



Science for Communities

He Pūtaiao, He Tāngata

SOCIAL SYSTEMS LAB

Social Systems Lab

OUR STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT

2021



WHY A SOCIAL SYSTEMS LAB?

The world is facing complex societal challenges:

- Climate change, COVID-19, increasing waste, reducing bio-diversity
- Structural racism, inequity, marginalisation of diverse knowledges and people
- Such complex challenges require systemic thinking and action.

The Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR), a Crown Research Institute in New Zealand, has a vision of Aotearoa where the safety, health and wellbeing of our communities is protected. ESR focuses on science in the areas of environmental and public health, food safety, forensic science and radiation safety.

Through the Social Systems Lab, ESR brings together systems thinking and social science to understand and act on complex challenges in collaboration with communities. The team explores innovation in applied social systems methods, and supports those we work with to learn more about systems thinking in practice. The Social Systems Lab is funded through the ESR Strategic Science Investment Fund from MBIE.

WE ARE A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM OF SOCIAL RESEARCHERS WITH DIVERSE EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

Social justice
and equality

Sustainability/
SDGs

Research
impact

Qualitative
research

Ethics

Co-design

Systems
thinking

Trans-disciplinarity

Bicultural research

Kaupapa Māori



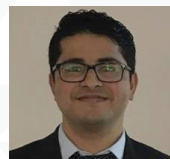
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OUR VISION AND MISSION

VISION

Support science to have impact for communities.

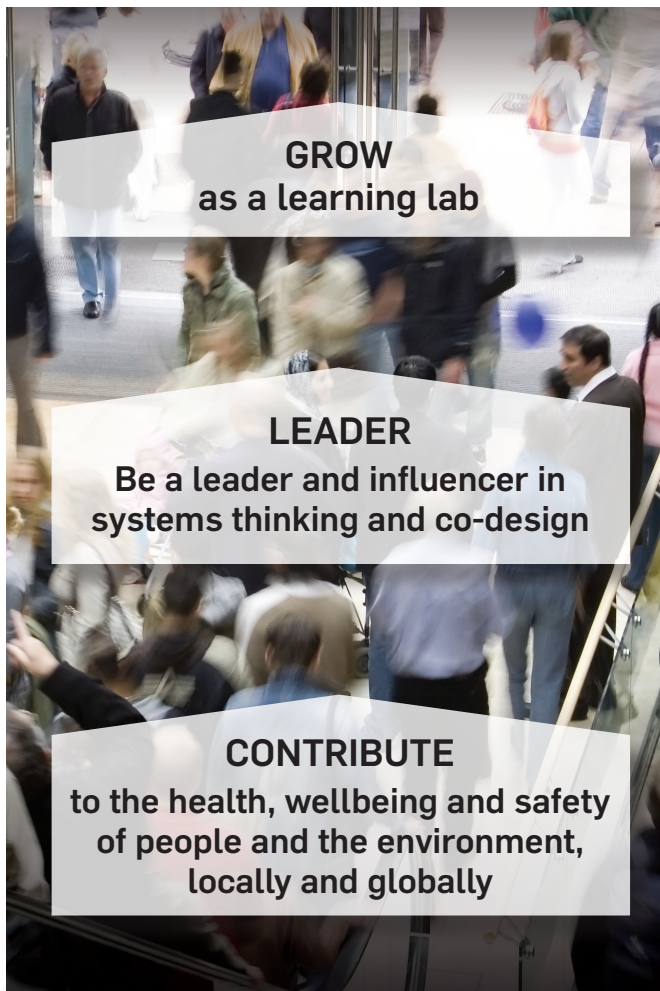
MISSION

Work collaboratively to design science with iwi, hapū, government and communities, to benefit those who partner with ESR.



The Social Systems Lab (SSL) aims to be a space where transdisciplinarity, systems thinking, and multiple perspectives come together to collaboratively undertake problem structuring and identify systemic solutions to specific areas of work or research. The SSL aims to grow as a learning lab and become a leader and influencer in systems thinking, co-design and in the transdisciplinary research space.

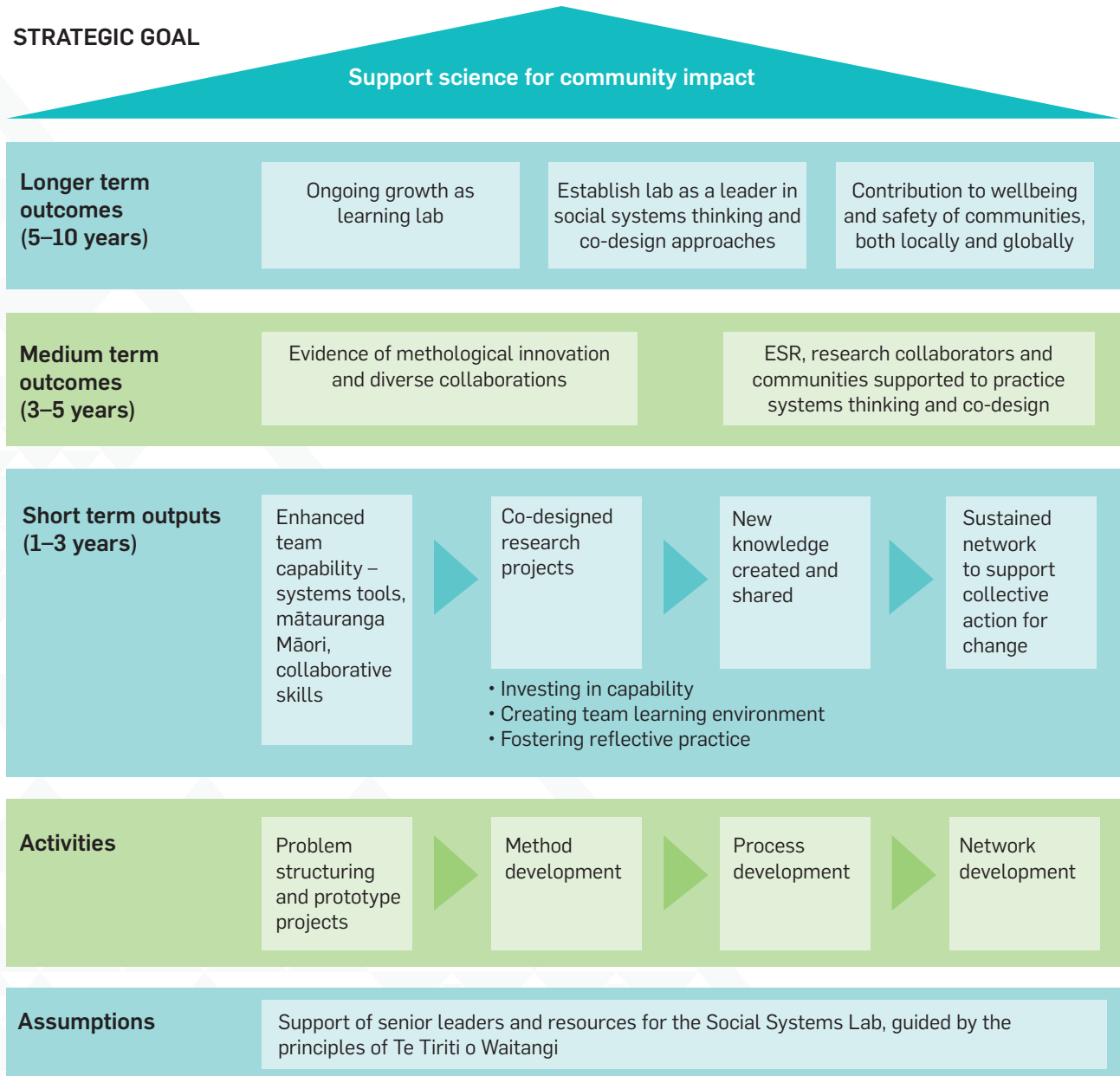
OUR THEORY OF CHANGE – OUR LONG TERM GOALS



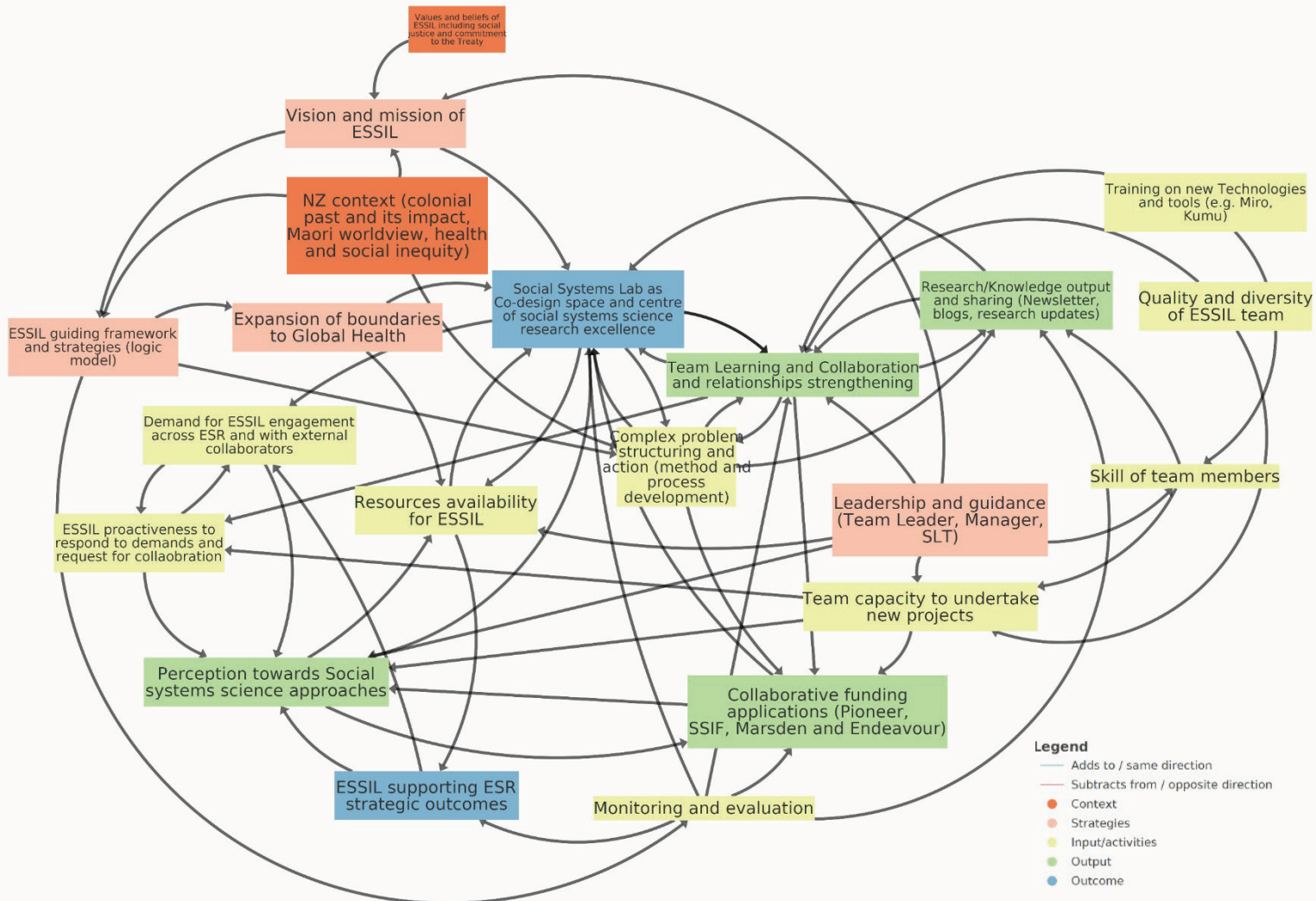
The Theory of Change or programme logic model aims to guide the Social Systems Lab in achieving its vision and mission.

The original logic model from 2020 was refined in March 2021 by the team. The logic model will be reviewed and adapted on an annual basis.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE-LOGIC MODEL

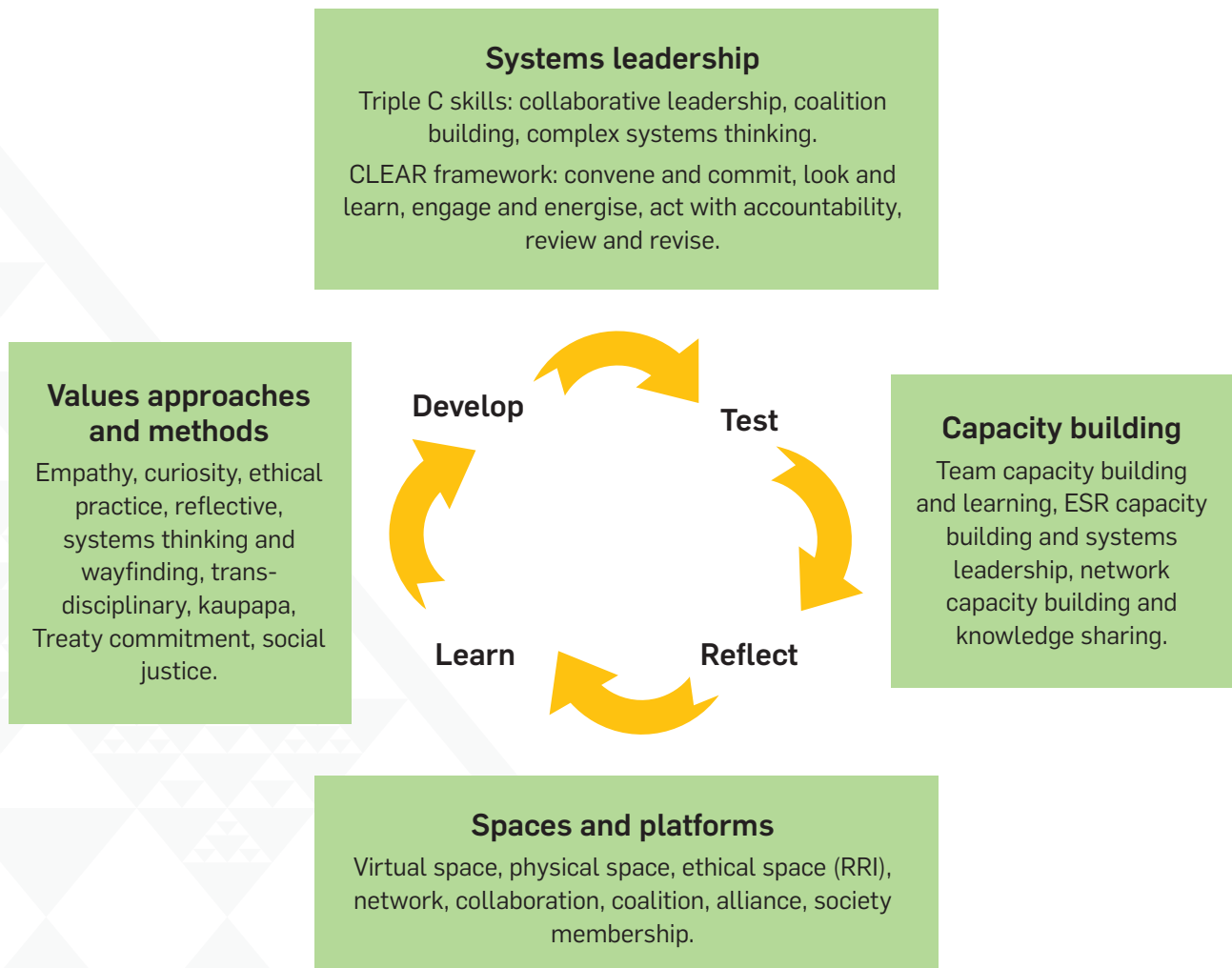


SYSTEMS MAP OF THEORY OF CHANGE OF THE LAB AND KEY SYSTEM INSIGHTS



- Collaboration space, team learning and method innovation are key interacting elements.
- The monitoring, evaluation and learning system, guided by the Theory of Change, strengthens the collective and reflective action.
- Proactive management of expectations and demands of the Lab is essential for effective collaboration and action.
- The support of senior leadership and long-term funding resources for Lab are important for success.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS LAB FRAMEWORK



Draws from logic frame, systems model and literatures relating to learning organisations, systems transformation, and systems leadership.

VALUES, APPROACHES AND METHODS: Exploring the link between axiology and epistemology in applied systems science.

SPACES AND PLATFORMS: Creating space for participation of diverse perspectives, learning and action on complex problems.

COLLECTIVE CAPABILITY BUILDING: Internal and external to ESR - capability building in systems thinking, co-design, transdisciplinary and kaupapa Māori-aligned research approaches.

SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP: Developing and applying systems leadership – within SSL, within ESR, with collaborators.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

Our learning framework allows us to understand, reflect on and learn from our actions within the SSL in terms of:

- **Values and methods**
- **Spaces and platforms**
- **Capability development**

We refine our theory of change by regularly comparing our progress against the theory of change, and look for new understandings.

The general approach is that of adaptive action cycles: planning-action-reflection-planning-(re)action. This will be carried out individually and collectively.





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INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND RESEARCH (ESR)

ESR is New Zealand's Crown Research Institute specialising in science for communities. ESR uses world-leading science to safeguard our health, keep our communities safer, protect our food-based economy, and improve the health of our water and natural environment.

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