, or an exercise, or a set of dodges,
Thought is a man in his wholeness wholly attending.

Thoughtfulness matters in a society dominated by organisational life. Most people work for large organisations for much of their waking hours. Employment in organisations where the leaders or management demand certain responses, and where in order to stay 'safe' employees must respond accordingly, has implications for the sorts of habits of thought that develop. The habits of thought give shape to the kinds of society we inhabit. We need to separate learning to be wise (thoughtful) from learning to be wily (surviving in an organisational setting) for without this the future of civil society is in jeopardy.

This book would not have made it to publication without the assistance of a great many people. It was a collective act of kindness and generosity of spirit that allowed me to engage with the thoughts and concepts that have led to this book. I write because we are.

Lesley Kuhn, 2008

References
Sagar, K. (1972) *D. H. Lawrence Selected Poems.* Middlesex: Penguin Books.