Reclaiming Relational Practice: The Integration of Social Pedagogy into Contemporary Social Work Theory, Practice and Education in the UK

Lowis Charfe

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Abstract

Social pedagogy is a well-established profession across Europe and Latin America and can be described as an ethical, theoretical and practice orientation for engaging with individuals receiving support from welfare services. In the UK, despite the emergence of a small yet significant network of individuals and organisations trained and practicing social pedagogy over the past fifteen years, the field remains largely unrecognised and often misunderstood within UK social work. Drawing on a book, four book chapters, four articles and an independent evaluation report, this thesis highlights the significance and originality of the body of published work in two key areas. The first is the teaching of social pedagogy within social work educational settings in the UK and abroad. The second is in advancing the understanding of social pedagogy within the social work field, for both practitioners and students to support the implementation of effective, relationship-based practice.

At its core, social pedagogy emphasises ethical relational practice, grounded in robust theories, concepts, and methods that foster relationships, enabling individuals to acquire the skills necessary to navigate their environments and make positive contributions to their communities. The increasing interest in and recognition of relationship-based practice in contemporary social work in the UK over the last five years, as evidenced by key independent reviews of children's services in Scotland in 2020 and England in 2022, underscores the relevance of these publications. The published works examined in this thesis introduce social pedagogical theory and practice to social work education and the profession, providing a comprehensive framework for cultivating meaningful and ethical relationship-based practice.

While contemporary social work education acknowledges the importance of relationships in practice, there has been a notable lack of in-depth exploration or teaching on the complexities and realities of this approach. For example, power dynamics between 'service users' and social workers are often overlooked or examined mainly through a macro lens. While it is vital to consider structural issues like marginalisation, institutional

racism, and poverty, this focus can obscure the more subjective, relational aspects of power, how it is experienced and enacted in everyday interactions.

This body of published works fills this gap by demonstrating how social pedagogy can effectively inform the teaching and training of social work students and practitioners, creating vital opportunities for learners to deepen their knowledge and skills in this practice approach. These significant contributions are informed by extensive personal experience in teaching and training social work students and qualified social workers, as well as involvement in research and independent evaluation projects. I describe the ways in which this body of work has been an essential resource for the ongoing recognition, development and implementation of social pedagogy as a transformative and necessary ethical, theoretical and practice orientation within the social work profession.

RESEARCH STUDENT DECLARATION FORM

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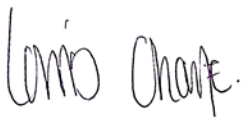

Print Name: Lowis Charfe

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Part One

Section 1: Introduction

Social pedagogy, long established in Europe and Latin America, was largely absent from English social work until the early 2000s. Its introduction was through research and government-funded pilot projects aimed at embedding its principles in children's residential and foster care services (Petrie, 2013, 2020; Hatton, 2013). These efforts aligned with New Labour's child and family-focused policies and were supported by the transfer of children's social work oversight from the Department of Health to the Department for Education (Petrie, 2013).

Despite positive outcomes from pilot projects involving European-trained social pedagogues in English residential homes and fostering services (Cameron et al., 2007, 2011; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012; McDermid, et al., 2019), the Conservative government's shift to austerity policies hindered policy-level adoption (Petrie, 2013). However, a grassroots movement in the UK, including social work practitioners and academics, has sustained and expanded interest through networks like ThemPra's Social Pedagogy Development Network, the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA), and the International Journal of Social Pedagogy (Cameron et al., 2021; SPPA, 2025; IJSP, 2025).

Relational practice is central to both social pedagogy and social work, shaping how care is delivered and outcomes achieved (Ruch et al., 2017; Ruch et al., 2018). While long acknowledged as fundamental (Beckett & Horne, 2006; Alexander & Grant, 2009), interest in relational practice has grown over the past fifteen years, highlighting its complexity, emotional labour, and challenges (Trevithick, 2014; Ingram & Smith, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2020). Due to being 'insufficiently defined' relationship-based practice is often 'elusive and aspirational' (Rush, 2020, pg. 2) instead of it being embedded into everyday interactions and practice. Psychoanalytical theories are the dominant theoretical discourse underpinning current understanding of relationship-based practice in

the social work field. This often highly intellectual and narrow explanation concentrates on behavior, attachment and past experiences of the individual being supported (Ruch, 2020). Social pedagogy enriches this discourse. It emphases a holistic viewpoint of an individual, intentional and reflective relationship-building (Smith, 2020) that starts with an understanding of self and 'interpersonal boundaries' (Fewster, 2004; Ingram and Smith, 2018, pg. 3), rooted in Freire's (1970) concept of praxis.

Recent reviews of children's social care in Scotland (2020) and England (2022) have placed relational practice at the heart of reform, emphasising the need to move beyond bureaucratic, process-driven models toward approaches rooted in trust and emotional presence. Both reviews highlighted the significance of positive, trusting relationships in achieving better outcomes for children and families (The Promise, 2020; MacAlister, 2022; DfE, 2023). The Promise (2020, p. 101) called for professionals to "bring their whole selves to work," while the English review highlights the transformative power of loving relationships for children to overcome adversity (McAlister, 2022).

Beyond children's services, adult social care is also embracing relational practice in response to critiques of overly technical, outcome-focused approaches (Harbo & Kemp, 2020; Smith, 2020). This shift is gaining traction through initiatives like the Human Learning System (Lowe et al., 2021), The Relationships Project (Robinson, 2022) and Social Care Futures (Crowther and Quinten, 2021) which advocate for services that prioritise human connection over Key Performance Indicators. Government-funded programs such as Changing Futures Northumbria and the National House Project (NHP) reflect this trend, embedding relationship-based approaches to support vulnerable individuals (Smith, 2023; NHP, 2024). Notably, the NHP (2024) uses social pedagogy to underpin relational support for young adult care leavers.

Despite recognition of the importance of relational practice in children and adult social care reforms, a gap remained between this vision and the practical tools available to social workers. Effective frameworks were needed to address the complexity of relationship-building and integrate theory into daily practice. My publications have contributed key insights by embedding social pedagogy in social work education and

practice, helping to ensure relationship-based practice is genuinely developed rather than treated as a passing trend or misused.

Since 2019, I have published multiple peer-reviewed articles, a book, book chapters, an evaluation report, and creative outputs that have implemented social pedagogical theories across diverse social work areas, such as youth justice, safeguarding, and adult social care, broadening its application beyond children's residential and foster care. These publications have been key in supporting students and practitioners to embed relational practice into everyday social work interactions and social work organisational culture, linking theory and action through Freire's (1970) concept of praxis.

Beyond publication, I have designed and delivered pioneering BA and MA courses in social pedagogy, the first of their kind in England, at the University of Lancashire. These courses supported students and practitioners to critically explore relational practice in complex social work environments. In doing so, my work assisted in the building of relational and reflective capabilities essential for ethical and anti-oppressive practice.

This thesis is submitted for the degree of PhD by Publication. It brings together a cohesive body of work that makes a significant and original contribution to understanding and developing relationship-based practice in UK social work through a social pedagogical lens. The thesis is organised around two key themes:

1. The teaching of social pedagogy in social work education and professional development, with emphasis on relational practice;
2. The introduction and development of social pedagogical theory and practice, and its relevance to relationship-based social work;

These themes frame the analysis of my published works, which are presented and critically contextualised in the chapters that follow. Together, they demonstrate the distinctive contribution this body of work makes to the field and its implications for future social work theory, education, and practice.

Section Two: Career Overview – From Practice to Teaching and the Discovery of Social Pedagogy: The emancipatory and transgressive journey.

"If I do not love the world - if I do not love life – if I do not love people – I cannot enter into dialogue…… Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know."

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970, pg.71)

Philosophical Foundations: The Centrality of Relationships in Social Work Practice

The above quote sets out a perfect explanation of my philosophical standpoint to teaching social pedagogy, relational practice and my subsequent publications. As this quote highlights relationships are key and at its core social work practice, good or bad, is all about relationships and how we build, maintain and sustain these (Ferguson et al. 2020; Cameron, 2013; Monteux & Monteux, 2020; Ingram and Smith, 2018). They are the important ingredient in social work practice that determines if people flourish, grow and develop. The impact of negative relationships can leave a long-lasting scar. From my own experience as a social worker, I know that relationships matter, that they are not straight forward, can be complex, tense at times and full of conflict (Ferguson et al. 2020). Yet they are at the *heart* of the job of a social worker.

This deeply embedded understanding was acquired from the twelve years spent working as a social worker; firstly, within the Manchester City Youth Offending Team and then as part of a Leaving Care team run by the national charity, Action for Children. I count myself lucky to have had incredible managers in both organisations, both of whom

instilled in me the importance of respecting a young person, never giving up on them and always being there if they needed me. One manager termed this *assertive outreach* before the term was linked to the *Troubled Families* programme (Rots-de Vries et al., 2011). Supporting these young people who often had a range of complex needs and what is often termed *challenging behaviour,* often tested my relational abilities. Yet understanding the legal and ethical requirements of my professional role alongside the learning and support from my manager and colleagues, meant that I developed the knowledge, skills and abilities to build, maintain and sustain these relationships with the young people I supported. One seminal moment was the Emotional Intelligence training course I attended, run by the renowned Professor David Howe. Howe's theoretical perspective that the starting 'point for an understanding of others is oneself' (Howe, 2008, pg.185) assisted me in developing high levels of emotional intelligence; and this helped me to ensure that the private feelings I experienced didn't negatively influence my responses and relationships with the young people I was working with.

Two other key aspects instilled in me were what I now recognise as a hermeneutic understanding (Zimmerman, 2015) of young people's lives and the German term 'Verstehen'. This translates as empathic understanding, signifying the ability to perceive the lifeworld orientation of each individual (Eichsteller, 2010). I now realise that both theories informed and underpinned the way I wrote Pre-Sentence Reports to a high professional standard, which, more importantly, offered the Youth Court an explanation and empathic understanding of the lived experience of the young person. Again, often in challenging situations where serious crimes had been committed that tested my own moral value base, I found I was able to set these aside and offer an unbiased account and suggest a fair sentencing option. Reflecting back, this relational and ethical aspect has been a major influence, which, when introduced to social pedagogy, had immediate synergies.

Alongside the importance of relational social work practice is the emancipatory and transgressive journey I have been on as a social work academic teaching at the University of Lancashire. Having the time and space to critically reflect during the process of writing this thesis, it has become clear to me the impact and influence of the work of bell hooks

(1994) and Paulo Freire (1970) on my development as an academic within the field of social pedagogy and social work. I will admit that when I first made the transition from social work practice to social work academia, I fell clearly into the 'banking method' of teaching (Freire, 1970). I believed that I had a wealth of social work experience that I needed to impart onto the students to make them the best social workers they could be. My emancipatory and transgressive journey started when I was introduced to social pedagogy by a colleague and I read Freire's (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed: now a well-worn and heavily annotated copy.

Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) both talk about the importance of creating a space where there is curiosity to explore and develop knowledge in partnership with learners. To do this truly relies on anti-oppressive and relational approaches to teaching, being able to enter a learning space as an equal who also has lots to learn as well as share (Freire, 1970, hooks 1994). This links to the ethical philosophy of social pedagogy (Cameron et al. 2021; Smith, 2020) in which as relational human beings we must be alongside each other learning as we journey together (Petrie, 2011). This connected deeply to the relational approach I had embraced as a social worker; it echoed what I believe to be important and reinforced my conviction that professional integrity and practice should be rooted in the fundamental moral values of equity and respect.

Having identified that there was a large focus on the everyday practice and statutory requirements being taught on social work degree programmes, I realised there was very little attention given to *how* to develop relational practice. The only module to address this was the third-year Psychosocial Studies module that University of Lancashire students took after completing their third-year placement. I always felt, after discussions with students in my capacity as the Third Year Lead, that this module came too late in the course. Most students were focused on their final dissertations and a desire to qualify and gain employment. They felt it was unhelpful after completing their final placement yet needed to pass to graduate. The module, as the title suggests, took a psychoanalytical approach to exploring human relationships in social work practice. Focusing on core psychoanalytical theories, this narrow focus meant that students found the content quite abstract and struggled to relate to their own social work practice. To counter this, I developed and ran,

firstly, an introductory module and then the BA degree course in Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation (BASPAP). This was the first degree course in England to focus solely on the teaching of social pedagogy and was endorsed and accredited by the Social Pedagogy Professional Association, meeting their stringent professional standards. Graduates of the course have gone on to secure positions within Barnardo's National Voice and Influence team, Empowerment Advocacy Service, Regional Participation Lead for the National Parent Carer Forum organisation, to manage innovative tenancy support projects, and progressed and graduated from the MA Social Work programme. Graduates have secured employment by demonstrating the implementation of learning and the development of excellent skills in relationship-based, advocacy and participatory ways of working. Feedback from their interviews highlighted this and set them apart from applicants with more standard qualifications such as social work degrees.

The BASPAP course reflected the core principles of social pedagogy practice: high levels of self-reflection, the skills to develop relational practice, and the ability to promote social justice. The first-year module Head, Heart and Hands, introduced social pedagogy philosophy and theories such as Haltung (Eichsteller, 2010). Students had to apply social pedagogy theories, concepts and methods to their own practice, assisting in developing high levels of emotional intelligence and reflexive practice. The innovative and original Imagination and the Common Third module saw lecturers from the School of Arts and Media teach alongside the core teaching team, supporting students to gain a theoretical understanding of creativity and the skills and confidence to develop creative practice. The third-year social policy module utilised social pedagogy theories to support students in gaining a theoretical praxis around the promotion of social justice and anti-oppressive practice. The Comparative Social Pedagogy module evidenced original and substantial innovative teaching practices; key social pedagogical practitioners and academics from across the international network provided on-line lectures detailing social pedagogical practice in their respective countries. Students had the opportunity to prepare questions in advance for the guest lecturers, guaranteeing that they not only acquired information they were interested in but also actively engaged in the content of the lectures. Integrity to the ethical philosophy and praxis of social pedagogy was of the utmost importance to me and I sought knowledge, advice and guidance from colleagues within the social pedagogy

network. Thus began a close relationship with Gabriel Eichsteller and his ThemPra colleagues and the cementing of my reputation as one of the leading social pedagogy academics.

In designing the course, I recognised the need for texts focusing on the wider use of social pedagogy within social work in the UK. This led to the publication of *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) bringing together key theories, concepts and elements of social pedagogical practice in one place as a reference book for students. It was also paramount that this was not only seen as a course textbook but could be used to apply social pedagogy within the broad social work field, therefore reaching a wider audience. Thus, widening the impact, increasing awareness and the scale of people taking a social pedagogical approach to their work. Providing original and significant content, it covered topics not linked to social work previously, such as the use of social pedagogy in adult social care, youth justice, social work risk assessments and participation and advocacy work. The article *Does My Haltung Look Big in This?* (Charfe and Gardner, 2020) was also written with the focus of being an academic and practice text. Providing original and significant contributions to knowledge, exploring in detail the social pedagogy concept of Haltung- a person's moral compass or value base (Eichsteller, 2010, Charfe and Gardner, 2019). The social pedagogical notion of creativity and learning was also discussed in the article *Creating a Learning Space* (Charfe et. al. 2020). These articles addressed the gap in academic sources for people wanting to learn more about specific aspects of social pedagogical theory and practice.

I have also continued to contribute to teaching on the social work degree programme at the University of Lancashire. In 2022 the third year Psychosocial Studies module was replaced by the module Relationship-Based Practice in Social Work, which was developed and led by me and block taught before the final placement. Drawing on my extensive experience and knowledge, this module takes a social pedagogical viewpoint of exploring the praxis of relational practice, with my publications playing a central part in the content development and core reading materials. The BASW Course Leader (see Appendix 1) stated that this module is regarded as one of the most vital components of the program. It is firmly rooted in my significant body of published work, which not only the Course

Leader stated but also the Module Leader, Naison Chaparadza (see Appendix 2) writing that the 'use of her papers and the text *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* has been pivotal in shaping the module's pedagogical approach and content'. Requiring deeper levels of reflexivity, the module utlises core social pedagogy theories such as the 3 Ps (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2024) to support the students to develop deeper levels of self-awareness. The concept of Haltung (Eichteller, 2010; Charfe and Gardner, 2019) is taught to assist the development of value-based, ethical and anti-oppressive practice. Issues of power within relational practice are explored in the application of the 3 Ps framework I developed (Charfe, 2025).

Scaling Relational Leadership: The MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership

As the BASPAP programme grew, having individual students and practitioners skilled in social pedagogy made a difference to their day-to-day practice and positive outcomes for the people they supported. One graduate, for example, has helped develop creative participatory practice within the organisation they work for, using many of the creative and experiential learning activities he participated in on the course. However, I began to realise that what also mattered was that graduates worked in teams and organisations that also acknowledged and embedded social pedagogy into their culture and systems, supporting relational practice to flourish. This recognition coincided with the reading of *Reinventing Organisations* (Laloux, 2016) and the report *Exploring the new world: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity* (Lowe & Pilmmer, 2019). The synergies between the Human Learning System (HLS) and social pedagogy were strikingly obvious. It led to me developing the innovative programme and first of its kind, the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership. Mapped against the Standards of Proficiency held by SPPA, this course was granted accreditation in 2018, as well as meeting the university's knowledge exchange policy driver by working in partnership with ThemPra to co-deliver the core modules.

Once again, recognising the academic gap for relational leadership led to the innovative and substantive course design, which used social pedagogical praxis as the theoretical framework for developing relationship-centered leadership. Modules such as Social Pedagogy Leadership introduced learners to the core philosophical and theoretical praxis

of social pedagogy and how to apply these to develop relational leadership. The Legal and Ethical Leadership module focused on developing an understanding and use of legislation and social policy underpinned by human rights to develop ethics as first practice (Bauman, 1993) in a leadership context. Co-Creating Change and Leadership was designed to develop innovative practice around co-production and participatory practice in leadership. Again, the original and innovative content of the module focused on the use of social pedagogical praxis and co-production theories in the transformation of practice, organisational culture and wider social change. Experiential teaching and learning methods underpinned the course and each innovative module assessment had a practical application. For example, the Effective Communication module consisted of a group presentation where learners critically appraised a famous leader's communication style set against the historical, cultural and political context of the time. The aim of which was to demonstrate a systemic understanding and application of effective communication skills. The second part of the module assessment was a reflective essay detailing how effectively they had implemented a creative communication process to address and positively change a communication issue regarding their organisational practice.

Students came from a wide range of settings, not only within the social work sphere, but also included third sector and voluntary organisations that provided homelessness/housing support, advocacy, drug and alcohol services, educational settings, as well as the Health and Safety Team Leader for the Swedish construction company Skanska (see Appendix 3). This student was attracted to the course after reading research around the importance of relationships in effective project management (Meng, 2012). Students were drawn to the course through a desire to develop relational practice in effective management. Graduates of the course have used their learning to make positive practice and system changes. For example, the organisation Salford Loaves and Fishes uses the Diamond Model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011) to structure staff supervision sessions. The Development Team for Lancashire County Council's Looked After Children and Leaving Care service secured funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to develop learning circles (see Appendix 4) to support embedding social pedagogical relational practice based on the social pedagogy leadership framework I developed (Charfe, 2023). The Children's Society Child Exploitation Team based in Preston has used a co-produced toolkit aimed at discussing the

issue of consent in relationships with young people based on my teaching around participation and co-production. Empowerment Advocacy Service (see Appendix 5) have remodeled their organisation and are moving towards a TEAL self-managed model of working (Laloux, 2014). They have embedded self-managed tools such as the Advice Process (Laloux, 2014) and structured practice and system processes to support the remodeled core values and missions of the organisation (Crowther, 2021, Charfe, 2025). All of which demonstrates how not only my teaching, but publications contained within this thesis have played a significant part in scaling up relational leadership.

As with the BA programme, it became apparent that there were no academic sources specifically looking at social pedagogy leadership. As the HLS report by Lowe & Pilmmer (2019) had been adopted as a core text, this led to the publication of the chapter *Human Learning System Meets Social Pedagogy* (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). This chapter is the first to link social pedagogy to the HLS paradigm, introducing people interested in relational public services to the core philosophy, theories, concepts and methods of social pedagogy. Whilst also explaining social pedagogy praxis and offering insights into its practical application to develop relational leadership. As Course Leader, this provided an academic space to be analytical and reflexive, whilst deepening my own understanding and consolidating the knowledge I had gained up to that point around the social pedagogy discipline and leadership. Using the transgressive theory of hook's (1994) helped to contravene the constraints of education and current social work thinking and practice around leadership. Critical pedagogy theory as described by Giroux (2018, pg. XXII) *"the tension between how things are and how they ought to be"* was employed to transgress the status quo (McLaren, 2018) and develop the social pedagogy leadership framework (Charfe, 2023). Published in the International Journal of Social Pedagogy, the framework (Charfe, 2023) makes an original and substantive contribution to knowledge in developing ethical and relational leadership on an individual, team and organisational level (discussed further in chapter two).

International Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

Outside of the teaching arena, I have also been involved in ground-breaking social pedagogical projects. In 2017 I agreed to lead the UK partnership group in the Erasmus funded project, Massive Open On-Line Course: Social Pedagogy Across Europe. The first of its kind, the project brought together eight organisations, containing both social pedagogues and academics, to explore the leading social pedagogical developments across Europe. This project provided a unique opportunity to develop further resources that would be helpful to students but also to expand my knowledge and connections within the international social pedagogy network. The MOOC project provides open access resources that detail the historical development and use of social pedagogy practice in each of the six countries, a unique project that has never been done before. My contribution to this project focused on the important and often overlooked aspect of creativity in UK social work practice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Explaining creativity and its importance to social pedagogical practice, my module provided not only theoretical discussions but also practice examples of creative methods used in direct practice. These were key resources for the Contemporary Practice module on the BASPAP programme but have also been adopted and used on Children, Schools and Families courses here at the University of Lancashire, Kingston University and Tallin University in Estonia. This was a transgressive experience affording me the space to develop my engaged pedagogy; as explained by hooks as (1994, pg. 202) 'the heart of this approach to learning is critical thinking. Conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis'. As part of the MOOC project, I was responsible for hosting the 'Firestarter' event at the University of Lancashire, to raise awareness of the project and ran a workshop at the launch event at the Universiteit Gent. All of which helped strengthen my international academic reputation and resulted in publication of the UK chapter (Charfe and Gardner, 2019b) in the final insight report *Social Pedagogy as a Meaningful Perspective for Education and Social Care* (Eichsteller and Bradt, 2019). Due to the connections made, I also facilitated several student trips where students were able to visit and shadow social pedagogues in their day-to-day practice. This experience supported them to understand social pedagogical practice in reality and within organisational systems, which had a lasting impact on many of the graduates.

The most recent evidence of my reputation as one of the leading academics in social pedagogy, was that, with high levels of competition from other universities and researchers, I secured the bid to undertake the independent evaluation (Charfe, Eren, Larkins, 2024) of the We Are Juno project in Liverpool. Due to my extensive knowledge, publications and teaching; as well as my membership of the Centre for Children and Young People's Participation here at the university, I secure the evaluation. As quoted by the Director (see Appendix 6) "Your skills, your values, your approach to working collaboratively with young people and your expertise are exactly what we are looking for." Upon completion of the evaluation, it reaffirmed to me that social pedagogical theory and practice needs to underpin every aspect of an organisation. Also, the realities of the difficulties and requirement for coaching and supervision to support practitioners and managers to understand and develop practice based on an unfamiliar paradigm or an 'insufficiently defined' (Rush, 2020, pg. 2) concept.

To conclude, all the above examples, and many more not mentioned, have shaped and informed my academic career and the two themes that have emerged in the publications contained in this thesis. These two golden threads (Smith, 2020) of explaining and using social pedagogy in relational practice and the teaching of social pedagogy are explored further and in more detail in the subsequent sections of this thesis.

Part Two

Publications For This Degree

As stated, the body of published works being critically analysed and reflected on in this thesis have two key themes: the teaching of social pedagogy in social work education and the introduction of social pedagogical and its relevance to relationship-based social work. Some publications focus directly on one or both, while others touch upon them lightly or include them in the background. A more detailed exploration of my contribution, originality and impact of each of the publications can be found in Appendix 7. Over half of the publications have been co-authored with colleagues with significant academic and practice reputations both within social pedagogy and social work and for each publication I have clarified my distinct contribution.

Publication 1.

Charfe, L. and Gardner, A. (2019) *Social Pedagogy and Social Work*, London, SAGE

Published by a leading global publishing house, to date this has sold 895 copies (see Appendix 8); it is the first book written in English to link social pedagogy with social work practice. The primary focus of the book was to address the gap in academic texts for social pedagogy students with a secondary aim of introducing core theories and methods to the broad field of social work. Professor Ucar (2020), Spain's leading social pedagogy professor, noted its significant contribution to the discourse on social pedagogy in the European Social Work journal. The book reaffirmed my belief that social pedagogy is a useful foundation for relationship-based social work practice as well as helping me provide evidence of how it can be applied in everyday practice. The book provides cultural relevance by grounding the exploration of social pedagogy, a relatively abstract concept till this point, in a more applicable and relevant way for students and

social workers to understand. I co-authored fifty percent of the book with chapters providing original content linking core theories to social work practice.

Publication 2.

Charfe, L. and Gardner, A. (2019) *Social Pedagogy as A Perspective in The UK, Chapter in: Insight Report: Social Pedagogy as a Meaningful Perspective for Education and Social Care*, Cumbria, ThemPra Social Pedagogy

As lead author, this chapter forms part of the Insight Report for the Erasmus-funded MOOC project, Social Pedagogy Across Europe which to date has had over 6,000 students enrolled globally. This project and report helped me gain a deeper level of understanding of social pedagogical theory and practice and again how this can be linked to relational social work practice. This innovative project was the first to bring various European countries together with the remit to critically explore cross-national similarities and differences in social pedagogical theory and practice. As lead author I set out the direction and chapter focus on the importance of creativity in direct practice. I co-authored half of the chapter report with original input focusing on application within children and families' social work.

Publication 3.

Charfe, L., Gardner, A., Greenhalgh, E,. Marsden, H., Nester, D., and Simpson, L., (2020) *Creating a Learning Space: Using experiential learning and creativity in the teaching and learning of social pedagogy*. International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 2020. Vol. 9(1).

Published in a special edition on creativity, this article offered critical reflections on the experiential and creative teaching methods used on the BA in Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation. It incorporated the philosophical paradigm of equity and Freire's (1970) theory of co-learning, and with the first cohort reaching their final year, provided an opportunity to reflect on students' and lecturers' encounters with experiential

learning. The article helped me to realise the importance of creativity in supporting learning but also the need for students to feel confident in embedding creativity in their relational practice. The conclusion of the article draws together the learning from the reflective exercise and offered original suggested ways that lecturers could consider embedding experiential learning into their teaching approach and the benefits of these on students' learning experiences.

Publication 4.

Charfe, L. and Gardner, A. (2020) *'Does My Haltung Look Big In This?': The use of social pedagogical theory for the development of ethical and value-led practice,* International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 9(1): 11

This article is the first detailed explanation written in English of this significant social pedagogical theory. Due to the on-going debate around ethical and value-based practice (Corbella and Ucar, 2019), this article offered an original contribution to the academic discussion around strengthening ethical social work practice. The impact of writing this article was that it surfaced the importance of our haltung with regards to how we develop relational practice in social work. The significant contribution it makes is that it highlights that ethical relational practice demands that values (personal or professional) are not only acknowledged and talked about but are alive in our practice. The article offers an original paradigm that supports constant reflexivity around how these are experienced by the people being supported (Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

Publication 5

Charfe, L. and Eichsteller, G. (2021) *Human Learning System Meets Social Pedagogy, in Human Learning System: Public Services for The Real World,*. Edited by Brogan, A., Eichsteller, G., Hawkins, M., Hesselgreaves, H., Jennions, B. N., Lowe, T., Plimmer, D., Terry, V., & Williams, G., Cumbria, ThemPra Social Pedagogy.

As lead author, this co-written book chapter was published in the Human Learning System e-book (Lowe, 2021), making a significant contribution by introducing key aspects of social pedagogy to the HLS paradigm. As already discussed earlier in this thesis, there is often little focus on the practicalities of *doing* relational work and the chapter focus was to address this. Under my authorship, the chapter explained the key social pedagogical theories and methods and how the application of these could support the development of *human, learning* and *systems*. My introduction to the Diamond Model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011) was used to assist readers in considering how to develop true relational leadership.

Publication 6

Charfe, L. (2023). *Ethical and relational leadership in a complex world: the use of the Human Learning Systems and social pedagogical leadership framework to navigate complexity*. International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 12(1): 16.

The first of my publications to have been written solely by me. This article explained the Social Pedagogy Leadership framework, designed by me to help MA Social Pedagogy Leadership students understand leadership from a social pedagogical perspective. It explains the Human Learning System approach and its role in promoting relational leadership within social work and public services. The article contributes to academic discussions on professional leadership development but is the first to link social pedagogical theory and practice to fostering ethical and relational leadership, with a focus on critical reflection and learning.

Publication 7

Charfe, L and Eichsteller, G. (2024) *Making Sense of Power and Politics in Everyday Practice through the 3 Ps,* in Baikady (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Power, Politics and Social Work* (2024), Oxford, Oxford University Press

With a diverse range of contributions from authors across the Global South and North, this book makes a significant contribution in discussing the challenges faced by the international social work community in light of political and power structures. My chapter focused on the often-overlooked micro-level: the relational and subjective experiences of power in everyday social work practice. The Danish concept of the *3 Ps- professional, personal*, and *private* (Jappe, 2010) has been extended to focus on power and relational practice. My adaptation of the *3 Ps* framework offers social workers a practical tool for critically reflecting on how power and politics operates across different domains of their professional lives, establishing ethical boundaries and anti-oppressive practice. Integrating theoretical insight with concrete practice examples, the chapter supports practitioners in examining their own positionality and developing reflective, relationship-based approaches to power.

Publication 8

Charfe L., Eren, L. and Larkins, C. (2024) *Independent Evaluation Report - We Are Juno*, UCLan (Not for publication)

This co-produced evaluation report summaries the findings from the independent evaluation of the We Are Juno organisation after their first year in operation. We Are Juno (2021) has used social pedagogy as its model of relationship-centered care. In line with their commitment to working in partnership with care-experienced young people to improve their service, the independent evaluation and final report were co-produced with the members of their Experts by Experience group. Due to my reputation and knowledge of social pedagogy practice and co-production, amid other competitive bids, I secured the contract to undertake this evaluation. The final report is based on the co-produced theory of change model developed with the Experts by Experience group which was used as an evaluation tool to assess the impact of Juno's social pedagogy model of care. The final summary sets out recommendations from the learning so far and how the organisation can continue to strengthen and embed social pedagogy practice in their organisational structures and direct practice.

Publication 9.

Charfe, L. (2025). *Who's got the power?: A social pedagogical exploration of power, the important element within relationship-based practice.* Social Work Education, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2025.2505733

Employing the 3 Ps framework (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2024), this article focuses on its use as a teaching tool within social work education. The article made an original and significant contribution in providing an innovative way of reflecting and developing anti-oppressive practice by addressing subjective power dynamics. Again, with Freire's (1970) notion of praxis the article provides substantive examples of the application of the 3 Ps framework in exploring power. This article has been adopted as a core text on the national Think Ahead programme and the framework as a teaching tool to aid student's understanding of power and development of anti-oppressive practice. The national programme has around 120 first-year social work students per cohort each year and has been running since 2016.

Publication 10.

Charfe, L. (2025) *I've Got the Power! A Social Pedagogical Exploration of Power Dynamics in Relational Leadership and Practice Within Public Services*, in Wilson, R., Hesselgreaves, H., French, M., Hawkins, M., Jamieson, D., King, M. and Kimmitt, J. (2025) *Futures in Public Management: The Emerging Relational Approach to Public Services,* Emerald Publishing

The chapter demonstrates growth and development within my writing around the 3 Ps framework (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2024). Focusing explicitly on power dynamics and the public service leadership role in leading service reform based on relational practice. The newly published Examples of Practice (HLS, 2025) explored in the chapter, provided illustrations of how issues of power are being addressed in the development of relational structures and practice. As proof of my skills and knowledge development and strengthening my writing, it provides original content and practice examples. This publication's discussion takes a Foucauldian view, that power is not positional but rather

relational and fluid. The article also builds on current leadership research (Zhao et al. 2016; Reitz and Higgins, 2020), which continues to highlight significant gaps in managers' or leaders' ability to address issues of power.

Part Three Thematic Exploration

Theme One - Advancing the Teaching of Social Pedagogy.

The first theme of the thesis highlights the significant contributions my publications have made to the teaching of social pedagogy. Transgressive (hooks, 1994) in their approach, my publications present innovative pedagogical approaches that step outside of mainstream social work education. They also offer valuable insights into curriculum design in higher education, demonstrating their originality and academic relevance, discussed further in this section.

Unlike England, where there has been limited political engagement in the findings from previous social pedagogical studies and pilot projects (Petrie, 2013, 2020), Scotland, has continued to be more open to embedding social pedagogy within direct practice (Smith and Whyte, 2008). Various Scottish universities have run higher education courses and organisations such as Kibble (2024) and the Camphill communities (Jackson, 2011) continue to use social pedagogy as their philosophical approach to care and employ social pedagogues. In recognition of this and as an alternative to traditional social work degrees, I developed and successfully ran a social pedagogy module, the flagship BA Hons social pedagogy degree and a masters level programme in Social Pedagogy Leadership at the University of Lancashire. What became clear as academic resources were collated for these programmes was the limited amount of relevant theoretical resources that explained social pedagogy theories, methods and concepts in an English context. The publications connected to this first theme were purposely written to address this as well as support the teaching and learning of social pedagogy theory and practice in educational settings.

3.1 Curriculum Innovation and Foundational Texts

At the time of developing course materials, there were four core social pedagogical textbooks (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Hatton, 2013; Storø, 2013; Stephens, 2013) written in English, none of which focused on social work practice and only one with a sole focus on the use of social pedagogy in the UK. Whist offering valuable insight there was clearly a contextual space for a book that situated itself within UK social work and social care, the sector my students worked within.

The book *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) was intentionally written as a core academic text that offered students one source containing all key introductory information on social pedagogy theory and practice. The publication provided students with explanations and practice applications of all the essential social pedagogical theories, concepts and methods. Two of the main challenges in writing the book were accessibility and maintaining academic integrity, ensuring that the explanations and applications of social pedagogical theories were accurate. Many concepts, such as the German 'Haltung' have no direct English translation and are unfamiliar to an English audience. It was therefore important that my publication explained the core theories to an English-speaking audience whilst maintaining the integrity and meaning of these European theories. Relating theories to direct social work practice supported translation and understanding. Being able to consult frequently and openly with respected academics and practitioners in the social pedagogy field was invaluable and only possible due to my position within the international community. Their insights helped consolidate my understanding and ensured academic integrity, while remaining relevant and accessible to students and social workers.

In recognition of the book's substantial contribution, the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA) endorsed the book. Home to the professional standards and centre for excellence, SPPA (2025) only endorses publications that meet and maintain the social pedagogical professional standards. Another rare honor was the book review by the leading Spanish Social Pedagogy Professor, Xavier Ucar (2020, pg.902), in the European Journal of Social Work who wrote:

"This book provides the answer to the questions posed by the academic literature in the first decade of this century in relation to the possibility of importing the theoretical and methodological model of social pedagogy into the UK"

This quote highlights the book's significant contribution to the body of academic work on the topic. The book is included in SAGE Knowledge, the digital library for social science students, researchers and faculties, meaning that there is broad accessibility throughout UK universities (see Appendix 8).

As the first cohort approached their final year, the International Journal of Social Pedagogy published a special issue highlighting the vital role of creativity in social pedagogical practice. This presented an excellent opportunity to co-author a review on the experiential teaching methods used, with both the students and the teaching team. Focusing on the importance of creativity, underpinned by the research of Robinson (2001) and creating learning environments where knowledge can be explored and defined (Freire, 1970, hooks, 1994) was a key focus of the article. To genuinely co-author the article meant that I had to accept and manage the fluidity of involvement from the students; as with all co-produced work people must be allowed to step in and out of the work (McKersher, 2020). Relying on the strength of the relationships between students and academics was important, as was constant critical reflection on the power dynamics due to being seen as the lead author. The most challenging aspect came from the peer reviewer process and the request to revise aspects of the student's analysis and writing. From a social pedagogical standpoint, upholding the central Freirean (1970) tenet of the importance of co-created knowledge, meant professionally challenging what felt like academic snobbery. In addition to providing a space for critical reflection on our educational experiences and a space to develop co-production skills, the article also outlined key learning points (Charfe et al. 2020). These aimed at assisting other academics to use an experiential learning approach, such as planning and resources, acknowledgement of the time-consuming nature of experiential teaching methods, the need for emotional resilience and confidence, and creating the right learning environment. The publication of this article led to a co-facilitated workshop at the SPPA annual conference, with around thirty participants. It focused on the key learning points

of the article and participants who were in HEI settings said that they felt more confident to try and use experiential learning techniques in their lectures. One of the co-authors and social pedagogy graduate (Nester, 2023) has gone on to contribute a chapter on children's rights and participation in an edition on child-centred practice.

As a direct result of these publications, I was asked to become the External Examiner for the Working with Children and Young People: Social Pedagogy programme run by Kingston University. As Associate Professor Febrer (see Appendix 9) has written, it is my reputation, expertise and extensive knowledge of teaching social pedagogy that led them to ask me to undertake this role. Having an understanding and direct experience of teaching social pedagogical principles and theories, as well as creative teaching methods, has assisted me in supporting the programme team in developing a high level of assessment strategies. There have been several modules where the Kingston team have developed creative assessment tools which have been adapted due to my feedback. One such example was the use of a mind-map to assist students in demonstrating their critical thinking skills. My own experiences highlighted in the article exploring experiential learning (Charfe, et al. 2019) of reflection, discuss and listening to the experiences of the students has been fundamental. It also helped me feel more confident in my ability to use experiential teaching methods and as Freire (1970) stated, to learn alongside and from students to strengthen my own knowledge and teaching practice.

3.2 Conceptualising Power in Relationship-Based Practice

At this juncture I began to study in more detail what had been written around relationship-based practice in contemporary social work. As highlighted in his research, Ferguson (et al. 2020) states that there is still a need for further research and academic resources to support the development of relationship-based practice based on ethical and anti-oppressive practice. Ruminating on the work of academics such as Ruch (2018), Ferguson (2020) and Smith (2020) the importance of addressing inherent power dynamics was identified as vital. In researching theories and methods (Tew, 2006; Thompson 2006; Tedham, 2021; Karim, 2023) related to power within relational practice, it became apparent that these frameworks took a more macro view of the issue of power

dynamics. They neglected the positionality and subjective understanding of individual social workers towards the power they hold. In discussions with my social pedagogue colleague Eichsteller, the Danish 3 Ps model developed by Jappe (2010) was enhanced to move from exploration of boundaries within relationship-based practice to the power inherent in each of the three aspects of the model. Setting the framework in a UK social work context meant I needed to acknowledge the legal and rights-based nature of the profession whilst assisting practitioners and students to focus on the micro aspects power dynamics linked to their own subjectivity. Utilising social pedagogical praxis meant the 3 Ps framework is situated in the everyday realities of social work practice, thus strengthening its application. The development of the model was underpinned by Foucault's (2002) theory, that power is 'relational and fluid in its manifestation, rather than something which is possessed and exercised' (Karim, 2023, p.1062). Foucault's theoretical approach lends itself to the focus of the centrality of relationships at the heart of social pedagogy and strengthens the use of the 3 Ps framework in exploring power through this relational lens. It also acknowledges that power is a core element of all human relationships and encounters; that it is ever present no matter a person's position within a social structure (Taylor, 2014, Gilbert & Powell, 2010).

This led to the publication of the chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Power, Politics and Social Work* (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2024), published by the world's largest university press with a global reach. When reading the open call from the editor, it became apparent that authors would likely focus on macro-level issues of power and politics. In contrast the published chapter offers a differing perspective, focusing on the 'everyday' practice of social workers within the political and powerful systems they operate. With the publication of the book, as anticipated, the other chapter focused on issues of neo-liberalism, political and sociopolitical systems. Whilst understanding the impact of these factors is important in relationship-based practice, it is also of equal importance that social workers and students can critically reflect and analyse their own positionality and subjective understanding of power in relationship-based practice. A point highlighted by the Danish social pedagogue Charlotte Firing (see Appendix 10). Charlotte discussed in detail the use of the chapter and the 3 Ps framework in the Relational Leadership course she facilitates for ThemPra. It has had over 200 participants completing the course to

date, coming from a wide range of public sector settings. ThemPra have embedded the adapted 3 Ps framework into sessions looking at power within relational leadership. She stated that this is a significant method in assisting the participants to explore their own understanding of power and privilege but also to consider how they can work in more equitable ways.

In order to explore this further within a social work education context, I developed a focus on power in the article *Who's Got the Power? A Social Pedagogical Exploration Of Power, The Important Element Within Relationship-Based Practice* (Charfe, 2025) published in the Social Work Education journal. This article offers a more detailed critical discussion on how to use the 3 Ps model as a training and teaching tool. Think Ahead, the national fast-track training programme for mental health social work, has adopted the 3 Ps framework (Charfe, 2025). Alexia Fenwick (see Appendix 11) the Professional Development Lead at Think Ahead, stated that the framework and article have made a substantial contribution with regards to their focus on leadership within mental health practice. Assisting students to consider issues of power within mental health services and ways in which they can work in more anti-oppressive ways, focusing on their own subjective thinking of the power they have within their professional position. After running a training session with a group of Think Ahead alumni, the 3 Ps framework has now been adopted into their leadership teaching for their year one participants which total 120 students nationwide annually. Alexia explained that the Think Ahead programme has a specific focus not just on the professional standards for qualification as a social worker but also a second stream of teaching aimed at leadership within the mental health social work field. As an organisation they had been struggling to find appropriate sources that supported their participants to delve deeper into the complexities of leadership within social work, especially around, power, privilege and their sense of self, therefore the article and framework make a significant contribution in supporting emerging learning.

3.3 Developing Social Pedagogical Leadership: A Conceptual Framework

Another significant gap emerged in relevant academic literature as the master's programme began, specifically focusing on leadership from a relational perspective. Underpinned by research findings showing the importance of relational practice on outcomes (Knight et al., 2017) the HLS paradigm was designed to assist the development of more relational public services that support people to flourish (Lowe and Pilmmer, 2019). Reading the Human Learning System (HLS) report "Exploring the New World" (Lowe and Pilmmer, 2019), the synergies between social pedagogical leadership being taught and the HLS paradigm were immediately obvious. Whilst teaching the master's students, I developed a social pedagogy leadership framework (Charfe, 2023) as a visual aid to assist them in thinking about how to apply their learning directly to their leadership practice. The article *Social Pedagogical Leadership* (Charfe, 2023) is designed to clearly explain how the framework effectively supports ethical and relational leadership. It serves as a vital academic resource for teaching and learning in social pedagogy leadership, as well as for the comprehensive study of relational leadership. This article has been adopted as a core text by the University West, Trollhattan, Sweden on their social work degree course, which has around 50 students annually (see Appendix 12). The article and leadership framework have become a core teaching tool and required reading for their social work students, who must 'demonstrate knowledge of the management of social work' a legal requirement for qualification in Sweden. The significant contribution to student's learning has been around using social pedagogy leadership as ethical and relational approach to leadership, for example the focus on spaces within leadership where relationship-based practice can be nurtured and developed; ethical and legal literacy that is used to strengthen relational and ethical practice and finally the use of learning as a reflective management and leadership strategy to develop anti-oppressive practice (Charfe, 2024).

To summaries, the publications mentioned above have made a cohesive and original contribution to the advancement of social pedagogy as an academic and professional discipline in the UK. By addressing gaps in theory, teaching and curriculum they demonstrate scholarly originality, pedagogical impact, and professional relevance.

Theme Two – The Introduction of Social Pedagogy to Relationship-Based Social Work

The two identified themes of the thesis overlap and are not mutually exclusive, because many people have been introduced to social pedagogy through various training or educational sessions I have run. This second theme relates to the growing academic development and practice of relationship-based practice in social work and the role of social pedagogy within this. The publications in this section notably contribute to the understanding and development of this field through the theme: the introduction of social pedagogy in social work. As already stated, while well-established across Europe and Latin America (Cameron & Moss, 2011), its application in UK social work has been limited and fragmented. The publications discussed here have played a significant part in addressing this by providing introductory explanations of social pedagogical philosophy, ethics, theories and practice set against the context of contemporary social work and how it can be applied to enrich relationship-based practice here in the UK.

4.1 Contextualising the Debate: Relationship-Based Practice in UK Social Work

As briefly touched on in the introduction to the thesis, the prevailing technical approach in social work has been criticised for emphasising processes and outcomes at the expense of genuine relational engagement (Harbo and Kemp, 2020; Smith, 2020). As a response, there is now a clearer shift toward approaches that prioritise relationships and being 'more human' (Trevithick, 2014; Lowe and Eichsteller, 2021). An important ethical concept to hold on to with the growing development of AI and its potential impact on human relationships, critical thinking and understanding (Brindle, 2023).

What has been seen as a marginal and fringe debate, relationship-based practice is now entering mainstream discourse, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The publications presented in this part of the thesis offer essential insights that are pivotal to the ongoing discussions in defining relationship-based practice and its fundamental components but also the facilitation of relational practice. I would argue that by fostering the authentic development of relationship-based practice, it can be prevented from becoming another passing trend or being misappropriated.

The discourse on relational practice is also gaining traction academically. In his research and publications, Smith (2020) observes that traditional casework models often fail to address the practical realities faced by social workers. Consequently, there is a growing call within academia to focus on developing relationship-based practices in social work (Ruch et al., 2018; Ferguson et al, 2020; Robinson, 2024). As already discussed, an important step has been my development of the module Relationship-Based Practice in Social Work at the University of Lancashire, taught to the third-year students before beginning their final placement. The on-going research being undertaken by the HLS network at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at MMU and Northumbrian Business School as well as the work of academics such as Harry Ferguson and Gillian Ruch are further examples. These exemplify the commitment to developing and articulating relationship-based practice within academia and practice. The impact of the publications in this thesis lies in their significant contribution to not only the teaching of social pedagogy but its use to develop relationship-based practice in social work.

4.2 Social Pedagogy as a Framework for Relational Practice

Social workers understand the role and responsibilities related to their specific field of practice, including the support and help they are expected to provide within the legal and safeguarding policies they operate under (Fermin and Lloyd, 2020; Charfe, 2023). As a social work lecturer, I often explain this as the "what" of social work; in other words, the day-to-day practice of social work that students learn about on university degree courses. Including the professional standards held by Social Work England (2019), knowledge

and skills (DoH, 2015, DfE, 2018) and the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018) they are required to meet during their studies and after qualifying.

Yet the ability to build, maintain, and sustain relationships is central to the everyday practice of social workers (Ingram and Smith, 2018; Monteux and Monteux, 2020). To assist with this, my publications have not only explained but also offered practical applications around the use of social pedagogy, they also offer significant insight into "how" social pedagogy can assist social workers to develop relationship-based practice and meet the requirements of their job (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, 2020; Charfe and Eichsteller, 2023; Charfe, Erin and Larkins, 2024). A key publication to traverse both themes in this thesis is the book *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Upon discovering social pedagogy, I recognised that it offered a holistic, relational and educational emphasis, missing from social work practice. The book addressed this gap by defining social pedagogy and the core theories and concepts within the context of social work practice as well as offering examples of application to enhance relational social work practice. Examples of this can been seen in my authored chapters that focused on relevant social work discourse and practice issues such as how the application of social pedagogy can strengthen the *risk-sensible model* that has emerged in contemporary social work practice (Featherston et al. 2018; Alfandarit al. 2023). As a direct result the book has been adopted on to the reading list of the Relationship-Based Practice in Social Work module at the University of Lancashire which has around 130 students annually attend the module. As the Year One Lead, Naison Chaparadza (see Appendix 2) states, this book has been consistently ultilised by social work students as a vital resource in preparation for placements but also their ongoing practice development.

In introducing social pedagogy to the social work discipline, being able to draw on my practice background, utilising my experience and knowledge to focus on the application and use of this little-known discipline, has been fundamental. Taking a Freirean (1970) approach, that social pedagogical theory is incomplete without exploring its practical applications, my immersion in the discourse, paired with direct practice experience can be seen in the article *Does My Haltung Look Big In This* (Charfe and Gardner, 2020). My article expands on previous publications (Eichsteller, 2010; Eichsteller and Holthoff,

2011) where brief and narrow explanations were given and limited in their application to early years settings. For me the wider social work application and connection to the issue of ethical and relational practice was very clear; linking to Bauman's (1993) theory of ethics as first practice, that within modern society we must define our own morality and ethical practice. I firmly believed that an understanding of our own Haltung formed the foundation stone of all relation and ethical practice, again related back to Howe (2008, pg.185), that the starting 'point for an understanding of others is oneself'. In writing the article I offered a detailed explanation of the German theory, which until that point had no direct English translation and loose interpretations had been offered (Eichsteller, 2010, Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). My article is the first to provide social work practitioners with a language to describe their internal moral stance and how this influences their practice. Social work practice focuses on the technicalities of the work, and my article provides a method for deeper self-reflection of their attitude and relational presence. Finally, and most importantly, practitioners are asked to consider the behaviors that demonstrate the professional values that they claim to adhere to, and how these are felt in the relationships they have with the people they support.

This article continues to be one of the most read and downloaded on the International Journal of Social Pedagogy (IJSP) website with over 20,000 views, 3556 downloads and has been cited 15 times to date with an Altimetric score of 25. With a global readership, this article makes a significant contribution to the discussion around ethical practice and professional values and the number of views and downloads demonstrates practitioners globally are keen to learn more from my article. This is also backed up by the research of Corbella and Ucar, (2022), which found that practitioners working in the social work and social pedagogy field were given little time or training to consider and explore the importance of ethics, ethical practice and the impact of these on their day-to-day work. Corbella and Ucar's (2022) research focused on the values and ethics used in the work of social pedagogues in Spain and due to the originality and publication of this article they ask me to support their research by assisting them in adding a comparative lens to their data. I gave academic support to Corbella's field study in the UK in 2021, running in-person focus groups with members of the UK social pedagogy network. I also assisted in providing translation when needed and explaining the cultural, societal, political and

professional context that the participants were describing. The data was included in Corbella's final thesis, and their findings and recommendations were that practitioners need to be offered training to explore and understand this important aspect of relational practice (Corbella and Ucar, 2022).

In UK, the article has been utilised to support practitioners to consider and explore ethical relational practice (see Appendix 13). My article (Charfe and Gardner, 2020) was sent as reading material ahead of the learning circle session on ethical and value based relational practice to the twenty practitioners attending. The *Values Alive in Practice* activity was run with participants to support them to explore their understanding of professional values but also how they demonstrate these in their behaviours when working relationally. This Learning Community Partnership (Hylton, 2024) was a two-year funded collaborative of individuals from organisations such as Virtual Schools, Lancashire County Council's (LCC) Commissioning Service, Looked After Children's Nurse, Looked After Children social workers, LCC's participation leads and NHP staff as well as care-experienced young people. Jane Hylton, a graduate of the MA Social Pedagogy Leadership programme was aware of the impact of social pedagogy on strengthening relational practice and was keen to develop this outside of her own team. As part of her final dissertation, she outlined how a learning community partnership could be cultivated to provide an environment for the exploration of deepening understanding and practice around relationship-based practice. The outcome and long-term impact of her work was to secure funding and set up this learning community partnership within LCC. The aim was to 'explore and implement a Learning Community to explore Relational Practice with a particular focus on Social Pedagogy concepts' (Hylton, 2024). The outcome of which has been "stronger understanding and ability to develop social pedagogical relational practice with care-experienced young people and stronger professional multi-agency relationships" (Hylton, NHP, 2024, see Appendix 13).

In 2024 the article and the Values Alive in Practice activity were embedded into the mandatory CPD training of social workers in Lancashire County Council (LCC) to assist them to move beyond just talking about the importance of values but to consider and

develop ethical relational practice with their work with care experienced children and young people. To date this has been used in three sessions with around 60 social workers from a variety of settings within LCC's Children and Families services.

4.3 Relational Leadership

As previously stated in this thesis, during the development of the masters programme a significant gap in academic sources around the subject of relational and social pedagogical leadership became quite obvious. Having adopted the HLS report (Lowe and Pilmer, 2019) as a core text on the course and after discussions with Toby Lowe (HLS lead professor), I was invited to write a chapter in the HLS book Public Services for the Real World (Lowe et al, 2021). The book's remit was to provide a new paradigm for public service management, offering a clear critique of NPM, explaining the core components of HLS and providing real-life case examples of HLS practice. Conceptually rich, HLS can often be seen to be too abstract or difficult to translate into the direct practice of people working within the public sector. As with previous authored works, my chapter gives language, theories and tools with which to bring HLS to life (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). It introduced the HLS audience to the core philosophical, ethical, theoretical and practice aspects of social pedagogy, linking these to the *human, learning, systems domains*. My authored section focuses on the core social pedagogical theories of the Diamond Model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011), 3 Ps (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021) and Head, Heart and Hands (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). Due to their applied nature, I believed that they were the most effective way to introduce social pedagogy to an HLS audience. The Freirean (1970) notion of praxis underpinned the discussion about how these social pedagogical theories could be used to develop and enhance relational leadership.

In an interview with Charlotte Firing, a Danish social pedagogue from ThemPra (see Appendix 10), she reiterates the significance of this publication with regards to the linking of social pedagogy to leadership practice within the social work field. For over fifteen years, this community interest company has led the way in enhancing social pedagogical practice in the UK, gaining an international reputation for quality training.

Charlotte pointed out a critical gap in knowledge among European social pedagogues regarding UK social work, emphasising that these publications have been vital in integrating social pedagogy into relational social work. What distinguishes these publications is their focus on the practical realities of social work, making them effective tools to assist social workers in their application of social pedagogy. Charlotte stated that many of the participants who attend their Relational Leadership course were often anxious about how to balance relational and ethical practice with the competing demands of legal frameworks and safeguarding policies. My chapter was therefore 'invaluable in supporting participants to do this' (see Appendix 10). Along with my other publications, it holds a central place on ThemPra's short courses; Relational Leadership and Developing Relationship-Centred Practice, which have been running for five years with 300 participants to date. Most attendees are newly qualified social workers and social care practitioners eager to improve their relationship-based practice. The article *Social Pedagogy Leadership* (Charfe, 2023) serves as a foundational text on ThemPra's Relational Leadership course, linking social pedagogical theory to practice in a meaningful way. ThemPra have also used these publications in the ongoing training and accreditation of the National House Project staff as part of the organisational commitment to embedding social pedagogy and relationship-based practice. To date, ThemPra has provided training and accreditation for around 40 members of NHP staff. Gabriel Eichsteller (see Appendix 14), co-founder of ThemPra, states that these publications are crucial for helping participants deepen and consolidate their emerging understanding of social pedagogy and relationship-based practice, ultimately enhancing their skills and ability to develop relational practice.

The significance of linking social pedagogy to direct social work practice is not only contained in academic publications but can be seen in the independent evaluation report (Charfe et al. 2024) completed for We Are Juno CIC. After being invited to submit a funding bid due to my academic reputation and up against stiff competition, I secured the National Lottery-funded project to evaluate the new children's residential service being established by We Are Juno. They are committed to using social pedagogy as their model

of care based on feedback from care-experienced young people, who highlighted the importance of positive relationships and feelings of being cared for (Coram Voice, 2020, Sanders, 2020; We Are Juno, 2021). The evaluation report was co-produced with the Young Leaders Group, now called Experts by Experience. I led regular evaluation meetings with the Director and Director of Care to embed learnings during the project. Using the Human Learning System Learning Cycle model (Lowe, 2021), I guided the directors in integrating social pedagogical practices into their organisation. The evaluation report (Charfe, Erin, and Larkins, 2024) provided recommendations on strengthening their social pedagogical practice, including the use of the 3 Ps framework (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2023) to enhance staff relational boundaries and address issues of power dynamics in their relationship-based practice. Recommendations also emphasised the importance of staff reflecting on their values to foster and develop a shared culture (Charfe and Gardner, 2019; Charfe et al. 2024). Additionally, the Outcomes Indicator Questionnaire was co-developed (Charfe et al., 2024) to assist the organisation in capturing evidence of how their social pedagogical care approach was meeting young peoples identified needs and outcomes.

To summarise, my publications have been key in supporting growing knowledge around social pedagogy in UK with a particular focus on its application to strengthen relationship-based practice within social work. By reasserting the importance of ethics, power dynamics, and reflective practice, these works provide both a critique of the current state of social work and a vision for its transformation. This vision is not one that rejects accountability or professional standards but rather one that calls for a more nuanced, human-centred approach to practice that balances organisational requirements with a deep commitment to the people social workers serve.

Conclusion

Through this thesis I have presented an overview of the body of work I have created that has been shaped by my professional and academic career and the belief that relationships are at the heart of good social work practice. There are on-going debates surrounding relationship-based social work practice, such as defining it, agreeing the core elements and how this can be applied to social worker's everyday practice. I have presented evidence that social pedagogy as an 'ethical, theoretical and practice orientation that embeds reflexivity' (Charfe, 2025, pg. 184) strengthens this area of practice. My publications have identified through their originality and significance how core theories and aspects of social pedagogy can enrich social workers' understanding and application of relationship-based practice.

Another important aspect in developing and strengthening this approach to social work lies in the teaching and learning of social work students as they develop their understanding and skills for the realities of everyday practice. The body of work presented in this thesis has made a significant and original contribution to this modest but growing body of academic and practice literature around the teaching of social pedagogy and relational leadership. I have also evidenced how my work has begun to influence how this subject is taught in the form of module, course and curriculum development. As the Naison Chaparadza, Module Leader for the Relationship Based Practice in Social Work, stated:

'the use of her papers and the text *Social Pedagogy and Social Work* has been pivotal in shaping the module's pedagogical approach and content'.

Throughout, the thesis foregrounds the importance of aligning values, theory and practice to ensure that relationship-based social work is not reduced to rhetoric. The publications

collectively support the movement towards more relational and human centered social work, reflecting the growing shift in both policy, practice and academic discourse.

Finally, as I journeyed through this PhD course, I have become aware of a significant gap in the social pedagogy and relational practice discourse - the lack of focus on friendships with regards to relationships. Even social pedagogues, like social workers, have often overlooked the importance of friendships at the expense of family relations, often due to legal duties placed on them which focus solely on these. Yet there is limited but significant research (Roesch-Marsh and Emond 2021, Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2022, Roesch-Marsh et al. 2023) from care-experienced children and young people that demonstrates the significance of friendships over family relationships. These friendships are also linked to positive safeguarding and transitions from the care system (Roesch-Marsh and Emond, 2021). Due to these factors the focus of my future work is going to be surfacing the elements that are in current practice that support social workers and other professionals to focus on nurturing and maintaining care-experienced children and young people's friendships.

To conclude, this thesis offers a powerful argument for the role of social pedagogy in social work education. It provides a foundation for future research and innovation in relational practice ensuring that it remains vital, creditable and an accessible element of social work education. It also can assist in transforming UK social work. It contributes original theory, pedagogical strategies and practice tools that advance relational, ethical and socially just ways of working.

Word Count: 10,998

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Appendix 1 - BA Social Work Course Leader Testimonial

E-mail Correspondence

Peter Cooling (School of Health, Social Work and Sport)

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport)

Thu 19/06/2025 16:58

Hi Lowis

The Relationship Based Practice module SW3078 in year 3 of the BA Social Work course is one of the most important modules offered on the programme. This module encourages students to reflect upon their developing understanding of relationship-based practice, as it has developed across the previous two years. This is a fundamental cornerstone of our student's professional development as the module makes connections with teaching specifically on SW1077 (communications module) and requires students to reflect upon the complexities and uncertainties of practice from placement. As such, SW3078 is the main vehicle which we promote relationship-based practice, both between lecturers and students, and ultimately students as professionals. Lowis has been fundamental in helping the course team make connections across all three years in developing relational practice. Her research has been central to the reading list and underpins our teaching that is research informed.

Kind regards

Pete

Appendix 2 - Module Leader Testimonial – Relationship Based Practice in Social Work

A testimony on Lowis Charfe's contributions to the BASW Course through Social Pedagogy- Naison Chaparadza – SW Lecturer, SW3078 Module Lead and Year 1 Lead.

Lowis has been a member of the SW3078 Module delivery team since 2023 and taught social pedagogy for Year 1 and Year 3 students.

Since the introduction of the SW3078 Relationship based Practice Module we have used Social Pedagogy as a cornerstone for developing the essential relational skills and capabilities required for effective social work practice in our final year students.

Lowis Charfe's teaching's teaching on the module and the use of her papers and the text Social Pedagogy has been pivotal in shaping the module's pedagogical approach and content. The text provides students with a much easier explanation on the self they bring to a social work relationship either with service users or professionals.

We have used Social Pedagogy and Lowis's contributions to support some of the theoretical groundings such as psychodynamic theories. Social Pedagogy in particular the 3 PS, common third and Diamond Model provide practical framework for our students enabling them to deepen their understanding of relational dynamics and the 'use of self' in professional contexts but also reminding them of bringing the humane side of them. Our students across Year 1-3 have consistently utilised the Social Pedagogy textbook and Lowis's teaching not only for preparing for their placements but also as vital resources for their ongoing development in practice, you would not marks a assignment or reflection without 3Ps, underscoring the direct and impactful relevance of the material.

Lowis' contributions in terms of teaching and the publications have profoundly helped in the development of knowledge for our 3rd-year students in the Relationship-Based Practice Module. As the module is fairly new and its predecessor was seen as too

abstract, Lowis's contributions through Social pedagogy has given us the ability to demystify the psychodynamic approach to the development of the self, translating it into a more accessible understanding of the 'Self' that students bring to social work practice. Her innovative analogue of the "3Ps" – the Personal, Professional, and Private self – has become a foundational concept within this module, empowering students to critically reflect on and consciously navigate who they become at different points of their engagements with service users. This framework has been instrumental in fostering deep self-awareness and enhancing students' ability to develop authentic and effective relational practice.

As the Year Lead for those new to Social work education, I believe that the teaching of social pedagogy has been crucial for social work students, enabling them to integrate the human part of themselves into their professional development and to truly grasp the significance of t heir values and haltung. The most impactful element has been how social pedagogy has particularly supported new students in understanding core social work values and the delicate balance of power with service users.

Its integration in the first year communication workshops, has laid vital foundational work for developing intercommunication skills, fostering genuine connections with people, and promoting authenticity. In Year One we consistently focus on self-awareness, explicitly linking the 3Ps and the Diamond Model to Rogerian approaches of congruence and non-judgmental practice, Using the Social Pedagogy concepts and way of doing things has helped our students develop co- skills for Readiness for Practice.

We have observed Year 1 students confidently transferring their awareness of the Diamond Model to their placements, where they work with individuals facing significant difficulties and limited opportunities. Their ability to apply this model in their reflections, supporting people to overcome adversity and recognizing inherent positives in each individual, powerfully aligns with the values and capabilities articulated by BASW and the PCF, demonstrating a profound impact on their developing relational practice.

In summary I do believe that the Lowis' teaching has been significant to the delivery of the programme across the course and in particular to the 3rd year Teaching – for

relationship-based practice. The publication Charfe and Gardner (2020) is cited in 75% of the papers that we mark every year which demonstrates the impact and the place that Social Pedagogy has taken on our course and our delivery. – Thank you Lowis

Appendix 3 – Master Programme, Student Testimonial

E-mail Correspondence

M aura Samonen<maura_samonen@hotmail.com>

25th October 2025

Hi Lowis,

I found the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership led by Lowis Charfe by chance and I'm really glad I did. I wanted to build on my work experience gained as a trainer and culture lead for Skanska UK, and have a qualification that recognised and strengthened my knowledge to make it feel "official".

This MA I felt complemented that perfectly. It showed me what learning could be like: engaging, co-created and creative, while still grounded in solid theory and research. I learned so much through the process, about theory, practice, academics, and many of those things continue to shape my work today as an EDI trainer and facilitator supporting adults in organisations across the UK. For example, when discussing boundaries at work, I often draw on the concept of the three Ps: Professional, Personal and Private. And when designing courses, I make sure to consider if the content engaging the head, heart and hands. The course genuinely changed how I think about learning, connection and the role we all play in creating spaces where people can grow.

Regards

Maura Samonen

(MA in Social pedagogy Leadership graduate)

Appendix 4 – HLS Examples of Practice – Jane Hylton – LCC and NHP

https://www.humanlearning.systems/uploads/NationalHouseProject.pdf

A Learning Community-Collaboration between The National House Project and Lancashire County Council's Permanence Service for Children Looked and Leaving Care.

I am a team manager for the Development Team. The team sits within Lancashire's Permanence Service for Children in Our Care and Leaving Care.

An opportunity came my way to take part in a Relational Practice Peer Learning programme for 12 months hosted by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and Esmée Foundation. I was particularly keen for Lancashire to take part in this in collaboration with the National House Project, due their ethos of relational practice at its heart along with co-production with young people.

HLS had been initially introduced to me during my 2-year journey on a MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership. On a professional and personal level, it has been fundamental for me to continue my social pedagogy exploration with my colleagues and services that are pivotal in providing support to care experienced young people and of course young people themselves.

The MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership has cemented an ambition and a curiosity to create an environment where practitioners and young people can develop an equitable safe space to explore relational practice and how Social Pedagogy and its concepts can have a huge impact on practice.

Lancashire's Children's Social Care has been judged as Good for the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers. The report identifies that relationship-based practice is embedded across all services and is at the heart of achieving positive outcomes for children. This is extremely positive, and I believe the momentum and appetite to explore relationships, love and belonging is present for practitioners and young people to discuss. this in more detail and the impact for those young people leaving care.

With the support of senior managers, who incidentally were also curious about social pedagogy concepts I thought the Peer Learning Programme would give me and colleagues the time and space to explore the meaning of relational practice. It was fundamental to have care experienced young people and multi-agency colleagues along for the journey which would take place as a learning community.

It's probably worth mentioning at this point that HLS and in particular the Learning Cycle wasn't at the forefront of my mind, however midway through the programme it became clear to me that HLS was at the heart of this. I'll explain more later.....

The initial focus of the project was to explore and implement a Learning Community to explore Relational Practice with a particular focus on Social Pedagogy concepts. We

envisaged the project would have a focus on interdependency and creating connected communities for young people leaving care.
In doing so, there would be a particular focus on co-production of services that support young people leaving care, and the value of co-designing and co-producing services alongside young people.

Another key aspect of the Learning Community was to build relationships with key partners such as housing and health with a view to reflect on what is relational practice and how this can impact on the desired outcome or 'System' for young people leaving care.

I always experience a little nervousness or self-doubt about asking colleagues to spend some time away from their usual 'day job' You can appreciate in the world of Children's Services, the 'day job' is incredibly busy. The same can be said of colleagues in other services, their work is no less busy but just a little different.
There was also an added challenge of young people coming along to the learning community, how can we make this interesting and relevant and at times fun. How will they feel in a room full of 'Professionals' (if I could get the room full!!) how will 'professionals' feel with young people there, could they have open and honest conversations, would they be open to learning as equals?

However, I had an advantage which made it that bit easier for people to take part, the practitioners anyway! A few months previously I had delivered several workshops on Social Pedagogy to managers and practitioners within Children's services. For me it was important to share my learning and knowledge from the SP leadership MA that I mentioned previously. Fair to say this led to a level of curiousness, for some anyway. I personally feel this contributed to people wanting to be part of the learning community, plus I had established a good working relationship with them.

The learning Community consisted of a wide variety of practitioners, these included IRO, Health, Virtual School, Children in our care and Leaving care Team managers, housing worker, care experienced engagement workers, house project lead and house project practitioners. Some care experienced young people attended the initial communities, but attendance wasn't consistent.

Where we would meet for the learning community was important. We wanted to stay away from the formal 'training' rooms an opted for the Lancashire House project base, with bean bags, sofa's, kettle for brews. The informality appeared to help with conversation flow and people appeared more relaxed which certainly helped with building relationships within the group. We actually took the learning community outdoors too. There is a great statement on the Thempra website which summaries brilliantly about the common third "

" It is not possible to teach. But it is possible to create situations, wherein it is impossible not to learn" Orienteering was a fun way to capture this statement. It was a lovely sight to see practitioners helping each other to read a map, problem solving and sharing more

about their service and how they can connect to support young people more effectively was just brilliant.

The first learning community gave us all an opportunity to get to know each other along with our values and what brought us to the jobs we do. Everyone brought an item to the group which meant something to them. It was so lovely to hear so many different stories and experiences, sometimes surprising, some very funny, but all personal. This was to be a recurring theme throughout the meetings, having space and time to talk and reflect on our practice and learn from each other.

Throughout 2023 the learning community met, usually monthly.

We shared tasks and activities that could be ways of building relationships with young people.
We shared tools from a social pedagogy perspective (use of posters, Haltung, use of the 4 F's) to support thinking and to take back and use within teams.

Established a core team to continue to work as a peer learning group. Linking this to HLS, this could form the start of a Community of Practice with shared agenda and facilitation. This would involve young people.
We also spent some time going back to the session kindly facilitated by Lowis Charfe about Participation and Co-Production and spent some time thinking about the opportunities for this within the organisations and services we work within. We then ended on a Pledge. This pledge is something that we have all committed to try.

What participants told us at the evaluation stage of the programme:

The sessions created space for interesting discussing and reflection. The main learning from colleagues as part of the learning circle was:
Things can be tricky when your own Haltung/value base, does not align to that of the organisation (or with that of colleagues within your organisation) and can stifle the opportunity to create change and do things differently. This is not a reason to stop trying.

They have benefited from learning more about the roles and responsibilities of others. Small changes can make a difference – when exploring values, moving this up to become a priority when in supervision so that this forms the basis for discussion – and not just focusing on values, but how these are evident. Keeping young people at the heart of the discussions taking place.
There are more opportunities for co-production – we cannot underestimate the work that young people want to be involved in. Examples have been shared about movement towards this because of the peer learning sessions. For example, young people taking a chairing role in an awards panel, plans for development of tools within the virtual school, policy team linking in more closely with young people across the House Project community to discuss their views and wishes.

Unfortunately, we have not had the level of input from young people as initially hoped. If we were to do this again, we would probably involve young people earlier – at the point

of putting the idea together – rather than inviting them into the learning circle at a later date. It was the right thing to bring young people into the learning circle and not to have something separate specifically for young people as their expertise and input is essential.

The learning community has definitely made an impact on all those that have attended. It was a great example of relational practice – we were able to better understand one another's roles, and the purpose of their service.

It has been a starting point and something that colleagues are keen to continue – having a shared space with colleagues and young people to develop practice and share ideas to improve services and provide more opportunities for young people leaving care. It is hoped that this can form the basis for developing a Community of Practice in Lancashire with continued focus on the pledges that were made.

It has continued to highlight the complexities of the system we work in and that coming together to continue to explore and learn together can lead to good outcomes.

While we may not have discussed HLS within the group, for me there is a clear connection to HLS and the learning community. We initially thought about developing a Thinking Tool for practitioners when exploring relational practice, a tangible outcome of the 12 month programme. However this was not achieved but when I have reflected on this, the Learning Community is the Thinking Tool.

The Peer Learning programme has come to an end now, however colleagues are keen to continue to meet as a community of practice which is so positive and a fantastic outcome.

Appendix 5 – Empowerment HLS Case Study

https://www.humanlearning.systems/uploads/Empowerment.pdf

| Overview

My name is Mike Crowther and it is my privilege to be the CEO of Empowerment, a Blackpool based charity. I have worked in the charity sector for 25 years and been in management positions for 15 of them. My journey in management has been a transformational one, from unquestioning acceptance of the New Public Management ethos to having my eyes opened by Human learning Systems.

Our work brings us alongside people with mental health issues, learning and physical disabilities, people with addictions, homeless people, victims of domestic abuse and those who are lonely and socially isolated. In brief, we work alongside people whose lives are messy and complex and who face on a daily basis an overwhelming system which doesn't seem to learn from what clearly isn't working, and in fact makes their situation worse.

Our excitement at discovering HLS via our initial discovery of social pedagogy has begun to inform our work on a daily basis. However, seeking to change the system 'out there', whilst not focusing on our own practice, frankly lets us off the hook as an organisation. Therefore, our initial challenge is to engage in a process of transformation of ourselves.

Our purpose is to use the principles of Human Learning Systems to radically change the way we do things, to be a living example of what can be done when we accept that being human is messy, we are making mistakes and learning from them continually and that our organisational system has to reflect that, rather than seeking to control what it can't really control anyway.

The story of change can only start with myself. I became a Manager and subsequently a Leader of an organisation during a time when the New Public Management was at its zenith. For me, this was as part of the New Labour government's 'Supporting People' programme, aimed at providing support services for people who were homeless or at risk of homeless. At the time, this was seen by many of us a significant investment in vital services, however it came with a very comprehensive framework all centred on achieving outcomes which were actually based on the 'Every Child Matters' framework.

As a young manager I bought into this way of working, wholeheartedly and unquestioningly. Prior to this, I had spent 10 years as a frontline support worker supporting homeless people, and it was as if I managed to forget all that had taught me, i.e. change happens through great relationships and placing the person being supported genuinely at the centre of the process. Now, from my staff (and I did view them as ***my staff***), I wanted paperwork completed accurately and on time. E.g. why weren't initial

assessments being completed during the first appointment? I insisted on ending support for those who were appearing not to engage with our support and I asked for constant data on outcomes, outcomes and more outcomes.

Ironically, there was a big emphasis on 'Service User Involvement', so as to consult and engage with our service users (they weren't people, merely users of our service). I can honestly state that I can't point to one single example of change implemented as a result of involving service users, it was tokenistic and fake. However, we could proudly point to our extensive service user involvement in our monitoring reports. Interestingly enough, money was deviated from frontline support to fund positions in our organisations whose purpose was solely to ensure our extensive performance monitoring requirements were completed accurately and on time.

And so, my management approach was molded and shaped by the New Public Management ethos. Fast forward several years, and after a series of personal setbacks, mental illness, relationship breakdown, I also recognised so much of my

unhappiness was based on the tension I had been living with for years. This was the fact that I was leading in a way that was actually utterly against my own values, which somehow I had managed to bury. Being a leader had become a miserable experience, so in 2017 when I landed at Empowerment I knew that something had to radically change. However, for that I needed a language and a framework for that change to happen...

And that was Social Pedagogy! A colleague had started studying the M.A. in Social Pedagogical Leadership at UCLAN and was effusive in expressing her excitement at the discovery of this amazing set of ideas, so I had to find out for myself. And, now I too am enrolled on the M.A. and loving every moment of it. It's been a journey of discovering something which I have always known instinctively, because it comes from my own Haltung!

Social Pedagogy is itself a hard concept to define succinctly, it is a patchwork of ideas, but for me it essentially boils down to this: we are all human beings, we grow and flourish when we journey side by side with each other, learning together collaboratively and not in competition. The key to it all is developing great and trusting relationships with each other, relationships based on true equality.

It is unapologetically positive about the unique potential of each human being, in all of our messiness and complexity. The implications for leadership are therefore clear; hierarchical, process driven forms of management with an emphasis on achieving outcomes is just wrong. It utterly ignores the reality of our lives, and is based not on trust and meaningful relationships, but on an attempt to impose a false construct on human beings, and.... it doesn't work!

Vision, Mission, Values

Social Pedagogy gave me a language and a pathway to journey alongside colleagues at Empowerment. We spent a year developing together a new Vision, Mission and Values, a set of words which would truly reflect what we do.

So our Vision now is to:

To work alongside people in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast who feel they have no voice and are not listened to; so that they are empowered to bring about real and positive change to their own lives and the lives of others.

Our Mission now is to:

To Advocate To Co-Produce

To Challenge Domestic Abuse and all of its consequences

To Tackle Social Isolation and Loneliness

To Recognise the Uniqueness and Potential of Everyone!

Together we will bring about 'Lived Experience' Inspired Change in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast

All of this is to be underpinned by our Values:

Working with Kindness
Working for Justice
Working towards Equality for everyone

The key words and phrases are 'alongside', 'together' and 'the uniqueness and potential of everyone.'

Now, we know that Vision, Mission and Values don't embed the change itself, in fact in my experience most are ignored whilst we get on with our day jobs. What is different, is that there is now a passion within Empowerment to live out these words in our everyday lives but also to hold us to account when we start to drift into the old ways. Most importantly, they have changed the conversation within Empowerment.

| Current Approach

Discovering Human Learning Systems.... The eureka moment!

Whilst studying for the M.A., we were introduced to Human Learning Systems, I have to say that the title didn't immediately excite me, but after reading some of the materials, it was like a eureka moment, a joyous recognition that there was a movement gathering around a set of ideas and principles which were absolutely centred on the actual reality of our lives. The last remnants of the tension between how the New Public Management

ethos had influenced me had drained away. Here was a way to be really great charity without having to behave in a way that went against our instincts, our haltung!

Here are some of the ways in which we have introduced Human Learning Systems into our approach both internally and externally:

Human:

We absolutely sign up the HLS notion that the people who work for Empowerment want to do a great job and therefore we trust them. We don't micromanage anybody, we work hard to give everyone the freedom they need to be brilliant. When we recruit, we don't hold formal interviews, we have conversations with people wanting to work with us. Passion and excitement are what we are looking for, not qualifications or the ability to answer all the questions! Supervisions and Appraisals are now based on each individual's challenges and aspirations, not on outcomes to be achieved.

When things get difficult between colleagues (which always happens, we are complex human beings trying to exist in the same space as a diverse range of people), we don't have telling offs or people being bollocked. We have difficult conversations (a concept borrowed from Brene Brown I think), so as to sensitively and respectfully resolve an issue.

Wellbeing is so important to us, the people who work at Empowerment are passionate individuals, but who are so busy working alongside complex individuals that very often they don't look after their own welfare. We have taken active steps to address this, with built in reflection time, a Time to Talk Room where colleagues can offload and share.

And being a Time to Change organisation we have sought to rid our organisation of the stigma of mental health. I share openly with colleagues my own experiences of depression and anxiety over the years.

I am so passionate about removing fear from the workplace and all the people who work here relaxing into being amazing individuals. We have a long way to go but we have made a start.

Learning

Embedding the HLS approach into Empowerment has been a development of the social pedagogical approach based on mutual learning. Allied to this is our newfound willingness to take risks, make mistakes and learn from it. So what happens when something goes wrong here at Empowerment. Well the first thing we do is encourage a culture of honesty, for all of our team to feel comfortable about sharing with us when things go wrong. In response, we as an organisation welcome the honesty and agree that we will have a 'Learning Get Together' to understand what we have learnt and what needs to be adapted or changed for the future. There is no blame, but there is accountability.

However, by seeking to remove the feelings of shame and embarrassment which leads often to covering up, we are working towards a much healthier way of working. By the way, it is readily

acknowledged within Empowerment that the person responsible for the most mistakes is... me! I think it is important to publicly acknowledge this (not always an easy thing to do), but is liberating to acknowledge my own imperfections by being vulnerable with the people I work with.

Systems

The Human Learning Systems approach is also informing the way we deliver services. I have to say that significantly, all of our funders both from formal local authority commissioning teams or grant making organisations such as the National Lottery Community Fund, are exemplary in allowing us the freedom to develop services and projects. There is already a great deal of trust which has been built through relationships. Fundamental to this is Empowerment being utterly honest when things aren't going well as we had hoped.

The epitome of this approach has been our Lived Experience Team (LET), funded by the Lottery as part of the Fulfilling Lives programme in Blackpool. This is a team led by and comprised of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage; namely homelessness, substance misuse, mental illness and offending behaviour. Their role is to work towards system change inspired by the experiences, knowledge and learning they have built up over the years as people who have engaged with the complex and often undo-ordinated system of agencies. Some of these remarkable people were living chaotic lives for 20-30 years and now they have a passion for changing the system.

It is striking that the approach they have followed is pure HLS. It is Human because first of all, I and the rest of Empowerment have never dictated to the team how and what they should do. They have done that themselves. At the heart of their approach has been developing a set of non- antagonistic relationships across the system with commissioners and designers of the services they used to engage with.

Then they have sought to Learn, and they have done this by conversation and listening to people sleeping rough, been struck off services for poor engagement and people who have just been released from prison. Because they have worked on the relationships, this learning is then shared with commissioners and service providers. People experiencing multiple disadvantages perhaps know better than anyone else what happens when the system acts in a disjointed way to try and achieve their own outcomes without considering the impact on other parts of the system.

The LET have by no means changed the system, but they can now point to real and significant change which has been achieved by their HLS approach.

WHAT NEXT

So, this is the start of our journey, we have a long way to go, but it is exciting about where we are going, wherever that is? When I was a devout follower of the New Public Management, I would inevitable say the following words, ‘We need a plan’. In fact,colleagues would mimic me, ‘we need a plan, we need a plan etc.’ And the truth is, I did,

here was a new challenge and I wanted to exert control over it, so let’s plan for it in the minutest detail. Once I had the plan in place then I could relax and move on to the next issue.

My new social pedagogical/HLS approach has removed my need for a plan (well, not as much) However, our plan for furthering the transformation of our wonderful organisation is that there is no plan. We will continue to learn and listen and then organically the transformation will take place. Even writing that, still makes me a little nervous, but I know it’s right.

Finally, because my own values match the way I work, being at work is much more fun, far less pressured and I genuinely think I and we are better because of the changes we have made.

Appendix 6 - Testimonial from the Director of We Are Juno

E-mail Correspondence

From: Sophie Clarke <sophie.clarke@thisiscapacity.co.uk>

Sent: 07 June 2022 11:05

To: Cath Larkins <School of Social Work, Care & Community>

<CLarkins@uclan.ac.uk>; Lowis Charfe <School of Social Work, Care & Community>

<LCharfe@uclan.ac.uk>

Subject: Juno Evaluation Project

Dear Cath and Lowis,

Lovely to meet you properly last week, thank you for taking the time to travel to Liverpool for the Juno meeting. It was a great session!!

Having reviewed your bid and responses as a panel, it's my absolute pleasure to say after a lot of thought and discussion, we'd like to invite you to be our evaluation partner for Juno.

Your skills, your values, your approach to working collaboratively with young people and your expertise are exactly what we are looking for; we'd love to work with you over the coming 12 months to make Juno the very best it can be.

If you're happy to move forward, it would be good to get some time in soon to talk through next steps – let me know when might work over the coming fortnight or so 😃

All very best,

Sophie

Appendix 7 - List of Publications

This appendix relates to Part Two: Publications for This Degree. All of the publications discussed in part two and have been listed here in chronological order to match the discussion within the main body of the thesis. Barnett's (1997) critical analysis, critical reflexivity and critical action framework has been used as a reflective model and linked to Smith's (2020) reflective chronological activity, the aim of which is to provide a structured narrative and synthesis of the body of work being discussed in a thesis.

The two key themes within the thesis are also identified in the table below and to recap these are:

- Theme One- Advancing the Teaching of Social Pedagogy
- Theme Two – The Introduction of Social Pedagogy

Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Key Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflexivity**	**Critical Action – Wider Impact**
2019	*Social Pedagogy and Social Work* SAGE Publishing I co-authored 50% of the book, writing the following: Introduction	Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	Theme One – Written as a core text book for the BA in Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation I developed and led at the University of Lancashire. This was the first UK academic textbook to set out all the core theories, concepts and methods, historical developments and practical applications that the students required. Theme Two - Due to the lack of social pedagogical historical development here in the UK, in particular England, the published texts up until the publication	My starting point was to write a textbook for the BA students and consolidate all of the materials I believed they would find helpful. As course leader, I knew there was a need for an introductory text for students. The book allowed me a space to explore and consider what I had learnt around the discipline of social pedagogy. To have critical	The book has sold 895 copies so far and is part of the SAGE Knowledge digital library for social science course (see Appendix) Positive feedback from academic peers regarding the impact of the book on SAGE website (see Appendix)

	Chapter 1 Chapter 2 Chapter 4 Conclusion As well as contributing to chapter 7.		of this book, had critically explored social pedagogy from a distinctly European perspective. Any discussion regarding UK social work had been centred on children's residential care and foster care services. The book widened this focus and is the first to focus on applying social pedagogy to social work in general. The book contains original and substantive focus on the use of social pedagogy in social work practice areas such as adult social care, youth justice, advocacy. There is also original and substantive focus on the application of social pedagogy to address practice issues such as risk assessments and developing the risk-sensible approach, participation and relationship-based practice.	discussions with the co-author Ali Gardner and social pedagogy colleagues around what fitted within a UK context and how we could translate aspects so that UK practitioners would understand the were explaining and see the value of it. I really enjoyed the writing process. It was the beginning of me cementing my reputation as one of the leading academics in social pedagogy here in the UK. I realised that there was also a link to social work practice due to my own positionality and professional experience. Also, the book would have a much wider audience here in the UK but also internationally if linked directly to social work practice. The book helped me identify that an important starting point for any true social pedagogical practice was Haltung. It encouraged me to have conversations with German social pedagogues to learn more and	Professor Xavier Ucar (2020), Spain's leading social pedagogy professor, noted its significant contribution to the discourse on social pedagogy in the European Social Work journal. Full article: Social pedagogy and social work (tandfonline.com) The book has been endorsed by the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA). It has also been adopted onto reading lists including: BA Working With Children and Young People (Kingston University) BA Social Care: Policy and Practice (University of Lancashire) BA Social Work (University of Lancashire)

				reflect on how it could be an important theory for UK practitioners and learners.	This has become the core text book here in the UK for anybody interested in learning more about social pedagogy and social work. The publication of the book led to Chief Social Worker for Adults, Lynn Romeo talking about it. Ali Gardner (co-author) wrote a blog on the Chief SW website highlighting the importance of social pedagogy. https://socialworkwithadults.blog.gov.uk/2018/12/19/social-pedagogy-social-what/ Delivered workshops at the Social Pedagogy Development (SPDN) Network and Social Pedagogy Professional Association annual conference.

					I have organised and hosted three SPDN at the University of Lancashire. SAGE publish the book internationally and it isn't sold just in the UK.
Date Published 2019	**Title and Co-author Contribution** *Social Pedagogy as A Perspective in the UK,* Chapter in*: Insight Report: Social Pedagogy as a Meaningful Perspective for Education and Social Care* ThemPra Social Pedagogy Publishing As lead author I set the focus and direction of the chapter. I co-authored 50% of the book, writing the following:	**Theme** Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication** Part of the MOOC project Social Pedagogy Across Europe. This project was the first to bring together different perspectives of social pedagogy theory and practice with eight organisations from six European countries. Giving learners a broader understanding of the differences, context and similarities of SP practice. Differing themes were developed by each of the partner organisations to highlight the use of social pedagogy in practice. Each session had the same outline to provide continuity throughout the course, with a discussion around the	**Critical Reflection** Being involved in this project has been the highlight of my academic career so far. It was challenging at times and time consuming. The biggest challenge was managing the divide between some of the academics and social pedagogue practitioners. Academic egos often got in the way of open discussions. The project allowed me an opportunity to develop a deeper and more international understanding of the historical, theoretical and practice developments of social pedagogy. It gave me access and time to talk and discuss social pedagogy with leading academics and organisations. I developed a deeper understanding of the praxis	**Critical Action – Impact** To date the MOOC has had over 6,000 participants enroll globally. It has a feedback rating of 4.6 out of 5 from participants and 96% of participants stating they liked the course. https://www.coursera.org/learn/social-pedagogy-europe The open access course is hosted by Coursera, the world's biggest online learning platform. It is aimed at practitioners across educational and social care settings as well as students. In 2018 I organised and hosted the MOOC 'Fire starter' event at the University of Lancashire with around 250 attendees

	Features of Social pedagogy in the UK Social Pedagogy Illustrative Example - St Christopher's Fellowship		historical developments and present context of social pedagogy practice. The theme of our (the UK's) session centred around the importance of creativity in social pedagogical practice. Creativity I felt was being overlooked as a valuable resource in social work practice. Our section provides an original focus on creativity within social work practice whilst also aiming to support participants to feel confident in developing creativity in relational practice. Two original and illustrative practice examples are set out in the chapter detailing the application of creativity through a social pedagogical lens. Again, the aim of which is to introduce theory and also help participants explore their own ability to be creative. Our session expanded the discussion around the importance of creativity as an aspect of social pedagogical practice, set out in Hatton's (2013) book Social	of social pedagogical as an ethical orientation and that it is not a method. During the European project visits I was able to see asocial pedagogy in action and meet social pedagogues. This helped me reflect on how social pedagogical practice could be adapted into an UK setting. It allowed me to create professional relationships and friendships that have continued. It also continue to strengthen my position as a leading academic here in the UK but also internationally. I have utilised these links and learning within my teaching. The project also increased my curiosity and belief in the importance of ethics and values as a starting point for relational practice. I began to expand my knowledge around the German theory of Haltung.	from across the UK and Europe. The aim of this event was to build interest for the launch of the MOOC and have people sign up for the course. The MOOC is used by several organisations – such as Empowerment Advocacy (Blackpool), We Are Juno (Liverpool), National House Project – as an induction and training tool for new staff and volunteers. For the BA Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation course, comparative module, I utilised my links to have some of the MOOC partners do on-line sessions with the students. Assisting them to gain a broader understanding of social pedagogy and develop their own practice. I have also organised various student trips to visit social pedagogical projects. The most notable of which was the

			Pedagogy in the UK. It also linked to the SPPA charter which highlights the importance of creativity. The MOOC is a free open access course hosted by Coursera, the world's biggest online learning platform. The MOOC is aimed at practitioners across educational and social care settings as well as students.		trip to Germany with the BASPAP students. Through my MOOC links I arranged for them to spend a day shadowing social pedagogues in their daily practice and then the day after held reflective session with the students and some of the social pedagogues. An amazing and impactful experience that directly changed some of the student's understanding.
Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflection**	**Critical Action – Impact**
July 2020	*Creating a learning space: Using experiential learning and creativity in the teaching and learning of social pedagogy*. International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 2020. Vol. 9(1). As lead author I proposed the idea to the students and teaching team. I then coordinated the	Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy	Due to the standardisation of teaching and assessments and a historical learning culture (Kolb, 2015) in UK HEI's, experiential learning is often overlooked as a teaching method. This article addressed this and demonstrated the importance of experiential learning particularly with regards to social pedagogy. Addressing this gap around the teaching of social pedagogy and the importance of creativity, it explored how creative methods were used to enhance learning by students and lecturers.	At the point of writing, the third-year students were beginning their final year of the BASPAP degree course. And this special edition of the IJSP seemed like an excellent opportunity to reflect and share all of our learning so far. Special issue: Creativity and Social Pedagogy – Science Open	To date the article has been viewed 7480 times showing that there is wider interest in experiential teaching methods. Along with the student co-authors we ran a workshop on the key themes of the article at the SPPA annual conference in 2020. This was attended by around 30 participants, many

	discussions and writing process. I co-authored around 20% of the article and led the editing process. My written contributions were the: Abstract Introduction Experiential Learning and Social Pedagogy Conclusion		The article was co-authored with students and some of the teaching team. Offering a unique opportunity for the students to write reflexively about their experiences of the experiential teaching methods used in their learning of social pedagogy. The article also explained the importance of creativity in social pedagogical practice and built on the published work of Sir Ken Robinson. The article used Robinson's (2006) as a basis to explore the importance of creativity whilst then going on to demonstrate practical experiential learning activities. It also built on the work of Hatton (2013) and Chambers and Petrie (2009) who all identified the importance of embedding creativity into social pedagogical practice. Co-production of the article was fundamental as working in partnership and equitably is a key aspect of social pedagogical practice. Up to date, there has been no other IJSP article co-produced and co-written with students.	This was my first academic article submission, and I found the process difficult. The peer feedback was quite a difficult process, and it made me question the content of the article, my ability to write at an academic level and produce a coherent narrative and argument. I also reflected a lot on the social pedagogical value of equity and the Freire (1970) concept of the emancipation of unheard voices (the student's). I had to try and balanced this with the academic requirements of the IJSP. It was difficult but also an enjoyable process of co-producing and co-writing. Trying to maintain and practice the values of equity whilst also making sure of academic rigor and meeting deadlines for submissions was challenging at times. I also had to defend some of the student's writing from criticisms within the feedback from the peer reviewers and found the process of not being able to have a direct conversation with them, frustrating.	of whom were academics or students. One of the co-authors and social pedagogy graduate, Dan Nester has gone on to write a chapter in book on children's participation. FM-01-9781804559413 1..11 (emerald.com)

				However, it gave me a good understanding of the difference between writing for a journal and writing a book. I have since been able to adapt my writing for the different mediums. The article also allows myself and my teaching team space to reflect, discuss and listen to the experiences of the students. It then helped course development but also helped me feel more confident in my ability to use experiential teaching methods and to learn from the students (Freire, 1970). The importance of relationships and human connections in aiding deeper levels of learning and understanding were surfaced for me.	
Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflection**	**Critical Action – Impact**
July 2020	*Does My Haltung Look Big In This?': The use of social pedagogical theory for the development of ethical and value-led practice,*	Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	This article is the first written in English to explain in detail the German concept of Haltung and link it to social work practice.	This article was a culmination of discussions with German social pedagogues and reading the very limited materials writing in English where Haltung was briefly mentioned. It allowed me the time and space to develop an understanding of the concept of	One of the most read articles to date on the IJSP with over 20,000 views, 3724 downloads and Altimetric of 25.

	International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 9(1): 11 As lead author I wrote around 60% of this article. I presented the idea and structure for the article to my co-author. I also undertook the editing process as well as writing the: Abstract Introduction Haltung Explained English social work practice Social Work Values Conclusion		The article also focuses on the importance of ethical and value led practice which is often talked about. This article offers unique insight into how the application of Haltung can help shape ethical relational practice. Haltung is an applied theory and supports critical reflection on how our values and understanding of ethics shape our professional practice. Along with my co-author we had developed the Values Alive in Practice activity which we had successfully used in several training sessions. The article explains this activity and how it can be used to support practitioners explore their 'Haltung' and professional values.	Haltung in a UK context and an argument for it being the basis of relational practice. There is no direct translation of the concept in English and therefore I had to make sure that this article offered a detailed and easily understood explanation of the theory whilst also linking it to a different cultural environment here in the UK. I enjoyed the writing and submission process and found one of the peer reviewer's comments very helpful. Their feedback identified other German sources that with translation support from German colleagues, helped deepen and refine my understanding. I became increasing aware of the need for the discussion of Haltung to be the starting point in any teaching and training around relational practice. All relation practice must start with an exploration and understanding of our own values and ethics and how	Having been widely viewed, it would suggest that there is a global interest in the importance of ethical and value-based social pedagogical and social work practice. After the publication of the article, I was asked to support a Spanish social pedagogical colleague to undertake focus group for her research around values and ethics here in the UK. The aim was to add a comparative element to her final thesis. Corbella's finding were written here: https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/ijsp/article/pubid/IJSP-11-6/ The Values Alive in Practice activity has been embedded into the mandatory training for new staff members of Children's Services within

				they shape and influence our interactions. On-going discussion within the SP network led me to then develop the concept of haltung in relation to organisational culture. This became a core theme in the development of the MA in SPL course. It's the publication I am most proud of to date. It also then made me consider the importance of the Danish concept of the 3Ps which became an emerging source for my next publications.	Lancashire County Council. To date around 60 new staff have attended training where this has been used. I ran a session for a Learning Community Partnership funded by Esme Fairburn Foundation. The aim of which was to embed social pedagogy practice in strengthening their relational approach. I ran a session on the importance of Haltung as a base for relational practice and used the Values Alive in Practice activity. This session was attended by around 15 people who came from a range of children's services as well as care-experienced young people.
Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflection**	**Critical Action – Impact**
Oct 2021	*Human Learning System Meets Social Pedagogy*, in *Human Learning System: Public Services for The Real World,* Edited by Brogan, A., Eichsteller, G.,	Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	Human Learning System (HLS) is an emerging and growing community of academics and practitioners aimed at developing relational changing public services. Underpinned by complexity	As soon as I read the HLS report I could immediately see the synergies between both SP and HLS. However, the practical application of HLS was missing in all of the publications. I saw how the	To date there have been 5985 requests for access to the free e-book that this chapter is part of. Demonstrating a sizable audience interested in reading more about the HLS approach.

	Hawkins, M., Hesselgreaves, H., Jennions, B. N., Lowe, T., Plimmer, D., Terry, V., & Williams, G. Published by ThemPra Social Pedagogy. I wrote 50% of the chapter and was lead author. I approached by co-author with the proposed structured the outline of the chapter. I also wrote the: Introduction The Diamond Model Haltung Reflection and Reflexivity Head, Heart and Hands I co-wrote the conclusion.		theory and linked to the work of Hilary Cottam it aims to support the radical change needed within the organisation and delivery of public services. It was often difficult for people to visualise how they could apply the HLS concept to their practice and organisational culture. It was often seen as a vague but interesting paradigm. Out chapter has made a significant and original contribution in utilising social pedagogy theories to explain how HLS can be developed in practice and within public service culture. Due to a lack of academic resources focusing on relational leadership, this chapter became a core academic text on the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership.	application of social pedagogy would support the network to embed HLS and began to introduce it to the growing network. I'd also begun to understand that we needed more than just individual social pedagogy practitioners and that social pedagogy could support positive organisational change. Especially after being introduce to the work of Laloux (2016) around TEAL and self-managed teams and Hilary Cottam's (2018) Radical Help. As a result I co-produced the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership with ThemPra, run via the University of Lancashire. Writing the chapter was an interesting and at times challenging process. Having discussions with my co-author and considering what aspects of social pedagogical theories and concepts fitted with the other themes and chapters of the book. However, this process again assisted me to consolidate and gain new knowledge and see things from differing perspectives.	After writing the chapter I have become one of the key contributors and member of the HLS community. Attended meetings around the continued development of HLS and research. I have also run various webinar session for HLS events focusing on how the application of social pedagogy can support the development of relational leadership. I have presented a workshop at the last three annual conferences, again focusing on specific social pedagogical theories and their application in helping develop HLS practice. After my second workshop in 2024 I was asked to contribute a book chapter based on my topic – the use of the 3 Ps framework to navigate power

				An emerging source was our discussion around the importance of how SP can be used and embedded in every aspect of an organisation and not just in the direct work of practitioners.	in relational practice. This would be part of the on-going book series *Futures in Public Management: The Emerging Relational Approach to Public Services,* Emerald Publishing.
Date Published Nov 2023	**Title and Co-author Contribution** *Ethical and relational leadership in a complex world: the use of the Human Learning Systems and social pedagogical leadership framework to navigate complexity.* International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 12(1): 16. 100% written by me.	**Theme** Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication** The first article to explain and link social pedagogy to the development of ethical and relational leadership. Written by me due to the lack of academic materials around this topic area which were needed for the MASPL students. It also built on the introductory chapter detailed above in the HLS e-book, explaining the social pedagogy leadership framework and the application of this and core theories in more detail.	**Critical Reflection** I found the writing process again emancipatory and difficult at the same time. I was able to step out of the *known* and begin to consider what I believed needed to be focused on in the development of relational leadership. This was the first publication I wrote independently and was stepping out of the comfort of having a co-author. Due to my relationships within the social pedagogy network and with UCLan colleagues, I had great support from people whose opinions and	**Critical Action – Impact** To date the article has been viewed 1978 times and downloaded 253 times. https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/ijsp/article/pubid/IJSP-12-16/ I have run an on-line workshop explaining the SPL framework as part of a Social Pedagogy Development Network event. This was attended by around 25 people and aimed at introducing people within the network to HLS and how they can develop relational leadership. The framework has been adopted by ThemPra and is a

			I developed the social pedagogy leadership framework as a visual aid for learners and practitioners to consider how and where they could begin to address the issues of ethical and relational practice and change organisational culture in complex public service work. It is an applied reflective tool.	feedback matter to me. I found that being able to verbalise my thoughts around the framework assisted in the writing process. I was also open to constructive feedback from them too. The peer review process was again challenging, I'm sure everybody finds the process of having your work scrutinised and suggested changes made, uncomfortable. Due to the time and effort spent and the belief in what we write, it can feel like a personal attack; however, I quickly move from this mindset. I always need to allow a short time for these private feelings to disappear and return to the reviewer's feedback with fresh eyes. I find that reviewer's feedback often supports my critical thinking and having a differing perspective, assists me in considering if I have structured and made clear my arguments. During this writing process the emerging theme of power in relational practice began to surface. And as mentioned above I ran various workshop sessions around	core aspect of teaching on their Relational Leadership short course. Which to date has had over 200 participants complete the course. The article has also been adopted onto the reading list for the social work degree course at the University West, Trollhattan, Sweden. This course has around 50 students annually (see appendix). The article and leadership framework have become a core teaching tool and required reading for their social work students. I have also been invited to be a guest speaker to the students at University West, Trollhattan in November, to talk through the SPL framework.

				this topic as I began to explore it more detail. Leading to the next set of publications detailed below.	
Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflection**	**Critical Action – Impact**
2024	Making Sense of Power and Politics in Everyday Practice through the 3 Ps, in Baikady (ed) Oxford Handbook of Power, Politics and Social Work (2024), Oxford, Oxford University Press Co-authored with 50% written contribution from me. I was the lead author and put forward the proposal and focus of the article to my co-author. I wrote the following contributions: Introduction	Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy	Along with my co-author we expanded and developed the Danish social pedagogical concept of the 3Ps (Jappe, 2010) to focus specifically on the issue of power. Before this the 3 Ps (Jappe, 2010) had been used to look at the boundaries within relational practice. Our expansion of the framework to directly look at the issue of power was original in thought and application. Offering an alternative perspective that starts from an individual's subjective understanding of power dynamics within their practice, it offers a substantive contribution to academic discussions around power and relational practice.	I responded to a global call for contributions to a new book being published on power, politics and social work. From my previous article I had begun to consider and discuss with social pedagogue colleagues the issue of power and relational practice. I was aware that many of the authors contributing to the book would take a macro viewpoint of power, politics and social work practice. I felt that these important issues needed to also be considered from a personal point of view, linking to my previous work around Haltung. I was correct in this	Published by the largest university press in the world with a global reach. The book has a diverse range of contributions from distinguished academics from the Global South and North. It makes a significant contribution in discussing the challenges faced by the international social work community considering current political and power structures. I ran a workshop at the annual HLS conference in June 2024. I used the basis of the 3 Ps framework to focus on power

	The case studies 3 Ps With a Human Rights Context I also contributed to other sections of the article with regards to social work practice. Making sure that what was being written was applicable to contemporary social work practice.			assumption and our chapter is the only one in the book looking at the issue from a micro perspective within a macro-overview. The aim of this chapter was to broaden the awareness of the usefulness and application social pedagogy and how the application of the 3 Ps framework can address power dynamics within global social work practice. No matter where you are in the world the issue of power is ever present in relational practice. I believe that the 3 Ps framework is a helpful aid in assisting practitioners to reflect and consider their understanding of power within complex practice. The main issue was the time scales and time pressures for writing this chapter. I found the process frustrating at times when I had worked hard on the chapter to meet deadlines and find that my co-author would make changes at the last minute. Luckily, I have a very strong and supportive relationship with them and even though it felt personally uncomfortable I was able to air my feelings of grievance.	within relational practice. My session was attended by 35 participants, and had positive feedback. This also helped me critically reflect and develop my thoughts and practice around the 3 Ps framework and power, further. I have also run an on-line webinar using the same content for the PACT research centre at the University of Lancashire. This was attended by 51 people and again the feedback I received has helped me develop my thoughts and practice.

				I have learnt that co-authoring work is a great lesson in compromise and that the Freirean idea of co-constructed knowledge is a challenging but ultimately rewarding process.	
Date Published 2024	**Title and Co-author Contribution** *Independent Evaluation Report - We Are Juno*, UCLan (Not for publication) This final report was co-authored with Professor Cath Larkins and a Juno Expert by Experience, Liv Erin. I was lead author and co-wrote around 70% of the final report. Liv Erin wrote around 10%. I set out the structure of the final report, wrote up key findings and liaised with Liv with regards to her contribution.	**Themes** Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication** We Are Juno was set up to challenge the increasingly poor outcomes experienced by care-experienced children run by the private equity companies, who account for 89% of residential children's homes in the Liverpool City Region. Based on feedback from a scoping exercise with care experienced children, Capacity Lab formed We Are Juno. This organisation aimed to challenge and offer an alternative provision for children's residential care using social pedagogy as it's basis of care. We Are Juno are the first to aim to underpin the whole organisation as well as use social pedagogy as their model of care, here in England. Therefore the evaluation was important in tracking and evaluating their journey and if their identified aims had been met.	**Critical Reflection** This has been one of the most challenging yet transgressive pieces of work I have done to date. Up until this point I had never led an evaluation report and I was committed to doing this as collaboratively as possible. I secured the contract due to my reputation, experience and knowledge of social pedagogy and Prof Cath Larkin's experience of children's participation. This was great validation for me but also I felt a great deal of pressure to undertake this evaluation right. That it be as helpful as possible to the Juno staff team and board. I quickly realised that the evaluation was not truly going to be co-produced with care experienced young people so I had to make sure	**Critical Action – Impact** We Are Juno are using the evaluation and review documents I developed with the Experts by Experience Group to capture the progress of care experienced children living with them. But also to support staff to embed social pedagogical and relational practice into their daily care and love for the children. I supported the Director and Registered Manager to connect with people within the social pedagogy network who can provide on-going support to help them continue to embed and use social pedagogy. We Are Juno have gained a rating of Good in their latest Ofsted review.

			The report highlights innovative practices, policies and systems aimed at embedding social pedagogy into the organisation as a whole. This includes things such as safeguarding and record keeping policies, the recruitments and induction process for all staff, staff training and support as well as the Experts by Experience group (formally known as the Young Leaders Group). The report also sets out learning points and how to move these forward as the organisation develops. This included for example ideas around strengthening the focus on Haltung and how the staff embed this in their day to day work, how this could be recorded and a practical tool to assist in capturing and evidencing the process children and young people make.	that as many elements as possible were and that the Experts by Experience were able to be as involved as they wanted to be. The amount of learning I have taken from this project has been vast and taken very different shapes. Writing an evaluation report is a very different exercise all together. Normally I am in the position of 'educator' and for this publication I had to sit back and observe much more to be able to offer an independent evaluation. The co-produced nature of the project and final report was a transgressive approach for me where I was challenged to reflect on my own power as well as the true meaning of co-production. I worked very hard to make sure that the core principles of co-production (McKercher, 2021) underpinned my work and that true co-production happened when it could. There was very limited engagement from one senior member of staff which made the possess very difficult. Due to the fact this was a very new organisation which experienced some real challenges, the new staff team did not engage in the evaluation process for	

				various reasons. Ofsted rightly so, said that I couldn't interview the young people living there. All of which meant that there was very limited data to inform the final report. I did however, have an excellent relationship with the Director and Registered Manager and was able to gain data from them.	
Date Published May 2025	**Title and Co-author Contribution** *Who's got the power?: A social pedagogical exploration of power, the important element within relationship-based practice.* Social Work Education, 1–15. 100% written by me.	**Themes** Theme 1- Teaching of social pedagogy	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication** Expanding on the book chapter above, this article focuses much more on social work practice. It provides a reflexive framework to assist social workers and students to delve deeper into relational practice and the positionality and understanding of power within their work. The article also focuses on anti-oppressive practice and power. There is a wealth of literature and frameworks around the issue of power, such as Thompson's (2006) PCS, Tew's (2006) matrix of power and Tedam's (2021) 4D2P. Unlike the ones mentioned above, this article and the 3 Ps	**Critical Reflection** Starting this PhD process I was acutely aware that up to date my journal articles have been published within one journal, the IJSP. I therefore felt that I would like to apply to journal outside of the social pedagogy network and further challenge myself. The article was original rejected from two journals with feedback stating that it didn't meet their aims and objectives. The last reject had some very helpful feedback from the peer reviewers that helped me realised that I need to focus much more on the actual aim of the article and make sure that this fitted much	**Critical Action – Impact** The framework and article have been adopted by the Think Ahead mental health social work programme. they have around 120 students annually. The article and framework are being used to help their students explore power within relational practice but also their leadership practice. The article has been viewed 833 times: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/metrics/10.1080/02615479.2025.2505733?scroll=top#metrics-summary

			framework detailed in it has a micro view point of power unlike the ones above.	more with the objectives and scope of any journal I submitted it to. The peer review process was very difficult with it being return five times, often with new points raised. I found this very frustrating and felt that one of the reviewers was being particularly pedantic, commenting on my writing style and making suggestions as to how they would write. The original article contained a table which I felt was a visual aid that could be used by educators. However I eventually agreed to this being removed even though I felt the reviewers comments were wrong. At that point I just wanted to get the article published. The second peer reviewer's comments were helpful in getting me to consider the originality and difference of the 3 Ps framework from others already in the social work domain. This strengthened the article. Working on this article reaffirmed the importance of not only looking at direct and individual practice, but also the application of this at all levels of an organisation. Which led me to my next publication.	Feedback from the peer reviewer stated that once published they will be using the feedback in their teaching with social work students. I have also present a breakout session at a conference hosted by the Relationships Project this year. It will specifically focused on the content of this article.

Date Published	**Title and Co-author Contribution**	**Theme**	**Critical Analysis - Originality of the Publication**	**Critical Reflection**	**Critical Action – Impact**
July 2025	*I've Got the Power! A Social Pedagogical Exploration of Power Dynamics in Relational Leadership and Practice Within Public Services*, in Wilson, R., Hesselgreaves, H., French, M., Hawkins, M., Jamieson, D., King, M. and Kimmitt, J. (2025) *Futures in Public Management: The Emerging Relational Approach to Public Services* Emerald Publishing 100% written by me.	Theme 2- Introduction of social pedagogy	The majority of the contributors to this book have looked at either theoretical concept around complexity or the practical application of HLS. In contrast my chapter looks at the importance of power dynamics within relational practice in the development of HLS throughout an organisation and direct practice. Offering original content and perspective to the growing HLS debate. Within this chapter I have adapted the original focus of the 3Ps framework to look at its application to all levels of public service practice and leadership. Some of the newly published Examples of Practice have been used as practical examples within the chapter. https://www.humanlearning.systems/case-studies/	After my workshop at the inaugural HLS conference in June 2023, I was invited to write a chapter based on the content of my workshop. I was really pleased to have been asked by colleagues that I admire within the HLS network. One of the major challenges in writing this chapter has been to make sure I focus on leadership and organisational change and not just direct practice. Original feedback from the reviewers had pointed out that I had focused too much on social work practice (my comfort zone!). I had to rewrite and strengthen the focus on the broader remit of public services. The Examples of Practice were really helpful in that they offered a	The most recent information from the last round of HLS examples of practice has found important data on key relational elements of the work. Equity has been one of them and I have been part of a working group exploring this in more detail. The outcome of which has been the following podcast series: https://open.spotify.com/episode/4VPlEltsGWt6xyFxNnZMIE As a direct result I have strengthened the focus on power within the co-production short course I run for ThemPra. We now have a full session where we look at this in detail and use the 3 Ps framework to help participants begin to address power dynamics. The course has had over 100 participants so far and from a wide range of organisations.

				range of examples of current practice. Even though they hadn't explicitly mentioned power dynamics I was able to make these links and use them to highlight key points I was making in the chapter.	

Appendix 8 – Testimonial from SAGE Publishers

E-mail Exchange – Susannah Trefgarne (SAGE Publishing)

Date: 4/8/25

Dear Lowis (if I may),

My name is Susannah and I'm the publisher looking after the Sage social work list. Thanks for your email enquiry of last week about *Social Pedagogy and Social Work.* Since first publication, the book has sold a total of 895 copies. The market is of course broader than this, through both library sales and through "Sage Knowledge", our digital library for social science, students, researchers, and faculty, which the book forms part of, making it accessible to students at those institutions. It is clear, not least from the feedback received, including the adopter feedback here Social Pedagogy and Social Work | SAGE Publications Ltd that the book was very well-received. I hope that this information helps your PhD by public works submission and wish you all the best with this.

With best wishes,

Susannah

Susannah Trefgarne

Senior Publisher

SAGE Publishing

1 Oliver's Yard
London, EC1Y 1SP
UK

www.sagepublishing.com

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Appendix 9 – Testimonial – Kingston University

Kingston University London

11th November 2024

Re: Lowis Charfe, PhD by publication

To whom it may concern,

Lowis is a well-known expert in social pedagogy. We engaged her as an External Examiner in 2022 as a result of her considerable knowledge, experience, and publication record in this subject area, which is an important and ever-emerging discipline within the social care field in the UK and Ireland.

Lowis is an influential academic across social pedagogy and social work, and her book by the same name (published with SAGE in 2019) is a key reading across our Undergraduate programme and indeed on our upcoming Graduate Diploma opening in September 2025. She is a thought-leader in her profession, and a key member of both the Social Pedagogy Professional Association for the UK & Ireland and the Global Alliance of Social Pedagogy & Social Education. She has had considerable impact in the field of social pedagogy, and remains committed to furthering both her own learning and the reach and value of social pedagogy nationally and internationally.

We are happy to answer any further questions on her input here at Kingston University if necessary.

Yours faithfully,

Yvalia Febrer NTF SFHEA

Associate Professor of Social Work
Department of Social Work and Social Care
School of Education, Midwifery and Social Work Faculty of Health, Science, Social Care and Education

Appendix 10 – Testimonial – Charlotte Firing, ThemPra

Zoom AI summary

Summary

Social Pedagogy in Relational Leadership

Charlotte discussed the use of social pedagogy leadership framework in ThemPra's relational leadership course, emphasizing its importance in understanding values and its application in various settings. They highlighted the need to balance values with legal frameworks and safeguarding policies, which can sometimes cause anxiety among participants. Therefore the framework is invaluable in supporting the participants to do this. Charlotte also mentioned the course's induction or introduction, which starts with an introduction to social pedagogy. Lowis agreed with Charlotte's points and suggested that the course's framework could provide a space for participants to think about the importance of values within a legal framework.

Annual Program Attendance and Organization

Charlotte and Lowis discussed the organization and attendance of their annual program. Charlotte mentioned that they had initially limited the program to 18 people, but due to the pandemic, the number of participants had dropped to between 8 and 14. They also noted that they had been running the program once a year since the pandemic, with occasional additional sessions. The participants come from various aspects of public services, including Sanska.

Leadership Course Diverse Perspectives

Charlotte and Lowis discussed their experiences from a leadership course, focusing on the diverse perspectives shared by participants. They highlighted a particularly insightful session with a man from an asbestos company in Belfast, who provided a unique perspective on values and workspace satisfaction. This man, who also managed festivals, demonstrated how these insights could be applied to organizing large groups of people.

Central Framework and Safeguarding Importance

Lowis and Charlotte discussed the importance of the social pedagogy leadership framework in their courses. Charlotte emphasized that this framework, which involves putting values into practice, helps to maintain a philosophical approach and prevents people from thinking that certain practices are unattainable or unfeasible. They also touched on the relevance of safeguarding in various

contexts, including legal and vulnerable people, as well as in industries such as asbestos handling. Lowis agreed with Charlotte's points, highlighting the importance of considering the impact of materials and chemicals on one's work.

Prioritizing Relationships and Power Dynamics

In the meeting, Charlotte and Lowis discussed the importance of prioritizing relationships and transforming power dynamics in their leadership courses. They emphasized the significance of equity and equality, including people, and how these factors contribute to personal and professional development. They also discussed the use of the 3 P's framework in their courses, particularly in relation to power, relationships, and change. Lowis asked about the importance of her involvement and the use of her published works in their courses, to which Charlotte responded that her unique background and perspective have been crucial in shaping their courses, particularly in relation to the relationship between social work and social pedagogy.

Appendix 11 – Testimonial – Think Ahead – Professional Development Lead

On 22/08/2025 15:46 BST Alexia Fenwick <a.fenwick@thinkahead.org> wrote:

Hi Lowis,

I found the 3Ps framework very helpful in supporting teaching on relationship-based leadership in social work practice. I used it as a tool for students to reflect on their 'use of self' in practice, particularly their perceptions of power and authority in their roles as student social workers. The framework supported discussions on both feelings of power and powerlessness, and how these influence practice. It also encouraged students to consider how their personal values connect with professional ethics, and how reflective practice can support self-development. This, in turn, helps them to work collaboratively with others, whether people using services or colleagues within organisations, to enable meaningful change.

Thanks

Alexia Fenwick (hear my name) (she/her)

Professional Development Lead

07901611501

Appendix 12 – Testimonial – Martin Molin, Professor of Social Work, University West, Sweden

November 8 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

It is hereby certified that Lowis Charfe's article (2023)[1] has come to significant use in a course at the Social Work Programme with Social Pedagogy as a profile, 210 HE credits, at University West, Trollhättan, Sweden. There are currently nineteen university institutions that have the right to confer this degree in Sweden. The Social Work Programme leads to a professional bachelor's degree that provides knowledge and skills for working in a number of fields, e.g. family counselling, correctional services, unemployment offices, volunteer organisations, diakonia, and occupational health services. Other common employment areas are social welfare officer, child welfare social worker, statutory work, care assessor/administrator, mental health counsellor, family service, prison services, juvenile justice, head of care unit, school counsellor, field assistant, etc. The programme provides the professional skills needed for work involving statutory investigative techniques, administration, documentation, organisation, evaluation, workplace development, care and relational practice, and leadership roles of various types.

Two prominent and national examination outcomes within the Social Work Programme are to 1) demonstrate knowledge of the disciplinary foundation of the field as well as awareness of current research and development work and 2) demonstrate knowledge of the management of social work. The article from Charfe is used as obligatory literature in a course called 'Leadership in social pedagogy work', 7,5 HEC, involving 80 students in the final, seventh term (2nd cycle level) of the programme. In accordance with these outcomes, it has been shown that Charfe's article has had a great impact and has significantly contributed to the students' learning in matters related to social pedagogy leadership.

In future courses on the programme, we are also considering using Lowis Charfe and Ali Gardner's (2019)[2] excellent book as obligatory literature in different phases of the programme. Furthermore, it can be emphasized that Charfe's writing has also inspired creative discussions including preliminary article ideas among the research group in social work at University West.

Best regards,

Martin Molin, PhD

Professor of Social Work

University West

Department for Social and Behavioural Studies

461 86 Trollhättan, Sweden

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martin_Molin

1 Charfe, L. (2023). Ethical and relational leadership in a complex world: the use of the Human Learning Systems and social pedagogical leadership framework to navigating complexity. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 12*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2023.v12.x.016.

2 Charfe, L., & Gardner, A. (2019). *Social Pedagogy and Social Work*. Sage

Appendix 13 – Testimonial -Jane Hylton

Teams transcript of discussion.

Transcript

11 November 2024, 02:42pm

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) started transcription

Hylton, Jane 0:13
Right. Well, so the learning circle, there was no funding implication to it. We didn't, we didn't have to seek funding at all because at the time because of our really strong collaboration with the National House project and they were really the House project were really embracing social pedagogy to their practice because it's very much steeped in, in, in relational practice.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 0:28
Mm hmm.
Yep

Hylton, Jane 0:38
Is a house project, So what I thought of on the back of doing the MA in social pedagogy leadership.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 0:45
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 0:48
I just really wanted to explore more about relational practice and what that actually meant to us as practitioners, and because of their kind of ethos around social pedagogy in their practice, I thought, well actually it'll be a good, really good collaboration between Lancashire County Council and them children's services. That is. And then what I did?

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 0:53
Mm hmm.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 1:14
We learnt a lot from it initially.
I really wanted it. Coal produced with young people right from the very beginning. But there was a lot of challenges to that. Lowest, If I'm being honest. Some of that was about

when we met the times of the day when we met, you know, the buildings and just also like the young people were doing other stuff. So it was really hard to get young people involved in it.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 1:23
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 1:38
So what we thought about doing I I knew there was some kind of like allies, if you will within children's services.
I'm not sure whether allies is the right word to use, but people that were really curious with social pedagogy as well, and some of those people like, there's one in particular, Ian, who works with virtual school. I had a housing worker, etcetera. Health are looked after nurses etcetera and commissioning and and Commission was a really big one for us because I think that's where we struggle with relational practise and and coal production because.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 1:52
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 2:15
As Commissioners, they haven't got time for it at all. So.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 2:17
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 2:18
There really needed to be to be challenged on that.
So that that so we opted to to meet at the base at Marshall Lane in Preston for these monthly learning communities and and they were just to be quite informal really. And I just thought right from the very beginning when I when I spoke to the people there, I said like we really need to have time to get to know each other and we've got really busy professional lives for want of a better word. And I said you're always getting pulled to like one meeting to another meeting, having to get to A to B.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 2:41
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 2:52
Lancashire Big County.

You know you could be travelling 100 mile round trip to get to someone, I said. Let's just use this space for just really sit down and reflect on our practise and what it means to young people and what is relational practise. What does it mean to them etcetera. And again, you know, it's that thing about whoever turn it was, they brought cake in and those sorts of things just to make it that bit nicer really as because everyone likes getting that use homemade cake as well, which is always.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 3:05
Yeah.
Yeah.
No. They look. Yeah, it's very nice when I came.

Hylton, Jane 3:21
Really special and yeah, yeah, absolutely.
And then I just thought obviously a huge part of this relational practise was around coal production and because of the sessions I went to that you facilitated during the Mai said, well, let's let's see if Lois will come along and have a look at deliver a session around Co production and what what that actually means. So they're they're well up for that actually. And even now after that session.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 3:47
OK.

Hylton, Jane 3:52
Because I can remember it because we came up to you clan, didn't we? For a change.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 3:56
Yep, yeah.

Hylton, Jane 3:57
And people now still two people in particular talk about that session. One was Claire Smith, who's our youth policy.
Strategic lead and Pat, who is our housing Pats, will be there tomorrow and pat our housing worker and I think that the session that you delivered spoke a lot to them really about I think in particular that thing around power as well and that we are we are in positions of power.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 4:23
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 4:27
And and we can't forget that. And it's about what we do as as as practitioners.
What we do about it, just to to, you know, and to be aware of it really when we're with young people and the things around the three PS as well, I think I think them too in particular really picked up on it and and what to use it in their practise.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 4:46
Right.

Hylton, Jane 4:50
Others one other person in commissioning.
Fully appreciated it, but just said you know The thing is when we talk about.
How tall and three PS and I I she said I'd get it. I mean, she's a youth worker in background. That's. That's what her degree's in. But she works for commissioning and she said it is. So it's incredibly challenging when you're working A-Team where their their ethics even or or their halt on do not align to yours. So when you're challenging them it's it's particularly.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 5:15
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 5:24
It is, it is. It's a difficult one. So we use those we used over. I think it was it was a period of 12 months of 12 months and I can't believe it was a 12 month period really

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 5:26
Yeah.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 5:35
That we did this and and we'd feedback regularly to national leaving care benchmarking forum.
Tempera and.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 5:44
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 5:47
It's fair, but, but yeah, yeah. Yeah. So they they were basically leading leading on this in terms of like.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 5:48
Yes, ma'am. Fairburn. Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 5:56
Yeah. Just just to see because they want to feed it back to the local authorities that were members of the Benchmarking forum.
On.
Sessions were always well attended, which actually surprised me, which is terrible to say, but I then I just thought, well, you know what, it just shows that that the value that people

were taking in it really because it did give them an opportunity to get off that madness, that is tight, that their day-to-day work. But they were also taking aspects of it back into their teams and it was things like we did something around we did that orienteering up at Williamson's Park.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 6:09
Mm hmm.
Yeah.
Mm hmm.

Hylton, Jane 6:35
Looking at the common 3rd and I, I thought this absolute.
No way. They they're. They're gonna, like, embrace it. So I was a bit nervous about that, actually, but they came and they were fully invested in it. And they were just saying, it's doing that. They kind of like just got common third automatically, rather than talking about it. But actually doing, doing the doing and having a really good bloody laugh about it as well, you know, charging around Williamson's Park and doing a bit in navigating.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 6:44
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah, yeah, yeah. And about it.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
I was gutted. I missed that session.

Hylton, Jane 7:05
I know, I know.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 7:06
And I can imagine Aaron getting everybody.

Hylton, Jane 7:08
Yeah, absolutely. You know, and we had, we had some people that were OK at navigating of people that had never done it in their lives. You know? So so we paired them off and and off they went. And yeah, they really they really understood that. Actually the common third after, after doing that activity.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 7:22
Oh.

Hylton, Jane 7:26
And then after like I say, when I say, I can't believe it was 12 months because it went really, really quick. We didn't have anything tangible lowest at the end because originally

when I spoke to Kelly Mottram from the House project, I said like, wouldn't it be great if a good developer tool, a tool around?

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 7:31
It yeah. Yeah, yeah.
Mm hmm.

Hylton, Jane 7:44
I could share this in teams around relational practise. That was coal produced by young people. We didn't get as far as that we didn't get as far as it, but what I did, what I took from it, I continued with the the learning circle in my own team and then invited other practitioners, social workers and personal advisors into that just say come on. You know, Nick's doing the session on.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 7:51
Yeah.
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 8:10
I don't know. I can't remember what he did. Now, like psychology, I think he was doing it on and yeah.
And there's all. Yeah, there's all different different themes that we'd pick through from the team and we'd all deliver it. So and people and Pa's did come along to it, which is really positive. So if anything.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 8:28
Yeah, yeah.

Hylton, Jane 8:31
What? I guess what we got from it was practitioners. Managers took aspects of it back to their teams.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 8:37
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 8:38
Talked to them about it, but we also continued with it in terms of in the development team continue to do that develop because I thought it was good for the team because they've got a wealth of knowledge.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 8:45
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 8:50
And it shouldn't be me kind of facilitating stuff. That's why I really wanted them to do it as well, which and they fully embraced it. They they love doing it. We've had a gap, but

it's something that I'm I'm going to start again in January again just to see you know if we can get more practitioners involved in that. So I don't know whether I don't know if that's what you wanted.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 8:50
Yeah.
Yeah, yeah.
Oh God, yeah.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Yeah.
It don't. Yeah. No, totally. And I mean, you know, the the HLS stuff. I mean, we did the the workshop on your example of practise and it was really well received. I mean there was about 40 people in the workshop who were really interested in like, this reflective learning space and what and how do you do it and what's the impact of that? So. So yeah, no, absolutely. So I suppose just to put you on the spot a little bit and this is going to make me cringe a little bit, but like, why was it important that you got me to come and do those?

Hylton, Jane 9:23
Oh God, really.
Yeah.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 9:40
What it is? Is it about the published work that I've done that was important?
Yep.
Yeah.
That's right.

Hylton, Jane 10:08
To bring people in and the purely academic, I think people are bit sceptical of that and think well, you know it's years they've never like practised in in this type of thing. But you had so and also the published work that that around social pedagogy and social work because when I again right at the beginning of the the learning circle I did I used I can't I can't remember now but I did use some of the.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 10:14
Mm hmm.

Hylton, Jane 10:36
Scenarios in there, some of the suggested. Try this on on people. I did use some of those.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 10:39
Yeah.

Hylton, Jane 10:44
So that was important to me and I've also kind of taken the book as well on a on a

roadshow around Lancashire. So when I deliver any training sessions and the times have been up to Lancaster unique as once a year, Jane Pie asked me to go and like, deliver a training session and only do it on our gut is actually because I can't do it this year. The date I'm quite sick human league.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 10:59
Oh yeah.
Yeah, yeah.
Oh.

ylton, Jane 11:08
And Manchester I know. So I can't go but anyway.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 11:12
More important.

Hylton, Jane 11:13
I take the book and I'm pretty sure I'm pretty sure the first time I took it, Jane purchase or suggested that they purchase some of the book for the library. I think that's what she said to me anyway. But I do believe her. No, it's all right. It's OK. So it was. It was important. Yeah. You knew your stuff. You published work. But also you've practised and. And yeah, around care experience in that that line of work.

Lowis Charfe (School of Health, Social Work and Sport) 11:15
Side.
All right. Yeah. Oh, thank you.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Appendix 14 – Testimonial – Gabriel Eichsteller – Co-Director, ThemPra

IMPACT TESTIMONIAL FOR LOWIS CHARFE

There is little doubt that social work is one of the most important professions. By identifying and addressing the social inequalities, which originate from human interactions and social constructs, it fulfils a core function within society. If the key to understanding any society is how it treats its most disadvantaged members, then the status and focus of social work tell us a lot. Given the increasing pressures experienced by social work teams as austerity continues to exacerbate many people's struggles, it has never been more necessary to strengthen social workers.

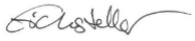
At the same time, there are also encouraging signs that the tide is turning, that new opportunities for radical change are arising. It is our collective and individual task to bring about a sea change by making a positive case for relationship-centred practice that enhances people's well-being, increases their resourcefulness and supports their inclusion into wider society. Based on my experience of supporting professionals on their social pedagogy journeys over the last 18 years, I believe that social pedagogy can help inspire sustainable change, which means not just reverting back to how social work used to be a generation ago but rethink, reclaim and reinvent social work in the 21st century. More importantly than my beliefs, however, are experiences in practice, where many professionals have led the way in underpinning their social work practice with a social pedagogical perspective.

Lowis Charfe's publications all put this vision forward, arguing convincingly for a close relationship between social pedagogy and social work. Her work combines her knowledge of the field of social work inside out both as a practitioner and lecturer at the largest School of Social Work in the UK, which provides her publications with a unique and hugely valuable perspective. Throughout these, she demonstrates how social pedagogy can enhance social work practice, celebrating what's great about social work whilst also setting new impulses to change the system. Her work showcases this synergy in concrete and practice-relevant ways and thus succeeds in outlining how a social pedagogical perspective can support social workers, particularly in reappraising the importance of relationship-centred practice and challenging some of the suspicions preventing social workers from developing positive, authentic and trusting relationships with the people they support.

Relationships have always been at the heart of social work, which is why social pedagogy should feel familiar, perhaps at first sight even like the Emperor's new clothes. To me this sense of familiarity is an important starting point in exploring the relationship between social pedagogy and social work. But it is equally important to go beyond the familiar, to change one's frame of reference and look for points of differences and opportunities for learning. In most countries, social pedagogy is not synonymous with social work, and for important reasons. A social pedagogical perspective seeks to draw attention to social justice issues and to enable professionals to critically reflect upon, and stay tuned into, the structural factors that cause social inequality rather than blame individuals for the hardship and challenges they encounter. Professionals must mediate between the individuals, groups or communities they support and wider society, which means that they need to think about relationships not just in terms of professional-client relationships but of how they can effectively nurture people's interdependence.

This perspective is not only important in social work. Indeed, I think that social pedagogy has far greater relevance, for instance as a perspective within early years, education, youth work, the justice system, community support and elderly care. For this reason, Lowis Charfe's publications have the potential to help counter the segmentation of practice areas and instead connect professionals involved in different aspects of an individual, group or family's life. Her academic work's integrative potential lies in resonating deeply with a broad range of professionals who are determined to resist the medicalisation and pathologisation of social care in favour of a more developmental orientation, an educational approach that builds on human potential, resourcefulness and resilience.

In addition to their great potential to make an ongoing important contribution to an open and lively discussion about the future of social work and the potential to forge new alliances with related professions, Lowis Charfe's publications have already had a valuable impact on social workers' understanding of how social pedagogy can benefit both the people they support and themselves as professionals. At ThemPra, we have been sharing much of Lowis Charfe's work with social workers and other professionals on our courses on Making Co-Production Meaningful, Relationship-Centred Practice, Relational Leadership, and Courageous Conversations, with very positive feedback from professionals who find her work engaging, easy to apply to their practice and valuable to key aspects of their work, such as critically reflecting on their own ethics, positionality and power in order to promote equitable relational approaches.



Gabriel Eichsteller

Co-director ThemPra Social Pedagogy CIC

Co-editor International Journal of Social Pedagogy

Appendix 15 – Reviews for Social Pedagogy and Social Work Book

Reviews on SAGE website

https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/social-pedagogy-and-social-work/book259025#reviews

Appendix 16 - Copies of Publications

Social Pedagogy and Social Work e-book link:

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uclan-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5942916

INSIGHT REPORT

Social Pedagogy as a Meaningful Perspective for Education and Social Care

Edited by
Gabriel Eichsteller & Lieve Bradt

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About this report

The Insight Report you're reading has been jointly developed by an international partnership between eight organisations from the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Belgium and the Czech Republic. As part of an Erasmus+ co-funded project, we have spent the last 30 months exploring how our understandings of social pedagogy can enrich social professions. We have found that, despite important differences between countries, our traditions of social pedagogy share important commonalities. These mean that social pedagogy can offer a meaningful perspective for education and social care. Throughout this report we seek to outline in greater detail why a social pedagogical perspective is important in enabling social professions to address contemporary social issues and help individuals, groups and communities to thrive. For this purpose, we have also included detailed examples from a range of practice settings, which we hope offer greater insights into how a social pedagogical perspective can inform and enrich relationship-centred practice.

About us

Our international multi-sector partnership between 8 organisations leading social pedagogy developments in higher education, vocational training and organisational capacity-building has been designed to share innovative practice across linguistic barriers that have frequently prevented cross-fertilisation in social care across Europe. Here are the partner organisations:

ThemPra Social Pedagogy
Community Interest Company

ThemPra Social Pedagogy is a UK-based social enterprise and the lead organisation in this project. It supports the sustainable development of social pedagogy through a range of short courses, organisational capacity building and whole-systems strategies. ThemPra has been actively promoting social pedagogy in a number of pilot projects across the UK, providing immersive learning experiences on specific aspects of social pedagogy, such as its core values, understanding the impact of trauma, leadership, reflection, change agency and learning facilitation. The team has also been developing open access educational resources such as the MOOC, speaking at conferences, supporting universities in developing social pedagogy modules, and setting up the Social Pedagogy Development Network.

UNIVERSITEIT GENT

Universiteit Gent is a socially committed and pluralistic university that is open to all students, regardless of their ideological, political, cultural or social background. It defines itself in a broad international perspective and has been recognised by the European Commission as a “success story” both for Erasmus and for the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence. Its Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy has substantial teaching and research expertise in social pedagogy, contributing to its discourse both in Flanders and internationally. The department's research is focused on the study of social work practices, connecting the English-speaking social work tradition with the continental social-pedagogical research traditions, and combining it with a broad educational perspective.

KJSH – Stiftung für Kinder-, Jugend und Soziale Hilfen is a large not-for-profit organisation providing social pedagogical services in youth care and VET activities in Germany. The KJSH provides help for over 4,000 individuals and families and employs more than 3,000 employees. Its services range from ambulant family care settings, including units for diagnosing and removing child protection issues, units with pedagogues living in, intensive care units, street work, school assistance, and ambulant care for young people with Asperger's syndrome to treatment units for people misusing drugs. The KJSH also collaborates with other providers and has several joint ventures, including the Ubuntu circus project giving life and experimental space to 16 young people in a fully functioning circus. Ever since being founded in 1991, the KJSH has been committed to the ideas of social pedagogy and promoted the relevant topics in the north of Germany. It is linked in with several universities, organises conferences and aims to continuously develop its approach in everyday life using ongoing supervision and evaluation.

The University of Central Lancashire was founded in 1828 as the Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge. Today UCLan is one of the UK's largest universities. Its School of Social Work, Care and Community is proud of its national reputation for delivering high quality education for social work, social care, the children and young people's workforce, and community leadership and engagement. The School has a vibrant community of research-active staff engaged in a wide range of research activities that make a difference to the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people, and which influences policy and practice both strategically and at grassroots level. UCLan has developed undergraduate and postgraduate introductory modules in social pedagogy which run across three different degree programmes. In 2016, it launched its innovative BA (Hons) in Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation. Since autumn 2018, UCLan is also offering an MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership, which has been co-developed with ThemPra.

Masarykova Univerzita, Brno is one of the largest universities for social pedagogy studies and actively involved in sector developments in Central and Eastern Europe. It comprises nine faculties with over 200 departments, institutes and clinics which offer a combined total of more than 1,300 fields of study. Masaryk University offers degrees in a wide range of traditional as well as newly-emerging disciplines and is currently one of the fastest-growing higher education institutions in Europe. Social pedagogy at MU has been developed over more than 20 years at two faculties: the Faculty of Pedagogy, where the focus is on leisure-time education), and the Faculty of Arts, where the Department of Educational Sciences aims at social and career counselling and guidance.

CommonView is a Danish Vocational Education and Training organisation providing coaching and consultancy in social pedagogy, with expertise in cross-cultural learning transfer of innovative social pedagogical practice. It facilitates team development and working processes both for individuals and for groups. CommonView runs professional development courses and training in terms of dialogue, reflection, personal value creation and conflict resolution.

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona is at the forefront of social pedagogy qualifications and leads the social pedagogy discourse in Spain and Latin America. UAB plays a leading role worldwide in scientific research, and its ample range of disciplines, in both education and research, indicates its multidisciplinary approach. UAB holds a leading position in the most prestigious and influential international university rankings, and, in recent years, this award has been complemented by its growing research impact, constant improvement of the quality of teaching and an ability to attract international talent to the university.

KP (University College Copenhagen) is Denmark's leading provider of undergraduate programmes in social pedagogy, including full-time distance learning courses. It aims to present an internationally recognised study and research environment and to be one of the leading international profiles in Denmark within welfare professions, especially in the field of Social Pedagogy. KP has over 15 years of experience with e-learning, mainly aimed at students residing in Denmark, but more recently expanded to the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The infrastructure that e-learning offers gives students new opportunities in an educational field. The students can maintain their everyday lives while at the same time being able to get an education.

About our project

The project *Developing an Open Online Course in European Social Pedagogy* (Reference number: 2016-1-UK01-KA202-024559) is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Erasmus+ aims to modernise education, training and youth work across Europe. It is open to education, training, youth and sport organisations across all sectors of lifelong learning, including school education, further and higher education, adult education and the youth sector. You can find out more at www.erasmusplus.org.uk.

A central part of the project has been the development of a Massive Open Online Course in Social Pedagogy across Europe. This MOOC is now available on Coursera, the world's biggest online learning platform providing universal access to the world's best education. Learners have completely free access to all learning resources, as well as the option to gain certification from our partners at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona for 43€.

Combining a series of short videos, further reading resources, quizzes, reflective questions and peer-led discussions, the MOOC is aimed at practitioners across all education and social care settings as well as (prospective) students. Learners can self-pace their progression through 8 sessions. We have designed these to encourage learners to explore and reflect on the following themes in relation to their own practice:

WEEK 1:

1. Social Pedagogy and Participation – a transnational perspective
2. Social Pedagogy and Resource-Orientated Practice – a German perspective

WEEK 2:

3. Social Pedagogy and Creativity – a British perspective
4. Social Pedagogy and Purposeful Shared Activities – a Danish perspective

WEEK 3:

5. Social Pedagogy and Prevention – a Czech perspective
6. Social Pedagogy and Social Education – a Spanish perspective

WEEK 4:

7. Social Pedagogy and Social Justice – a Belgian perspective
8. Social Pedagogy in a wider context – perspectives from around the globe

Aims

The key aims of the MOOC are to:

1. Give learners an insight into how social pedagogy has been developing across Europe, highlighting both the diversity and connections,
2. Highlight the importance of valuing every person as intrinsically 'rich', recognising their unique potential and ability to be a valuable member of society,
3. Introduce learners to ways in which they can bring this belief to life in everyday interactions and relationships that support people's learning, nurture their well-being and enable them to feel included in society,
4. Ensure learners are familiar with the most fundamental aspects of social pedagogical practice in ways that are applicable in their own personal and professional life.

More details about our project are available at mooc.social-pedagogy.org.uk. For full access to all learning resources please visit www.coursera.org/learn/social-pedagogy-europe

I. THE CONTEXT FOR SOCIAL PROFESSIONS ACROSS EUROPE

Gabriel Eichsteller (ThemPra Social Pedagogy) and Lieve Bradt (Ghent University)

In an interconnected digitalised world, there is new emotive power in social issues and how they are portrayed. Responses, such as the Dutch historian Rutger Bregman's challenge to the global elite at the World Economic Forum in Davos that they must pay far higher tax to address social inequality or the Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg's protest against her government's lack of action over climate change, or the image of Alan Kurdi, the young boy whose body was found on a Turkish beach after his fated escape from civil war in Syria, have shown how quickly social issues can capture global attention. They have created public waves of outrage and empathy for those experiencing the adverse effects of social inequality, cutting through the complexity of social issues that often makes them difficult to understand or relate to. Whilst an important step, public awareness does not automatically equate to social or political action that might address the complex social issues faced across many countries. Waves of public support can easily ebb away or become undermined by populist responses to social issues. For those affected by social inequality, however, the impact is more persistent, making them dependent on any support provided by the welfare state.

Whilst many of the consequences directly affect individuals, the disruptions arising from social issues such as poverty, environmental damage and pollution, ageing societies, cultural diversity, global changes to employment due to the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, are not only occurring at an individual level. In many

countries, these complex social issues with which societies are faced, have also put huge pressure on their respective welfare state to respond meaningfully and to address social inequalities systematically, effectively and sustainably. These are no small challenges for social professions, and the global aspects of these issues as well as their complexity significantly limit professionals' potential to make enough of a lasting impact.

To add to these challenges, in many countries these changes have played out against a background of fiscal austerity since the financial crisis in 2008. At a time when more people are suffering from poverty and relying on the social welfare state, increasingly, the expectations on social professions are to achieve better outcomes with fewer resources and to demonstrate the value they provide. As Hingley-Jones and Ruch note, 'with this concentration on outcome-driven performance the extent to which professional practices and values determine practice has become increasingly constrained' (2016, p. 238). The effect of austerity within social practices has not only been limited to reductions in financial resources for social practices but has multi-dimensional implications. Fiscal austerity goes together with emotional and relational austerity (Hingley-Jones & Ruch, 2016), both for the individuals supported by social professions and for the professionals themselves. As Hingley-Jones and Ruch suggest, '"Relational austerity" - practice that is increasingly authoritarian rather than authoritative and combative rather than compassionate - emerges as an unintended consequence' (2016, p. 238) of a financially austere climate.

Austerity and other pressures on social professions across Europe have also led to a conditionality of social rights designed to increase the threshold at which individuals are entitled to access social services or welfare benefits, as well as ensure that rights are tied to specific conditions or responsibilities. Just as there are ideological aspects to austerity, Dwyer notes that welfare conditionality 'combines an inherent hostility towards state-provided welfare, with the view that collectively provided social benefits and services should be regarded not as social rights but as particular and conditional privileges to be bestowed only on active, responsible citizens' (2019, p. 2). Given that human rights are meant to be inherent, unconditional and universal rights rather than have limited applicability only when certain conditions are met, this has undermined social professions as a human rights profession (Reichert, 2003; Ife, 2008; Staub-Bernasconi, 2012; Witkin, 2018). Ife suggests that we must see 'human rights as a discourse that is changing and evolving but still universal in that it is about how we construct shared values about what it means to be human, and about the implications of a perception of our shared humanity for the way people should be treated' (2008, p. 225). This suggests the need for ongoing engagement with, and critical reflection on, the ethical issues that educational and social professions encounter on a daily basis.

Complexity in educational and social professions

There is increasing recognition that both the context of educational and social practices and our direct practice as professionals is characterised by complexity. Payne (2008) notes that different aspects of complexity are in interplay, partly because of the number of individuals, groups or families we might be supporting, with their unique relational dynamics, partly due to the multi-layered issues they might be experiencing, and partly owing to the different professionals who might be involved too, with their respective legal and official responsibilities. Barnett (2004) suggests that we need to recognise that we operate in a 'complex world, […] a world in which incomplete judgments or decisions have to be made; incomplete either because of the press of time or because insufficient evidence is to hand fully to warrant any particular decision or because the outcomes are unpredictable' (pp. 250-1). He goes on to explain that the uncertainty and lack of security encountered in a complex world challenges us to come to a position where we can 'prosper in a situation of multiple interpretations' (p.251), where we can live comfortably with the unknowability, unpredictability and uncertainty surrounding us.

The difference between a complicated and a complex system is often likened to the difference between a race car and a rainforest. One can be fine-tuned by expert mechanics, whereas the other consists of an intricate ecosystem in which everything is interrelated, interdependent and part of an ever-changing equilibrium (cf. Hood, 2018). Anything that impacts on this equilibrium has both predictable and unpredictable consequences, some that are evident immediately and others that may only emerge a long time after. In complex situations, cause and effect are obfuscated and can only be understood retrospectively. Dave Snowden, who developed the influential Cynefin framework for leaders' decision-making, suggest that complex situations have huge implications for how we make decisions, most notably that it requires collaborative leadership and an approach that enables new solutions to emerge. When there is not just one solution, the only thing we can do is 'probe first, then sense, and then respond' (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Yet, this approach does not always underpin educational and social practices and policy contexts. In the absence of an explicit recognition of complexity as a key factor determining relational practice and human growth within ever-changing social contexts, we find it increasingly tempting to reduce uncertainty and complexity through procedural approaches that offer structure and guidance, as well as an evidence base that promises to achieve consistent and predictable outcomes (Parton, 2009; Devlighere, 2017). Yet, as Snowden and Boone (2007) highlight, looking for best practice as a solution only works well when we're faced with simple decisions on issues that have one obvious solution (see also Biesta, 2007). Where we fail to recognise complexity and expect to find simplicity instead, we end up in chaotic circumstances, which pose huge challenges to leaders, professionals and subsequently the people they are meant to support.

Social pedagogy can provide an integrative theoretical and ethical framework within which to understand and respond to the complexities and uncertainties we encounter through professional curiosity, meaningful dialogue

with the people we support, recognition of the expertise they can offer and constant reflection on the underlying assumptions of our practices. If our aim is to find meaningful ways of improving their lived experiences, it is crucial that we respect people's and communities' life worlds and actively involve them in shaping the support, drawing on their strengths, insights, hopes and ideas.

Implications for educational and social care systems – towards a social pedagogical perspective

The austerity politics in many European countries and the complex nature of social issues have not only increased the challenges encountered by the most disadvantaged individuals and groups within society; they have also created additional pressures for the professionals meant to support these people. Ensuring meaningful responses that make a genuine positive difference over time relies both on our skill as professionals and on the organisational culture and systemic context framing educational and social practices. This raises the question whether we have systems that are dynamic and responsive – or, metaphorically speaking, adept and ever-evolving organisms rather than more or less fine-tuned machines. After all, the ways in which we think about the system of which we are a part reveals the extent to which we recognise complexity or are oblivious to it.

In her insightful report titled 'Kindness, Emotions and Human Relationships' (2018), Julia Unwin argues that public policy must respond to the changes in technology, such as artificial intelligence, automation and big data, and address the increasing disconnect between people and institutions. In order to build trust and confidence in public services, we must bring together the

> *'two lexicons in use in public policy. There is the language of metrics, and value added, of growth and resource allocation, of regulation, and of impact. And there is the language of kindness and grief, of loneliness, love and friendship, of the ties that bind, our sense of identity and of belonging. Native speakers of each of these languages converse separately perfectly well. They make decisions, and frequently get a great many things done. But so many of the challenges of our time require a more bilingual approach. They require us all to develop a fluency in both languages, and an ability to use the two lexicons without embarrassment or apology, and to move between them appropriately.' (p. 9)*

Kindness, Unwin argues, is not simply about being nice or avoiding conflict; it is inherently disruptive: 'Kindness comes from solidarity, and solidarity, in the modern world, demands a significant shift of power' (p.38). It requires investment in relationships and that provide the people we support with meaningful ways of co-constructing how

they can best be supported. Unwin warns that, 'if public policy does not respond creatively and urgently to this challenge, it will rapidly dissipate trust and fail to deliver. The results would be disastrous for us all.' (p. 39) This means that educational and social professions require a coherent framework that supports fluency in both the rational and the relational lexicon.

These calls for a system designed around human relationships and kindness are echoed by Hilary Cottam in 'Radical Help' (2018). Cottam argues that we need a social welfare system that is able to 'create capability rather than manage dependence; it must be open, because all of us need help at some stage in our lives, and when we are thriving many of us have help to offer; it must create possibility rather than seek only to manage risk; and it must include everyone, thereby fostering the connections and relationships that make good lives possible.' (2018, p. 18). Her call for a paradigm shift to ensure that people, relationships and communities are at the heart of the welfare system resonates from a social pedagogical perspective, which includes two developmental lines. Hämäläinen explains that social pedagogy refers, on the one hand, 'to a theory and practice of people's growth into membership of society and community, and on the other hand, to a theory and practice for prevention and alleviation of social exclusion and promotion of welfare' (2012, p. 8). These developmental lines are not mutually exclusive, meaning that social pedagogy is therefore able to provide a meaningful perspective across both paradigms: the welfare system that still focuses on managing the needs and issues of the most disadvantaged and the welfare system that is based on capability, growth and human connection. So what then is social pedagogy?

Social pedagogy – facilitating social change

As we seek to illustrate with this insight report, a social pedagogical perspective can help us navigate the complexities of contemporary issues in many societies in ways that address disadvantage, prevent adversity and promote cultural development through a relationship-centred, educational approach that seeks to support 'safe uncertainty' (Featherstone et al, 2014). Broadly speaking, social pedagogy offers an integrative and coherent perspective on supporting learning, well-being and social inclusion both through relationship-centred practice and structural efforts to address social inequality and promote social change.

There are many diverse interpretations of what social pedagogy is, and definitions necessarily vary depending on the historical, cultural and practice context in which social pedagogy is discussed (Hämäläinen, 2003). Indeed, Lorenz suggests that 'social pedagogy is an important but widely misunderstood member of the social professions' (2008, p.625). Given the complex ways in which social pedagogy has evolved in close relationship with societies – the traditions they cherish, the beliefs they uphold, the challenges they encounter, and the opportunities they seek – it is perhaps understandable that social pedagogy is widely misunderstood, often seen as elusive and or hard to grasp. As Úcar explains, 'you cannot try to limit what by its very nature has no limits, nor

claim to get snapshots of what, also by nature, is dynamic and mobile' (2011, p. 127). Following this line of thought, our insight report seeks to broaden rather than limit understandings of social pedagogy by illustrating how its ideas, principles and practices can be both discovered and nurtured across different cultural and professional contexts.

Whilst its complexity may be inconvenient in some respect, it is also one of the strengths of social pedagogy (Hämäläinen, 2003). It requires contextual awareness, prompting us to re-think its meaning and relevance depending on the socio-political environment and the institutional framework of our practice setting. Moreover, its complexity also implies that any attempts to understand social pedagogy merely at a cognitive level are bound to be reductive. This means that we should take a holistic approach to understanding social pedagogy at a theoretical, philosophical and practical level – with 'head, heart and hands' as one of the influential historical educationalists who has shaped the development of social pedagogy, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, proposed. For this reason, we have aimed to convey social pedagogy both in abstract and concrete terms throughout this report, highlighting the various characteristics that guide social pedagogical practice.

There are various reasons why, in our collective view, social pedagogy provides an essential and valuable perspective for educational and social practices tasked with responding meaningfully and pro-actively to complex social issues. These are outlined below:

1) Social Pedagogy is relationship-centred

Relationships are at the heart of social pedagogical practice and require from professionals to constantly think about, actively build and enable the development of relationships. Human beings are inherently social beings, eager to connect and belong, able to empathise and love. As professionals we are called upon to develop authentic and trustworthy supportive relationships with the individuals, groups or families we support. But the focus on relationships extends beyond this as we must also nurture the relationships people have with those around them to ensure that they have a strong social support network or a rich relational universe (Carter & Eichsteller, 2017) as well as access to resources. Professional-client relationships in this sense mean we're not just the lifeline in crisis, but that we're strengthening people's safety net and helping them recognise that they, in turn, can be part of other people's safety net too.

2) Social pedagogy draws on people's inherent capabilities and potential

Social pedagogical practice is based on the notion that each person is intrinsically rich, gifted with unique talents, capabilities and potential. Where educational and social practices reject a deficit-orientation of human beings and respects the inherent dignity of others as equal human beings, our role changes from fixing what's wrong with other people to creating an environment in which people can thrive, draw on their unique resources and unfold their potential. This recognises the lived experience of the people we support and their expertise in this respect, thus enabling us to both better understand the impact of complex social issues and jointly explore possible ways forward.

3) Social pedagogy is dialogical and participatory

Focussing on capabilities implies a participatory approach that emphasises dialogue. This enables us as professionals to navigate our respective realities and lived experiences, ensuring that the people we support have a genuine voice, feel respected and develop agency. By ensuring that individuals or communities are a valued part of the solution, rather than seen as part of the problem, we can collaboratively develop meaningful responses that bring about sustainable change.

4) Social pedagogy focuses both on practice and structures

Addressing social issues and supporting cultural development requires from us that we aim to affect change both in direct practice and at a structural level. Our focus must go beyond relationship-centred practice in recognition that we cannot limit social pedagogy to 'the conscious use of relationships' as this might risk that the debate on social problems does not go beyond the organisation of care and that problems are merely understood as problems of individuals and their behaviour (Coussée et al, 2009). Social pedagogy aims to act as a 'critical friend' within society, so it has to be able to challenge the status quo and popular opinions by making a coherent moral and theoretical argument for supporting the disadvantaged, disregarded and disenfranchised individuals and groups within society. It also has to justify its existence by demonstrating its relevance in practice and its contribution to wider society in ways that go beyond resolving issues. Social pedagogy should also encourage community-building, help facilitate inclusive intercultural dialogue between different individuals and groups within society and champion universal human rights.

5) Social pedagogy is attuned to social justice issues

Social pedagogical practice must critically reflect upon the ways in which social justice issues, such as poverty or homelessness, are socially constructed and structurally reinforced. Instead of blaming the individuals affected by complex social issues and thus ignoring the wider societal responsibility for how we collectively respond to social changes, we must keep matters of marginalisation and social exclusion at the forefront of our practice and recognise the limitations of our ability as individuals to solve complex social issues, which are far beyond any one person's sphere of influence. By conceptualising our work in this way, we open up possibilities to form alliances and see ourselves as part of a broader movement towards social justice.

6) Social pedagogy offers an integrative and coherent framework

As a perspective, social pedagogy speaks to a broad range of professionals in educational and social practices and even beyond, for instance in health care. Its strong ethical and interdisciplinary theoretical foundations frequently resonate with practitioners in related professions, giving social pedagogy the potential to provide an integrative and coherent framework for inter-professional practice and multi-agency work. Social pedagogy recognises that as professionals we all have a shared responsibility for the ways in which we support disadvantaged individuals, groups or communities – and we all have different insights and roles that, collectively, enable us to navigate the complexities we encounter in practice.

7) Social pedagogy nurtures inspiration and motivation

At a time when educational and social professions are under sustained pressure, it is crucial that we provide work environments in which practitioners feel connected to a greater sense of purpose and their own motivations. Its emphasis on human agency, relationships and holistic well-being require us to aspire to embed social pedagogical values within organisational cultures too. Research on leadership across different industries suggests that motivation and inspiration are closely linked to professionals experiencing a sense of autonomy, mastery and purpose (Pink, 2011) and that more and more leading organisations are moving towards a radically more productive and soulful organisational model (Laloux, 2014 'Teal organisations' are characterised by self-managing teams of employees, a concern with the wholeness of each human being that rejects reducing employees to the rational self (the part of us that's 'professional'), and recognition that organisations are complex living organisms with evolutionary purpose. A social pedagogical perspective can support these ambitions and thus enable organisations to create a working environment in which people feel able to be authentic, are intrinsically motivated, connected to a deeper sense of purpose, and trusted to make good decisions that serve this purpose.

These manifold benefits of a social pedagogical perspective mean that organisational leaders, decision-makers and professionals in social and educational practice settings have good reasons to create the conditions in which well-educated professionals feel trusted and equipped to challenge dominant problem definitions and their own practices, try out new ideas, adapt existing approaches and feel empowered to meaningfully support the individuals, groups and communities affected, using a participatory approach to draw on people's inherent resourcefulness. Social pedagogy aims to equip social and educational professions with the theoretical perspectives, ethical foundation, relational and methodological skills required to facilitate situated professional judgment and professional agency.

In the following section, we introduce social pedagogy traditions from across the different countries represented in our project partnership, focussing both on relevant theoretical and practical perspectives to stimulate reflection and dialogue about how social and educational professions can meaningfully respond to both contemporary challenges and reveal new opportunities. The insights into both theoretical and practice developments in these countries draw on our international partnership and ongoing dialogue as part of the project developing our Massive Open Online Course in *Social Pedagogy across Europe.* Therefore, they necessarily represent the perspectives of us as a project team. For the purpose of this project we selected six partner countries with different traditions of social pedagogy in order to show its diversity. Whilst we have also included practice perspective from a further seven countries in the MOOC (Canada, Mexico, the United States, Brazil, Greece, Slovakia, and Poland), this would have been beyond the scope of this report.

We have chosen two examples of social pedagogical practice designed to illuminate the diverse yet congruent character of such responses and the extent to which social pedagogical responses are structurally embedded, commonly found or only just beginning to emerge. Naturally, we could have chosen many more insightful examples. We share these not with the appeal for others to replicate these practices or to suggest that these are necessarily superior to other responses to social issues. Rather, in recognition of complexity, we hope that they illustrate the power of creative responses and ideas of how to stay true to social pedagogical values when social and educational professions are under pressure. Some of these examples might be relevant or applicable to some readers, whilst others may inspire deeper examination of, and connection with, readers' own practice and the extent to which they have succeeded in developing meaningful responses that turn the challenges faced by the communities they serve into opportunities. If you wish to share your own practice example, please feel welcome to contact us.

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II. SOCIAL PEDAGOGY ACROSS EUROPE

Social pedagogy traditions can be found in many countries across Europe and, increasingly, around the globe. Whilst its origins as a paradigm can be traced back to 19th century Germany, many of the ideas are recognisable in the work of educational thinkers and social philosophers even before that. The term *pedagogy* itself goes back to antique Greece, where it was used to describe the 'guardian whose responsibility it was to lead (*agogos*) the young boy (*paides*) to school. […] The adult had the task of accompanying the child, of being with the child, of caring for the child. This is a kind of "leading" that often walks behind the one who is led.' (van Manen 1991, p. 37).

The social pedagogy traditions in the countries represented in this report illustrate that many of these ideas have travelled across cultural boundaries and continue to do so across the world. There are distinct differences between these traditions – necessarily so, given the different cultural contexts – as well as fascinating commonalities. We hope that this report can contribute to the increasing transnational dialogue about social pedagogy by showcasing the richness and potential which this diversity has to offer. This is also illustrated in the practice examples from each country of how social pedagogical professionals have developed effective responses to some of the challenges they are encountering within their specific practice context.

EARLY YEARS CARE
PLAY WORK
YOUTH WORK
SCHOOLS
FOSTER CARE
RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE
LEAVING CARE SUPPORT
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES SUPPORT
FAMILY SUPPORT
SOCIAL WORK
SOCIAL HOUSING
ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES SUPPORT
COMMUNITY DEVELOP-MENT
PSYCHIATRIC CARE
DRUG ADDICTION TREATMENT
PRISON SERVICE
PROBATION SERVICES
CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE
A social pedagogical perspective can be found in a wide range of practice fields, which we have illustrated here. Semi-transparent country flags indicate that such a perspective is uncommon.
Practice Fields

Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in Germany

Brigitte Paterson, Colin Paterson, Heike Schädler & Jörg Schlüter (KJSH)

Features of Social Pedagogy in Germany

Whilst Germany has a longstanding history of social pedagogy, which dates back to 1844, it is often noted that the German approach to social pedagogy reflects a somewhat undefined concept that attempts to connect several historically changing notions in one term. The term *Sozialpädagogik* appears to represent a rather blurry terminology and, at the same time, a very indistinct idea of one or even more professional fields. This is closely related to, and has its roots in, the over 120-year-old broad discussion of theories of social work and social pedagogy. These conversations were closely connected to attempts to establish an academic discipline in Germany's higher education system. In the 1970s, these attempts resulted in courses being established at regular universities as well as at so-called 'universities of applied sciences'. Initially, social work programmes were located at the more practically orientated universities of applied sciences and social pedagogy courses at traditional universities, emphasising the social pedagogical roots in some of the philosophical approaches of the 19th and early 20th century.

The theoretical debate on social pedagogy has often been summarised as a challenging adventure to find the 'real' identity of social pedagogy. The various attempts still characterise at least three things, according to Rauschenbach (1991):

- An academic discipline under the roof of pedagogy/educational sciences;
- A conglomeration of theoretical perspectives on fields and practices of education, which particularly emphasise their social and societal conditions;

- A collective term for a rather disparate professional field, which Germans traditionally identify as *Kinder- und Jugendhilfe* (child and youth welfare).

Probably the most dominant theory of social pedagogy is the approach of *lifeworld orientation* (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Schurgurensky, 2014). It has mainly been developed by Hans Thiersch and his school of thought since the 1970s and was initially called *everyday orientation*, referring to Karel Kosik's thoughts on the dialectics of everyday life. At the core of lifeworld orientation lies the assumption that social pedagogy is above all a practice which is concerned with a deep understanding of the subjective views and everyday life routines of the people it supports. This is relevant to this approach, as social pedagogy identifies individuals' life and coping strategies to understand their functionality as well as to distinguish between strategies that are more or less 'working' for them. Likewise, this approach aims to describe how the process of understanding itself opens up ways for social pedagogy to shape all relevant dimensions of clients' everyday life (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009).

Currently, the 'profession' debate in Germany not longer distinguishes between the terms *social pedagogy* and *social work* (Kessl, 2013). Today, the study of *social care* (Soziale Arbeit) as an overarching terminus, leads to a dual qualification encompassing both social work and social pedagogy.

Areas of employment for people with a social care degree are very broad and widely spread. In the public sector, social pedagogues are employed in social work departments concerned mostly with the areas of child protection and children in care and fulfil statutory functions in these areas. Schools have become a field of employment over the past decades, with a role for social pedagogues to support individuals in the academic efforts, bridging difficulties in the social domain, including students' home, and encouraging group work. In the private and voluntary sector, social pedagogues find employment in day care settings for small children (nurseries, kindergartens) up to the eldest in society, offering support to families and children in contact with child protection social work teams, residential settings across the life span and in programmes and services designed to support various groups and individuals in their respective communities. Given Germany's rapidly ageing population, social pedagogy plays a key role in attempts to develop and provide solutions for the elderly, in community, semi-residential and residential settings. An important lens provided by social pedagogical approaches includes the realistic and appropriate inclusion of client resources and the integration into the clients' respective life worlds.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

The examples given below outline 2 of our services at KJSH, through which we have attempted to respond creatively to the ever-changing socio-educational circumstances in Germany. They show that, in social pedagogy, we aim to ensure that the support we offer starts where the individuals or families are at, not where we need them to be, and that the support evolves in dialogue with them, not along narrow and pre-determined parameters.

Ackerstraße – Residential Crisis intervention Unit, Berlin

Ackerstraße is a family-activating residential unit in Berlin, which provides a short- to mid-term home for children at risk of being removed from their families, and at the same time provides a living space for the family as a whole. The legal basis for the work at Ackerstraße is the German Law for Youth Care (SGB VIII §34, partly in combination with the §42). This outlines the goals and settings of social pedagogical support to parents in quite a detailed manner. Strictly speaking, the legal basis in this case is residential care for children who are actually at risk of harm, neglect or other forms of abuse. The parents, carers or other people who are seen as helpful to addressing the underlying problems may also live there. They are given guest status. This small difference is important for the work with families, because it aims at two issues that often do not seem to fit together in everyday work. Firstly, the local authority responsible for a child at risk needs to ensure the child's safety at any time. Secondly, the local authority needs to positively assess that the parents of the child at risk have the ability and intention to work on the child protection issues by keeping the relationship with the child and building on that.

The innovative and somewhat radical idea behind this service is that, even though clear child protection concerns have been identified in a child protection assessment, the intervention aims to keep these relatively young children or babies together with their primary caregivers in order to enhance parental capacity where possible while at the same time ensuring the safety and protection of the children.

The structure of the German legislation provides the necessary context for such an innovative intervention, as the SGB VIII seeks to provide parents with a multitude of services, supporting them in their responsibilities in their children's upbringing. At the same time, this legal basis also has an impact on funding, as it means that it is accessible for any parent in need and effectively guarantees long-term financial stability for services such as Ackerstraße.

The service at Ackerstraße has 8 full-time social pedagogues and social pedagogical care workers working on a rota basis to support up to 8 children and their families. This number varies depending on the family situations.

There is one house manager in the team and a manager who oversees 2-3 of similar services, working very closely with the team.

The local authority's crisis team working around the clock will decide if a child may require a place in the unit. When it has been agreed with us as the provider (KJSH Stiftung / KJHV Berlin) that the unit is able to provide ample resources, there would in any case be a short sequence of dialogue (care planning) with the family and the local authority to point out very clearly where the red line is in terms of child protection and what needs to be done. It is clarified that the child is being taken into care and that the parents have 'only' guest status. The aim is to work with the family, but the possibility of the persons with custody (usually the parents) having a crisis is always anticipated. The parents then may move out whilst their child remains at Ackerstraße (as part of child protection) and may move back in again later. The intended timeline for a placement of a child or family living in the unit is 3-6 months. After this, there is a thorough phase of care planning. It is either decided with the family what can be done if the family is not seen as capable of living outside a setting like this. If it is not possible to decide with the family what to do, the local authority would refer the case to the family court for a decision based on the assessment made in everyday life with the parents. If the family moves out to live on their own, intensive outreach care will always be provided.

The approach and the residential crisis intervention unit are fairly new, so long-term outcomes are not yet available. One clear outcome experienced so far is that roughly half of the families who have lived at Ackerstraße are still together 1.5 years after leaving the Ackerstraße and that the child protection concerns are below the legal threshold that would require further interventions.

Ubuntu – die Wagenburg

Ubuntu is a working circus project designed to provide a temporary home for 1-2 years to young people who cannot live with their families. It provides schooling for those unable to attend their local school. The legal basis for the work of Ubuntu is also outlined in the German Law for Child and Youth Care (SGB VIII §34). This is not necessarily a child protection issue, as the law also covers support to children, young people and families in need. On Ubuntu's premises there are two groups, both of which are supported by a team of 12 professionals overall, some of which are qualified social pedagogues, some social care practitioners with a social pedagogy background, including a circus pedagogue and 1.5 teacher positions. There are places for 16 young persons aged 12 or older at Ubuntu.

The idea behind Ubuntu is to provide an alternative learning approach with a 'real time' goal. This means that the young people who choose to be placed at Ubuntu go through a thorough part-time acrobatic training. The ideal timing is that they start living at Ubuntu in the late summer, although this is not always the case. When the young

people move in, they are situated in a small circus caravan which they have all to themselves. The young people's education then consists of three parts: School, practices (anything surrounding a circus) and acrobatics. After roughly 9 months, Ubuntu tours the schools of the young people it accommodates. The purpose of this tour is to give the young people's schools a new perspective on this individual as well as enabling the young people to present themselves in a new way. At the same time, around 50 young people who don't live at Ubuntu have already been training for 2.5 months. After the first tour, the groups start to mingle before the whole circus – including Ubuntu residents, their parents if they want, the 50 young people not living in Ubuntu and their parents if wanted – tour the north of Germany for 6 weeks over the summer. After this period, the young person returns home or is old enough to start living on their own.

The rationale for the tours is that, with the natural pressure arising from a tent filled to its capacity of 300, there is less focus on learning issues. This often enables young people to perceive themselves differently, to reimagine who they are and can be. The mix between residents and non-residents is designed to be inclusive, and the people buying tickets for the shows are unaware of the fact that this is partly a residential youth care unit.

For further details please visit www.ubuntu-wagenburg.de

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Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in the Czech Republic

Dana Knotová and Vladka Kyjánková, Masaryk University

Features of Social Pedagogy in the Czech Republic

Social pedagogy is currently integrated into the system of pedagogical sciences. It belongs to the applied pedagogical disciplines focussed on the prevention and solution of social problems. It is based on the findings of complementary scientific disciplines, such as social psychology, sociology of education and schooling, pedagogical anthropology, and as such it is a highly interdisciplinary science. There are many disciplines under its umbrella, which had previously been separate, for instance pedagogy of free time, special pedagogy with its current inclusive orientation that emphasises joint education law (i.e. the social aspect), or outdoor education. Therefore, the predominant notion is that social pedagogy is a complex and multidimensional field.

It is necessary to interpret social pedagogy's current conception in the context of historical, cultural, and societal connections, since the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia) was part of the Eastern European, so-called communist countries for more than 40 years. The communist ideology puts emphasis on social equality, with the goal of public policy then being the prevention of social differences, which has led to a strong focus on prevention. These historical connections explain the contemporary concern with prevention and the social goal of education. Primarily, this focuses on people's socialisation and their integration into the community, the prevention of situations endangering human development. In addition, social pedagogy aims to help people in situations of threat and social conflict. Social pedagogy therefore focuses primarily on families and people who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion, e.g. those who have educational problems in the family, housing problems or are unemployed.

A characteristic feature of socio-educational traditions in the framework of contemporary Czech socio-educational thinking is the inspiration by German and Polish social pedagogy. The influence of German social pedagogy can be seen in the focus on helping people improve their lifestyle, with an emphasis on the subjective dimensions of life situations, so that they can be understood by those who experience them in their daily reality. Concepts of German social pedagogy have been resonating in the socio-educational discourse of the Czech Republic since the 1990s (e.g. Klíma, 1994; Kraus & Poláčková, 2001). Before 1989 – a year of crucial socio-political reform when the communist party lost power in the Czech Republic due to the so-called 'Velvet Revolution' – socio-educational thinking was developed under the influence of Polish social pedagogy as a pedagogy focusing on the environment of education (e.g. families, school). This influence also remains visible in the focus on environmental pedagogy (Knotová, 2014; Kraus, 2008; Procházka, 2012).

The opinion that social pedagogy is one of the perspectives (or paradigms) of social work (Hämäläinen, 2003, 77) is not shared in the Czech Republic. Social pedagogy has established itself as a discipline close to social work, though not entirely interchangeable with it. Unlike social work, it is primarily targeted at prevention, targeting the reduction in risky behaviour among all age groups, the elimination or minimalisation of educational and parenting problems and helping families avoid the danger of social marginalisation or social exclusion.

Over the last two decades, there has been an alienation between social work and social pedagogy, as cooperation has been stuck in a stalemate at the academic level. However, in practice, both disciplines cooperate in many NGOs and institutions working with similar client groups and using similar methods. Overall, social pedagogy is a field which, thanks to a strong socio-scientific multidisciplinary basis, has a good position and allows for the performance of various social professions around important issues such as social inclusion, social and cultural diversity, equal opportunities, social ecology, and community development.

Whilst 'Social Pedagogue' is not currently a regulated profession in the Czech Republic, graduates of social pedagogy degrees easily find multi-professional employment in various job positions. They can be free time pedagogues, pedagogue assistants, educators, educators-therapists in prisons, and very often they can be found as special prison pedagogues, for whom higher education in the field of pedagogical sciences is prescribed, or at different positions in the Police of the Czech Republic. Upon completing the (legally stated) requirements, they can also work in the Probation and Mediation Service. Graduates are also employed in departments of Social and Legal Protection of Children and in the field of foster care. Graduating in social pedagogy is currently a qualification prerequisite for pursuing the profession of a social worker. This variety is partly enabled by the inclusion of several social work units in the social pedagogy course plan. On the other hand, the social work course does not include any units from social pedagogy.

At present, social pedagogy as a field of study is taught in secondary schools (attested by a baccalaureate diploma) and is accredited, in particular, at ten faculties of the eight Czech universities in their Bachelor or postgraduate studies. Among the university faculties in which the programme is being studied are typically the pedagogical, philosophical, theological faculties. This field of study has long been of interest among students; over the last decade, more than 14,000 students have graduated in social pedagogy from universities (Lorenzová, 2017).

Auspicious support for the development of social pedagogy was brought about by the establishment of the Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy in 2013. The Association began to cooperate with the Czech Pedagogical Research Association, School Psychology Association, and many different local authorities, the Prison Service, the Probation and Mediation Service, and non-profit organisations. The Association set its aim to develop social pedagogy as a field of study and science, including its applications in practice, to develop educational standards in the field of social pedagogy, to strive to anchor the profession of a 'social pedagogue' in education, and to create conditions for the social pedagogue profession also in the social sphere (Hladík, 2014). Within a short time, it has managed to prepare the standards of the social pedagogical curriculum and to involve the members of the Association in proposals for legislative changes in order to establish the profession of a social pedagogue in the education department and the department of social affairs.

Social pedagogy is evolving as an academic discipline and can thus be described as 'knowledge that is being created' (Caride, 2016, p. 96). However, whilst discussions are repeatedly being held at an academic level about its conception and theoretical basis, insufficient attention is paid to contemporary trends and concepts of theories of science. The theory of social pedagogy would be enriched by constructivist, discursive, phenomenological, or structural concepts, which have appeared in social pedagogy traditions abroad. Also, attention should be paid to strengthening the professional community and its role in applying social pedagogical knowledge in practice. The solution to the relationship between social pedagogy and social work is an evergreen.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

In this section we present two examples of how social pedagogy is applied in practice in the Czech Republic to respond to social challenges. The first example outlines the activities of Drom, an organisation established to support socially marginalised Roma families with the direct participation of social pedagogues. Having been one of the first such organisations in the Czech Republic, Drom's work is still very much needed, as unfortunately polls show that attitudes towards Roma amongst the wider population have not changed much – they are the least popular minority and are therefore still one of the most heavily marginalised social groups. This is despite the

long-term governmental programme Roma Integration Strategy for 2020, which has focused on key areas of life: culture, education, employment, housing, health and safety.

The second example is a recently-started project, The Rapid Rehousing Project in the city of Brno. This project provides a municipal flat and intensive 'housing first' case management for up to 50 families who were previously living in private hostels, shelters or other forms of homeless accommodation. The project is led by Brno city council in cooperation with several NGOs actively employing social pedagogy in practice. In the Czech Republic this area is not explicitly covered by law and thus the project is unique in involving the cooperation of both government and NGO actors in this area.

Drom - supporting Roma families, Brno

Established by the city of Brno (the second largest city in the Czech Republic with 400,000 inhabitants), Drom started its activities in the 1990s. It is located in a city district with a predominant Roma population. Roma form the largest ethnic minority in the Czech Republic, making up approximately 2.2% of the total population, and Roma communities are frequently marginalised due to their low social status, high rates of unemployment, and typically low levels of education. The aim of Drom's work is to support their integration, to adopt approaches leading to the elimination or minimisation of social exclusion impacts, to analyse the problems of a socially excluded locality, and to cooperate with non-profit organisations in community social work. In the Czech Republic, the activity of the NGO sector is regulated by the Civil Code. Community planning is an obligatory part of the planning of social services at local and regional level and is coordinated by local authorities.

The organisation's workers provide a unique spectrum of services to clients of pre-school to senior age, with more than a thousand clients per year. In the context of field social work, Drom deals mainly with debt problems, as their clients are often at risk of loss of standard housing and long-term unemployment. One of the major services provided is free social counselling. The organisation also operates a community centre, which focuses on helping victims of crime and the reintegration of offenders. Within the community centre, a community garden, a craft and sewing workshop have been formed, informal communication at the neighbouring level is preferred. The organisation also offers comprehensive services and uses therapeutic approaches aimed at stabilising families, supporting single mothers and foster parents.

The majority of activities provided by the leisure time centre fall under preventive activities provided in low-threshold facilities for children and youth. The leisure time centre is open every weekday afternoon and, in addition to assisting with preparation for school and tutoring, it organises recreational activities and hosts various occasional and seasonal events. The centre provides a safe environment in which young people learn to be the

co-creators of their programme and partners in dialogue. Drom has had a positive effect on the Roma community, e.g. by increasing the participation of parents in their children's education, changing their attitudes towards the importance of education and raising their interest in the educational outcomes of their children.

For further details please visit www.drom.cz

The Rapid Rehousing Project, Brno

Our second interesting example of how social pedagogical approaches can be applied is the Rapid Rehousing Project, which started in 2017 and aims to address social housing issues. The project helps families in housing distress, who may live in an inadequate sublease (where there is little space, many occupants, poor quality of housing) or risk being evicted from their tenancies. This project is significant because the support for social housing (the so-called Social Housing Act) is not legislatively resolved in the Czech Republic. Whilst this topic has been discussed for more than 20 years, there has not yet been any agreement at political and legislative level. This has left a vacuum for practice, which the Rapid Rehousing Project aims to fill.

The project has enabled 50 socially excluded families in housing distress to obtain rental housing and thus create stability. A family homelessness registry week was conducted in Brno in 2016, and 421 families living in private hostels, shelters or other forms of homelessness were registered. These families are typically considered not fit for housing by both private and public landlords, with the consequence that they have little access to housing. The Rapid Rehousing Project is the first attempt in the Czech Republic to influence the quality of life of families by providing adequate housing. It is based on the concept of safe living as a basic human need. The project offers social counselling, with the active involvement of social pedagogy students.

The project is evaluated by researchers using a randomised control trial to collect evidence of its impact. The information is provided through media, expert and political panels and has the potential to be adopted by other cities and non-governmental organisations across the Czech Republic. In its pilot phase, families could access support through the project on the conditions that they lived in the city of Brno and were willing to cooperate with a social worker. Families were selected randomly by means of a lot, as part of a randomised control trial. The evaluation showed that families gained a sense of security and certainty, it activated several families towards work opportunities, and some children showed improved behaviour and school results. 12 months later, families were able to meet the rental conditions, and no family had withdrawn from the project. One mother described the impact as follows:

'When we were staying in a dormitory my daughter was seldom communicating, she was always quiet ... looking around with a hollow gaze and not following what others were saying. Now that we have a flat to ourselves she

has begun to talk, she now has her own room; and really her progress very much surprised me: she has started to communicate, she is actively learning, she is happier.'

For further details please visit https://hf.socialnibydleni.org/rapid-re-housing-brno

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Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in Denmark

Charlotte Firing (Common View) & Martin Sørensen (UCC)

Features of Social Pedagogy in Denmark

In Denmark social pedagogy is based on a long tradition rooted in the notion of equality and is continuously developing in relation to societal currents. The origin comes from the idea that the structures within society consists of a range of factors that can cause exclusion on different levels, and therefore society also has an obligation to provide opportunities and support to make sure that marginalised groups or individuals can find their way back into the community.

Social pedagogy is both an academic discipline and a profession in Denmark. As an academic discipline, it can be studied at university colleges providing BA programmes and, at postgraduate level, at universities. It has been one of the most popular courses for many years. Given the close link between social pedagogy and pedagogy in Denmark, after their first year of studies, students can choose their specialism in kindergarten pedagogy, leisure pedagogy or social pedagogy. As a profession, social pedagogues work in a range of practice fields focussed on relational 'hands-on' work with people across the whole age range.

A central way of looking at social pedagogy in Denmark is by seeing it as a two-headed creature where theory meets everyday practice. There is a wide use of methods, with social pedagogues preferring various participatory methods such as inclusion, which can be used with communities of all kinds. The professionals have theoretical knowledge and expertise, but the individuals they support are seen as experts in their own lives.

The concept of 'inclusion' has gained a strong foothold over the last 10 years and is used as an overall framework in social pedagogy as well as in other professions such as social work, health service, occupational therapy and

teaching, meaning that in practice social pedagogues are working in a multi-disciplinary setting. Inclusion is a broader concept than integration and emphasises that society and communities have to be flexible and operate smoothly in order to be able to include individuals at risk of being marginalised in the community. The theoretical angle implies that social pedagogues have to work with the community, so the individual does not see him- or herself as marginalised. The responsibility for marginalisation – and for addressing the issue – is therefore placed upon the group or community.

Currently there is an increasing use of the term 'evidence'. Evidence-based practice is rooted in best practice and has been developed in institutional settings where social pedagogy is practised and where the impact of social pedagogy is difficult to measure. This means that social pedagogues are increasingly expected to work by a best-practice method, which has proven to be efficient in other areas of social pedagogy. Transfer of knowledge into local settings and institutions has proven to cause substantial difficulties and therefore social pedagogues have to trust – and use – their critical sense and rather than not simply adopt the idea of evidence-based practice. Civil service employers and politicians have determined that specific methods must be used to measure outcomes.

When working with 'evidence-based methods' social pedagogues have to rely on their own professional judgement. Evidence-based methods can be illustrated as a three-legged stool where social pedagogues must rely partly on the evidence, partly on their own professional judgement and partly on the persons they are working with.

The field of social pedagogy is also experiencing an increasing use of psychological and psychiatric diagnoses. Social problems are often connected to different parts of diagnosis, and social pedagogues have to work within the special frame which the diagnosis offers. On the one hand, this gives social pedagogues an understanding of the person's problems, but on the other hand it curtails their professionalism.

The social pedagogical profession is facing a new target group of people with substantial mental health issues related to anxiety, depression, eating disorders etc. Children and young people from the socioeconomic middleclass are increasingly appearing in the social pedagogues' daily jobs. Social pedagogues meet them on the streets where, instead of being at school or at work, they are experimenting with drugs and crime – and this at a scale never seen before. It could therefore be said that social pedagogy has moved from institutional practice to the everyday life of families in their homes.

The profession is represented by SL, the national union for the 39,000 social pedagogues. SL is working towards creating a more solidary society in which everybody, regardless of their daily challenges and problems, is able to live a life being an important part of Danish society. SL and other professional bodies representing specific practice fields such as residential child care seek to enhance the working conditions of social pedagogues by

influencing the political level of society. These organisations are often invited to political debates because of their knowledge regarding specific areas of social pedagogy.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

Throughout their education, social pedagogues are encouraged to explore new ways of practicing, use creative ways of responding to emerging social issues and draw on their own interests in connecting with the people they support. One of the currents ideas is to create more social enterprises and thus provide inclusive working opportunities to marginalised people. This is illustrated in our first example, the Sports Project, which has gained national recognition. Chrysalis Schools, our second example, shows that social pedagogy offers a helpful perspective in educational settings, ensuring that professionals support children holistically, recognising them as unique human beings.

The Sports Project (Idrætsprojektet), Copenhagen

One of the more innovative and inclusion-based practice developments throughout Denmark is the Sports Project. This project started 10 years ago with one social pedagogue having a vision of how engaging in sports could support and motivate young people in residential care. Today, it is anchored in the social administration of the municipality of Copenhagen and linked to the 'Centre for vulnerable and crime endangered young people'. It aims to build bridges between leisure activities, school, education and adults. The core team is multidisciplinary and consists of more than 100 full-time and part-time employees with a variety of professional backgrounds. They are mostly social pedagogues, teachers and sports science graduates; however, social workers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists are represented too. A large number of volunteers forms an important part of the project. It is a large community where everybody is welcome and where young people, through the relations with others, can unfold their potential. The possibilities are manifold and the sky is the limit.

The Sports Project has pioneered and refined a unique method based on 5 principles, which form the foundation of everything they do. No matter who they collaborate with or what the objectives are, these basic principles are reflected in the effort/performance:

1. *Voluntariness*

Participation is voluntary, hence all participants must agree to collaborate. However, a collaboration with the Sports Project can begin with the coach simply trying to gain consent from the participant by doing intensive outreach work. The concept of voluntariness is the foundation of the individual's experience of being an active

participant in their own life and enables the individual to move in a new direction and take ownership of the process.

2. *Patience*

Patience is reflected in all facets of the work and in all cooperative relationships with children, young people, adults, families, networks, business partners, associations, etc. They patiently and persistently keep on even when facing long-standing resistance and multiple rejections.

3. *Flexibility*

Flexibility is expressed through 4 parameters: (1) the Sports Project's working hours are flexible to accommodate wishes for activities; (2) the Sports Project always engineers the effort according to the individual's needs and does ongoing adjustments if these needs change; (3) the Sports Project always includes the individual's network in the effort and, where possible, adds on a holistic effort including the whole family; (4) the Sports Project accepts and respects the different procedures and methods carried out by the cooperative relationships and is aware that all efforts are done in collaboration with others.

4. *Motivation*

The Sports Project is pursuing the dreams and wishes of the participant, and the motivational work is based on those dreams and wishes. The objective is to provide an opportunity for the participant to experience their own desire to work out, learn and participate. The Sports Project is not using any form of force or unnecessary pressure, instead they keep on insisting on just being together.

5. *Belief, hope and comfort (peace of mind)*

The Sports Project believe in the participants – believe that everybody has resources and potential. They offer prosocial communities – schools, leisure life, education and occupation – and hope that the participants will join them. It creates a safe environment as a foundation for development, learning and well-being.

The Sports Project operates from bases in five different locations in Copenhagen. These different locations entail equipment for a variety of activities, learning hubs, kitchens and administration. All locations provide a lot of opportunities for shared activities with the coach or with other children, young people and adults.

For further details please visit https://idraetsprojektet.kk.dk

Chrysalis Schools

Our second example illustrates how inclusion underpins social pedagogical practice even in specialist settings. Chrysalis Schools is the largest special needs school in Denmark combining education and treatment as well as respite care, adult education and a treatment centre. The school provides aim-directed education for over 300 children and young people with multiple diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, cognitive disorders, personality disorders and PTSD. New pupils are admitted to one of Chrysalis's 16 schools, which specialises in the particular form of pedagogy and approach that they believe will most benefit the child. Under the framework of inclusion, their work focuses on creating opportunities for the pupils to return to mainstream schools wherever possible. Alternatively, there are still inclusive opportunities at each Chrysalis department/unit.

All the pupils have a need for individual schooling according to their treatment, and all schooling takes into consideration their personal, academic, social and treatment aspects. The team believe that all children and young people have the opportunity to have a valuable and self-providing adulthood. There's a clear philosophy: 'we never give up! Because all our pupils have inherent potential for development'.

The employees are divided between social pedagogues and school teachers, both working together in aiming for the best pedagogical solution for each pupil at Chrysalis Schools. This means that even though it is a school, they are convinced that the contribution from the social pedagogues is equally important as that of the school teachers.

The school also works closely with the families of its pupils, for instance by offering guidance, making sure that the new competencies learned by a child are recognised and supported by their parents at home, and supporting new initiatives both at home and in school.

What's particularly interesting about Chrysalis Schools is that it includes a treatment centre, which consists of a health care unit, a diagnosis unit and an out-patient clinic. This is where all knowledge of psychological, psychiatric and health professional treatment is brought together, and as such it provides a centre of knowledge and competencies with an overview of all the pupils circumstances and developments. It is a unique resource for Chrysalis Schools, and all the individual units have access to the centre.

For further details please visit http://chrysalisschools.dk/

Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in Spain

Xavier Úcar, Laura Arnau, Paloma Valdivia, Angela Janer & Laura Corbella, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Features of Social Pedagogy in Spain

Social pedagogy as a discipline arrived in Spain at the end of the 19th century. The existing relationship between Spanish and German philosophers made social pedagogy known early in our country. It would not be until the 1950s, however, that it became an academic discipline in some universities. Although it initially focussed on marginalised children and young people, it soon extended to other ages and life situations, probably due to the influence of other theoretical and practical educational movements that arrived in those years from other countries such as France, England and some Latin American countries.

Due to the influence of these movements and in the context of an increasingly permissive dictatorship, numerous initiatives of community educational work were spontaneously implemented in many neighbourhoods around Spain in the 1950s and 60s. An extraordinary variety of social agents appeared, including socio-cultural animators, specialised educators, local development agents, leisure educators, popular educators, and others. At this time, it was not clear which professional and academic field they were located in or part of regarding the activities that spontaneous professional agents developed in the neighbourhoods. In fact, the fields that claimed them for themselves were diverse: education, psychology, sociology and social work among them.

At the end of the 1980s, Spanish universities reorganised the university degrees of pedagogy and education. It was at this point that the university studies of social pedagogy and the spontaneous socio-educational initiatives of the neighbourhood converged. The fact that social pedagogy was not consolidated as a science and that it had been alien to the popular movement around education in the neighbourhoods and with socially and culturally

disadvantaged people allowed associations and diverse groups to position themselves in favour of establishing some social education studies that were clearly professionalizing.

The result was the approval, at the end of 1991, of a 3-year Diploma degree that led directly to the profession of social educator. These studies could have three different profiles, as agreed in 1988 in a macro state conference in which academics, researchers, professionals and municipal training schools participated. These were: (1) sociocultural animation and leisure pedagogy; (2) specialised education and (3) adult education in its three possibilities: (a) literacy (basic adult education); (b) sociocultural animation of adults, and (c) occupational/labour training. Since then, it has been clear that these professional actions are part of the academic and professional field of education.

In 2012, social education became a four-year university degree. From then on, social pedagogy has the discipline studied as part of the social education degree. It is considered within the scientific framework that elaborates the theoretical and practical principles that guides the action of social educators. Social pedagogy is the disciplinary and research framework, and social education is the university degree and the profession.

Social pedagogy and social education work with individuals, groups and communities throughout their entire lifespan. The socio-educational intervention of social educators seeks to accompany people to help them learn and acquire resources allowing them to live their lives in a dignified way in their socio-cultural contexts. Currently, it faces the same challenges that other developed societies do. As a human rights profession, it seeks to support people in coping with or overcome the social problems they experience as well as in growing and developing socially and culturally. In Spain, social pedagogy and social education have always fought against inequalities in a humanistic framework.

The social-educational relationships developed by social educators occur within the framework of the daily life of individuals, groups and communities. This means that they act in the very diverse and heterogeneous, informal, organisational and institutional spheres in which people spend their lives – from socio-educational work with young people on the street or in leisure centres, to work in prisons, or also through work in residential centres for children, young people or the elderly or, finally, in schools. In recent years, social educators have begun to be included in schools.

Across all the Autonomous Communities of Spain there are professional associations of social educators that are grouped in the General Council of Associations of Social Educators of Spain (CGCEES). It is estimated that there are currently around 12,000 registered social educators.

Regarding academia, we must highlight the *Sociedad Iberoamericana de Pedagogía Social* (SIPS), a scientific society with more than 35 years of history. Over these years, it has launched 31 Inter-University Seminars

(annually) and 5 Ibero-American Conferences (every 4 years, in Chile, Portugal, Brazil and Mexico). SIPS also publishes a journal, *Pedagogía Social. Revista interuniversitaria,* which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2017. It is currently open access and has recently been included in the SCOPUS Database. Over the last two years both SIPS and CGCEES have been advocating for the creation of a National Law on Social Education.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

The examples presented below show how a social pedagogical perspective ensures a proactive social change perspective with a strong focus on empowerment – either of communities as in the first initiative, RUA XIC, a community education project in a few neighbourhoods in Barcelona, or of specific disadvantaged groups as in our second example, En Trajecte, a project supporting young people's employability. Whilst youth unemployment remains a key social pedagogical issue, there are many other areas of social pedagogical work with young people, for instance around creativity, mobility, housing, leisure, health and prevention risks, global youth policy, inclusion. The following link https://www.joventut.info/bonespractiques/ outlines further noteworthy projects from across the Autonomous Community of Catalonia.

The RUA XIC project, Barcelona

The RUA XIC project is a community education initiative promoted by the cooperative ART&Coop. This entity is based on the idea that art and social education cause social transformation and community empowerment. The initiative seeks to improve the coexistence between residents and socio-cultural entities in the neighbourhood with the main aim of co-creating and performing a high-quality art show once a year. The methodology used is based on collaborative work and networking among all the community agents involved. The first RUA XIC project took place in 2011 in Barcelona's Poble Sec neighbourhood and has been steadily growing both artistically and from an organisational point of view, to the extent of them doing a different show every edition. Now in its 6th edition in Poble Sec, the RUA XIC project is currently also taking place in Sant Martí for the first time.

The main aims of the RUA XIC Project are to:

- Promote citizen participation and to establish links between sociocultural entities and people, create network and cohesion in the neighbourhood,
- Generate spaces for coexistence in diversity, in the broad sense of the term: intercultural, intergenerational, gender, socioeconomic, etc.,
- Identify different dynamics and any potential problematic situation in the neighbourhood and critically and actively reflect on them (raising awareness of collective aspects),

- Democratise culture, giving access to creative processes to people who generally do not have it as well as occupying the cultural facilities of the city with community art and education,
- Perform a quality art show, through a collective creation.

The project works on the belief that art facilitates the positive development of individuals and communities, and addresses the challenge of participation, which is a fundamental issue in processes of social and community education. From this point of view, various levels of artistic participation are promoted. The activities are free and adapted to the needs of each group. The creation process lasts several months and culminates with a presentation on the street or an indoors show.

The specific methodology of each edition varies according to strategic and contextual elements but follows the same structure:

1. Collaborative diagnosis of needs and interests
2. Choice of the centre of interest and dramatic creation of the show
3. Programming and dissemination of the artistic and lead group workshops
4. Performing thematic workshops (e.g. plastic, social theatre, percussion ...)
5. Community trials of the show
6. Performing the show
7. Evaluation meeting with all the people involved in the process

For further details please visit http://ruaxic.blogspot.com/

En Trajecte, Terrassa

'En Trajecte' (On The Way) is a programme run by Terrassa City Council's Service for Youth and Leisure Time under the Law on Youth Policies of Catalonia (2010). The service aims to increase youth employability by offering young people guidance in accessing some sort of education or training, and to provide them with information regarding scholarships and grants, how to plan trips, proposals for their free time, etc. It is addressed at young people aged 16 to 20 who have interrupted or discontinued their studies and are identified as being exposed to a particular risk such as poor social adaptation, unemployment or school dropout.

En Trajecte's content is based on a social pedagogical approach. The programme promotes their return into the educating system by identifying which professions the young people are interested in. Therefore, in order to prevent youth unemployment, which affected 32.7% of under-25s at the end of 2018, and school dropouts, the programme intends to rebuild young people's academic and professional itinerary providing individual support,

self-knowledge, competence reinforcement, guidance and experiences in the world of work. Specifically, the main aims of En Trajecte are to:

- Identify young people's needs according to their vocational decisions,
- Avoid young people disconnecting from the education, training and labour market,
- Promote their personal development, self-knowledge, and their vocation through their competence development (self-knowledge, communication, emotional management, team work, conflict resolution, active participation and decision making),
- Design a formative and professional individual project,
- Help them develop a more positive attitude, self-esteem and to empower them to be active agents in the development of their life and professional trajectories.

The project also seeks to promote young people's autonomy for them to be able to search and manage information to make decisions about their academic and professional itineraries, considering all the resources and community services available in their context.

In terms of the methodology used, the programme combines individual and group activities. Young people attend group sessions twice a week (total of 6 hours weekly, 90 hours overall). The sessions feature team building activities, workshops run by external expert professionals, visits to different community services and organisations, etc. Therefore, the professionals involved in these group sessions are the social pedagogue, who is the reference point for the young people, and the external professionals who collaborate on the training. In addition, young people have 10 hours of individual tutoring with the social pedagogue, who provides guidance and orientation through the whole process.

In the first three editions of the programme, 94 youths took part, 58 boys and 36 girls. The majority of them had been disconnected from their studies or training for 6 months to a year. By the end of the programme, 73 of them had re-entered the education system through professional training, occupational courses, etc. thus demonstrating the effectiveness of En Trajecte to positively affect young people's future career trajectory.

For further details please visit www.casabaumann.cat

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Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in the UK

Lowis Charfe, Ali Gardner & Lindy Simpson (University of Central Lancashire)

Features of Social Pedagogy in the UK

Social pedagogy is an emerging field of practice in the UK and has been heavily influenced by research, theory and application throughout Europe and further afield. Pedagogy is a more familiar term in the UK and often used in the context of formal education. Whilst social aspects of education linked to personal and social development as well as well-being are commonly used within formal education and some social care settings, the term social pedagogy is still relatively new for many practitioners in the UK (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). Currently social pedagogy is not viewed as a distinct profession or discipline; instead it is recognised and adopted by organisations and practitioners in a variety of settings, at a range of levels and in different ways. This includes local authority projects and models across the UK but most notably in Scotland, where the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 forced a complete overhaul of the youth justice system focussing on child welfare rather than punishment. In turn, the social pedagogical principles underpinning this shift started to have a wider impact on children's services generally in Scotland and could be argued to have led to a more child-focussed practice (Smith, 2012).

Over the last ten years there have been many developments within social work organisations and educational institutions embedding and extending the use of social pedagogy into social care practice. Many organisations have spearheaded these developments with the provision of short courses and capacity building activity (mostly facilitated by ThemPra and Jacaranda), national networking events and conferences, as well as qualifications aimed at promoting social pedagogical practice and skilling up the social care workforce in using social pedagogy as a practice orientation. Additionally, the work of Professors Pat Petrie and Claire Cameron at the Thomas Coram

Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, has supported the development and application of social pedagogy to social work in the UK.

In 2009, Helen Chambers and Pat Petrie developed the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues for artists working with 'looked after' children after the success of three large scale arts-based projects in the UK. The framework based on social pedagogical principles, aims to give practitioners guidance on the principles, values, skills and knowledge needed to support creative ways of working with children and young people (Chambers & Petrie, 2009). Not only is this framework important for practice, but it helps to highlight the importance of creativity in social pedagogical practice in building confidence, the development on boundaries within the 3Ps framework, well-being, participation and reflective practice (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). There have been several successful creative projects that have built on the framework, such as the Creative Mentors scheme run by Derbyshire County Council. Creative mentors work with school children who are at risk of exclusion or struggling to engage in school. Based on the Common Third theory, they use creative activities to build relationships which will then focus on supporting children to participate in directing their re-engagement in education.

Social pedagogy as an academic discipline has slowly started to grow in UK higher educational institutes over the last ten years. Currently there are only a few programmes or modules relating specifically to social pedagogy, mainly located within social care and social work departments. It is hoped that the implementation of the Social Pedagogy Standards for Education and Training (SET's) along with the Social Pedagogy Standards of Proficiency (SOP's) will increase interest in social pedagogy as a choice of study and drive confidence in future employability, a key focus for students undertaking university study.

The launch of these standards, developed by the Social Pedagogy Professional Association in partnership with Jacaranda, ThemPra, Crossfields Institute and members of the Social Pedagogy Development Network, sets out a philosophy underpinning social pedagogy along with expectations for practice. This has supported a far greater understanding of the theoretical and practical application of social pedagogy in the UK. In particular, the standards align well with the revised Code of Ethics provided by the British Association of Social Work in 2012, emphasising a commitment to three basic values of human rights, social justice and professional integrity.

Many practitioners in education, social work and social care recognise social pedagogical principles in their own approach and have found the language and insistence on a values-based rather than procedurally driven approach liberating in their own practice (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). In a climate of austerity dominated by a performance-driven culture, ill-equipped to meet changing demographics and increasing need, organisations and practitioners have become increasingly frustrated with a lack of opportunity to support individuals in a way that reflects these values as well as supporting positive changes in people's lives. Examples of this can be seen in the formation of *The People's Assembly*, a national campaign against austerity that seeks to challenge the

government response to what they describe as 'the growing humanitarian crisis caused by austerity' (www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

Against this background of limited resources, high demands on public services and a growing dissatisfaction from both people receiving social care and support to the professionals providing it, it is of no surprise that there is a renewed interest in alternative approaches to practice. There is a real appetite amongst the social care workforce to engage in practice that is committed to self-determinism, is asset-based and relationship-centred, and takes a creative approach to practice in order to promote independence and interdependence, resilience, growth and well-being. Because of this, social pedagogy appears to be resonating with policy-makers, organisational leaders and practitioners and is providing an opportunity to re-engage with legislation, policy and practice in more creative ways.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

Although social pedagogy is still an emerging field of practice in the UK and is not yet regarded as a professional discipline, many individuals and organisations embed social pedagogical principles and approaches in their work. Some organisations have formally adopted social pedagogy as their practice framework and are leading the way in asserting value-driven practice, which promotes well-being, growth, choice and interdependence. The following two organisations portrayed below provide examples of how social pedagogical principles are being recognised and embedded within the design and operation of their work. These organisations have been chosen as they highlight the positive way social pedagogical practice has been used to address some of the contemporary challenges faced in their particular area of social care practice.

Wellbeing Teams

It is well documented that the UK has a growing population of older adults placing greater demands on health and social care provision and services. The leading piece of legislation, the Care Act 2014, called for a greater emphasis on preventative approaches to delivering social care in trying to address this challenge, whilst working with the focus on the commissioning of personal care services for older and vulnerable adults. There is also growing recognition of the negative impact of task-orientated personal care on vulnerable and older adults' health and well-being, with growing research identifying the need to return to a relationally based approach to practice. In response to this, Wellbeing Teams have established a more flexible and person-centred approach to provide support focussing on well-being and happiness rather than a traditional 'care' approach. This is a fundamental shift away from the ideology of delivering welfare to the promotion of well-being and community

connections, which are placed at the centre of any care plan. Not only are Wellbeing Teams driving forward innovative practice, they have also taken an innovative approach to how they are organised by becoming 'self-managing' teams (Laulox, 2016). The well-being of the professionals is as important as that of the older adults they support.

Wellbeing Teams were established in 2015 by Helen Sanderson, drawing on the model of the Dutch healthcare provider Buurtzorg. Recognising the pressure on home care services in the UK, Sanderson wanted to change both the way services were being delivered to people and the working conditions for carers. She therefore put three aspects of self-managing organisations (Laloux, 2016) at the heart of Wellbeing Teams: enabling carers to bring their 'whole self' to work, a focus on evolutionary purpose and self-managing teams. Wellbeing Teams work with commissioners and other care support providers in a number of areas across the UK to deliver support to adults with care and support needs under the Care Act (2014). The model aims to provide person-centred care and support to people and to connect them with their community. Given reduced budgets and cuts to services and support in many local authorities, one of the innovative ways in which Sanderson has addressed reduced funding in her own organisation is to experiment with new technologies to support living at home and connecting with communities whilst at the same time retaining the relational aspect in their practice. The teams are small, neighbourhood-based and provide a flexible and responsive approach to meeting individual needs, focussing on outcomes and building up support networks. As self-managing teams, planning and decisions are made by each team themselves, meaning that they are close to the people receiving and delivering the support rather than in a hierarchical structure. This approach is far from common in the UK and challenges the way social care support is usually funded and commissioned.

In recognition of the centrality of relationships, Wellbeing Teams have six core values: compassion, responsibility, collaboration, curiosity, creativity and flourishing. The teams support individuals to take risks and learn rather than adopt the more traditional focus on making people *safe* and *cared for*.

For further details please visit www.wellbeingteams.org

St Christopher's Fellowship

In a different area of social care practice, St Christopher's Fellowship is taking an innovative approach to working with children and young people against a backdrop of various high-profile public enquires into child abuse and sexual exploitation and the failings of the child protection and 'looked after' care system (Munro, 2011; Jay et al, 2018). The impact of these high-profile cases on social care practice has been the shift in focus of children and families social work to concentrate on outcomes, risk management, procedures and the over-emphasis of managerialism. Subsequent government responses have also forced social workers and other professionals working with children, young people and their families to focus on accountability, safeguarding and risk management. All of this has led to a 'rational-technical' approach as described by Professor Eileen Munro, who led one of the most high-profile inquiries (cited in Trevithick, 2014). To counter this and meaningfully improve outcomes for children and young people, St Christopher's Fellowship has worked with ThemPra to train the majority of their staff in social pedagogy so that relational practice is at the centre of all the work they do. Drawing on research and project evaluations from organisations based in the UK, they have developed social pedagogy throughout the work they do with vulnerable children and young people and are seeing more positive results (St Christopher's Fellowship, 2019).

St Christopher's Fellowship is a charity founded in 1870 and works with children and young people across the UK and Isle of Man. They provide a wide range of services including children's homes, supported housing, fostering and specialist support services, all designed for young people in care, on the edge of care, or leaving care. The aim of their work is to work alongside young people to support their development, grow their confidence and reach their full potential. The ethical principles of social pedagogy have been embedded within the organisation as a whole, and their 'Haltung' of being able to see the potential in each child or young person is at the centre of any work undertaken. This doesn't just stop at direct practice, as there is an on-going training programme for staff at all levels to receive training around social pedagogy and its application to practice.

A recent project development that highlights innovative and social pedagogical practice is their Safe Steps Children's Homes for girls aged 12 to 17 years who are at risk of child sexual exploitation. As mentioned above this has been an issue of national concern with various government inquiries and initiatives. Local Authorities' Children's Services often respond to any safeguarding concerns by placing vulnerable young people in residential care, foster placement or secure units that are often miles away from their families, friends and communities. This is not only costly but also increases the vulnerability and isolation of these young people. Often very little educational work is done to address and reduce the safeguarding or risk factors, and risk management is the main focus of any care plan put in place.

St Christopher's Fellowship has taken the radical approach to addressing the needs of these vulnerable young people by setting up the Safe Steps homes in local communities. Using social pedagogical concepts such as the Relation Universe (Carter & Eichsteller, 2017) to ensure a focus on interdependence instead of independence, the emphasis is on developing and maintaining positive networks of support whilst addressing and educating the young people to detect and identify negative and harmful relationships. All of the support is built on social pedagogical concepts such as Head, Heart and Hands in that relevant theories around power, exploitation and sexual abuse are used to underpin support plans and direct work, whilst forming positive relationships and an emotional connection are central to these. Finally, young people are then taught the skills they need to be able to build positive relationships in the future and keep themselves safe. Creative practice is also a fundamental part of the work St Christopher's Fellowship undertakes, and social pedagogy has enabled staff to think 'outside of the box' and develop innovative ways of working that promotes the well-being and growth of each young person that they are working with.

Social pedagogical practice seeks to respond creatively to emerging social issues, and St Christopher's Fellowship have recently developed the Trusted Relationship project which aims to help reduce serious youth violence – an area of growing public and government concern. This new service has been co-produced with young people, who have been involved in shaping and developing all aspects of the service. By building a trusting relationship with a key adult, young people involved in the project are supported in addressing their social isolation and other issues that leave them vulnerable to being groomed by adults or become involved in gang activity. As with Safe Steps, this work is done in the heart of the communities where children and young people live to support them to build positive connections and networks that will help them flourish.

For further details please visit www.stchris.org.uk/services/safe-steps-home-cse

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Social Pedagogy as a Perspective in Belgium (Flanders)

Lieve Bradt & Rudi Roose (Ghent University)

Features of Social Pedagogy in Flanders

Within Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, social pedagogy is not considered as a separate profession, and 'social pedagogue' is not a regulated professional title. Social pedagogy focuses on the relationship between the individual and society and how this relationship is/can be influenced through education. As was the case in many other European countries, the origins of social pedagogical ideas in Flanders are grounded in the societal transformations of the 19th century Industrial Revolution, which made clear that the traditional socialisation mechanisms (i.e. family, church and the local community) were no longer adequate to realise social cohesion. There was a growing need to develop additional pedagogical interventions aimed at the social integration of individuals in society. However, in the development of social pedagogical practices, the focus was clearly on children from the lower classes, as those practices were believed to compensate for the lower standards of schooling and for less beneficial educational conditions at home. Taking care of young people became a high priority in order to maintain the social order and fight social diseases such as criminality, epidemic illness and unemployability.

Within the development of these philanthropic initiatives, two streams can be distinguished. The first was a focus on preventative health care and a concern for social hygiene. These initiatives were connected to international developments within the field of social work and were intended to compensate for the developmental deficits of children from the lower classes. Secondly, there was a focus on adult education. These initiatives were connected to the 'volkshogeschooluitbreidingen' (Extended Universities), aimed at educating people within the upcoming labour movements and the dissemination of scientific knowledge amongst people. In these initiatives, the focus was on the emancipation of the working class through education.

Both developments resulted in 1920 in the establishment of a specific programme of social work, recognised by the Ministry of Justice. After the second World War, these social work programmes were assigned to the Ministry of Education and evolved into practice-oriented programmes at university colleges. Between the 1960s and 1970s, social pedagogy as an academic discipline started to gain ground in Flanders. Again, two developments can be distinguished.

At the Catholic University of Leuven social pedagogical research was initially mainly aimed at the development of methods within adult education. Later connections were made to the field of youth research and critical social pedagogy (influenced by the ideas of Paolo Freire and Oskar Negt). Under the influence of the 'planning of change' approach, professionalisation also became an important topic. From this perspective, social pedagogy is approached as 'learning for the group and through the group' and as the emancipation of 'the lifeworld' from 'the system'. Today, 'social and cultural pedagogy' is one of the options within the Educational Sciences Master's programme, with 'social and cultural pedagogy' being one of the courses within both the Bachelor's and Master's programme.

At Ghent University, more specifically the then Department of Social Welfare Studies (now the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy), social pedagogy has been strongly connected to social work. Social pedagogy is one of the courses within the Master's of Social Work and the Master's of Educational Sciences. Both in relation to research and teaching within the Master's of Social Work (which was established in 2004-2005), social pedagogy is currently approached and developed as a perspective on social work, which is a unique approach within the Flemish academic field. Within the Department, the research mainly focuses on the study of social interventions (in the broad domains of youth work, youth protection, social-cultural work and community development), in which pedagogical and social work practices are deliberately connected to underlying social and political assumptions and objectives. The research is aimed at analysing theses underlying assumptions as well as gaining more insight into how social and pedagogical practices intervene in the life conditions and lifeworlds of children, young people and adults. Social pedagogy as a perspective implies the following elements: firstly, a re-evaluation of the pedagogical and political character of social work; secondly, the interrelation between private issues and societal choices; and thirdly, the interconnection between all sectors, methods and professional fields that are aimed at social integration and dealing with the tension between respecting diversity and realizing social cohesion within a changing society.

From a social pedagogical perspective, the issue at stake is not merely to find the best solutions to a given social problem, but rather – before thinking about solutions – to continually re-examine in participatory ways what the problem might be and whether our practices question or confirm prevailing understandings of the problem. This perspective is considered valuable, as the social professions are increasingly challenged due to, amongst others,

pressure on the realisation of human rights as the foundation of social work practices, an increasing outcome-oriented focus on practices instead of a focus on processes, and a tendency to specialisation rather than developing a generalist approach.

Social Pedagogy in Practice – Illustrative Examples

As mentioned before, we approach social pedagogy as a 'perspective' on social interventions. Key in this is the 'deconstruction' of given definitions of social problems and the way social professionals intervene in relation to these problems. In that vein, we give two examples of what this perspective can mean in practice. Our first example concerns the notion of 'invisible care', whilst the second example refers to the notion of 'pedagogy as the construction of pedagogy' in a practice setting called 'The Phoenix'.

Invisible care

In Flanders, policy-makers have introduced 'vermaatschappelijking van de zorg', a policy strategy that is difficult to translate but comparable to similar ideas such as a 'Big Society' in the UK and a 'participation society' that has been formally introduced and implemented in the Netherlands (see Grootegoed, Broër & Duyvendak, 2013). The policy rationale of 'vermaatschappelijking' embodies the connotation of organising care and support *with/in* the community and society, thus shifting the paradigm in pursuit of an inclusive approach towards so-called vulnerable citizens such as elderly people, disabled people, and people in poverty, 'allowing them to acquire their own meaningful and particular place in society while embracing both their vulnerabilities and strengths, supporting them in this venture where necessary, and organising care and support with, and integrated in, society as far as possible' (Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Affairs, 2013, p. 4). The underlying viewpoint in these policy developments entails that the public responsibility for the welfare of citizens who need (long-term) care and support in their everyday lives should be rebalanced with the private responsibility of the individual, their natural social networks (such as family members) and the community/civil society (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2015). In the international realm, this idea squares with the idea that an increasingly significant level of provision should also come from the local and 'informal sector', meaning from families and communities (Williams, 2001; Dean, 2015). Here, 'everyday care and support that people provide for one another within households and neighbourhoods' (Dean, 2015, p. 14) is supposed to be reconciled with the responsibility of the state as a provider of welfare resources and services. Although there is supposedly no hierarchy but complementarity between informal and formal care, this development of 'vermaatschappelijking' also reflects the underlying viewpoint that the public responsibility for the welfare of citizens, for economic gains, should again be

rebalanced with and possibly returned in a stronger way to the private responsibility of the individual, their natural social networks (such as family members) and the community/civil society (Dean, 2015).

In that vein, the current emphasis in social welfare policy in Flanders on principles and practices of 'invisible care' entails an interesting, and potentially innovative, development from a social pedagogical perspective. Where social interventions are traditionally organised with a focus on the person and their network from a categorical perspective (children, elderly, the disabled), the attention to invisible care might provide a more interesting social pedagogical strategy to rebalance public and private responsibilities in the provision of care, as it can cut through boundaries of a categorical perspective and define problems less as private and more as public issues. Invisible care refers to 'care being intrinsically integrated into social and urban life, embedded in everyday life and social interactions' (Vlaams Bouwmeester, 2014, p. 80). Invisible care entails interdisciplinary collaboration between social welfare actors, architecture and urban planners, and local policy makers. It is inspired by a socio-spatial approach that adopts the idea that space is not only a place where things happen, but rather enables social interactions and allows that social relations are interwoven between diverse citizens (Warming & Fahnoe, 2018).

As an example of the way invisible care can be pursued, a current action research project in Flanders is implemented in a residential care facility for people with multiple disabilities. The project aims at a reorientation from having all the characteristics of a 'total institution' both in terms of architecture and mindset, leading to the segregation of disabled people from mainstream society. The efforts done aim to open up the residential care facility in the local community according to a socio-spatial perspective, while changing the architectural conditions and mindset of disabled citizens, professionals and the local community. On the condition that invisible care consists of in/visible care, with reference to both 'visible' (care with a public mandate) as well as 'invisible' social welfare arrangements (architecture and spatial and structural resources that allow and enable community and informal involvement), practices of invisible care might therefore disrupt categorical approaches in care and allow for intergenerational and productive social interactions between citizens with diverse life worlds in the community.

The Phoenix

Our second example is 'De Vuurvogel' or 'The Phoenix'. This is a youth care practice working with youngsters and families with a difficult care trajectory. Often these are youngsters with a long and bumpy care trajectory, who have been diagnosed and labelled with a number of disorders such as borderline, autistic, psychotic, psychopathic, etc.. Where many youth care interventions in Flanders focus on a remedial strength-based approach with attention on treatment of diagnosed youngsters, The Phoenix changes the way in which diagnosis

is approached. Instead of focusing on the diagnosis of the young person and their family, they focus on the diagnosis of their own point of view as social professionals. They question which ideas they have about the situation and how their perspectives relate to the perspectives of the young person and their parents. The idea is that youth care is not about finding solutions, but first and foremost about looking for meaning, even in very difficult situations with very troubled youngsters and parents. As such, for instance, when a young person has committed a crime, this fact is not ignored, but it is analysed by the team from a broader social perspective in which the meaning of what happened (instead of only the idea that they should not do it again) is always a concern and topic of discussion. Hence, The Phoenix approaches 'pedagogy as the construction of pedagogy'. This means pedagogy is a radical dialogical intervention in which social workers, youngsters and parents try to find out together over and over again what the meaning of their interaction is and how youngsters and their families can be supported to live a life of human dignity. As a consequence, the care trajectory is always prepared to leave the beaten path and to look for new ways of working. As such, practices of art, film-making, etc. are introduced as innovative ways of finding meaning in situations that are often diagnosed as hopeless. The result is not a univocal success story. Care remains difficult and challenging. Yet the radicalisation of openness and honesty can throw light in otherwise dark trajectories as youngster and parents feel respected. This alone can be a major shift and innovation in their lives.

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III. EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES

Gabriel Eichsteller (ThemPra Social Pedagogy) & Lieve Bradt (Ghent University)

As the different 'images' of social pedagogy across the six countries show, social pedagogy offers a rich and diverse history of attempts to better understand how social issues are culturally constructed, how they affect individuals, groups and communities, and how we can meaningfully address these through educational and inclusive practices as well as structural change. The traditions from many countries show that, as a perspective, social pedagogy is not only focussed on resolving or preventing problems, but also emphasises the importance of community development, of building inclusive societies in which every person feels connected, enabled to thrive and can make a meaningful contribution to their community. This is reflected, for instance, in the Wellbeing Teams and their focus on connecting older people to the wider community. As the example of RUA XIC shows, socio-cultural animation has much to offer in weaving a stronger community and celebrating culture through the arts. At a time when social and educational professionals are under enormous pressure, this aspect may sometimes feel like a luxury we cannot afford or don't have time for. However, it is crucial that our perspective on practice remains positive and hopeful rather than deficit-orientated, that it encompasses a focus on the difference we can make – and that our belief in the power of human potential is present in our interactions.

As the illustrative examples from the six countries demonstrate, when we place relationships at the heart of our practice and facilitate learning, well-being and belonging, the impact can be profound. It can be nothing less than

life-changing for the people we support, and it can make all the difference between a demotivated and disempowered workforce going through the motion and a determined, energetic team that takes collective ownership, feels supported and finds creative ways to turn challenges into opportunities – because the impact of placing relationships at the heart of our organisational cultures can be equally profound. It is therefore paramount that we create practice conditions in which professionals are trusted to draw on a broad conceptual and methodological understanding of their practice, connect their own value-base and motivation with the organisation's ethos and purpose, and try out new ways of responding to changes in society. This is particularly evident in the practice example of St Christopher's Fellowship and the ways in which they have successfully developed social pedagogical responses to some of the most significant child protection challenges.

It is important to highlight that, whilst the focus on relationships is central to social pedagogy, we must also consider how we can change the way in which social problems are conceptualised and dealt with on a societal level. The emphasis on inclusion and supporting marginalised communities as well as challenging the way in which these are perceived in mainstream society highlights that a social pedagogical perspective seeks to keep the wider picture at the forefront of practice. Many of the examples presented above illustrate the importance of challenging the ways social problems are defined and how they are dominantly being solved. This is demonstrated by the Flemish residential care facility adopting invisible care to 'deinstitutionalise' the care experience, the Rapid Rehousing Project countering family homelessness to tackle a social issue in the absence of a legal framework, and Ubuntu, the circus project offering young people the opportunity to reject social conceptualisations and redefine who they are. They show the need for creativity not just in what we do but how we seek to reconceptualise our work within its broader social context. Whilst we may not be able to change some of the stigmatising attitudes encountered by disadvantaged groups, we can succeed in creating an environment where there is no space for labels.

Where we actively challenge marginalisation and promote social inclusion, we can make a lasting difference not just for the people we support but for the wider community. The Danish Sports Project provides a good example of how sports can be used to facilitate the inclusion of marginalised groups of young people, offering them an opportunity to make a positive contribution to their community and a fresh outlook on their own lives. As the example of Drom and its support of the Roma community in Brno shows, it is crucial that we are by the side of those experiencing stigma and offer support designed to challenge stereotypes in wider society. En Trajecte highlights that group work can play a central role in reducing the sense of isolation that can often result from being marginalised and thus make an important contribution in connecting individuals to others who experience similar issues. The example of Chrysalis Schools as a specialist institution is interesting in this respect as it highlights that the aim of inclusion can also be pursued in settings that are targeted at specific groups.

In grappling with the complexity of the social issues faced by many disadvantaged groups, a social pedagogical perspective provides a clear framework to respond effectively. The example of Ackerstraße highlights the importance of working closely in dialogue with everyone involved to identify the hidden resources both in the family and their wider support network, ensuring that interventions are reflective of the family's lifeworld, build on and further strengthen their resourcefulness to address the challenges they encounter. The work of The Phoenix emphasises that what matters most amidst these complexities is our willingness to leave the beaten path and explore what gives meaning to someone's life, what makes them feel respected as an equal human being. In this sense, it is the subjective experience of complex social issues that guides social pedagogical practice.

Working in ways that are frequently counter-cultural and designed to question the status quo is an ongoing challenge and requires critical reflective support. The practical application of social pedagogy is strongly shaped by professionals' Haltung – their ability to practice authentically, using their own ethical compass. Through ongoing and consistent reflection on their Haltung, both individually and at team and organisational level, they gain a deeper awareness of themselves and their impact in interaction with others, clients and colleagues alike. Crucially, the greater self-connection enables them to stay connected to the experiences of others, their unique perspectives and potential. Practice that emerges from this form of connection is more reflective of the life experiences of everyone involved and thus stands a greater chance of being 'lifeworld orientated' in ways that make a meaningful difference.

Towards a transnational social pedagogical perspective

Recent research (Janer & Úcar, 2016; 2018) has shown that, from an epistemological, ontological and axiological common core, social pedagogy develops in harmony with the social and cultural characteristics of each context. Even in countries with a longstanding tradition of social pedagogy, such as Germany, there is ongoing debate about the purpose, scope and relevance of social pedagogy, with a variety of different viewpoints. This critical self-reflection on social pedagogy's identity is crucial as it keeps the dialogue between (and within) academia and practice alive, enabling new trains of thought, ideas and responses to social challenges to shape its evolution. This means that there is not one social pedagogy tradition that is more noteworthy than others, nor one country that has more to offer than the rest. There is, we think, much insight and inspiration to be gained from each country. And there is a need for a continuous and fluid communication between different countries to exchange information and experiences, highlight our diverse traditions and learn from each other. This is also what we want to stimulate with both this insight report and our MOOC. We don't claim to have developed *the* social pedagogy but hope that the panoramic overview of the various traditions can contribute to the wider debate.

With growing interest in social pedagogy across the globe, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries and across Latin America, but also places as diverse as Japan and Israel, it is vital to further the cross-national discourse and to find a way of building a transnational perspective of social pedagogy together. In our view this cannot be a rigid perspective but should showcase the many diverse contributions of each country's social pedagogy tradition – the Czech emphasis on prevention, the Spanish focus on community development and socio-cultural animation, the UK efforts to reclaim relationship-centred practice in a procedure-driven policy environment, the German emphasis on lifeworld orientation, the Danish focus on social inclusion, and the Flemish concern with social justice issues, to name but a few. With an increasing number of publications and learning resources such as our MOOC available in English and Spanish, the scene is set for greater dialogue and meaning-making beyond the national borders. A transnational perspective on social pedagogy needs to reflect the complexity of our world and social pedagogy itself. If we don't expect social pedagogy to be like a complicated machine that can be fully understood but rather see it as a complex organism that evolves reflexively within the socio-cultural environments that we are part of, then the question is less about how we define it and more about how we can live it.

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Article

Creating a learning space: Using experiential learning and creativity in the teaching and learning of social pedagogy

Lowis Charfe [1,*], Ali Gardner [1], Edwin Greenhalgh [1], Helen Marsden [1], Daniel Nester [1], Lindy Simpson [1]

[1] School of Social Work, Care and Community, University of Central Lancaster, Preston, UK
* Correspondence: lcharfe@uclan.ac.uk

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Abstract

This reflective account has been co-developed, produced and written by students and the teaching staff on the BA Hons Social Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Participation degree at the University of Central Lancashire. The account focuses on the use of experiential and creative teaching methods utilised on the course and how this enhances the understanding and application of social pedagogy. The article critically analyses the link between how the social pedagogical theories, concepts and methods are taught and the advancement of the student and lecturer understanding of this field of study. In developing this reflective account, the current student cohort and lecturers were given the opportunity to participate in a collaborative reflection across all years of the course. They discussed their own learning journey and how this has shaped development of creativity within their practice. During the discussions around the use of blended, experiential learning and creativity, three key themes emerged: (1) the importance of the environment on creativity and learning; (2) the importance of relationships, creativity and learning; and (3) Haltung, psychological safety and creativity. In the reflections on what they have learned so far, the students and lecturers hope to inspire other education providers to use creative and experiential teaching methods within their courses. The authors feel that the reflective account contains useful information around the learning that has taken place over the last three years of this course being taught.

Keywords: social pedagogy; creativity; learning; experiential; relationships; imagination; teaching; education; space; environment

Social pedagogy

Application of theory to practice is central to social pedagogy and, as an ethical orientation, it also has many connections to the social work tradition and education. Charfe and Gardner (2019) stated that it can be argued that social work sets out the 'what' that needs to happen in practice, and social pedagogy helps to focus in more depth on the 'how'. Due to the applied and relational nature of social pedagogy, experiential learning and application of theory in practice was embedded into the BA Honours Social Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Participation degree. It was seen as essential that as lecturers and educators we were able to use a social pedagogical approach in our teaching. With advice, assistance and utilising the experience from ThemPra in using experiential learning methods, this approach is used in the majority of the taught sessions. The aim of this is to support the understanding of social pedagogical philosophy and theory. It is also an important aspect in aiding the development of an individual's professional practice; creativity supports the progress of self-efficacy and self-confidence and gives individuals the confidence to try new ways of working or new activities without having to be an expert at them.

Robinson (2001) emphasised the difference between imagination and creativity and states that they are different from one another. On the one hand, he defined imagination as being able to think about what's not there, being able to step out of the here and now and see things differently. Creativity, on the other hand, involves doing something – actions not thoughts – and so Robinson (2001) stated that creativity is applied imagination.

Experiential learning is also used to assist students in feeling confident about using applied theory and creative tools in their own practice to work in a more relational manner. Storø (2013) wrote that creativity and creative activities are an important place where social pedagogues can support people to learn new skills and knowledge that they can apply to other parts of their lives. This can include learning co-operation and sharing, self-assertion, self-control and being able to take turns, as well as empathy (cited in Storø, 2013).

As the first group of third-year students were undertaking their final modules of study it felt timely to co-reflect on our journey so far and consider what we have learned. We convened three gatherings where we planned to undertake reflective conversations with any of the degree students who wanted to attend. Participatory methods were used in line with social pedagogical principles of working alongside people (Petrie, 2011) but also with regards to the Freire (1996) principles of the co-production of knowledge. Reflective conversations (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) were identified as the most appropriate participatory method as they allow equity among all the authors. The use of mind-map tools (Buzan, 2018) supported radiant and reflective thinking due to the link between an increase in cortical skills to support clarity and the organisation of reflective thinking. The focus was on critical reflection and discussion around learning with the objective of writing a reflective account. The first two meetings were well attended with 12 students from across the three years of the degree programme as well as three lecturers, with a gender mix across the whole group. The final meeting was attended by all the authors who had been given the task to write up the reflective conversations. The use of a mind map and the reflective framework 'Head, Heart and Hands' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) helped to focus the reflective conversations and three key themes emerged from our discussions. These were: (1) the importance of the environment on creativity and learning; (2) the importance of relationships, creativity and learning; and (3) Haltung, psychological safety and creativity.

Experiential learning and social pedagogy

Before discussing the key themes that emerged from the reflective conversations, it is worthwhile to set out a brief explanation of what we mean by experiential learning and the link to creativity. Creativity is at the heart of experiential learning, which is often defined as the process of learning through experience and is sometimes called 'hands-on learning' (Smith, 2010). It is different and distinct from rote or didactic learning, in which the learner plays a comparatively passive role and learns by repetition of the information being given out by the teacher. Experiential learning considers the individual learning process and is concerned with making theory and learning more concrete and related to the students and their social context (Storø, 2013). In his book *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*, Robinson (2001)

set out the importance of recognising that everybody learns in different ways, that education should be about holistic learning, and that education should be creative so that it engages people in being curious. The more curious we are the more we learn Robinson (2001) argued and this is not done by sitting people in classrooms and just 'lecturing' them.

Supporting students to develop and utilise critical thinking, questioning, reflection and curiosity, as well as developing creative practice, links to the 'Head, Heart and Hands' theory set out by Pestalozzi (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Pestalozzi understood the need for a holistic approach to education and to develop a 'child's heart, mind and body in harmonious unity' (Eichsteller et al., 2014, p. 34). Setting an environment where the position of a lecturer being the expert is removed and the students are encouraged to think about their own knowledge is fundamental to an experiential learning approach. The students 'own' their learning and are able to access knowledge that will help them apply learning to practice.

Creative teaching is underpinned by Freire's (1996) discourse around education not being about the 'transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge' (p. 30). So creating an environment where students are able to be curious and experimental, and moves away from right or wrong answers, is an important part of experiential learning. As an ethical orientation to practice, it is equally important that social pedagogy underpins the approach to how the subject is taught and that students experience it in every aspect of their learning environment. Reflective space is also central to supporting understanding and the knowledge being gained by both the students and lecturers (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). The co-production and writing of this reflective account have been part of this process and have given students and lecturers an opportunity to explore the importance of creativity in supporting their understanding of social pedagogy. Creativity is also linked to a humanistic value base and, as Jackson and Burgess (2005) suggested, creativity comes through the use of self, genuine warmth and empathy in practice, which clearly connects with the definition of social pedagogy (ThemPra, 2017).

The importance of environment on creativity and learning

When exploring the responses regarding students' and lecturers' views on the differences between creative learning and traditional teaching methods, several themes were identified that were consistent throughout everyone's replies. The first of these themes was the impact that creative learning has on the learning environment and vice versa. Students and lecturers felt that creative learning levelled the playing field, creating an atmosphere that democratised the relationships between students and lecturers, which in turn encouraged dialogue and made people feel more relaxed. The environment cultivated when using creativity as part of the teaching led to some people feeling able to bring creative learning into different environments, such as their practice and also into their personal lives. In traditional learning environments students felt they were supposed to take a passive role and to listen in silence, whereas in this new environment they felt they were actively engaging.

The next recurring topic was the positive impact that creative learning had on the development of relationships within the learning environment. Students and lecturers shared how creative learning tapped into feelings more than traditional learning and cultivated a sense of trust. In turn, this led to students considering themselves to be more able to open up and talk to others about their feelings and develop positive relationships. This mirrors the relational aspect of social pedagogical practice and the importance of being able to build and maintain supportive and caring relationships which are also genuine, meaningful and have a clear purpose (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). These reflections linked to the heart aspect of Pestalozzi's 'Head, Heart and Hands' theory can also be made (Eichsteller et al., 2014, p. 35).

Another theme linked to the environment and creativity was how creative learning made it more possible for different learning styles to be accommodated, as it was more adaptable and organic than traditional learning styles. This led to people feeling their learning had been enhanced. Creative learning and activities used on the course, such as drama, music, dance, crafts and poetry, had also given people more resources that they were able to apply to their practice. On the other hand, people who found traditional learning styles more favourable considered creative learning to be an uncomfortable experience. It was recognised that the social pedagogical creative approach to teaching would not suit everybody but that due to the relationships and the ability to use 'challenge by choice', people were able to stay within

their learning zone (Senninger, 2000, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2017; Charfe and Gardner, 2019). This is an important point that will be discussed later in the article with regards to psychological safety.

The next identified theme was that people felt more engaged in creative learning as opposed to traditional teaching. This increased engagement led to learning becoming more purposeful and meaningful. In traditional teaching, some students felt that the experience was more like witnessing the teaching as they were encouraged to be passive by sitting quietly and listening instead of engaging in the teaching experience. This passivity led to many students feeling that they would just 'switch off' within traditional teaching. Passivity within people's experiences of traditional education can be linked to Freire's (1996) banking concept, whereby students are viewed as empty vessels without knowledge that depend on a knowledgeable educator to fill them with information of that educator's choosing. The students were able to link this to their own practice and understanding of the importance of recognising the inherent potential within all human beings to develop self-efficacy (Eichsteller et al., 2014). This ties in to the key focus of social pedagogical practice being about working alongside people (Petrie, 2011) and not becoming a professional who uses the power of their professional status to do things 'to' people (Simpson, 2019).

There was a general consensus that the environment and spaces used as part of the teaching played an important part in increasing understanding and creativity. By using spaces within and outside the university creatively, such as outdoor space and visits to a local museum, participants were helped to put into perspective the theories and concepts, and gained a sense of 'living' the experience. The environment that appears to have had the most profound effect on this learning process has been the week-long residential held at various outdoor activity centres. The most recent was held at the Waddecar Scout Activity Centre in the Forest of Bowland on the River Brock. The residential is the setting for the teaching of the communication module for the first- and second-year students, with the third-years having the option to attend if they wish.

This year, for the first time, all three years of social pedagogy students were brought together, some of whom had only met a couple of times prior to this. The students and lecturers viewed it as a great opportunity to experience inhabiting a shared living space, communal facilities and learning about the importance of communication and interpersonal skills. Each year group took responsibility for cooking an evening meal for everybody, creating opportunities for conversation, reflection and the strengthening of relationships. You could be excused for thinking this does not sound like the ideal setting for a positive learning experience but it provided a reflective opportunity to consider things such as how young people or older adults might feel entering a residential setting.

The creative use of outdoor spaces on the residential enabled communication theories to make sense, rather than the traditional 'death by PowerPoint'. For example, the activity of Shepherd and Sheep, in which a student has to guide a group of blindfolded sheep (students!) into a pen, takes communication to whole different level. Students were able to reflect on communication skills such as messages passed from one person to another through touch, gesture and expressions, as well as words (Petrie, 2011). These activities also supported reflection on the fact that communication requires a great deal of thought, consideration and creativity. This is especially so when considering many different variables, such as disabilities, the environment and our relationships with one another, all of which may affect how a person communicates. How do you safely herd blindfolded sheep that are spread across a field into a pen? As it turns out you give them numbers and clear, direct instructions. A PowerPoint presentation can give you the theories, but not the physical experience and responsibility of having to think for yourself, while implementing your ideas under pressure in an environment that may not be ideal. Creativity and hands-on experience were identified as being invaluable to the learning process when working with people; you wouldn't expect engineers, architects, joiners, nurses or doctors to learn from lectures and seminars alone.

Relationships and creative learning

Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) described relationships as being at the heart of social pedagogical practice. Authentic, personal relationships are fundamental in social pedagogy as they support the development of human potential by allowing a pedagogue to understand an individual's needs, and work alongside them in a way that works for them. The relationship-based approach of social pedagogy allows

a pedagogue to be a whole person, not just a pair of hands (Charfe and Gardner, 2019; Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011). When analysing responses from the students and staff members on the degree, the importance of the positive relationships that have formed and grown organically were identified as an important theme. People talked about how these relationships have played such a key role in creating a positive experience from studying the degree. One student commented that they 'feel so lucky to have met such a fantastic group of likeminded people, who I work so well with and have genuine relationships with'.

Several students highlighted a theme of feeling connected and equal with students and lecturers alike. One commented on how 'our relationships are about us all learning from each other not just students learning from lecturers. There is an equality that leads to more confidence and less anxiety.' Meanwhile, another student reported that 'people have commented on entering our lectures that they were unable to distinguish students from lecturers.' This was seen as an important feature.

Lecturers described how they had never before taught on a course where they feel so connected with the students and how important creative teaching methods have been in forming relationships. It allows them to bring their whole self to work and for people to get to know them as a person, which is a clear relational aspect of social pedagogical practice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Another comment from lecturers was 'At first I was the "*teacher*" with loads of knowledge and practice experience that *I had* to pass on to students. Now my role is to create an environment for learning where we all learn alongside each other and I bring in my knowledge when it's appropriate.' Students described how lecturers being involved in activities alongside them has been beneficial in creating an equal environment with no power dynamic and has helped to form positive relationships with the lecturers. One student commented 'I like how there's next to no power imbalance between students and lecturers, and I genuinely see my lecturers like friends more than lecturers! This is so helpful for me, because I can approach lecturers and be comfortable to be completely open and honest about questions and concerns.' These comments highlight the importance of participation as a core part of social pedagogy and the importance of understanding how the issue of power and the need to balance this works between the students and lecturers (Simpson, 2019).

Many of the responses from lecturers and students indicate how there has been a positive correlation between these beneficial relationships and creativity. A student stated how, before starting the course, some group members felt uncomfortable at the thought of being creative. However, once these genuine friendships began to form and people felt more comfortable in each other's company, these anxieties began to fade. Senninger (2000, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2017) described the Learning Zone Model, a concept used in social pedagogy to describe the ideal frame of mind for learning. There are three sections in the Learning Zone Model (see also Charfe and Gardner, 2019). The Comfort Zone is where an individual feels safe in a familiar situation. Individuals are unlikely to learn anything new in this zone; however, it is important because it provides a space to return to and be able to reflect on learning. The next section of the model is the Learning Zone, the ideal zone in which to learn, where an individual can push boundaries and feel able to discover new experiences and develop themselves. The final zone on the model is the Panic Zone. Someone who is in this zone will not be able to learn anything new due to high levels of fear (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). It is important to realise that all individuals are different, so the boundaries between the zones are different for everyone, and can differ from day to day. When starting the course, some individuals in the group may have entered the Panic Zone when asked to be creative. However, it has been noted in the responses that the creative nature of social pedagogy has been fundamental in forming the organic bond between everybody on the course, as it has made it easier to open up and express ourselves to members of the group. One person commented: 'I feel like I'm in a safe space to be as creative as I like. Doesn't matter if it's good or bad, nobody will judge.' This suggests that these positive relationships have helped people to venture into the Learning Zone (Senninger, 2000, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2017) and try creative activities that they would not have attempted otherwise. Developing an understanding of the emotional stability required to do something new or challenging directly links to social pedagogy in practice. The pedagogue must be tuned in to the boundaries of a person's Learning Zone for positive change to be possible.

One student mentioned when describing how these relationships make it easier to be creative that 'It's not about how pretty the picture is but the relationships we were forming and the teachings we are

learning at the same time that are important.' Meanwhile, another added 'the creative methods we use often require us to move outside of our Comfort Zone and take risks. It is daring to take the risks that deepens the relationship as the sense of community and support grows.' Rothuizen and Harbo (2017) described the importance of meaningful belonging, which stems from the beliefs of philosophers John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–79), who suggested that every individual has unique potential and that predetermining their options and trying to shape them through institutions can prevent them from meeting their potential. Throughout studying the Social Pedagogy degree, the lectures have been very person-centred and students have been provided with the space to use in whichever way works for them in order to meet their potential. This space that has been granted has allowed relationships to form naturally through working together. One student mentioned that relationships on the course are open and very understanding. They went on to describe the relationships on the course as 'feeling like a family'. This demonstrates the level of comfort and safety there is in the space that is provided on the course.

Once again, the residential and the communication module were highlighted as being significant. Occupying a shared space with a group of people, many of whom don't know each other, can be really daunting for some. However, many comments and thoughts given by the group demonstrate how this experience has made the group feel closer, and one student described how it made them feel 'more comfortable'. To conclude the last residential, everyone in the group stood in a circle and took it in turns to reflect on the relationships that had been built and the learning that had taken place throughout the time away. Once someone finished talking, they threw a ball of string to members across the circle while still holding onto the string themselves, so it ultimately a web was made once everyone had spoken. This enabled a visualisation of all the connections and relationships in the group on the last day of the residential. A student commented:

> It was such a powerful exercise in closing the residential and reflecting on the relationships that had been built and the learning that had taken place. Letting go of the string was also very powerful as it was rolled up into one piece, symbolising an established tight-knit community. The exercise enabled people to be very honest and also focused on the diamond model and seeing the positive assets that people bring to a group.

Haltung, psychological safety and creativity

Imagination is about having the ability to see things differently and creativity is the dynamic energy that translates those ideas into action (Robinson, 2001). Interventions in people's lives should be focused on positive change for the future, which requires both imagination and creativity. The social pedagogue must understand their own Haltung, imagination and creativity to effectively work alongside people (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Many comments confirmed that an effective way to develop that understanding is to be immersed in creative learning methods.

A final theme to emerge from the reflective conversations with students was that of the importance of psychological safety and the importance of developing this to support learning. A technique used on the course to help foster this was by capturing the initial feelings of students and lecturers at the beginning of some modules through 'Hopes and Fears' activities. These begin using anonymised responses and as the sessions progress individuals have the opportunity to 'own' and reflect as they choose. This information supports the group's awareness of aspirations and anxieties in the learning space and so supports the safety of the space. It also provides a valuable emotional baseline to frame a reflective evaluation of the learning experience at the end of the module. The module entitled 'Imagination and the Common Third' is focused on experiential creative activities, including drama, music, sound walks, singing, dance, knitting and sculpture. The most commonly shared fear was 'I don't want to look stupid'. This will trigger open discussion about individual perceptions of their own creativity, which is linked closely to people's creative identity. People are quick to share how they are not creative and this is followed by their inability to draw, dance and so on. Some students embrace their creative identity and they have the challenge of reinterpreting the purpose and impact of creativity as it relates to social pedagogy in practice. The module

aims to break down this narrow view of creativity and to support students to experience and experiment in a safe learning environment.

It was important, therefore, to consider how individuals could be supported to feel safe in their learning environment. Edmondson (1999) suggested a clear link between psychological safety and creativity. In his research, he found that individuals are motivated to innovate when the interpersonal atmosphere is safe for risk endeavours. Gong et al. (2012) referred to the term *participative safety*, which highlights the importance of information sharing and trust. Attending to these preconditions is a key part of the induction period of the degree for students but is also important for the teaching team. The formation of ground rules is common practice in many university programmes as students and lecturers strive to negotiate notions of choice and responsibility in an adult learning environment. From a social pedagogical perspective, however, in which the use of self is central to practice, the bonds of those occupying the learning space has to be more genuine and meaningful.

Alongside the induction, the residential provides another valuable opportunity to enhance the psychological safety of students and lecturers. At this point the students meet different cohorts and work and share the same space for a few days. The students have experience of lecturers joining in all the learning activities as equals on the residential and throughout the course. Reflections come from every person, regardless of role, and this helps to establish a genuine, non-hierarchical learning partnership. This demonstrates how the course design, from day one, aims to reflect a social pedagogical approach. It reinforces the learning opportunities as the content is subject-relevant, but also the learning methodology mirrors the social pedagogue in practice (Simpson, 2019). For this to be achieved, the lecturers have to be genuine and openly share their values with the group. As mentioned, this can lead to the learning space feeling so safe that at times students can find it a challenge to maintain their personal boundaries. The 3Ps concept (Jappe, 2010) is key to supporting students to work out the appropriate boundaries when this occurs and can provide another learning opportunity. It is vital that the group have shared boundaries and that the lecturer has the skills to maintain an emotionally safe and appropriate learning environment. The following case example helps demonstrate this.

Case example: Movement and dance lecture

Ruth Spencer, a lecturer from the BA (Hons) Dance Performance and Teaching course, joined the module to facilitate a half-day session focused on movement and dance. The session was scheduled to take place in the usual classroom, which was a narrow, small room with no windows and not much floor space. The room seemed inappropriate and there was discussion about trying to find a bigger space. It wasn't possible and on the day Ruth arrived, the group had to move the tables out of the way. Ruth began by chatting to everyone and gently moved into an activity where we all sat on chairs in a circle and passed a small bean bag around. This silent activity powerfully demonstrated the information we gained from each transaction. Some passed the bag with great care as if it was fragile; others threw it carelessly. Next we walked around the room with character and purpose and discussed what we understood about each other's style of movement. The power of visual observation and the information we process about people's movement was already becoming very clear.

Ruth skilfully moved from sitting and chatting to standing and moving. The notion of feeling stupid did not appear to be present. By the end of the morning we were body sculpting using props and costumes to create images and emotions. This involved us making physical contact and giving and taking weight with one another. Ruth had adeptly guided us through the morning to achieve creativity in movement we had not imagined. She gradually enabled closer but always safe touch between individuals who would not have felt comfortable at the beginning of the session. The room we had thought would be cramped in fact supported the session as it was familiar and had no windows. On reflection the students commented they had feared going into a large dance studio with a wall of mirrors.

The reflections following this session were insightful and individuals described feeling liberated and connecting with childhood play. The process of building trust and taking things gradually to build confidence was seen as being parallel to the process of a social pedagogue beginning to work alongside an individual or a family. The structure of the session was facilitated by Ruth, while the response, creativity

and learning were the responsibilities of each person in the room. If we talk about it now, each person remembers what happened and how they felt.

Conclusion

From a lecturer's point of view there are many benefits to using creativity and experiential learning, which have been highlighted throughout the article in the reflections and comments from both students and the teaching team. There also needs to be an honest acknowledgment that this teaching method is time-consuming and takes a lot of planning and sometimes resources. You are unable to just turn up to a lecture and rely on PowerPoint presentations. It also takes a great deal of emotional resilience and confidence. There is a level of emotional connectedness, set out within the boundaries of the 3Ps (Jappe, 2010) that lecturers have to truly understand and be prepared to undertake with their students. This again takes energy and emotional resilience and support from other members of the teaching team is very important. It also takes confidence to step out of the standard way of teaching and answer to the colleagues around you who might question and not understand this method of teaching. But in saying all of this, it has been our experience that the benefits by far outweigh the negatives and that the student experience is much more positive. There has not been sufficient space to explore in greater detail the importance of creative teaching methods and activities in developing professional skills for practice. This could be the focus of a future article in its own right. However, it has been our experience that the creative approaches taken have helped enhance the students' skills, knowledge and aptitude for professional practice. We have seen students gaining higher grades for similar topics covered in other courses, and there is a deeper level of understanding and better feedback from students. Lessons are creative, engaging and fun! Using creativity and experiential learning also helps participants to develop their confidence, which translates into improved teaching practice. One of the most interesting points is that this approach to teaching is much more freeing as a lecturer; you don't have to be the expert all the time. It is much more about creating a safe environment for exploration of a topic or theory and sharing knowledge. Again, there has not been space in the article to expand on how important this is in supporting students to learn about conflict and tensions within groups, all of which has occurred even with the strong bonds identified by the students. The safe environment supports them to develop the ability to work as an effective member of a team while also dealing with tension, conflict and difference of opinions – all key skills needed for effective professional practice. We also acknowledge that this approach is not suited to everybody; some students need the structure and rigidity of lecture-based lessons, as do some lecturers. So before taking on this approach you need to question how you view creativity and if this fits with your Haltung; can you actually give up power and operate on a more equal footing with your students and colleagues? If so, then enjoy the exploration and journey you are about to start.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

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Article

'Does my *Haltung* look big in this?': The use of social pedagogical theory for the development of ethical and value-led practice

Lowis Charfe [1,*], Ali Gardner [1]

[1] School of Social Work, Care and Community, University of Central Lancaster, Preston, UK
* Correspondence: lcharfe@uclan.ac.uk

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to set out how the use of social pedagogical *Haltung* can support the exploration of values and how this informs and shapes a practitioner's direct work. Haltung is a German concept that has no direct English translation but means 'mindset', 'ethos' or 'attitude' (Eichsteller, 2010) and relates to an individual's value base. Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) set out that a social pedagogical Haltung is based on the two concepts of empathic understanding and regard. This article argues that the use of a social pedagogical Haltung gives practitioners a philosophical framework to support the reflection of core values and ethics held on a personal level. It also supports an understanding of how these influence practitioners and students when using *self* in relationship-based practice. The understanding of Haltung is important, but for social pedagogical practice to be undertaken it also has to be demonstrated by actions. The reflective activity of 'values alive in practice', set out in this article, provides a tool for social workers, practitioners and students to critically explore their own values and practice and make more meaningful connections between their Haltung and the behaviours they demonstrate in their everyday work. In the United Kingdom, values and standards for social work practice are set out by the British Association of Social Work and Social Work England. Arguably these have, at times, been reduced to a checklist for students and practitioners and can

lack more in-depth and explicit links to practice. The analysis of practice is more likely to focus on the skills and abilities of practitioners rather than the value base that underpins these. While the understanding and key application of core knowledge and skills is essential for competent social work practice (Forrester et al., 2019), this article argues that it must also be supported and shaped by ethical principles. It seeks to explore how social workers can be supported to adopt value-led approaches to complex work within an outcome-focused culture.

Keywords: Haltung; ethical practice; value-led practice; reflective tool; social pedagogy

Introduction

Before starting the discussion set out in this article around *Haltung* and values alive in practice, we would like to acknowledge the professionalisation of language in social work and how this has led to individuals being viewed as 'other', as 'objects' or as 'cases' that need fixing. As Freire (1970) argued, the use of language and terminology can be directly linked to power, discrimination and oppressive practice. The ability to recognise and reduce power imbalances and work alongside people in a more human way is central to social pedagogical practice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

In an effort to avoid further marginalisation of individuals through the use of disempowering language, the use of the terms 'service user' or 'client' will not be used. Instead, the article refers to 'people' and 'individuals'.

Haltung explained

Haltung is a German word that has no direct English translation but 'roughly translates as mindset or ethos' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 34) and is as such our attitude to the world around us (Eichsteller, 2010). Haltung can be understood as a moral compass that guides every action taken in every area of an individual's life (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). An individual's Haltung is an important and fundamental aspect of their personal being and shapes the way they think and feel about the world around them, situations that they face and the relationships they have with other people. Due to the subjective nature of Haltung, Eichsteller (2010) wrote that it can be 'more or less distinct by how we actually live by our values'. As such, it can be seen to be value-neutral, due to the fact that each individual will form their own Haltung.

Another aspect of Haltung is the link to the active use of *self* in practice and the core feature of social pedagogy that centres around 'authentic engagements' with the people practitioners work alongside (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 34). As a result, Haltung and the use of *self* is not something that is utilised in a certain situation or only during working hours but is, as Eichsteller (2010) noted, 'a skin and not a jacket' (p. 34). Haltung takes the use of social work values one step further as it recognises that personal and professional values are fundamental in shaping the way social workers and practitioners work alongside people. Social work practitioners are therefore 'more than just a pair of hands' in professional practice (Eichsteller, 2010, p. 4).

The word 'ethos' takes the definition of Haltung a step further in linking an individual's attitudes to the established sets of moral codes and values in society (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2014). Corbella and Ucar (2019) insisted that ethics are concerned with the dignity and happiness of everybody in a society and that all actions are guided by values and ethics. Ethics are often individual and personal yet determine a person's behaviour and standpoint. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011) stated the importance of acknowledging the constructed and 'conceptualised' nature of how different groups are viewed within a society or community, and how this shapes the development of a person's own Haltung. Due to the socially constructed nature of Haltung, it will differ between individuals and it can be argued, therefore, that there is no 'correct' Haltung.

In social work and social care practice there is continued dialogue and debate around the link between ethics, theory and practice. Storø (2013) and Corbella and Ucar (2019), among others, have clearly identified the difficulty in being able to link the use of ethics to direct practice. Cleary (2020, p. 2) has developed this point further and has identified three aspects of ethics. He has named them as 'professional ethics', 'everyday ethics' and 'philosophical ethics'. He stated that the professional and everyday relates to 'decision making and action' within professional and personal lives, while the philosophical aspect relates to the meta-reflections around 'goodness, justice, love and happiness'. In relation to Haltung, it can be argued that all three are important to consider when reflecting on the development and shaping of an individual's Haltung and the direct use of *self* in practice.

In relation to social work and social care, the use of the new approaches in practice, discussed later in this article, will be influenced by each practitioner's Haltung. For instance, the term 'child in need' is very subjective and is greatly influenced by aspects such as a professional's view of children, how they view a child's capacity and whether they see the rich child (Malaguzzi, 1993). Is it their belief that they need to provide a child with protection and do they see their role as a rescuer? A practitioner's view

will also be influenced by the culture of the agency they work in along with the way key principles of legislation or policy are translated into practice. For example, there is a duty to complete a needs and wishes assessment of children under Section 1 of the Children Act 1989 as part of a wider assessment of a family. Any social worker completing such an assessment is aware of the need to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the children as there is a legal duty to do so. How they conduct this assessment and how the information given by the children will be used in the final assessment will be influenced by the social worker's Haltung. If they see children as vulnerable to manipulation by adults and as being too young to truly know their own views, these views are likely to influence how the social worker interprets and assesses the information given by the children.

Likewise, adult social care is heavily influenced by societal and individual values surrounding those identified as vulnerable adults. Social care organisations have a long history of deeply embedded paternalistic values shaping welfare delivery, something that disabled people have continued to challenge and campaign against (Morris, 2004). In adopting social pedagogical approaches, practitioners must continually challenge these societal perceptions and their own assumptions in attempting to see individuals as experts in their own lives rather than passive recipients of care (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Wieninger (2000, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) pointed out that our Haltung influences how we think about others and therefore how we are likely to respond to them.

Because of the subjective nature of Haltung, it is necessary to critically reflect on one's own value base. In using social pedagogy theory and the professional codes of ethics, practitioners can develop awareness in relation to how this can influence their responses to the complex ethical dilemmas within social work practice. Making judgements is a major part of being a human being but it is also an important skill in assessment and decision making in social work practice. Social workers need to remain acutely aware of the factors influencing their professional judgements.

Social pedagogy can support this self-reflection. As an ethical orientation it encourages practitioners to 'strive towards understanding people, being respectful and recognising the unconditional value of human beings' (Kaska and Ladbrooke, 2016, p. 20). One of the key historical thinkers, Pestalozzi (1964, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011), identified the link between humanity and the need for a positive and harmonious view of people as well as the importance of valuing and respecting individuals. Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010; Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 35) expanded on the important work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and Levinas (1981) who developed the two important pillars of social pedagogical Haltung, with empathic understanding on one side and regard on the other. Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) drew on Gadamer's use of hermeneutics in gaining an 'understanding of an individual, their way of life and their perspective' by using relational-based practice. Similarly, the German term '*Verstehen*', which translates as empathic understanding and being able to see the lifeworld orientation of an individual, is useful in understanding Haltung. Empathic understanding requires the practitioner to form a genuine emotional connection to the other person through reflecting their experiences and demonstrating understanding. This links clearly to Freire's (1970) assertion regarding the importance of 'investigating people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality' (p. 87) in the use of relational-based practice. By regard, Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) referred to the work of Levinas (1981) and the German term '*Achten*', which 'refers to accepting the otherness in people who are different from ourselves' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 35). This enables the practitioner to respect difference when there is no personal experience of an individual's situation. In setting out the two pillars of a social pedagogical Haltung, Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) gave us a navigation method or reflective framework through which to direct practice.

Another key dynamic to Haltung is the importance of the promotion of social justice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). At the heart of this is the ability to recognise the Haltung represented in legislation, policies and organizational procedures. An understanding of Haltung on a macro level is just as important as understanding its influence on the micro level. 'It is important to recognize the explicit and implicit principles and ethos (Haltung) of legislation can play a powerful role in shaping our practice and the relationship between the state and people who access services and support' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 36). A key example of this is the guiding principle contained in the Children Act 1989, that the 'welfare

of the child is paramount'. Even though this is an important principle it could be seen to place a child's needs, wishes and feelings over those of their parents or carers, instead of taking a holistic view of a child's situation and the emotional and relational connections they have to other members of their family. This guiding principle is the Haltung represented in legislation, which has had a direct impact on how practitioners interpret this in their practice.

A short critical discussion of current English social work and care practice

Understanding the political and policy-led landscape is key to understanding the environment that current social work and social care practitioners are working within. Since 2010, when the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Coalition government initiated an austerity programme, a reduction in state responsibility and funding for health and welfare services has been evident (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2014; Bilson, Featherstone and Martin, 2017). As a result, many organisations and local authority departments have had to reduce, redesign, work in partnership or close services, while trying to meet continued growth in demand for support services. Alongside this there has been a focus on the transformation of the workforce and the search for new approaches to working in response to cuts in funding. Some of these responses have been embedded into legislation, a clear example of which can be seen in the Care Act 2014. The introduction of this piece of legislation saw a shift away from the paternalistic approach with the emphasis on the provision of services, to one that focuses on well-being, self-determination, choice and control (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). The Care Act 2014 promotes the use of strengths-based (Saleeby, 2006) and person-centred (Sanderson and Lewis, 2012) approaches in all areas of practice with adults and their families. From a social pedagogical perspective, the centrality of a relationship-based approach in supporting individuals to develop and improve their independence and well-being is essential to practice. There is a clear focus on working *with* individuals and their families rather than *for* them (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) and this reinforces the commitment to a person-led rather than needs-led approach to practice.

With regard to working with children, young people and their families, there have been similar developments set against the austerity agenda. Many local authorities have looked for ways to provide improved outcomes for children and families while managing cuts to services, understaffed teams and high caseloads. As identified by Ruch, Turney and Ward (2010), austerity has led to an increased focus on risk management, safeguarding and investigative approach to practice. As a direct result, local authorities and third-sector organisations have looked for new approaches to practice that will support workforce development while also equipping their staff to manage the complexities of working with children and their families. This has included the use of Risk Sensible models (Featherstone, Morris and White, 2014) and Signs of Safety (Spratt, Devaney and Frederick, 2019), which privilege the use of relational approaches and focus on key social pedagogical principles including independence and interdependence, building confidence and motivation, setting goals and contributing to society.

Although many social workers would clearly identify with social pedagogical principles as described above, the ability to translate this into practice has become increasingly challenging in current contexts. Social workers and social care staff already under increasing pressure through the rational-technical approach (Munro, 2012, cited in Trevithick, 2014, p. 1) find it difficult to see the 'space' for adopting relational approaches to their work. A common theme in discussions in training social care staff is that current systems and contexts prevent them from working in this way, even though the espoused narrative of strength-based and relational practice is commonplace within the workplace.

Social work values and standards

There has been a long tradition of advocacy, rights-based approaches, participation and relational practice in social work in the United Kingdom (BASW, 2014; Ruch et al., 2010). The importance of these are enshrined in the professional standards set out to guide social work practice, such as the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Children and Family Practitioners (DfE, 2018), the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services (DoH, 2015) and the Professional Capability Framework (BASW, 2018).

When it comes to setting out the values and ethics for social work practitioners, the British Association of Social Work (BASW, 2018) articulate a comprehensive list of the desired values. These are set out in the Code of Ethics and come under three headings: human rights, social justice and professional integrity, all of which link to the same ethical base of social pedagogy practice (Corbella and Ucar, 2019). There are also a number of ethical practice principles aimed at supporting practitioners to apply these standards and values directly in their practice. As BASW (2018) rightly pointed out, social work strives to 'meet human needs and develop human potential' and that social workers should act with integrity and 'treat people with dignity and care'.

BASW's Code of Ethics and the ethical practice principles set out a detailed explanation of each; for example, the need for developing professional relationships and the need to be able to assess and manage risk. The *what needs to happen* in practice is very clearly set out and gives excellent guidance as to its importance, yet it can be argued that *how this is done* is the key aspect, which is less clear. Our personal experiences of teaching in higher educational settings on social work and related degree courses and providing continual professional development training to practitioners is that there is little time or attention paid to supporting people to assess their own values. In their research, Corbella and Ucar (2019) found that training was not effective in supporting professionals' and students' own understandings of how the ethical dimension to their work affected their practice. They also cited the worrying statistic from Vilar (2014, cited in Corbella and Ucar, 2019) that 80 per cent of practitioners do not have adequate support systems to help them deal with ethical and complex decisions that may challenge their own values. As a result, social work values, at times, have been reduced to a tick-box exercise as students strive to demonstrate their skills in competence-based frameworks of assessment. This lack of contemplation risks the student failing to recognise the importance of continual reflection once qualified. It is at this point that we propose the key benefits of social pedagogical approaches and attention to one's Haltung, in challenging one's own value base and the impact of the action one takes in practice.

Adopting social pedagogical approaches in practice

It is very common in policy and practice to understand *what needs to be done*, but often it is less clear about *how things get done*. This is where social pedagogy can be helpful. Instead of creating systems and processes to practice, social pedagogy is more concerned with *how and why* a particular action is taken and relies on relational approaches to support interventions and ethical and value-led practice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Social pedagogy focuses on the 'conscious use of relationships' (Bengtsson, Chamberlain, Crimmens and Stanley, 2008, p. 9) by practitioners, which are based on social pedagogical actions. Stephens (2013) insisted that these relationships have to be underpinned by the notion of *caritas*. He argued that *caritas* is the 'benevolent concern for others that signals a sense of solidarity' (Stephens, 2013, p. 23) and went further than kindness. It also clearly links into the diamond model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011), in that practitioners have to be able to see the potential in the person they are working with. Once this has been achieved, they have to use every opportunity to support them to build up their confidence and self-efficacy, ultimately leading to them taking charge of their own lives (Stephens, 2013; Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

Importantly, practitioners need to be supported to be confident in their own values, judgements and actions in order to utilise their most critical resource – themselves. Corbella and Ucar (2019) highlighted the complex nature of ethical practice and values and suggested that these are wrongly ignored as the focus is solely on theory, practice and the use of 'common sense' (p. 2). Through adopting a social pedagogical perspective, organisations and individual practitioners can be supported to develop positive relational approaches to practice that serve to meet the underpinning aims of the organisation, policies and legislation. An example of this would be the use of social pedagogical Haltung in supporting practitioners to develop ethical practice. However, the focus of this article is not to critically analyse this in further detail, but rather to look at the issue of professional values in practice when these approaches are undertaken and lead to more effective practice and outcomes for the people social work practitioners are working alongside.

Social pedagogy is essentially concerned with well-being, learning and growth (ThemPra, 2017). It is underpinned by the idea that 'every person has inherent potential, is valuable, resourceful and can make a

meaningful contribution to the wider community if we find ways of including them' (ThemPra, 2017, n.p.). Social pedagogy provides a philosophical, theoretical and practical approach to practice. As such it requires an organisational and individual commitment to these aims in order for the ethos to be translated into practice. Social pedagogy should not be seen as 'an *add on* to social work or a set of methods that can be picked up and used' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 8). As Hämäläinen (2003) stated, social pedagogy does not happen because of the methods utilised but rather as a result of social pedagogical thoughts. Stephens (2013) explained that social pedagogy is a lens through which the world can be viewed, that in turn will influence the way practitioners respond.

Values alive in practice

The importance of practitioners being aware of their own Haltung is a key starting point when using relational practice. But reflection alone is not enough. Freire (2001) stated that there needs to be 'right thinking, right doing' (p. 39) and Stephens (2013) wrote that 'a compassionate disposition and kind actions are particularly important' (p. 23). Cleary (2020) also argued that reflection and ethical reflection are part of 'guided action' (p. 2) and help practitioners 'qualify action' (p. 2). It is also key to note that reflection that does not help practitioners develop their practice should be seen as ineffective. Kierkegaard (cited in Hatton, 2013, p. 28) asserts that for a person to become self-aware there needs to be critical reflection on their thoughts, feelings and actions. 'Knowing when to push, when to let go, what to listen to, and what to ignore – all these skills are based on the profound respect for human dignity and working to restore a sense of who they are and what they want to be' (Kim Berg, cited in Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011, p. 38).

If critical reflection is key, it has to be rooted in an individual's practice as well as a philosophical understanding of their own Haltung. To support this development and from experiences of facilitating training and teaching sessions, we have developed a reflective activity called 'values alive in practice'.

This activity supports individuals, teams and organisations to consider the behaviours that demonstrate their Haltung. The starting point is to invite people to explain their understanding of named core values, such as respect, compassion, love, being non-judgemental and so on. This is achieved by setting the participants into small groups and giving each group one value different from the other groups, which is written out on a brightly coloured piece of paper. They are encouraged to think about their own understanding of the value before sharing with others. After being given a set time, the group must then discuss what this value means to them personally and how they would define it. They are encouraged to try to find an agreed term that can explain this value to the wider group. The wider discussion encourages the group to compare their definitions and to focus on the challenges in achieving agreement on a particular value. The aim of the exercise is to tease out the subjective nature of our understanding of values on a personal and professional level.

The 'values alive in practice' activity then requires the groups to explain how they demonstrate this value in their practice. For example, when working with individuals or families, how would the person they are working alongside know that they are demonstrating the highlighted value? What behaviour in their direct practice would demonstrate compassion? How would somebody they were working with know they were being compassionate towards them? Individuals are given a short amount of time to reflect and then share this with their group members. They are encouraged to share practice or life examples of how they have demonstrated this value and how it had been received. This critical analysis and reflection support the practitioner or student to link the importance of understanding and explaining core values while demonstrating and use these in their direct work. Once again examples are fed back to the wider group and reflective questions by the facilitators are asked, including:

- How easy was the activity?
- What made it particularly challenging?
- Did you hear any examples that you felt were helpful to your own practice?

In the evaluation of this activity, students and practitioners often comment on their increased understanding of the difference between values and behaviours as result of the exercise. Similarly, they

suggest the exercise helps them to understand Haltung and the notion of congruence between one's values and one's actions.

Values alive in practice supports reflection on another key social pedagogy idea around the genuineness and purposefulness of actions. Social pedagogical practice has to be 'purposeful, with the ultimate aim of supporting growth, development and well-being' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 13). Links to the work of Freire (1970) can be made here, particularly in terms of his analysis of dialogue and the importance of this being genuine. Freire (1970) stated that 'dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love of the world and for people . . . Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to other' (p. 70).

Conclusion

Kornbeck (2009), Hämäläinen (2003), and Cousseé, Bradt, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2010) have all written about how difficult it is to define social pedagogy and social pedagogical practice. It is often said 'it depends' when discussing whether practices are social pedagogical and the contested nature of this discipline makes it difficult to identify. Social pedagogy is not a set of methods to be used but a lens through which to see the world and react accordingly; it is therefore much more of a philosophical and moral code by which to live life (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Fundamentally important are the genuine and authentic actions that practitioners take based on a 'profound respect for their human dignity' (Eichsteller, 2010, p. 3). This can be seen in their thoughts and interactions with people.

To help develop social pedagogical practice, the use of Haltung as a starting point supports the understanding of personal values and critical reflection on how genuine and authentic practitioners are being in their actions. The use of the two pillars of social pedagogy Haltung in Mührel (2008, cited in Eichsteller, 2010) gives practitioners a framework in which to constantly reflect on their ability to work in a strengths-based, respectful and humanist way. It also means that practitioners must have an understanding of the Haltung contained in legislation and policy and how these are interpreted into their direct practice. While using the two social pedagogical pillars of Haltung as a framework that supports self-reflection, values alive in practice compels practitioners to check that their Haltung is being supported by their actions.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

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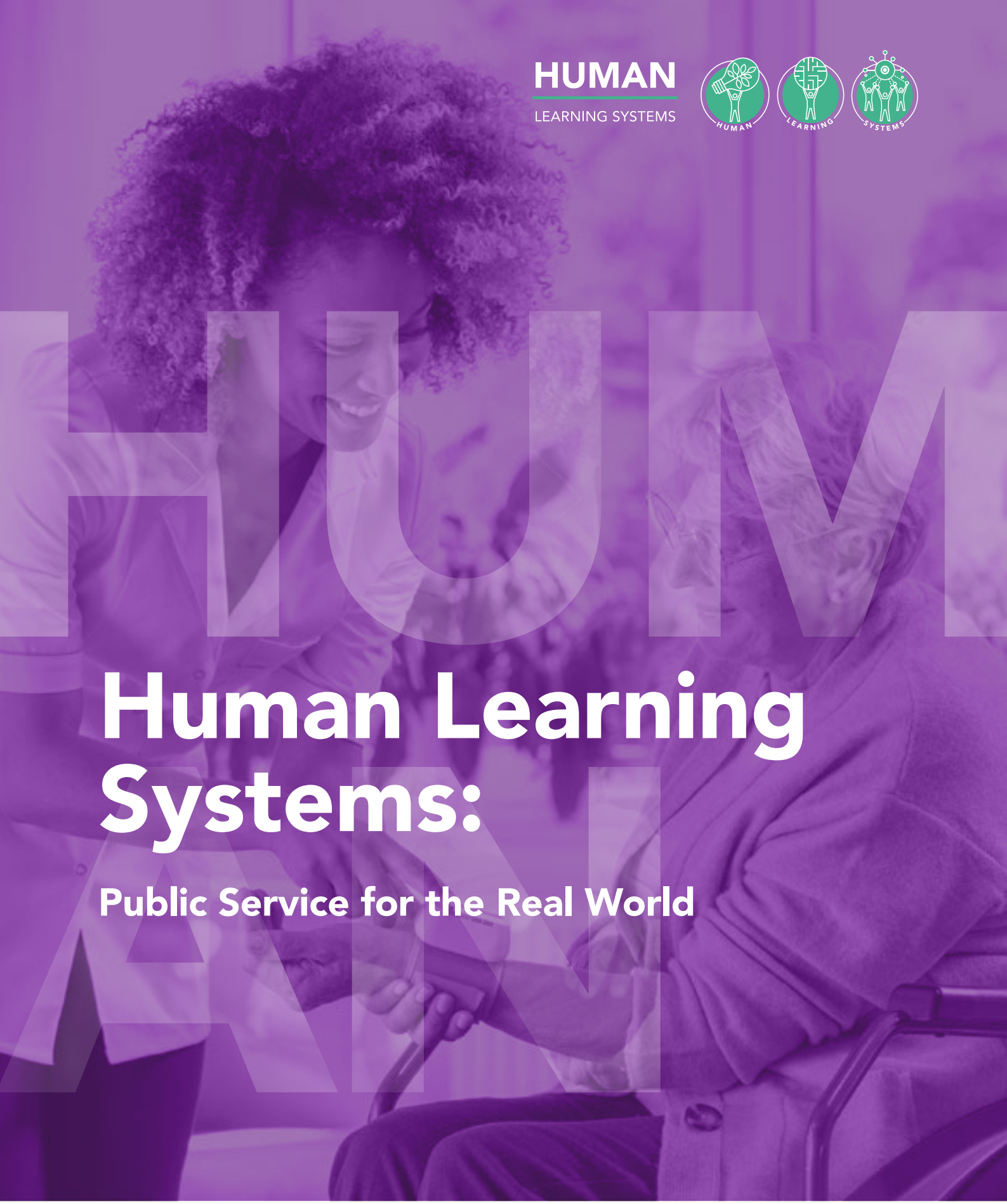
HUMAN
LEARNING SYSTEMS



Human Learning Systems:

Public Service for the Real World

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Foreword

Olli-Pekka Heinonen
Director General of the International Baccalaureate, previously Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education

How can governments respond effectively to the complex reality of the world? How can government support people to lead flourishing lives, when each life is different? I have been wrestling with these questions for much of my career.

Almost 30 years ago, as a young minister, I thought that government and governance was about power, and power was about control and having the right answers. As the years have gone by, I have learnt that with the wicked challenges of today, that kind of thinking accelerates negative, not positive outcomes.

In Finland, we have developed an approach to government that we call Humble Government. It says that government does not know best, but that we can learn together with the people we serve, to help each person – and each place – find what is right for them.

If government, and the public service we support, is to work in this way, we need alternative approaches to public management. It all starts by admitting to not knowing the right answers. That is the prerequisite for learning. We will find solutions by trying things out, and changing and developing ourselves in this process of interaction. It is by this never-ending process of learning together that we reach positive outcomes. The world has no shortage of well-written strategies, but the gap between strategy and implementation is huge. It is all about how we value and treat each other as humans, how we understand the systems we are part of, and how we commit ourselves to the shared journey of learning.

I am delighted to have played a part in helping to explore and develop Human Learning Systems (HLS) as such an alternative approach. Our case study explores how government can create better outcomes by supporting actors at local and national system scales to learn together in addressing complex challenges. Government can be humble by optimising for learning, not control.

When contexts keep changing, performance management is always slow to respond. Instead of trying to

control "results", we must strengthen the competence of all actors in the system to be more resilient and adaptive in this time of flux. It can be hard for governments to say that we don't have all the answers, and to put genuine decision-making power into the hands of the public and the workers who serve them. But brave governments do this. They can use an HLS approach to public management to transform how government and public service works. We have made a good start to our learning process. We did it. You can, too.

Naresh Singh
Ph.D. Professor, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, and Director of the Centre for Complexity Economics, Applied Spirituality and Public Policy at OP Jindal Global University, Haryana, India

Former Director-General, Federal Government of Canada and Former Principal Adviser, United Nations Development Program, New York

It gives me great pleasure to welcome this groundbreaking work, which has the potential to catalyse a transition from the way public service is now managed, commonly known as the New Public Management (NPM), to the approach being called Human Learning Systems (HLS). This transition, in my view, can be of the same order of significance as the other great transitions in public service management from traditional to Weberian (classic public administration) to NPM. It is useful to recall how momentous these transitions were.

Traditionally, the public realm was managed by monarchial dictates and religious doctrine, sprinkled with emotion, sentiment, magic and superstition. This was gradually replaced with Weberian "ideal type" bureaucracy, based on the centrality of the legal rational authority. This concentrated power in the hands of those who controlled the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. As Weberian public administration hardened and became overly bureaucratic, NPM was introduced to use a more business and market orientation, focusing on managers, markets and metrics. Human wellbeing – what one might expect as the basic purpose of public service – did not seem to matter.

And it now seems the time to herald the transition from NPM to the HLS approach – the subject matter of this book. HLS recognises that outcomes such as improvement in human wellbeing are not produced by managers and their organisations, but rather result from complex adaptive systems which are the communities

in which people live. The implication is that each human being is different and through interactions with others and their relationships, individual and collective wellbeing is achieved.

As such, the macro emerges from the micro through facilitation and learning and not through hierarchical control. The most important outcome seems to be the continuous process of learning and adaptation, leading to continual improvements and resilience-building. Fundamental shifts from outcomes-based performance management, for example, are called for. It is reassuring that the recommendations in the book emerge from concrete case studies rather than theoretical musings.

Desirable as it may seem, this HLS transition or revolution will not be easy. Bureaucracies such as those of governments of OECD countries, including Canada, or of the UN and similar organisations, will feel they are losing control of financial resources and will proclaim the need to be accountable. Underlying all this will be a feeling of a loss of power.

In developing countries such as India, government reflects a mix of traditional public administration and NPM. On the other hand, civil society organisations are very active in communities. This will present opportunities for HLS in the civil society space but challenges in the governmental space. The best chances of HLS success in either OECD or developing countries might be where a marriage between civil society and local government is possible.

Introduction

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Public service for the real world

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

> *Do you believe that public service should help people to create good outcomes in their lives? To help people find useful work? To live and stay well? To care when others cannot? To connect with one another?*
>
> *But do you also have a nagging feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with the way public service works at the moment? And how it is perceived?*

If both of those things are true, then this report is for you.

We argue that a significant part of the problems experienced by public service are due to the way that public management[1] is conceived and carried out. (Public management is the term for how public service is organised.) We argue that the current way of organising public service creates a simplified fantasy world, divorced from the messy reality of how real outcomes are made in real lives.

We suggest that engaging with that complex reality will enable public service to help people create those outcomes as effectively and efficiently as possible, and demonstrate the true value of public service.

What do we mean by public service?

Let's begin with some definitions. In this report we use **public service as a shorthand for those purposeful activities that support human freedom and flourishing**. Public service is one human being saying to another – I support your quest to live the good life. In the last 20 years, public service has started to use the language of "outcomes" to describe specific instances of human flourishing. It seeks outcomes such as increased employment or wellbeing, reduced obesity or fear of crime.

Our definition encompasses core public sector services such as education, welfare provision, and healthcare. It also includes the vast

contribution of civil society, from the work of charities and social enterprises to mutual aid groups and community development.

We can see in this definition that public service is to be found way beyond the boundaries of state provision. This sense of public service lives in mutual aid groups and in forms of charitable action.

Organising public service: public administration/ management

All the work of public service requires organisation. Whether undertaken by teachers or refuse collectors, whether in a community centre, café or office, such work needs a sense of shared purpose, and an agreed method by which to achieve that purpose. It means that decisions have to be taken regarding resource allocation and how to develop the skills and capabilities required to achieve the purpose in practice. It requires people to reflect on how the work is being done, and mechanisms to be put in place to ensure that such work continues to improve and adapt in a changing world.

How this organising work is done – how shared purpose is created and enacted, how resources are allocated and managed, how improvement and adaptation are enabled – is the task of "public management" or "public administration".[2] Currently, there is a dominant paradigm – a mutually supportive set of beliefs and practices – for how public management is done. It is called "New Public Management" (NPM). It was created in the 1980s, and is sometimes referred to as the 3Ms – Markets, Managers and Metrics.

That nagging feeling

> *"So many people know intuitively that our current accepted ways of working don't work, but they haven't previously had any language to give expression to this."*
>
> **Collective Impact Agency case study**

If you've been feeling as though there's something fundamentally wrong in our organisation of public service, then we hope this report offers a way to make sense of that feeling.

We have found that NPM is **dehumanising**:

NPM is founded on Public Choice Theory, which believes that people are fundamentally selfish and cannot be trusted. Consequently, NPM believes that public servants must be forced to serve the public through the extrinsic motivation of reward and punishment – their performance must be "incentivised". Consequently, every aspect of public service must be translated into a quantified performance measure, so that managers can know whether each person, team or organisation deserves punishment or reward. And people who ask for help must be assessed to see if they really need it, because they're probably trying to grab more than their share.

This core belief, and the practices which enact it, encourage standardisation of service; care is standardised into packages or 15-minute chunks of purchased time, desired "outcomes" are predefined, irrespective of what a particular person needs or wants, and they are measured against standardised metrics and other performance indicators, which focus only on what is measurable while ignoring the diversity of human experience.

NPM is slow to learn and adapt to a changing world

Because it believes that people are fundamentally selfish, the dominant purpose of management is control. The processes and "impact" of public service are measured in order to control staff via reward and punishment. Assessments are undertaken to measure whether people meet thresholds, not to genuinely understand their lives. Regulators make judgments in order to hand out badges for success, or shame-markers for failure, and to produce league tables that encourage competition between public servants, rather than collaboration.

The unsurprisingly frequent result of continual management attempts to motivate people extrinsically through reward and punishment is a pathological culture of blame and defensiveness. As a result, performance data is often "gamed" (created by those whose job is to produce good-looking data), and so the data is next-to-useless for learning. We have created a public management approach which routinely lies to itself.

Processes of learning and adaptation are further impeded by the lack of autonomy given to staff. Under NPM, the *de facto* purpose of public sector staff is to hit predefined performance metrics. Usually, these metrics change annually, making public service slow to respond to an ever-changing world. When rapid, unignorable change occurs – like a pandemic – normal performance management processes have to be turned off because they are useless, and learning mechanisms have to be invented from scratch. Because, in normal times, learning is a luxury.

NPM creates fragmentation

NPM encourages public service fragmentation through two mechanisms. Firstly, it disaggregates public service into component parts, so that it can write manageable contract specifications. Those contracted to deliver public services must be controlled by SMART targets – because they are selfish – and so each public service must be separated into contracts with particular specifications.

Secondly, because public servants and organisations are forced to compete with one another, NPM naturally creates a competitive rather than collaborative environment. Organisations become reluctant to share knowledge and practices. Instead, they seek to create particular intellectual property, as these offer Unique Selling Points (USPs) that enable them to win the next contract.

NPM is wasteful

Because NPM is dehumanising, slow to learn, and fragmented, it is also massively wasteful. A public service that is managed using an NPM approach expends a huge amount of resources in not helping people. It wastes time and resources by providing standardised packages that don't meet people's individual needs. It wastes resources assessing people to see if their situation is bad enough to deserve help, and then turning them away until their situation is worse (and therefore more difficult and expensive to help with). It wastes resources by running processes of punishment and reward, through duplication of effort, and by letting people fall through the cracks. The most comprehensive review by public management academics of the evidence on NPM has this to say:

> *"NPM... was ostensibly intended to create 'a government that works better and costs less'... So what do we have to show for three decades or so of NPM reforms? The short answer seems to be: higher costs and more complaints."*
>
> **Hood and Dixon (2015)**

A story to illustrate

Gateshead Council, a local authority in the UK, decided that it wanted to try and do something different with the way it dealt with people who had not paid their Council Tax bills. (Council Tax is a local property tax, levied by local authorities in the UK.)

Its previous approach to dealing with people who had fallen behind with their Council Tax bills was based on the assumption that they could pay but had selfishly chosen not to. Those people therefore needed to be reminded of their duty to pay, and if that failed, they had to be forced to settle their debts.

Consequently, if people failed to make their scheduled payment, a flag would be raised on the council's internal system, and this would trigger a letter saying: "you haven't paid your Council Tax. Please do so by date x, otherwise we will issue an enforcement order."

Almost no-one paid in response to this first letter.

If people had still not paid after a set amount of time, a second letter was triggered, which said: "you still haven't paid your Council Tax debt. If you fail to contact us to arrange payment by date x, we will send bailiffs to confiscate your property."

Quite a lot of people used to get in touch after receiving this letter, as a way to ward off the threat of bailiffs appearing at their door. These people would arrange catch-up payment routines. Very few of them would stick to these payment schemes.

Anyone who hadn't paid by the due date would be sent an enforcement notice. Bailiffs would visit their house (the cost of the bailiff's visit was added to their debt). Most of the time, the bailiffs were unable to recover enough property to settle the debt, because it turned out that the key problem was not that people could pay but were choosing not to, it was that they didn't have enough money to pay.

The council realised that their way of responding to Council Tax debt was an expensive way to make a bad situation worse. They weren't getting the money they were owed; the families who were already in debt got further into debt; and the psychological stress of the debt-collection process created a range of other negative outcomes for people whose lives were already problematic enough.

As a result, the council decided to experiment with a more human approach. They asked the question: "what if we treated people getting into Council Tax arrears as a signal that maybe they were starting to struggle? What would happen if we took that signal as a cue to offer help, rather than making things worse?"

So, they identified a cohort of people who were due to go into the enforcement phase and instead of sending the bailiffs, the council called them to say: "we see that you've got behind with your Council Tax. Let's put that aside for a minute. Would you like to tell us what's going on for you?"

The council worker's job was reframed: their job became to build a relationship with the person – to understand their strengths and needs – and to offer help in whatever way they could, in order to help that person get back on their feet. The case study of this work is written up in our previous report. The bespoke help they offered was very successful. It helped people to flourish in a range of different ways – from accessing the benefits they were due, finding work, improving family relationships, better school attendance and achievement, and improved mental health. Many people were able to start paying their Council Tax again. Everybody won. All it took was the simple shift from viewing people as if they were selfish individuals who needed to be forced to pay, to human beings who needed some help.

However, that's not the point of this story (you'll see lots of other examples of this approach working in different contexts throughout this report). The point of this story comes with a final detail. One of the people who was in arrears and was rung up by the council put the phone down on them and rang the council switchboard. The caller told the switchboard operator that they had been contacted by a con-artist – someone pretending to be from the council. They told the operator that they knew it couldn't be someone who was really from the council, "because they offered to help".

This member of the public had got so used to standardised, by-the-numbers, control-based public service that anyone who was actually taking the trouble to get to know them, and was offering to help, must be a fake. This is how dehumanised public service has become.

The attraction of NPM: a magical fantasy world

NPM has been the dominant paradigm for long enough for its flaws to be clearly evident. They are highlighted in research evidence, and in the experiences of those who have been adopting this approach. Sir Peter Housden, ex-head of the Civil Service in Scotland, wrote in 2016 about "the unconscionably long death of New Public Management" and bemoaned the absence of an alternative.

We don't seek to assert that every problem that public service experiences is the fault of NPM. Nor would we say that some of the issues identified above (a focus on control, fragmentation, and being slow to learn) are unique to NPM; these problems loomed large in the previously dominant, patrician version of public administration. Our starting point is that NPM is the currently dominant public management paradigm, so we see these flaws manifest in that approach. And our analysis is that these flaws cannot be solved within NPM, as they are a necessary part of that paradigm's internal logic: "they're not a bug, they're a feature".

If the evidence and experience of the problems of NPM are so substantial, why has it persisted? Alongside the practical realities of the time it takes for paradigms to shift, and the support provided to NPM from the broader political shift to neoliberalism, we think one explanation for its persistence is that it offers leaders of all types (e.g. politicians, civil servants, and public service managers) something precious and magical: **the illusion of simplicity and control**.

NPM encourages managers to create a simplified fantasy world based on thin abstractions – a pale imitation of people's lives. Instead of seeing the whole person, they substitute proxy indicators. Instead of looking at the complex stories of their effects in the world, they look at dashboards and RAG (Red-Amber-Green) ratings. And worse, the data which populates these thin abstractions is produced by people who are incentivised to lie. NPM then pretends that this fantasy world of dashboards and RAG ratings is real, and tells managers that their job is to create change in such data.

The problem with this approach is that the captured data bears little resemblance to the complex reality of how outcomes are made in the world, and therefore to the actual challenges of organising public service so that it helps people to create positive outcomes in their lives.

Consequently, NPM creates a magical fantasy world for managers to live in: a world in which the numbers are real, and changing the numbers becomes the day-to-day purpose of the work. This fantasy world is so ubiquitous that the game of producing good-looking data has become indistinguishable from the actual task of organising the work of public service. Unsurprisingly, this approach is ultimately wasteful, demoralising and dehumanising.

Story 2: A conversation between a National Health Service (NHS) provider and an NHS commissioner

I was witness to a conversation between a senior manager of commissioning processes for the NHS in the UK, and the finance manager of a large-scale provider of NHS services. The conversation went something like this:

The commissioning manager was outlining how their team was currently doing lots of work to recalculate how NHS payments were going to work in the future. They were going to try and move away from paying for activity towards paying for outcomes. They were putting lots of effort into finding ways to price different outcomes accurately, so that the providers would be financially incentivised to carry out the most useful health activity. They described how difficult it was proving to do this well.

The finance manager of the NHS provider organisation shrugged and responded: "you do realise that we employ teams of people to create good-looking cost information that makes it look like we're doing what you want? And you know that the cost information that your teams ask for doesn't reflect the work we have to do to keep people healthy? So, don't worry about it, whatever you ask for in future, we'll find a way to give you the figures you need."

"Yes," replied the commissioning manager. "Of course, I know that's what you do. That's the game, right?"

At this point, it is important to give some nuance to our claims about "the real world". The version of reality that public service mostly deals with is socially constructed – it is something we human beings make together, rather than something that simply exists. So, the nuanced version of reality and public service is – **it's all real.** When a government minister leans on a civil servant to produce data to say that COVID-19 testing targets have been met, that is the reality for that particular civil servant.

The question we ask from this nuanced perspective is: whose version of reality has been privileged under NPM? Our contention is that this abstracted, target-based version of reality has been unnecessarily privileged. The logic of NPM, and how it has infected political discourse and action, privileges this reality. The demands it creates on everyone at different scales to produce good-looking data has made the game real. But when that happens, we ignore the complex lived reality of the people that public service is supposed to help, and public service becomes less human, less effective, and more wasteful as a result.

It is our claim that public service should instead privilege this reality – the complex reality of each member of the public being served. (It's a bit harder to get that onto the title of a book, though.)

An alternative: Human Learning Systems

This report offers an alternative paradigm for public management. We call this paradigm Human Learning Systems (HLS). It has been created by a set of public service workers who were fed up of pretending that the game they were playing was real, and fed up with the relentlessly dehumanising and wasteful effects of NPM. This report has been created by an action research process drawing on roughly 50 case studies of HLS practice, mostly from the UK but also from across the globe. It seeks to make sense of the new reality that these pioneers have been creating.

HLS is based on a different set of fundamental beliefs, and therefore has a different set of mutually supportive management practices.

The HLS approach to public management continuously explores the messy reality of how the outcomes that matter to each person might be achieved in their unique life context. The job of public management – of organising this work – is to create the conditions whereby public service makes this possible in the most efficient and effective way. **It is public service for the real world.**

Human – our moral purpose

HLS is based on the belief that the purpose of public service is to support human freedom and flourishing.

This provides the moral purpose for public service. It also provides a view of what it means to be human in a public service context. It means that we understand human beings intersubjectively – as people who live in a web of relationships (a "system") which helps to define who they are. In other words, to understand a human being, you must understand their world.

Learning – our management strategy

If each person sets what matters to them, and each person's life context is a constantly changing system that is unique to them, how can public service help people to create their own outcomes? This question demonstrates that the task of creating public service outcomes is **complex.**

In complex environments, learning is the only viable management strategy. Public service must build a learning

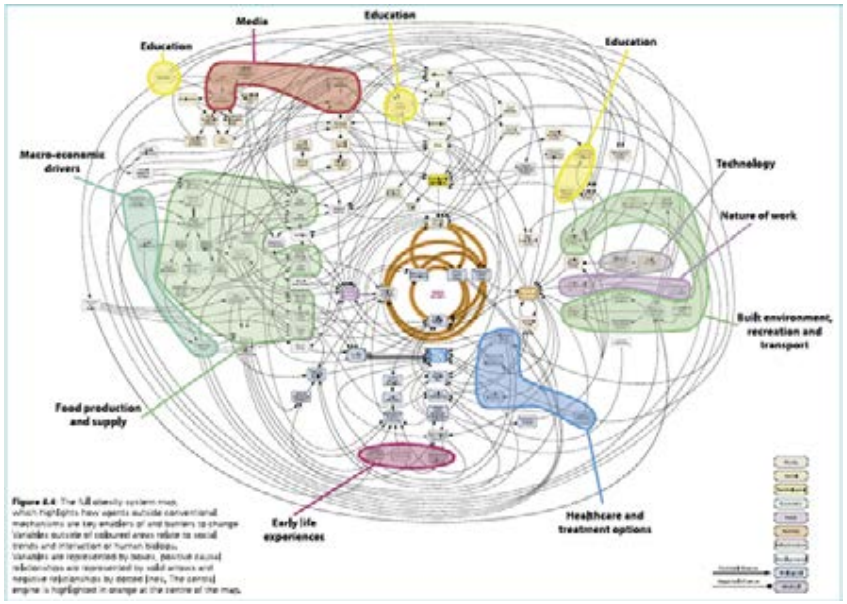
relationship with the public – a relationship which seeks to understand the detail of each life context, and, together, continuously explores how the patterns of results ("outcomes") in their "life as system" might change.

Systems – our unit of analysis

If the purpose of public service is to help people create positive outcomes in their lives, then public service needs to understand how outcomes are made. We believe (with good evidence) that these outcomes in people's lives are created by the workings of complex systems. In other words, **outcomes are emergent properties of people's lives as systems**. Therefore, creating outcomes requires these complex systems to produce different patterns of results.

For example, this is a representation of "the system" (a set of causal relationships between factors) which creates the outcome of obesity (or not).

Figure 1: Systems map of obesity.



Sturmberg, JP (2018) Health System Redesign How to Make Health Care Person-Centered, Equitable, and Sustainable. Springer, Australia. P238

Systems are therefore the unit of analysis that is most relevant to achieving our moral purpose, and to which our method is applied. Put simply, **if we want good outcomes, we need healthy systems** – systems in which people collaborate and learn together, because this is how outcomes are made.

Better outcomes, for less money

The really good news about the HLS approach is that because it roots public service work in the real life experiences of the people it seeks to support, it is able to address some of the wastefulness of NPM. From what we have seen, it helps to create better outcomes, for less money. For example, the Plymouth Alliance was able to cut the costs of emergency accommodation for homeless families by 50% in less than six months, by creating an integrated approach to family support, based on the strengths and needs of those families. Similarly, the use of 'Blue Light' (police, ambulance, fire) services was cut significantly, as people's real needs were met before they became emergencies.

From the Wellbeing Teams case study we begin to get a measure of the reduction in unplanned service use when people's strengths and needs are met by home care: people supported by Wellbeing Teams services in Thurrock were five times less likely to go into hospital. Staff costs were reduced too, because staff were happier. Sickness rates for Wellbeing Teams staff were a third of the national average and staff turnover was five times lower than the national average.

The Human Learning Systems approach to public management is being constantly developed by those who are doing it. There is so much that we don't know, as each adoption of the approach is essentially a process of learning how the HLS principles can be applied in a new context. Some areas for further exploration are highlighted in the 'Further Questions' chapter at the end of this report. You will also notice that this report has multiple authors, and that we each have our own perspective on HLS practice. We think this is a good thing.

For those doing the practice now, HLS seems to work to produce better outcomes, for less money, whilst creating happier and more fulfilled staff. If this sounds like something you'd like to explore further, the following chapters seek to share what they've learnt.

Continuous learning

It is worth noting at this point that HLS is an emerging paradigm rather

than a unified body of knowledge. There is still far too much to uncover to begin to offer a "definitive" account of HLS practice. In any case, it is likely that such a thing is impossible. The chapters in this report have been written by various authors, all bringing different perspectives to bear on the subject. We think this is a good thing, because we think it means you will hear what "real" means from those different perspectives.

There are chapters on :

The core principles:

- Being Human: public service for real lives
- Learning as meta-strategy for public service
- Creating healthy systems

Principles into action: how change happens

- Purposefully pursuing an HLS approach
- Enacting learning as management strategy
- Enacting a learning strategy at different system scales
- System stewardship: managing and governing a learning strategy
- Methodologies and methods to support taking a Human Learning Systems approach

HLS at different systems scales:

- The impact of Human Learning Systems for people
- HLS and the workforce: implications for workforce recruitment and selection and workforce development
- Experimenting and learning during a crisis: A voluntary sector perspective
- HLS and place: transforming local systems
- National-level working: humble government

Other themes:

- Funding and commissioning in complexity
- System leadership in HLS
- HLS meets social pedagogy
- Public management paradigms
- About this report

We hope you enjoy your exploration.

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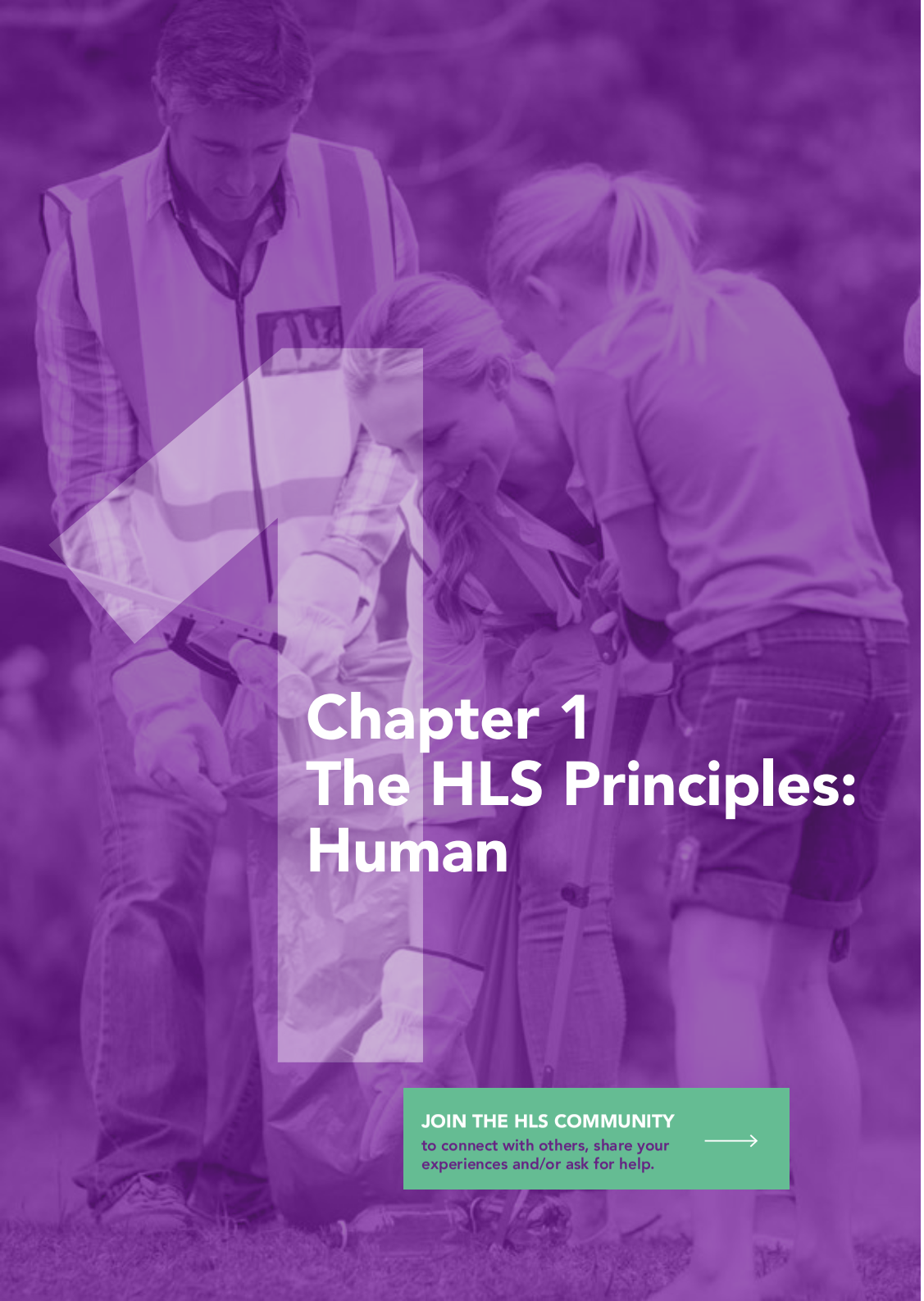
Endnotes

1 The discipline of "public management" is also sometimes called "public administration". Sometimes, the different languages of public management and public administration are used to represent different paradigmatic framings of the task of organising public service. For the sake of simplicity, we won't explore those differences here. For the purposes of this book, the terms can be used interchangeably.

2 See note above.



Chapter 1
The HLS Principles: Human

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Being Human: public service for real lives

Authors: Toby Lowe and Gabriel Eichsteller
Contact the authors

Public service and "being human"

The "Human" of Human Learning Systems (HLS) roots public service in people's real lives. It gives HLS as public management practice its sense of moral purpose and its sense of how we see and relate to all the people involved in public service – those who provide help, and those who are helped.

By supporting practitioners to analyse and reflect on the work they have been doing to create an alternative public management paradigm, we have been able to understand more about the Human element of public management practice.

The Human element of HLS says that the moral purpose of public service is to enable **human freedom and flourishing**.

And it says that we see and understand people intersubjectively – as people who live in a web of relationships which helps to define who they are. In other words, to understand a human being, you must understand their world.

These ideas combine to say that HLS as an approach to public management recognises each person's freedom to define what counts as flourishing in their own life. Therefore, public service needs to build strong relationships with people to understand the detail of what flourishing means in their specific life context. It is public service for real lives: real from the perspective of each and every person.

The Human element of HLS therefore provides the *why* of public service (to promote human freedom and flourishing), and provides pointers towards the *how* – seeing people as fully-rounded human beings in the context of webs of relationships. A Human approach to public management is therefore both purpose and (gives pointers towards) method.

The Human element of HLS therefore makes two kinds of claims: a moral claim, about what we value in the world; and a "how the world is" claim, about the relationship between humans and their context.

This chapter will explore what we have learnt about the humanity of public service as moral purpose and the view of human beings which connects this moral purpose to action. It will then explore what we have learnt about how these ideas translate into core principles for public management.

The moral purpose of public service

People who work in an HLS way believe that the underlying purpose of public service (as a broad umbrella term for all forms of social intervention) is to support **human freedom and flourishing**. They seek to help people's lives (or deaths) go better than they would have done without such an intervention. In other words, they care about outcomes in people's lives.

What is important is helping each and every person to live their own best life (so long as that life is compatible with flourishing for others). This applies to those working in public service, and to the public. And the two are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing. When public servants are treated with empathy – as fully-rounded human beings with unique strengths and needs – they are better able to be empathetic to those they serve.

This means that human freedom and flourishing are both purpose and method. Supporting positive outcomes for people is enabled by supporting the human freedom and flourishing of those who serve. This is the revolutionary aspect of HLS public management practice – giving staff the freedom to build authentic human relationships with those they serve, and to respond to what those relationships uncover, is the most efficient and effective way for public service to support the creation of desirable outcomes.

Public service as a freedom-supporting service

The conception of freedom that underpins an HLS approach to public management is one which is strongly connected to practical notions of freedom as they are experienced (or not) in people's lives – they draw more on the "positive liberty" tradition of "freedom to" than the "negative liberty" tradition of "freedom from".

The freedom that public service supports is therefore the freedom for anyone to pursue a good life. Public service is the support that one human being gives to another to say: "I support your quest to live the good life. And because each life is different, we meet you where you are, and begin from there. You are not on a pathway designed by others, you are living the reality of your life."

We negotiate our individual and collective freedoms in both state and civil society contexts, and the manifestations of this form of public service are to be found way beyond the boundaries of state provision. This sense of public service lives in mutual aid groups, and in voluntary sector action.

Viewing public service as a way to support human freedom and flourishing means that HLS is a public management paradigm that stresses a particular set of values. It is therefore suitable as an implementation mechanism for any public policy that has those freedoms and flourishing as its goal.

It is important to note at this stage that HLS makes a different type of claim from New Public Management (NPM). Whereas NPM would claim to be an approach that can implement *any* public policy equally effectively, HLS does not make this claim. HLS only claims to be an effective mechanism for implementing public policy that has human freedom and flourishing at its heart. For example, it could effectively implement public policy that promotes child welfare. But if you want to implement a "hostile environment" for migrants, HLS is not the public management paradigm for you.

Public service and the complexity of human beings

> *"We have to embrace our complexity. We are complex."*
>
> **adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy, p. 88**

The second claim that HLS makes in respect of people's humanity is that **to be human to one another requires us to understand and respond to the complexity of each person's life**. This is a claim about understanding one another as human beings. It says that a human being is not a discrete atomised individual, but rather a person who exists in a web of relationships. To understand a person is to understand them as part of their many contexts.

Another way of describing this web of relationships in which people exist is to say that this is their life viewed as a system. This is similar to the way in which ecologists highlight that all living creatures are part of an *ecosystem*.

When applied to the world of public service, this understanding requires a fundamental change in how the HLS version of public service views people. When we understand people's lives as complex, it means they rarely have one simple, well-defined problem that the public sector can "fix" and be done with. (See the Learning chapter

for an explanation of complex and complicated.) In most (approximately) 80% examples of HLS public service in people's lives people are not viewed as having problems which need fixing. Instead, HLS public service views people as individuals who are experiencing challenges in their lives – some of which can be helped by public service. These challenges can be positive – for example, someone may say "help me to build and make the most of my potential in the world" – or negative, "I'm in chronic pain, please help me".

We should not ignore the (approximately) 20% of examples which may be amenable to "fixing" type responses. In other public service contexts, "fixing" responses are sometimes called "transactional" public service relationships. These are typically viewed as either simple problems to solve ("I want to pay my vehicle tax online") or complicated ones – "my leg is broken, please help")[1]. In either case, the view is that there is a single, well-defined problem with a known "best-practice" response. If public service is able to identify the problem correctly, and administer the "best practice" response, it will have done its job.

It is easy to understand why people arrive at the conclusion that paying vehicle tax requires a simple transaction rather than a deeper relationship. We can imagine someone saying: "I don't need a hug when I'm paying my car tax".

However, we think that it is a mistake to try and categorise whether a public service requires a complex, relational response, or a simple transactional one, based on an analysis of the type of public service being performed. Whether a public service is complex or not depends on the context of the person being helped, not on the difficulty of the task. It is true, I didn't need a hug the last time I paid my car tax. But if I were the parent of a child that was recently killed in a car crash, I might. In that instance, I might need help to navigate that system, and potentially require understanding if my payment is late.

Similarly, if a broken leg becomes more than a two-time visit to the hospital, and interferes with the care a person provides to an elderly relative, or means that their income drops to the point where they cannot feed their family, then public service has a complex problem on its hands.

Whenever we standardise our response to problems in order to make them easier to manage, we stop seeing the reality of the lives of the people public service is there to help. This matters if we care about real outcomes in the world.

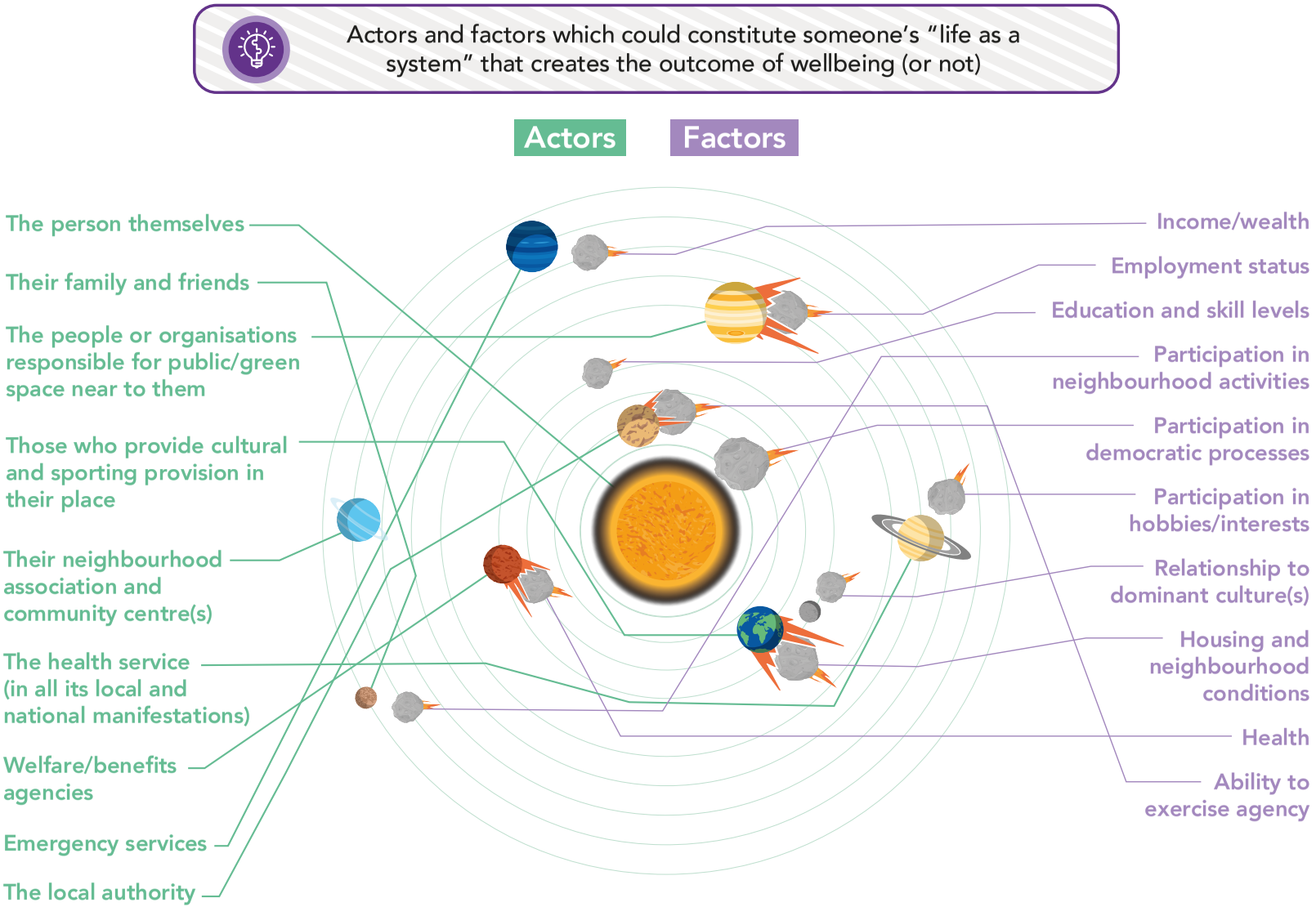
> *"The world is a complex, interconnected, finite, ecological – social – psychological – economic system. We treat it as if it were not, as if it were divisible, separable, simple, and infinite. Our persistent... problems arise directly from this mismatch."*
>
> **(D. Meadows)**

Therefore, perhaps it is wise for public managers to treat all public service problems as if they are potentially complex. HLS as a management approach is designed to enable public service to deal with these complex challenges.

A human approach to public service is based on an understanding that each person is at the centre of their own interconnected and interdependent (complex) system, and the positive and negative "outcomes" that they experience – having their potential developed, or being in chronic pain – are the patterns of results produced by that system that is their lives.

One way of understanding the complexity of human beings is to understand that everyone is at the centre of their own unique system of actors (people and organisations) and factors (causal drivers) which are constantly interacting to make an outcome. We can imagine such a system as a solar system, with the person at the centre. The pattern of interactions between all the elements is what we call "an outcome".

Figure 1: A person's life represented in terms of system of actors and factors which create the outcome of wellbeing



> *"People are encouraged to focus on what's strong and go from there; exploring passions and interests and creating positive networks away from services. People will also be supported to overcome external and internal barriers created by the systems and processes that are in place when a person accesses services."*
>
> **(Mayday Trust case study)**

What have we learnt about Human public services?

How does this moral purpose and view of what it is to be human get applied in a public service context? By bringing together the people who have been developing and undertaking HLS practice, we have seen that being human manifests itself in:

How public service sees people:

- Public service seeks to understand, appreciate and respond to the **diversity** of human beings
- Public service seeks to understand and appreciate people as whole human beings – their **strengths** as well as their needs.

How public service engages with people:

- Effective public service relies on strong human **relationships**
- Where decision-making **power** sits in public service
- **Trust** as the foundation of human public service.

The public service skills and capabilities required for "being human":

- Effective public service relationships require **empathy**.

What have we learnt about what it means to enact a Human view of public services? What are the key elements of serving the human freedom and flourishing of complex human beings?

(At this point, it is very important to state that we would not in any way claim that this is an exhaustive list of what it means to be human to one another. Nor would we make the narrower claim that this is what it means for public service to be human. This is simply what we have learnt thus far.)

How public service sees people

Diversity and bespoke service

Public service seeks to understand and respond to the **diversity** of human beings. It seeks to understand that each one of us is different, and that therefore we have different strengths and needs which need to be understood to serve our particular freedom and flourishing.

Seeing the diversity of human beings means that public service needs to move from standardised responses to bespoke service. Given that there are as many ways to be human as there are human beings, a more "human" public service is one that seeks to understand each person's unique life context, and respond to that with actions and support that are appropriate to them.

An excellent example of this is seen in the Dorset Integrated Care System case study. The explicit purpose of this work was based around understanding and responding to the unique life context of each person in the last year of their lives. They expressed this in terms of a purpose for their work which says:

> *"In my last year of life, help me live well until I die."*
>
> **(Dorset Integrated Care System case study)**

When they took this approach, "we discovered huge variety in the people reaching the end of their life". Consequently, two of the core sets of practices they developed were:

> *"1. We understand what really matters to them about this; how they want to live, what they want to achieve and how they want to die.*
>
> *2. We support them to live well in their own way, as part of their community, focusing on what matters to them together."*
>
> **(Dorset Integrated Care System case study)**

In order to check that they have heard people's unique strengths and needs accurately, and that they are responding to these appropriately, the team undertake regular "shared sense-making" sessions with the people they support and their families/carers.

Seeing the whole person

Public service seeks to understand people as whole human beings. In particular, this means their **strengths** as well as their needs. It is too easy for fragmented, NPM-ised public services to see people as the bearer of whatever problem is treated by that particular service – people become "a person with mental health problems" or "a homeless person". An HLS approach to public service seeks to understand and cultivate a person's strengths, whatever they are – they may be a parent or a child, a dog-owner, a person who likes going for walks in the country or playing team sport. All these things are potentially relevant for developing the outcomes that we seek, because they are all part of that person's life as system. And so, all are important to understand.

In terms of public service practice, this is partly about well-known "strengths-based" approaches moving away from the so-called "deficit model" of public service. However, as we can see from the Mayday Trust and Help On Your Doorstep case studies people's strengths are things to be actively cultivated by public service:

> *"By focusing on the individual, their strengths and unique context, people can utilise their existing skills, access the appropriate resources and build the right network to ensure they are prepared for a life away from services."*
>
> **(Mayday Trust case study)**

> *"The most effective long term solutions are those that enable individuals to improve their own ability to manage their lives. These solutions build confidence and capability, work from strengths, and recognise that each person's journey is different. A key element involves a focus on the person not just the circumstances surrounding them, but, unfortunately very few services do both"*
>
> **(Help on Your Doorstep case study)**

In these cases we can see the connection between the Asset-Based Community Development approach and HLS.

It feels important to highlight the fact that in seeing the strengths and assets in a person's life, we are not suggesting that people are solely responsible for addressing the challenges in their lives. This is fundamentally a perspective that highlights people's interdependence and the reality that the complex challenges that arise in complex lives frequently require a collective response.

Humanity and the effectiveness and efficiency of public service

Having explored how an HLS view of public service sees the people it is seeking to serve, we can also explore the link between public service efficiency and support for human freedom and flourishing. The experience of HLS practice is that, for public service to create positive outcomes efficiently, it is necessary (but not sufficient) for it to pursue human freedom and flourishing.

If public service does not promote people's freedom to identify for themselves what matters to them, it wastes resources trying to impose someone else's vision of the good onto people. For example, when "outcomes" or "results" are used as performance management tools – when they are written into contracts or performance frameworks – then they cease to support the freedom and flourishing of the person being served. Instead, they are targets to be pursued based on someone else's understanding of what is good for that person..

This is freedom and flourishing transmuted into standardised measures (not what matters to the person being served) and imposed through reward and punishment. The evidence from the implementation of such approaches is that they emphasise discipline and punishment. Outcomes-based performance management does not support freedom and flourishing; it is standardisation and coercion. It doesn't matter who sets such targets – they may be coproduced from the experiences of citizens who have experienced similar issues – but when they are turned into standardised measures and targets, they still direct the work of public servants away from the particular and unique strengths and needs of the person being served.

To be efficient and effective means meeting the strengths and needs of each person being served. When the work of public servants is directed by predefined targets, they are forced into doing things which are not about responding to the particular strengths and needs of the person in front of them. As well as being dehumanising, this is also massively wasteful. We waste money when public service fails to start from the reality of people's lives.

> *"'New public management'… was ostensibly intended to create 'a government that works better and costs less'… So what do we have to show for three decades or so of 'NPM reforms? The short answer seems to be: higher costs and more complaints."*
>
> **(Hood and Dixon, 2015)**

Better outcomes, for less money

When public service engages with the whole reality of someone's life, it can save money. For example, the Plymouth Alliance provided an example of HLS approach leading to cashable savings. Previously, housing officers would evict families because a member of that family had been exhibiting antisocial behaviour. Another part of the council then had to pay for those families to stay in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation – one of the most expensive forms of housing that local authorities are obliged to provide, and one which likely exacerbates the family problems that led to the antisocial behaviour in

the first place. It was an expensive way to make a bad situation worse.

When the housing and homelessness support services were connected as a system and budgets were pooled, housing officers massively reduced the number of evictions, because they were able to see that wastefulness from a systemic perspective. Instead, they began to work with families to help them address the underlying family problems which manifest themselves as antisocial behaviour. As a result, Plymouth Council were able to cut their emergency accommodation spending in half in less than a year. Similarly, the use of 'Blue Light' (police, ambulance, fire) services was cut significantly, as people's real needs were met before they became emergencies.

From the Wellbeing Teams case study, we begin to get a measure of the reduction in unplanned service use when people's strengths and needs are met by home care: people supported by Wellbeing Teams services in Thurrock were five times less likely to go into hospital. Staff costs were reduced too, because staff were happier. Sickness rates for Wellbeing Teams staff were a third of the national average, and staff turnover was five times less than the national average.

NPM and austerity

In the UK since 2010, public service has been subject to huge and ongoing cuts in available resources. These cuts have created different – and opposing – tensions and drivers in the system.

On the one hand, the cuts have exposed the wastefulness of NPM and created drivers for change. When there was sufficient resource in the system, the wastefulness of treating people as less than fully human – of not responding to their particular strengths and needs – could be overcome by increasing staffing and resourcing levels. Austerity-driven cuts exposed the wastefulness of NPM as never before. It created an environment in which previously unthinkable changes to management approaches became possible, as senior leaders realised that the greatest risk was continuing with the status quo. In some places, such as Plymouth and South Tyneside, this opportunity was seized as a way to explore alternative approaches.

However, because of NPM's false reputation for creating "efficiency", in other contexts leaders doubled down on NPM as a way to try to manage in austerity. Thresholds for care were introduced or raised, "back office" functions were outsourced, and payment-by-results contracts were used to try to "incentivise" providers to focus on what really mattered. All these responses have the opposite to the desired effect – they increase costs, either directly, or through externalities that appear as costs elsewhere in society. Thresholds increase costs (as outlined above) through the cost of assessment and not resolving problems when they appear. Outsourced back offices break the relationships between administrative support and those doing "frontline" work, robbing both administrative and "frontline" work of the contextual information they require to do their jobs well, and payment-by-results contracts simply result in gaming of data. This means that our taxes pay people to produce good-looking data, rather than helping people with their actual challenges.

What leaders have learnt through adopting an HLS approach is clear. **The dehumanising approach of NPM is not only a moral outrage, it is a needlessly wasteful, expensive moral outrage**. When faced with complex challenges, public service is most efficient when it seeks to understand the reality of the lives of the people it serves, and supports them with their freedom and flourishing.

How public service engages with people

> *"The work of intervening in complex challenges is built on a myriad of methods, insights, and skills, yet none of it will have real impact without attending to the quality of relationships in the system."*
>
> **(Sam Rye, The Relational Field)**

Relationships:

Understanding the unique real-life context of each human being relies on strong human **relationships**. Human relationships are not just a necessary context for public service to understand (people are significantly defined by the web of relationships of which they are part), but they also become the necessary foundation of an effective public service response in complex environments.

For example, without a deep relationship between a member of the public and their mental health support worker, public service cannot fully understand the strengths and needs of that person, and cannot make an effective response. Furthermore, human relationships are not just means to uncover a more effective public service response; in many cases, a relationship is a more effective public service response, as can be seen, for example, in the Wellbeing Teams, Moray Wellbeing Hub and Mayday Trust case studies.

> *"Even when we get things wrong [in relational practice], the humanity of it helps."*
>
> **(Gateshead Council, Director of Public Service Reform)**

This perspective treats relationships as a fundamental resource that is required for systems to produce outcomes. These relationships are the social infrastructure that is necessary to create positive outcomes.

> *"We are a resource not a service."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub)**

From a public management perspective, a key question then becomes – how is public service being organised in order to enable effective relationships between public servants and those they serve, and across the wider system of public service? In this respect, commissioners and team leaders need to pay particular attention to:

1. Caseloads (so that workloads allow for meaningful relationships)
2. How workflow is organised – so that those being served have a consistent relationship across their experience of receiving service, rather than being passed from person to person.

The Melton Mowbray Borough Council case study demonstrates the importance of this form of relationship, even in areas such as planning and building control, where having an end-to-end caseworker made a local authority's planning service more efficient and effective. This also suggests (3) that we need to rethink the professional identity of public servants, to include the capacity to form authentic relationships with those being served.

The final aspect for public managers to consider is (4) building and maintaining human to human relationships amongst system actors – people in different organisations (or different parts of the same organisation) who all serve the same people or place. This work, exemplified in the Collective Impact Agency and Collective Leadership For Scotland studies demonstrates the work required, and enabling conditions thus created, through relationship-building, and particularly how different forms of leadership enable effective system relationships.

Within this work of developing human relationships across systems of interest, the Finnish National Education Agency (EDUFI) case study demonstrates this aspect of the importance of relationships in public service work. In their work, they discovered that – for people across different organisations to learn together – it was not simply a matter of building the skills for learning, they had to develop learning relationships:

> *"The [Education Agency] mentors actively worked to rethink the relationships between different actors in the system – each person has their own pressures, fears, perspectives – people were supported to express theirs to others, and to listen to others."*
>
> **The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)**

Developing learning relationships between actors in a system also creates a virtuous circle. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority case study found that learning together was a way to build trust between people, where it was absent previously.

Initially, enabling effective relationships may seem like a resource-intensive approach. However, the evidence from the case studies shows that, in the medium term, the opposite is true. For example, the Wellbeing Teams case study shows how an effective relationship between a home carer and a person being cared for massively reduced workload on other services, and resulted in a significant overall saving.

For work that requires a bespoke, human response in order to be effective, it is not small caseloads that are inefficient, it is large ones. With large caseloads, relational work is effectively impossible, thus scarce public service resources are spent paying for work which is unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes. Similarly, ensuring that there is space in workloads to enable effective relationships to be nurtured and maintained with colleagues in other parts of public service – who serve the same people – may appear to be a luxury. It is the opposite. Without time to connect meaningfully, scarce public service resources are wasted both in creating duplicated effort and causing people to "fall between the gaps".

Where decision-making power sits

One of the key aspects of an HLS approach to public management is that decision-making responsibility should be "devolved into the work". This means that decisions about the support that public service should offer – and how that support manifests itself – ought to be taken by the person (or people) being supported, with the help of a relationship with someone who knows their life context well and is able to apply knowledge that's based on learning from other relevant contexts. This is also described as "evidence-informed practice".

Trust as the foundation of Human public service

Effective public service relies on **trust**.

We know that trust is important for public service because it lowers transaction costs, as in the FCDO: Adaptive Management case study, and speeds adaptation times. It does this by cutting out NPM's expensive and wasteful monitoring and control systems – created within that paradigm to serve the foundational belief that public servants cannot be trusted.

However, trust plays a more fundamental role in public service than that. In complex environments, **trust is necessary to make public service work at all**.

As we have explored already, complex human environments require bespoke public service responses. For public service to be human, it is necessary to respond to the diversity of each and every human life. There are only two sets of people who have enough knowledge about the detail of that human life to decide accurately what a good outcome looks like and what the appropriate public service response is:

1. The people being served (including families, carers, etc)
2. The public service workers who have a strong enough relationship with them to genuinely understand their context and apply context-specific evidence about what is likely to help.

No other people have enough knowledge about that context to decide what a good outcome looks like, or what form of service is required to work towards that outcome. Consequently, **public service decision-making about what outcomes are important, and the forms of service which help to create them, must be devolved into the work**, into the relationship between the people being served and those who serve them. This devolution therefore depends on trust. Those being served need to be trusted to understand their own strengths and needs; those serving need to be trusted to understand and respond to those strengths and needs.

This can be seen in the example of Lighthouse Children's Homes. They realised that the diversity of the strengths and needs of the young people they support meant that standardised measures of "progress" weren't appropriate for that work. They realised that to respond to the particular needs of each and every child requires trust in their staff:

> *"It also means that we have to redefine how we measure success, to move away from predetermined quantitative indicators or fixed goals to more qualitative measures with greater responsiveness and variability rather than predefined outcomes. Most of all, it requires a degree of trust in one another, in mutual intentions, with an understanding that there are multiple ways to achieve a goal. For example, one of our goals is that all young people in our home get a good education. Measures such as number of 'good' GCSEs achieved at 16 years old, or how many go on to higher education are proxies for this goal, they may not be meaningful or suitable for every young person."*
>
> **(Lighthouse Children's Homes)**

Trust is part of a more effective public service relationship

Effective public service in complex environments therefore requires trust. Trust also has additional benefits – it seems to make relational public service work more effectively. This can be seen in the example of the Moray Wellbeing Hub:

> *"We build trust much faster and more meaningfully. This then has an impact on the therapeutic benefits of peer-support – people who trust each other faster have improved wellbeing faster."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub)**

We have therefore seen that trust is a fundamental requirement of effective public service in complex environments, but how have people created this trust?

How to build trust

Dialogue and engagement with uncertainty

The work of GreaterSport to develop physical activity across the Greater Manchester city region purposefully sought to build relationships of trust.

> *"The local pilot was a different way of working for everyone and required the core team (within GreaterSport) to build relationships with key contacts in each of the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester, and Glossop. This took time, and required constant dialogue and engagement to reach a place of trust."*
>
> **(GreaterSport case study)**

Honest conversations about the complexity, and therefore inherent uncertainty, of the work also seem useful in building trust:

> *"Comfort with discomfort is something we see as*

> *central to that relationship development, and we found that this was contagious. Through those difficult conversations, relationships were built where previously inaccessible commissioners and suspect competitors became friends and allies, and a tone of honesty and trust was quickly built."*
>
> **(Likewise case study)**

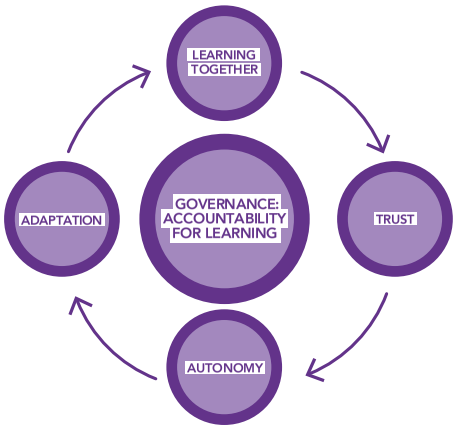
Complexity and trust therefore seem to have a usefully symbiotic relationship. Trust is required to work in complexity, and talking honestly about the complexity of the work helps to build trust.

Learn together

One of the key findings from these case studies is that learning together builds trust. We have seen this consistently across case studies from the individual level, Mayday Trust, to the local level, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, to the national level, FCDO and EDUFI.

As a really simple example of this in practice, in order to develop trust between commissioners and providers where it was previously lacking, the Liverpool Combined Authority turned contract management meetings into learning meetings. The meetings transformed the relationship from previous arguments about who was to blame for the recorded performance data into "what can we all learn from this data, and our experiences of doing the work of commissioning and delivery?"

Figure 2: A virtuous cycle of learning together and trust



Being trusting – organisational structure, performance management and payment mechanisms

Another key finding from across the case studies is that building trust starts by being trusting. The way that trust (or its absence) is embedded in organisational practice – particularly performance management – seems crucial. When staff are trusted to perform well, and when this is enacted through organisational structures and performance management systems such as self-management, staff act in a trustworthy way. This can be seen in classic organisational research literature around psychological safety, the Buurtzorg neighbourhood care approach in the Netherlands, and also through the Neighbourhood Midwives and Wellbeing Teams case studies.

Our case studies do not show that self-management is necessary for organisations to demonstrate trusting behaviour. For example, Dorset Integrated Care System shows that trust is possible in traditionally managed teams. What seems necessary is that decision-making responsibility is devolved into the work, building on the intrinsic motivation of staff to perform well. And so, even when traditional hierarchies are present, managers are not seeking to control staff; rather, they are seeking to enable their capacity to use their judgment well.

In perhaps the most extreme version of this, Vinařice Prison extended trust to inmates to work in new ways to help with the country's COVID-19 response.

The other key mechanism which seems important in building trust is whether trust is embedded in payment mechanisms and structures. This was apparent, for example, in the work of South Tyneside Alliance:

> *"Wishing to pursue a high-trust, low-bureaucracy system, the CCG [Clinical Commissioning Group] agreed to take a different approach to the incentive scheme. Essentially, the Executive and Governing Body agreed to automatically make the payment to practices, provide them with their individual data on various practice performance measures and ask them to undertake some improvement work. The only other requirement was to produce a poster to share their learning with practice colleagues at a GP education session."*
>
> **(South Tyneside Alliance)**

Being trustworthy

The necessary flipside of being trusting is that people and organisations must strive to be relentlessly trustworthy themselves. It is continuous work, because trust is hard won and quickly lost. From the case studies we have seen, certain practices support and demonstrate trustworthiness: transparency, honesty, and living your values.

Transparency

Transparency, and particularly financial transparency provides an underlying reassurance about the appropriate use of public funds. For example, Plymouth Alliance use an open-book accounting approach for their contracting arrangements. In return for the absence of KPIs in contracts, organisations agree to total financial transparency. In addition, the organisations involved in the Alliance offer full disclosure to one another when applying for grants and other contracts.

Honesty

Being trustworthy obviously requires telling the truth, as the FCDO case study demonstrates. However, this goes beyond simply not lying to one another – it demands that organisations tell one another hard truths. For example, the Empowerment case study shows the use of practice and tools that enable people to have "difficult conversations". This requires a level of maturity and adult-to-adult relationship which is difficult to achieve.

Living your values

Finally, being trustworthy requires that actors in a system live the agreed values and principles. One way that organisations achieve this is through the use of confirmation practices as micro-scale continual reflection on whether people are living up to the values they espouse. Embedding values or principles into the governance of partnerships is another mechanism The organisations in the Plymouth Alliance, for example, use eight agreed principles as the primary mechanism by which to hold one another to account.

People fear that systematically using trust is somehow naive, and is therefore not real. Again, this runs counter to the evidence that we have seen. Those doing this work have found that systematically developing and using trust creates a reality in which trust is an asset for the system. It is important to note, however, that being trusting does not mean that violations of trust are ignored. On the contrary, those who cannot be trusted cannot be part of public service delivery.

It is no surprise that James M. Buchanan, a key proponent of Public Choice Theory (the intellectual foundation of NPM), deliberately sought to undermine the trust between those who provide public service and those they serve, as discussed in Nancy Maclean's book Democracy in Chains. Buchanan understood that trust was necessary for effective public service. And so, to meet his desired goal of delegitimising public service, he knew that it was necessary to create the public management conditions in which trust was absent. The task of public service leaders and managers who want public service to thrive in complex environments is to do the opposite – to create the conditions under which trust is an effective organising principle for public service systems.

From a public management perspective, the key questions become:

1. What are good reasons for trust? (Who can be trusted, why, and under what conditions?)
2. How can that trust be built and cultivated as a key asset on which the public service system depends?

The capabilities and skills required for Human public service

Empathy

Effective public service relationships require **empathy**. To understand the life of another person – whether a person that a public servant is seeking to serve, or a public servant elsewhere in the system – requires empathy. Public managers have found that this is a capacity that can be cultivated, both through training and by the systematic collection, distribution and shared sense-making of information. The material for this sense-making is often life stories – data that encourage us to see one another as fully-rounded human beings, rather than as the thin abstractions presented by quantified data. Management processes should systematically build empathy between all the people involved.

An exemplar for this can be seen in the Plymouth Alliance case study. The Plymouth Alliance have adopted appreciative inquiry – a strengths-based way to collect stories about people's lives, which are relevant to achieving particular outcomes. They use it as a mechanism for building empathy across the system, supporting adults who have experienced homelessness, mental health problems, substance misuse issues, and similar challenges in the

city. They train members of the Alliance in the use of appreciative inquiry, and they collect the stories of everyone involved – leaders, managers, workers and the people being served – and then undertake shared sense-making processes, whereby different groups of people come together to turn this data into meaning. They describe purposefully using this approach to discourage "othering" in their systems – the practice of viewing colleagues or the public as a "them" who is fundamentally different to "us", people who are less-than-complete humans, people who need to be controlled and "done-to".

Furthermore, as with other factors associated with more human public management practice, empathy is not just a method by which to enable better communication, it becomes a useful aspect of the public service relationship itself. The Vinařice prison case study highlights this:

> *"I can only help another person by being human and empathetic to him, I don't have to be an expert, like a psychologist to help another."*
>
> **(Vinařice Prison case study)**

It is important to highlight the fact that empathy is a capacity that can be nurtured through training, and the use of practices such as appreciative inquiry. Because empathy is an act of imagination – of placing yourself in the life of another – there is a danger of doing so without real access to that person's life or to the complex nuances of diversity. To empathise without this is to run the risk of erasing difference.

We have explored what we have learnt about the Human element of the HLS principles. We will next explore Learning.

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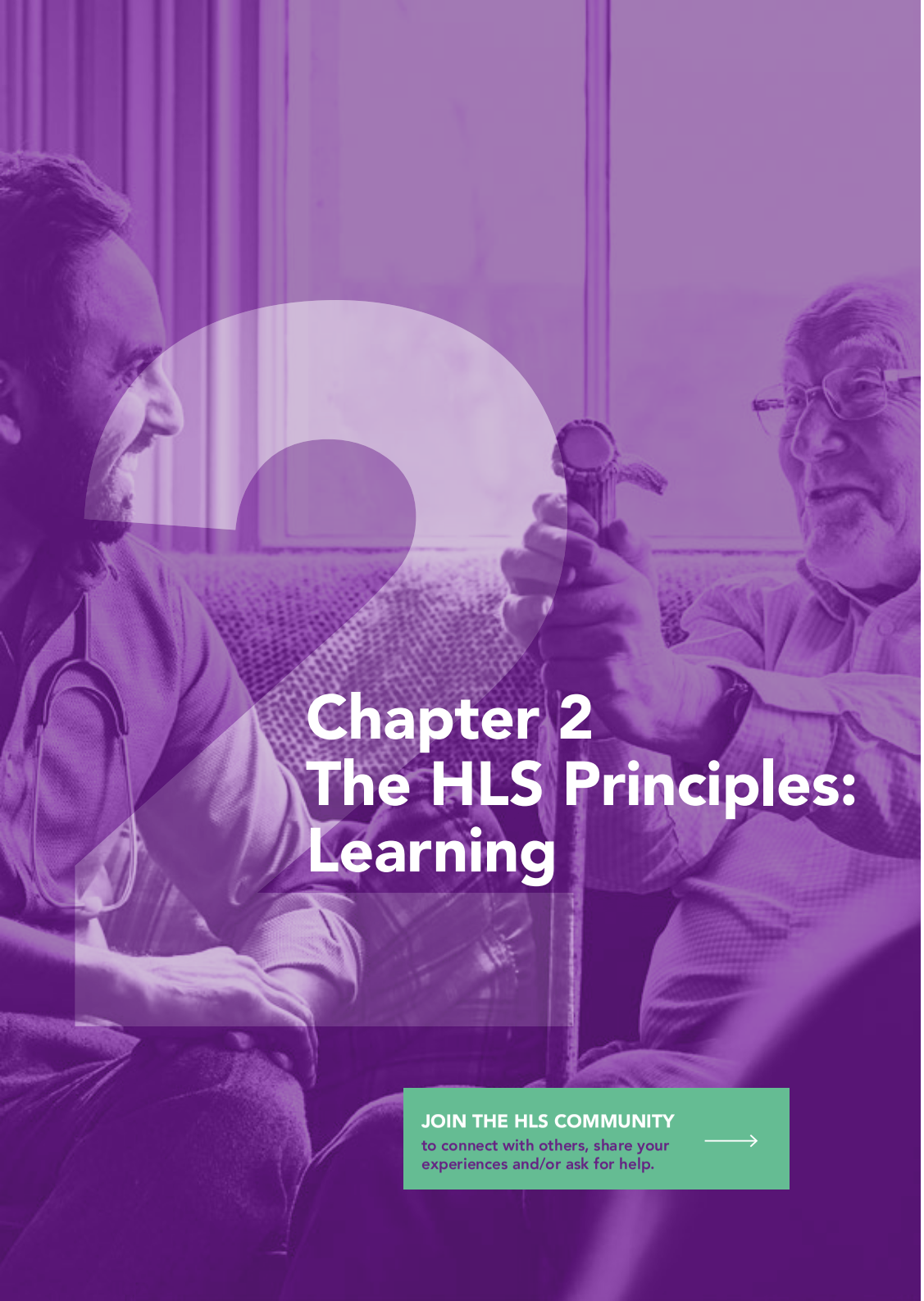
Endnotes

1 I have heard medical practitioners make persuasive arguments that things like fixing broken legs are also complex tasks – but let us say, for now, that they are complicated.



Chapter 2
The HLS Principles: Learning

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
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Learning as meta-strategy for public service

Authors: Toby Lowe and Hannah Hesselgreaves
Contact the authors

If the Human element of HLS as a public management approach provides the moral purpose, and we view people as essentially interconnected, the "Learning" element provides the management strategy by which we can enact that purpose and perspective.

The Learning element of HLS is therefore concerned with *how* public service gets better. It makes claims about:

- The way that positive, purposeful change happens in complex systems
- The purpose and focus of management activity
- The role that learning mindsets and practices play in enabling positive human relationships.

This chapter will explore:

- The core principle of learning as management strategy
- Why learning is required as a strategic response in complex environments
- The challenges and enablers of this strategy.

We will then explore how to enact learning as management strategy, at different system scales, in the "Principles into action" chapters .

Learning as management strategy – how positive, purposeful change happens in complex systems

One of the key challenges that complexity poses to public management is that complex systems are unpredictable. In complex environments, we cannot reliably say that if we do *x*, then *y* will happen.

How can public managers pursue purposeful change in an environment like that? This is one of the reasons why, when we accept the complex reality of the world, it demands that we adopt a different approach to public management. To begin, let us remind ourselves of the realities of working in complex environments.

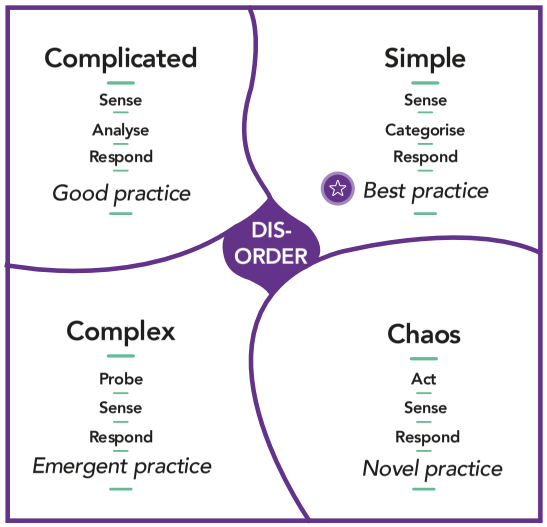
Complex systems are context-specific and dynamic. This means that "what works" in public service in complex environments is:

- Highly localised – what works in one place will not necessarily work in another
- Constantly changing – what works at one point in time

won't necessarily work when it is repeated.

This is one of the key points articulated by the Cynefin framework, developed and refined by Dave Snowden:

Figure 1: Cynefin framework, Dave Snowden



Cynefin usefully demonstrates that in order to find answers to any complex public service challenge, we need to undertake a process of action-research. This action-research approach requires actors in a complex system to operate a continuous learning cycle in which they seek to get involved with, and undertake action in, the systems in which they work. This learning cycle starts with a learning mindset (probe), makes collective sense of what people learn from these probes (sense) and then encourages people to continue to adapt their actions to what they find (respond). The appropriate strategy is therefore *emergent* – it cannot be known in advance, but is determined instead by what we find from ongoing learning.

Thus the management strategy for public service leaders in complex environments is a **learning strategy:**

We can't be certain what will work in order to achieve our desired purpose in any context, so we need to learn about the context and try things out

Our perspective within our system is partial, so to build a more expansive understanding, we need to bring people together to learn about each other's view of the world

We can't be certain that what worked yesterday will work tomorrow, so we need to keep learning as part of a continuous process.

How is an outcome created?

We can apply this understanding to our purpose – of enabling human freedom and flourishing – by asking: "how is an outcome created?" From our understanding of complexity, we can see that an outcome is created by the combination of people and causal factors (a "system") that make up a person's life, interacting in a certain way. An "outcome" is what we call the pattern of results of that system at any particular point in time.

The work of purposefully creating a desired outcome is therefore an attempt to get all of those relationships (between people and factors) to combine to produce a different pattern. Learning is required to understand the unique system that is each person's life: their relationships, their strengths, their needs, the outcomes they prioritise, and how those outcomes are created. Experimentation is required to explore how public service can respond to all of those things, and how different people and organisations can collaborate in conditions where nothing is static or reliable.

From a management perspective, this is the reality of how an outcome is made. Outcomes cannot be purchased or "delivered", they have to be explored. If we care about outcomes, then the purpose of our management practice is to enable this learning and exploration to happen effectively.

Learning as management strategy – a different version of strategic planning and performance management

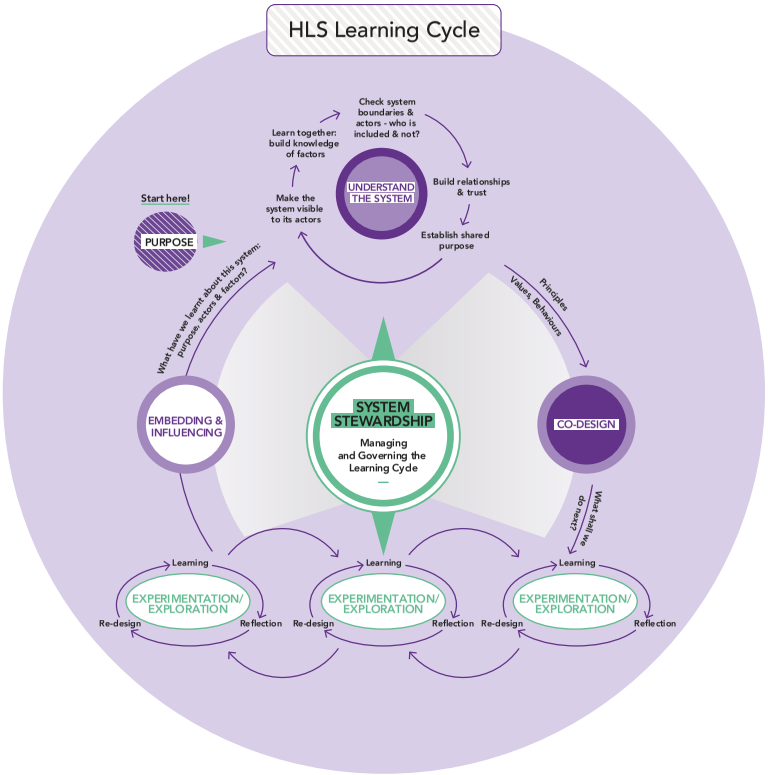
Learning as management draws on the principles of Henry Mintzberg's emergent strategy approach for businesses (interestingly recontextualised in the social justice space by adrienne maree brown) and Ralph Stacey's work on Complex Responsive Processes in organisations. Its core idea is that public service in complex environments is not a process of implementing a programme which has been shown to "work" in other places. Instead, public service

is a process of continuous, ongoing learning. **It is everyone's job to learn, all the time,** at whatever scale of public service system they work. The organisational strategy is to enable that learning to happen effectively.

Learning Cycles

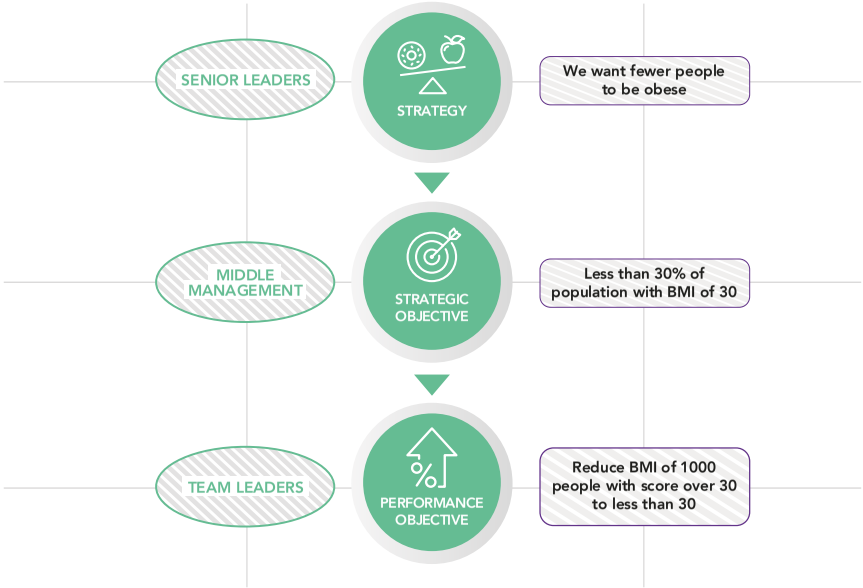
From work across the case studies, we think that a learning strategy requires a Learning Cycle that looks something like this:

Figure 2: The HLS Learning Cycle



Adopting learning as meta-strategy draws on a very different kind of draws on a very different approach to strategic planning from the one currently dominant in public management, which rests on a symbiotic relationship between strategic management and performance management. Senior leaders set the strategy – a big picture vision. And then this strategy gets translated into ever more specific performance objectives as it cascades down through an organisation – each layer of management being responsible for defining and monitoring the objectives of the layer below. In other words, those at the top set the strategy and then seek to control the action of those below, extrinsically motivating them to follow the strategy through the use of performance management's reward and punishment mechanisms.

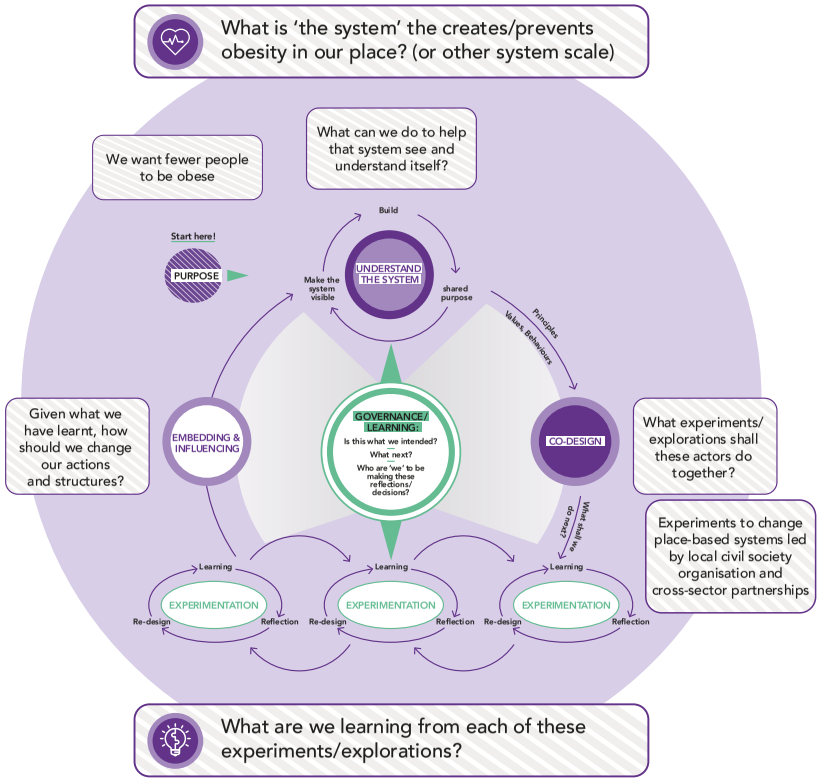
Figure 3: A traditional approach to strategic planning and performance management for tackling obesity



In learning as meta-strategy, apart from the initial definition of purpose – which sets boundaries and guardrails for the learning process – it is the ongoing learning process that determines the content of the work, and so the task of leadership and management, at all levels.

The overall strategic task is to ensure that a context-appropriate version of something like this HLS Learning Cycle happens effectively and authentically. Translating our "obesity" example into a Learning Strategy, it might look something like this:

Figure 4: An HLS approach to emergent strategy for tackling obesity



Learning in every interaction

The core idea of learning as management strategy, then, is that management cannot know in advance what the correct course of action should be for work in any given area. Therefore, it is impossible for management to set targets that guide the work effectively. Consequently, the work of every person and team requires a learning process. All aspects of an organisation's work – from each worker's encounter with a person they serve to the administrative practices of payment mechanisms – potentially fall within the gaze of self-reflection, learning and adaptation.

> *"The learning process is governed by everyone within Mayday who lives the learning culture of constant reflection and 'challenge and be challenged'. The process of listening, reflecting, challenging and changing is continuous and underpins all of our work."*
>
> **(Mayday Trust case study)**

It is no surprise that those who have adopted this approach emphasise the amount of effort required to maintain the practice of learning in every interaction. Essentially, this approach means potentially taking any aspect of routinised practice and changing it to become thoughtful and considered.

We see learning as management strategy implemented throughout the case studies that inform this report. For example, we can see it at the level of national government in the strategy of the Finnish Education Agency to support educational attainment and child welfare. We see it in and in COVID-19 response strategies in Healthcare Improvement Scotland. We also see it at the local level, including the case studies of the Plymouth Alliance, Likewise, and GreaterSport in Greater Manchester.

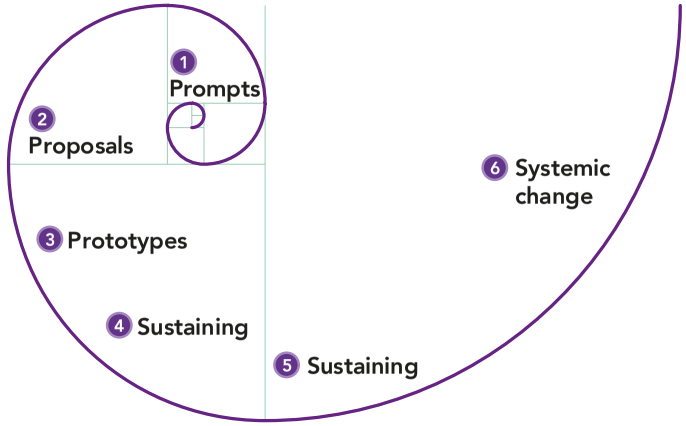
Difference with previous strategic approaches to learning

Before we explore why public service organisations and systems would go about enacting learning as management strategy, we should pause to consider how this is different from the perception of learning within current strategic approaches.

Scaling

One key difference can be seen in the way that the HLS and NPM approaches to learning understand "scaling". We can see this difference in the way that social innovation strategy incorporates learning: a problem occurs in the world (Prompt – stage 1). Proposals are created (2) to address that problem, and prototypes are tested (3). Those proposals that work are then sustained (4) and scaled (5), and this creates systemic change (6).

Figure 5: The Life Cycle of Social Innovation



Simon, J. et al, Life Cycle of Social Innovation (2014)

This differs from learning as management strategy that we have outlined, because in the social innovation version, the type of "learning in every interaction" we describe happens only at stages 2 and 3. It is at these stages that people are responding to the uncertainty of the world, and trying out responses to see what happens. Beyond that, when people have found "what works" then social innovation moves to an implementation phase – we know what works, we need to scale it up – to get everyone to do that, in all places. Any "learning" that occurs in these phases is didactic: it is training on how to effectively undertake the routinised practices which have been shown to work in other places and other times.

We know that this approach to learning will not work in complex environments, because what works is localised and time-bound.

Consequently, one of the key differences between the HLS approach of learning as management strategy and other approaches to learning is that in the HLS approach, learning is not a discrete phase but the ongoing underpinning of all work. One of the key implications of learning as a meta-strategy in complexity is that the purpose of learning is not to find "what works" and then take that to scale. That strategy has repeatedly failed in complex environments. As we explored above, knowledge about "what works" cannot simply be taken from one context and applied to another. We see the recognition of this in the work of the Finnish Education Agency's Innovation Centre:

> *"Let's forget scaling"*
>
> **Olli-Pekka Heinonen, Director General of EDUFI, the Finnish National Agency for Education**

Instead of the purpose of experimentation and innovation being to find the "right answer" the organisational strategy is to enable sense-making of that data in new contexts. **What is scalable, therefore, is not the content of what is learnt in any given context, but the capacity for learning itself – to scale the capacity to undertake the Learning Life Cycle in different systems**[1].

It is easy to understand how creating the ongoing capacity for learning in each context could appear wasteful to those used to thinking about innovation in a centralised way: "why do we have to duplicate learning capacity in each system of interest?" And the answer to this is pretty straightforward – because that's how the complex world works. Pretending that the world is simple, and that learning can be done centrally and exported to others, is what creates waste. It wastes everyone's time implementing approaches that cannot be reliably assumed to work. By placing learning centrally, rather than close to the work itself, we waste everyone's time and resources.

Spreading learning, not scaling content

It is important to highlight that the HLS approach to learning does not say that what is learnt in context is useless for another. Rather, the HLS approach says that what is learnt in one context may be spread to another. In other words, information about principles, practices and processes can be shared between systems to inform their learning journeys. Knowledge from one context can provide a useful starting point for the learning of another – so that each place does not have to start from scratch. But the crucial point is that it remains an exploration in the new context, not a process of implementation.

One of the benefits of this "spreading approach" to learning is that it addresses the "not invented here" problem (in which places are resistant to solutions imposed on them from the outside). By developing curiosity between places, and enabling each place to learn from another, practice spreads through curiosity rather than coercion.

Who gets to learn?

The other key difference in the HLS approach to "learning as management strategy" is revealed when we explore the question: who gets to do what type of learning? HLS emphasises the importance of learning as exploration – seeking to develop new knowledge about what works, and how, in any given context. In current strategic approaches, this type of learning is a discrete organisational function; it is done by researchers or evaluators. Or, in really forward-thinking organisations, by those lucky enough to be involved in design processes. These are the people who get to do learning-as-exploration.

It is also likely that managers – from team through to senior level – get to do a restricted form of learning. It will be their role to interpret performance data and make necessary adjustments to practice.

Everyone else implements what is learnt by others. Rather than genuine learning, these people receive training: you do this, and this is how you do it.

In the HLS approach, everybody learns, alongside the people being served. Learning is a curiosity-based mindset by which we continue to reinvent both ourselves and our work:

> *"We have curiosity about our own lives as learning labs for our values and figuring out what it means to be human at this point in time. And we have curiosity about each other's lives, about why we do what we do, about the roots of our behaviours."*
>
> **adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy, p 194**

The role of evidence in enabling learning: humility and "evidence-informed practice"

Another key way in which the HLS approach to learning is different is the role that "evidence" plays in the learning process. Many parts of the public sector have clung onto "evidence-based practice" and policy as their gold standard, but if complexity means we cannot rely on consistency or predictability, where does that leave the role of evidence in helping those who do public service to learn? If "what works" changes from place to place and time to time, what is the role of evidence in helping us to learn about what to do in any given context?

The problem that policymakers, managers and other practitioners encounter when seeking to use evidence created in one context in a different context (different in either space or time) is that there is no way of knowing whether that evidence is true enough in the new context to be of value. This is the case because of the nonlinear way in which complex systems produce results – tiny differences in context can produce wildly different outcomes, and thus render all previous evidence useless; or the differences in context can produce no difference in outcomes at all. And there is no reliable way of predicting which will apply. This makes the task of management difficult. But this is the truth of the task of managing in complex environments, and until we face this truth, we will be unable to respond to it.

It is for this reason that complexity-theorists such as David Byrne and Gillian Callaghan describe the necessity of "being humble" about our knowledge claims in complex environments. So what does humility mean for learning as management strategy?

Firstly, as we described in the "spreading" section above, it means being modest when applying knowledge derived from other contexts. Given that there is no reliable way of telling whether evidence from other times and places holds true for our system of interest, the best role for that evidence is as a starting-point for learning. Where should we start when seeking to answer the question: what will work in this time, in this place, to achieve our purpose? We do not have to start afresh each time, we can draw on knowledge from other times and places.

This is the approach of evidence-informed practice (as distinct from evidence-based practice or policymaking). Evidence-informed practice treats knowledge from other places as useful material to inform practitioners' ongoing learning, rather than as "best practice" to be applied, and it has similarities to forms of learning practised by indigenous Australians.

Figure 6: A representation of the relationship between abstract and concrete learning.

Yunkaporta, T (2019), Sand Talk, Text Publishing, Melbourne. Reproduced with the permission of the artist.

> *"The circle on the left represents the abstract world of mind and spirit, and the circle on the right represents the concrete world of land, relationships, and activity… There needs to be an interaction between abstract (spirit) and concrete (physical) worlds of knowledge for this kind of complexity [of neural systems] to develop fully. Without closing the loop between abstract knowledge and reality, and without making connections between different ideas and areas of knowledge, true learning cannot occur."*
>
> **Sand Talk, pp. 97-99**

Secondly, humility means recognising the partiality of our own perspectives, and the limitations of the abstractions we create. In complex environments, (1) there will always be other legitimate perspectives, and (2) our measurements are thin abstractions of reality, rather than reality itself, so this requires us to be humble about the demands we make of this knowledge.

If we are humble about what measurements tell us, we should not use them to decide whether people or organisations have adequately fulfilled their purpose, and deserve reward or punishment. Instead, we can subject our data to collective sense-making – bringing all the relevant actors together to ask: these are our measurements, what do these measurements mean for us? We can use them to model scenarios to help inform our judgements. We can use it to correct our cognitive biases. But we should always remember that our data can mislead us in exactly the way that any other partial picture of the world can do.

Measuring to learn

One of the key differences of learning as management strategy is the choice that it creates regarding the purpose of measurement. As we will explore in the 'Enacting learning as strategy' chapter, it is necessary for managers to choose the purpose of measurement. It is widely acknowledged that we want to use measures to learn, but doing so requires a parallel choice: to stop using measures for the purpose of performance management (to administer reward and punishment).

It is possible to measure for either the purpose of learning or the purposes of reward or punishment. But is impossible to use the same measures for both purposes, because – as Campbell's Law highlights – measures used for the purposes of reward or punishment "tend to distort and corrupt the processes they are intended to monitor". Research evidence strongly suggests that once people choose to use measures as part of performance management systems, the data becomes untrustworthy. Such measures are therefore of little use for learning. This is the reality that public management must confront if it is to learn effectively.

> *"When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."*
>
> **Charles Goodhart (1975)**

Why pursue learning as strategy?

If learning as management strategy requires this much work, why have the organisations in our case studies adopted this approach? In their experiences, we can see that Dave Snowden's insights (outlined above) – on learning as a necessary response to complexity – manifest themselves very clearly:

> *"In our complex reality, development work is a reflection of uncertainty. What works in this context? Am I capable of examining this topic from all perspectives? And where do the boundaries of my agency and expertise lie?... Working with uncertainty requires boundaries to be broken. On the one hand, this destabilises our positionality as an expert and hence the authority of our perspective in relation to other parties in a multilevel system, and on the other hand, questions the operating culture and existing structures."*
>
> **The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)**

Once we recognise that a situation is complex, then learning becomes a necessary strategic choice. Routinised practice has the illusion of being more efficient because it requires less time for thinking and reflection, but will inevitably lead to inefficiencies because the conditions which made that practice appropriate will at some point change.

The action research process of undertaking experiments or explorations in systems is necessary for developing the bespoke responses that a human approach to public management entails. A bespoke response requires ongoing learning about each and every context, and the changes that occur when purposeful interventions are made in that system. We see this in the experimental approach developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)

> *"Our change objective is to develop a flexible model*

> *for pre- and primary school education where individual learning paths are in focus. No student should be pushed forward on their learning path before they have the required knowledge and skills to advance, and advanced students should also not be prevented from advancing at their own pace. In our experiment, everyone is allowed to learn at their own pace better than before."*
>
> **(The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI))**

The way that a learning strategy is required to enact a human approach also manifests itself in the way in which experiments and explorations seek to understand change in patterns produced by the life of that person-as-system. This change is partly provoked by the actions of the experiments and explorations themselves:

> *"To test new ways of working, we listen to people to identify the right problem and create an autonomous, curious, and learning environment where prototyping something different is possible and meaningful. Through consistent reflection, we listen to what the 'doing' is showing us and either run with it and continue or fail quickly to try something else."*
>
> **(Mayday Trust case study)**

The shift towards a more thoughtful, continuous learning approach for all workers therefore enables problems to be seen and addressed more rapidly. It also helps to work against the development of "well, that's how we've always done it" cultures.

Learning as strategy – learning in every interaction – isn't just an approach to ensure effective and efficient adaptation to dynamic and uncertain environments. It is an approach to addressing injustice. Our case studies have emphasised that the ongoing learning approach enables those voices and perspectives that have been marginalised by current practice to be heard.

> *"Learning and experimentation is a core feature of our work and reflective practice is a key part of this. There are different levels of comfort with reflection in the team, so we need to make a conscious effort to build reflective practice into everything we do – through personal responsibility and through structures at every level of the organisation. This acts as a key anti-stigma and employability tool – people have to question and process what is going on, be mindful in their actions."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub)**

This connects learning back to the principles of equal human worth and empathy outlined in the Human chapter, and the fundamental characteristic of healthy systems (equality of voice) described in the Systems chapter. Learning requires learning from everybody's perspective:

> *"This phase is essentially about learning through listening and we learned that almost everybody – staff and people using the system – felt ignored or rejected or constrained by the then current approach."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance case study)**

Bespoke, adaptive responses, lower costs

The benefits of this strategy appear in terms of being able to provide **bespoke** (and therefore less wasteful) responses to particular strengths and needs, the ability to rapidly adapt as these strengths and needs – evident in Wellbeing Teams – and the context in which they manifest themselves, change, and reduce transaction costs for each of these adaptations.

> *"Wellbeing Teams have demonstrated an ability to learn and adapt rapidly. Our self-managed model, emphasis on bringing the whole person to work, focus on self-care and use of technology to support and spread learning has made it possible for this to happen and for significant changes to roles and structure to be introduced quickly and effectively. Our handbook was rewritten six times in its first eighteen months to reflect the learning over that period."*
>
> **(Wellbeing Teams *case study*)**

The UK Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) have also found that learning for bespoke and rapid adaptation can reduce transaction costs for each of these adaptations.

> *"So we don't need to necessarily call in the lawyers for every agreement that we have with them because…. there's a lot of trust already there."*
>
> **(FCDO case study)**

We see therefore that the meta-learning strategy enables more rapid adaptation at lower cost.

Challenges

What challenges have people experienced when seeking to adopt and enact learning as meta-strategy?

Shifting to measurement for learning is hard

Shifting to a learning strategy rather than a control strategy may be the most difficult aspect of the shift to an alternative public management approach. Measuring for accountability is so ingrained in the practice of so many organisations, and is such an integral part of NPM, that it takes a concerted, collective effort to make this switch.

At local level, even where commissioners have been able to signal the switch to learning as strategy by commissioning differently, they still find themselves with some national reporting requirements based on NPM philosophy and practices. In the case of the Plymouth Alliance, for example, they are still required to report to central government using national performance measures, such as completion rates for drug treatment programmes. Their solution to this challenge was to continue to collect the data they were required to collect for national reporting, but not to use it as a local performance management instrument. In other words, they disconnected the measurement from reward and punishment mechanisms. They were then able to report the figures which were demanded of them without the corrupting influence of Campbell's Law.

Professional identities

As the EDUFI case study demonstrates, the professional identities of many public servants have been bound up with the requirement that they are experts – that they know the answers to whatever problems they are likely to encounter.

The challenge of shifting such identities is both difficult and nuanced. Subject-based expertise is still relevant as part of learning journeys, but it does not provide a readymade answer. Enabling public service workers to feel that their knowledge is valued, while at the same time enabling them to view each and every encounter and challenge as a learning opportunity, requires nuanced development work.

EDUFI addressed this challenge through a programme of coaching and mentoring. Treating this as a development opportunity for public service workers seems to help people to shift from simple "expert" identities towards a position where they are able to deploy their knowledge in more nuanced, complexity-sensitive ways.

Enablers:

Strategic learning support – the Learning Partner role

How do public managers bring actors in a system together, and enable them to design and run explorations which enable them to learn together ways for that system to produce better outcomes? What roles are required to do this and how can learning be shared to show new practices and approaches as viable alternatives to the status quo?

Some of the case studies referenced in this report have developed a specific role to guide themselves along this learning journey. The Lankelly Chase Foundation developed a specific brief for a Learning Partner to support them and the organisations they fund to go on a learning journey. Researchers from Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University have begun to explore what this Learning Partner role entails.

A Learning Partner provides support for organisations (or systems) to undertake each stage of the learning process, and to progress around the cycle. The Learning Partner can also play a crucial role to connect the first and second loops, ensuring that these learning processes remain connected.

In brief, a Learning Partner helps organisations to build their own capacity to learn, typically by adopting action learning and action research (ALAR) approaches to moving through the HLS Learning Cycle as an inquiry, which includes experimentation, data gathering, sense-making, reflection and reflexivity. The Learning Partner can help organisations to record an account of their learning for improvement and for governing purposes, and can also perform convening roles to build relationships between people, organisations, and systems, so that shared learning can take place. In other words, Learning Partners help keep learning central when the work itself can draw people in.

We explore how managers can enact this learning strategy in the "Principles into action" chapters.

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Endnotes

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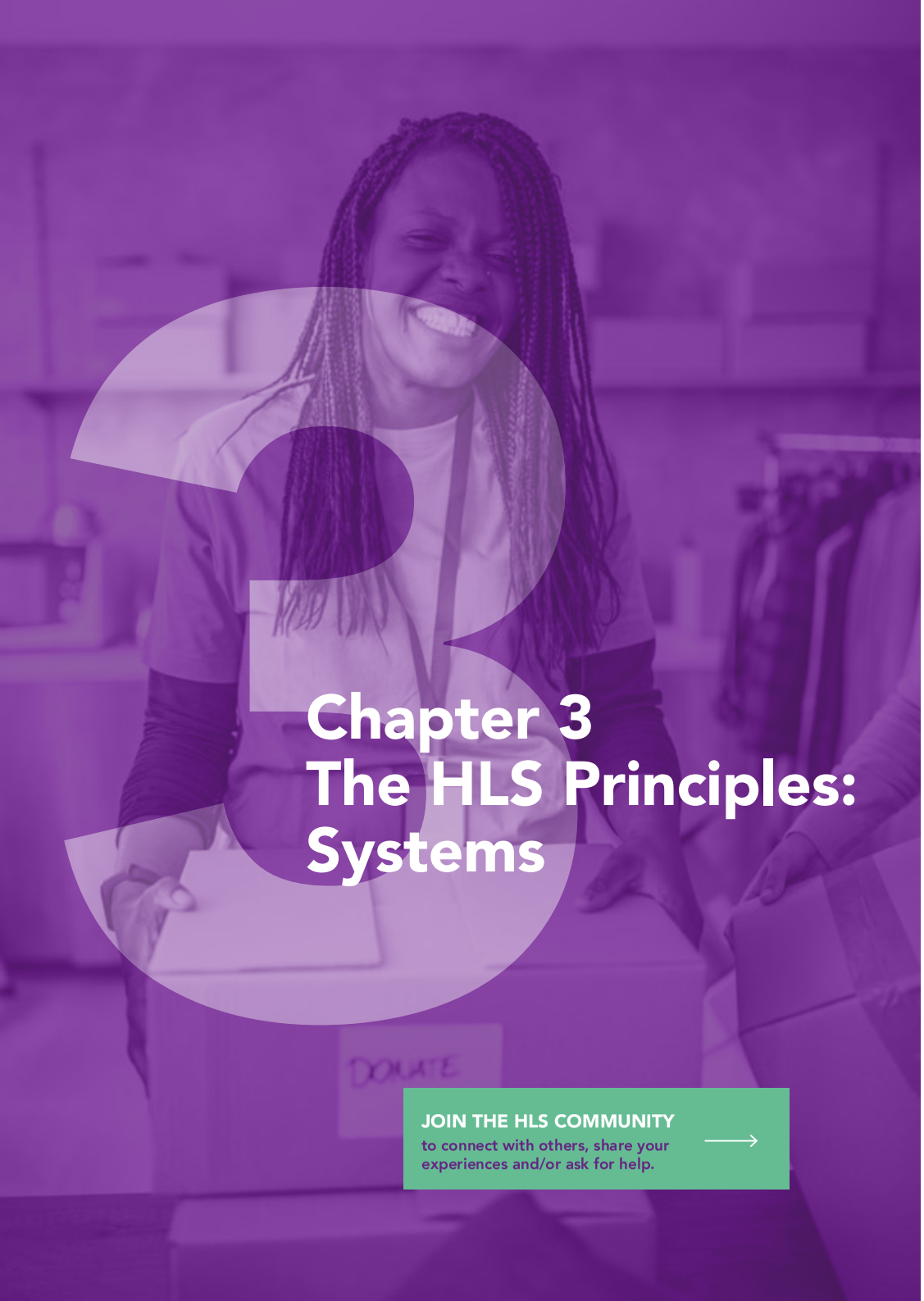

Chapter 3
The HLS Principles: Systems

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to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help. →

Creating healthy systems

Authors: Toby Lowe and Max French
Contact the authors

Introduction

So far, we have explored the Human moral purpose of public service, and how the Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach to public management sees human beings in the complex web of relationships that is their lives. We then explored Learning as the management strategy that enacts these beliefs. We can now turn to Systems as the unit of analysis – the things to which our purpose and strategy are applied.

This chapter will explore what we mean when we talk about "systems", and outline why we think systems are the important unit of analysis for public service: **systems create the outcomes that we seek (or are trying to avoid).**

We will then explore this idea further – how can public management enable the complex systems that describe people's real lives to produce positive outcomes more frequently? We will express this using the principle that **"healthy systems tend to produce positive outcomes".** We will go on to explore the characteristics of healthy systems, and the means by which healthy systems can be created and nurtured through the role of **System Stewardship.**

What do we mean by a "system"?

Work on HLS sits within a vast and multifaceted history of systems thinking and complexity theory. This history and tradition gives HLS a language and set of ideas to draw on. The unifying idea behind the variety of systems thinking and complexity is that relationships matter very much. In order to understand anything fully, you should not take it out of its context and break it down into its component parts. Instead, to understand something, you must understand the web of relationships and interactions within which it exists.

Systems thinkers call this web of relationships and interactions "a system".

"Systems of interest" and the language of systems thinking

The default position of systems thinkers is therefore that the things we want to make sense of in the world exist as part of complex webs of relationships, interactions and interdependencies. The core challenge of any form of systems thinking is that pretty soon we find that everything is connected to everything else. This is true, but not helpful for our ability to understand and act in the world! How am I supposed to make sense of this thing in front of me, if I need to understand all of the things it exists in relation to?

The question therefore becomes – "how can we identify the bits of the interconnected universe that we need to understand in order to improve the things we care about?" To answer this question, when people talk about actual systems they create a boundary around a particular set of relationships they feel are important, and they call that a "**system of interest**". We borrow this language from Michael C. Jackson's excellent book: Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity. (see also the section on system boundaries below).

When we talk about "systems" in the world of HLS, we are referring to this kind of created "system of interest".

People create these systems of interest at different kinds of scale – a person's life can be seen as a system (e.g. all the relationships they have with people and things) and a place can be a system (e.g. the relationships between people and organisations in a place). (See the section on system scales below.)

Given that this is what we mean when we say "system", we can see the way in which the language of systems thinking can be confusing in a public management context. Sometimes, people talk about themselves and their organisation as being different from "the system"; this is particularly true of independent community or voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) that don't receive state support. In this context, when people say "the system" what they often mean is "the state", or an "establishment" set of relationships, cultures and processes – a set of relationships of which they are not part. This is **not** what we mean by "system" in an HLS context.

Systems thinking is therefore a mindset and a way of framing the world that can be learned. This learning requires work. But the payoff for doing this work is the ability to describe and understand the set of relationships and interactions that makes the outcomes we care about both possible and real.

Boundaries and purpose of systems of interest

A "system of interest" is therefore that bit of the interconnected universe that someone or a group of people have agreed is important in order to make some particular thing that they care about happen (in a better way).

This is important, because it means that:

1. A system of interest is defined in relation to a purpose. A system of interest is always a system which makes x or y happen. In order to define a system of interest – to say who and what is part of that system – you have to start by saying what the purpose of that system is: what is it for?
2. A system of interest is a human construct. The boundary of that system is an artificial line that human beings draw around a set of interactions that are happening in the world. It is a map, not the territory.
3. We draw this boundary in order to make useful work possible – because otherwise every person in the world has to come to every meeting about everything.
4. A system of interest is a particular representation of the world. It is subject to the same partialities, blindnesses and biases as any other human creation. We will return to this point later in this chapter.

We can see immediately that **who gets to define the boundaries of a system, and on what basis they make those decisions, becomes a crucial set of decisions**. We have seen from many of our case studies that a significant amount of work is being done to challenge these decisions and how they are made. We see organisations such as Likewise, Help on Your Doorstep and Wellbeing Teams seeking to challenge the idea that outcomes are delivered by particular service silos, and instead to draw the boundaries of systems of interest in a local, place-based way. We also see case studies such as the Plymouth Alliance which are constantly seeking to challenge and redraw the boundaries of systems that they have created.

Systems of interest and outcomes

From an HLS perspective, **the relationships and interactions we care about are those that help to produce particular outcomes in people's lives**. So, if a person or organisation has any kind of relationship that impacts on relevant outcomes in someone else's life, then that person or organisation can be considered a part of their

system of interest. For example, this set of people and organisations could be considered as part of a system of interest around a person's mental wellbeing (not an exclusive list!):

- The person themselves
- Their family and friends
- Their employer (if they have one)
- The people or organisations responsible for public/green space near to them
- Those who provide cultural and sporting provision in their place
- Their neighbourhood association and community centre(s)
- The health service (in all its local and national manifestations)
- Welfare/benefits agencies
- The local authority.

The most important part of a system of interest from an HLS perspective is the person, family or group whom the outcome is for. From an HLS perspective, the people being served are the core of "the system"; they are not viewed as separate from "the system".

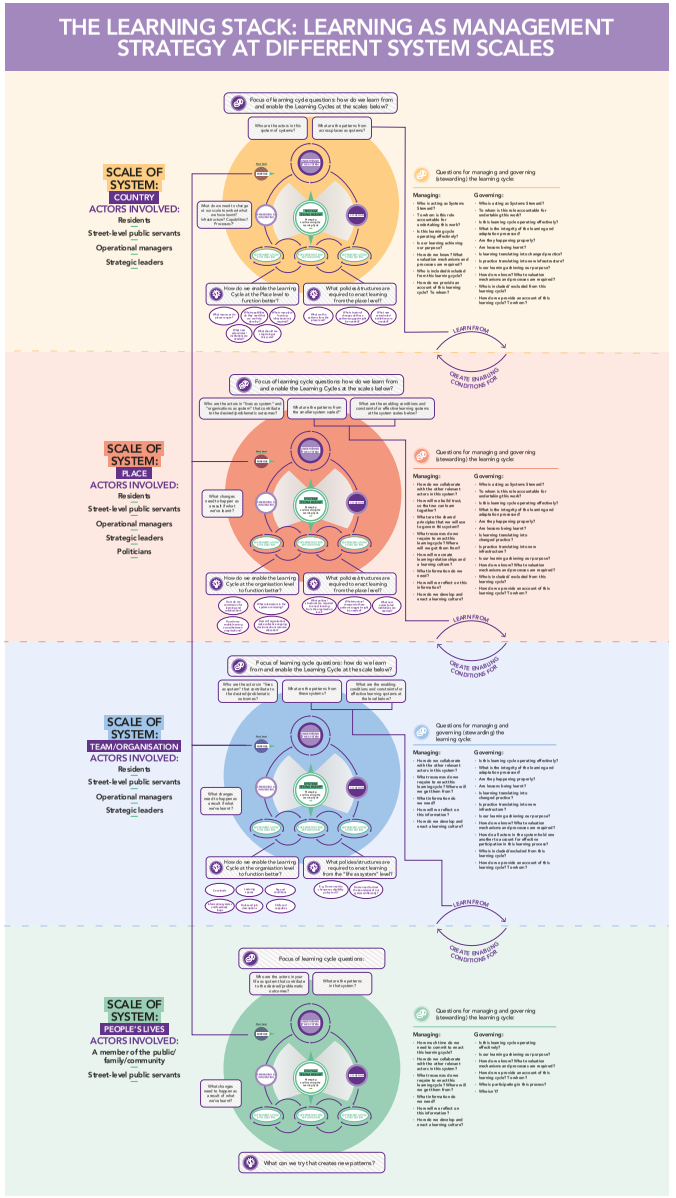
Scales of systems of interest and their fractal nature

When we remember that every time we talk about a system of interest it is simply a partial representation of reality that we have created, it is useful because it also reminds us that we can create such representations at different scales. In the same way that we use different scale maps for different purposes – we use a large-scale map to see the assets in our neighbourhood, and a small-scale one to plan a cross-country car journey – we can see systems at different scales.

As we will explore in the 'Enacting a learning strategy at different system scales' chapter, it may be useful for HLS practice to represent systems at four different scales:

- Person's life as system
- Team or Organisation as system
- Place as system
- Country as system

Figure 1: "The Learning Stack" – Learning Cycles at different system scales



Person as system

For our purposes, the most zoomed-in version of a system of interest that is likely to be useful is "person's life as system". What are the factors and relationships in an individual person's life that contribute to their experiencing a poor or a good outcome? For example, if they are a person who is experiencing chronic pain, do they feel that pain more when they're at work or in their leisure time? Do they experience it around particular (groups of) people? Or at a particular time of day or night? Is it brought on by a particular movement or set of actions? All these elements would be relevant parts of seeing that person's life as a system of interest.

This representation of a system is therefore likely to be most useful for public service workers who are working directly with members of the public.

Organisation as system

Organisations are obviously key actors in any representation of how public service works, and there is much excellent existing work which explores how organisations can operate more effectively when systems thinking is applied – for example, Stafford Beer's work on the Viable Systems Model has proved useful to many organisations, likewise the Vanguard Method (and various adaptations) have helped to develop thinking and practice. (An excellent overview of systems thinking in public sector contexts can be found here.)

From an HLS perspective, the key question is: how do organisations function as learning systems? How do different workers and teams share knowledge? How is the importance of learning signalled and valued? How do organisations recruit people with the motivation for curiosity?

These questions are explored further in chapters on workforce, learning and development in organisations. Further exploration of the role of HLS practice for VSOs in the pandemic is explored here.

Place as system

Many HLS practitioners find it useful to think of systems at a place level – neighbourhoods, towns and cities, counties or regions. We see examples of all of these "places as systems" in the case studies. For example, Help on Your Doorstep and Plymouth Octopus Project look at neighbourhoods as systems of assets which can help produce positive outcomes in people's lives. Both the Plymouth Alliance and South Tyneside Alliance view systems from the geography of a local authority – which organisations in this place support people to create particular outcomes in their lives? What are the relationships between those organisations, and how can they learn and act together?

At this scale, much of the work of developing these as effective systems of interest to create positive outcomes concerns building effective relationships between the people and organisations involved – developing empathy and trust, and cultivating curiosity as the basis for learning relationships.

This topic is explored further in the "HLS and place: transforming local systems" chapter.

Country as system

The scale of "country as system" seems to introduce another dimension to the idea of place as system. We see from case studies such as Collective Leadership for Scotland and the Finnish National Education Agency that understanding of systems at this scale are not simply trying to replicate and expand the relationship-building from the local place scale. Instead, the work seems to take a "system of systems" approach, in which the focus of relationship-building is building empathy and learning relationships between "places as systems".

Systems of actors and factors

The other important point which arises from understanding that systems of interest are partial representations, created by people, is that there are different ways to represent a system of interest. These different representations serve different purposes. In terms of HLS practice, the two most common representations of systems of interest are "actors in a system" and "factors in a system". Actors are the people and organisations in a system who undertake actions. Factors describe the causal relationships between identified variables in a system.

Actors

The most common representation of systems that we see in HLS practice is the actors that constitute it – the people and organisations whose relationships and interactions make up the system.

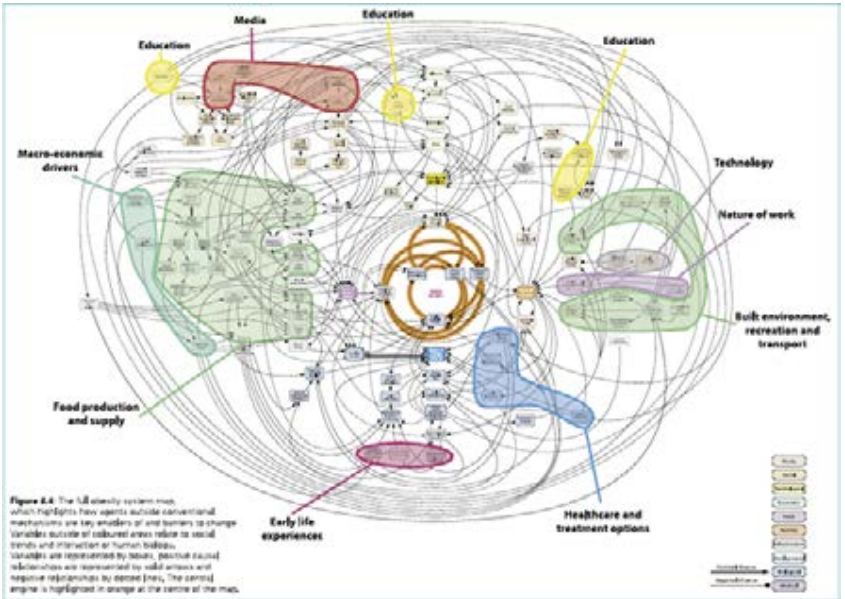
For example, the Plymouth Alliance's system work began by asking the question: which organisations in the city support positive outcomes for people who experience homelessness, substance misuse, mental health problems, and involvement in the criminal justice system? They used this list of actors as the starting point for "understanding the system" (see

below). This involved understanding the relationships (or their absence) between those actors and undertaking shared systems leadership training (and other work) to develop the relationships between them.

Factors

The other common representation of systems of interest in HLS practice is through the relationships between the structural factors that contribute to the creation of a particular outcome. The classic representation of a system of interest in this way is the "obesity systems map" produced by the UK Government in 2007.

Figure 2: Systems map of obesity



Sturmberg, JP (2018) Health System Redesign How to Make Health Care Person-Centered, Equitable, and Sustainable. Springer, Australia. P238

This systems map – a form of causal loop diagram – shows 108 different factors and the relationships between those factors, which together contribute to the outcome of obesity (or its absence). These factors are grouped and named as things like "early life experiences", "technology", and "healthcare and treatment options". The relationship between these sorts of factors constitutes a system from this perspective.

In the HLS case studies, we see the UK Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) programmes making significant use of this type of mapping. We can also see this kind of factors analysis at play in the work of The Children's Society, Lighthouse and Mayday Trust. In all of these cases, the organisations sought to "understand the system" by looking at the relationships between structural factors which help create particular outcomes (or the absence of those outcomes). For example, the Children's Society wanted to explore the factors leading to child exploitation, and see where such a system could be disrupted. Lighthouse looked at the factors contributing to poor outcomes for children in care, and found that elements such as poor pay and conditions in the children's care sector were significant.

When working to nurture systems of interest that create better outcomes, it is likely that both of these kinds of representation will be important. The interaction between the relational agency of the actors involved in systems of interest and the structural factors (and their relationships) operating in that system is how outcomes are really made.

The core knowledge underpinning the HLS approach is that outcomes are produced by whole systems. In technical terms, they are emergent properties of complex systems. Which means that outcomes are not "delivered" by organisations. This is why systems of interest are important to HLS practitioners – because it is from these systems, and the behaviour of the actors within them, that positive outcomes can emerge. **If we want better real-world outcomes, we need to create the conditions whereby those outcomes emerge from such systems more frequently, for more people.**

How can we help systems to produce better outcomes?

If systems create outcomes, the obvious question is: what actions can public managers take to enable those systems to produce better outcomes?

From the HLS case studies, we have seen two types of approach taken by public service leaders and managers:

- Nurturing "healthy" systems
- Disrupting systems that produce negative outcomes.

"Healthy" systems produce better outcomes

A key piece of learning from HLS practice is that "healthy" systems produce better outcomes. Which raises

the obvious question: what does it mean for a system to be "healthy"? The most concise answer seems to be: **a healthy system is one in which actors learn together and act collaboratively, in order to achieve human freedom and flourishing.**

This answer arises from two places. Firstly, from the experience of the case studies. At all system scales – from a person's life as system through to countries as "systems of systems" – the case studies indicate that public services are able to help people to lead flourishing lives more effectively. They do this by helping actors in a system to learn about that system and collaborate on purposeful experiments and explorations to make that system produce a more desirable pattern of results more frequently.

Secondly, the answer comes from the logical consequences of our understanding that outcomes are created by complex systems. Given the evidence of how complex systems behave (see Learning chapter), how else could we create positive real-world outcomes more often except by collaborative learning and experimentation? If we want public service for the real world, what else could we do?

We will now explore the different aspects of what makes a healthy system.

The behaviours seen in healthy systems

The most complete articulation we have seen of what a healthy system entails comes from the work of the Lankelly Chase Foundation. They have worked with the organisations and people they support to identify nine behaviours that one would expect to see among actors in systems that are working to serve the interests of those who experience severe and multiple disadvantage.

These behaviours are about perspective, power and participation. More detail about each behaviour can be found here.

Perspective

- People view themselves as part of an interconnected whole
- People are viewed as resourceful and bringing strengths
- People share a vision

Power

- Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted
- Decision-making is devolved
- Accountability is mutual

Participation

- Open, trusting relationships enable effective dialogue
- Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level
- Feedback and collective learning drive adaptation

Looking across the range of HLS case studies, we can see public managers undertaking work to address a number of these factors. These combine to give us three significant areas of understanding for what constitutes a healthy system.

Healthy systems are learning systems

The most obvious aspect of healthy systems that we see from across the range of case studies is that healthy systems are learning systems. In other words, they are systems in which the actors continuously learn together about the ways in which that system operates.

As outlined in the Learning chapter, this learning process is necessarily active – actors learn by doing in the world. Actors in the system explore and experiment together, on an ongoing basis, to understand how their individual and collective actions interact with the broader factors in the system to produce emergent results.

> *"Some of the wicked problems are so [complex], that usual management approaches don't solve these problems. We need everyone in the system, whom the problem concerns, to be part of the solvers. As we don't know all the answers, we have learnt to fail and take a new direction. This changes the working culture and even the change is slow, it happens by doing… There is a need to reinforce the system's ability to learn together."*
>
> **(The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI))**

Another way of saying this is that it is the actors in the system of interest becoming conscious of the behaviour of that system, and their own part in creating that behaviour.

> *"We are trapped in beliefs and habits that harm the people we want to support. By using artistic or participatory methods, we can bring our unconscious habits to our conscious attention, so that we can air them and possibly chip away at them."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation case study)**

The FCDO case study demonstrates two aspects to a learning system:

- Firstly, the actors within the system have a **learning relationship** with one another. They learn together, and treat data as information which requires an act of collective sense-making. This act of collective

learning is a recognition that they are actors in a system together, and that change occurs as they learn together.

- Secondly, a learning system is one which purposefully gathers data about the causal factors operating within that system of interest, and makes those a subject for reflection and learning among the actors in that system.

These two aspects of creating a learning system are aspects of enabling "the system" to see itself – to reflect on and learn about both the **actors and factors** which constitute it, and therefore to make conscious choices about how the relationships between actors and the relationships between factors should operate.

Healthy systems cultivate and make use of trust

If collaborating and learning together are the key features of healthy systems, we can easily see why trust is so crucial an asset for such systems. We have seen from the Learning chapter that a virtuous circle exists between learning together and trust. Learning together helps build trust, and trust helps people to learn more effectively – because they are willing to be more honest, and more open to changing together.

> *"Team members note the team is less prone to 'blaming' other parts of the system than might be usual within such a service. Given licence to collaborate with peers in the system to change things for the better, they encounter first-hand the dilemmas and barriers that others encounter, allowing for greater empathy and trust. Work is approached with a mindset of curiosity, rather than simply seen as a 'delivery challenge'."*
>
> **(The Children's Society case study)**

Healthy systems are diverse systems

As we have seen from the Human chapter, understanding the diversity of human experience is crucial for enabling effective outcomes – because outcomes, and how they are created, look and feel different in each person's life. Consequently, the systems of interest by which outcomes are produced must reflect that diversity of experience.

Healthy systems address inequalities of power

We also see from the case study work that tackling power inequalities is a necessary part of enabling the diversity, and therefore health, of systems. The genuine participation of diverse voices

in a system requires addressing the structural power inequalities that have meant some voices are unreasonably valued over others.

Disruption of systems producing negative outcomes

In some of the case studies, we have seen another aspect of systems work which enables systems to produce better outcomes for people. This is work which disrupts the systems that produce negative outcomes in people's lives.

For example, The Children's Society's work on child exploitation begins by seeking to understand the systems in which children are exploited – the relationships and social processes by which this exploitation occurs. Having understood the relationships and processes that perpetuate child exploitation, they then seek to assemble groups of actors who can intervene to disrupt these relationships and processes at crucial points (such as the relationships children experience when they are in a police station).

The recent work of the Lankelly Chase Foundation's action inquiry into the systems that perpetuate severe and multiple disadvantage is similarly focused on disruption. Lankelly Chase's system behaviours have been used as a benchmarking and sense-making framework to help chart this process of disruption. It will be interesting to continue exploring the relationship between systems working which seeks to create healthy systems in order to produce positive outcomes, and systems working which seeks to disrupt the systems that create negative outcomes.

Creating healthy systems and disrupting those that produce negative outcomes are related – they are not binary strategic choices. However, understanding *how* those different strategies relate to one another is an area for further exploration.

System Stewardship: how does a system become healthy?

The most important lesson from across our case studies is that it is very rare for healthy systems to develop spontaneously. In all the circumstances we have encountered, creating healthy systems requires **purposeful work.**

Borrowing the language of the Institute for Government, we have come to call the purposeful work of creating healthy systems "System Stewardship". The case studies themselves use many different variants of this language. Some explicitly describe themselves as Systems Stewards. Others call themselves "systems servant" "systems noticer" or "orchestrator

of the ecosystem". The role of Systems Steward also contains strong connections to the role of Systems Convenor, as articulated by the Wenger-Trayners.

What have we learnt about System Stewardship?

When we articulated the role of Systems Steward in our previous report, we observed that:

- It was the person (or people) who took responsibility for bringing about desired System Behaviours
- Commissioners seemed to play a particularly important role in System Stewardship
- It required brave leadership, as it required leaders to assume responsibility for systems without seeking power over them.

We think that this basic understanding of System Stewardship still holds broadly true, with the following additions to our understanding

System Stewardship requires legitimacy

Systems Stewards are essentially seeking to improve the quality of relationships and interactions between actors in a system of interest. Undertaking this role requires those actors to believe that the person(s) playing the stewardship role have legitimacy in doing so. Therefore, the System Stewardship role requires some form of (at least tacit) consent and agreement. We can see this in the way that EDUFI negotiated relationships between local and national actors in the Finnish education system, and in the experiences of different actors who have sought to undertake System Stewardship roles in different places within the Lankelly Chase Foundation's action inquiry.

In the Foundation's action inquiry, Systems Stewards seek out voices ordinarily excluded from decision-making, yet whose perspective – from living with or working closely with severe and multiple disadvantage – gives them a unique insight into the system and the possibilities that exist for change. Lankelly Chase Foundation's action inquiry into place as systems is finding that the legitimacy of a Systems Steward is connected to their ability to enable diverse participation. Ultimately, however, legitimacy is a quality that can only be conferred by those from whom it is sought. Effective systems stewards require legitimacy, and their legitimacy depends on being perceived as such by those within the system.

The role(s) of System Stewardship need to be resourced

System Stewardship requires considerable work. The necessary convening, relationship-building, and coordination requires considerable effort. This work needs to be recognised as important, and funded accordingly.

> *"Our primary role as a service provider can also mean that funding for the resources that we need to 'steward' a system involving over 150 different services can be overlooked by commissioners and funders. They can sometimes value our networks and the relationships but struggle to appreciate the human and monetary investment that goes into developing and managing this."*
>
> **(Help on Your Doorstep case study)**

System Stewardship is a leadership role – which can be undertaken through distributed leadership

As is further explored in the Systems Leadership chapter, the role of Systems Steward is a leadership role. However, this does not mean that it must be a single person or organisation who plays this role. Indeed, the style and type of leadership required seems to share many characteristics with ideas of distributed leadership. As such, the Systems Steward role can be distributed among many actors in the system. This has been a key area of exploration for the Lankelly Chase Foundation, who have explicitly sought to develop collective approaches to System Stewardship.

System Stewardship can be enacted by coordination teams, which consist of local actors committed to place-based system change. However, in many cases system stewardship is more distributed, enacted through a number of interlinked core teams, or through a range of other interconnected local actors.

> *"HLS requires letting go of the illusion of control and instead focusing on taking collective responsibility for creating the conditions for healthier systems."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation case study)**

The potentially distributed nature of System Stewardship highlights the shared responsibility for work to change how a particular system behaves, and underlines a key piece of systems change learning that has been made in a number of places – **system change is self-change**. Changing the

behaviour of a system is not something that one person or organisation does to another, it is a journey that everyone must go on for themselves:

> *"The HLS approach has therefore helped us move from a position of raging against the machine to recognising that by working together we can achieve lasting change – a change which must begin with ourselves."*
>
> **(Aberlour case study)**

> *"This way of working feels like no one person has the answers or is in control. It feels messy and emotive. It requires a focus on how we work, not just what we do. It means people need to give up some privileges and open themselves up to new possibilities generated by collective intelligence."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation case study)**

Values and behaviours promoted by Systems Stewards

The EDUFI case study highlights some of the key values and behaviours that Systems Stewards display and help to develop when they play a role which they describe as "orchestrator of the ecosystem". These include increasing transparency in the system, and acting as an enabler of others.

Systems Stewards and Learning Partners

One of the emerging questions around the role and practice of Systems Stewards concerns the relationship between being a Systems Steward and a Learning Partner . Given our understanding that "a healthy system is a learning system", and the role of Learning Partners in guiding and supporting actors to undertake a shared learning journey, there would seem to be a strong similarity, or mutual support, between elements of these roles.

For example, the EDUFI Innovation Centre acted as Learning Partner to local education systems, and – in performing this role – began to expand beyond the traditional boundaries of "learning" work:

> *"The promotion of the abovementioned [system] values implies rethinking the relationships, status and connections between the different actors in the system. The mentors actively worked to "rethink the relationships between different actors in the system – each person has their own pressures, fears, perspectives – people were supported to express theirs to others, and to listen to others."*
>
> **(The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI))**

Similarly, in the Wallsend Children's Community case study, one of the key roles of the Systems Stewards is to help bring together knowledge about how their place functions as a system. In this context, the Systems Stewards undertake lots of work to "understand the system".

In the Lankelly Chase action inquiry, learning partners often work closely with Systems Stewards to build critical reflection into their working practices. Methods like action learning cycles and reflective practice can formalise and routinise learning practices among participating actors and build a dynamic approach to collaboration and shared experimentation.

Understanding the relationship between these roles would seem to be a useful area for further exploration. One potential way to differentiate the roles is that Learning Partners support systems actors in their journey around the Learning Cycle, while Systems Stewards take responsibility for the management and governance of the Learning Cycle as part of their overall responsibility for system health. Significant further exploration is required to help build our understanding in this area.

Creating healthy systems in practice

We will explore the ways in which people have created a healthy system in the "Principles into Actions" chapters.

At this stage, we will explore one of the key challenges that public managers in the case studies have experienced in the shift to System Stewardship letting go of the idea of control.

The illusion of control

One of the key challenges experienced by public managers who work in this "systems" way concerns the requirements it makes of public managers to "let go of the illusion of control" (in the language of the Lankelly Chase Foundation). This is a significant challenge, because people's professional identities may be entangled with expectations that they will have control. And this (illusion of) control probably came with particular power and privilege. There is a risk of leaders seeing that working in this way:

> *"means that we lose some of our privileges. We can lose our identity, privilege, status, income, security, position. We don't always know what we will gain and we don't know if it will have the same value as that which we stand to lose."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation case study)**

From the perspective that they have been used to occupying, the illusory nature of the control that comes with traditional styles of leadership may either not be apparent or not offer any comfort. If we are to support our leaders in changing, we should be aware that we are making this kind of demand.

We see similar fears expressed by public servants of various types in the EDUFI case study. The requirement that public officials experiment alongside peers and citizens meant that they had to divest themselves of professional identities which were historically based on knowing the answers to difficult questions. Overcoming this fear required significant mentoring support.

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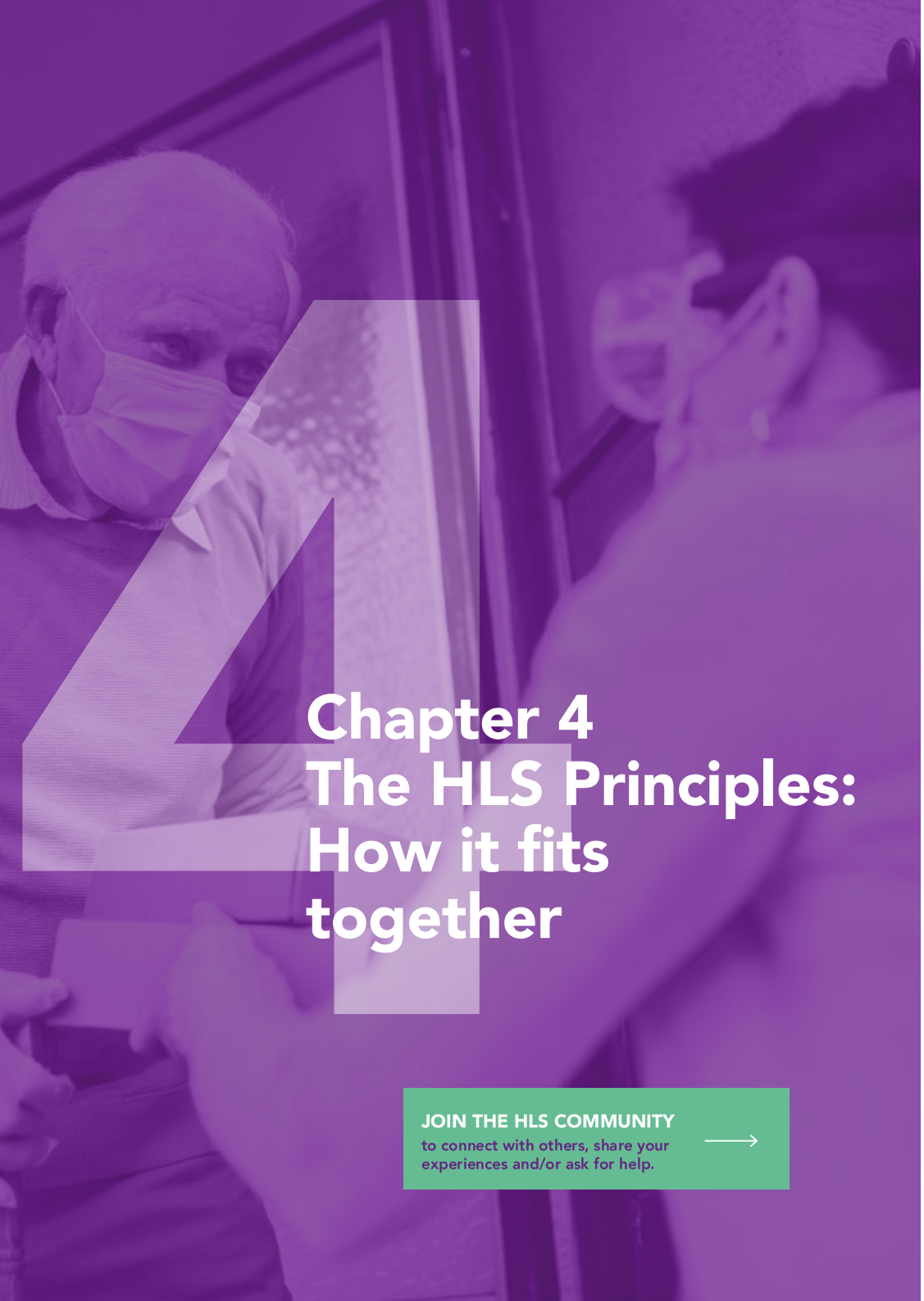

Chapter 4
The HLS Principles: How it fits together

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How it all fits together: the relationship between "Human", "Learning" and "Systems"

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

Human Learning Systems (HLS) is emerging as a public management paradigm – a coherent and mutually supportive set of foundational beliefs and practices that enable public service to better support human freedom and flourishing.

In order to present and explore the core ideas and practices in this report, we have presented separate chapters on "Human", "Learning" and "Systems". In these chapters we have explored particular questions relevant to each: how can we be more "human" in public service? How do we embed learning as the strategic approach? How do we enable systems to produce better outcomes?

However, as well as learning more about each of these topics, we have also learnt more about the relationship between the Human, Learning and Systems elements – how they combine to create a whole paradigm.

Three different types of claim

The first thing we have learnt about the different elements of H, L and S is that each is making a different type of claim.

Human – our moral purpose and how public service sees people

The Human element of HLS makes two claims. Firstly, it is a statement of the moral purpose of HLS as a public management paradigm. It articulates our foundational belief that the moral purpose of public service is to promote human freedom and flourishing.

Secondly, it makes a statement about what we mean by "being human"

in a public service context. It means that we understand human beings intersubjectively – as people who live in a web of relationships (a System), which helps to define who they are. In other words, to understand a human being, you must understand their world.

Learning – our management strategy

The Learning element of HLS makes a claim about how public service improves, and therefore what the orientation of management strategy and practice should be. We think that management of public service should optimise for learning, not control. Learning is the meta-strategy for public management practice. It is both how public service improves and how paradigm shift in public management practice comes about.

Systems – our unit of analysis

The Systems element of HLS makes a claim about the unit of analysis that is most relevant to achieving our moral purpose, and to which our method is applied. Each person has the freedom to translate flourishing into desirable outcomes in their own life. It is the role of public service to help with creating these outcomes, in whatever ways are useful, for whomever asks for help.

We believe (with good evidence) that these outcomes in people's lives are created by the workings of complex systems. In other words, outcomes are emergent properties of people's lives as systems. To create outcomes, therefore, requires these complex systems to produce different patterns of results, and so these systems become the focus of our purpose and method: healthy systems produce good outcomes.

These different claims come together to form a whole in this way:

We believe that the purpose of public service is to promote human freedom and flourishing. Because we recognise and respect their freedom, each person gets to choose what "flourishing" means for them (so long as it is compatible with flourishing for others). We call the choices they make about what flourishing means for them the "outcomes" that public service seeks to help develop in the world.

These outcomes are not "delivered" by public service. Rather, the outcomes emerge (or not) as a result of the ongoing interactions between all the relationships and causal factors in that person's life. This requires public service to see each person as being at the centre of their own unique system of relationships and causal factors.

The most effective and efficient way for public service to understand and respond to the unique and ever-changing nature of the complex systems that create outcomes in people's lives is to adopt learning as both meta-strategy and management practice. Public servants must develop learning relationships with those they serve, relationships that enable public servant and citizen alike to see and understand that particular "life as system". It is the job of this learning relationship to understand the ever-changing detail of each person's life context, and to explore ways to intervene in this system in order to produce desirable patterns of results ("outcomes") more frequently.

It is the job of public management practice to enable this learning relationship between public servant and citizen. It can learn to do this by treating all system scales (for example, "person's life as system " or "place as system") as complex systems that can be stewarded towards learning and adaptation through resource allocation, governance, and capacity planning, if all three are focused on enabling learning and adaptation.

Holons – the whole in the part

Another aspect of what we have learnt about the relationship between the H, L and S of Human Learning Systems is that, while we can see the different types of practice that exemplify each element, it is a mistake to see them as separate practices.

When we dig into any given area of HLS practice, we frequently find that whole is exemplified in the part. This may have something to do with the fractal nature of complex systems, or maybe it's the nature of this as an emerging paradigm – a mutually supportive, interdependent set of beliefs and practices.

The L and S in the H

We have learnt that effective public service has at its heart the moral purpose of human freedom and flourishing, and that in order to recognise that everyone in public service – from the people being served to all the public servants – should be understood as human beings in a complex web of interdependent relationships.

We see this manifest in "bespoke by design" approaches to public service, which build relationships with people and respond to whatever strengths and needs they find. We see it in management practices that purposefully and systematically use empathy to build trust.

And when we peer into the practice of the H, we find the L and the S.

Learning:

How else can you provide a bespoke response to strengths and needs, if you don't start with learning? The process by which public service comes to understand people's life context is a learning process – a learning process both for those who do public service and those they are supporting. And the bespoke interventions that are created in the relationship between public servants and those they serve are experiments based on learning. How else can public service understand the effects of those bespoke interventions?

Systems:

We have already explored how HLS public management practice views human beings as living at the centre of their own complex systems. We also see a systems perspective in understanding humans. A systems perspective helps us to see that there is no single point of truth from which a "life as system" can be seen. A person may simultaneously be a parent and a child, a victim of crime and a perpetrator of crime, a good neighbour and a terrible spouse. Seeing a person's life from the perspective of the various actors in their "life as system" helps us to see the multiple truths of a human life.

Finally, a systems perspective helps public service to recognise that a bespoke response usually requires collaboration. The range of interventions that may need to be explored and experimented with in order to create alternative outcome patterns are likely to require a range of expertise and relationships. For outcomes with the most complex set of entanglements, this may require collaboration between family members, community organisations and other civil society groups, healthcare professionals, social workers, and police and other justice professionals. A systems perspective naturally helps with recognising all these actors as relevant to an outcome, and enabling effective collaboration between them.

The H and S in the L

We have discovered that learning is the primary method for public management. Creating learning environments is the primary task of public managers, and change happens by enacting learning as meta-strategy.

And when we peer into the L, we find the H and the S.

Human:

When we have explored how learning happens in public service systems – at all system scales – we find that learning relationships are crucial to effective learning practice. Learning in complex systems is an exploration that human beings do together; incorporating the unique subjectivity of each person is crucial to the quality of the learning process.

And in a beautiful example of a virtuous cycle, we have found that the process of learning together is a great way to build trusting relationships between actors in a system. When people are able to view working together as a process of shared discovery, relationships of trust are created. This includes viewing the people being served as an intrinsic part of this shared learning process – people, and the public servants who support them are on a shared learning journey.

Systems:

Systems are the unit of analysis in which the learning method is applied. In order to enable people's lives as systems to continuously produce the best possible outcomes in the face of an ever-changing world requires collaborative learning – learning between all the actors who are involved in creating that outcome. Consequently, learning is required, not just within organisations, but across systems.

The H and L in the S

We care about systems, because systems create the outcomes that matter to people. And so it is within systems that we explore the interventions that create different patterns in people's lives, and we seek to nurture healthy systems, so that those desired patterns happen more often.

And when we peer into the S, we find the H and the L.

Human:

The first scale at which HLS practice creates a view of a system is that of a human life. And any scale of system that we choose to imagine into being is populated by human actors. It is therefore unsurprising that key elements of what we have seen as "healthy" systems are qualities of human relationships, such as trust. Similarly, we have seen that the work to create healthy systems seeks to build human to human relationships between the actors involved, breaking down hierarchy and the siloed perspective that comes from viewing people only as the bearer of a role.

Additionally, the diversity of human beings helps us to understand that a healthy system must hear a diversity of voices, and ask questions about who is included and who is not.

Learning:

We have also discovered that a healthy system is a learning system. One of the key leadership tasks that we have described with the label "System Stewardship" is to help the actors to experiment and learn together. Without learning and adaptation, collaboration becomes stagnation.

The learning element of HLS also continually reminds us not to assume that we have access to "the truth". We know our own truths, we need to learn those of others in the systems we create.

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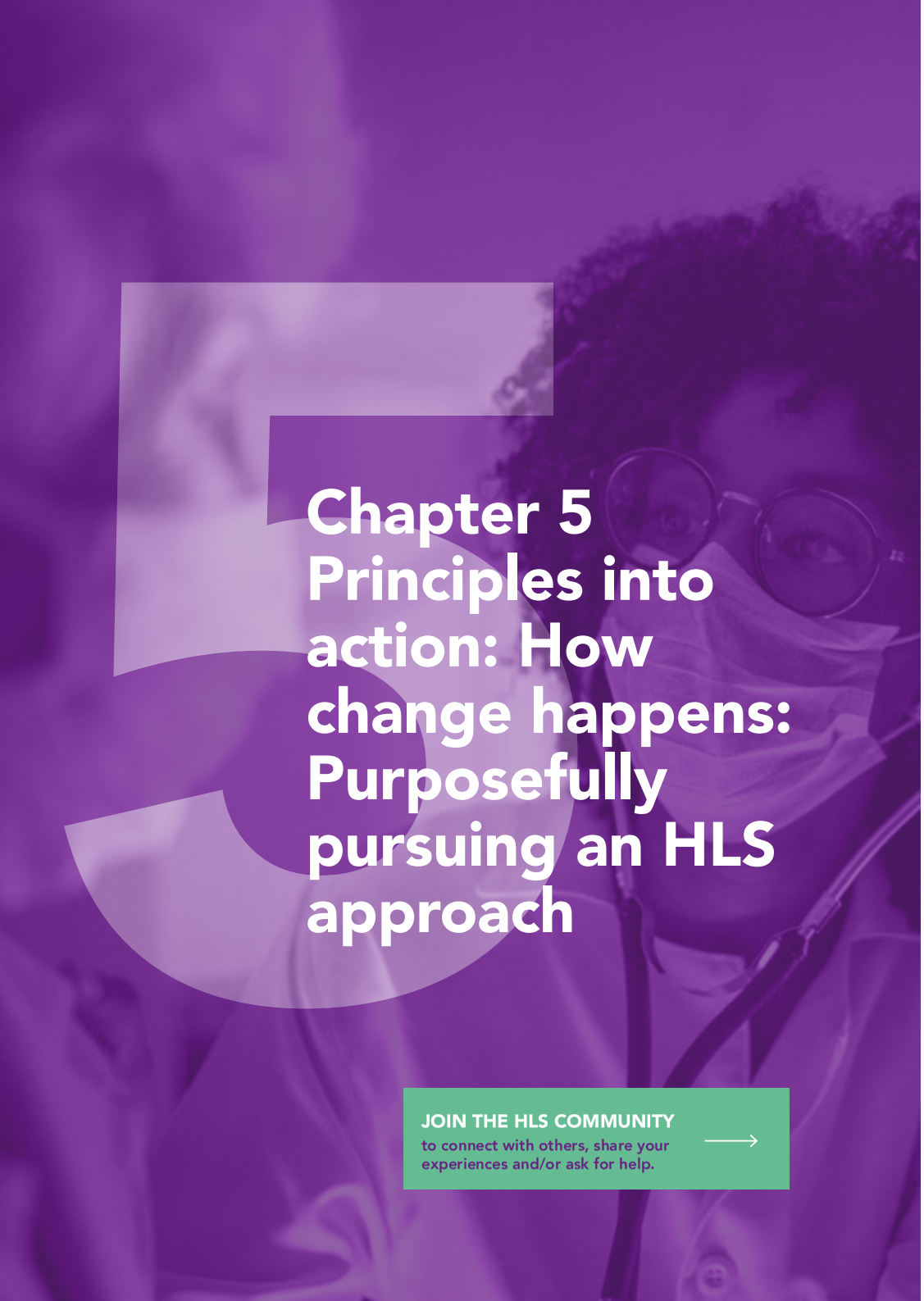

Chapter 5 Principles into action: How change happens: Purposefully pursuing an HLS approach

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Purposefully adopting an HLS approach

Authors: Toby Lowe, Hannah Hesslegreaves and Rob Wilson
Contact the authors

The first section of this work has outlined the Human Learning Systems (HLS) principles. The next question is: how might you put these into practice?

This chapter will explore the overarching process of change, and how to purposefully plan and enact the kind of learning-based emergent change that a shift towards HLS represents.

The chapter will outline the Learning Cycle model as the method for enacting change. It will then explore the nature of creating a paradigm shift in public management, and some of the key enabling factors that we have seen make such a shift possible.

HLS and the process of change

As we outlined in the Introduction chapter, the change that we're describing is a change of public management paradigm. That can feel like a very daunting prospect! The good news is that this paradigm shift can be enacted at lots of scales, and the desired change is an example of itself – it is enacted by adopting the learning strategy that you are trying to create. So, by taking a learning approach yourself, you help to create paradigm shift.

> *"Emergent strategy is about shifting the way we see and feel the world and each other. If we begin to understand ourselves as practice ground for transformation, we can transform the world."*
>
> **adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy, p 191**

The case studies have shown that people have used the HLS principles to support change in their approach to public management in two ways. Some people have used the HLS concepts and language to help them understand and articulate a range of practices that they had already (at least partly) developed. Others have

used HLS principles to purposefully plan and enact change in the way their organisations and systems operate.

These chapters are for those who want to use HLS to plan and enact change in their approach to public management, or who have adopted elements of HLS practice already and are looking to expand those to make a paradigm shift in public management.

The challenge – change is emergent

From the experience of those who have taken this journey, one of the key points of learning is that adopting an HLS approach needs to be an example of itself. This means it needs to be a process of exploration and learning, pursued with humility and curiosity, without an overly prescribed goal.

What does an appropriate goal for change look like?

From the experience of those who have undertaken these journeys, we can see that the large-scale change goals they set are at the level of principles or high-level goals, e.g. "we want to treat everyone as fully-rounded human beings", "we will optimise for learning, rather than control", and "we want trusted relationships between actors in our system, which provide bespoke service for those who are being served". These principles are the kinds of high-level change goals that seem to work.

Therefore, it would likely be a mistake to treat any of the particular manifestations/processes by which other places/organisations have achieved aspects of these as your goal. For example, while the Plymouth Alliance have used alliance contracting as a mechanism for resource distribution and governance, it's not necessarily the right vehicle for every circumstance. Creating an alliance contract shouldn't be the goal.

This fits the pattern of all the examples in this report. We think that they serve as inspiration and illustrations of what is possible, rather than recipes to follow or practices to copy. The way that these principles manifest themselves in your context will be emergent and unique to your circumstances. The expression that sums this up nicely is **"principles travel, practices adapt"**.

Learning as management strategy

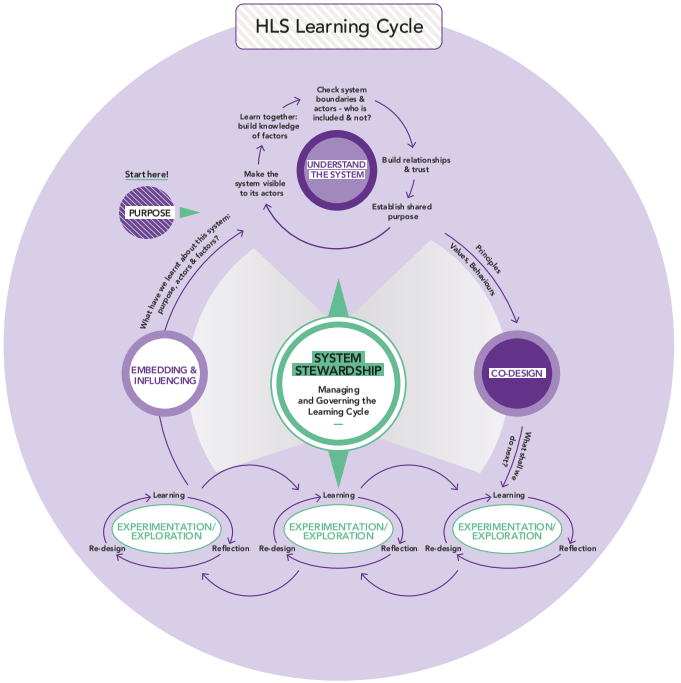
As we've seen in previous chapters, learning becomes the management strategy by which organisations can pursue emergent goals.

A Learning Cycle: a guide for your learning journey

As we described in the Learning chapter, we have a model to represent our current best understanding of the likely direction for a learning journey – a journey that enables you to find what works in your context. We call this model the Learning Cycle.

However, we should be very clear – this will not be what your journey looks like! This diagram represents a simplification and abstraction of a journey that will be much messier than this.

Figure 1: The HLS Learning Cycle



This diagram is a model of a journey, and like all models, it is wrong. The danger with a representation like this is that it disaggregates and sequences practices that are usually interdependent, messy and fractal.

So the model is wrong, but is it useful?

We think the value in this model is that it offers an explanatory guide to the overall public management approach to producing positive outcomes in complexity. Because if you want to create positive outcomes in the complex reality of people's lives, then it's hard to imagine that you won't need to:

- Understand the system(s) by which those outcomes are created
- Codesign and conduct experiments or explorations into the forms of intervention which change the patterns of results in those systems
- Learn from the results of all those experiments
- Continuously repeat this learning cycle as the world continuously changes.

(What we have learnt about undertaking each of these stages well will be explored in the next chapter.)

Essentially, this model serves two purposes:

1. For those who are comforted by having a picture of the overall approach, this provides comfort. It is a "certainty artefact". The uncertainty of working in complexity is challenging, particularly for personality types who like certainty. For the person who needs to see what the plan looks like, this provides the shape of a plan.
2. It provides a useful set of reference points for those following similar learning journeys. The identified elements of this journey are those that others have found useful. They may well be useful for you too. And if they are likely to be useful, you can allocate resources and schedule workload so as to enable these things to happen.

Sequencing

The visualisation of this model as a sequence of steps is a simplification that will not be applicable or appropriate in all contexts. However, the visualisation of sequencing allows us to highlight where sequencing may be useful.

Learning from existing knowledge

There is likely to be useful prior knowledge about how a particular system of interest works and who its actors are. It would seem to be a sensible course of action to draw on existing knowledge as a starting point for "understanding the system", while at the same time recognising that it could be out-of-date or incomplete.

Furthermore, it feels very likely that there are pre-existing relationships between actors in a system of interest, and these relationships will have specific power dynamics. This history will be important in understanding how a system works (or doesn't). The collective work of constructing a shared understanding of the system is likely to need to reference this history in some way (even if that referencing is framed as "a fresh start").

However, as with all knowledge construction processes in complex environments, there are significant limits as to what prior knowledge can tell you. It is important to remember that "understanding" is an active process – a process of action inquiry, of building relationships and trust (coming from learning together), and developing shared purpose. It is a process whereby a set of relationships and behaviours is becoming explicitly known to those who exhibit them. This cannot just be a process of study, it is a developmental process.

Understanding before codesign

Placing "understanding the system" prior to "codesign" highlights the fact that it may be useful for actors in a system of interest to understand themselves as a system – as a set of people and organisations who are in an interdependent relationship – before they start to purposefully intervene in the operation of those relationships and interactions.

Furthermore, it suggests that before actors can most meaningfully engage in codesign of experiments and explorations, they should have some sense of shared purpose, i.e. they should have a shared sense of the purpose of their explorations. This sequencing also suggests that developing trust between actors enables that codesign process to operate more effectively, as they are more likely to be honest with one another in that design work.

Limits to sequencing

However, as with all complex things, we should beware the simplicity of this kind of disaggregation and sequencing. It is possible that people can create a sense of shared purpose through conducting action-experiments together. Micro-scale experiments, such as those that emerge from a Trojan mice strategy, can have this quality. But if people are thinking about a purposeful change strategy, designing experiments without strong prior knowledge feels a higher risk manoeuvre than beginning with a process that seeks to "understand the system".

Learning Systems

As we saw in the Systems chapter, the **Learning Cycle applies to systems**. In other words, it is a collective

endeavour between the actors of any given system. This applied from the smallest scale (e.g. a person's life as system) through to the largest (e.g. a country as system).

The Learning Cycle is a process by which a system comes to know itself as such, and the actors within it begin to consciously explore, experiment and learn together as a way to enable that system to produce different patterns of results – which we call "outcomes".

What this model is and isn't

It is:

- An attempt to understand how learning *can be* enacted as a management strategy for public service
- Taken from elements of practice across different case studies.

The crucial words in the statements above are "attempt to understand". This is an early attempt to build a more detailed framework which can provide scaffolding for how these learning practices and relationships are enacted, managed and governed. No doubt it will be improved significantly as knowledge about HLS practices increases.

It is not:

A description of what happened in total in any of the case studies

A description of what *must* happen in any given context – there will be elements of this model that are not right for any given context.

In the following chapters, we will expand on the model to outline the relationships between Learning Cycles at different system scales. For now, we will begin to explore how learning as an approach to *public service* can become learning as an approach to *public management*

Changing the public management paradigm

Paradigm shift as a learning journey

As previously highlighted, **the adoption of an HLS approach has to be an example of itself**. In other words, changing how public management is done is in itself a learning journey that actors in a system must undertake together.

This can be thought of as a "double-loop" learning process. Double-loop learning enables reflection not just on what is being learnt, but also on the mindsets and structures that enable learning to take place. In this way, we can see how double-loop learning enables the potential for paradigm shift.

Figure 2: Single and Double Loop Learning

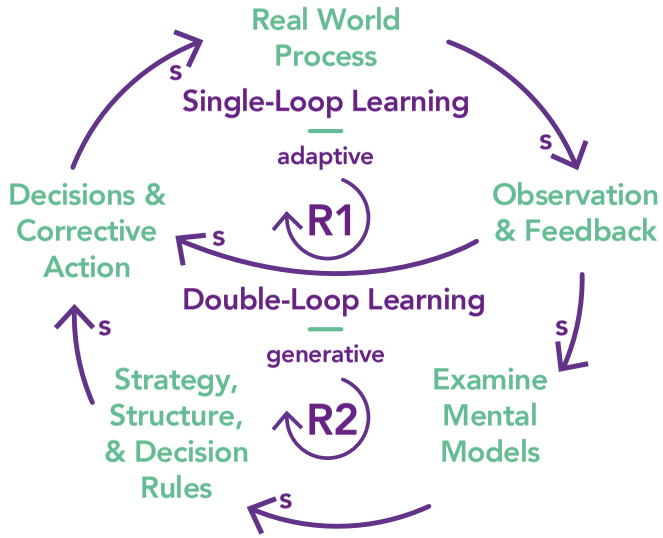


Image adapted from Exponential Improvement: http://www.exponentialimprovement.com/cms/causingstress.shtml

As we explored previously, NPM is a public service paradigm because it has a set of foundational beliefs, mindset and practices which are mutually supportive and interdependent. Double-loop learning brings into focus the relationship between the mindset, practices and structures that enact and enable the current way of doing things. It makes those mindsets, practices and structures the subject of learning and adaptation themselves. This is what it means to enact learning as the meta-strategy for public management.

When we describe the shift towards the HLS approach as paradigm shift, it is important to understand why we describe the change in this way. What is a paradigm, and how does one shift?

A paradigm is a mutually reinforcing set of foundational beliefs and practices. The classic example of paradigm shift is the change from the Ptolemaic view of the cosmos (the belief that the earth is the centre of the solar system) to the Copernican (that the sun is the centre of the solar system). These different paradigms shaped the questions that were asked about how the planets and stars moved, and how the observational data that was recorded was interpreted.

Over time, the accumulated observational data could not be made to fit with the Ptolemaic view, and so a new overarching explanatory story – a new paradigm – was required. At this point, enter Nicolaus Copernicus to provide one – and to cause a bunch of trouble for ruling power structures, who had invested significantly in the Ptolemaic view.

We suggest that New Public Management (NPM) is a paradigm in the same way as the Ptolemaic and Copernican views of the cosmos[1]. It is a complete and internally coherent set of beliefs and supporting practices and cultures: people are inherently selfish, so they need to be controlled by performance management rewards and punishments; competition creates efficiency, so we should create marketplaces in public service. We also think that the version of reality that it presents is flawed, and these flaws create many of the problems that are experienced by public managers.

There is a significant implication for viewing public management as a paradigm. It means that you can't just change some of the practices of NPM. Because each practice is mutually reinforcing – and justified by foundational beliefs – you can't change one thing without the necessity of changing the things that are dependent on it, and on which it depends.

For example, within an NPM frame, you can't simply decide to change the purpose of measurement to focus it on learning. Within an NPM frame, measurement is required to know whom to reward or punish (has this person/team/organisation met their targets or not?). So, if you change the purpose of measurement, performance management systems become inoperable. And if you can't reward or punish people, how will they be incentivised to do the right thing? And how will we know whom to choose among the competitors for contracts, if we can't compare their performance?

Therefore, to achieve the changes that a wide variety of people have recognised are necessary (for example, making measurement serve the purpose of learning) requires paradigm shift in public management.

It is also worth highlighting another important point about the beliefs that underpin paradigms. When we describe the beliefs that underpin NPM, **we are describing the underlying logic and beliefs of the paradigm, not the underlying beliefs of those who work within it**. So, when we say that the foundational belief of NPM is that people are selfish, we don't mean that everyone who uses management tools of NPM believes that people are selfish.

Instead, we are seeking to bring to people's attention the underlying logic of the paradigm. When we use the tools of NPM, we are buying into a set of practices designed around the idea that people are selfish, and need to be controlled. By using those tools, we manifest that underlying logic in the world – we make it real, whether that's what we personally believe or not. The argument of this report is this: if that's not what you believe about people, you can now choose not to manifest that logic. You can create a world that works differently.

If you want relationships of trust, if you want to enable learning and adaptation, it is immeasurably harder to create this reality using practices that were built on a belief in untrustworthiness and the necessity of control. This is the reality of paradigms, and the essence of the choice faced by public managers. If these things are valuable, choose to enact a paradigm that enables them. There is little value in complaining about a lack of trust and learning while using a paradigm that is designed to enact distrust and control.

This idea has been expressed in similar ways in a different context:

> *"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"*
>
> **Audrey Lord**

Paradigm shift as emergent – Three Horizons

One of the implicit dangers of describing change in terms of paradigm shift is that it makes it sound as though change is binary – either we have this paradigm or that one. However, this needn't be the case. We know that change is emergent: that changing one aspect of the world can lead to unexpected change in another. But to ignore the interconnected, whole nature of paradigm – to say that we can change just this practice without changing its underlying beliefs, and the other practices that support it and are dependent on it, is to pretend that the world is other than it is. And we're fed up of pretending.

One way to see the emergent nature of paradigmatic change, and to visualise the overlapping and contested shift towards paradigm change, is through the Three Horizons model.

Figure 3: The Three Horizons model

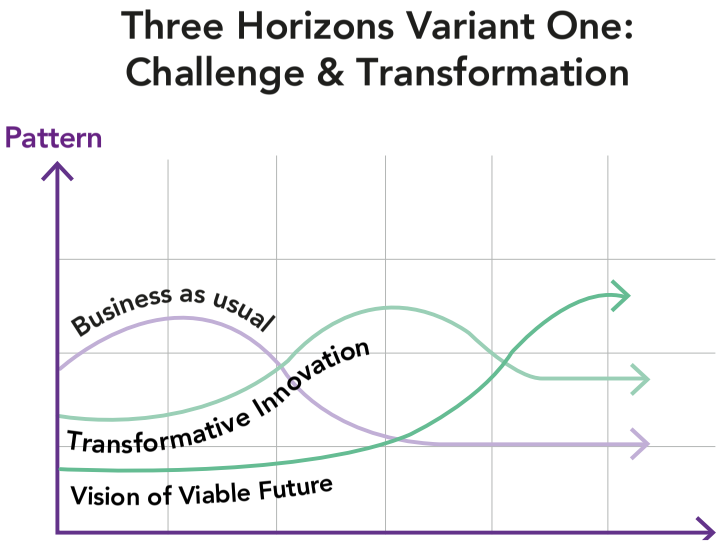


Image from www.H3Uni.org

We can see examples from the case studies of people taking a Three Horizons approach. We can see it explicitly in the Collective Leadership for Scotland study and in the work of Neighbourhood Midwives:

> *"The challenge is to work out how to offer women and midwives another option, without having to dismantle the entire system. A new approach that can start by sitting alongside the current model to offer a different way of delivering care which provides assurance, doesn't compromise on safety and which doesn't rely on unmanageable caseload sizes to maintain it."*
>
> **(Neighbourhood Midwives case study)**

The Three Horizons framing usefully highlights the fact that paradigm shift doesn't happen overnight – it isn't a single point in time. There will be transition points when practices of new and old paradigms sit alongside one another, and there is a valuable role in keeping the previous system running while transformative change occurs elsewhere. As part of experimentation and exploration, alternative public management practices can be tried out and movements emerge around them, building from collective courage to collective commitment.

Where/how do I start to create change?

One of the challenges of taking a "systems" approach to anything is that it can feel as though you need to change everything in order to change anything. This can feel paralysing if you're not careful.

Fortunately, those who have led processes of change towards HLS working have found that the converse is true – that change somewhere can lead to change everywhere. Change in any one part of the system can be infectious, and can lead to all sorts of other changes.

The key lesson from this is that you can start anywhere you find energy for change. Returning to our understanding of different system scales we have seen change begin at all of these levels. It can start with a single practitioner adopting a learning strategy with the person they serve. Or it can start with an organisation that wants to have a learning relationship with the people they serve. Or it can start with a commissioner in place, who recognises that they want to make that place work as a learning system in order to create better outcomes. Or it can start as a national initiative, helping places to create themselves as learning systems.

Given that change can start anywhere, how will you locate the energy for change?

Dissonance is the energy for change – find it

The generalisable experience from many of the HLS case studies is that dissonance and dissatisfaction provide the starting energy for change. This is the key point about paradigm shift. Like Copernicus, the desire to change our worldview starts when that worldview cannot adequately explain our experiences. This sense of dissonance – the dissatisfaction people feel with the overarching explanatory stories – provides the initial energy for change.

Wherever you turn you will likely find people engaged in public service who are experiencing a dissonance with NPM – because it is wasteful and dehumanising. If you have made it this far through this book, maybe you feel that dissonance too! How will you recognise it in others? Who is complaining about the lack of truth-telling in the system? Who is struggling with the emotional

consequences of pretending that managing against abstracted data is the same as making real change? How does that dissonance show up in the shared meetings/conversations you have? How does it manifest itself in the informal conversations you have about work? What kind of intentional conversations can you host which allow people to voice dissonance with the existing public management approach?

Validate, amplify and make sense of that dissonance

Once you have found others who are experiencing dissonance, how can you collectively validate and make sense of that dissonance? Creating platforms in which people can express countercultural, "heretical" perspectives can be useful in this respect. This helps to create a sense of collective bravery in your context.

The experiences which have helped to create people's sense of dissonance are likely to be quite varied. How can you connect people's varied dissonant experiences to the ideas and practices of the dominant NPM paradigm, or an HLS experience? A key question in this respect: does the HLS framing help people to make sense of their dissonant feelings? Those for whom the answer is "yes" make up your initial allies and partners in change.

Learning is the strategy, experimentation/exploration is the method

As we have explored above, adopting an HLS approach is an example of itself. People learn their way to HLS practice. Learning is the meta-strategy.

With whatever allies you can collect, how can you enact this learning strategy? What experiments and explorations can you design together? Where is the space for trying a whole new approach? The most likely places to look in your context are those that experience the most intractable problems – the "wicked" problems. These are problems where people will be looking for new approaches, and given that wicked problems are usually expensive, the chances are that resources can often be found for addressing these.

Many of our case studies have successfully managed a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, they have created as large a permission space for experiments as possible – in order to provide the opportunity for the kind of change that is noticeable – while on the other, they have created a safe enough space to permit failure. Because some of the experiments and explorations will necessarily fail. Where might you be able to create spaces that have those characteristics

in your context? What problem is big or expensive enough to require a new approach, but one in which experimentation and exploration is going to be possible?

Be infectious

If you're doing something different, others will be curious. You can develop that curiosity into an alliance by creating opportunities to share your experiences across organisational boundaries. Think of this as growing a network of allies by infecting people with your experiences. Remember – there is little value in trying to convince people. If what you're doing is interesting and useful, others will likely find it so too. All you need to do is share generously.

Making the money behave differently

As described above, to make lasting change in the public management paradigm in your context, at some point you will have to change the structural processes by which resources are allocated and accounted for; at some point you will have to make the money behave differently.

How can you cultivate allies in that space? How can you enable them to experiment with or explore different commissioning, contracting or grant-making practices? The relationship between charitable foundations and public service is particularly interesting in this respect, as charitable foundations can act as a force for change by offering seed funding, and otherwise de-risking alternative approaches.

When you encounter resistance, you can…

In any kind of change journey, you will necessarily encounter those who want to resist that change. At this point, some of the tactics deployed by our case studies include:

Don't try to convince sceptics

One of Donella Meadows' key insights is that you can't talk or "evidence" people into paradigm shift. It is the nature of a paradigm that those operating in one paradigm ask different kinds of questions, and value different kinds of answers, from those who are operating in another one. When you encounter sceptics, you do not have to try and convince them – in fact, seeking to convince them in advance may well be impossible, and is likely to be a waste of your energy. So, don't waste time or energy trying to talk sceptics around by means of evidence or reports.

If you're not trying to convince such people, what can you do instead?

Involve them in the learning process

"Don't report to people, engage them in the learning process" is one of the repeated lessons from across the case studies. For those you want to bring on board, how can you make them part of the experimentation and exploration process? (How are they part of "the system" that you want to behave differently?) How can they experience what "different" looks like at first hand?

Show and build empathy

It is worth remembering that very few people joined public service because they wanted to be obstructive. Almost all people in public service want to make positive, purposeful change in the world. How can you find people's sense of purpose, and offer an opportunity to explore that purpose through learning? Remember, everyone in the system is human.

Go around them

If people don't want to be involved, go around them. Change happens at different speeds in different places. It is useful to remember that "the future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed". No-one in an organisation or system is powerful enough to control all the spaces. Use your network of allies to construct an alternative space where the blockers' power is less apparent.

Meet resistance with accountability

If there is someone whose support (or at least acquiescence) is required to create an effective permission space for experimentation and exploration, then if all else fails, you can ask them to account for their resistance. For example, if the problem is that people insist on using particular performance management or commissioning mechanisms (such as Payment by Results), you could ask them to provide an account of why they believe that the evidence supports such a position, and ask them to sign off on that account. Then, when evaluators ask why such an approach was followed, you will be able to provide them with that explanation.

The whole point of this report is to help people to understand that they have a choice about which public management paradigm they will use. You can help people to see and understand the choice they face – by making it explicit, and by collecting and sharing information relevant to that choice (for example by the way that you frame evaluations).

Scale

The really good news is that the work to create and enact the HLS Learning Cycle can be undertaken at any system scale. It can be enacted in one-to-one

work between a public servant and the person they serve, right up to a national and international scale.

The key to making sustainable change is to ensure that you connect your Learning Cycle with a Learning Cycle at the scale above (we will explore this idea further in subsequent chapters). This larger scale takes what you have learnt from the context of your practice into the broader public management system that enables (and constrains) it. This connects with the point we have observed about "scaling" that we have seen in the Learning chapter – what is scalable is the capacity for learning.

Enablers

If the HLS Learning Cycle is the method for change, what are the enablers of change that we have seen from among the case studies that enable that Cycle to be successfully enacted?

The right team

Successfully enacting learning as a meta-strategy for public service requires participation from a range of types of role/actors in the system:

The public (those being served)

We have seen from case studies such as the Plymouth Octopus Project, Plymouth Alliance and Mayday Trust that HLS works best when those who are being supported are a core part of the learning process. If you get this involvement right, it can be a significant enabler in addressing any other barriers, because the authentic voices of the people being supported carry significant weight.

"Street-level" people **(deliverers of service)**

You need a range of people who work directly with those you are seeking to serve. These people will be the prime experimenters and explorers. It is their energy and drive to work differently by which the work will be different (or not).

Operational managers and team leaders (Learning legimitisers)

You need the involvement of those who manage the street-level people – those who are responsible for allocating workloads and other resources. These are the people who will be primarily responsible for creating and maintaining effective learning spaces, and for making connections across and between those spaces.

Resource allocators and monitors

At some point, you will need the involvement of those whose primary function is resource allocation and monitoring, e.g. grantmakers, commissioning and procurement people, performance management

people, finance and accounting people. Following the Learning Cycle will likely involve working quite differently for them and it may take them significantly out of their comfort zone. How can you support them on that learning journey?

Senior leaders (permission-givers)

At least initially, the Learning Cycle will require a permission space to operate in that will need to be protected from "business as usual" and from those with a vested interest in the status quo. Senior leaders are required to both protect the permission space for people to act in and communicate the value of working in this way to others outside that space. They are also the ones who are likely to be responsible for maintaining the focus of the large-scale learning systems – for example, by giving permission for the money to be managed differently, and by changing performance management structures.

Perhaps the most important role that senior leaders can play is signalling the importance of the change to the public management approach, and maintaining this signalling when things go wrong. Protecting the learning space as a safe space to fail is crucial if it is to achieve its goal.

Politicians (Connection to democratic processes)

Politicians can be extremely useful allies in developing an HLS approach. For example, by engaging with successive Cabinet Members, the Plymouth Alliance have experienced a supportive political environment even while political control of the Council has changed hands.

Learning from the Plymouth experience, engaging politicians does require a different form of dialogue. For example, an HLS approach does not sit well with campaign promises which make (inevitably random) target-based claims. However, the HLS approach does have two aspects which seem attractive to politicians: it enables a better experience of public service for voters (and generates large numbers of engaging, positive human stories) and it seems to enable public services to be delivered more efficiently.

Infection vectors

These are people who can spread the learning as a meta-strategy across boundaries through their contagious enthusiasm and their ability to share their experiences in a way which connects with others. Crucial to this role is authenticity – sharing experiences, warts and all.

If you and your allies are planning to embark on a learning cycle, it could be useful to check that you have all these roles covered. If you haven't got all of these people on board initially, how can you use your expanding network of allies to get them on board as you go?

Tools for action learning and sense-making

To enact learning as meta-strategy will require tools for codesign, action learning, and sense-making. Fortunately, there are a wide variety of tools and methods available.

Information systems to support learning

In the same way that NPM has shaped our service environment, it has shaped the way computer systems structure the design and use of the data in management and service delivery practices – for examples of this see Wilson et al (2013), Lowe and Wilson (2017), Lowe et al (2019), and Jamieson et al (2020). Currently, judgments about services are based on the principle that measurement can be used to make assessments of quality. In this logic, it follows that organisations providing the services can be held accountable, and sorted, ranked and/or resourced according to such a principle.

At the heart of this process is the use of data as the source for managing performance and assessing outcomes, which has been described as tantamount to being paid for the production of data. Here what counts as an "outcome" is a given, and the role that information systems play (be they paper records, spreadsheets, or service records systems) is to become the mechanisms by which data and information are collected, collated, compared and presented – on an industrial scale.

The widespread use of these tools creates and then reinforces the social reality ("what gets measured gets done"). This current approach to data and information in services, at the practice, management and commissioning levels, where new interventions and targets lead to new data requirements, often on top of existing ones, belies the complexity of the relationships that enable public service to function.

So, as well as a new approach to service delivery and governance, we need to think about how we use information systems differently to produce and use data in order to inform our learning and reflection. One idea for doing this is to take the opportunities offered by the new generation of information systems

to move away from organisation- or service-specific systems to shape and build shared ICT infrastructures as a "community commons".

An example of this is how we manage the identity information of people, communities and services. At the moment, there are two scenarios. The first is large social media and e-commerce firms monopolising the ways in which people access services and services make themselves visible for profit. The second is individual organisations and services collecting information about people and recording it in their systems. This means that people often cannot easily access information about themselves, and sharing information is problematic.

An alternative approach which would be to help people have more control over who they shared their identity data with, via innovations such as Data Trusts (where a dedicated organisation holds the data safely and provides tools to help people share their data when they need to). For organisations and services it might be the cocreation of a local civic register (or list of services), which could then be used to create personalised lists of services relevant to people's needs.

It follows that a key enabler for HLS practice is the creation of appropriate information systems and architectures.

The key questions for HLS practitioners are therefore: who is going to build those for you? How can these shared ICT services be designed and made sustainable? You will need some people who are able to build different types of information infrastructures with the purpose of supporting ongoing learning, rather than build systems that are tied to the delivery of particular programmes or organisational aims and hence need replacing every time the policy changes.

Opportunities

One of the key enabling factors for enacting an HLS approach is that NPM is so unsuited to operating in complex environments that it repeatedly creates opportunities for a better alternative. For example, when COVID-19 struck, NPM was so unsuited to operating in such a patently uncertain and dynamic environment, that when the virus first took hold in the UK, the initial public management response was to turn off almost all the instruments and practices of NPM.

Control-based approaches, using targets or KPIs as a way to extrinsically motivate public servants, will always fail in complex environments sooner or later. They fail because they deny a fundamental truth about the complex reality of the world – that we cannot know now what the right public service

approach will be in a year's time to create positive outcomes in the lives of citizens. The Windrush scandal, the Mid-Staffordshire Hospital scandal, the Baby P scandal, and repeated scandals involving private providers such as G4S and Serco demonstrate that the next high-profile failure of NPM is never far away.

The next time our public management approach becomes news, we can be ready with an alternative. Have your explanations and accounts ready; have a network of allies ready to work differently.

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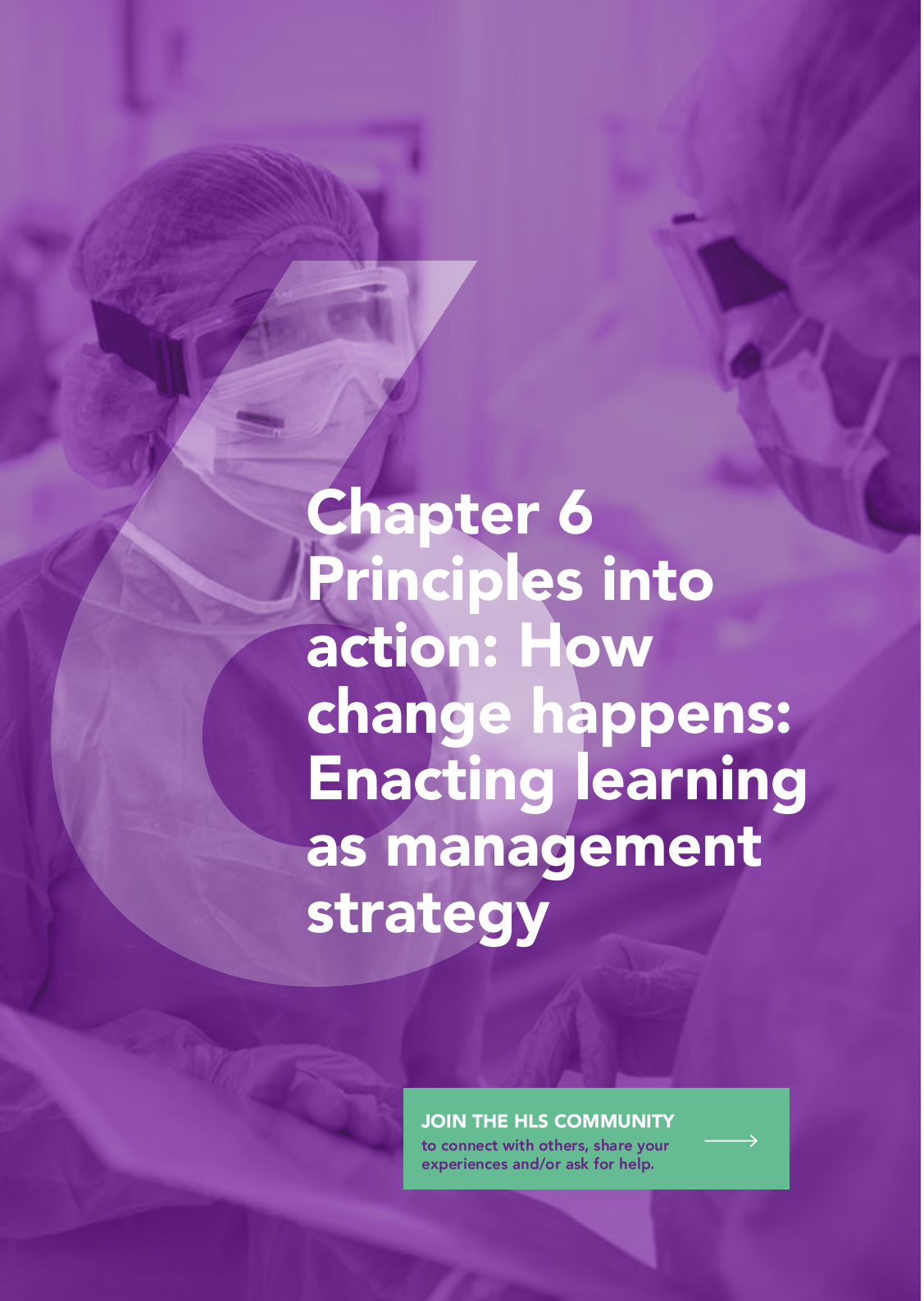
Endnotes

1 This is by no means an uncontroversial view. Thomas Kuhn, the person who drew our attention to the nature of paradigms in scientific discourse, suggested that it was more difficult to apply the idea of a "paradigm" to social science.



Chapter 6 Principles into action: How change happens: Enacting learning as management strategy

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Enacting learning as management strategy

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

Introduction

Whatever your role and whatever scale you work at, to enact HLS is to undertake a learning strategy, one that enables those involved in a complex system to see and understand the dynamics of that system, and to explore and experiment with that system, so that it better enables human freedom and flourishing.

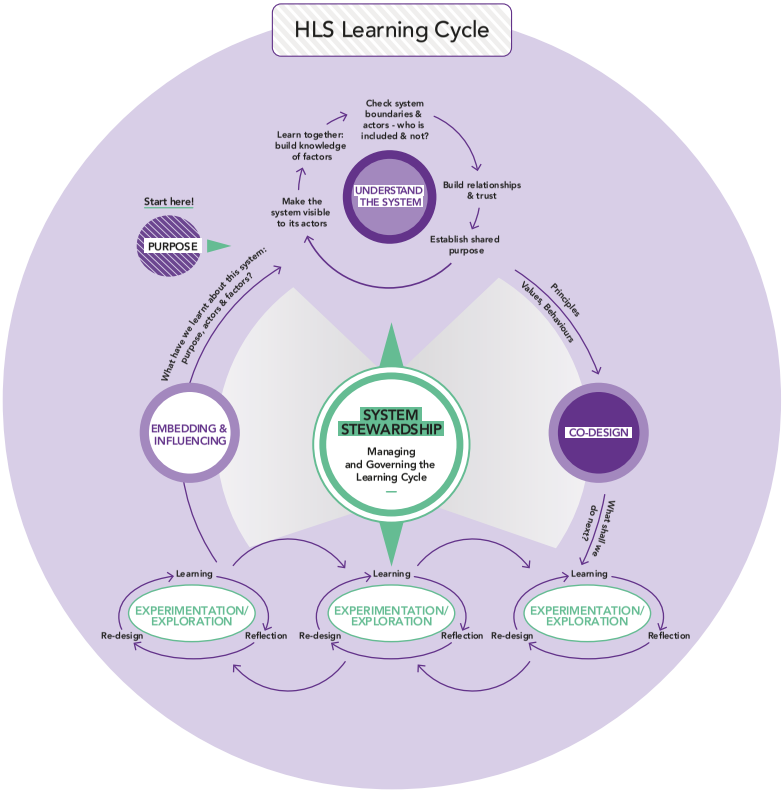
Across the case studies that form the backbone of this work, we have seen that the model of a Learning Cycle can be a useful guide for people to think about the way in which a learning strategy can be enacted.

In this chapter, we will explore what we have learnt from the different case studies about the detail of what action at each stage of the Learning Cycle entails.

The next chapter will then explore the relationship between Learning Cycles at different system scales. And in the last chapter of this section, we will explore what it means to manage and govern this Learning Cycle.

Undertaking the Learning Cycle

Figure 1: The HLS Learning Cycle



What are the practices that enable those doing public service to undertake this kind of Learning Cycle journey?

Fortunately, there is no shortage of practical advice and examples for creating learning organisations. The work of Peter Senge is the obvious place to start, given his role in developing the concept of the learning organisation. The Social Pedagogy chapter of this book explores how to embed learning as a principle for public service. Research in Practice also have an excellent guide, which contextualises learning organisations for public service.

The key to operationalising a learning strategy within a particular public service practice is the switch of management focus to "optimising for learning, rather than control".

We can see two sets of practices in our case studies:

- Undertaking the Learning Cycle at a particular system scale – what do we need to learn in order to achieve our desired purpose?
- Managing and governing ("stewarding") that learning cycle – planning and allocating the resources, and checking whether it is working appropriately.

We will explore the question of how to Manage and Govern the Learning Cycle in the final chapter in this section. At this point, we will focus on what we have learnt about the practices that actors use in order to enact each stage of the Learning Cycle.

Purpose

The act of defining a system's purpose is crucial, because that enables the boundaries of a system of interest to be drawn, and thus the actors within that system to be provisionally identified. For example, Plymouth Alliance identified and created a system of interest whose purpose was helping people with multiple and complex needs to live the lives they would want to lead. This enabled those acting as Systems Stewards to identify a *de facto* list of actors in the city who contributed to meeting that purpose.

Understand the System: actors and factors

The first element of the learning journey is learning about the system of interest. This can contain elements of 'traditional' social science research practice, in which previous observational or experimental research is used to build a picture of the outcomes that such systems create, and the identified causal factors underpinning such results.

But "understanding" is also a process of action inquiry – it is a process of building relationships and trust (coming from learning together) and developing shared purpose. It is a process by which a set of relationships and behaviours becomes explicitly known to those who exhibit them. This cannot just be a passive process of study, it is a developmental process whereby the actors in a system come to see and understand it as such.

From the case studies, we can see two aspects of helping the system to see and understand itself: the actors and factors in a system (see Systems chapter).

The first aspect brings actors in the system together to enable them to see and recognise themselves as a system working to achieve the stated purpose, and to build the relationships of trust and sense of shared purpose which are the foundations of a healthy system. We see can see this role as a form of systems convening – a social learning process where actors uncover a sense of shared purpose and learn about the relationships that enable them to enact it. This is the most common type of System Stewardship seen at this point in the cycle. It is evident in the work of Aberlour, Plymouth Octopus Project, Plymouth Alliance, EDUFI, South Tyneside Alliance, Wallsend Children's Community, and many others.

Cultivating trusting relationships between actors

We see from a number of the case studies that those seeking to enable healthy systems are working to actively cultivate trust between the actors. For example, the Plymouth Alliance use Appreciative Inquiry widely to build empathy across actors in the system, as a means of developing trust. They also ensure that their commissioning mechanisms – the way they allocate and distribute financial resources – cultivate trust. They do so by removing competition between actors for finances as much as they can, and by requiring open-book accounting from all parties.

We see similar purposeful trust-building between actors at the national scale in the EDUFI case study. In their work they seek to build "intimacy" between national and local systems within the overall education system in Finland, and develop approaches to learning together which both build and rely on trust.

The second form of understanding the system is a learning process in which actors explore the current knowledge about the factors that contribute to the system achieving (or not) the desired outcomes. For example, we see this type of causal loop/system dynamics analysis undertaken in the FCDO and The Children's Society studies. As we will explore in the next chapter, this also means learning about the factors that influence "the system" from the scale below, and from scales above.

Deep listening – actors and factors together

One important aspect of the practice of understanding systems that we can see from the case studies is that understanding the actors who comprise a system, and the causal factors operating in that system, are not two separate tasks. Many of the case studies emphasise that it is only by listening deeply to human lives in context that we build up a richer picture of the factors at play in a system. The Mayday Trust again serves as an interesting example:

> *"How we listen is critical – it's about intelligent listening, not just creating literal responses to what people say which can create a perverse incentive. An example of this is when people experiencing homelessness didn't access medical help as they felt uncomfortable in the waiting rooms and other people felt uncomfortable too, the sector response was to create 'the homeless GP' surgery. This may have solved an immediate discomfort but had the long term impact of further segregation and exclusion of people from their communities.*
>
> *This radical redirection [of Mayday Trust practice] was reached by listening to people and hearing individuals defining their own problems, not assuming what the problem was on their behalf. It gradually became apparent that when we listened to people, that currently the most significant problem in their lives were system barriers which got in the way of their ability to transition themselves out of their situations. These system barriers presented themselves in many ways such as structural (e.g. Housing allocations policies and welfare reform) or economic (e.g. the gig economy) or psychological (e.g. the deficit informed system not listening to their stories)*
>
> *These systemic barriers, instead of being recognised and removed, were becoming further hidden and deflected as charities and providers increased the focus on pathologising people's experiences and making these the problem of the individual and not of the system."*
>
> **(The Mayday Trust case study)**

This combination of deep listening as a way to pay full attention to context, and using this to analyse the structural factors underlying the behaviour of systems, seems to help address the problem of learning and adapting from "first order" analyses. Looking at actors and factors together, therefore, seems to be an important way to understand the **power dynamics in a system** – how power manifests itself

in terms of the relationships between actors and in terms of the structural forces that shape the patterns of results that the system creates. Understanding and (where necessary) addressing these power dynamics is a crucial part of creating a healthy system (see Systems chapter).

Developing shared purpose: a guiding star

Building a shared understanding of a system of interest is a process in which the actors involved learn together. This understanding can then be used to build a sense of shared purpose for that system – moving from the *de facto* purpose given by whoever is acting as a Systems Steward to a sense of shared purpose articulated by all the actors involved. This sense of shared purpose provides the guiding star for all those working in the system – it enables people within it to ask the question: this thing that I am doing, does it help to achieve our purpose? If so, how does it do that?

Shared purpose becomes shared values and principles

How is this shared purpose operationalised, so that it can function effectively as a way to prioritise and coordinate action? In the case of the Plymouth Alliance and Dorset Integrated Care System, this shared purpose was articulated as a set of guiding principles for the Alliance. These principles then manifest themselves in the governance mechanisms for the alliance, and serve as the basis for collective reflection and decision-making. A published set of principles served a similar purpose in the work of Sport England and GreaterSport in Greater Manchester:

> *"People could see that the core team were being true to principles set out in the beginning, therefore it was useful to have a list of guiding principles which were being checked against."*
>
> **(GreaterSport case study)**

Other cases articulate a shared purpose through agreements on shared values. For example, Wellbeing Teams uses a shared values agreement to govern their work.

These shared principles and values are used as the reference point which enables ongoing prioritisation and decision-making. These principles and values perform the coordinating function, and the basis for accountability, that Key Performance Indicators do for NPM. People use techniques such as confirmation practices, and Principles-Focused Evaluation, as ways to help one another to account for the way in which they are living up to those principles and values (and challenge them if they are not).

Codesign

By now, codesign is well established across a range of practice disciplines. The question for this element of HLS practice is therefore: how does codesign work as part this learning cycle?

What is being codesigned?

An important starting point is the question: what is being designed? A crucial difference between the learning approach in HLS and other contexts in which codesign might be applied is that what is being codesigned are not programmes to be delivered. What is being designed are the processes of action research that people refer to as "experimentation" or "exploration". In other words, **it is the learning process that is being codesigned.**

This is highlighted in the Plymouth Alliance case study:

> *"We then began to generate prototypes and experiments to test our learning and try new things. We were consciously trying to create a permissive atmosphere which encouraged and supported thoughtfulness, experimentation and learning. Lessons were gathered and shared and better ways of doing things were embedded in practice. Experiments might be very small – perhaps two workers in different agencies agreeing to work in a more integrated way, or structural e.g. abolishing 'staged' approaches to housing and moving to a bespoke approach or financial, or devolving a rehab budget to a group of providers. We gathered learning about these approaches through AE but also through the use of data."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance case study)**

Through the work of the case studies, we can begin to see knowledge which could help others to shape these codesign processes. For example, the EDUFI Innovation Centre developed some parameters for what an experiment is and isn't, and a set of tools to support the design of experiments:

"An experiment is:

- I am purposefully and curiously gathering feedback on whether my idea is good or not

- If successful, my experiment will further my broader goal
- I am not sure what the outcome of my experiment will be
- My experiment is to try something on a small scale before I expand
- My experiment has a clear beginning and ending
- The success or failure of my experiment can be clearly ascertained through evaluation

An experiment isn't:

- I will start calling my idea an experiment after it fails
- My experiment is so innovative that it is separate from other realities and goals
- I know for sure what will happen in the experiment, and I already presented the results in the project plan
- I'm experimenting at the same time in the entire country, or just for the sake of it for all users at once
- My activity is forever
- If my plans do not get realised, I will end up in trouble. This is why I hide my failures from others, often to be sure of myself." **(The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI))**

Other case studies provide useful examples of the kinds of questions which help to shape experiments. We can see this in the questions that Wellbeing Teams asked:

"We expressed the design as a number of questions that guided our experiments and learning:

People:

- Can we deliver home care that gives as much choice and control as possible to people who receive it?
- Can we work in ways that reflect what matters to people and support them to have better days?
- Can we intentionally connect people within their communities?
- Can we use technology to support people to be safe and well, and to connect people?
- Can we use a "reablement" and prevention ethos?

Team members:

- Can we deliver home care through self-managing teams, paying above the living wage, on salaries?
- Could people work in shifts, rather than being only paid for contact time (which usually leaves people with hours during the day when they are not required)?
- Can we recruit people for values, instead of experience or qualifications?

- Can we support people to bring their whole selves to work?
- Can we support people to grow and develop at work?
- Can we work in teams that feel like teams, where people feel connected?

Providers and Commissioners

- Could we deliver care through self-managed teams in a way that Care Quality Commission (CQC) accepted?
- Can we deliver our service within the same commissioning process, e.g. price per hour?" (Wellbeing Teams case study)."

Codesign and trust

Nicely illustrating the limitations of the linear presentation of the Learning Cycle, we can see that building trust doesn't stop at the "Understanding the System" part of the Learning Cycle. The codesign element has also been used by the case studies to develop **relationships** and **trust**. For example, in the FCDO case study we see that managers purposefully used participatory codesign processes to create key programme resources, such as a Theory of Change, and programme strategy documents. These participatory processes were designed to build relationships of trust between different programme actors.

Codesign and diversity

The codesign stage also seems to be crucial in enacting the principle of diversity that we have seen in the Human and Systems chapters. The participation of diverse voices in codesign processes is a way to ensure that the experiments and explorations created through codesign start from a recognition of the variety of human life contexts. Similarly, the focus on encouraging **diversity** in authentic human **relationships**, in which people bring their whole selves, is important in codesign processes, as this mitigates the danger of groupthink. Drawing on diverse experiences encourages a broader perspective, and provokes more creative responses.

Experimenting and exploring

Experimentation is at the heart of the learning cycle. EDUFI, The Children's Society and Moray Wellbeing Hub refer to experimentation as "their method":

> *"Carrying out experiments enables ideas, services and the like to be developed in collaboration with those for whom the solution is intended. Those involved in experiment activities at schools include children, young people, families, teachers, school staff,*

and external operators at the schools.

With experimentation, the solution is put forward for others to see and test at an early stage, allowing the testers to become developers of the solution. In other words, 'professionals' do not develop the solution in a disconnected bubble, but rather in dialogue with the target groups and stakeholders."

(EDUFI case study)

The language that different organisations use to refer to this kind of "experimentation" varies. Organisations also use the language of "prototyping" and "reflective practice". This variation in language highlights an important point about the nature of the action inquiry that organisations are pursuing as part of their HLS approach.

It is important to note that the goal of this action inquiry is not necessarily to mimic the methodology and approaches of the natural sciences. Natural science experiments require controlled conditions, which almost certainly don't exist in complex, real-world environments. People conducting "experiments" did not try and artificially recreate these controlled conditions in their action research. The language of "explorations" therefore seems equally applicable. When conducting an exploration in a complex, ever-shifting landscape, those undertaking exploratory action develop fast-paced feedback and reflection loops, asking the question: **what happens if we try this?**

"We use strength-based reflective practice sheets which take an appreciative inquiry approach to explore what worked well and what could be better next time. We ask the same questions of ourselves as facilitators, supervisors and coordinators as we ask of the people we work with. We look across the insights gathered and the different perspectives to see connections and themes in what's working and what's not. We've found that reflective practice is an important self-management tool. How we evaluate this complex system is something we are still working on as we have so much data!"

(Moray Wellbeing Hub case study)

Measuring in the experimental/ exploratory process

One of the crucial parts of experimentation or exploration is that it is undertaken rigorously. As exemplified by the EDUFI case study material above, it is easy to claim to be doing an experiment in retrospect. Rigorously undertaking an experiment or exploration requires the collection and analysis of information that helps those conducting the experiment or exploration to know what is happening, and to adjust as they go.

What information do people need to gather in order to understand what is happening with their experiments and explorations? This is an important question, because we know that measurement is important because it is a crucial part of learning together. To learn together requires data. And we get a significant part of that important data by measuring well. When we reflect on our practice, we can't simply rely on recollecting our experience of our work, because we know that they will be subject to cognitive biases – we will likely place undue importance on the most recent or positive events, and we may select those recollections which best fit our pre-existing worldview. Measures help us to learn, and the act of deciding about measures helps us to question if what we are measuring is really the change that we want.

There are a range of excellent guides for principles and values and toolkits to enable organisations and systems to use measurement for learning. The methods used by different case studies can be seen in the Methods chapter. Whatever the chosen method and framework for data capture, the crucial point is that the data is used for learning rather than accountability. In other words, it should be used for "improving" rather than "proving". The reasons why it is important to choose between "proving" and "improving", and why it's not possible to choose "both", were explored in the Learning chapter.

Collective sense-making

The collection of data – whether through measurement or other methods – is only half the story, however. By itself, data is meaningless. Meaning is given to data by processes of sense-making. We have seen throughout the case studies that a crucial element to the learning process is collective sense-making – where data that has been collected is put on the table and the partners work together to make sense of what it means. For example, we see this in the Lankelly Chase Foundation, FCDO, EDUFI, Plymouth Alliance and Liverpool City

Region case studies. In each of these, the collective sense-making practices are crucial, not just because of the instrumental value of what is learnt, but also because they are vital for building the trust upon which learning relationships are built. As a specific example, this is what happened when the Plymouth Alliance placed the data collected from 400 Appreciative Inquiry interviews onto tables at an open access event and asked public officials, public service delivery managers and staff, and members of the public to make collective sense of what it meant.

Who gets to experiment/explore?

One interesting point to note is that the potentially distributed nature of System Stewardship is that there are many different people and organisations that can support and enable these kinds of explorations. For example, the Aberlour case study serves as an excellent reference for a voluntary sector organisation leading places through this kind of Learning Cycle.

Embedding and influencing:

The final stage in the Learning Cycle (before it starts again) is the act of embedding knowledge gained from the experiments and explorations in the system. This means changes to the actions and mindsets of actors in that system, and changes to the processes and structures by which that system operates.

We see this at the scale of "person's life as system" in the reflective practices coached by Mayday Trust and that the people they serve undertake together. At the place scale, we can see this kind of embedding and influencing at work in the Lankelly Chase Foundation case study.

> *"We introduced reflective practice to learn about ourselves and the work. We used Systems Coaching to understand the systems (or nested systems) we were part of and our shared purpose. We used Deep Democracy to have better dialogue, build trust, make decisions based on collective insights, and address conflict. These methods were helping us to embed the learning from the experimental action we were supporting into our own individual practice and the organisation, and then taking the learning back into the experiments."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation case study)**

The final point concerning the practice of "embedding and influencing" is that it is required to operate between system scales. Some of the learning from experiments and explorations requires action at a greater system scale. For example, if a member of the public and their support worker find out together that moving house would be a helpful part of a person's flourishing, but they are ineligible for rehousing because of a Housing Association's allocations policy, then this learning requires embedding at a higher system scale, in order to influence change and lead to adaptation.

Next steps

We have explored what we have learnt about enacting the Learning Cycle from the case studies. Our next chapter dives deeper into this practice, and explores how Learning Cycles operate at different scales of "system", and the relationships between Learning Cycles at different scales.

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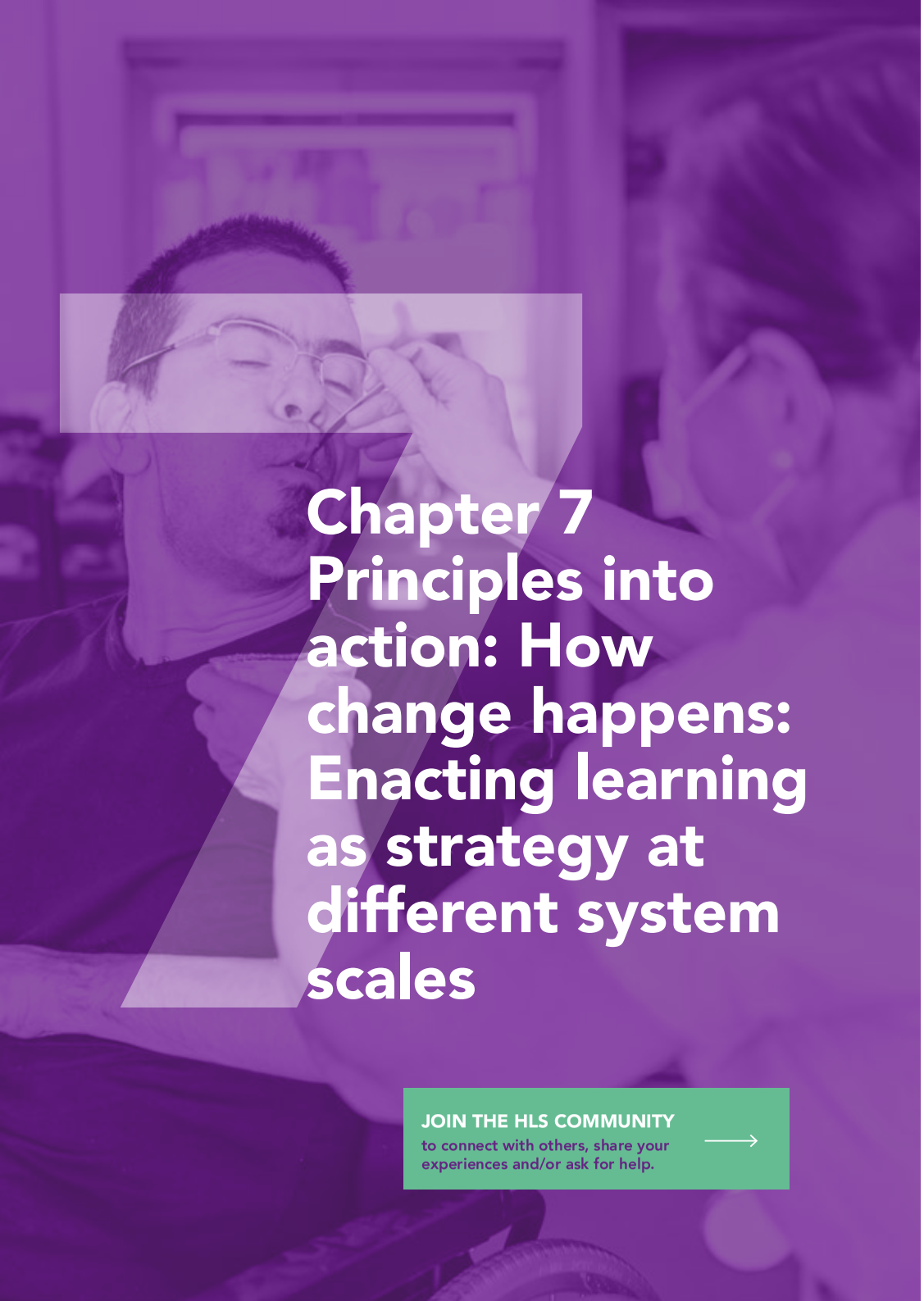


Chapter 7 Principles into action: How change happens: Enacting learning as strategy at different system scales

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Enacting a learning strategy at different system scales

Adopting learning as the meta-strategy for public management

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

Introduction

We have seen how a learning strategy can be enacted via the model of a Learning Cycle. This is a way to enact the Human Learning Systems (HLS) principles as a public management strategy.

We will now explore what it means to enact this Learning Cycle at different system scales. This exploration will cover:

- The content of the Learning Cycle at each system scale, and the types of question that frame learning
- The horizontal and vertical relationships between Learning Cycles

It is worth highlighting at this point that our understanding of Learning Cycles at different system scales is a new area of exploration for HLS. As such, it is one of the areas of knowledge that is likely to require significant further refinement, as all of the case studies develop and new ones are created.

System scales[1]

From the work of the case studies, we can identify four scales of viewing a system at which this type of learning strategy is developed and implemented:

- Person's life as system
- Team/organisation as system
- Place as system
- Country as system.

What we have seen from across the different case studies is that the Learning Cycles at each of these scales are connected. The job of the Learning Cycle at the larger scale is to create the enabling environment for a Learning

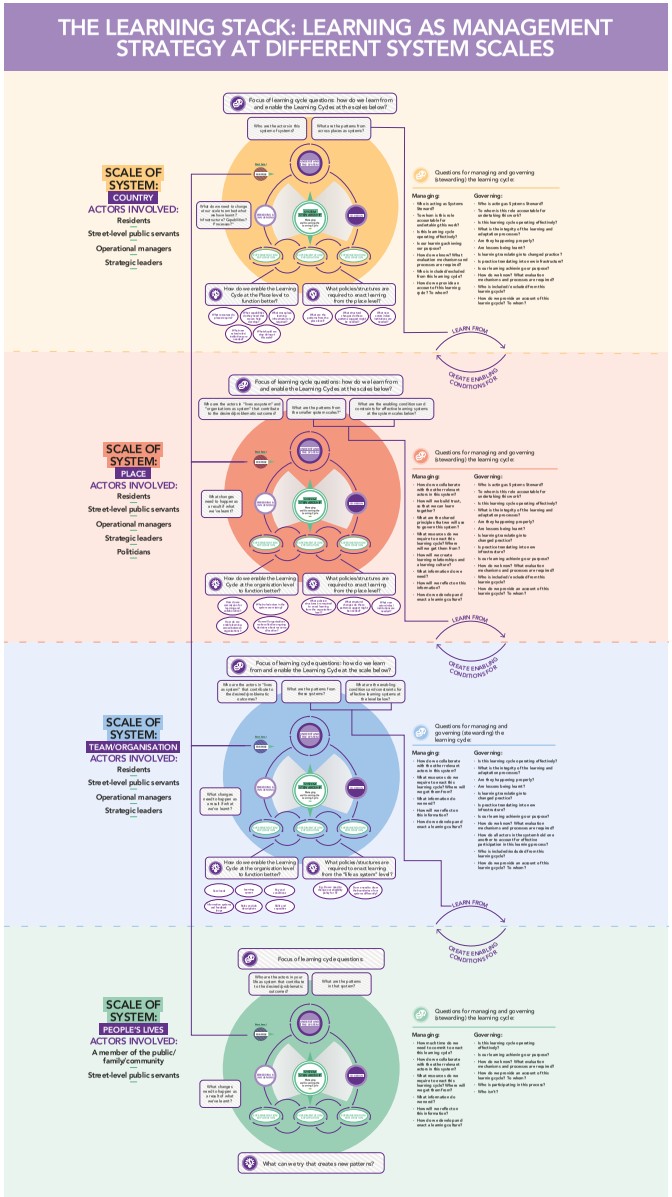
Cycle to operate successfully at the scale below. Thus any two adjoining scales can form dyads – a pair of system scales where the job of the larger scale is to explore the public management practices that enable learning at the smaller scale, and to enact and coordinate learning from that scale.

At each system scale above "person's life as system", we can therefore see two sets of practice:

1. Undertaking the Learning Cycle at a particular system scale. The content of the Learning Cycle is informed by two questions:
   - How can we learn from the patterns in the system below?
   - How can we enable that learning cycle (below) to function effectively?
2. Managing and governing ("stewarding") that learning cycle – planning and allocating the resources, and checking whether it is working appropriately.

In this way, learning as a management strategy can be enacted as a set of strategic choices at any and all scales of a system. This creates an interdependent set of Learning Cycles which can be represented in this way:

Figure 1: "The Learning Stack" – Learning Cycles at different system scales



We will explore the first of those practices in this chapter, and the second in the next chapter.

Devolved power

The relationship between the different system scales highlights a fundamental point about power in an HLS version of public management. In an HLS approach, power is devolved into the work – into the relationship between the public and the workers who serve them. The purpose of all the other management layers is to enable that relationship to function well.

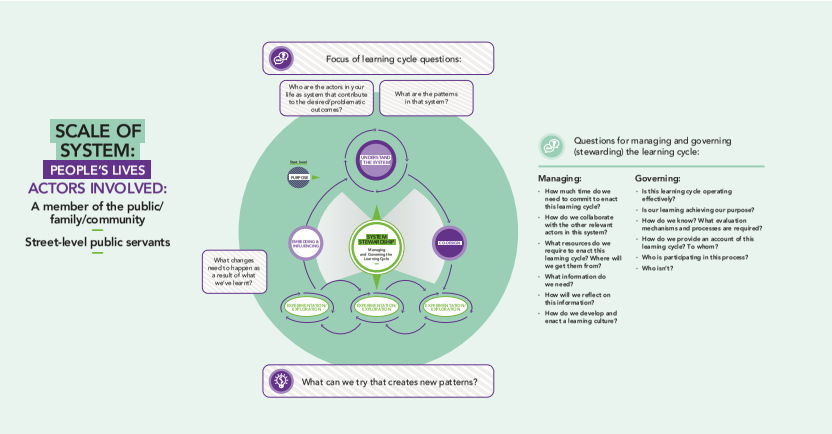
This is the foundation of the claim that HLS makes – to be public service for the real world. It is public service grounded in the real lives of those it seeks to serve.

Adopting a learning strategy at a particular system scale

Let us explore what adopting learning as a meta-strategy looks like at one of these scales: the scale of seeing **a person's life as a system** – as the web of relationships in which they exist.

We can see that this involves undertaking a Learning Cycle focused

Figure 3: The HLS Learning Cycle at the scale of "life as system"



on understanding the system that creates a particular set of desirable or problematic outcomes in a person's life – who are the actors in that system, and what are the structural and causal factors that produce the patterns of results that exist? We call this phase of the Learning Cycle "Understanding the System". Note that this phase will necessarily involve looking at factors that arise from many different scales – the global level will manifest itself as a factor in someone's life as system through issues such as climate change, while national scale systems could impact on people in the form of welfare or immigration policies. Looking at someone's life as system means understanding their relationships with the wider world. This happens at lots of different scales at once.

Actors undertaking this Learning Cycle then codesign and conduct experiments and explorations which affect the pattern of results of that system. They then embed what they learn from these experiments in the form of change to their actions and to the structures of that system.

Relationship between system scales: creating the enabling conditions and constraints, and enacting structural change

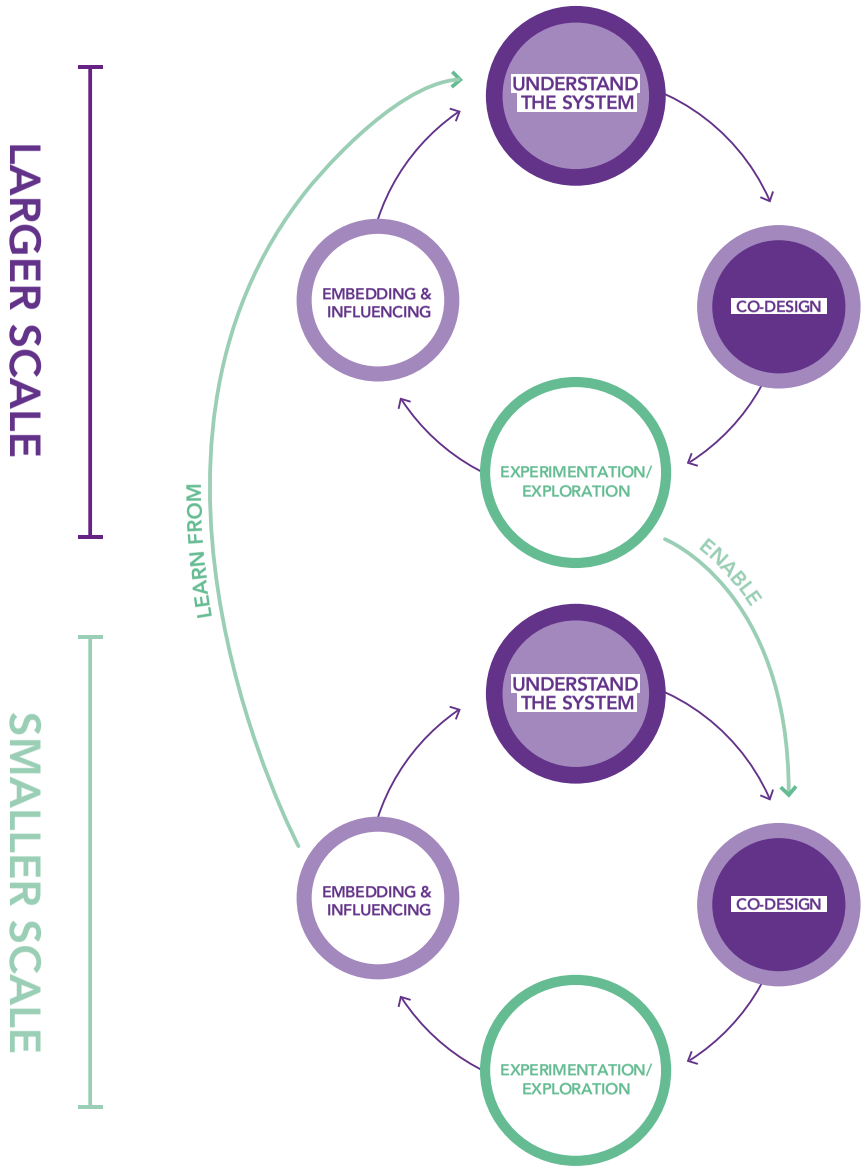
It is not possible to manage and govern how a learning cycle operates, and to enact necessary changes on the basis of what is learnt, solely at one system scale.

For example, a worker at the scale of "person's life as system" cannot enact an effective Learning Cycle with someone they serve if they have a caseload that does not give them time to do this. In order to run that cycle well, they need enabling conditions to be created from the scale above – in this example, their organisation needs to operate caseloads which give them the capacity to engage authentically with each person they serve in a Learning Cycle. They also need the organisation to create effective constraints for their work – for example, by saying that the role of the particular worker is to support people who live in place *x*, but not place *y*.

Similarly, some of the things that are learnt from the experiments and explorations into change in life outcomes will require change at a scale beyond the capacity of either worker or person to affect directly. For example, if the person needs to be re-homed, but does not fit with the re-homing criteria of a Housing Association, then this requires change in housing allocation policies at the organisational or place system scale.

We can represent the relationship between two system scales in this way:

Figure 4: A a dyad (pair) of Learning Cycles



Public management through a learning lens

When we look at the case studies and explore the "enablers" of learning-based public service practice, we see that for public service workers to pursue learning as a strategy, it requires the practices, processes and cultures of public management practice to be aligned.

This means that at all system scales larger than "person as system", enacting a learning strategy means the content of the Learning Cyclewhat people are experimenting with – is public management practice.

People are experimenting with alternative versions of public management practices, such as evaluation, contracting, and performance management. From the experiences described in the case studies, it does not seem possible to graft a learning approach onto contracting or performance measurement, management processes that focus on hitting predefined service specifications, or other forms of target.

> *"There is a strong project evaluation working culture in development work which focuses on the evaluation of results... The change and effects achieved by development work are left in the dark. Current evaluation models are inadequate for new understanding of creative processes."*
>
> **(The Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI))**

This is a reflection of the paradigmatic nature of previous choices around evaluation, contracting, and performance management. The reason that these operational mechanisms are done in a particular way is not that they are the "right" way to do evaluation or contracting. These mechanisms were chosen because they enable NPM to function – they are internally consistent with, and mutually reinforcing of, the underlying beliefs and practices of that approach. We should not be surprised, then, that a different paradigmatic approach needs to be operationalised in different ways.

> *"To do things in a different way which prioritises human relationships, potential, learning and empowerment requires rethinking how we do everything in the organisation, which is sometimes challenging and exhausting. It also requires that we explain why we need to do things differently to stakeholders – funders, commissioners and others who may not share or be familiar with our approach and may not*

> *recognise the value of it."*
>
> **(Lighthouse case study)**

The Collective Impact Agency's work in Gateshead explored attitudes to learning among organisations in the system of support for people in the borough. They found an overwhelming belief that "learning is a luxury" and that this belief stemmed from funding and commissioning practices which did not explicitly value learning. The Children's Society found a similar effect within their work to create more systemic responses to the problems of child exploitation – that the use of traditional target-based performance measurement and management tools impacted negatively on the capacity to create effective learning systems, even when the targets were self-imposed by staff.

> *"The decision to self-impose targets… probably also reflects anxiety that a future funder might wish to see quantitative data to consider follow-on funding – and the recognition that some strategic partners may use such data to judge our credibility. In practice, having numeric based outputs has potentially driven the team to think in a more traditional way, driving attention away from the qualitative impact of the work being done and incentivising quicker, less systemic activities."*
>
> **(The Children's Society)**

The experiences of our case studies match 50 years of research evidence in this field. These findings are neatly captured in Campbell's Law:

> *"The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."*
>
> **(Donald T. Campbell, 1979)**

A systematic review of research into the effects of target-based performance management systems found that over 80% of studies find evidence of gaming and 74% find evidence of people deliberately lying (Franco-Santos and Otley, 2018).

> *"the most salient unintended consequences of directive performance management systems are gaming, information manipulation, selective attention, illusion of control and relationships transformation."*
>
> **(Franco-Santos and Otley 2018)**

This helps contextualise the choice to pursue learning as a meta-strategy. The tradeoff is not increased learning versus decreased control; it is increased learning versus sacrificing the *illusion* of control. Existing target-based performance management arrangements are subject to high-levels of gaming. Thus, the control that managers thought they had was simply control over the production of good-looking data.

Change the structural drivers – fund, commission and performance-manage for learning

One of the striking lessons to emerge from many of the case studies is the importance of changing how money and performance management works, in order to create the enabling conditions for Learning Cycles. Thus, learning how to commission and performance-manage differently becomes a key part of exploring how to create healthy systems.

The resource allocation and control mechanisms in NPM are built on distrust. The core belief of Public Choice Theory, which provides the intellectual foundation of NPM, is that public servants are rational, self-interested, utility maximisers, and therefore cannot be trusted to use resources in a way which pursues the public good. The performance management and accountability mechanisms that NPM deploys are therefore built on Principal-Agent Theory, in which the "owners" of resources (Principals) have to constrain the autonomy of those who use them (Agents) in order to prevent them from using those resources for their own selfish ends.

The lesson from across a wide range of our case studies is that such resource allocation and performance management is inimical to the trust required to create healthy systems. Consequently, case studies such as the FCDO, Plymouth Alliance, South Tyneside Alliance and Plymouth Octopus Project use alternative resource allocation and performance management mechanisms as a necessary part of creating healthy systems.

As an example, Plymouth Alliance uses an alliance contracting mechanism to manage resources collectively across a system of organisations that support adults who have experienced homelessness, mental health problems, and substance misuse in the city. The Alliance Leadership Team makes collective decisions about resource allocation and management according to the principles developed and agreed by all partners. Different combinations of teams and organisations use these resources to experiment with new forms of service provision, collaborative working

arrangements, and skills development. The results of the experiments then guide reallocation of resource in real time.

These alternative resource allocation and performance management mechanisms both require and cultivate trust, and focus accountability on learning together effectively.

Competition between actors in a system for financial resources also seems to be similarly corrosive of trust. The Neighbourhood Midwives case study provides a powerful example of how competitive behaviour undermines the collaboration between actors required to make systems healthy.

This highlights and reinforces the key role that **commissioners have as Systems Stewards**. **Healthy systems, where Learning Cycles function effectively, require the money to work differently**, and that means changing practice for those whose function is to allocate and distribute financial resources to achieve social purpose.

> *"Changing the commissioning of home care requires systemic changes that Wellbeing Teams were of course not able to make, despite the success of the model."*
>
> **(Wellbeing Teams Case study)**

One of the most important lessons that we see from across our case studies is that to enact learning as management strategy, organisations change the structural drivers of workers' behaviour. For example, if you have System Stewardship responsibility at the scale of place as system, then you need to fund, commission and performance-manage organisations for learning.

In the South Tyneside Alliance study, this was framed as creating a trust-based payment mechanism for health and social care services:

> *"Creating experiments in working differently – trust-based payment mechanisms. [We created]... a series of experiments to try to embed a different approach, focusing on building trust and 'learning to say yes'."*
>
> **(South Tyneside Alliance)**

This was also the approach taken by the Liverpool Combined Authority in their commissioning and contract monitoring of homelessness outreach services.

We can see the same approach within Sport England's funding of work to develop physical activity in Greater Manchester (GM):

> *"Each of the eleven localities within GM was given a considerable budget to 'test and learn' whether a sustainable increase in physical activity could be achieved by bespoke changes depending on the structure, relationships and geography of a place. Over the last 2 years each locality has experimented with approaches to get people more physically active, working with different partners, using insight in different ways, approaching commissioning differently, adjusting marketing techniques and testing different ways to engage communities… rather than submitting metrics and measures to be assessed against key KPIs, localities join a reflection session every 3 months to feed in learning."*
>
> **GreaterSport case study**

These case studies are significant for two reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate that it is perfectly possible for public services in the UK to be funded on the basis that organisations will learn together, rather than funding on the basis of service specifications or other forms of targets or KPIs. **If public service commissioners want to do this, they can choose to do so. A precedent has already been set**. Furthermore, it is not simply at a local scale that this is possible. We see the same approach to funding for learning at a UK Government level in the FCDO's LearnAdapt programme.

Changing the purpose of evaluation – from "proving" to "improving"

One of the common public management changes we see across a number of the case studies is decisions to change the purpose of evaluation. Across a number of the studies, we find examples of evaluation being used as a learning and improvement tool for those undertaking the work, rather than as a mechanism which seeks to create accountability. In evaluation language, this entails a change from summative evaluation to formative or developmental evaluation.

> *"The adaptive management programmes also sought to transform the role of Monitoring and Evaluation teams, shifting their role towards learning.*
>
> *Reframed as mechanisms to support learning, the Monitoring & Evaluation and Learning (MEL) teams were able to support the programmes to reflect on their core purpose: "are we making a difference to young women's lives? And is this happening in the way that we expected it to and that we*

> *wanted it to?"*
>
> **(FCDO case study)**

Similarly, the EDUFI case study found that previous forms of evaluation were not fit for purpose, and sought to change how they operated:

> *"The Innovation Centre recognised that existing forms of evaluation and performance monitoring – approaches that were designed to "prove impact" and monitor resource use were not fit for purpose as accountability mechanisms for the work of the Innovation Centre: the [current] reporting model is largely based on ensuring reliability: whether the funding has been used correctly. There is a very limited accumulation of information from the process to the National Agency for Education. Systematic, continuous assessment is missing from the funding of development activity. The administration has no opportunity to participate in local development activity and make fuller use of the learnings. There is insufficient working time to direct development activity and make a synthesis from the learnings in the administration." [Evaluation pilot 19-20: slide 50]*
>
> **(EDUFI case study)**

Adopting a learning strategy at each system scale

We can see how learning as strategy was enacted at each of the different scales by exploring our case studies.

Enacting a learning strategy at the scale of "people's lives as system"

When public service workers are working with particular people (or small groups of people), the work to understand the system manifests itself as both relationship-building and developing a deep understanding of that person's life context. The purpose of this work is for the worker and the person being supported to learn together about the person's life context. Undoubtedly, the public service worker will learn from the expertise and experience of the person about their own life context. It may also be a process of revealing aspects of the person's life context to themselves – aspects that may have been hidden to them, because of their perspective. It is a learning process for everybody.

For example, this practice is manifested in the Mayday Trust case study, in which Person-led, Transitional and Strength-based (PTS) coaches work with people who have been

experiencing complex problems in their lives to enable them to begin to see these problems in the broader context of their lives. We see similar practice in the Dorset Integrated Care System, in which practitioners work with people approaching the end of their lives, and their families to "recognise what matters to them" and respond accordingly.

We have also seen from the case studies that viewing people from a strengths-based perspective is helpful in enabling them to be seen as whole individuals, rather than the bearers of particular problems. This can be seen in the work of Lighthouse, Aberlour, and the Mayday Trust.

Enacting a learning strategy at the scale of "organisation as system"

To enable this way of working for their street-level practitioners, each of the organisations above experimented with or explored the creation of new management strategies and practices, which created both the enabling conditions and constraints to support and provide boundaries to these practitioners' learning cycles. The organisations enacted a learning strategy by reframing the job of street-level practitioners, so that they no longer seek to deliver a prescribed service. Instead, they form relationships, and in those relationships explore and experiment with opportunities for positive change.

In the work of cases such as the Mayday Trust, Neighbourhood Midwives, and Likewise, a public service organisation decided to remake their organisational strategy as a learning approach. They went back to first principles – how do we serve the ever-changing, bespoke strengths and needs of the people we support?

They responded by seeing each person's life as a complex system. The job of their street-level practitioners was therefore to build a relationship with that person, and the practitioner and the person/people they were supporting would learn together as they went around the learning cycle. They would understand that person's life as system to see what patterns they could find. The worker and citizen would codesign and undertake experiments and explorations in that system to see how those patterns could be changed. And they would embed the learning from those experiments as changes in behaviour and structures of that "life as system". And those changes lead to the learning cycle starting again.

Another example is Wellbeing Teams, who developed a "self-managing teams" approach, modelled on the Buurtzorg example of neighbourhood-based home care in the Netherlands. Their management practice – their

resource planning and allocation mechanisms, role descriptions, information systems, and improvement feedback loops, training and skills development, etc – were all created to enable effective learning relationships between the care workers and those they served. And all these mechanisms, processes and artefacts were themselves experiments – they were produced and iterated by a Learning Cycle at the organisational level.

However, each of these organisations who developed and enacted a learning strategy at the scale of "life as system" and "organisation as system" encountered significant problems – because the public management practices at the scale above did not create the enabling conditions to enact their learning strategy. In particular, the resource allocation and performance management processes created significant obstacles to enacting the learning strategy. Sustainable change requires a paradigm shift in these public management practices.

What is required for sustainable change is therefore a similar Learning Cycle at the scale above – the purpose of which is to both enable and learn from the learning processes at the scale below.

A final aspect of a human approach to "understanding the system" at an organisational scale that we have seen through the case studies is understanding and responding to everyone's humanity – the people working in the system as well as the people being served by it.

> *"Wellbeing Teams seek to be 'human' to one another – both to the people we support and our colleagues. We talk about love and developing close relationships (whilst also being aware of boundaries and safeguarding)."*
>
> **(Wellbeing Teams case study)**

The lesson we have learnt here is that the deep understanding of "the system" (whether of a person, organisation or place) that comes through participating authentically in those relationships – and reflecting on them – is more than just an instrumental process to gain increased knowledge. Participating authentically in those relationships, and understanding the structural conditions that enable this participation (such as wages, caseloads, and communication practices), enables everyone to be the worker they want to be. We see this in the practice of case studies such as Lighthouse and Melton Council as well as Wellbeing Teams.

"Here are some examples of how we are human with each other:

- Weekly meetings: Wellbeing Workers use highly structured meetings, based on holacracy tactical meeting practices. Each week, they review their performance, set priorities, and raise and resolve tensions. This includes a monthly review and root-cause analysis of any incidents or complaints.
- Shared roles: The roles traditionally done by a manager are shared amongst the team.
- Buddies: Each Wellbeing Worker has a linked colleague providing peer-to-peer support.
- Coaching: The Wellbeing Leader provides coaching support to the team.
- 'Bring your whole self to work' practices: these include one-page profiles; gifts of the head, heart and hands; passion audit; individual work histories; and Wellbeing Action Plans.
- Confirmation Practices: Reflective practice and coaching are anchored into structured routines that use simple statements about what really matters. These help Wellbeing Workers to confirm what's working well and where there are opportunities to improve.
- Group 'Supervision'/'What if' cards: Wellbeing Teams use scenario cards (known as 'What if' cards and derived from real world examples) to explore issues of good practice and to conduct shared supervision.
- Monthly questionnaire through Peakon to help the teams identify what is working and not working (equivalent to a colleague engagement questionnaire).
- Person-centred team review every 6 months to review what is working/ not working (based on purpose, values and team agreements) and agree objectives for the next 6 months." (Wellbeing Teams)

Enacting a learning strategy at the scale of "Place as system" (see also Place chapter)

Community development

At this scale, there is a significant component of the initial stage of the Learning Cycle, "Understanding the System", which manifests itself as building horizontal "human to human" connections – to help everyone involved recognise the interdependent relationships forming that place as a system. Partly we see this in the community development practices of case studies such as Help on Your Doorstep, Plymouth Octopus Project and Moray Wellbeing Hub.

A crucial aspect of the human approach to understanding the system at a place level is the recognition of

the importance of diversity of human experience – there are as many ways to be human as there are human beings. This recognition manifests itself in a couple of important ways:

Developing relationships across communities – almost no-one requires a reminder from a public service worker that human relationships are important in how the place in which they live operates. People might need some support with the recognition that whatever view of their "place as system" is, it comes from the particular relationships, and therefore also the cultures, of the communities to which they belong. There are very few places that are home to just one community, and even those are unlikely to be totally homogeneous. Enabling everyone to genuinely hear the diversity of human voices in a place is likely to require purposeful work.

The public management approach to understanding a place as a system must also recognise and respond to diversity. In this context, it is a question about how a place is understood (or made "legible") by public bodies and authorities. In particular, it means that an authority should seek to understand a place's character at a small enough scale, and with enough qualitative detail, to resist the temptation to produce an aggregated and averaged-out view of the place, based solely on the thin abstractions of quantitative data.

This suggests that the scale of "legibility", and the decision-making that such legibility enables, should be devolved to as small a scale as possible. The appropriate decision-making scale is that which enables a bespoke public service response for each and every person and community. We see this in the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) case study – rather than seeking to determine teaching methods and child welfare policy programmes at a national level, EDUFI devolves decisions about these practices to municipalities, schools and teachers.

We see in the examples of Plymouth Octopus Project, Collective Impact Agency, Aberlour, Plymouth Alliance, South Tyneside Alliance and Liverpool Combined Authority what it looks like to enact a learning strategy that creates the public management practices – system convening, resource allocation, creation of learning spaces, governing, skills and capacity planning – which enable a learning strategy to be enacted at the smaller scale.

The learning journey at the "place as system" scale created new commissioning mechanisms – which commissioned for healthy systems – for learning and collaboration rather than (made up) "results". Furthermore, it created the spaces to learn from the activity at the scale of "lives as systems".

Their experiments created new actors and structural factors at the level of "lives as system" – for example, they created training programmes to ensure that everyone at the "lives as system" scale was able to provide mental health support. They created new services to respond to unmet need.

In many places, and many public policy contexts, it is possible for places to develop and enact a learning strategy independent of what happens at a larger geographical (regional or national) scale. However, it is always easier to enact a learning strategy at the scale of "place as system" if it is in the context of enabling conditions created at that larger scale. Fortunately, we now have examples of what it looks like for national government to develop and enact their own learning strategy, which enables and learns from the scale of "place as system".

Enacting a learning strategy at the scale of country (see National Government chapter).

From the work of EDUFI and FCDO, and Healthcare Improvement Scotland we can see what it means to enact learning as strategy at the level of national government.

These organisations used their learning journey to experiment with public management practice that support learning strategies at the level of "place as system". For example, they developed a Learning Partner role – part system convener, part learning support – to support learning at local levels.

They developed cross-place learning infrastructure, which enabled learning to spread between places and to spot patterns and themes across places requiring ongoing changes to the roles and structures that exist within systems at different scales.

Further, they created the enabling conditions for learning at the place scale by – for example – changing regulation, accountability and evaluation practices, and most significantly by developing resource allocation approaches that supported the implementation of learning strategies at the "place as system" scale. They did this by funding programmes on the basis that partners should collaborate and learn together. Crucially, they developed the mechanisms by which to enact these ideas through processes of experimentation with public management practices. They brought local and national actors together to explore how best to resource and regulate.

Questions for the Learning Cycle each scale

	Scale: Lives as systems	Scale: Teams/Organisations as systems	Scale: Places as systems	Scale: Countries as systems
Stage of learning journey	**Focus of learning cycle questions: (what needs to be learnt to achieve purpose?)**	**Focus of learning cycle questions: (what needs to be learnt to achieve purpose?)**	**Focus of learning cycle questions: (what needs to be learnt to achieve purpose?)**	**Focus of learning cycle questions: (what needs to be learnt to achieve purpose?)**
Purpose	What is the person trying to change about how their life is?	How do we help people to achieve their purpose(s)?	How do we help people to achieve their purpose(s)?	How do we help people to achieve their purpose(s)?
Understand the system – Build relationships & trust – Establish shared purpose – Make the system visible	Who are the actors who contribute to achieving this de facto purpose? How do the causal factors in this system operate? What is the shared purpose of the actors in this system? What principles and values can articulate this shared purpose?	Who are the actors in "lives as system" that contribute to the desired/ problematic outcomes? What are the patterns from these systems? What are the enabling conditions and constraints for effective learning systems at the level below?	Who are the actors in "lives as system" and "organisations as system" that contribute to the desired/ problematic outcomes? What are the patterns from these systems? How do the causal factors in this system operate? What are the enabling conditions and constraints for effective learning systems at the level below?	Who are the actors in the "places as system" that contribute to the desired/ problematic outcomes? What are the patterns from these systems? What are the enabling conditions and constraints for effective learning systems at the level below?

Co-design	Questions for codesign of experiments/explorations: • What questions do actors need to explore to achieve purpose? • What existing evidence/ knowledge exists to help guide our experiment/ exploration design? (Where should we start?) • What actions (experiments) will they take to carry out those explorations? • What data do they need to collect? • How will actors collectively make sense of this data?	What experiments with management practice do we need to enable learning at the system scale below? What experiments are needed to enact structural change from what has been learnt from the scale below? What experiments are required from learning from other systems at this scale?	What experiments with management practice do we need to enable learning at the system scale below? What experiments are needed to enact structural change from what has been learnt from the scale below? What experiments are required from learning from other systems at this scale?	What experiments with management practice do we need to enable learning at the system scale below? What experiments are needed to enact structural change from what has been learnt from the scale below? What experiments are required from learning from other systems at this scale?

Experinentation – Learning – Reflection – Re design	What do the experiments/ explorations tell us about how to achieve purpose for the person being served? What practices/behaviours can be changed directly? What requires structural / collective change?	What exploration do we require in the following types of areas: • Caseloads • Learning spaces • Information systems and feedback loops • Pay and conditions • Roles and job descriptions • Skills and capacities	Experimenting/exploring areas such as: • How do we commission for learning and collaboration? • What skills and capacities are required across organisations to learn effectively? • What roles/actors in the system are missing? • How will actors make ongoing decisions about resource allocation? • How do we enable learning across/between organisations? • How can accountability mechanisms promote learning? • What forms of evaluation will enable learning?	Experimenting/exploring areas such as: • How do we resource places for learning and collaboration? • What skills and capacities are required across organisations to learn effectively? How can those be provided? (Learning Partner role?) • What roles/actors in the system are missing? • How do we enable learning across/ between places? • How can accountability mechanisms promote learning? • What forms of evaluation will enable learning?

Embedding & influencing	How do the practice and behaviours of worker and person being served need to change to adapt to what we have learnt? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? To whom do we need to communicate the need for structural change? (changes in larger systems)	What changes need to happen as a result of what we've learnt? What structural changes do we need to enact? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? To whom do we need to communicate the need for structural change? (changes in larger systems)	How does our practice need to change to adapt to what we have learnt? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? What changes need to happen as a result of what we've learnt? What structural changes do we need to enact? What existing structures and processes are inhibiting a learning approach? How will we dismantle or repurpose those? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? To whom do we need to communicate the need for structural change? (changes in larger systems)	How does our practice need to change to adapt to what we have learnt? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? What changes need to happen as a result of what we've learnt? What structural changes do we need to enact? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? To whom do we need to communicate the need for structural change? (changes in larger systems) What existing structures and processes are inhibiting a learning approach? How will we dismantle or repurpose those? What resource allocation and performance management processes are required to enable this to function as a learning system?

Spreading learning: Horizontal learning at each system scale

Initially, we explored how to enact learning as a management strategy by undertaking Learning Cycles. We then explored how those Learning Cycles are connected at different system scales. The final layer of sophistication we need to add in order to make Learning Cycles useful in the real world is to give them a horizontal as well as a vertical sense of scope.

The representation we have offered in this chapter so far is of a "vertical slice" of system scales that contribute to achieving a particular outcome in someone's life – such as finding a job, or being healthy. It is easy to think of these vertical slices in terms of the traditional policy or implementation areas of public service: health or education policy, or employment support or social care at an implementation level.

However, the systems that produce outcomes in people's lives are notoriously resistant to categorisation in this way. A person's ability to engage in education will be strongly connected to their health, which in turn will impact on their economic prospects. A person's housing situation, their caring responsibilities, or their relationships with others in their neighborhood are likely to affect their mental health.

The real life interdependencies that contribute to outcomes are endless.

Fortunately, HLS has a head start when it comes to responding to the complex reality of outcomes, because it starts with a Learning Cycle rooted in each person's life – what are the relationships and factors that contribute to the outcomes that the system cares about? However, in the case studies we have seen (which, we think, reflect the reality of human organisation), boundaries get drawn around systems that respond to different outcomes. The Plymouth Alliance, for example, focuses on enabling adults to flourish. There is a separate system for responding to children. But there are bound to be overlaps between these two systems of interest.

We can incorporate this reality into the way that learning strategies are enacted by giving Learning Cycles a horizontal as well a vertical set of relationships – connecting different Learning Cycles at the same scale together (see Figure 5 below). We can see a potential example of at the "person's life as system" scale when Multi-Disciplinary Teams (workers from different organisational systems) form around a person. At the place scale, this could manifest itself in the form of the move towards place-based working, and place-based partnerships. (We see this at a hyper-local place scale in case studies such as the Plymouth Octopus Project). It is possible to imagine how the idea of cabinet government could be reimagined as a way to create horizontal learning at a national scale.

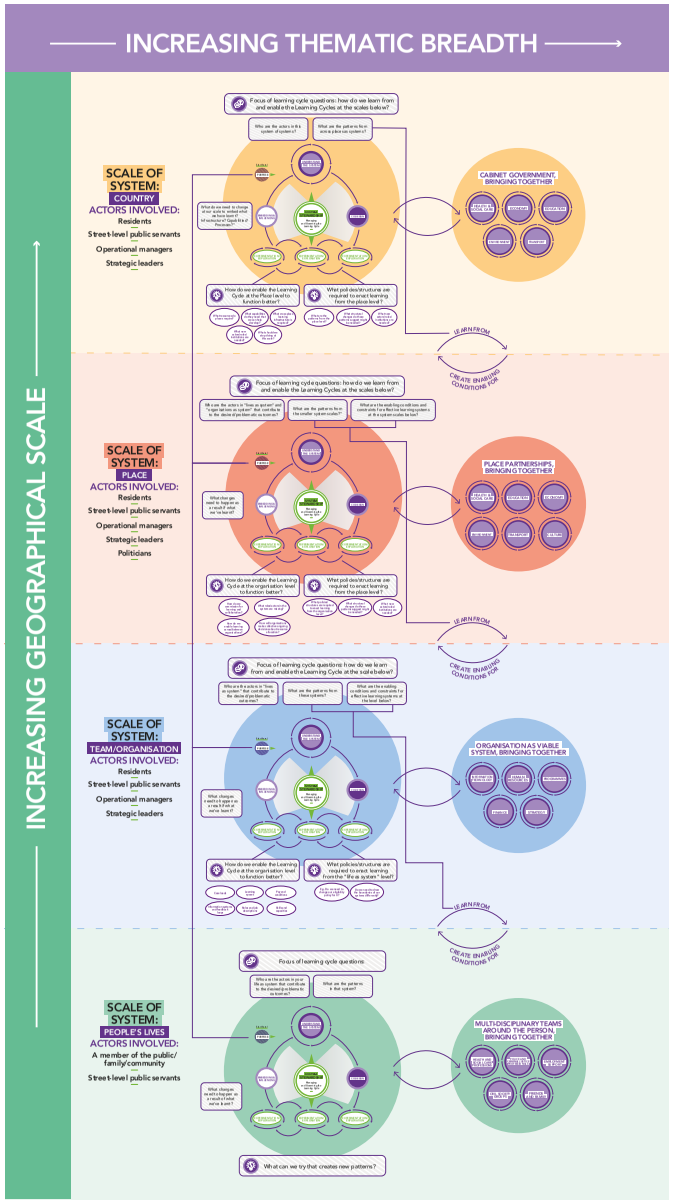
Spreading learning

We have seen from the EDUFI and Healthcare Improvement Scotland cases studies that the horizontal connection between Learning Cycles at the same system level can be supported by the creation of learning infrastructure which enables this knowledge spreading and exchange, and that building this "spreading" learning infrastructure is a crucial role played by the system scale above. We can apply this lesson at all system scales. For example, local authorities have a role in spreading learning between organisations working in a place. Central government plays a key role in spreading learning between local systems. This spreading seems to depend on the creation of a cross-system learning infrastructure. This is learning infrastructure, which cultivates curiosity between places, enables systems to share their learning and knowledge with one another, and for patterns to be seen across these systems. What is learnt in one system can therefore become the starting-point for experimentation and exploration in another.

We are right at the start of our understanding of the horizontal and vertical (and likely diagonal) relationships between Learning Cycles. This is an area that requires significant further exploration.

In this chapter we explored the different kinds of questions and topics that might be explored at each Learning Cycle scale, and the horizontal and vertical relationships between those. In the next chapter we will explore the other management task at each system scale – that of managing and governing the Learning Cycle itself.

Figure 5: Connecting Learning Cycles horizontally and vertically



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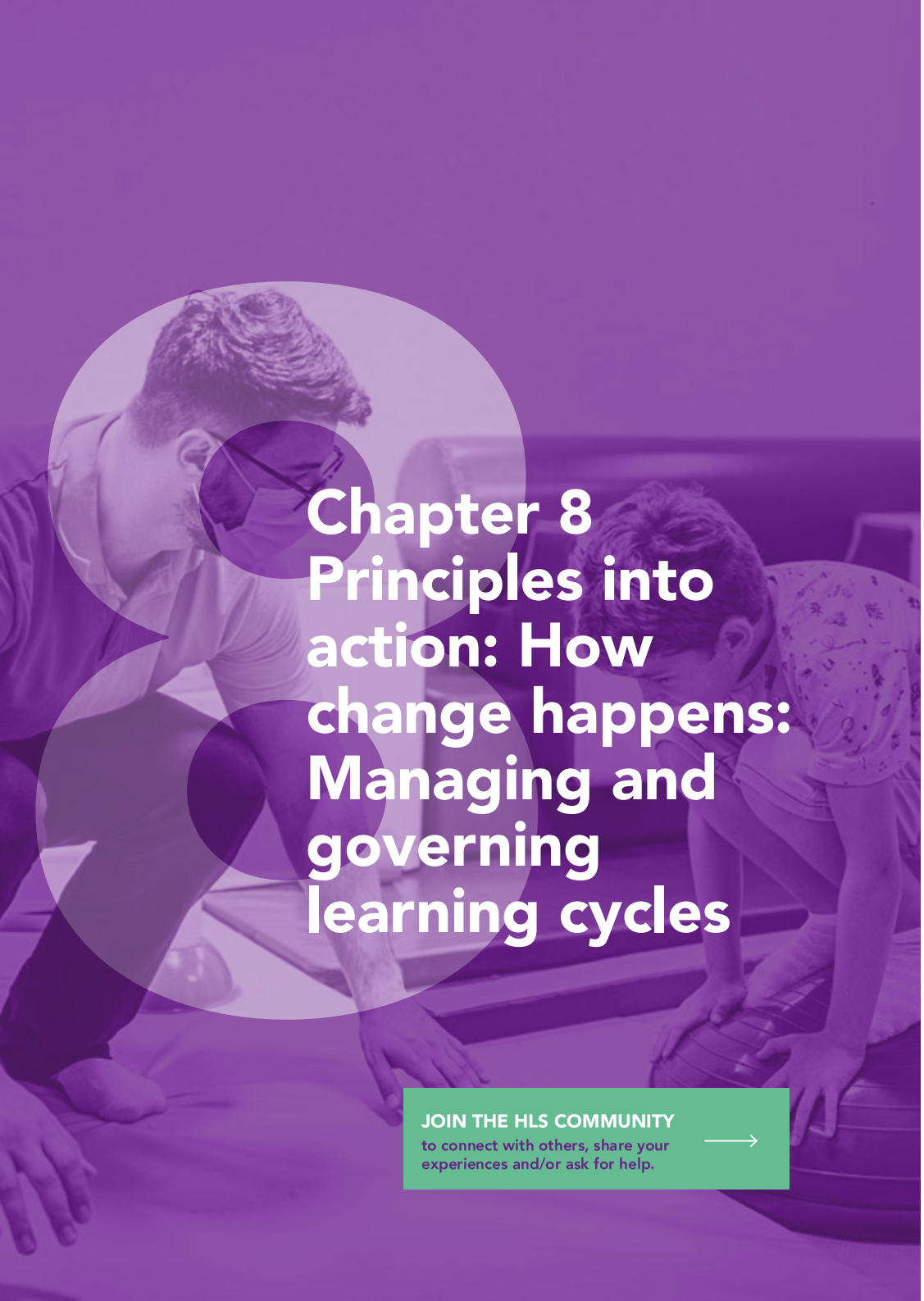
Endnotes

1 Scale is a slightly imperfect term in this context. For example, where national organisations are working in a place, then it confuses the idea of increasing scale from person > organisation > place > country. If you have suggestions for a better way of describing the relationships between systems constructed at each of these levels, then we'd love to hear them! Also, there are potentially other useful scales at which to view systems – e.g. internationally – but we didn't have examples of that scale in the case studies.



Chapter 8 Principles into action: How change happens: Managing and governing learning cycles

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Managing and governing learning cycles

System Stewardship: managing and governing a learning strategy

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

In the previous chapter we explored how Learning Cycles work at different system scales, and the horizontal and vertical relationships between different Learning Cycles. In this chapter, we explore the management and governance practices required to enact a Learning Cycle at any given scale.

The work of managing and governing Learning Cycles is the core task of System Stewardship, as outlined in the Systems chapter.

At this point, we should repeat the caveat from the previous chapter. Identifying the management and governance processes required to implement Learning Cycles successfully is one of the newer areas of understanding in Human Learning Systems (HLS) practice. As such, it needs significant further exploration and iteration.

Managing and governing collaborative learning systems

What have we learnt from the case studies about how to steward learning systems?

Managing

Reflecting on system boundaries

In our definition of "systems" we outlined the necessity of drawing boundaries around a system of interest (in order to get useful work done) and the artificial nature of those boundaries.

One of the important roles that a Systems Steward seems to play to create healthy systems is to continually reflect on where the system boundaries have been drawn. This reflection not only includes the formal mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of system boundaries (e.g. which organisations are on distribution lists and get invited

to meetings), but also addresses the inequalities that can prevent genuine participation (an person/organisation may be invited to a meeting, but has their perspective been properly heard?).

The work described in some of the case studies has started to explore the importance of keeping such boundaries fluid. For example, organisations within the Plymouth Alliance actively seek to keep the boundaries of their system of interest fluid by explicitly reflecting on the boundary line – which people and organisations should we be having relationships with in order to serve the purpose of this system?

We can see similar ideas being explored by EDUFI, when seeking to build relationships between the national and local aspects of the Finnish education system. This aspect of the work is only beginning to be explored, and there is much more to be understood. At this stage, it seems helpful to be reminded that our system boundaries are artificial constructs, made at a particular point in time. Therefore, there seems to be utility in regularly reflecting on where these boundaries lie, and keeping them porous by creating relationships across and between such boundaries.

Ensuring diverse voices are heard

The case studies highlight a broad range of ways in which diversity of voices in systems is actively promoted. Lighthouse emphasise this point when articulating their systems change work – they seek other perspectives than their own. Plymouth Octopus actively work to promote diversity in neighbourhood networks; Surrey Youth Focus does something similar for youth participation. The common practice across all of these case studies is that these Systems Stewards actively go looking for under-represented voices and for perspectives that are seldom-heard within the conversations that have traditionally taken place in those contexts.

Addressing power inequalities

Work that addresses power inequalities can be seen in the work of the Lankelly Chase Foundation. Their system convening work, and exploration of the legitimacy conditions for Systems Stewards contains much useful practice – including participatory grant-making.

> *"We needed to create the conditions for better quality engagement and dialogue. Firstly, the way we have traditional conversations often doesn't tap into the full potential of people's diverse experiences, talents and gifts. Secondly, difference cannot be neatly integrated on the terms of those doing the including – that is, without any social conflict or significant change in structures or power relations."*
>
> **Lankelly Chase Foundation case study.**

Creating learning infrastructure

Each system scale requires learning infrastructure in order to enable a Learning Cycle to function, and ways to design experiments and explorations must be created. Mechanisms to capture and share information are required, as are reflective spaces, so that people can collaborate in making sense of the data captured.

One way to understand the practice of creating reflective spaces is to understand them as infrastructure-building. As we explored in the Learning chapter, embedding learning does not mean taking the content of what has been learnt from any of the public service experiments and scaling it. Instead, systems stewards seek to create curiosity about what has been learnt in one context in other parts of their system.

To do this, they create learning infrastructure within their systems. The goal of this work is to spread learning from one part of their system to another – by creating mechanisms for sharing, and cultivating a curiosity about what others have learnt. We can see this example at a national scale in the EDUFI case study, in which the members of the Finnish Innovation Centre created the infrastructure for learning between the different localities they supported, and cultivated a curiosity through mentoring and coaching. In this way, they scaled and embedded the capacity for learning.

Alongside this infrastructure-building, we also see a recognition that it is necessary to dismantle the infrastructure, such as performance management systems which are hindering healthy systems and actively inhibiting learning.

One of the key lessons from the learning processes of the Melton case study is how people from different authority levels are engaged with the learning infrastructure. The lesson seems to be: **don't report your learning to people, involve them in the learning process:**

> *"In terms of the management and its involvement, the intervention was led from the beginning by the Planning Manager, who worked directly with a technician. This allowed the normally disparate aspects of a change programme to*

> *already be combined. This codesign is perhaps the most important aspect of this intervention, which allows for the learning to follow through to implementation."*
>
> **(Melton case study)**

Build a learning culture and learning relationships

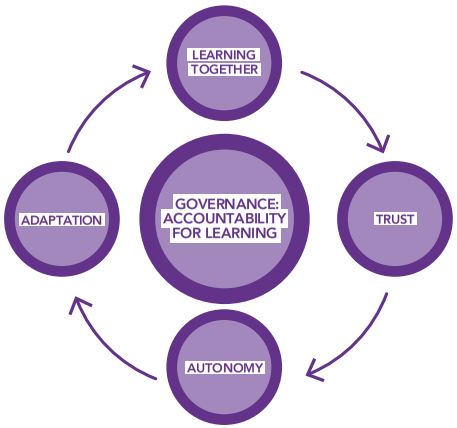
One of the key management tasks for enabling effective Learning Cycles at any system scale is creating a learning culture, underpinned by learning relationships between actors in the system. This has been the explicit work of the Collective Impact Agency programme in Gateshead, for example.

Learning and trust

In previous reports, we have highlighted the fact that trust is required in order to create the space for learning to drive improvement. In this round of work, we have been able to refine and develop our understanding of this mechanism. We have found that learning together is a mechanism to build trust.

At both national (FCDO, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and EDUFI) and local scales, we found that managers deliberately created mechanisms for actors to learn together as a way to build trust. The relationships of trust created the autonomous spaces of action in which actors can adapt their practice to the bespoke demands of particular contexts. And crucially, these autonomous spaces thus enabled adaptation to the changing nature of these contexts. To close this learning loop, the effects of these adaptations in the relevant systems provided further material around which actors learn together.

Figure 1: A virtuous cycle of learning together and trust



Thus funders and commissioners who fund for learning are able to establish a virtuous cycle of learning and adaptation. Empowerment deliberately worked on healthy relationships with their commissioners and service providers to enable them to share in their learning.

Learning together builds trust, which creates the space for autonomous action. Autonomous action enables ongoing adaptation to context, which, in turn, provides the material for further learning. The purposeful creation of this kind of virtuous cycle is the effect of learning as a meta-strategy, enacted by funding and commissioning for learning. This finding also connects with the research undertaken on psychological safety and learning.

We can see this in the South Tyneside Alliance case study, when they describe the effects of learning together:

> *"The outcome was impressive, in terms of both the impact of practices using their own data to drive patient-centred improvements and also the effect that the general approach had on developing trust and improving relationships between the CCG [Clinical Commissioning Group] and practices."*
>
> **(South Tyneside Alliance)**

Building a positive error culture

We have seen from across the case studies that it is crucial for public managers to build a "positive error culture" – a culture in which the expectation is that people talk about their mistakes and uncertainties, because this is what enables people to learn together. As we can see from the FCDO case study, a positive error culture relies on particular financial structures being in place – it is exceptionally difficult to build a positive error culture if the payment mechanisms, and contracting arrangements only reward success and punish failure. For example, Payment by Results contracting is toxic to the creation of positive error cultures. The adaptive management processes of FCDO's case study seek to embed a positive error culture by:

- Creating job security for programme delivery staff
- Explicitly signalling that "failure" is allowed as part of the experimental process
- Removing competition between actors for programme funds.

Addressing structural factors seems to be necessary, but not sufficient for creating a positive error culture. The EDUFI case study found that mentoring and trust-building work was also required in "daring to fail":

> *"Through theory and mentoring we supported the idea of 'dare to fail'. We discovered that it takes time to build trust and talk about failures and mistakes. All teams needed time to try out things, one step at the time, and to discover the limits for experimenting in order not to risk too much."*
>
> **(Evaluation Report Innovation Centre, page 11)**

The importance of developing a positive error culture for government, and practices which help to develop that culture, have been highlighted in recent "Fail Forward" work by the Centre for Public Impact. Significant work has also been undertaken to develop Learning Communities as ways to support teams of people in talking effectively about mistakes and uncertainties.

Skills and capacity-building

Managing a learning cycle also means ensuring that staff have the skills and capabilities required to learn together. We have seen system leadership training deployed as a useful capability building mechanism. For example, the Plymouth Alliance used the Leadership Centre's programme and others have used this one from The Staff College. The Collective Leadership for Scotland case study describes how they developed their own programme for leaders to develop a learning culture – "a spirit of inquiry" – by helping them to create their own "action inquiry" processes.

Reframing "expert identities"

Another aspect of helping staff to develop a learning culture is helping them to challenge aspects of their professional identities that hamper their ability to participate effectively in shared learning at a system level. The EDUFI case study raises an interesting point about an "expert" identity and its impact on learning culture and relationships. They found tension between the "expert" identity that public officials had been expected to exhibit – ("I have expertise in this subject, so I am expected to know the right answer to any given problem") – and co-learning processes. They described the change in identity required of public officials from experts to 'inspirers' of curiosity and teamwork.

This shift in identity is the corollary of the epistemological shift required when working in complex systems. Because it is impossible to have complete knowledge of how a complex system works, we are required to be humble about any knowledge claims we make about how that system operates. The shift from "expert who knows the answers" to a person who inspires curiosity can be seen as an appropriate response to learning in complexity.

> *"Public officials are not anymore the 'experts sitting in the room', and their role becomes to encourage people to share, learn and contribute – in a way, they become system experts. There is a need for switching from operator with pre-settled answers to an inspirer engaging in teamwork. They are expected to question their own identity and role within the system."*
>
> **(EDUFI case study)**

> *"Participants – and in particular public officials – were encouraged through mentoring sessions to reflect on the limits of their knowledge and expertise boundaries. These were necessary to make them stop thinking of themselves as experts – but also make sure other participants would stop seeing them as experts and expecting from them to know the truth. These elements were key to create a psychological safety environment and make participants think of a notion of collective knowledge where the input of each of the participants was important to cocreate and facilitate a learning environment."*
>
> **(EDUFI Case study)**

Governing

Creating effective governance arrangements for the learning cycle may be the most important long-term role that a Systems Steward plays, as it is the governance arrangements that ensure accountability, equity, and alignment with purpose.

The key questions that governance arrangements wrestle with are:

- Who gets to decide what appropriate learning practices look like?
- How will organisations hold one another accountable for following agreed practices and values?
- What legal and organisational structures are required to underpin governance processes?
- Is the learning process happening in the way we expected?
- Do we need to change it in any way?

As an example, the South Tyneside Alliance created an Alliance Charter, which was:

> *"Signed by the CCG, Council, two Foundation Trusts, and the voluntary sector network (Healthnet). The charter includes a set of principles that guide the way leaders in the system undertake their role. It has a top-line commitment that we will reach consensus decisions on the basis of 'best for the person, best for the system'. The alliancing approach includes collaborative decision-making structures for deciding local priorities, taking decisions about proposals and leading local change programmes."*
>
> **(South Tyneside Alliance case study)**

Governing the learning cycle

If what is being governed is the process of learning together, how does such governance operate? In previous HLS case studies, such as the Plymouth Alliance, we have seen how an agreed set of shared principles serves as the foundation of shared governance. The members of the Alliance leadership hold one another to account for living these principles.

The Lighthouse case study demonstrates that shared values can play a similar role in governing learning processes – and also the way in which reflective practice can be a governance mechanism:

> *"We regularly reflect together critically on our practice and progress as a team using our values as a practical set of compass points to evaluate whether what we are doing is actually aligned with our values. We coproduced our values through a participatory dialogic process within the team, strongly guided by considering what values young people had told us were important to them… When we reflect, we do so not with a narrow view of values as implying a set of 'behaviours' which we then have to perform, but rather as guiding principles, where it is inevitable that we will sometimes recognise in reflection we have not lived up to them in practice. We understand that the open shared learning from this as an iterative reflective process is the crucial way in which we keep our ongoing practice and development aligned with our values."*
>
> **(Lighthouse case study)**

Accountability

Adopting learning as a management strategy requires rethinking accountability mechanisms for organisations. The good news is that this is work we knew we had to do, because existing target-based performance accountability mechanisms fail in complex environments.

In short, the problem is:

- We can hold people/teams/organisations accountable for outputs because whether someone delivers an output or not is (mostly) under their control, e.g. holding someone accountable for whether or not they delivered a workshop is a reasonable act. But performance managing against outputs creates all sorts of perverse incentives, which end up making performance worse.
- We would like to hold people/teams/organisations accountable for delivering outcomes, but it is not reasonable to do so, because outcomes are emergent properties of complex systems – they're not under the control of a person/team/organisation. For example, holding someone accountable for whether the person they're working with gets and keeps a job is not a reasonable act. When people try to do this, it creates gaming (turning everyone's job into the production of good-looking data), thus making performance worse.

Therefore, complexity breaks performance accountability. If we care about outcomes and yet try to hang on to the NPM version of accountability, (built on Principal-Agent Theory) then we are left with a terrible choice. It is reasonable to performance-manage outputs, but we know that is the wrong thing to performance-manage. However, it is unreasonable to performance-manage outcomes, the thing we'd like to performance-manage. Either of these choices leads to dysfunctional systems.

So, what forms of accountability can work in complex environments? What have we learnt from the case studies?

Accountability in dialogue: from "holding to account" to "helping to account"

One of the ways in which accountability has been rethought, so that it actually works in complex environments, is by switching to a form of accountability that exists as a dialogue between stakeholders, rather than as a reporting or inspection process. We see this particularly in the EDUFI case study, where they developed "multi-stakeholder dialogue" as a mechanism to both reflect on the progress

of work at local level and explore the effectiveness of local-national relationships. This accords with the "Humble Government" approach that is being developed across the Finnish state:

> *"Autonomy must therefore come with accountability through a commitment to continuous dialogue that creates feedback-loops and ensures learning and improvement when needed."*
>
> **(Annala et al – Humble Government: How to Realize Ambitious Reforms Prudently)**

Crucially, this form of accountability in dialogue is underpinned seems to be underpinned by a switch from the idea of "holding to account", in which the person providing the account is assumed to be extrinsically motivated, to "helping to account", in which the accountability process is part of a person's (or organisation's) ongoing reflective practice. This switch would therefore seem to require the purposeful creation of a broader reality in which the actors involved in a system are trustworthy (i.e. those who are deemed untrustworthy are excluded from the public service system).

Accountability for learning

The FCDO case study shifts the focus of accountability from "results" to learning. The FCDO adaptive management processes use "sentinel" (proxy) indicators, gathered by independent evaluators, to help the partners in the work understand how effectively their systems are operating as learning systems.

> *"It's not me critiquing what they're doing, it's me giving them a heads up, an independent heads up on maybe you should start thinking about this. I feel like that approach with funded partners can be really, really helpful because it's not a formal lesson or learning mechanism that we put in. It's very informal, it comes across as if it's very ad hoc. Therefore, there's a lot of familiarity together and there's a lot of sort of friendship, it's not too professional. It allows them to maybe take that ownership, which we mentioned at the start. They feel as if they're owning that."*
>
> **(FCDO Case study)**

Distributed accountability

As well as shifting the focus of accountability, the case studies are also shifting the direction in which it operates. As in the FCDO example above, the Plymouth Alliance and Wellbeing Teams studies use horizontal – peer-to-peer – accountability. Peers hold one another to account. This can also be seen in the Empowerment case study.

> *"Embedding the HLS approach into Empowerment has been a developing of the social pedagogical approach based on mutual learning. Allied to this is our newfound willingness to take risks, make mistakes and learn from it. So what happens when something goes wrong here at Empowerment? Well, the first thing we do is encourage a culture of honesty, for all of our team to feel comfortable about being sharing with us when things go wrong. In response, we as an organisation welcome the honesty and agree that we will have a 'Learning Get Together' to understand what we have learnt and what needs to be adapted or changed for the future. There is no blame, but there is accountability."*
>
> **(Empowerment case study)**

The direction of accountability conversations is also shifted to enable "downwards" accountability – accountability to the people being served. For example, the Aberlour Trust have developed mechanisms to enable families and communities to hold them to account as an organisation for their practice.

Unsurprisingly, the task of fixing accountability – of finding which forms of accountability work effectively in which kinds of context remains unfinished! The range of mechanisms by which accountability and governance of learning strategies can work is an area for significant further exploration in HLS research.

Questions to support the management and governance of a Learning Cycle:

Doing public management differently starts by public managers asking themselves different sorts of questions about their practice. These questions might be useful as starting-points. From these questions, you can then begin to ask: how would I know the answer to these questions? Who needs to discuss these types of things on an ongoing basis? What information do they need for those conversations? What spaces will they happen in?

The right answers to these questions

are those that you and your colleagues find for yourselves. The HLS case studies can highlight how others have answered these questions in their own contexts. Chances are that at least some of these answers will be relevant to you and your context – and so might be useful starting-points for your reflections.

We have highlighted a range of the management and governance questions that seem useful for enacting these changes at each scale. These are given in the table below.

	Scale: Lives as systems	Scale: Teams/Organisations as systems	Scale: Places as systems	Scale: Countries as systems
Managing	• How much time do we need to commit to enact this learning cycle? • How do we collaborate with the other relevant actors in this system? • What resources do we require to enact this learning cycle? Where will we get them from? • What information do we need? • How will we reflect on this information? • How do we develop and enact a learning culture?	• How do we collaborate with the other relevant actors in this system? • What resources do we require to enact this learning cycle? Where will we get them from? • What information do we need? • How will we reflect on this information? • How do we develop and enact a learning culture?	• How do we collaborate with the other relevant actors in this system? • How will we build trust, so that we can learn together? • What are the shared principles that we will use to govern this system? • What resources do we require to enact this learning cycle? Where will we get them from? • How will we create learning relationships and a learning culture? • What information do we need? • How will we reflect on this information? • How do we develop and enact a learning culture?	• How do we collaborate with the other relevant actors in this system? • How will we build trust, so that we can learn together? • What are the shared principles that we will use to govern this system? • What resources do we require to enact this learning cycle? Where will we get them from? • How will we create learning relationships and a learning culture? • What information do we need? • How will we reflect on this information? • How do we develop and enact a learning culture?

Governing	• Is this learning cycle operating effectively? • Is our learning achieving our purpose? • How do we know? What evaluation mechanisms and processes are required? • How do we provide an account of this learning cycle? To whom? • Who is participating in this process? • Who isn't?	• Is this learning cycle operating effectively? • What is the integrity of the learning and adaptation processes? • Are they happening properly? • Are lessons being learnt? • Is learning translating into changed practice? • Is practice translating into new infrastructure? • Is our learning achieving our purpose? • How do we know? What evaluation mechanisms and processes are required? • How do all actors in the system hold one another to account for effective participation in this learning process? • Who is included/excluded from this learning cycle? • How do we provide an account of this learning cycle? To whom?	• Who is acting as Systems Steward? • To whom is this role accountable for undertaking this work? • Is this learning cycle operating effectively? • Is our learning achieving our purpose? • How do we know? What evaluation mechanisms and processes are required? • Who is included/ excluded from this learning cycle? • How do we provide an account of this learning cycle? To whom?	• Who is acting as Systems Steward? • To whom is this role accountable for undertaking this work? • Is this learning cycle operating effectively? • Is our learning achieving our purpose? • How do we know? What evaluation mechanisms and processes are required? • Who is included/ excluded from this learning cycle? • How do we provide an account of this learning cycle? To whom?

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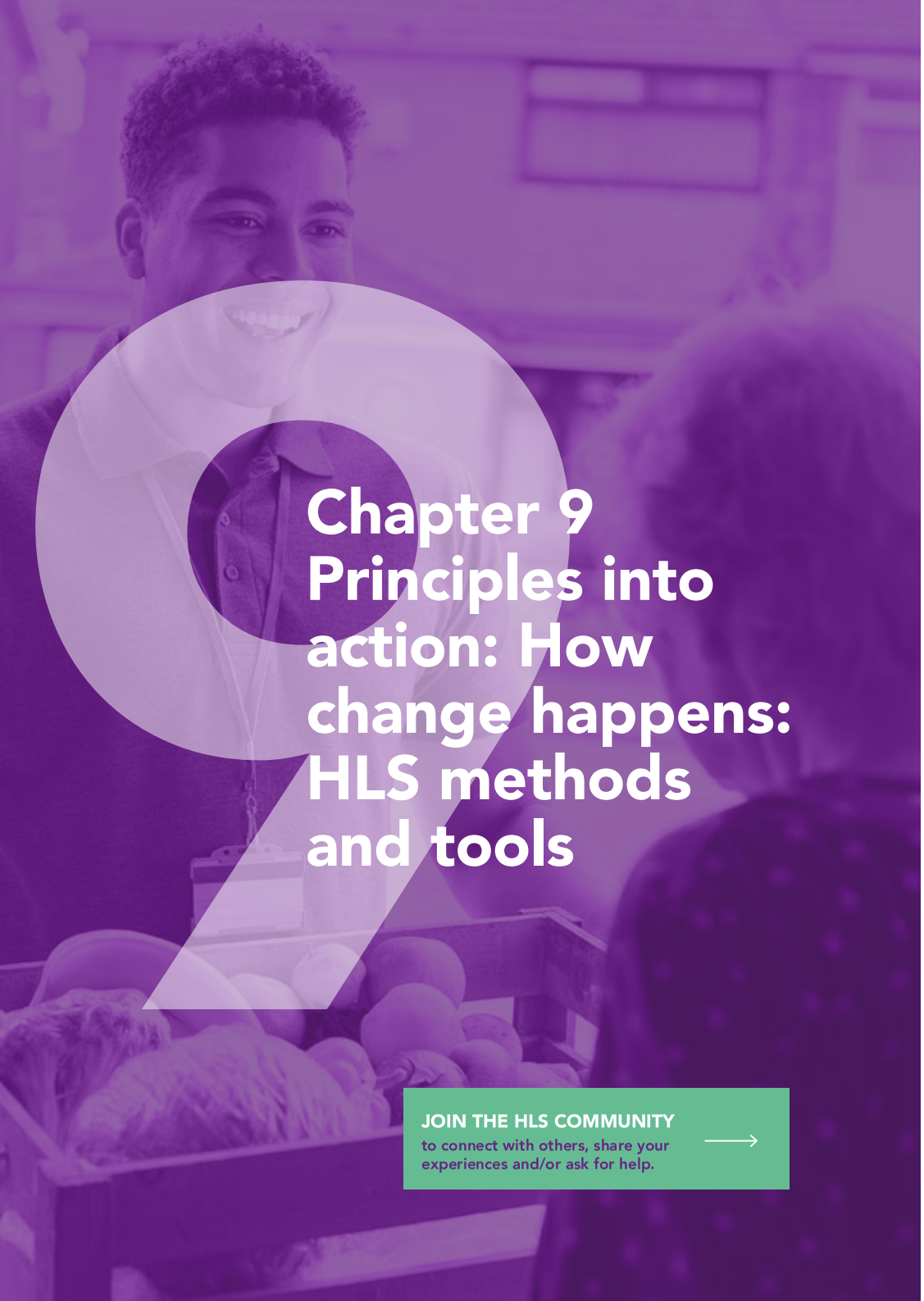

Chapter 9 Principles into action: How change happens: HLS methods and tools

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to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Methodologies and methods to support taking a Human Learning Systems approach

Author: Melissa Hawkins
Contact the author

Introduction

The aim of this chapter/section is to offer ideas and examples which may be useful to support practitioners working in public services who wish to take an approach to organisation and management. It is intended that this chapter/section is to give an indication and some examples and methods for inspiration, and of course, the appropriateness of each method will differ according to context. Overall, the message is that these methods can provide opportunities for critical reflection, learning and frameworks to support action, which are all requirements for an HLS approach to have a chance of success. It needs to be noted that each method comes with its own, sometimes long and ambiguous history, heritage and context, none of which are easily condensed. Further investigation is encouraged, and helpful starting points for readings and resources are given at the end of this section.

In essence, each of these methods supports learning, which is considered integral to successful innovation and development. By attending to learning, the other aspects of HLS, (human and systems) are also attended to; learning at the individual and organisational levels can improve relationships and motivation, and learning with and from other organisations and citizens can improve system health. As well as drawing substantially from the work of the HLS case studies and organisations involved in the creation of this report, work beyond HLS is included, as this offers significant provocations and insights into how learning can support innovation and movements for change. There will, of course, be excellent sources which we have missed out on by accident and not by design.

Methods to support HLS

The methods can be split into what works most effectively at three levels:

1. Individual learning,
2. Organisational learning
3. Cross-organisational learning.

It should be noted that many methods can be used at different levels; for example, action research can be used across all three levels, so what is shown here are the examples we have for that level. All three levels are significant. For example, individual learning through attending a Systems Leadership course has been cited as an important contribution for how large-scale collaboration for change has been enabled in the Plymouth Alliance. Colleagues of The Tudor Trust are finding that an ongoing action inquiry learning group composed of grant managers, senior leaders, and trustees has created a safe space for experimenting with different funding processes. The Lankelly Chase Foundation is working with a number of organisations to consider how to collaborate more effectively to work across organisational silos.

1 Individual learning

Learning at the personal level can foster curiosity, engagement, and , which in turn contribute to organisational development. Individual learning incorporates personal learning journeys through attending courses and continuing professional development, and self-directed learning practice such as journals and blogs.

Educational courses and resources

Educational courses can allow participants to learn about theory, reflecting on their practice and that of others. Courses on complex systems theory and thinking have helped individuals reflect on and learn about a complex worldview:

Plymouth City Council contracted with the Leadership Centre and facilitated an inclusive programme of system leadership training for staff at all levels. This process opened the door to the complex needs alliance and many other examples of the city's whole system. The Leadership Centre supports public sector leaders to work better in complexity by offering various programmes, including Systems Leadership and Leadership for Change.

Wallsend Children's Community (WCC) have participated in Wicked Lab and Systems Effects workshops to develop further their understanding of creating systems change. Wicked Lab provides a Complex Systems Leadership programme where participants can learn about wicked problems. Wicked Lab also offers an online tool "that maps, tracks and measures systemic impact, and a methodology and training to support Systemic Innovation Labs". Systems Effects is a research tool that enables collecting and analysing different perspectives on homelessness and barriers to finding employment to inform policy and practice.

Particular meta-theories or frameworks for learning and working, such as social pedagogy, resonate with the HLS approach.

> *"Social pedagogy is a field for theory, policy and practice, sometimes referred to as 'education in the broadest sense'. In public policy, the term social pedagogy covers measures that take a broad educational approach to social issues, either alongside or instead of other policy options."*

Social pedagogy has resonance with complexity-informed practice, in that relationships and trust are considered prerequisites for collaborative learning and systems change work.

The CEO and colleagues of the Empowerment charity are undertaking the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and are using the ideas of social pedagogy to redesign their mission and vision: "Social Pedagogy gave me [the CEO of the charity]) a language and a pathway to journey alongside colleagues at Empowerment to change the conversation." The MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership is a unique course delivered by the ThemPra Social Pedagogy CIC. It combines opportunities to consider how theory impacts practice in the workplace.

Self-directed reflective practice

Reflective practice can create a space for intentional reflection on actions and create opportunities to learn from such activities. Various reflective practices share the commonality for practitioners to reflect and learn from experiences in a learning loop or cycle. Learning logs, reflective diaries, and personal journals can provide a space for individual reflections. There are many frameworks and ways of using these tools, and there isn't a right or wrong way to approach them. If you are unsure where to start, some organisations run free events on "guided journaling", such as The Collective Leadership for Scotland.

Reflective practice does not always just mean reflecting on personal experience (although, of course, it can

be just that); it can also involve seeking learning from other sources, such as colleagues and broader thoughts on practice collected as research. This constitutes a "critical reflective practice". Bringing in other sources of knowledge beyond the known can enable critical thinking over individual approach and experiences and address questions concerning reflexivity and underlying assumptions.

Some members of the Plymouth Alliance use personal notebooks to jot and record things before they are forgotten in the rush of everyday life. This demonstrates the simplicity that the approach could take by simply putting pen to paper. The learning and development manager at Tudor is exploring different journaling techniques for colleagues to think about using after having found the personal experience of journaling a useful one.

Publicly sharing reflective practice.

Many individuals choose to move beyond private reflections to share their thoughts with others, including colleagues, peers, and broader audiences. The Next Stage Radicals Website has hundreds of blogs waiting to be read, which you can access here. Sharing reflections with others can help those reading them, but also the act of writing a blog can help strengthen reflections so that learning can occur.

Connections with others' learning journeys can be made through blogs, and often more personal experiences are shared, which may often get missed out with more formal reports and papers. Lankelly Chase staff and associates post frequent blogs on both their website and on Medium, including reflections on work and links to other ideas, concepts and theories. WCC has a blog that includes weekly insights gathered from the community and the blog on broad-ranging aspects to the work of WCC, such as gathering data and research on issues about pupil perceptions on schooling and COVID-19.

2 Organisational learning

Learning at the organisational level enables colleagues and members of a community to learn from one another and includes learning groups and the use of learning frameworks.

Relational learning methods

Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry was initially developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1980, and takes an asset-based perspective of the management and innovation process, thus providing an alternative to deficit approaches.

> *"At its heart, appreciative inquiry is about the search for the best in people, their organisations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. Appreciative inquiry is not so much a shift in the methods and models of organisational change. Still, appreciative inquiry is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to 'see' the wholeness of the human system and to 'inquire' into that system's strengths, possibilities, and successes."*
>
> **(AI Commons – Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry)**

The processes of appreciative inquiry can follow this cycle *(AI Commons 2021)*:

Define – What is the topic of inquiry?

Discover – Appreciating the best of "what is"'

Dream – Imagining "what could be"

Design – Determining "what should be"

Deliver/Destiny – Creating "what will be"

The Plymouth Alliance has used appreciative inquiry in many of their explorations to date, developing the method that best fits their context and need. The process often involves colleagues being paired with each other to facilitate peer learning and support before conducting narrative interviews with citizens. The results of these interviews are often shared and reflected upon within the wider group. Reading out people's real-life stories and experience enables life to be viewed through another's eyes. Appreciative inquiry is used as the primary approach to exploring new ideas for policy and practice and developing a greater understanding of the impact of changes on citizens supported by the alliance.

Several other cases contributing to this report make use of appreciative inquiry. Surrey Youth Focus has learned the method from Gary Wallace of Plymouth Alliance and is using it for multiagency sense-making, gaining a shared understanding of children's lives; the Lankelly Chase Foundation has used Appreciative Inquiry along with other participatory methods, and the Moray Wellbeing Hub use strength-based reflective practice sheets, which take an appreciative inquiry approach to explore what worked well and what could be better next time.

Most significant change

The Most Significant Change (MSC)

technique, also referred to as the "storytelling" method, originated with work by and is a values-based inquiry into evaluating programmes and impact through participant reflections, collated into stories of change.

Arts at the Old Fire Station (AOFS), which is also one of the cases involved with the Lankelly Chase Place Action Inquiry programme, have drawn on MSC to develop their version of the story-telling technique and now use it as an integral part of their work to evaluate programmes, including the impact of COVID-19.

> *"We've found collecting, analysing and presenting stories to be a creative and participative process, meaningful and enjoyable. It has shifted evaluation from a necessary add-on to a central part of our work and who we are. Both the stories and the learning that has emerged from them have been rich and insightful. They have led us to think deeply about how we work and have even resulted in us rewriting our mission statement."*
>
> **(Arts at the Old Fire Station 2021)**

AOFS have created an explanatory video and guide, as they are finding others interested in this approach, which includes POP (also one of the cases in this report).

Learning groups

The defining of "learning groups" at the organisational level encompasses formalised processes whereby colleagues form a group whose primary aim is to learn from each other, primarily through reflecting on actions and experiences in the workplace.

Lankelly Chase has explored several ways to learn as a group, including learning circles and learning communities. A group of peers come together in a safe space to reflect and share their judgements and uncertainties about their practice and share ideas or experiences to improve collectively. The Tudor Trust has created a learning group composed of grant managers, trustees, learning and research managers, and the senior leadership team to cocreate action learning into their funding practice. This has involved working with a small number of grantees to explore what taking a "bespoke by default" funding approach means and how it could be improved.

Learning frameworks

The use of frameworks to structure has been used in several ways in this report's case. The frameworks for organisational learning can be categorised as those useful for retrospective, continuous, and cyclical learning.

Retrospective learning: sense-making

The concept of sense-making was developed by Karl Weick and is the retrospective process of making sense of past events to consider what action to take in the present.

The Plymouth Alliance have been working with a team of researchers who are using the Newcastle Living Lab research methodology to support reflection, learning and collective sense-making:

> *"The Lab method works by engaging stakeholders in a coproduction process, to support long-term strategic planning based on the interests of the members of the wider network, moving beyond the often narrow prescriptive, understandings and interests of the policymakers or the organisations. It achieves this by representing projects and programmes using a range of visualisation and modelling techniques supported by a suite of open source and creative commons tools."*
>
> **(Newcastle Living Lab 2021)**

As part of the process, a series of "exhibits", usually in the form of adjacent PowerPoint slides, are presented for participants to stimulate reflective dialogue with colleagues. An example of such an exhibit is provided in the Appendices (see appendix A).

Continuous learning: rapid learning environments

Methods to support continuous learning can be helpful, as the time between event and reflection is significantly shortened. This can enable people to avoid falling into the trap of retrospective coherence, the attempt to reduce complex and messy situations into simple ones, which are therefore easier to manage. In his work on sense-making using the Cynefin Framework, David Snowden suggested how innovation teams could be deployed during the pandemic. This approach, which could be considered a "rapid learning environment" (RLE), is used by Chris Bolton and the Audit Wales team. As a result, Collaborate CIC is taking a similar approach with a learning framework. These frameworks can help explore current innovative practices arising out of the crisis, such as COVID-19, to extend them into future practice.

The Children's Society has had to change drastically, moving from

face-to-face to online support. This has led them to question the impact this will have on the organisation's future direction and to reflect on how decisions are made and by whom. They take the principles of an RLE to structure for real-time learning, such as weekly reflections, observations of strategic meetings, and reviewing data.

Lankelly Chase have used their version of an RLE to explore out loud and share publicly how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting organisations and individuals. They have outlined a candid account of their method, with the note that after four weeks of providing space and time for the exercise, some found that they were experiencing a "reflection fatigue" and a sense of loss of the "watercooler" opportunities for informal conversation to occur during the everyday life of the office.

Action learning and research cycles

Action research and action learning approaches are umbrella concepts for a range of approaches that include reflection and learning from action in context. Many approaches aim to move away from a linear approach to learning to a cyclical one, and frameworks often have the components "". The advantages of action research and action learning are that they provide a bottom-up approach for participants. This enables them to take ownership of the project and navigate the unique complexity of individual places by focusing on what can be learned in particular contexts.

There are quite a few case studies that make use of action learning, research and inquiry by focusing on the use of explicit frameworks. Although working in their own ways and contexts, the following cases draw upon Bill Torbert's levels of action inquiry and other forms of action research/earning practices. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, The Collective Leadership for Scotland, alongside action inquiry expert Dr Cathy Sharp, ran an open-access free online learning programme that included action inquiry alongside other approaches such as Three Horizons and Leading in Unknowing. Lankelly Chase has been developing a strategy for action inquiry for several years now in their systems change work, and have been drawing on Torbert's levels of action inquiry to structure the project and guide decision-making and other actions.

3 Cross-organisational learning

Cross-organisational learning enables learning to occur between people who do not know each other. They learn by attending events and learning groups that span organisational and place-based boundaries.

Coproduction

Although a somewhat nebulous concept, in its most straightforward form, coproduction, can be understood as creating opportunities for people to "" by forming equal partnerships. Elinor Ostrom first used the term when reflecting on public services' importance for engaging with the community. This link was broken – in this case, increased crime rates occurred in Chicago due to police officers patrolling neighbourhoods in cars rather than on foot.

Coproduction has been used in different ways, and some argue that it is sometimes used to pay lip-service to the idea rather than authentically engage with the method. There are several networks, organisations, and projects that can offer resources and support, including The Social Care Institute for Excellence co-production network, The Realising Just Cities project led by Professor Beth Perry, The Scottish Co-production Network and, while Co:create provides training and facilitation.

Lankelly Chase has explored a myriad of methods, including coproduction:

> *"Our codesigned work involved meeting with over 200 people. They helped us understand different perspectives, what role people wanted a foundation like ours to play in the places, what we thought our money could achieve, what we could learn from what others were doing and what we should focus on. We started with individual conversations and soon realised that codesign participatory methods generated more cross-pollinating ideas, connections and excitement."*
>
> (**Lankelly Chase Foundation**)

In addition, Lankelly work alongside organisations on coproduction projects, such as 'The Elephants Project' , which – upon realising the barriers faced when trying to coproduce work with citizens – sought to tackle the "elephants in the room", the barriers no-one was willing to talk about openly and honestly.

Events

There are many examples of events on complexity-informed practice, both face-to-face and online, which provide the opportunity for interaction with ideas beyond the known realm of personal experiences. As a potential positive of the pandemic, many events have moved online, which, although resulting in apparent drawbacks such as lack of spaces for networking and building relationships,

has meant that participation has been widely increased. Events provide an opportunity to meet new people and strengthen existing relationships and learn with each other. Although one-off events cannot provide the ongoing support needed for learning to become embedded within organisations, many organised events are created with the intention of laying the seeds for collaborations and longer-term partnerships.

Face-to-face events had been run, pre-pandemic, by organisations such as the Tudor Trust, who ran a "complexity day" with grant holders to explore what complexity-friendly funding meant for them. This was considered a success by those involved because it allowed everyone to start to talk more openly about the challenges faced by both funded organisations and funders. Organisations forming part of The HLS Collaborative have run several events, including face-to-face events led by Northumbria University, Collaborate CIC and Next Stage Radicals; associated recordings and resources for these can be found on the HLS website.

Numerous online events and conferences, past, present and future, have enabled people from across the world to participate. These include a series of webinars on the development of the HLS approach during COVID-19, which were organised by Northumbria University and included partners' participation across the HLS collaborative. The collaborative runs online masterclasses and workshops on taking an HLS approach, details of which can also be found on the website

Learning for action groups

This encompasses communities of practice where there is a shared domain of interest, community and practice, and others that are either at the early formation stage or are groupings that don't fit the conventional community of practice model. Many of the cases and organisations comprising the project review board of this group are part of such groups. The Losing Control Network, IVAR and Next Stage Radicals are currently running regular community of practice groups and peer support and learning groups for those involved in public services, all of which offer regular time and space rather than a simple one-off event.

Some groups are taking on more of a social movement trajectory, as they are positioning themselves as an alternative to what could be considered mainstream organisational practice. These groups include the New System Alliance, which seeks to

change what they believe to currently be a broken system to a person-led one. Next Stage Radicals is a learning community that grew from an event convened by Easier Inc, the RSA and the Q Community to explore. It could also be said that The HLS Collaborative falls somewhere within this category. Although its primary focus is on developing a particular approach, there is also the element of seeking to change the current system, which is dominated by NPM, to one which is influenced by a complexity-informed practice.

Roles to support learning

There are numerous methods to choose from when seeking to learn and to change practice. What also needs to be considered is the roles and responsibilities different actors play as part of this change. We have noticed a range of roles that can support learning at both an internal and external organisational level, which can be labelled as learning champion, curator of learning, Learning Partner, thinking partner, consultant, researcher, or educationalist. These roles do not "take on learning" for everyone within the organisation; their role is to create learning opportunities for all.

Internal learning support roles

There are examples from the cases where people are given explicit roles to support learning. POP has employed a, who supports learning and reflection by building relationships between colleagues working on various funded projects. The Tudor Trust has also employed someone specifically to support learning as a learning and communications manager. Likewise, a charity and community centre in Camden, North London has the benefit of an evaluation and learning lead who has recently expanded the remit of organisational learning to lead an evaluation report for a network of commissioners, NHS trusts, local authorities, and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations. This has not only brought new insight but also has enabled stronger connections and relationships to be made. In other places, such as the Plymouth Alliance, key actors within the system have supported colleagues with their learning. They have done this informally, for example in conversations using complexity theory to highlight the problematics of the current system, and also by giving support to the application of research methods such as appreciative inquiry.

External learning support roles

A Learning Partnership can be thought of as a group of people embarking on a learning journey together and supporting each other on that journey .

IVAR often takes on the role of Learning Partner in supporting the VCS, defining the approach as moving beyond short-term projects to working alongside an organisation. At the same time, it undertakes an especially challenging programme or initiates significant change for example in its Learning Partner role with Big Local and Commonweal Housing. Collaborate CIC has been a Learning Partner with the Cornerstone Fund, a funders collaboration working in systems change, which aims to put citizen action at the core of decision-making. Collaborate CIC has helped the collaboration reflect on their systems change experience and practice and act on this learning individually and collectively.

Since 2017, Northumbria University has been engaged in a Learning Partnership action inquiry with the Lankelly Chase Foundation, which draws upon the principles of action research and action learning and social learning theories to frame the work. The journey has been an interesting one, the Learning Partners regularly reflecting on how best to support learning has revealed some points for reflection for others working in this way. The Centre for Public Impact and Easier Inc have recently engaged as thinking partners with a group of regulators at the local and national government level and "regulated" public sector organisations and charities. This developing community of practice aims to create the space for building generative relationships, sharing learning, and experimenting with ways of working differently.

Many of the cases involved in this chapter have made use of research and participated in educational courses. WCC has been part of a national evaluation of Children's Communities conducted by Sheffield Hallam University and has drawn on ethnographers' expertise at the University of Sunderland to create two community researcher roles. Grant holders associated with the Tudor Trust also speak of their research use, including St Marys Church carrying out their research with the community and drawing on the CI OM-B framework of behaviour change. Edberts House bases its work on the KOLB learning cycle of understanding (Tudor Trust 2020) . The Blackpool-based charity Empowerment uses social pedagogy to underpin its approach. Along with personal transformational learning journeys gained through enrolling on the MA in social pedagogy at UCLan, the charity has used social pedagogy principles to redefine its vision and values.

Summary

There are a few final points to consider when using methods to develop an HLS approach. We have drawn these from our experiences as researchers working with a number of the organisations describe in the case studies and from practitioners working in the public and voluntary and community sectors:

Consider the rationale and purpose for choice of method

Take the time to learn more about the methods before making a choice; what is offered here is only a snapshot, and you should shape selection and usage. The purpose of any method is to develop a curiosity and motivation for critical engagement and reflection. This cannot happen if people aren't given the choice of how to engage. The methods will not "show you" how to make systems change happen; they are there to support this process and should not be used to simplify and reduce complex issues.

Some of the cases, such as the Plymouth Alliance and Lankelly Chase, have spoken about how the best outcome for engaging in a learning programme was the time spent and relationships built with colleagues.

The methods described here are structured; however, many speak of the importance of informal learning spaces such as the water cooler moments, mainly put on hold due to COVID-19. Consideration of how these moments could, do, or should not feed into future organising and decision-making may be worthwhile.

Attend to the needs of everyone in the organisation or place

Exploring new learning methods is not always an easy task, and some may treat anything new with scepticism or even suspicion. It is worth finding out why some people may be reluctant to make changes; are they worried about failing? Are they sceptical about another reinvention of the wheel? Are they feeling motivated to change, and if not, what can be done to support everyone on this journey? Learning occurs through interaction with others; it is difficult to do this when relationships are fractured, and there is a culture of mistrust within an organisation or place.

Taking a pragmatic approach is usually a good idea; a one-off learning event is not the best way to embed learning, but perhaps it might be the only choice due to time constraints, or it might be used to ignite a spark of interest (if it is a good event!). Careful thought is needed so that learning does not become a burden for people; space and time are required and thus needs

to be built into job roles and can require creative thinking, especially when time-poor.

Think about the roles and responsibilities required to support learning

Consider the collective intelligence already held within the organisation or place and how to utilise it. Also, think about how different roles – both internal and external to the organisation and place – can help to support learning. For example, an external role may be useful when mitigating potential negative aspects to learning, such as the development of echo chambers.

If priority is not given to the importance of learning throughout the organisation or place, it will be challenging to create dedicated time for this to happen. This might mean thinking about what needs to be reduced or removed to create space and time for learning.

When thinking about responsibility for learning and how this will feed into accountability mechanisms, the issue is that learning is mainly invisible and does not always or automatically happen. Therefore, do not fall into the trap of making people accountable for anything which is out of their control, and use proxy measures (such as evidence of learning) with caution.

Questions for readers

Here are a few questions to ask about using methods to support the development of an HLS approach:

- How will you make sure your choice of methods will fit you and your organisation and will not place an extra burden on people?
- How will you make the time and space for learning to become part of everyone's everyday roles and responsibilities?
- What will you have to stop or start doing to make way for learning to happen?
- What are everyone's roles and responsibilities in your organisation/ place, and how can you ensure that learning doesn't become something to "hand-off" to someone else?
- Who gets to make the decisions about choice of approach and methods, and why do they get to make those decisions?
- How can you use these methods to develop a love of learning, curiosity and critical attitude?
- How can you use these methods to "hold" uncertainty rather than try and use them as a fix-all and in a reductionist way intended to simplify the necessarily complex?

You should also consider the ethical requirements of applying these methods. Some of them may well draw out reflections of a sensitive nature, and this needs consideration of how to manage and plan for this type of occurrence, for example such as creating safe spaces for learning.

Appendices

A: Newcastle Living Lab: Representing the Plymouth Alliance

The Newcastle Living Lab research methodology can support reflection, learning and collective sense-making

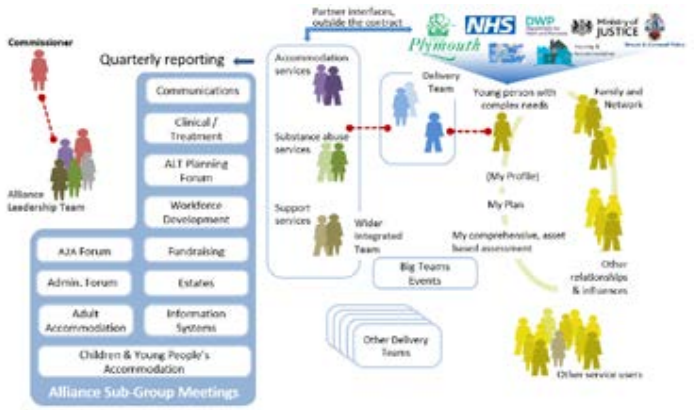
> *"The Lab method works by engaging stakeholders in a co-production process, to support long-term strategic planning based on the interests of the members of the wider network, moving beyond the often narrow prescriptive, understandings and interests of the policymakers or the organisations. It achieves this by representing projects and programmes using a range of visualisation and modelling techniques supported by a suite of open source and creative commons tools."*
>
> **(Newcastle Living Lab 2021)**

As part of the process, a series of "exhibits", usually in the form of adjacent PowerPoint slides, are presented for participants to stimulate reflective dialogue with colleagues.

This is an example of an exhibit created by Mike Martin in conjunction with the Plymouth Alliance;

Representing the Plymouth Alliance (Mike Martin 2020):

Figure 1: Representing the Plymouth Alliance, Mike Martin (2020)



B: List of examples with resources:

Here are some resources for methods and also examples of HLS case studies which have made use of these methods.

Method	Resources	Examples of HLS case studies which have used methods
Educational Courses	The Leadership Centre	The Plymouth Alliance
	Wicked Lab System Effects	Wallsend Children's Community
	Social Pedagogy UCLan Social Pedagogy Leadership Social Pedagogy Professional Association (sppa-uk.org)	Empowerment Charity
	Managing Complexity: A Systems Approach – Open Learn – Open University Systems Thinking in Practice – Open University	N/A
Websites	Systems Innovation platform	N/A
Books	Systemic Leadership for Local Governance	N/A
Reflective practice	Collective Leadership for Scotland supportive practices	The Plymouth Alliance The Tudor Trust Lankelly Chase Foundation Wallsend Children's Community
Appreciative Inquiry	Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry – The Appreciative Inquiry Commons (champlain.edu)	The Plymouth Alliance
Most Significant Change	Storytelling Evaluation Methodology | Arts at the Old Fire Station A Dialogical, Story-Based Evaluation Tool: The Most Significant Change Technique	Lankelly Chase Foundation – Arts at the Old Fire Station
Learning groups	What is Action Inquiry and what are the benefits	Lankelly Chase Foundation The Tudor Trust
Learning frameworks	Newcastle Living Lab Is anyone deploying "Innovation and Learning" people alongside COVID-19 Response Teams? – What's the PONT How we are learning during our response to the Coronavirus outbreak by Adam Groves – On the front line of systems change | Medium Action Inquiry – Resources – Collective Leadership for Scotland (collectiveleadershipscotland.com)	The Plymouth Alliance The Children's Society Lankelly Chase Foundation Collective Leadership for Scotland
Co-production	Co-production Network | SCIE	Lankelly Chase Foundation
Events	Events | Human Learning Systems	The Human Learning Systems Collaborative
Roles	The value of the Learning Partner by Hannah Hesselgreaves | by Lankelly Chase | Medium	Northumbria University IVAR Collaborate CIC Easier Inc

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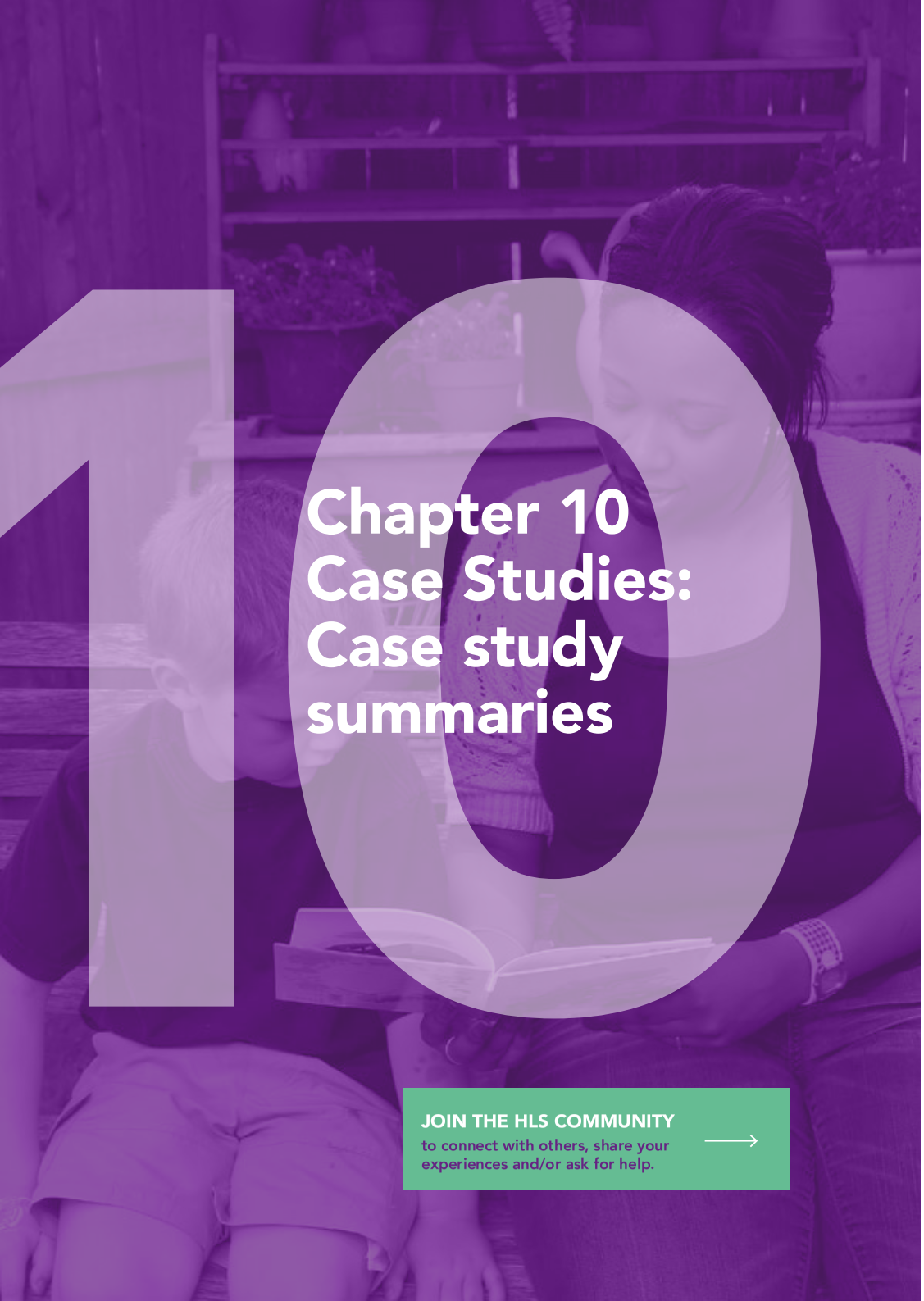

Chapter 10 Case Studies: Case study summaries

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Case studies

Introduction

The analysis in this book is built on the experiences of those who are implementing a Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach in practice. We have explored the reality that the incredible practitioners have created, in a wide variety of public service contexts. In all, 29 new case studies were created specifically for this book, together with 19 previous case studies that had already been documented.

You can find details of all of the case studies on a searchable map at https://www.humanlearning.systems/case-studies/

Summaries of each of the 29 case studies that were created for this research are outlined below, with a link through to the full-length version. It is important to offer some context for these. We do not offer these as *exemplars* of HLS public management practice. They are not a set of practices which should be copied. Instead, we offer these case studies as interesting examples from which to learn. The question we would encourage you to ask is: what elements of these case studies provide useful or interesting reflections on my context? As with the general approach in this book, the rule of thumb is **"principles travel, practices adapt"**.

Some of these case studies explicitly adopted an HLS approach as a way to create change. Others have found the language and principles of HLS to be a useful way to articulate the sort of change that they were already developing.

All these case studies have been developed within a wider public management context which is not fertile ground for HLS practice. Consequently, all of the case studies contain compromises at the boundaries between the systems that practitioners have been able to create in their sphere of influence, and other public management systems. Given that this is likely to be the case for the near future for all HLS case studies, we think that these compromises are interesting, too.

Finally, it is also important to highlight the fact that some of the work described in these case studies has "failed" in the traditional sense, in that they are part of projects or activities

that no longer exist. From an HLS perspective, this failure is absolutely necessary. If people don't fail, they're not really experimenting.

Case study summaries

Aberlour: Families and Communities First

Funded by the Corra Foundation Whole Family Approach – System Change fund, Families and Communities First works with the people and communities of North West Dumfries in Scotland to change the provision of whole family support for families affected by substance misuse.

The work is supported by Collaborate CIC and follows an HLS approach, with families, communities and local partners carrying out a whole system review and tests of change in North West Dumfries. We will produce a learning report that will propose an ongoing plan for continuous change and improvement – looking beyond the boundaries of substance misuse and support.

The Children's Society: a national approach to "disrupting" child criminal exploitation

Disrupting Exploitation is a national programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (2018-2021), with the systemic goal of "disrupting" child criminal exploitation across three geographic regions. The emphasis on disruption reflected their organisational strategy at the time, which was to "break cycles of disadvantage". The programme has an emphasis on systemic working, codesign and experimentation, a significant shift from The Children's Society's more typical 1-2-1 service delivery for young people, conducted alongside separate policy and campaigning teams.

The HLS model hadn't been articulated at the time they developed the programme. It was designed with reference to similar underlying insights regarding relational work in complex systems.

Coast and Vale Community Action: lessons in trust

Coast and Vale Community Action (CaVCA) works alongside people in communities to help them achieve the improvements they want to see in the places they live. CaVCA seeks to influence and work with other organisations across all sectors whose activities can help this aim. In 2014, CaVCA collaborated with other local organisations to hold a joint event called Totally Socially, which celebrated community and local, independent entrepreneurialism. It has come to inform CaVCA's way of working. Totally Socially worked on the principles of focusing on strengths, walking alongside others, and listening to others without taking over. HLS has helped to describe and validate what CaVCA does and how it does it.

Collective Impact Agency (CIA) CIC – Gateshead as a learning system

CIA helps socially-minded people and organisations work together more effectively. In practice, this means lots of informal relationship-building, connecting people to one another, creating and holding collective spaces for people to reflect and learn together as a result – and deepening their relationships, forming groups around shared interests to experiment with doing things differently and doing better things, and everything in between. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we organised fortnightly reflection spaces on Zoom with a group of more than 35 organisations that is now known as Gateshead Futures. The unstructured sessions have had a profound impact on deepening relationships. We have also established a shared learning space within Adult Space at Gateshead Council, which is exploring a more human, person-centred approach to social care.

Collective Leadership for Scotland: one thing at a time

This case study looks at the Collective Leadership for Scotland Team's response to supporting leaders and others across public services during the early months of COVID-19. We explored what could be offered in response to the high pace, overwhelmed and necessarily reactive nature of leadership at this time. A programme was developed called "One Thing at a Time", building from our work around system change and leadership. The aim of the programme was to create space for people to learn, connect and reflect in ways that supported engagement at the depth and with the issues that most resonated for them.

Dorset Health and Social Care: results through relationships

"In my last year of life, help me live well until I die." What do we need to be amazing at, to ensure the last year of life is as good as possible? How well does reality match our aspirations? In 2018, the NHS England Personalised Care Group invited the Dorset Integrated Care System, a small group of people working in the community, hospitals, hospices, and commissioning, to focus on improving personalised care towards the end of life. The project that developed, *Results through relationships*, is a collaborative work to understand what matters and to focus on that together.

Empowerment: Human Learning Systems – the change has to begin with me…

Based in Blackpool, Empowerment is an advocacy charity working alongside people with mental health issues and learning disabilities, young people who have experienced domestic abuse, and those who are experiencing multiple disadvantage. In developing the vision, mission and values of the organisation, Empowerment has combined social pedagogy and HLS. Empowerment values the passion and excitement of its employees and values learning and taking risks. It sees trust and relationships as vital to system change and the freedom to develop services and projects.

Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI): Innovation Centre – enhancing learning systems through experimentation

The Innovation Centre of the Finnish National Education Agency (EDUFI) has developed an approach to public management at national government level which uses learning as the meta-strategy. They redefine the role of the central government as enabling local actors to collaborate and learn together better.

This "learning as meta-strategy" is enacted through Experimentation Labs in which EDUFI's role is to build the capacity of actors in local and national education systems to learn and improve together through the use of experimentation and codesign methods.

This represents an evolution of traditional Innovation strategy – they do not seek to scale what has been learnt in any place, rather it is the capacity for learning that is taken to scale.

Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), UK Government: Adaptive Management

This case study explores FCDO's Adaptive Management programming.

The Adaptive Management International Development Programme's work has developed management practices that seek to promote learning and adaptation. They succeed in connecting practice-based learning with strategic learning, and make a shift towards reframing accountability as accountability for learning. This learning strategy is enabled by funding and contract management arrangements that prioritise learning. This strategy applies both at the macro level of programme management and at the micro level of de-risking experimentation and enabling necessary failure by decoupling people's job security from potential failure.

GreaterSport: Greater Manchester region

Greater Manchester is one of 12 places chosen by Sport England to work together on a new approach to build healthier, more active communities across England and be part of the Local Delivery Pilot.

Through a whole system approach, the two partner organisations are changing the factors that have the biggest influence on how active people are able to be, working collaboratively with communities and other parts of the system. This means they have to work differently in lots of ways, including how they measure change.

From the beginning, the emphasis has been on understanding how change has happened, as well as the impact. To achieve this, they have prioritised a "test and learn" approach, encouraged critical reflection, and built relationships based on trust.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland: ihub

Healthcare Improvement Scotland's improvement hub (ihub) supports those delivering health and social care across Scotland to redesign and continuously improve services. At the initial stage of the COVID-19 response, the ihub developed a learning system to understand how the health and social care system in Scotland was responding to the pandemic and to identify key learning for the future. This identified three key themes as critical to enabling services to respond effectively to the pandemic:

- The importance of trusting relationships
- The role of communities
- Technology-enabled services.

The approach embraced the HLS principles by allowing the space and conversations to reflect on gathered insights and collaborative sense-making around the implications of the emerging practice.

Help on Your Doorstep's HLS journey

Help on Your Doorstep (HOYD) is a charity working with residents who are vulnerable, isolated, and experience social inequality in Islington, London. Their goal is to support people to thrive and live in happy, healthy communities. Their Connect outreach, support and navigation service works across Islington to engage 2,000 residents a year, understand their needs and aspirations, and provide direct support and referrals into their wide-ranging network of referral partners. Their HLS approach relies on the strength of their community relationships and the scale, scope and nature of their partnership networks.

Lankelly Chase and place – letting go of control

Lankelly Chase works to tackle systems of injustice and oppression that result in the mental distress, violence and destitution experienced by our most marginalised citizens. It focuses on power, culture, mindsets and relationships, all of which are key to understanding the dynamics of complex interlocking systems. At the level of places, it is supporting interconnected networks of changemakers across six places in England. These networks of changemakers – from all parts of local systems – are engaged in action inquiries, which are united by the question "how do we change the systems that perpetuate severe and multiple disadvantage in our place?"

In its HLS journey, Lankelly Chase used participatory methods of codesign, such as World Cafe and Appreciative Inquiry to gain the views of over 200 people on the best qualities of healthy systems, recruited a learning partner, and experimented as a team. It sought to develop the conditions for better quality engagement and dialogue with others and also cultivate this mindset internally through methods such as reflective practice, systems coaching, and deep democracy.

Lighthouse Children's Homes

Lighthouse's mission is to give children in care the same opportunities as everyone else by providing high-quality children's homes with a strong focus on education. It applies a framework based on social pedagogy, which is a holistic, relational approach based on empowerment and learning. The approach shares many features of the HLS approach. Its model was developed through a deep process of research and consultation, including visits to children's homes in Germany and Denmark. The system values the contribution of young people and empowers them to shape the design and practice of services.

Likewise: HLStress – moving into the system

Likewise is a social care organisation working with people living with mental illness. The HLS approach has provided a framework and a language for learning from the local mental health system's response to COVID-19. It supported their confidence in opening up honest, difficult, and productive conversations with local partners, enabling the development of a more joined-up mental health response across the local area, and moving them from the periphery into the centre of the local mental health system. The focus on learning has also helped uncover systemic risks and opportunities, but challenges remain in emphasising diverse forms of learning and in redefining their systemic role.

Liverpool Combined Authority: Liverpool City Region – commissioning homelessness support

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority have used HLS as a way to commission differently. They have experimented with this new approach when commissioning their Assertive Outreach service, as part of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Trailblazers funding to support the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Commissioners worked with providers to develop a learning culture, which – in turn – helped to build relationships of trust between commissioners and providers. This then enabled providers to create more flexible, bespoke services for people experiencing homelessness, and provided positive examples of ways to enable learning and adaptation which could spread to other parts of the local system during the COVID-19 crisis.

Mayday Trust

Mayday Trust was originally established over 40 years ago as a traditional housing support provider, but underwent a radical transformation in 2011 by prototyping a PTS response, which is used to explore the HLS approach.

People going through tough times are supported by a PTS coach, who focuses on their strengths, as well as their unique context. Mayday is continually reflecting and evolving its approach based on new learnings. The problem Mayday tries to address is not homelessness but rather the systemic institutionalisation of people accessing support services.

Melton Mowbray Council – transforming the planning system

This is an account of how managers became enthused and took responsibility for leading change and cocreating it with their staff within the planning service at Melton Mowbray Council. This transformation was performed in one of the most transactional and regulated statutory services in a local council, demonstrating that the HLS approach can be applied to all types of services, both complex and also simple and transactional.

The approach they took was in stark contrast with their standard and legislative based thinking and obvious digital solutions. They incorporated new management behaviours and

team working, allowing for a human approach to working with staff. Waste was dramatically cut, the manager became enthused, and the staff environment created a highly motivating culture.

Moray Wellbeing Hub CIC

Moray Wellbeing Hub is a grassroots, place-based organisation which emerged from peer-leaders who had lived experience of mental health challenges delivering their own support groups. It now has over 300 people as part of its collective. The organisation is rooted in a commitment to a peer-values approach above all else – mutual, intentional, authentic. It has experimented with a self-managing team model, aiming for self-sufficiency in delivering activity with statutory, voluntary and public partners, and with a goal of increasing the mental "wealth" of the Moray locality.

The core of their approach to working with people is continuous learning and trust. By creating trusting relationships across a community, they have become "a resource" to that community rather than a service. Their journey involved continual influencing and questioning, acting as a critical friend to many layers of the system simultaneously. However, they have experienced challenges in attracting resources, particularly with funders who had a narrow focus on proving impact.

Neighbourhood Midwives' NHS pilot

Neighbourhood Midwives (NM) was a midwifery social enterprise commissioned to provide a two- year NHS pilot in Northeast London as part of NHS England's Maternity Transformation programme. NM's aim was to provide individualised continuity of care to women and their families by autonomous midwives, working in self-managing teams. Before its closure, NM was in the process of developing an organisation-wide coaching system, starting with discovering and defining what "good" looked like across all their "core and support capabilities". The coaching practices included reflective feedback, compassionate communication, and an agreed set of "non-negotiables" to underpin ongoing learning and development and provide external assurance to the regulatory bodies.

The Plymouth Alliance

The Plymouth Alliance is a collaboration between the local authority, Clinical Commissioning Group and actors in the local system who support adults experiencing homelessness, mental health problems, substance misuse, and associated life challenges.

The Alliance was established as a means to work across organisational

silos to achieve the city's vision of improving population-based wellbeing and reducing inequalities in health. It integrates commissioning, health and social care, and a system of health and wellbeing. This innovation in commissioning and collaboration has played a substantial part in the development of an HLS approach. Plymouth Alliance's seven organisations operate together under one contract and use a set of principles to guide decision-making. The Alliance values building relationships and trust and considers learning to be an integral part of its work.

Plymouth Octopus Project (POP)

Plymouth Octopus Project (POP) was set up in 2014 as a project of the Zebra Collective. Aiming to connect and revitalise the relationships between charities, community groups, and other socially and environmentally focused organisations, POP operates as a "network weaver and facilitator" that at the same time provides and acts as a conduit for critical intelligence, knowledge and experience for their members through news, training and one-to-one support. From this source, POP has been pioneering the use of small-scale, trust-based, collaborative-by-default grant-making through these networks.

Sobell House

Sobell House is an NHS Hospice and a department in Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust that provides palliative and end of life care for adults. It implemented system-wide improvements to its care of the dying through a three-year project funded by the Sobell Foundation. The project asked fundamental questions about the governance of care of the dying and what was actually happening, thereby embracing the complexity of the system. Staff led the process, identifying where improvements were possible and how they could gain skills and confidence. There is evidence of a significant improvement in the care of the dying since 2016.

South Tyneside Alliance

South Tyneside Alliance is a partnership between the Clinical Commissioning Group, local authority, third sector organisations, and health and social care providers. It was created as a way to develop a more effective system of health and social care across the borough. South Tyneside recognised the interconnectivity of the actions within a complex system and wanted to collectively embrace being "all in it together", not just as a project but as a way of being.

The actors in the system sought to change their behaviours based on learning from colleagues in Canterbury, New Zealand. This was very challenging, but they have focused on building relationships as the cornerstone of success. They are trying to do what is "best for person, best for system" rather than individual organisations, and learning to trust each other and say yes to ideas from their teams.

Surrey Youth Focus

Surrey Youth Focus is an independent charity that works with youth organisations and the public sector to improve the lives of children, young people, and families. As representatives of the youth third sector in Surrey, they bring key people together to tackle issues collaboratively with the aim of creating a place where every child has the opportunity to flourish and reach their potential. Their approach had been different for a while, but the HLS Systems Steward model has validated their way of working and has given them the confidence to launch new initiatives and advocate change at a higher level.

The Tudor Trust: supporting voluntary and community groups working in complex environments through our grant-making

The Tudor Trust is an independent grant-making trust that supports voluntary and community groups across the UK. Tudor aims to put relationships at the heart of applications and grant management, gives core and flexible funding, and provides additional support when needed. This case study looks at how Tudor has explored what it really means to work in an HLS way, both within the Trust and in support of organisations working in complex environments.

Wallsend Children's Community

Wallsend Children's Community (WCC) was established in 2016 with the aim of improving outcomes for children and making life better for families and young people in Wallsend. Everyone in the area, working or living, is part of the Children's Community and collectively they hold a shared vision for a better future. A core team of three facilitates the work along with two community researchers.

Together, the team work with their communities to understand the area, the assets and their strengths. This knowledge is used to bring together and empower every person who makes

up the system – pupil or headteacher, parent or counsellor, youth worker or police officer, parent or young person – to find new ways to work more collaboratively to change the system where it is not supporting children and young people to succeed. This case study was written in December 2020. As of April 2021, WCC continues to be hosted by Save the Children UK.

Wellbeing Teams

Wellbeing Teams is a startup designed to demonstrate how small, neighbourhood self-managed teams can work in health and care. In Phase One, the teams worked within home care. Wellbeing Teams was the first self-managing health and care organisation to be regulated by the CQC and was awarded the highest rating of "outstanding". The five key features of Wellbeing Teams are:

1. Relationship-based care and support
2. Focus on what matters to the person and their wellbeing
3. Community focus
4. Recruiting people for values and bringing their whole selves to work
5. Self-management.

In Phase Two, they are supporting providers and councils to introduce the model, principles and practices of Wellbeing Teams into other areas of health and care – for example, working with Camden Council to introduce Wellbeing Teams into Extra Care.

Vinařice Prison, Czech Republic

This case study looks at the change in Vinařice Prison in the Czech Republic during the pandemic. The prison employed a human approach to dealing with inmates, one that was supported by its partners, namely a firm offering call centre employment and a small charity which supported offenders and ex-offenders with social work services.

During the pandemic, the team at the prison turned one of the call centre rooms into a sewing room, where inmates made masks for groups in need such as the police and the elderly. The inmates also acted as call centre operators for a specialised COVID-19 pandemic helpline providing information about the pandemic, which was a formative experience for them.

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Contact details for each of the case studies can be found on the Human Learning Systems website.

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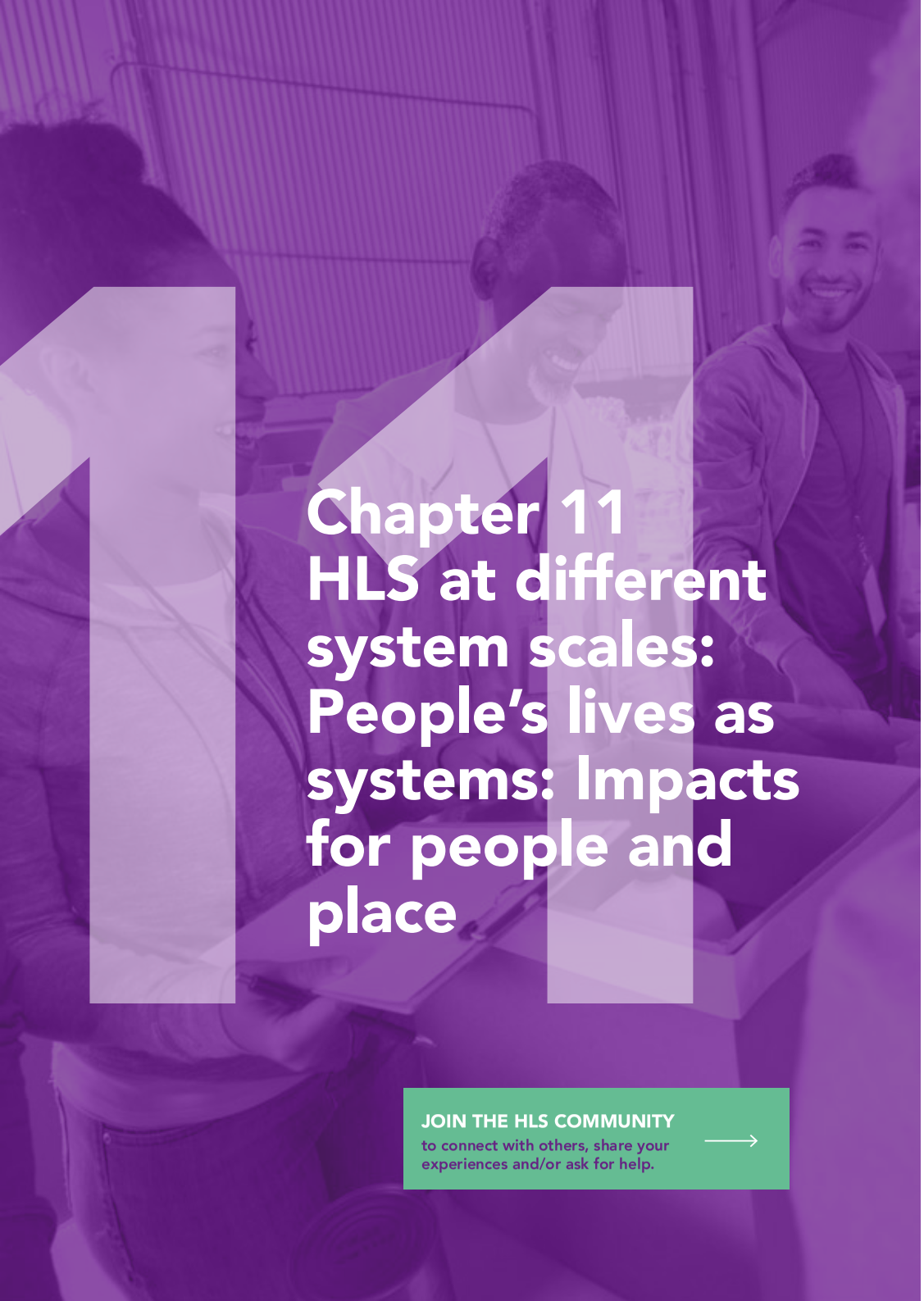

Chapter 11
HLS at different system scales: People's lives as systems: Impacts for people and place

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help. →

The impact of Human Learning Systems for people

Authors: Andy Brogan, Jeremy Cox and Mark Smith
Contact the authors

People can experience public services as hard to access, bureaucratic, slow, time-consuming. When they come into contact with services run along HLS lines, the impact is very different:

> *"It's the first time we felt anyone listened."*
>
> *"He no longer felt like a piece of meat, but that people really cared about him as a person."*
>
> *"When you asked me how I was, I realised no-one had done that for two years. After that, things got better."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

In the service that these comments came from, a member of staff reflected:

> *"I find these comments upsetting though – an indication of very significant problems with usual practice, and the need for urgent change."*
>
> *"We did enough to get them off the phone, but we knew we'd hear from them again. It was horrible."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

For those whose situations are basically OK, say someone temporarily out of work and needing to claim housing and council tax benefits, someone concerned about illegal parking in their neighbourhood, or an older person needing to access social care; the experience can be frustrating and wasteful, but things tend to work out in the end.

If your situation happens to be complex, with multiple challenges or difficulties, then dealing with services that don't seem to talk to each other can be confusing, exhausting and downright unhelpful. People

experience being passed from one team or agency to the next, constantly retelling their stories, being treated as a "case" and not quite fitting into anybody's remit. The Navy calls this game "dockyard tennis", and in public services the person ends up as the ball.

There is a backdrop to this response from some public services, which is that they "default to no". You need to prove you need support. This is why people don't trust public services that aren't accessible and provided universally (and revere those that are). It's caused by a mindset of scarcity among public service providers rather than one of empathy and abundance.

Time and time again, we see a pattern – the people, families and communities with the most complex issues, in most need of help, who are the least well-resourced experience services as almost impossible to access, punitive and actively harmful. They end up with enforcement rather than help. HLS-informed approaches have found a way to create services that have a completely different impact for citizens: easy to access, empathetic, humane, helpful and, best of all, highly effective.

In this chapter we begin our exploration of the impact of HLS on citizens with the crucial part played by the "bespoke-by-design" approach to understanding outcomes and designing services – putting the **Human** in HLS.

> *"Paul had pain from a recently diagnosed, advanced cancer. The pain was severe, and it was suggested he would need to come into hospital to manage his pain, although he preferred to stay at home. Taking a bespoke-by-design approach, his support and pain relief was structured to work at home, and to ensure he and his wife felt fully supported. This all happened within a few hours of the first call to the hospice – a timely response which prevented a hospital admission and potentially a very difficult end-of-life journey. Paul was able to remain at home until he died some weeks later. The time and space to respond in such an agile way was created by keeping the diaries of key team members relatively free of fixed commitments – the team had learned that to properly meet the needs of people, rapid, customised responses were regularly needed."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

This overtly person-centric approach to service design relies on a foundation of shared sense-making and pattern-spotting that starts with the person, their context, and their aspirations and moves towards some kind of positive action, sometimes even a solution. Services that fit solutions to situations are back-to-front. This approach starts with what lies in front of us and is thus intentionally "front-to-back", always anchored to the context of people's lives. This drives pattern-spotting and alignment of policies, structures and organisational systems – a structured discipline for **Learning** from what matters to individual citizens that is another HLS hallmark.

> *"In the end-of-life system that helped Paul and his family, staff and managers instinctively felt the right thing to do was to deliver bespoke-by-design care, but were worried that it would be too resource-hungry. They stuck to their plan for front-to-back learning, taking one case at a time and steadily building up caseloads until they had established a rhythm of working at scale. What they learned was counterintuitive – that their HLS-friendly approach didn't just create better outcomes for people, it turned out to be more efficient, too."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

Services built on bespoke-by-design, front-to-back foundations work at the level of the individual citizen and at the level of the **System** at the same time – simultaneously bespoke and scalable. For residents, we learn to do always, only and exactly what matters; at the level of the system, our work with residents reveals the patterns that tell us where we need to act system-wide to make it easier to do what matters.

> *"Leaders and teams continue to work together to fine-tune their bespoke end-of-life work with patients and their loved ones, and to tweak the overall system so that the improved working processes are hardwired, scaled, and spread."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

This chapter explores the pivotal role of these important practices (bespoke-by-design, front-to-back, and simultaneously bespoke and scalable) in creating positive impacts for citizens, illustrated with stories and results from some of the pioneering work that has informed the HLS perspective.

People feel their own outcomes, not population measures

The impact of HLS for people is best understood "front to back", from the perspective of the outcomes that really matter to individual citizens. What matters to people is real, what systems "want" to see is conceptualised. Starting with what's real is always more likely to work.

This stands in contrast to the "back-to-front" approach we typically see in our organisations and across public policymaking – working from desirable population measures to policies, targets, service specifications, and upward reporting regimes.

The value of any impact exists only in the experiences of real, individual people. Everything must anchor to these experiences or risk "the faulty test paradox". When we realise that the real purpose of a benefits system for many citizens is to help them to get off benefits, it would be a faulty test to ask if we had improved our ability to pay their claims within centrally defined target processing times. When we look at testing the impact of an HLS approach, then we have to begin with the questions about the experiences and stories of citizens, expressed in their terms, as individuals.

What do good outcomes for people look like in practice? Longer lives? Healthier lives? Happier lives? More productive lives? Better deaths? Stronger relationships? Stronger communities? Other things entirely? The story of how an HLS approach impacts people's lives provides a simple answer: "it depends". It depends on what matters to those people as individuals; outcomes for people cannot be thought of at an aggregate level with any real meaning without starting with individuals, their families, and support networks. This is a natural corollary of core HLS principles concerning human freedom and flourishing and the purpose of public service to promote that freedom and flourishing.

> *"Stephen had been sleeping rough and was using drugs and alcohol. He wanted to make changes in his life, but he wasn't ready to talk about employment. He just wanted help to focus on his next steps without the pressure of where that could lead."*
>
> *"Sheila was dying in a hospice. When we asked her what good support looked like from her point of view, she said that she was really enjoying reading at the moment and if she was reading at 2am could she be left to it, rather than being offered something to help her sleep."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

> *"Karen's youngest son was autistic, and her daughter was going through a tough time at school. For Karen, quitting smoking would have to wait, despite the prompts that the computer system was throwing up for the health professionals to take action."*
>
> *"Terry wanted to learn how better to manage his money by having someone he trusted to help him with his day-to-day spending, which he knew was impulsive and driven by boredom. The established practice meant setting up a formal appointeeship that released his money in batches many days apart, and reduced his contact with a trusted caseworker. This played into his impulsiveness and boredom and led to more debt."*
>
> **(From Mark Smith, of Gateshead Council)**

For real people in their real lives, what matters always means what matters to this person or these people, in this place and at this time. At the right moment, getting into employment can be an amazing outcome. At the wrong moment, it can be the unwelcome pressure that leads someone out of recovery and back onto the street. In the middle of a troubled night, a little attention can be a welcome reminder that someone cares. In the middle of a good book and a place of calm contentment, it can be an annoying interruption. Quitting the smoking cessation programme can be a sign that someone needs help to persevere, or it can be a sign that they are taking charge of their priorities and ensuring that what really matters is what they're really focused on.

All of this makes understanding the aggregate impact of HLS on people's lives very challenging. While we can measure changes in patterns – for example, changes to the profile of demand on services, employment rates, obesity rates, cancer survival rates, and so on – it's only by anchoring back to the stories of people's lived experience that we can know whether changes in overall patterns represent people leading better or merely different lives.

From an HLS perspective, aggregate data can be useful, but "population outcomes" are a wicked fiction – understanding citizen impact is about making sense of data in the context of an individual's stories and vice versa. It is crucial to figure out how we can work from the particular to the general and not the reverse – we must learn to favour a journey of "context to patterns", rather than "policy to procedures".

"Bespoke by design" flows from understanding context

As we understand the stories of real people, we see that their outcomes are highly contextual and individual – people vary in ways that are significant for how public services need to respond to them if they are to be effective. They require public services to be bespoke as a default, defined and continually refined to absorb the variety of what really matters to people right now, and how that shifts dynamically over time as people's situations change.

This puts the 'human' into HLS, in a way that is systematic – I get the help I need in ways that work for me **by design**. We have seen time and again that understanding and responding to what really matters to individuals, in their context, rehumanises the interactions between citizens and the people delivering services, and between people and institutions. Rehumanising services is the foundation for better outcomes.

The great convention historically governing the design of public services is that standard work works. It does not. The functional mindset is tempted to segment people – to bundle them up as being alike – and then to treat them as alike too. This is problematic for multiple reasons:

- It reduces complex, whole people to their category. They become their condition or classification, or whichever one of them is more visible to the eyes of the system, and this introduces multiple forms of harm – including avoidable cost.
- Worse still, they become one of their conditions, whichever one stirs the most action in the system. For example, someone suffering with mental health problems who drinks is seen as a drinker, and you can't pass go with mental health services until you stop drinking. In this particular example, "Double Diagnosis" is a predictable single-loop response.
- It ignores the unique context and strengths of people, reducing the possibility of these being part of their support story.
- It ignores the fact that outcomes are always person-shaped,

building an evaluation system that hardwires (institutionalises) the faulty test problem, where we evaluate success in terms that are irrelevant to the people we are trying to serve.

> *"A lady who was encountered by virtue of her rent arrears was able, when asked what mattered to her, to talk about her abusive relationship, protecting her child and trying to forge a new life. After months of support, which included freezing the debt, they were safe, she was working and the child was settled into a new school. Her benefits were also finally accurate, and she was able to plan ahead for the first time in years. Her debt was broadly the same and thus the support was deemed to have been ineffective by the functionally-focused parts of the system."*
>
> **(From Mark Smith, of Gateshead Council)**

Why do these problems arise? In complex systems, standardised and functionalised organisational processes create friction between people, organisations and citizens; because they stop services from understanding and responding to the particular needs, strengths and situations of individual citizens.

> *"An experienced physio arrived at the Emergency Department with a badly twisted ankle. She thought it might be broken, but knew if it was not, she would be able to go home and treat the soft tissue injury herself. The best way to proceed was to have an X-Ray to rule a break in or out and go from there. The nurse practitioner who saw the physio wanted to manipulate the injured ankle because the hospital IT system governed the diagnostic process, and she had to follow the scripts. An argument ensued – 'I need to know what pathway to put you down' versus 'you are not manipulating my ankle when we don't know whether it's broken or not'. Standardisation had literally been written into the IT system and was making it harder for two intelligent clinical practitioners to make an informed decision based on the particular context in front of them."*
>
> **(This is a personal experience of Jeremy's with a family member)**

Bespoke by design feels highly counterintuitive to people schooled in traditional Taylorist management ideas. In the end, though, pathway thinking that attempts to categorise variety and respond with specified, predetermined processes is just another sort of silo thinking, this time with the silos lying on their side. Bespoke-by-design thinking turns out to be more humane, more effective, and more efficient. It does not rule out formalising certain aspects of process or practice based on patterns, experimentation and evidence. These would take the form of repeatable core capabilities – we might have a discipline of working to "understand, rebalance, maintain" for people with complex escalating needs, for example, with individualised and highly adaptive work within this frame. The key is that design never starts with standardisation as the aim.

> *"Mike had cancer which had spread to his brain. He was becoming intermittently drowsier and seemed quite comfortable. When a member of staff visited him on the ward, she asked what was important to him. His reply was simple: 'Going home. My son.' She explored further… 'Going home' was important to him because he had some business to sort out – finances, making a will and so on. 'My son' meant that he wanted to be the one to talk to his son about dying. With support, Mike achieved what mattered to him. He died four days later."*
>
> **(From Saskie Dorman, of Dorset Health and Social Care)**

> *"At Wellbeing Teams, a practice of intentionally finding and supporting 'the little moments that matter' exists, brought to life and maintained in the culture through team meetings and the use of Slack, where stories are routinely shared about the different ways Wellbeing Workers have found to deliver compassionate, personalised support. Examples of this include the use of Life Story Books and a demonstrable commitment to ensuring that 'every shower can be a spa experience and every cream application can be a massage'. In support of this, Wellbeing Workers decided they wanted to carry pamper kits so they could paint people's nails or offer hand massages."*
>
> **(From Helen Sanderson, of Wellbeing Teams)**

With bespoke by design institutionalising a discipline of individualised service design and delivery, the approach also ensures that intervention and support for people remains adaptive and dynamic, with people and professionals involved in cycles of genuine codesign, action and reflection.

Trying to make policy decisions based on "helicopter" data is problematic

The temptation to aggregate up to population measures and use them to make policy decisions about how services should be delivered is problematic – it dissolves the context that allows us to make sense of the value of that individual's experience. It ends up dealing in outputs (how much this, that or the other happened, how many of these there were… essentially how busy we have been) and mistaking them for outcomes. Measures of industry either trump, or become mistaken for, measures of efficacy. People experience outcomes, not populations.

Fundamentally, we must reconcile ourselves to the inconvenient fact that public services are inherently complex in nature, and outcomes in complex systems are emergent effects – the numbers at an aggregate level are not and never will be the simple sum of individual outcomes or particular interventions.

> *"Complex adaptive systems are systems which are made up of many interconnected parts that are constantly self-organising and adapting in response to their environment. The concept has been applied widely to natural systems such as the brain and insect colonies, to organisations and societies, and to economies."*
>
> **(Ramage & Shipp, 2009)**

The Finnish National Eduction Agency recognises the problem of judging success and failure at the aggregate level. They have been running education and schooling experiments that are informing the HLS approach, and they report an important perspective on outcomes:

> *"When there is no direct pressure for activities to be 'successful', it becomes possible to also test riskier, more innovative, and more unintuitive solutions."*

Critically, they are maintaining an intentional focus on learning from their programme of experiments, rather than notions of "successful outcomes". To underpin this, they are framing

social metrics to track the complex web of impacts across a number of dimensions, deliberately anchoring aggregate measures in the context of the student and family:

The student and family – learning, involvement, influence, wellbeing

- The teachers, staff and school – role, agency, know-how, wellbeing, everyday life
- The municipality and wider population of citizens – equality and marginalisation, sustainability
- Techno-economic metrics – effects on the reputation of the experiment, experiment coordination and cooperation, the experiment's finances and dissemination costs.

If we acknowledge that population outcomes are troublesome, then perhaps we must also accept a provocation that "place" may not really be any more than a collection of proximate people. So "place-based" is also a concept we need to treat carefully to avoid the mistake of assuming "place-level" measures as being indicative of citizen outcomes in the same way we do with population measures.

People don't just have their own problems, they also have "problems (and aspirations)-in-common"

Public service reform in Gateshead is generating profound insights about the interplay between the particular of citizen impact and the general of place and population. Teams are learning that place takes energy from the insight that people have problems-in-common, and if these are proximate, it can make sense to do something or generate something in a place that addresses this and prevents its proliferation. This has been adopted locally as the way to do place-based work – perhaps it is more precise to think of it as "proximate people-based work".

Problems-in-common are key to spotting patterns and building capability to tackle the headwinds, and this is enriched further by strengthening the tailwinds around meeting people's overall purpose of a good life, rather than just an improved one. This means understanding and responding to aspirations and strengths, whether in common or unique. This often requires lateral thinking and the creation of new networks and relationships. As capacity and resourcefulness build, increased dynamism and resourcefulness is

observed in communities as we collectively become better at helping to make more new things happen that people are interested in pursuing. This growth enhances our 'problems-in-common' frame with the more generative notion of 'aspirations-in-common'. Understanding aspirations-in-common helps to hone methods around creative thinking and spotting or creating opportunities to thrive at a level beyond that achieved by solving problems.

Working on the notion of problems-in-common can never work without the base unit of understanding a person's context and what matters to them, and this is agnostic of place – it is true everywhere. If we knew this of every person, the right blend of common and bespoke solutions would emerge, notwithstanding other system and resource limitations.

> *"Experience to date in Gateshead tells us that each time we work to a 'person-sets-boundary' principle, a bespoke combination of any or all of intervening, supporting and transacting occurs. Some actions we take are common and others are rare. This helps us to create collective/local capacity for the common ones such as parks, job clubs, mutual aid etc. Knowing which things were idiosyncratic, and how often something idiosyncratic was needed to have a positive impact, helps us to make the case for population outcomes as the dominant planning mechanism being unhelpful."*
>
> **(From Mark Smith, of Gateshead Council)**

Another example of a problem-in-common is the availability of daytime and overnight support for people experiencing homelessness who also have alcohol issues. They commonly benefit from being able to access services and supported housing that are "wet", where alcohol consumption is tolerated and moderated as part of a therapeutic environment. Of course, not everyone wants or needs wet settings, so building patterns from contextual insights is necessary.

This insight that community or population-based action ought to be treated as a second-order process, driven by the first-order work of bespoke by design is profound. This is echoed in the chapter on place, where the importance of linking context to place in taking a "local healthy system" perspective is explored.

Patterns revealed when we aggregate up signal priorities for action

This notion of problems-in-common and aspirations-in-common is a particular type of pattern that emerges from context. The more we learn to work this way, the more skilful we become at spotting a range of patterns in our aggregate data that might be good signals for action, the characteristics of the sorts of interventions, transactions and support that enable positive change and stories to emerge.

We can aggregate data, but it is what mathematicians call a stochastic process. Stochastic social science theory is related to systems theory in that events are understood to be interactions of systems:

> *"In an ever more complex and interrelated world, a better understanding of social systems and of the dynamics of their behaviour is of crucial importance. Many of the tools holding promise of potentially significant contributions to the analysis of social systems have been, or are being developed outside of the social sciences proper, mostly the loose collection of diverse scientific approaches called 'systems science' or 'systems theory'."*
> **(Pichler, 1977)**

The aggregate doesn't reveal the necessary actions, it just gives us patterns that are signals for action, so we need pragmatic ways to break through the complexity. Some examples of these patterns in aggregate data:

- In multiple locations around the country the authors have found a number of indicators that are most diagnostic of underlying complex issues and a need for support. These include council tax arrears, rent arrears over a certain amount, involvement in crime or antisocial behaviour, and referral to Children's and Young People's services.
- Patients who need chronic wound care in the community often experience a range of significant impacts on their wellbeing, and for the NHS managing these wounds is extremely expensive and time-consuming. In an English county where the rate of persistent problematic wounds was significantly above the national average, this was treated as a signal for action.
- In place-based multiagency work in Greater Manchester, it became clear that a significant proportion of police demand was coming from people who had been in contact with mental health services, and that there was no availability of mental health expertise at the frontline of policing, where demand was being picked up. Mental health providers were so stretched that they felt unable to relocate staff to work alongside the police, and they wanted cases to be dealt with via established referral and assessment mechanisms.

In all these cases, once we had signals that seemed fruitful for action, we had to go back to context to make sense of the underlying issues case by case. The reasons for rent arrears, persistent wound issues, or people suffering mental health issues coming into contact with the police are many and varied, and we know that our bespoke by design approach – treating every case as an opportunity to understand what is going on for each citizen in their context – is an effective route for learning and action.

We have created a virtuous cycle of effective action that moves from context to patterns and back to context:

1. Start bespoke

When we work case by case, person by person to a bespoke-by-design and "person-sets-boundary" principle, we generate better outcomes for citizens and more efficient working methods.

2. Respond to the problems – and aspirations – in-common

As we continue to work in our new person-centred way, we build up experience and see patterns of issues, aspirations, strengths and actions emerging – these lead us to create resources, policies and systems that are common, and some that are less frequent.

3. Signals in the aggregate

With action happening off the back of the patterns we have seen emerging from our work in context, we can review the aggregate data for signals.

4. Back to context

We follow these new clues from the aggregate back into context, making sense alongside citizens and colleagues to understand what is needed to make sense of, and respond to, the signal through bespoke-by-design action.

Putting design and control back in context is simultaneously bespoke and scalable

Once this process starts, bespoke-by-design service delivery, emergent pattern recognition, aggregate data scanning, and sense-making back in context are happening at the same time and serve to reinforce each other.

This process indicates a crucial shift in emphasis for central/national roles away from the specification of detailed policies, prescriptions and KPIs to enabling learning locally, and across organisations, localities, partnerships and networks.

Funding and organising from the centre – with the intention of enabling learning and horizontal accountability – becomes a critical capability, often referred to in the context of HLS as System Stewardship. This implies and requires a significant redistribution of power from the conventional "power-over" hierarchical structures where power is concentrated in few senior roles and in spaces away from context; to models where sense-making and action are shared coproductive processes, and leaders are a part of decision-making that is anchored in context.

When HLS-informed approaches are working harmoniously it enables system partners to connect what is being learned through sense-making and action at the level of the particular (the human) and the general (the systemic). This opens the way to working in ways that are simultaneously bespoke and scalable. We learn to capture and act on the systemic patterns at scale that emerge from our bespoke working with individual citizens, and we cultivate the discipline for pattern-spotting to habitually drive us back to context. Because co ordinated and complementary action happens at both the individual and system levels, coherent methods for the evaluation of impact can be developed that reflect the systemic feedback relationships between both levels.

In Greater Manchester, HLS-informed work with separate organisations over a period of time from the police, to local authorities, to health, revealed the pattern of people who were repeatedly coming into contact with multiple services, but whose issues when seen through the "horizontal silo" of service thresholds and eligibility were not serious enough for concentrated intervention and case ownership. They tended to deteriorate over time, accumulating referrals, assessments and failed interventions, consuming more and more resources, and suffering worsening impacts personally. This pattern-spotting from bespoke by design work in individual organisations led to a combined-authority sponsored multiagency programme of place-based teams who learned how to support individuals in this cohort, and flush out the resources and interventions needed estate, borough, and GM-wide to make it easier to provide the support and resources needed.

Many other examples of learning and improvement that are simultaneously bespoke and scalable are emerging from the pioneering organisations that are informing and being inspired by HLS principles. They all share the common notion of locating design and control back in context. We know that healthy systems produce better outcomes: with more effective collaboration, coordination and learning, HLS allows us to disrupt unhealthy systems in ways that are generative and inclusive, rather than destructive.

The impact is more humane, more efficient and more effective public services and places

In the Greater Manchester work, the impacts of an HLS-friendly approach were seen, felt, heard and measured from the citizen to the locality level.

- At the individual level, the polarity of a citizen's experience was switched. People in the "complex issues, below threshold" cohort moved from a 2/3 likelihood of deteriorating over time, to a 2/3 likelihood of improving. Citizens were living better lives, in terms that were meaningful to them, from employment, to health, to relationships and beyond.
- Staff reported improved motivation and pride in their work, because they were experiencing greater levels of autonomy, competency and relatedness.
- The cumulative impact over time for individual people, and of action triggered by the problems they shared in common, saw positive shifts in locality-level measures at the aggregate level. Where place-based teams were running, there was reduced consumption of services that were reactive and restorative, such as blue light callouts, benefits payments, crime and antisocial behaviour. At the same time, consumption of preventative and proactive services like recreation, adult education, school attendance, employment support and preventative health increased.
- As in the EDUFI example, impact started and ended with people. External evaluations and eclectic perspectives were invited to help nurture the emphasis on front-to-back learning and insight, over "success" versus back-to-front prescriptions and targets.
- Independent financial evaluation estimated that for each pound spent on locality-based teams working with a bespoke by design

approach, roughly £3 were saved through reduced demand across a wide range of services, including blue light, housing, and social care.

HLS-informed work in public service systems can be messy and disorientating, because it is by nature emergent and complex. But there are real and fundamental impacts for citizens – they experience better outcomes in their terms, reduced inequality, and a rehumanising of relationships with the people providing services. Non-bespoke, pattern-blind services are bad for citizens, demoralise staff, and are wastefully inefficient. HLS is creating a moral imperative to be better – the impacts for citizens individually and in aggregate leave us with a clear call to action.

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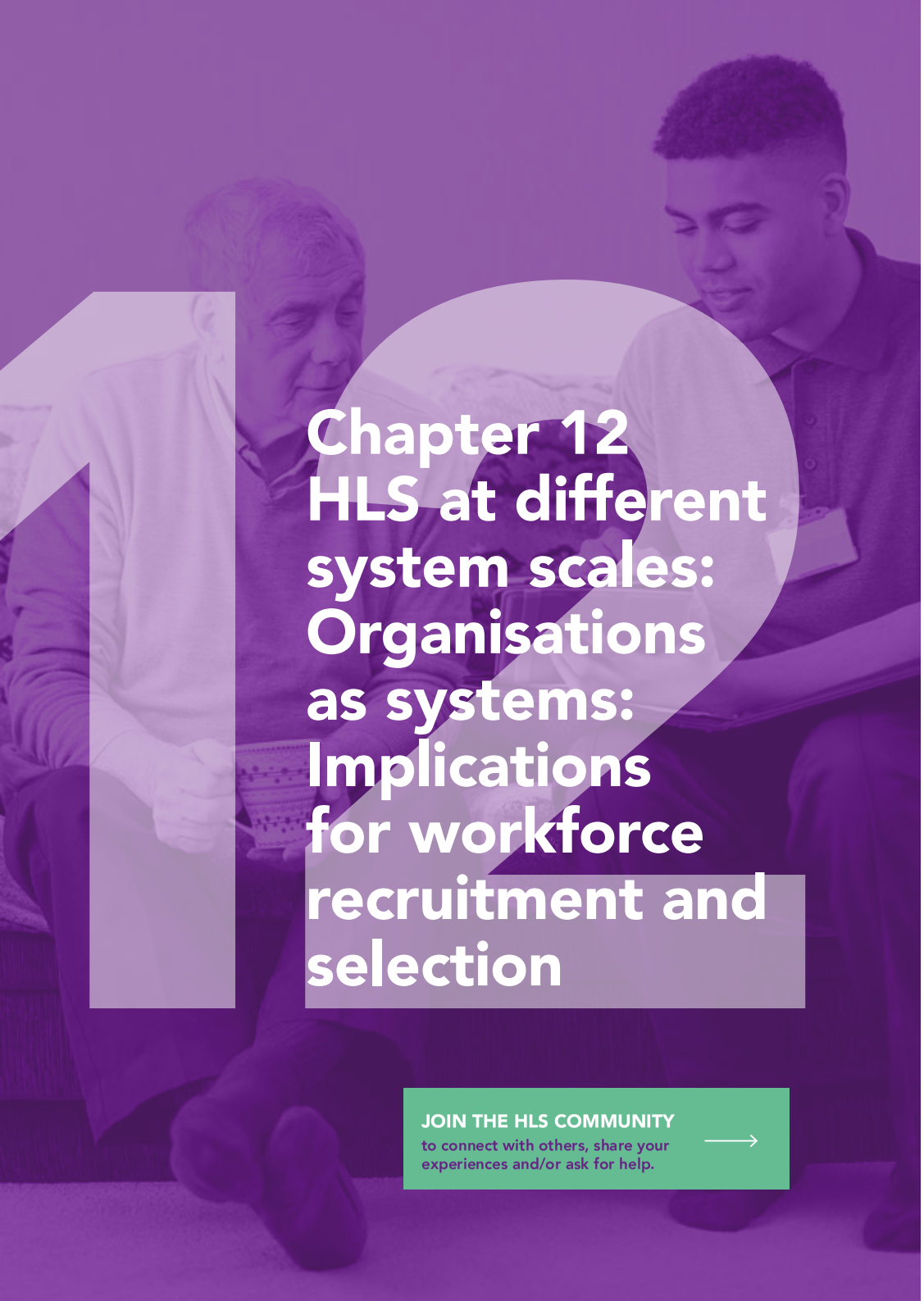

Chapter 12 HLS at different system scales: Organisations as systems: Implications for workforce recruitment and selection

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
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Human Learning Systems: implications for workforce recruitment and selection

Authors: Helen Sanderson, Brendan Hill and Gabriel Eichsteller
Contact the authors

Outline

Using HLS in organisations offers new opportunities for recruiting a workforce that can meaningfully respond to the complex challenges of the 21st century. In this chapter, we outline the human resources implications of HLS, drawing on the case study of Wellbeing Teams, which won the Guardian Public Services Award for Recruitment and HR for their approach to values-based recruitment – a process designed to recruit individuals whose ethos and beliefs align with those of the organisation. As HLS supports a shift from competing to collaborating, it is important to consider what HLS means for how organisations recruit new team members and what a systems approach could look like. While our background is in health and social care, we have sought to draw out wider implications that we hope are equally applicable across other public service sectors.

With its focus on recognising individuals as whole human beings, creating a learning culture that fosters ongoing experimentation and innovation, and applying a systems perspective, the HLS approach emphasises very different qualities in the workforce to those typically examined in recruitment processes. At the core of it is an overt invitation to interviewees (as well as interviewers) to turn up as people first and foremost, to be both professional and personal. Recruiting your workforce in an HLS-informed way is therefore not just about changing a few interview questions or the recruitment format – it starts from greater clarity about your organisation's identity. What are its purpose and values? How does it conceptualise people, both its workers and the people it serves? And how are these ideas about human nature reflected in its structures, processes and culture? If we recruit with these ideas at the heart of how we work, the impact will be felt at an individual, team, organisational, and then systems level, hopefully with each level

positively reinforcing the other.

In reconceptualising recruitment within your organisation, we don't want to suggest that you must follow the exact same model outlined below. We're mindful that Wellbeing Teams were founded on clear values and principles as well as an organisational structure of self-management that meant values-based recruitment was present from the outset. This is fundamentally different to organisations that are interested in shifting towards HLS, but with an existing workforce that has been recruited in more traditional ways. Rather than a blueprint, the insights below from recruitment at Wellbeing Teams are therefore offered in the hope that they provide inspiration, enable you to reflect critically and spark your own ideas for humanising your HR processes and strategy. We have aimed to outline the themes that we think are critical for you to examine in this respect, starting off with your organisation's purpose and values.

Purpose and Values

Think of purpose as your organisation's lighthouse, a clear, bright and highly visible beacon helping people navigate their everyday practice. Some days, when the weather is calm and sunny, the lighthouse is a nice landmark and

offers reassurance. As the weather changes and conditions become more challenging, the lighthouse increases in significance, providing a crucial anchor point that ensures people can adapt their course and stay true, responding expertly and flexibly to whatever situation they find themselves in, all guided by the lighthouse. Without a lighthouse, their ability to navigate would be severely limited.

The same can be said for organisational purpose. The greater its meaning is to every person in the organisation, and the more its purpose guides its workforce from day to day, the more meaningful their practice becomes and the more they're able to respond innovatively to a diverse range of circumstances in ways that are congruent with the organisation's objectives.

Many of the HLS case studies, such as Lighthouse, Empowerment, and the Mayday Trust, reveal a clear sense of purpose that indeed acts like a lighthouse, a reference point for everyday practice as well as long-term strategy. It is actively maintained, and decisions are made by team members in the light of the organisation's purpose. This includes decisions about how to recruit new team members whose values align with the organisation's ethos and purpose.

Conceptualising human beings

Asking deeper questions about the purpose of your organisation – why it exists and how it contributes to making the world a better place – raises philosophical questions about your view of the nature of human beings. HLS celebrates human diversity, the richness of human potential, and the importance of encouraging people to bring their whole self to work. Recruitment processes should therefore be designed in ways that reflect a positive and strengths-based view of human beings. This starts with the language used in HR and how this might support applicants in feeling recognised as a unique individual. Moreover, it requires a critical rethink of the advertisement, shortlisting, interviewing and selection processes, in terms of how these are designed and who is involved. Importantly, at each stage, we must seriously consider how we can strengthen diversity within the organisation and the extent to which all processes facilitate recruitment for diversity. As you can see in the example below, values-based recruitment increases diversity because it focuses on how people's values align with the organisation's purpose. It also highlights the importance of creating an inclusive environment where every person feels able to play to their strengths, connect to their values, and develop their potential.

Rethinking recruitment in organisations

With its emphasis on recognising that human beings are more than the requirements listed in their job specifications, HLS offers new opportunities to rethink how we can find and recruit people whose values align with those of our organisation and with the potential ability to live those values in their daily practice. No matter whether we take a moral view about the importance of ensuring recruitment is fair, equitable and unbiased, or focus on the economics of the recruitment process as resource-efficient and providing value for money, values-based recruitment has enormous potential.

Helen explains below the 10 principles at Wellbeing Teams that underpin their approach and how they work in practice.

Values-based recruitment

Helen Sanderson

Wellbeing Teams are small, neighbourhood, self-managed teams, supporting people to live well at home and be part of their community. When I decided to set up Wellbeing Teams in 2018, without any background or qualifications in HR or recruitment, I was on a steep learning curve. My colleague Michelle and I started off with a blank piece of paper on the large pinboard in my basement office, with our purpose and values written in black pen at the top. Rather than outsource recruitment to an external agency, we wanted to design a process that reflected our values, and we found great colleagues who were a good fit for us and the work – from their perspective and ours. We had decided to look for people from outside the health and care sector. We believed that we could teach people the skills that they needed, and for people with existing experience of home care, it would be harder to unlearn traditional practices, like phoning the office to speak to the manager. We imagined that if people had experience with customers or the public in some way, and their values aligned with ours and they were curious about self-management, then this would be a good place to start.

The process we designed, experimented with, and kept (keep!) adapting, looks different from traditional HR-led recruitment in 10 ways. Before I explain these 10 ways, let's get clear about what we mean by values-based recruitment. At Wellbeing Teams we think about it in two directions – are we demonstrating our values through the recruitment process? And does our recruitment process intentionally attract people whose values align with ours?

The research around values-based recruitment is compelling. It tells us that it can reduce employee turnover and increase employee satisfaction and performance (Edwards and Cable 2009; Hoffman and Woeher 2006), as well as increasing trust and cooperation between team members (Hurley 2006). It has become a buzz phrase in the care sector, however, and now most organisations do their own version.

My go-to person around values, and one of the national advisors for Wellbeing Teams, is Jackie Lefevre. She argues that every organisation does values-based recruitment, the question being whether it is conscious or not. As Jackie puts it, "the things you write and say, how you express them and sequence them all matters. The shortlist criteria you use, the structure of the interview questions, what you give candidates marks for and what you don't give them marks for – all this is driven by an underlying set of values. Whether intended or not, certain values are coming through. You are doing values-based recruitment – just not deliberately."

Values are an expression of what matters most to a person, a group, an organisation. Values shape our sense of the world, how things work, and what is "like" or "not like" us. In recruitment, two sets of values are at work. The values of the recruiting organisation (or a combination of the values of the organisation who wants to recruit and the values of the recruitment consultancy being used) and the values of the potential candidate.

Great hires take place when the values of the employing organisation and the values of the individual align and resonate with one another. This is not about looking for an exact "match" where the person has precisely the same values as the organisation. There is no such thing as the "right" set of values. This is not about taking a values-shaped cookie-cutter to the labour market, seeking people who fit that shape. Rather it is about values alignment.

Consciously values-based recruitment is about finding the words, processes and activities which both embody the uniqueness of the employing organisation and put flesh on the bones of a candidate's sense of what the job might be like in real life. For instance, if creativity is a core value for your organisation but the recruitment process is very standard, then you won't be attracting any people who value creativity highly. If you're interested in seeing what this looks like, please read Helen's accompanying blog on Values Based Recruitment.

Key features for recruitment in an HLS organisation

From when we started, with our blank paper on the pinboard, to now supporting a local authority to recruit their first Wellbeing Teams, there are ten key features that we are using and testing (Sanderson 2021). They differ from a more typical approach in four aspects: relation to purpose, who is involved, how recruitment takes place, and what is seen as success.

1. **Purpose.** I know this sounds obvious, but the purpose of recruitment is to find the best person to fill a vacancy. The nuance here is what we mean by the best person. We think about mutual fit between the whole person and our team. We want you to decide if we are the right fit for you, as well as whether

you are the right fit for us – not just on paper but in real life. Our process is designed so that you rule us out first if you decide we are not a good fit for you, because this saves time and energy for everyone.

2. **Who.** This is usually the role of the HR team, with the local manager, or it might be outsourced. We think that everyone is a recruiter, and we pay attention to that (but not in a typical "bonus if you refer a friend" way). In each team there is someone who has a specific role around recruitment. Coproduction matters to us, whether we are working with an individual or family to recruit their team, or recruiting a team to support people in a local neighbourhood. We therefore involve a coproduction partner, who has lived experience and can bring a valuable perspective to the recruitment process.
3. **How.** Standard recruitment consists of one or more interviews. We want to see how people interact together, because teamwork is crucial. We want to see how people bring their whole selves to the recruitment experience, and we try to get to know them over a few hours.
4. **Success.** A good recruitment process is seen as quick and efficient as well as delivering the best candidates, and then handing over to operations/learning and development. You are likely to spend more time with your work colleagues than your family, and your physical and mental health will be significantly impacted by your work. We invite people to invest time and energy in our recruitment process (while still being efficient).

Here is a summary of the approach that we have taken to recruitment in Wellbeing Teams.

	Moving From	Towards
Purpose	Finding the best candidate for the job. Therefore, providing information about the job, tasks and responsibilities.	Mutual Fit. Approaching recruitment based on the idea of mutual fit. This means providing a range of ways to help prospective candidates get a good insight into the role and us as an organisation, and decide first whether we are for them.
Values – attracting	Recruitment based on qualifications and experience.	Values-based. Recruiting based on values and characteristics and only qualifications if absolutely required to do the role and cannot be learned once in the role.
Values – demonstrating	Recruitment design based on efficiency.	Demonstrate the organisation's values. Recruitment design based on demonstrating the values of the organisation – walking the talk.
Who Role	The HR team or another dedicated team is responsible for recruitment (and this may be outsourced).	Everyone is a recruiter, and there are a range of people with recruitment in their roles alongside other roles. We have coproduction partners working alongside us in recruitment.
Decision-making	Recruitment decisions made by the HR team.	Coproduction. Recruitment decisions made by/with the team/manager and coproduction partners (experts by experience).
How Finding people	Thinking about who to recruit is based on experience and qualifications and where people with that experience/qualifications will be looking for work.	Marketing approach. Deciding who to look for based on values, and then using a marketing approach to reaching potential candidates based around personas.
Process	Interviews.	Groups. Candidates are given opportunities to demonstrate who they are, and to shine, in a range of ways, for example workshops.
Success Candidate experience	Overall candidate to colleague experience is not usually considered. Recruitment, induction and probation are handled by different departments.	Continuity. Recruitment, induction and probation are led by the same people offering continuity of experience.
Time	Success is seen as making the recruitment as efficient as possible.	Invite people to invest time and energy. We ask people to prepare before a workshop, and invest 2-3 hours with us.
Review and learning	Recruitment process evaluated by the HR or recruitment team, based on metrics.	Learn from everyone involved. Everyone involved in recruitment, including candidates (successful and unsuccessful), are involved in reviewing the process and identifying what to try next, what experiment is needed to test out ideas for improvement.

If you want to find out more about what this looks like in practice, please read Helen's blog on the Human Learning Systems website.

Creating bespoke recruitment processes

It is important to acknowledge that not all HLS-informed organisations have adopted value-based recruitment in the way and to the extent illustrated above. As highlighted throughout this e-book, the local and organisational context is key to determining how you can best integrate the HLS principles within the recruitment and selection process in your organisation. As we've shown above, thinking differently about recruitment can be highly beneficial, and the HLS approach offers an important opportunity to rethink, and perhaps reappraise, recruitment.

There are a range of ways in which organisations can introduce recruitment processes that align with the overall aims of an HLS approach. Whilst the above process is not a cookie-cutter template meant to be simply copied and pasted, we hope it will spark creative approaches to recruitment that feel both more human-centred and benefit the organisation itself, too. The extent to which you adapt your organisation's recruitment process to make it more purpose-driven and values-based needs to take into account your organisation's unique context. It's about starting the journey somewhere, wherever you can. This may be by changing the terminology to reflect a more human-centred approach – finding ways to level the power differential in job interviews and demonstrating that you meet interviewees as human to human. Or it may be exploring how you can gain a more well-rounded insight into your interviewees' whole selves and their ability to work with their head, heart and hands.

The issues highlighted above have touching points at an individual/personal level, in teams and organisations and in the cross-organisational, multisectoral systems we all operate in. We explore the systems implications in the following section.

Rethinking the workforce from a systems perspective

Brendan Hill

With its focus not just on individual organisations but on recognising their systemic interconnectedness, the HLS approach offers the opportunity to go one step further in how we think about recruitment. After all, if we truly want to put individuals and communities at the heart of public service, then we should think systemically and focus on how we can collectively and collaboratively support human flourishing. This poses questions about how we can recruit a workforce that benefits the wider system, at a time when many public service sectors such as health and social care are under increasing pressure to provide services in a very challenging recruitment market.

There are significant problems not only in recruitment but retention as well, particularly in what are seen as key professions, such as nursing and social work. It is crucial to recognise that the workforce challenge is about more than just what we do, it's about how we think. So, what if we designed health, social care and other public service systems around human connection and put people, communities and their relationships at their heart? What would that mean for our workforce? Below are some radical ideas for how HLS could help us re-examine workforce-related issues from a systems perspective.

Enhanced but fewer?

The workforce challenges in health and social care are well-documented: with an ageing population and persistent levels of social deprivation, the need for professionals in health and social care has increased over the last two decades. Yet it seems that there aren't enough suitably qualified practitioners to fill the vacancies, and subsequently providers are spending a huge amount of resources on recruitment. Retention levels are low, with providers trying to recruit practitioners from competitors, much like Premier League football clubs. When we take a step back, it becomes clear that our neoliberal system both wastes a huge level of precious resources and treats professionals as commodities. The consequences for communities and those who depend on support are dire.

To address this, we must start on common ground. One would hope that the following priorities are relatively universal:

- Providing more holistic approaches to an individual's health and wellbeing
- Addressing the prevention and public health challenge to reduce the burden on specialist services and complex care
- A shared understanding of the importance of the "social determinants of health"
- The integration challenge for health and social care, i.e. integrating around individuals and their communities, rather than organisations.

Addressing these at a time when demographics and finances alone present significant challenges make these increasingly difficult to achieve. Difficult perhaps, but not impossible if we can find a shared sense of purpose. Surely all who are involved in the current and future provision of health and care must share the following core aspirations of:

- Helping people help themselves as much as possible, so that they can be active participants in their own health and wellbeing
- When we as a health and care system are needed, we provide high-quality personalised services, tailored around the needs and preferences of people and their families (focused on "*what matters most*").

With the emergence of "place-based approaches" to health and care planning, new ways of working across professional and organisational boundaries are beginning to release the local systems' potential to focus on how to better provide and organise care around need. (The COVID-19 effect has accentuated this, too.) The permission to think and act differently, and having the freedom to do things in a way that suits personal and local need, will be key to success. However, if we are serious about developing this approach across the whole system, we need to start thinking big about the workforce. At least 75% of funding is usually spent on staffing services, so the type and number of staff we have, and how we remunerate them, is central. So, one of our biggest challenges (and opportunities) is to **redesign our workforce around the needs of the people**. A simple idea, and relatively obvious, but if we listen to what we are told, the experience of those accessing services (and sometimes staff, too) would often indicate that this is not the way our workforces are currently arranged.

There is, of course, excellent care provided to many, and this should naturally be acknowledged. But this good quality care is all too often provided by dedicated staff in spite of the system they work in, not because of it. I do not want my position to ever come across as "professional-bashing", as I was CEO of an organisation that has been predominantly "clinically-led", and indeed my own professional background is in nursing. I believe we need to support and invest in our professions, refreshing their purpose, remit and skill base in order to increase their ability to serve our communities better in an HLS-informed way.

With this in mind, we now need to develop a serious conversation with provider organisations, government agencies, and sector bodies on the following issues:

- The core training and development requirements of existing health and care professions need to "catch up" with regard to the importance of the social determinants of health, including a greater emphasis on promotion, prevention, and self-management.

- The emerging non-professionally-aligned roles (including navigators, link workers, wellbeing teams and peer support) should be overtly expanded as a substantive and substantial pillar of the workforce, with particular value being placed on how these positions can be developed as part of a deliberate step up in cross-sector workforce planning.
- We must now challenge the myth that we can tackle the chronic shortages in areas such as general practice, community nursing, social work, psychiatry, etc, by continuing to rob other parts of the system or chase staff that do not exist. *The cavalry are not coming*.
- We should examine a range of professional roles and bandings with a view that the evolving health and care system might, in some instances, require "*enhanced, but fewer*" of some clinical/professional roles to help fund the change we want to see.
- The "fewer" professional roles that remain will need to supervise, support and nurture the expanded non-professionally-aligned roles and teams. Hopefully, by enriching these jobs in this way, we will also improve the recruitment and retention of these valuable system resources.

If we can indeed make progress on the challenges outlined above, then we can ask further questions of our system partners to take practical next steps:

- Can the values-based recruitment described by Helen be adopted across sectors as the cornerstone of recruitment for these non-professionally-aligned roles focusing on a common set of system-agreed core values and competencies?
- Using that set of core values and competencies, can we re-examine existing roles, so we might consider a "*same people, new approach*" – giving overt permission and support to our current people to do different things and work in a more bespoke way across a place/system (for instance, through "staff passporting")?
- How might we also raise the profile of "not from the manual" practices that work both for the people we serve and for the staff themselves and that might challenge professional and organisational norms/requirements? Shining a light on these should then influence what we are looking for in the people we recruit.

We strongly believe that HLS can help us make this shift seem exciting and achievable.

Ways forward: how you could get started introducing these principles

Irrespective of your role within the system, here are some ways in which you can start introducing the above principles into conversations and processes:

	Ideas for getting started
Purpose	Are there more ways that you could help prospective candidates get a good insight into the role and you as an organisation?
Values – attracting	Can you review roles to check that qualifications are absolutely required and the skills cannot be taught when someone is in the role? How are you embedding the values that you are looking for at each stage of the process and in all written communication?
Values – demonstrating	Does each stage of the process reflect the values of the organisation?
Who Role	How can you involve teams in recruiting their colleagues? Can people with lived experience play a part in recruitment, with meaningful influence throughout the whole process?
Decision-making	Can you clarify how decisions are made now throughout the process? What would it take to shift any of these to involving the manager, team and people with lived experience?
How Finding people	Do you know who you are looking for? Have you got personas around each group of people you are targeting? Are you changing your marketing approach to reflect different personas?
Process	Could you consider workshops instead of just interviews?
Success Candidate experience	Can you work closely with people responsible for recruitment, induction and probation – working as a team to offer greater continuity of experience for successful candidates?
Time	Are there other ways that you can invite people to invest time and energy in applying for the role?
Review and learning	How can you learn from everyone involved in recruitment, including candidates (successful and unsuccessful)? Can you agree on an experiment to see how you can improve recruitment based on this learning?

In the following chapter, you can read about how to keep the people you've succeeded in attracting to your organisation through value-based recruitment. The chapter explores the kind of approach to learning and development that can underpin HLS.

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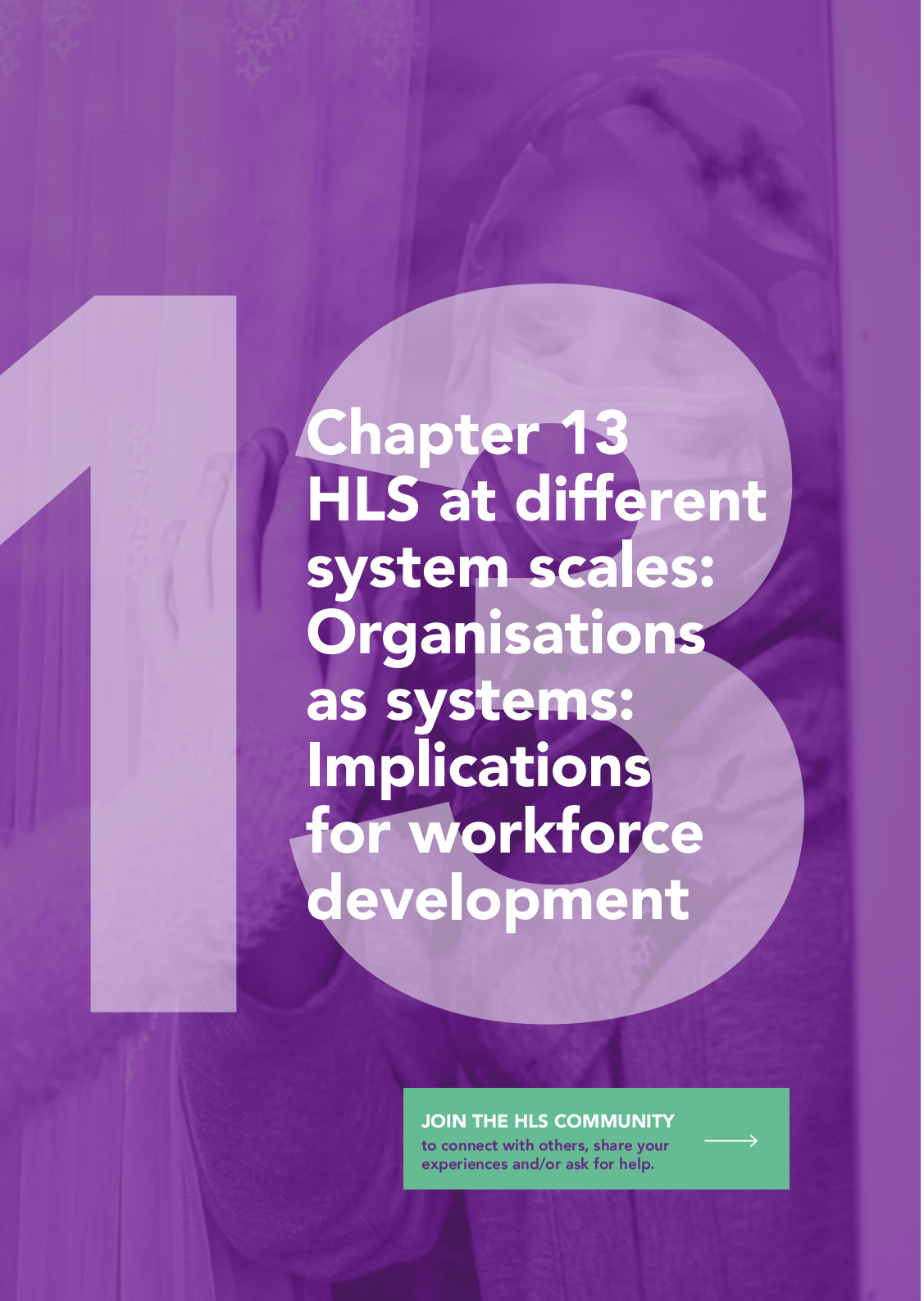

Chapter 13 HLS at different system scales: Organisations as systems: Implications for workforce development

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Human Learning Systems – implications for workforce development

Rethinking organisational learning & development activities

Authors: Brendan Hill, Helen Sanderson and Gabriel Eichsteller
Contact the authors

> *"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."*
>
> **(Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed)**

Outline

When developing an HLS approach in your organisation, it is essential to ensure that workforce development activities are reflective of the ethos and aims of HLS. In this chapter, we outline some of the implications for Learning and Development (L&D) departments, focusing on how you can enable your workforce to gain relevant knowledge and understanding, become attuned to their values, and develop the skills needed to practice HLS. This requires a radical rethink of the role of learning and development along with a focus on the organisational conditions that help cultivate and grow an HLS culture.

When incorporating this new approach to L&D, it will be necessary to ensure that the skills of the workforce are both valued and harnessed effectively. If handled clumsily, the heightened emphasis and importance placed on values and the centrality of "being human" may otherwise be interpreted as an implied devaluation of the existing skills linked to professional roles in public services. Our background lies in health and social care, and we have therefore focused

on this sector. At the same time, we feel that much of what we say of health and social care will be equally relevant and applicable to public services more widely. We hope the perspective we offer can inform wider developments within these sectors.

The key starting-point for an HLS approach to L&D is a deeper examination of your organisation's purpose and values and what these say about how you view your workforce. If you believe that you've recruited the kinds of people who share your purpose and values (more about how to achieve this in our chapter on recruitment and selection), it's essential to create an enriched learning environment that seeks to bring out the best in everybody, allows all people in your organisation to flourish, and helps ensure that systems serve people and communities. But it isn't merely the purpose of your organisation that requires attention. As is evident from the opening quotation from the hugely influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by the Brazilian social educator Paulo Freire, we also need to critically examine the purpose of L&D itself and the extent to which it functions in order to perpetuate the status quo or to enable systems transformation.

Purpose and values

As explained in our previous chapter on recruitment and selection , your organisation's purpose acts as a lighthouse, providing a guiding point for staff to navigate the everyday challenges and complexities they encounter in their practice.

Your organisation's purpose therefore needs to be clear, well understood, and meaningful to every person in the organisation. And it should visibly guide the learning and development activities for the workforce, which can enable your organisation to maintain and evolve your purpose together with your staff teams, so that it continues to be of relevance in everyday situations and enables thoughtful, flexible and innovative practice. If you want to find out how some of the organisations involved with HLS are ensuring that practice is underpinned by a clear sense of purpose, please read the case studies of Lighthouse, Empowerment, and the Mayday Trust.

A fresh perspective on human capacity

Implicit in the purpose of your organisation – why it exists and how it contributes to making the world a better place – is a particular view of the nature of human beings. HLS celebrates human diversity, the richness of human potential, and the importance of encouraging people to bring their whole self to work. Learning and development activities should therefore be designed in ways that reflect a positive and strengths-based view of human beings. We need to recognise that every person has unique learning potential and that it is our job to create an enriched environment for learning. Learning doesn't happen simply by sending staff on a training course; it happens when external conditions support people's intrinsic motivation to deepen their knowledge and understanding, develop their skills and abilities, and draw on their curiosity and imagination.

Learning is inherently relational, and thus requires an inclusive environment where every person feels recognised as a valuable individual and has opportunities to learn from and with others. The environment we create has to reflect a positive view of people as learners – as opposed to a deficit-oriented view of people lacking skills that they need to be taught – and equip staff with the skills to bring more of who they are into their practice. This leads us into a critical differentiation of how we understand the interplay between individual capabilities and the learning environment.

The Nobel prizewinning social economist, Amartya Sen, suggests that capability is about more than the resources or skills available to an individual. Of equal importance is who they can be, given the available resources and the extent to which their physical and social environment enables (or prevents) these as being of value to the individual and their social environment. Sen refers to realised capabilities as "functionings", drawing attention to the contextual factors that make it possible for individuals to convert their capabilities and unfold their inherent potential. For instance, a skill such as being compassionate is only a "convertible" capability if the organisational culture finds it valuable and supports the development of compassionate practice. In other professional contexts, it could equally be a quality that causes issues within a team. From an HLS perspective, when it comes to learning activities, we therefore need to consider both the capabilities we help people develop *and* the environments that enable people to convert their capabilities into

functionings, so that we bring out the best in every person.

The 3 Ps (see HLS meets Social Pedagogy for details) offers a simple yet nuanced model to encourage team members to be authentic. It differentiates between the professional, personal and private selves. The professional self is about our professional knowledge, values and capabilities. The personal self includes our own values, interests, skills and experiences that can help us develop authentic relationships with colleagues and the people we support, to empathically connect and engage person to person, as equal human beings. Bringing the personal self into practice is therefore essential – provided that we differentiate between the personal and the private self. The latter should not be part of practice, it's who we are when we're with friends or family, what we're happy for them to know about us but wouldn't just share with anyone. Where we draw the line between the personal and private depends both on us – it's our individual professionally guided decision – and the situation. It might differ depending on whom we support, how well we know them, and what might be of value to them in dealing with certain challenges.

In encouraging practitioners to be authentic within a professional capacity, it can also be useful to introduce them to the concept of *Haltung*. Roughly translated as ethos or stance, the German term refers to how we bring to life our core values and guiding principles. It can thus facilitate ongoing reflection and dialogue within teams about the extent to which our interactions reflect both our own and our organisation's values and purpose. Relationship-centred practice requires us as professionals to move in our Haltung between *empathic understanding* and *regard* for their otherness. Empathic understanding allows us to show that we have some familiarity with what a person we support might be going through and develop a genuine connection person to person. Regard for their otherness reminds us that every person is unique, that experiences are always subjective, and that we must respect their human dignity in situations where we are challenged to connect with the other person.

L&D programmes are critical for actively developing the ways in which we bring ourselves to practise and build authentic relationships as part of how we support people. In other words, they enable us to develop more meaningful relationships with ourselves *and* with other people in our practice.

Supporting people to perform at their best

In our earlier section on HLS implications for workforce recruitment, we suggested that one of our biggest challenges – and opportunities – is to redesign our workforce around the needs of the people and communities we serve. That might be a simple idea, and a relatively obvious one, but the people we support – and sometimes staff as well – too often experience being expected to fit into the services provided rather than have services fit them. We looked at how this requires rethinking from a systems perspective of the capacities that we need to serve people and the roles this will require, and how we might find and recruit people to deliver these roles and capacities. But it doesn't stop there and, if anything, HLS can help emphasise the systemic connections between recruitment, induction, probation and continuous professional development – with wider links to performance management and contracting (see Learning chapter). We therefore need to rethink what is currently delivered under the title L&D.

This raises important questions about how we can elevate L&D in organisations and across local systems. If learning is a key feature of healthy systems, and meaningful outcomes in people's lives reflect the health of the systems around a person or a local community (see Systems chapter), then learning must not be seen as a luxury. Where, then, does L&D sit within your organisation? How much importance and funding is it given? How is it embedded and aligned to your organisation's purpose? While concepts such as the Learning Organisation by Peter Senge have been around for some time now, we feel that HLS can further substantiate the integral role of learning and help us explore further opportunities to ensure it is central to organisations and local systems.

Here are the features of what we think an HLS approach to L&D looks like (Sanderson, 2021). We will share examples from Wellbeing Teams and at the end describe the implications for traditional L&D teams, and where you could begin to make these changes. We also suggest you read Helen's accompanying blog on how these features are integrated into Wellbeing Teams.

Twelve features of an HLS approach to L&D

1. **Understand the capacities needed to achieve the organisation's (system's or team's) purpose, live its values, and meet legal and regulatory**

requirements. Have a clear, shared understanding of the roles required to deliver this.

2. **The capabilities are taught through induction and probation, and people are supported to demonstrate their confidence and competence in the capabilities and in living the values of the organisation/system.**
3. **Focus on performance (seeing changes in how people deliver their role) not just on achieving learning outcomes. Include both hard and soft skills, and take a relational approach**, for example, being able to complete an assessment accurately, to do this with empathy and compassion, and to show up for meetings well prepared and convey empathy and compassion. Those responsible for developing and leading programmes must address how the implicit knowledge and complexities of a professional skill base, such as nursing or general practice, can be seen as a way of amplifying the value of a relational approach. Meaningful supportive relationships thrive if a nurse increasingly asks "what matters most to you?" or a GP asks "do you struggle to make ends meet at the end of the month?" when engaging in what will hopefully be a helpful conversation with a patient. Thinking in this way and starting with the person enhances their ability to be helpful.
4. **Focus on "whole person", including wellbeing and their growth and development** not just work and career aspirations.
5. **After probation, growth, development and performance goals are set by the person (in collaboration with their manager, colleagues and people who use the service where possible).**
6. **People are supported to find their best way to achieve their growth and development goals.** There is no one-size-fits-all approach.
7. **There are a wide range of curated learning and development opportunities available** for people to use to help them achieve their goals, including coaching within the role, communities of practice, deliberate practice, and feedback. Support is provided in curating these to be tailored to each individual, signposting and joining up people within the organisation, across a local system, or virtually.

8. **Seeing the day-to-day work as the best opportunity to develop and grow and improve through coaching, feedback and deliberate practice.** For example, meetings can also be opportunities for development, not just sharing information.
9. **There is a proactive programme of development opportunities in areas where the whole system/ organisation wants to grow,** for example in resilience, relationship-centred practice, and wellbeing.
10. **Resources (e.g. budgets) are devolved as close to teams as possible,** supporting local decision-making. If learning is meant to be central to HLS organisations, the funding needs to reflect this (see Learning chapter).
11. **Learning and development opportunities are offered across a system,** not just on a role basis. For example, rather than every district nurse having training in dementia-friendly communities, it is offered to everyone who has a role within that community, across the system. This fosters relationship-building between professionals, deepens their insights into each other's contribution, and highlights the resourcefulness and diversity of expertise within the system. This could even be extended to include people with lived experience, who have an important perspective to bring to the system.
12. Success is seen as improvements in performance in relation to roles: people growing in their abilities (in the areas that matter to them, as defined by them and their team, including the views of the people they serve), and the whole organisation/system developing in ways that support their purpose and reflect their values.

We need to overtly create opportunities for organisations within a system to create space for, and emphasise the value of, the human and learning elements as key areas within workforce development, so they can be sense-checked and hopefully embedded. The more organisations collaborate on this, the more likely the 12 features outlined above will be adopted.

What can this look like in practice?

Intra-organisational learning

HLS provides opportunities for organisations to take a fresh look at how your organisation creates learning spaces that enable all team members to develop their whole selves.

Below we look in detail at how this is done at Wellbeing Teams – small, neighbourhood, self-managed teams supporting people to live well at home and be part of their community – and the processes we have developed to support ongoing learning and reflection. You can find a lot further detail in this blog, with links to specific methods in the table below. Here is how we put the 12 features outlined above into practice:

Principle	How Wellbeing Teams put this into practice
Understand capacities needed to deliver purpose, values and regulatory expectations.	• Explicitly linking purpose, policies and procedures to capabilities team members need to demonstrate. • Describe the behaviours that you would see/not see when we are living our values.
The capabilities are taught through induction and probation, and people are supported to demonstrate their confidence and competence in the capabilities and living the values of the organisation/system.	• Confidence-scaling to help new team members think about how confident they feel in relation to key elements of their role • What-if cards to reflect on practice scenarios in relation to values • Progress self-assessment and reporting whether team members feel they're on track or off track for each element of their role • Confirmation Practices linking role-specific statements to our values • Demonstration of confidence and capabilities at the end of probation • Coaching and feedback as a gift to grow and learn.
Focus on performance (seeing changes in how people deliver their role) not on just achieving learning outcomes. Include both hard skills and soft skills, and taking a relational approach.	• "Progress" self-assessments used for team members to gauge how they are doing in delivering within their role. This includes soft skills in relation to people we support and working as part of a team (e.g. compassionate communication).
After probation, growth, development and performance goals are set by the person (in collaboration with their manager, colleagues and people who use the service where possible).	"Future Focus" is how team members think about how they want to develop and grow. Team members develop wellbeing action plans Team members use confirmation practices to reflect on how they are delivering on their role Confidence-scaling to enable team members to reflect on their confidence to fulfil different elements of their role, and identify where further support might be needed Multiple choice testing to ensure people have understood what they need to know at the end of induction.
People are supported to find their best way to achieve their growth and development goals.	The learning sequence is used to find the best way to achieve goals.
There are a wide range of curated learning and development opportunities available.	There is a virtual learning helpdesk for team members who want support to know what is possible and available. Opportunities include champions, communities of practice, national advisors, practice sessions with feedback, TED talks, and book clubs.
Seeing the day-to-day work as the best opportunity to develop and grow and improve through coaching, feedback and deliberate practice.	Team 15 – 15-minute exercise in team meetings on a monthly basis Confirmation Practices used within team meetings every 2 weeks Monthly focus themes across the organisation.
There is a proactive programme of development opportunities in areas where the whole system/organisation wants to grow, for example in resilience, relational-based work, wellbeing.	Monthly themes that introduce a focus on practice or wellbeing Book clubs Practice groups.
Resources (eg budgets) are devolved as close to teams as possible.	Each team has its own development budget.

You can find in-depth descriptions of all of these learning processes in Helen's blog on the Human Learning Systems website.

Inter-organisational learning

The opportunities for creating space within a system to focus together on workforce development across organisations and sectors will need to increase. The following examples could be described as green shoots:

Joint system leadership development programme – Collaborative Newcastle

Many organisations, of course, have their own internally focused programmes to develop their existing or future leaders. While these will have value, bringing together employees from primary and secondary, health and social, and statutory and civil society organisations has obvious system benefits. We know that trust and mutual understanding can be supported by learning together, so this programme is aimed at investing in the longer term with leaders at many levels and from different sectors.

The collective funding support for this programme by all local statutory health and care "anchor organisations" has been fundamental in its development (including keeping civil society places free). The programme includes a regular session on HLS, so this approach is being introduced to a wide range of professional groups.

One of the key elements of the course programme is for small groups of participants to form a "quad" and focus on a local "system priority" during the course. As a member of the steering group, Brendan Hill "guinea-pigged" the first programme. Our project was on developing social prescribing access, which led to a consultant anaesthetist, clinical director, VCS mental health professional, and a CCG manager coming together for a conversation that, frankly, just wouldn't have happened otherwise.

The work continued with a subsequent programme cohort. It resulted in a training session for inpatient consultants and nurses, and we are now working with primary care networks and civil society and local authority colleagues to take it further. We intend to develop the training as one of Collaborative Newcastle's priority workstreams in its collective response to address health inequalities. I don't think this initiative would have happened in the same way without those early conversations in our first quad. Those participants are now finding their way as emergent Systems Stewards.

System learning experiences for healthcare students

Discussions are underway with the clinical lead for effective learning at Health Education England in the North East and North Cumbria region to prototype additional placement opportunities for students in Newcastle and Gateshead – primarily nursing and allied health professions – with a focus on local system thematic priorities.

As with the joint leadership programme quads, the central premise is bringing systems thinking to a learning and development environment. For example, a student nurse with a pending professional future in older persons/dementia care nursing would have – as part of a related placement – time with a local carers association, local authority community team, and perhaps a local care home. This would facilitate an improved understanding of the different roles played, the service integration needed, and – perhaps most importantly – the idea that meaningful outcomes are delivered by systems, not single organisations. Many place-based systems have similar priority themes. Older persons/ frailty pathways, mental health and "best start in life"/children's services, could all benefit from a more systemic approach to professional learning experiences. Further work on this is expected in 2021/22.

Inter-professional learning in children's services

Orkney Council piloted a joint in-depth course in social pedagogy for staff from across social care and education (see also Social Pedagogy chapter). Facilitated by ThemPra and funded by what is now the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, the 10-day experiential course focused on creating a shared approach to relationship-centred practice across the entire spectrum of children's services – from early years care to schools to children's social work and children's residential care. By introducing social pedagogy as an overarching ethical and conceptual framework that enabled participants from different services to connect their practice to the wider purpose of nurturing children's wellbeing, learning, and social inclusion, participants were able to develop inter-professional practice in a number of ways.

An evaluation by Strathclyde University highlighted the benefits of developing a shared language and understanding across different parts of the system, strengthening relationships between participants from different agencies as a result of engaging in team-building activities on the course and learning together, and deepening insights into every part of the system and the role played by each agency. This

mutual understanding led to greater recognition of everybody's contribution to children's and families' lives, increased personal confidence, and enabled more effective collaborative practice, for instance in multiagency care planning.

It is worth noting that the evaluation showed the importance of designing learning situations that go much deeper than traditional training. The time taken to actively and purposefully develop relationships between participants, to relate theory to practice, and collectively reflect on deeper philosophical questions and values made a huge difference, not just to the individual learning experience but, crucially, to the system's benefits.

Learning with young people in care

In its precursor to the BA in Social Pedagogy, Advocacy and Participation, the University of Central Lancashire ran an introductory module on social pedagogy, which brought together a group of undergraduate students, young people looked after by Lancashire County Council, and some of their care workers. All group members, including the lecturers, learned together as equals, using a range of creative and experiential learning methods to facilitate opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building. For the young people, this experience was transformational both in terms of being treated as equals and in recognising their potential to go to university (only 13% of care leavers progress into higher education, compared to 43% of young people without care experience).

Their care workers valued the opportunity to learn together with the young people, better understand their perspectives on relevant issues and who they are, and role-model that learning is a lifelong and rewarding activity worth engaging with. Equally, the BA students who took the module as part of their degree found it hugely beneficial and insightful to learn in a group that created greater connections between different actors within the local system around children in care. Perhaps most crucially, the experience of learning together gave all participants new insights into how to be more equitable within a system that is usually very unequal.

It is a positive sign that these examples are not exceptional, certainly among organisations that take a systems approach to learning and development. As we hope the above examples help highlight, such an approach brings benefits to the organisations and their workforce, as well as to the people and communities they serve. But moving further in this direction requires a major shift.

Shifting the L&D paradigm

As we have shown above, HLS enables us to radically rethink L&D activities both within organisations and across the system. Here is how this approach differs from traditional L&D and the paradigm shift required:

From	Towards
Training needs analysis to determine what the organisation needs.	Clear shared understanding of the capacities the organisation needs to deliver its purpose and values, with legal and regulatory frameworks.
The training department or the person's manager determines learning goals.	Growth and development goals set by the person themselves based on their role and their own/ colleagues/manager's reflections of what is needed to excel in the role. This includes the perspective of people using the service where possible.
Designing and delivering training programmes.	Curating learning opportunities – which could include Ted talk recommendations, book clubs, coaching opportunities, online sessions that relate to the purpose and values of the organisation, and the support people need to excel in their role.
Focus on learning skills.	Focus on applying skills and improving performance in day-to-day work.
Focus on career development.	Focus on whole person development.
Offerings are largely separate from the day to day work – people attend courses.	Seeing the day-to-day work as the opportunity to develop (see Learning chapter) and grow and improve through coaching, feedback and deliberate practice. Meetings are opportunities for development, not just sharing information.
L&D Budget held by the L&D team.	L&D Budget held by each team.
The L&D team see themselves as the experts on learning and create a programme that reflects that expertise and track who attends what.	The L&D team see themselves as curators of learning opportunities, and coach and support teams to find the opportunities they need to improve their performance in their role and to grow and develop.
The L&D team count the number of courses and the number of people who attended each course.	Success is seen as improvements in performance in relation to roles, and to people growing in their abilities, in the areas that matter to them, as defined by them and their team (including the views of the people they serve). The whole organisation or system growing in its capacities to deliver its purpose and live its values.

How you can achieve this paradigm shift will very much depend on a variety of factors, including your role, where your organisation currently stands with regard to adopting HLS, your team's and leaders' openness to rethinking these aspects, and the system that you're a part of. But an aspect of systems thinking is that every impulse we set has an impact on the wider system. With this in mind, here are a few ideas on where you could start.

Principle	Where you could start…
Understand capacities needed to deliver purpose, values and regulatory expectations.	• Explicitly linking purpose, policies and procedures to capabilities team members need to demonstrate • Operationalise your values and describe the behaviours that you would see/not see when living our values • Separate policies from procedures • Encourage ways to learn, improve and experiment with procedures (while clarifying what cannot be changed).
The capabilities are taught through induction and probation, and people are supported to demonstrate their confidence and competence in the capabilities and living the values of the organisation/system.	• Review how you check what confidence and competence people have at the end of induction • Introduce scenario or what-if cards to check understanding and how people would respond to situations • Develop a self-assessment for people to review their progress in induction • Introduce confirmation practices or reflective questions.
Focus on performance (seeing changes in how people deliver their role) not on just achieving learning outcomes. Include both hard skills and soft skills, and taking a relational approach.	• Introduce the learning sequence or equivalent • Identify the soft skills needed in each role, not just the technical or hard skills • Focus on team behaviour as well as role competence.
After probation, growth, development and performance goals are set by the person (in collaboration with their manager, colleagues and people who use the service where possible).	• Introduce a process to help team members think about how they want to develop and grow in their lives, not just their careers • Introduce wellbeing action plans or equivalent in induction • Use reflective questions for people to talk about how they think they are doing in their role with their manager or colleagues • Think about how to test capability in delivering a role at the end of probation that includes soft skills and may take into account the perspectives of others.

People are supported to find their best way to achieve their growth and development goals.	• Support people to think about how they can learn – without assuming it means going on a course • Consider a virtual "learning helpdesk" for team members who want support to know what is possible and available.
There are a wide range of curated learning and development opportunities available.	• Collate and curate the learning opportunities available • Start a book club, monthly theme, etc to demonstrate different ways to learning.
Seeing the day-to-day work as the best opportunity to develop and grow and improve through coaching, feedback and deliberate practice.	• Introduce opportunities to learn and practise skills in team meetings, even if it is only 15 minutes once a month.
There is a proactive programme of development opportunities in areas where the whole system/organisation wants to grow, for example in resilience, relationship-centred work, wellbeing.	• Consider monthly themes that introduce a focus on practice or wellbeing.
Resources (e.g. budgets) are devolved as close to teams as possible.	• Consider devolving part of the budget to departments or teams.

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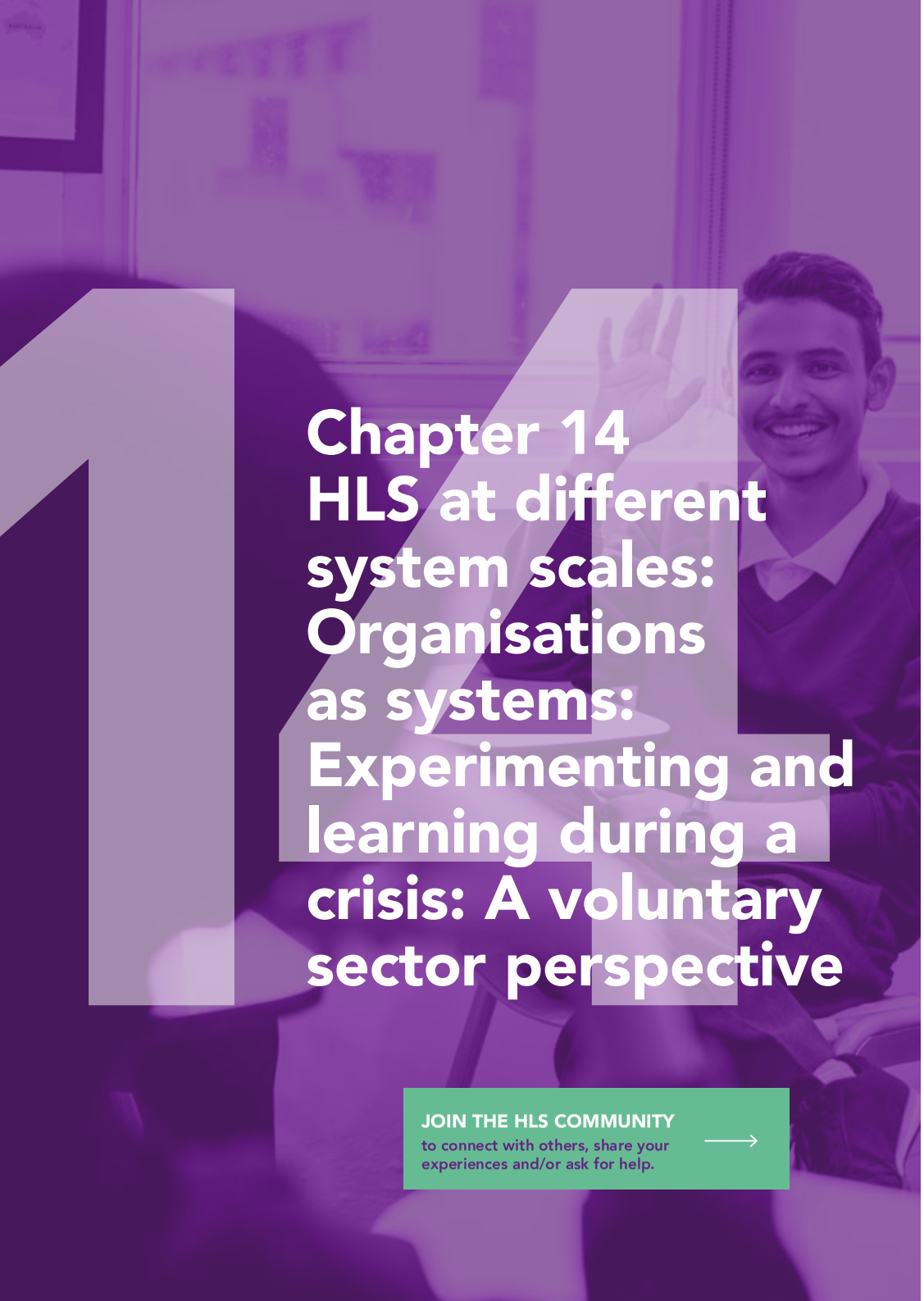

Chapter 14 HLS at different system scales: Organisations as systems: Experimenting and learning during a crisis: A voluntary sector perspective

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Experimenting and learning during a crisis: a voluntary sector perspective

Author: Dr Vita Terry
Contact the author

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, the scale and pace of the unprecedented changes has had a significant impact on the way we work and on our home life. Since the start of lockdown in March 2020, we have drawn on the Human Learning Systems case studies and talked to voluntary sector leaders and from them heard of the tremendous challenges and pressures the sector has faced, including service provision being overwhelmed, rapid adaptation to remote working, and some organisations facing closure.

Research has highlighted the urgency of the voluntary sector response to what has been described as "a humanitarian crisis", which involves "absorbing the shock of lockdown; taking stock of the implications for individuals, communities and the organisation; and quickly planning and implementing a response". At the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, there was an "increase in demand from individuals and communities, with voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) swiftly shifting focus to help people access foodbanks, medical prescriptions and social support for vulnerable groups". One year later, these needs have shifted and we have seen an increase in concerns about unemployment, debt, rent arrears and welfare advice. Undoubtedly, these concerns and needs will continue to shift as the pandemic (and the fallout from it) unravels.

The rapid adaptation and adjustment by the voluntary sector to respond to these needs has been remarkable. For example, adapting to constantly changing government rules and restrictions such as furloughing staff, remote working, and social distancing; adopting new technologies and appropriate safeguarding policies; and shifts in funding and support. In addition to this impressive response,

the sector has also seen a huge upswelling of volunteering and the swift and spontaneous establishment of thousands of mutual aid groups. However, some people have raised a note of caution about "responding to the people you work with".

The response from VSOs to the pandemic is dynamic and varies widely (in the first six months, there were three phases of smaller VSOs' response). Many organisations have been agile and have adapted services while remaining aligned with their core values and ethos, some have repurposed mission statements to meet the changing needs, but – for others – it has had a detrimental impact on organisational survival. These precarious times have created mounting pressures, huge challenges, and uncertainty for the voluntary sector. That said, there is an opportunity to explore and adopt new and differing ways of working and not simply to revert to how things have always been done. For example, there has been a shift from siloed to collaborative working across sectors and funders adopting flexible and less restrictive grant-making practices.

This chapter illustrates different examples of how the pandemic has created conditions for VSOs to adopt HLS practices, including:

- Collaborative relationships
- Adaptation and experimentation
- Distributed leadership
- Being human and working with emotions in voluntary sector organisations.

Collaborative relationships

Voluntary sector relationships, within and across sectors, can vary depending on location, subsector, individuals and historic relationships. In addition, it is well reported that pressures from funding and commissioning processes can create a competitive environment that fuels anxiety, fear and territorial behaviour, which pushes organisations to work in silos.

Particularly in the early stages of the pandemic, there was a growing emphasis on working together to respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs and growing demands of individuals and communities:

> *"In times of a crisis (COVID-19), people and organisations are more open to coming together. Leveraging existing relationships to build new ones is key."*
>
> **(Wallsend Children's Community case study)**

> *"The local relationships and partnerships developed during the first six months of our community hub proved to be a catalyst for what turned out to be an incredible community response during the COVID-19 crisis."*
>
> **(Aberlour Child Care Trust case study)**

Even in places where relationships had previously been described as tense and competitive, there has been a collective approach to tackle this shared problem. Several factors have enabled this. For example, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and shone a spotlight on the complex social issues that individuals and communities face. In response, there is a growing understanding and awareness across sectors of the purpose and benefit of bringing different stakeholders around the table to take a systems approach to complex needs and issues. Practically, the shift to remote meetings has encouraged regular communication and made decision-making spaces more accessible and available to different stakeholders:

> *"COVID-19 created an opportunity for change that we jumped on. Driven by commissioners recognising local need – a very important leadership move – a group of VCS [Voluntary and Community Sector], Local Authority, and NHS Trust organisations were drawn together to develop a rapid, systemic solution to the overstretched services and increased need of the Borough's most vulnerable people living with serious mental illness. We found ourselves in a position we had not been in before – able to influence a systemic change offer based on our experience and our values, and with the language and frameworks of HLS to support us."*
>
> **(Likewise case study)**

This has included working with unexpected individuals or organisations and bringing together stakeholders to support collective decision-making processes. There is growing recognition of the value of drawing in varied expertise and knowledge. In turn, this has built rapport, a shared sense of purpose, and trusting relationships, which, in some cases, have begun to address traditional power dynamics and challenge old practices. Despite this move towards positive cross-sector collaborations, there are still challenges with public agencies not wanting to give up control – or limited funding to continue support – preventing an equal playing-field from happening in a meaningful way.

During the pandemic, the need to act quickly, transparently, and with a sense of urgency meant that certain barriers were removed. For example, we have seen a decline in the usual organisational red tape associated with sharing information and data, which can often prevent collaborative work. We also saw funders increasingly adopting a more flexible approach with voluntary organisations, being supportive and flexible and allowing them to use resources in the best way they saw fit to meet the needs of individuals and communities. Other research has also noted, in comparison to before the crisis, the tremendous pace of needs being identified and met. This changing environment has enabled different stakeholders to work collaboratively and to join up services. This raises questions about the role of traditional bureaucratic processes and practices, and the importance of not immediately reverting back to these. It is important that we pause and reflect on how things have worked and what we want to retain, for example, a sense of urgency and collective effort and also ensuring decision-making spaces remain open and accessible.

Adaptation and experimentation

For some VSOs, the pandemic has created conditions for being more experimental and testing assumptions that have previously influenced a certain way of doing things. It has provided a unique opportunity to trial new ways of working, to experiment and learn and there has been an emphasis on "collective bravery" to take more risks.

A common example is VSOs moving to remote delivery and using this to experiment with different technologies and platforms. Physical services cannot be completely replaced due to the power of face-to-face connection, particularly when navigating sensitive and personal issues, but there have been benefits from remote delivery. These include flexibility, less commuting, and broadening organisations' reach and accessibility. Moving forward, organisations are keen to learn from this experience to embed blended working, while also responding (or being sensitive) to issues such as digital and data exclusion:

> *"In other ways we have massively gained through online engagement – in particular, we've engaged more people who are transgender, LGBTQI+, introverts and those with caring responsibilities. But there are great swathes of our area that are very rural and don't have decent internet."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub case study)**

The pandemic has provided some organisations with the space to reflect on their practices, objectives and future strategy. This includes revisiting the relevance of old ways of working and pre-existing assumptions. To learn about what has worked well but also to unlearn some things. During this process of adaptation and experimentation, it has been essential for VSOs to stay focused on their values and core mission to prevent "mission drift". This requires proactively creating spaces, discussion and practice, for example, collective conversations as a team:

> *"We'll adapt while always sticking to our approach, our values and our reflective practices."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub case study)**

> *"When everything around you changes, keeping focused on your remit and whilst working responsively, keeping clear focus on the future and consequences of reactive decision-making, is vital."*
>
> **(Wallsend Children's Community case study)**

Working in this way has meant accepting that it is OK to fail. Organisations have gone through this experience together, sharing their learning with others and learning together in an open and honest way, which has built stronger and more trusting relationships. This practice has demonstrated a shift in mindset, inspiring organisations to share learning collaboratively. It will be important to continue this when thinking about how to "build back better" as a means to tackle competitive and territorial behaviour:

> *"This crisis has also allowed the core team to put on pause a couple of projects which we had found ourselves responsible for the delivery of. The project management piece came very early in our development and should have never been our role. However, with this pause, going forwards, we will now be able to think more proactively about how the system can take responsibility for them."*
>
> **(Wallsend Children's Community case study)**

Distributed leadership

Voluntary sector leaders have faced tremendously challenging times during the pandemic, leading in uncertainty but also having to balance this with their own personal turmoil. Leaders have taken on huge responsibilities

and have regularly had to make tough decisions to look after the safety and welfare of their workforce and service users, keep up to date with changing government guidelines, and plan scenarios for a shifting and uncertain future. As a result, many leaders are frustrated, stressed, overworked and exhausted:

> *"There is this enormous responsibility I feel towards the families we support, to be there for them, but also to do stuff strategically, as well as responsibility towards my staff and volunteers. The buck stops here."*
>
> **(IVAR, 2021)**

The multiple and varied ways voluntary sector leaders have experienced and responded to the pandemic has depended on a number of factors, such as organisations' service delivery focus and context and pre-existing skills and experience of coping in a crisis. For some leaders, the conditions created by the pandemic have encouraged them to adopt HLS ways of working, which challenge traditional hierarchical styles of leadership and move towards more distributed leadership. Leaders have increasingly delegated responsibilities, with staff taking on new roles or moving to different parts of an organisation to support with additional demands.

Staff have demonstrated commitment and flexibility by quickly adapting, learning new skills, and gaining expertise. This has helped build new internal relationships, an appreciation of others' work, and senior management recognising the value of the workforce. The result has been a greater autonomy for staff and an increase in core motivation, purpose and job satisfaction. It has also encouraged people to take ownership over their working day and workload, for example, staff being able to say no to back-to-back Zoom meetings and stepping away from the computer to go on a daily walk.

The shift in leaders giving up power and control during the pandemic can also be seen in service delivery. Staff are being trusted to do what is best for the people accessing services, by using creative approaches or making rapid decisions rather than seeking permission from senior management. Organisational practice has also changed, with more open and regular communication and devolving and sharing decision-making across a team. This collective decision-making provides a space for reflection, reaffirms the organisation's mission and values, ensures individuals feel listened to, and builds supportive relationships:

> *"We have tried to stay true to our values and a Human Learning Systems approach throughout this turbulent period by collaboratively evaluating the opportunities available to us, both within the team and with our trustees, and by using our values and core mission as compass points for our decision-making, rather than being disproportionately influenced by financial pressures and opportunities or growth for its own sake."*
>
> **(Lighthouse Children's Homes case study)**

The key is for leaders to recognise the value of being human with their workforce. For example, being supportive and acknowledging individuals' emotional concerns and wellbeing during these times; possibly needing to ask different questions when planning work; accepting some things are not in their control; and being more transparent about their own concerns with staff. Leaders have recognised part of their role is to make sure the right people are in the 'room', and to give staff enough time to do what they need to do. In turn, this has created stronger relationships, a shared sense of purpose, and heightened team morale within organisations:

> *"I am managing more with honesty, sharing more about myself, rather than managing from a distance and being cold. I am trying to create a family, to let people be emotional and honest."*
>
> **(IVAR, 2021)**

Being human and working with emotions in voluntary sector organisations

During the pandemic, individuals and voluntary sector organisations have demonstrated that "they 'showed up' and then 'stuck around' within communities experiencing complex social issues to support people when they were needed the most". For the voluntary sector workforce, this has meant staff working beyond paid hours, or volunteers working longer hours, taking on additional roles and commitments, as well as living through COVID-19 and their own personal situations. Although we do not know the full extent of the fallout, the pandemic is affecting individuals' mental health and wellbeing. People have had to adapt quickly to remote working, makeshift offices, and balancing home life demands such as home schooling, caring for dependents, and, in some cases, coping with bereavement.

Addressing workplace wellbeing

can reduce boredom and boost productivity and job satisfaction. Now more than ever, to survive in these challenging and uncertain times it is essential that voluntary sector leaders take on more responsibility to provide emotional support – not only for their workforce, but also for themselves. There has been a wide range of experiences of leading during uncertain times and differing responses to supporting the emotional wellbeing of workforces. These responses have been shaped by a range of factors, including being adaptable to each individual's personal situation and the communication modes and practices that were already in place.

We are all feeling the emotional demands of living through a pandemic, and, due to the blurring of home and work life, it is not easy to compartmentalise work. Staff are feeling exhausted, sensitive and receptive to tensions that might normally have been brushed off. This can have a knock-on effect by creating uncomfortable and tense work dynamics. Leaders have adopted different practices to address this, such as: offering additional coaching or support sessions; conducting weekly "temperature checks", i.e. about how people are feeling; building self-care into the working day; sending care packages to staff; weekly online "coffee mornings"; and offering extended annual leave:

> *"Staff are really struggling – we have upped clinical supervision to twice a month. This second lockdown is really hurting ... home schooling, staff breaking down in team meetings … if you say something in the wrong way, people take it so personally."*
>
> **(IVAR, 2021)**

> *"Can't give someone a hug, so need to think of different ways of doing this, e.g. 'coffee and cake chat' on Zoom – this works for some people and not all, but gives a chance to keep up to date with individuals' responsibilities they are facing."*
>
> **(IVAR, 2021)**

It is essential that providing emotional support should not be viewed as a one-off or tick-box exercise, but rather be fully embedded into an organisation's culture. There is no one-size-fits-all to supporting the emotional wellbeing of a workforce, and what is required for one organisation might be different for another. A good first step is to bring people together to have regular and transparent conversations about what does and does not work for them, because this will also change over time and organisation will need to keep learning about how to support staff wellbeing. As noted earlier, learning together can in itself be a powerful process for building trust.

Although the voluntary sector's response to the pandemic and the resilience shown by the workforce have been hugely impressive, the level of activity and commitment shown is not sustainable, as there is an enormous risk of burnout and knock-on effects to emotional wellbeing. Nor should resilience be used as a strategy to cope with crisis. Other research has pointed out that working in an HLS way can already be emotionally demanding and VSOs are already founded on emotions, feelings and values due to the nature of the work; therefore, it is essential that during a pandemic (when emotions and stress levels are already heightened) this is managed accordingly. We see this as an opportunity to pause, reflect and respond to the current situation and embed new and different work practices to improve future working conditions in the voluntary sector since the full impact of the pandemic will be experienced for years to come.

Conclusion

Despite the positive elements of the response to COVID-19, the future remains precarious and uncertain for the voluntary sector. There are growing concerns about scarcity of resources and the "funding cliff edge", potential austerity measures, and an increased pressure to hit performance targets, which may lead to greater competition and undermine the advances made through greater collaboration. We saw the immediate response to the pandemic was to pull together, but there is a risk that old behaviours will come back and organisations will revert to self-preservation mode. The pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for learning new ways of working (in some cases unlearning certain things) and demonstrates the importance of consolidating this learning as we move past COVID-19 and into the future.

Some key learning points to think about in the future are:

- How decision-making spaces can continue to be accessible and available to different stakeholders, to draw in varied expertise and knowledge to respond to complex needs
- To learn together as a way of building trusting relationships and tackling competitive behaviour
- Finally, to acknowledge and address the emotional demands from working in this way, particularly during a pandemic, and to embed reflective and supportive practices to prevent burnout.

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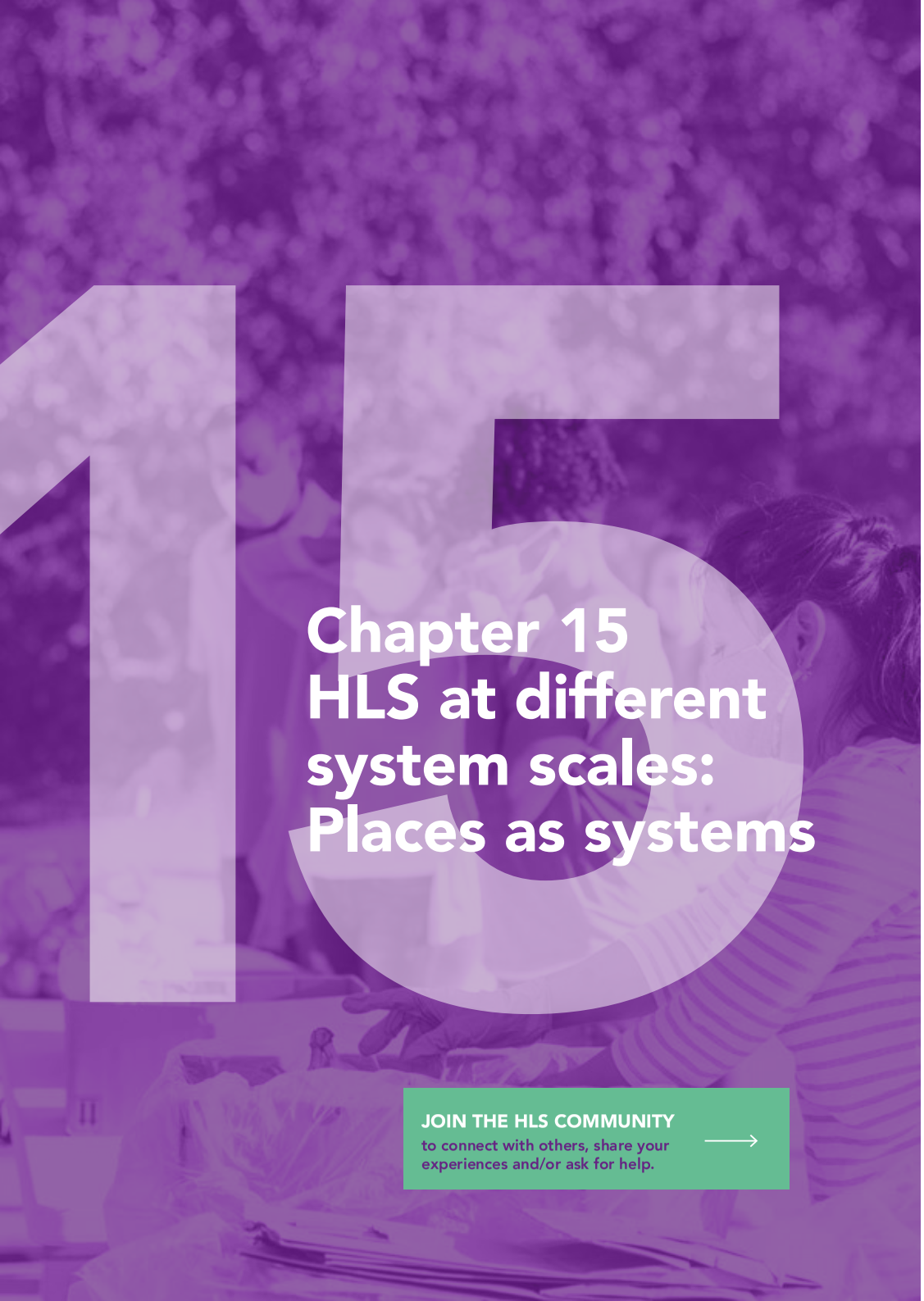

Chapter 15
HLS at different system scales: Places as systems

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HLS and place: transforming local systems

Author: Dawn Plimmer
Contact the author

Introduction

"Systems" is arguably the least well developed and understood feature of HLS. Many organisations interested in HLS can identify opportunities to develop more human ways of working and embed learning, but the prospect of engaging with and influencing others in the system is often the biggest hurdle. Systems are beyond the control of any one organisation, and the mindsets and structures that shape our day-to-day work are overwhelmingly organisational rather than systems-focused.

But systems matter. Outcomes in people's lives emerge from complex systems, not individual organisations, programmes or projects. And so, while developing human and learning practice within organisations is necessary for HLS practice, it is not sufficient. This chapter explores how HLS practice can reach its potential through a focus on nurturing collaborative systems approaches at a local level.

As explained in the Systems chapter, when we talk about systems we mean a "system of interest" – an artificial boundary drawn around a set of relationships that help to create a particular outcome. These systems can be thematic (relating to health, housing, etc) or geographic, and often both (everything happens somewhere). This chapter focuses on systems defined by place: local systems which are themselves embedded within larger regional and national systems. And most importantly, the context in which we live our day-to-day lives, and the foundation for providing human support.

In this chapter we use the term "place-based" to refer to approaches that are rooted in and responsive to the context of a specific place and the people who live there. We use the term "healthy system" to describe the enabling conditions for these approaches – factors that help local actors work and learn together to help enable better outcomes for people (see Systems chapter).

This chapter explores:

Why place matters: why it is a distinctive and valuable lens of HLS

How to develop a healthy local system that enables HLS

What roles different actors can play at different levels of the system, and routes to change

Where next – opportunities to develop our understanding of healthy local systems to strengthen and grow HLS practice.

1. Why place matters

Local context matters. To enable a whole person, "human" response, we need to understand an individual's life and unique context. While everyone is different, the distinct assets and challenges in the places where we live have a big influence. The availability of quality employment and affordable housing, access to green space, the quality of local services, access to informal networks of support – all combine to shape our day-to-day and the long-term trajectory of our lives. It is only by understanding the range of factors that impact on an individual that we can identify the underlying challenges that need to be addressed, and uncover the range of opportunities, assets and actors in a local place that can be part of developing solutions to these challenges.

Recognising the complexity of people and place has two key implications for enabling a "whole person" response informed by local context:

- **Local actors need to work together to understand, support and enable people in a connected, holistic, human way**. This requires practitioners working on the ground to have the autonomy to work in a relational way and provide support tailored to the specific context, working in partnership with the people and communities they are supporting. Support is joined up, and draws on all of the available resources and assets in a place – within the community, the voluntary sector, the public sector, and beyond.
- **Places need to purposefully create a healthy system to enable this practice to thrive.** Specifically, to create the conditions:
  - For organisations to work together effectively in a human and context-led way as the norm not the exception (i.e. people and organisations are encouraged and incentivised to do this rather than having to constantly "battle" against standardised and siloed approaches)
  - To identify and address patterns across a local place that impact multiple people (from issues such as homelessness and child obesity, to the need for access to welcoming green space). This requires local people and partners coming together to listen, develop collective understanding, and take coordinated action to respond to specific local issues and opportunities. (See The Impact of HLS for people chapter for more on addressing "problems-in-common".)

Below, we outline key features of place-based approaches that enable connected, holistic, human support; we then go on to explore what a healthy system that enables this practice looks like and how to develop it.

Features of human, place-based support

Organisations and partnerships working in an HLS way have identified the following features as crucial to enabling human support.

Place as purpose

Local identity is key to place-based approaches – people feel ownership of opportunities and approaches that are rooted in the places they live. Starting with a focus on local identity can be a useful way to galvanise communities and partners around a shared ambition for place, and ensure this is context-led.)

> *"We made the hub place-based as humans are tribal and community connection is a strength. So our 'Champions' are of the community of Moray. In this respect we're different to many other social movements that don't tend to be rooted in a place."*
>
> **(Moray Wellbeing Hub)**

Understanding what matters in people's lives

Working in a context-led way often requires putting to one side what has always been done, and instead deeply listening to understand what matters. Listening exercises are a valuable way to understand the system overall – spotting the patterns, assets, challenges and behaviours that impact outcomes across a place. Crucially, this should include widening the conversation beyond a narrow service lens to understand the breadth of things that make a difference to people in their day-to-day lives – from chats with friends to access to green space.

In South Tyneside, members of the local health Alliance Leadership Team (ALT) going out and deeply listening to local people led to important realisations about what matters:

> *"Members of the ALT were encouraged to get out and have conversations with members of the public… The idea was to start to explore what people were really interested in and talking about in their lives, whether or not related to health. The results were interesting in that despite some fairly high-profile health issues being topical at the time, local people were much more concerned about their own lives and those of their community."*
>
> **(South Tyneside Alliance)**

At an individual level, there needs to be scope to listen and respond to people's specific circumstances:

> *"Services and systems can often only see presenting needs and not the person. The most effective long-term solutions are those that enable individuals to improve their own ability to manage their lives. These solutions build confidence and capability, work from strengths, and recognise that each person's journey is different."*
>
> **(Help on Your Doorstep)**

Mobilising communities

Building the agency of local people and communities to connect with and support each other, and take actions on issues important to them, is an important feature of human approaches. This requires developing trusted relationships with individuals, collaborating with partners, and working together to understand local assets and opportunities. Many of the HLS case studies include a focus on connecting people to local networks and helping people feel part of their community.

> *"We deliver our mission by bringing people together, providing access to facilities and resources and building confidence, aspiration and entrepreneurial skills. By doing this we can help to support a local economy that works for local people, we can build the foundations for growing aspirations, and we can grow resilient people and communities. CaVCA's purpose is to support thriving communities by helping people achieve the things they want to achieve to improve the places they live in."*
>
> **(CaVCA)**

Connected support

Moving away from siloed services that each address a specific "problem" to be "fixed", towards more holistic, connected and enabling support is an important feature of human approaches. The focus is on understanding people as individuals, taking into account their specific circumstances, and for partners to coordinate among themselves to enable a more flexible and connected local support offer. Making support accessible close to where people live is key to restrict barriers to engagement.

> *"A critical factor in our success was offering access to a wide-ranging, multidisciplinary service offer. The conversations that we had were more holistic than single-issue services were able to have."*
>
> **(Help on Your Doorstep)**

2. How to develop a healthy local system

To enable the shifts from standardised and siloed to human and context-led support requires fundamentally shifting how local systems work. To create a healthy system that works better for people requires partners coming together, not only to rethink delivery, but also purpose, behaviours, structures, capabilities and power dynamics. In this section we explore what it takes to develop a healthy local system that enables human approaches – making it easier to work in a connected, holistic, human way; and enabling this to happen at a more meaningful scale.

For organisations that have developed effective human approaches which are informed by local context and learn in everything they do, taking this beyond their organisation and working with other actors in the system can be challenging. Organisations that work in an HLS way often struggle to thrive in a local system, particularly where traditional structures incentivise siloed rather than holistic approaches, and competition rather than collaboration.

This is reflected in a number of the case studies, including the examples below from the perspective of a funder and a small social enterprise that provided a community-based midwifery service in an area of Northeast London.

> *"In 2012 our strategy changed from funding individual service responses to attempting to change wider systems. At its*

> *most basic, this was because the services that seemed most effective did not flourish in the world of commissioning, procurement and funding. We saw people with vision and determination making profound change at the level of their charity or project, but being worn down by the rules and practices of surrounding systems ('how things are done').*"
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

> *"We felt as if we were drowning in the endless requests for evidence that our procedures were sufficient and the production of raw data to demonstrate compliance with targets and standards… We closed for financial reasons, which were the direct result of the restrictions and limitations in the funding of the pilot."*
>
> **(Neighbourhood Midwives)**

Working together as a local system: the role of System Stewardship

Developing healthy systems requires purposeful work to optimise what local actors can achieve collectively (see, for example, Changing Local Systems).

The existence of a System Stewardship function (see Systems chapter) is a key enabler of this.

A Systems Steward is a person, organisation or group that takes responsibility for helping to create a healthy system by building trust and relationships and helping people work better together towards common goals. System Stewardship is not about traditional project delivery nor about "directing" others; instead, it is about helping actors come together to understand the system and weave together their contributions to enable a focus on what people can achieve together that they can't alone. This role often includes connecting support on the ground but, importantly, has a key focus on creating a healthy system to create the conditions for this practice to thrive in the long term.

Below we outline some examples of activities Systems Stewards have undertaken to help local actors work better together. Importantly, in all these examples, bringing together and gaining the buy-in of partners was a gradual process. Typically the process starts with people who are frustrated and keen to drive change and, over time, engages those who were initially more sceptical, as they began to see for themselves that working differently and working together can achieve better results.

Creating the space

Developing HLS practice often requires creating spaces for different kinds of conversation. Meetings with a solely operational and transactional focus do not provide the space that HLS needs to build relationships and trust, explore and act on learning, and address inequalities of power and participation. Systems Stewards play a key role in creating a different space for conversation that helps build the relationships, trust and empathy, which in turn enable partners to identify the fundamental shifts required in the way things are done locally, and act on these together.

The case studies highlight examples of how creating these spaces have been fundamental to enabling new practice.

Lankelly Chase funds and nurtures the development of these spaces:

> *"We are working in a committed way in six places around England, supporting spaces for people with similar values from across systems to come together in interconnected networks. It's the diversity and collective insights that can create something no single individual/organisation could initiate. People in these spaces are deciding what needs to change and are taking experimental steps to do things differently."*
>
> **(Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

In Plymouth, coming together on Friday afternoons for "coffee and cake" while writing a funding bid helped create new relationships and understanding between local partners (both commissioners and providers) and a sense of shared responsibility for taking action to improve support for adults experiencing multiple and complex disadvantage. While the immediate funding bid that brought partners together was unsuccessful, the relationships and sense of purpose has endured and enabled partners to fundamentally shift how the system operates.

In its case study, Likewise identify how they were able to shift the tone of relationships and activity locally in cross-sector conversations convened by local commissioners as part of the COVID-19 response.

> *"Through those difficult conversations, relationships were built where previously inaccessible commissioners and suspect competitors became friends and allies, and a tone of honesty and trust was quickly built. The relational element of*

> *the work had shifted a space of hesitancy and mistrust into one of openness and conviviality – a far more productive space."*
>
> **(Likewise)**

Connecting and weaving

Systems Stewards play an important role in reaching out to and bringing together many different perspectives and actors across a place. They help people see beyond traditional roles and historic tensions to focus on what matters to people and place, and mobilise a collective response that makes the most of local assets. The case studies highlight examples of the weaving, connecting, navigating and influencing roles Systems Stewards can play in local systems.

> *"We take a weaving approach to providing support. We build thematic and geographical networks and connections."*
>
> **(Plymouth Octopus Project)**

> *"We work together with our communities to understand our area, our assets and our strengths. This knowledge is used to bring together and empower every person who makes up the system: pupil or head-teacher, parent or counsellor, youth worker or police officer. We come together to find new ways to work more collaboratively to change the system where it is not supporting children and young people to succeed. Our role as a core team is one of Systems Stewards, working across the system with a focus on the health of the system around the child and family."*
>
> **(Wallsend Children's Community)**

> *"HLS highlighted the one area we have long struggled with: our place in the system… From the relentless challenges of housing to the overstretched mental health services, the short-term nature and restrictive referral criteria of support services, we often found ourselves picking up the pieces of a sprawling, complex network we could barely conceptualise. Thinking systemically has brought our attention to the need to be more proactive – we know that we can better support people if we can navigate, influence, and play a potent role in that systemic space."*
>
> **(Likewise)**

Seizing moments of disruption: COVID-19 as a catalyst for change

Sometimes it takes a significant disruption or shock to a system to create the realisation or opportunity for fundamental shifts in how things are done, and how local partners work together. The pandemic is one example. In some cases, the pandemic helped expand the space to act, making partners realise that they could only effectively support local people if they worked together – coordinating as a system to enable human support.

> *The local relationships and partnerships developed during the first six months of our community hub proved to be a catalyst for what turned out to be an incredible community response during the COVID-19 crisis.*
>
> **(Aberlour Child Care Trust)**

> *"Driven by commissioners recognising local need – a very important leadership move – a group of VCS, Local Authority and NHS Trust organisations were drawn together to develop a rapid, systemic solution to the overstretched services and increased need of the borough's most vulnerable people living with serious mental illness. We found ourselves in a position we had not been in before – able to influence a systemic change offer based on our experience and our values, and with the language and frameworks of HLS to support us."*
>
> **(Likewise)**

Creating the conditions for HLS to thrive in a place

What is it about these activities that enable change? They help build the conditions for a healthy system – "rewiring" mindsets, practices and structures from a focus on organisations to a focus on working together effectively to enable more human support. We now explore what these conditions are – both factors relating to people and how they interact, and the infrastructure required to enable more collaborative, human approaches.

While there is no one specific route to creating a healthy system – places start from different positions of strength and challenge, based on current context and historical trends – the below characteristics feature strongly in existing literature (for example, Building Collaborative Places and New Operating Models for

Local Government) and in local HLS case studies.

Conditions in healthy local systems that enable HLS:

- **Shared purpose and principles:** Partners in a place are aligned around a common purpose that cuts across and provides the motivation for their work. While all partners (and individuals) will have different perspectives, there is a common understanding of overarching priorities for the place, and how organisations can each contribute to this.
- **Trusting relationships:** people and organisations are connected with others and develop honest authentic relationships as a foundation for working together.
- **Collaborative behaviours:** people across the system value collaboration and work in a connected (rather than competitive) way. These collaborative behaviours are promoted and embedded at multiple levels.
- **Sharing power:** actions are taken to address imbalances of power and gain diverse perspectives. Decisions (including on resource allocation) are devolved as close to the ground as possible to enable locally responsive solutions.
- **Systems infrastructure:** systems and structures shift from an organisational to systems focus to enable collaborative approaches. This includes the development of more system-wide approaches to workforce, commissioning, governance and data.
- Enabling leadership: leaders see their role as creating enabling conditions for collaborative approaches. There is a shift from organisational to systems leadership, and hierarchical to enabling leadership.
- **Learning and insight:** there is a learning culture focused on experimentation, convening and collective sense-making as a driver of improvement and building trust.
- **Embedding and influencing:** the work of developing healthy systems is never done. People and partners are motivated to improve, embed and influence for the adoption of these practices more widely.

This section has explored what a healthy system that enables HLS looks like. Now we explore the roles of different actors, and where to start and how to embed HLS in local systems.

3. Roles and routes to change

Enabling a whole person approach that is responsive to local context requires actors at multiple scales/levels of place to contribute to a healthy system.

Roles

The role of national actors is explored in the *National-level working* chapter. Below we explore how actors operating at more local scales can best contribute. In complex systems, decisions are often made best by those who have a good understanding of context – including by people and communities themselves. The role of actors at each scale is therefore to create the conditions to enable more autonomy and ownership at a local level.

Without compromising on the Human aspect of HLS, it is important to acknowledge that not all support is best delivered at the most local level. Some support (for example, heart surgery) requires a level of specialist expertise that can only exist when serving populations on a larger scale. The task is to organise support at the most appropriate scale. Also, even when support is best configured locally, it needs to be connected beyond the immediate "place" boundaries. For people who move frequently, connections are required *between* different places to enable more joined-up support. In both these cases, human, holistic support at a local level is important in connecting people into wider expertise and support structures beyond the place.

The table below identifies how actors at different scales can help build the conditions for a healthy system and, in turn, enable more human approaches. This draws on both existing literature and "bright spots" of practice across the case studies. Please note, the characteristics given below for each condition are examples only and should be read as a spectrum rather than absolute categories.

	Proximity to people's lives		
Spectrum	Closer to people's lives e.g. hyperlocal	→	*Further away from people's lives* e.g. regional
Purpose	Working directly with local communities to identify what matters and build on local assets and identity		Identifying overarching common goals across the place to develop sense of shared purpose and principles, and identify how each partner can make the best contribution
Relationships	Develop trusting relationships with people, build local connections and sense of agency among local people		Building relationships and trust among different actors, valuing and resourcing stewardship functions, connecting and helping partners navigate different geographical footprints across key services and partners
Behaviours	Local people, volunteers and workers work together without a sense of hierarchy, playing to each other's strengths to create change		Enabling and modelling collaboration across sectors and themes
Power	Developing the trust, structures and capability for local people to have a say in decisions that affect them and their community		Bringing together diverse perspectives and challenging imbalances of power. Enabling more locally-led approaches through devolving decision making and budgets where relevant
Infrastructure	Seek opportunities to change processes and structures to support collaboration as the default e.g. "one team" approaches, participatory budgeting, community hubs		Develop and enable more systems-focused approaches to workforce, commissioning, governance and data
Leadership	Fostering community leadership and acting on barriers to more human, connected support		Setting the tone for an enabling approach that mobilises and develops collaborative capacity among partners at various scales
Learning	Creating spaces in communities for local people to share insights, identify priorities for community action, and test new ways of working		Spotting patterns, convening and enabling learning – what's common and different across localities, what can we learn from each other?
Influencing	Share insights to help advocate for the enabling conditions needed at a community level, bringing together local actors to demonstrate the potential of connected community-led action		Making the case for place-based approaches, identify blockers and work to address these, building the conditions for more local ownership

In reality, neither people's lives nor local governance and services are divided in a neat way – different organisations tend to work at different scales and always will have different footprints. Often these boundaries are not ones that make the most sense to local people. Health, emergency services and local authorities might all work across different geographical scales for example, with residents identifying with place at a much more local level.

As the importance of adopting locally responsive and collaborative approaches is increasingly recognised (in the new NHS reforms, for example), the issue of how to define place boundaries is an issue that more and more places are grappling with. Where it is possible to reach agreement about geographical alignment this can be an important enabler for place-based working. However, this should not distract from the more fundamental question of how to change practice – working in a place-based way should look and feel different (and more effective) for people at all levels, from local people to senior public sector officials. Place boundaries are artificial constructs drawn to make useful work possible (ref. Systems chapter). Drawing these boundaries should be seen as a helpful step in enabling experimentation and ongoing development of practice not as a problem to be "solved" in itself. Part of what we need to test and learn about is how place and thematic boundaries might need to be redefined or made more fluid to better reflect the reality of places and people's lives, particularly as the local context inevitably changes and evolves.

Routes to change: exploiting opportunities in place

Looking across the HLS case studies, one of the most exciting features is the diversity of starting points in different places. In some cases, systems change is driven by people and organisations who are in positions of formal authority (for example, public service directors or commissioners). But in other cases, change is being led by those who don't occupy formal positions of power, and in fact, their lack of formal authority means they are better able to question and disrupt how things are done across the system (for example, local charities).

Below we explore examples of systems change driven at different geographic scales (across the "proximity" spectrum above) and by different actors, each of whom have taken on a 'System Stewardship' role. As part of this, we highlight how these actors helped develop conditions for a healthy system.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority: led the development of an HLS approach to homelessness assertive outreach services across the Liverpool City Region. Included introducing and championing an HLS approach, working with local authority commissioners to make the case for a more flexible approach by highlighting the fact that standardised services weren't working for each of their six different areas. The Combined Authority has played a System Stewardship role in building **trusting relationships** and **collaborative behaviours** and embedding a focus on **learning**. A number of local authorities have seen the benefit of the stewardship role and are planning to adopt this locally.

Surrey Youth Focus (SYF): a collaboration charity working to bring together organisations in Surrey to improve the lives of children and young people. SYF plays the role of Systems Steward – building **trusting relationships** and **collaborative behaviours** across sectors and working to understand the system – to tackle siloed working and power imbalances to make support work better for children and families. SYF facilitated the development of Time for Kids – five key **shared principles** that are being used to drive whole system cultural change across Surrey, and are being adopted across the county by VSOs and public sector organisations. SYF focuses its **leadership** role on creating the enabling conditions at the county level, working in partnership with Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, Surrey Heartlands and other organisations to inspire everybody working with children, young people and families across the county to use "Time for Kids'' principles as inspiration for their approach to their work.

Wallsend Children's Community (WCC): aims to improve outcomes for children and make life better for families and young people in Wallsend. Employed by Save the Children, the WCC team of three staff act as Systems Stewards, working across the system with a focus on building the health of the system around the child and family. They help to build and sustain **shared purpose** locally and seek to **shift power** by seeing children and young people as the centre of the system. When **learning and insight** shows that the system is not supporting children in the way it should, WCC works to identify the people and **relationships** who can have the biggest and most positive impact in improving the way the system is working and bring new partnerships together to co-develop appropriate solutions.

Help on Your Doorstep (HOYD): a charity working with residents who are vulnerable and isolated and experience social inequality in Islington, London. To work towards its goal to support people to thrive and live in happy, healthy communities, HOYD has taken on a System Stewardship role – curating a multiagency network of services equipped to deal with a range of social issues and working with these services to support residents more effectively. **Trusting relationships** are key to HOYD's work at multiple levels – with the community, partners and funders and within the team. Its work focuses on **sharing power** with communities – drawing on the voices of people it works with to **influence** other parts of the system. It also fosters **collaborative behaviours** among partners and creates the infrastructure needed to support more connected, accessible services, including common referral process and communication systems.

Sometimes, HLS practice is driven by actors who have worked in a place for a long time, building on their local insights and relationships to push for change beyond their organisation and across the wider system. In other cases, HLS practice is driven by new entrants to a place, who take on a stewardship role to help develop a healthy system.

Rather than size, sector or how long an actor has worked in a place, case study organisations identified that the key "ingredient" or source of legitimacy that marked an organisation or individual's ability to drive change was the ability to bridge the gap between the "old" world and the "new" – being trusted within the establishment (based on relationships, authenticity, credibility) as a foundation for introducing, testing and embedding HLS thinking and practice. And, importantly, being trusted by and viewed as legitimate by multiple actors – by those in positions of formal power, and by people working on the ground and in communities. This System Stewardship role (described in the *Working together as a local system* section above) – bridging between and connecting many different perspectives and actors – is crucial. While this

connecting and weaving role is crucial, it can be invisible and intangible, meaning it is often not adequately recognised or resourced.

> *"Our primary role as a service provider can also mean that funding for the resources that we need to 'steward' a system involving over 150 different services can be overlooked by commissioners and funders. They can sometimes value our networks and the relationships but struggle to appreciate the human and monetary investment that goes into developing and managing this."*
>
> **(Help on Your Doorstep)**

Resourcing and recognising the value of this function is key to enabling the development of healthy systems and, in turn, more human support.

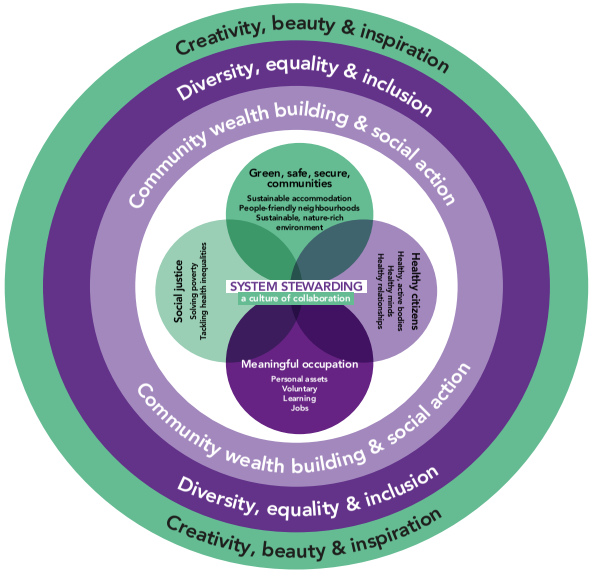
Drawing system boundaries: geography and thematic focus

Throughout this chapter, we have reflected on place as a "system of interest". But for many of the HLS case studies, the system of interest is defined by theme as well as place – children in Surrey or Wallsend, for example.

Considering the interaction between geographic and thematic focus in place-based examples of HLS practice, and the enabling roles set out above, we can make the following observations:

- System boundaries need to be drawn somewhere. In the case studies, we can see the tradeoffs of geographic vs thematic focus, i.e. those systems with a tight geographic focus tend to be broader in thematic focus, and the reverse is often true.
- More can be done to purposefully consider where system boundaries are drawn, and how these can be more useful and permeable. How can we treat a family as a whole, rather than divided into adults' and children's "systems", for example? Hyperlocal approaches are one way to bridge the two – local teams that work in a place-based way, but interacting with specialist services at the city/town level. For example, Oldham's place-based, multiagency teams, the most local level of Oldham and Greater Manchester's approach to place-based working.
- As HLS practice develops, there are important opportunities to consider how to purposefully take a HLS approach across a place as a whole, i.e. how can a city proactively build the conditions for HLS across the place, rather than only in specific thematic areas?

Figure 1: Representing System Stewarding, Hartlepower 2020



The work of Hartlepower, the Voluntary Development Agency in Hartlepool, offers an illustration of how HLS approaches across place could be conceived holistically. The graphic is a template for Hartlepower's effort to nurture multi-sectoral, collaborative networks that address four broad outcome areas represented by the four overlapping circles in the centre (green, safe, secure communities; healthy citizens; meaningful occupation; and social justice). Informing the outcome-focused work are three key enablers in the outer rings (creativity, beauty and inspiration; diversity, equality and inclusion; and community wealth building and social action). Citizens' perspectives inform all aspects. The important role of System Stewardship is illustrated in the centre – helping to coordinate and weave together the collaborative efforts aimed at improving life in the town. Hartlepower acknowledges that realising this whole town approach presents considerable challenges (including transforming organisational boundaries and roles) and views this template as a useful guide for moving towards a more holistic approach.

4. HLS and place – the next frontier

This chapter has drawn on case study examples to demonstrate the importance of taking a place-based approach to enable "human" approaches. In situations of complexity, decisions are often best made by those with an understanding of local context. The role of national/regional actors is to enable decision-making to happen close to the ground in a context-led way. The role of local actors is to contribute to the development of "healthy local systems" that build on local insight and trusting relationships to enable human support and more community- and people-led approaches.

Systems is the least developed and understood feature of HLS, and therefore an important opportunity for developing and spreading HLS practice. This chapter has demonstrated that system-wide change is possible, and there are multiple routes to and roles in creating this change. While there is no one route to change (it's complex!), there is value in learning together to share, develop and push practice, including developing the conditions identified here that help embed HLS practice across a system.

There are two key priorities to amplify the potential explored in this chapter:

- Translating human, learning practice beyond single organisations and across local systems – to enable a connected response that draws on all the assets in a place. This includes both:
  - Local actors working better together to understand and support individuals (including mobilising the contribution of local people and assets)
  - Purposefully creating a healthy system to enable this practice to thrive.

  As part of this, resourcing and recognising the value of System Stewardship is a key area for development.
- Exploring opportunities to embed HLS across a place as a whole:
  - Identifying opportunities to take a HLS approach across a whole place (beyond typical service silos)
  - Exploring what this means for how we draw system boundaries including more "human" ways to organise when taking people and place as the starting point
  - Identifying the mindset, behavioural and structural shifts required at different geographical scales, and how to enable these.

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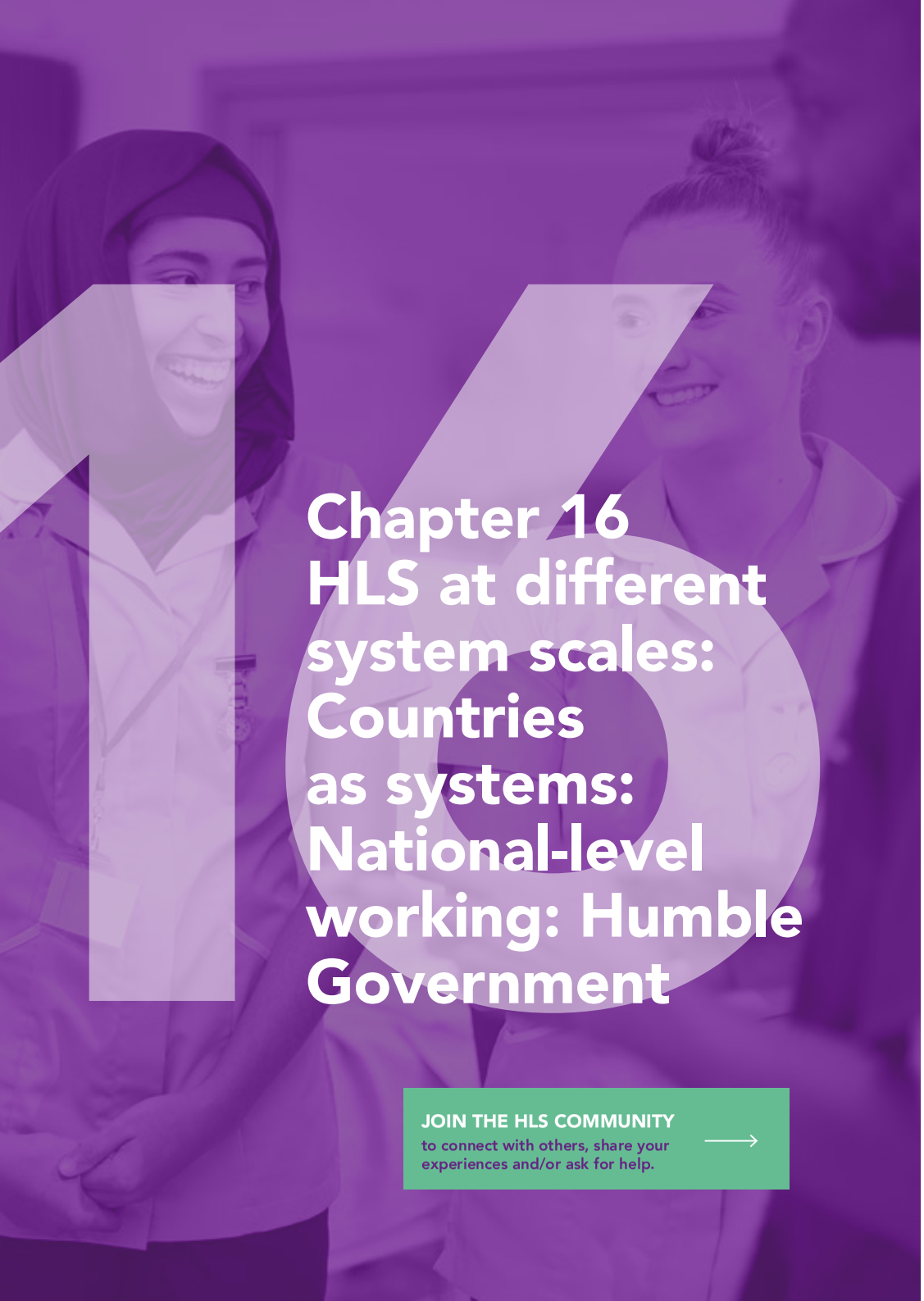


Chapter 16 HLS at different system scales: Countries as systems: National-level working: Humble Government

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

National-level working: Humble Government

Author: Toby Lowe
Contact the author

From local to national

Human Learning Systems (HLS) has emerged from local-scale public management practice. Its development has been largely a bottom-up process – starting from those who do public service. It began with the question, "what is required to enable public service to support human freedom and flourishing?" and has developed from there. In our previous research reports, we have been able to outline what this means for local-scale funding and commissioning practice, and then we explored a range of case studies that enabled us to reflect on public management practice more broadly at a local scale.

This report represents the first time that we have had examples of HLS at a national scale: the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) of the UK Government, EDUFI – the Finnish National Agency for Education, Collective Leadership for Scotland (CLFS), and Healthcare Improvement Scotland. As this is the first exploration of the HLS approach to public management at this scale, our findings are necessarily incomplete. There is still a significant amount to learn and explore at this system scale.

This chapter will explore what HLS looks like as a public management approach at the scale of "country as system".

Learning as public management strategy the national level

As we have explored in the System Scales chapter, an HLS approach to public management entails creating connected Learning Cycles at different system scales (see Figure 1 below). This starts with a Learning Cycle at the level of the relationship between a worker and the people they serve, and then each larger system scale undertakes a Learning Cycle in which they (a) learn from, and (b) learn to enable the learning cycles of the scale below.

> *"The Experimentation programme and each of its experiment stories has been on a journey of its own, with things done differently throughout. However, doing things differently only becomes significant when considered in relation to previous operating practices, cultures, and norms, as well as their transformation, i.e. the big trajectory.*
>
> *When the experiment stories and their trajectories are understood as factors in the operating culture trajectory, resistance experienced is also revealed to be a sign of participation in the negotiation process. This is a learning process with several twists and turns, which, provided dialogue continues, will also contribute to building the future."*
>
> **(EDUFI case study)**

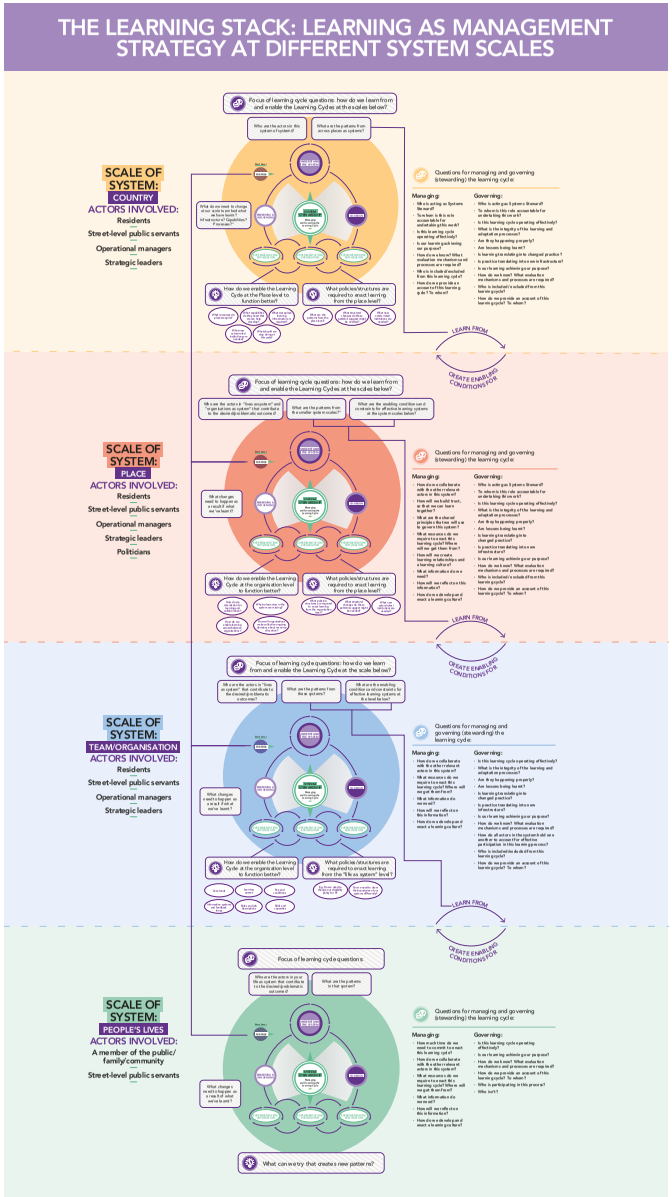
In this chapter, we will explore the particular role of national-scale public management practice in implementing learning as management strategy.

Humble Government

Learning as the meta-strategy for government has a transformative effect on the way that government sees its role, and the type of policymaking it seeks to do. Applying an HLS approach at national level means that a government cannot claim that it knows, in advance, what will work to support the freedom and flourishing of all the people it serves. Instead (using the language of the Finnish Government), it adopts the position of **"Humble Government"**:

> *"In today's increasingly complex operating environment, familiar policy approaches often have unpredictable outcomes, which hamper the achievement of transformative political goals. To achieve its goals, the government has therefore pledged itself to reform its decision-making by promoting continuous learning, new forms of interaction with stakeholders and long-term policymaking through improved collaboration with parliament."*
>
> **(Annala et al, 2021, Humble Government: How to Realize Ambitious Reforms Prudently)**

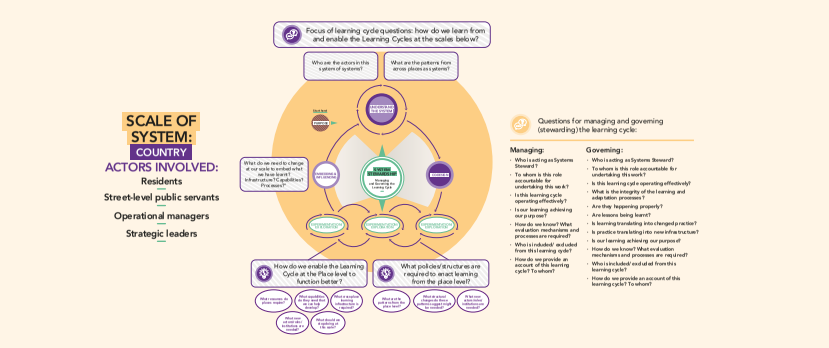
Figure 1: "The Learning Stack" – Learning Cycles at different system scales



Learning as strategy at the national scale

Let us remind ourselves of the national-level focus of enacting learning as meta-strategy:

Figure 2: The Learning Cycle at the scale of country as system



There are three key roles that seem to be played when enacting an HLS approach at national level:

- Supporting places to learn
- Supporting learning across places
- Learning from places (and enacting required structural change).

Let us explore each of these in turn, drawing lessons from the experiences of the case studies.

Supporting places to learn

Signalling the value of learning

One of the important roles that a larger-scale system can play in supporting learning at smaller system scales is signalling the value of learning. This is particularly the case if the smaller system scales exist in a dependent relationship with the larger, i.e. if they depend on the larger scale for resources.

Acting as a Learning Partner to places

From the work of EDUFI's Innovation Centre we can see a clear role for central government in supporting the development and functioning of effective learning systems at the place level. Elsewhere in this book, we have referred to this kind of role as a Learning Partner. In essence, the Learning Partner role seeks to support actors in a system in their journey around the Learning Cycle.

In order to create healthy place-based learning systems, they aimed to:

- Build learning relationships – characterised by humility, empathy and trust
- Cultivate learning attitudes – e.g. positive error culture, dealing with uncertainty

The Learning Partner role therefore undertook hands-on activity at the level of place in order to enable the effective development and functioning of learning systems at that scale.

They do this by:

- Convening – bringing together local actors, such as municipalities, schools and families to identify shared issues of concern
- Capacity and skills building – e.g. they supported local actors to design experiments to explore local issues, helped them to understand how to collect and reflect on the data they gathered
- Coaching – to help actors to reflect on the attitudes and behaviours required for their effective participation in these learning journeys
- Challenging – helping to ensure rigour and ambition for the learning process.

Creating the structural conditions for learning

Some of the conditions which are necessary for effective place-based learning systems to function are set at the national level. Drawing on the case studies, and other work, we can see different aspects of how national-level actors create the conditions for effective learning systems to operate at local scales.

Connecting the local to the national

An interesting aspect of how the EDUFI team described their work was the creation of "intimacy" between the national and local scales. They described a previous problem of a lack of connection and understanding between national and local-level actors, which meant that actors at the two scales did not understand one another's purpose and roles, and consequently found effective collaboration difficult.

To address this, they purposefully sought to create spaces for conversations between actors at national and local scales through, for example, the development of multi-stakeholder dialogue forums, and by the involvement of national level actors in local experiments.

Rethinking accountability and evaluation

The version of accountability enacted by New Public Management (NPM) – in which actors are held accountable for delivering "results" – does not work in complex environments. Rather than creating accountability, it creates an environment in which actors feel obliged to defend their positions, rather than engage in meaningful dialogue, and systematically lie to one another. This creates conditions which significantly inhibit the possibility of enacting learning strategies at smaller system scales, as it erodes the mindset required for genuine learning and makes the information held in the system untrustworthy.

In the EDUFI case study, we have seen how the national education national agency recognised that previous accountability regimes were inhibiting effective learning practice at local level, and replaced those reporting mechanisms with a form of "multi-stakeholder dialogue" instead. Crucially, this shifted the form of accountability from a simple hierarchical reporting mechanism of metric-based data to a conversation between stakeholders at many different levels in which different actors provide an account of their practice to one another. **It represents a switch from "holding to account" to "helping to account"**. This seems to have played a significant role in enabling learning across different system scales.

The FCDO case study provides an example of an alternative approach to rethinking accountability. While not a complete switch, in this example the department made a significant move towards a switch in the focus of accountability conversations. They sought to create an environment in which actors were held **accountable for learning**. They used a range of "sentinel indicators" to help assess whether programmes were learning and adapting in the manner expected of them.

A crucial part of rethinking accountability concerns rethinking how regulation functions. In many places, both regulators and those they regulate have come to recognise the pathological, "parent-child" character of many regulation relationships. This fits with much of the evidence about the effects of regulatory practice within an NPM paradigm, which suggests that it creates a "blame shifting" culture. As a result, progressive regulators are beginning to explore how to create more generative regulator-regulatee relationships and experimenting with forms of regulation that promote and enable learning environments.

Alongside a change in the form and focus of accountability, national-level actors also recognised that they needed to make **a change in the purpose of evaluation**. Both EDUFI and FCDO case studies demonstrate a shift in the purpose of evaluation – from being an accountability mechanism (asking questions like: "did you stick to the plan?" and "can you prove the impact of this work?") to a learning mechanism (asking questions like: "can you help us to make sense of whether this is working in the way we expected?"). This represents a shift to a more formative or developmental approach to evaluation. The shift in purpose of evaluation seems necessary both to shift towards learning (rather than defensive) attitudes among actors, and to provide reliable information from which to learn.

Retraining national actors

Some of the national-level case studies explored the different capabilities and leadership skills required at national level to enact learning as a meta-strategy. The Collective Leadership for Scotland study highlights the potential importance of systems leadership training as a way to help leaders to develop learning capabilities and relationships. The EDUFI case study describes a mentoring approach developed to enable public servants to shift from "expert" identities (people who are required to know the answer to any problem in advance) to "learner" identities (people who want to use their knowledge to learn about context-specific challenges and to share what they learn with others).

Funding for learning

One of the crucial roles we have seen for national-level actors in creating the enabling conditions for learning approaches to public management is providing funding for activities in a way which promotes learning. The FCDO case study highlights the importance of contractual arrangements that both require and enable learning and adaptation. Crucially, this means funding without Key Performance Indicators that are focused on either output or outcome targets. The simple message seems to be: to enable a learning strategy, you need to fund for learning.

National learning infrastructure – supporting learning across places

The second key role that we see national-level actors play in enabling a learning strategy is to create learning infrastructure which enables learning between places. In the EDUFI case study, EDUFI staff created learning spaces where learning from different places was shared between actors. They found that this enabled a

mechanism for spreading learning between places (as opposed to a "scaling" approach, which seeks to implement "what works" in one place in another place).

We can also see examples of national learning infrastructure which enables cross-place learning created by non-state actors. In the absence of an effective response from the US federal government to coordinating a national response to COVID-19, The Rockefeller Foundation supported the creation of a learning network for those who were leading COVID-19 responses in US cities – the Pandemic Solutions Group. This network became a crucial mechanism for actors to share experiences and data and learn together.

The creation of these types of cross-place learning infrastructure also enables national-level actors to spot patterns of results and behaviour across different contexts, which help them to understand the types of support that lower-level learning systems require.

Learning from smaller-scale systems (and enacting required structural change)

Some of the learning and adaptation which comes from place-scale systems requires action at a national level. For example, it is much harder for local public service systems to enact a learning approach to public management if national regulation regimes still use traditional (broken) versions of "accountability for results" or predefined versions of "best practice". Consequently, when learning about the problems of regulation regimes is shared from place- or organisational-scale systems, it requires national-scale systems to experiment with different approaches to regulation.

We can also see examples of national-level policy experiments that arose from learning created at smaller system-scales in the example of experiments with Universal Basic Income (UBI). For example, evidence concerning the "profoundly negative" outcomes on welfare recipients of conditional benefit payments has encouraged national-level actors to experiment with unconditional benefit regimes, such as UBI.

Enacting a learning strategy at a national level

From these examples, we can give indications of the kinds of questions that may be useful in enacting, managing and governing a public management learning cycle at national scale.

	Scale: Countries as systems	
Stage of learning journey	**Focus of learning cycle questions: what needs to be learnt to achieve purpose?**	**Questions for managing and governing (stewarding) the learning cycle** **Managing:** • How do we collaborate with the other relevant actors in this (and other) system(s)? • How will we build trust, so that we can learn together? • What are the shared principles that we will use to govern this system? • What resources do we require to enact this learning cycle? Where will we get them from?
Purpose	How do we help people to achieve their purpose(s)?	
Understand the system – Build relationships & trust – Establish shared purpose – Make the system visible	Who are the actors in the "places as system" that contribute to the desired/problematic outcomes? What are the patterns from these systems? What are the enabling conditions and constraints for effective learning systems at the level below?	
Co-design	What experiments with management practice do we need to enable learning at the system scale below? What experiments help us to enact the required structural changes from the system scale below? What experiments are required from learning from other systems at this scale?	• How will we create learning relationships and a learning culture? What information do we need? • How will we reflect on this information? • How do we develop and enact a learning culture? **Governing:** • Who is acting as Systems Steward?

Experinentation – Learning – Reflection – Re design	Experimenting/exploring areas such as: How do we resource places for learning and collaboration? What skills and capacities are required across organisations to learn effectively? How can those be provided? (Learning Partner role?) What roles/actors in the system are missing? How do we enable learning across/between places? How can accountability mechanisms promote learning? What forms of evaluation will enable learning?	• To whom is this role accountable for undertaking this work? • Is this learning cycle operating effectively? • Is our learning achieving our purpose? • How do we know? What evaluation mechanisms and processes are required? • Who is included in/ excluded from this learning cycle? • How do we provide an account of this learning cycle? To whom?
Embedding & influencing	How does our practice need to change to adapt to what we have learnt? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? What changes need to happen as a result of what we've learnt? What structural changes do we need to enact? How will we share learning with internal and external audiences? To whom do we need to communicate the need for structural change? (Changes in larger systems.) What existing structures and processes are inhibiting a learning approach? How will we dismantle or repurpose those? What resource allocation and performance management processes are required to enable this to function as a learning system?	

Enablers:

Devolved government working practices

Working in a context of devolved government responsibilities seems to be an important enabler of the adoption of learning strategies from the smallest to the largest scale. For example, the Finnish national education system traditionally features significant autonomy for local actors. This seems to create the conditions whereby central government understands the enabling and coordinating roles of learning as meta-strategy. Similarly, in the UK context, the examples of this at a national scale are found in places with aspects of devolved government, such as Scotland and Greater Manchester.

Areas for further exploration:

As the most recent area of exploration for HLS public management practice, there are still significant areas for further exploration. These are outlined in the Further Questions chapter.

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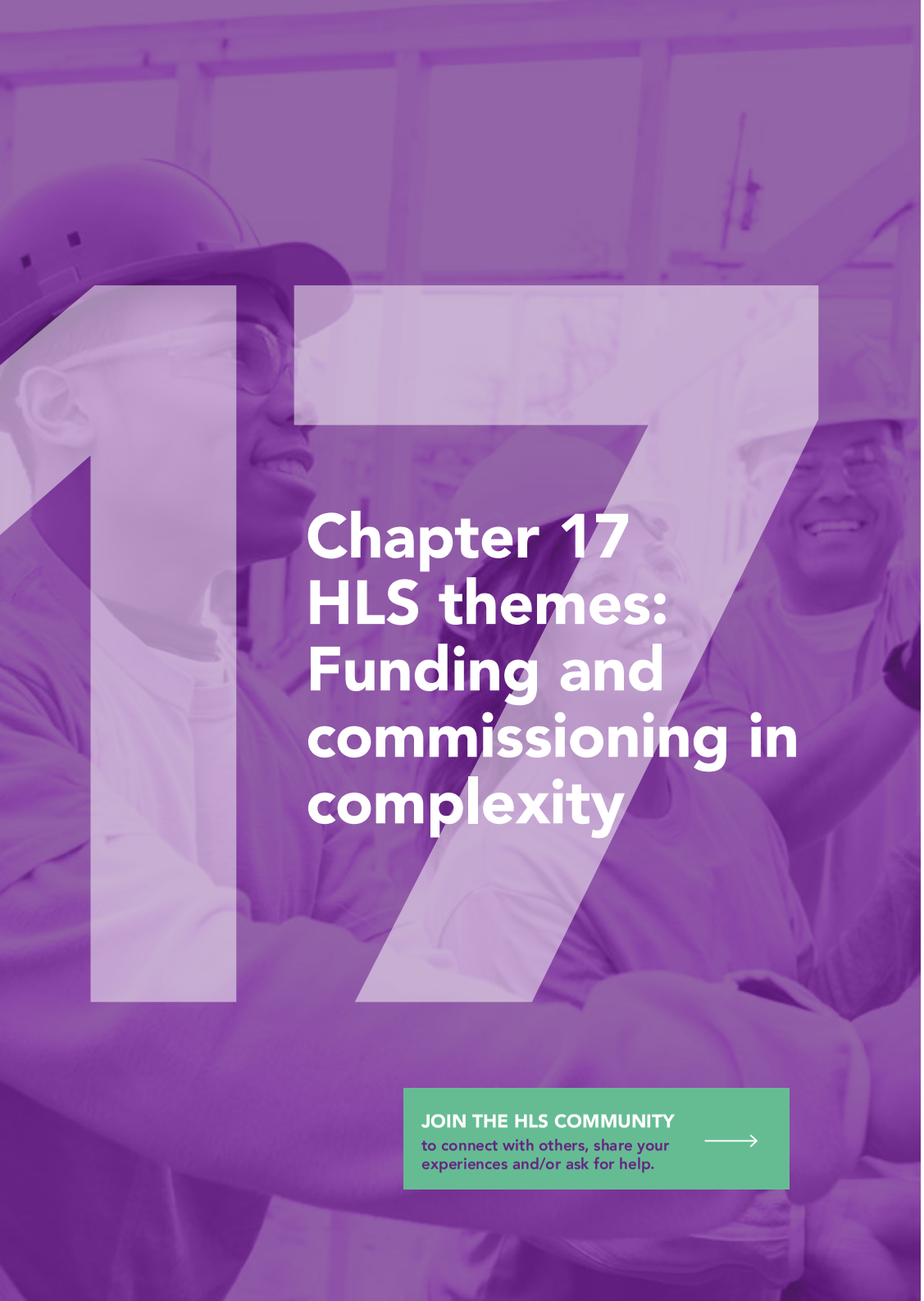

Chapter 17 HLS themes: Funding and commissioning in complexity

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Funding and commissioning in complexity

Authors: Melissa Hawkins, Dawn Plimmer, Jeremy Cox and Vita Terry
Contact the authors

Introduction

This chapter uses HLS as framing to explore how funders and commissioners can manage and distribute resources to respond more effectively to the complex reality of social issues.

Society faces complex challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated. Organisational and community responses have been profound, with many going above and beyond to support those most vulnerable and in need. However, policies, processes and resource allocation for social interventions can sometimes hinder rather than enable this support. We ask what can be done about this, and how funders and commissioners can allocate resources in more effective ways to enable organisations to do the best job they can in supporting citizens and communities.

Mechanical, controlling and reductionist (commonly known) approaches to funding and managing social change do not work, as NPM has demonstrated. This is because:

- Individual lives are complex, with multifaceted factors affecting people's life-courses and outcomes. Taking a generic and standardised approach to support does not help; instead, we need to listen and provide respectful and flexible support that enables people to consider and play an active role in working towards what a good life looks like for them.
- Dominant approaches to funding and commissioning over the past few decades have sought to contribute positive outcomes through a focus on compliance and control. But this hinders rather than enables the bespoke and flexible approaches that we know make the most difference for people.
- Funders and commissioners often stimulate competition between organisations rather than fostering the collaboration required for systemic and joined-up human

approaches that work best for individuals.

With accompanying evidence, these arguments were discussed in two previous reports that have laid the foundations for this work: A Whole New World – Funding and Commissioning in Complexity and Exploring the New World: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity.

The HLS approach has emerged as an alternative to NPM, and has been shaped and is continually evolving based on the work of many people innovating in the public and third sectors. In this chapter, we consider the implications of taking an HLS approach to funding and commissioning. While acknowledging that there are differences in funding and commissioning processes, there are significant similarities and opportunities for shared learning. Therefore, we draw on examples from and make recommendations for both funding and commissioning practice.

This chapter is not a dogmatic blueprint to follow – different contexts will shape and influence responses – and our collective understanding of effective practice is continually evolving. The aim is to explore trends in practice to provide ideas and inspiration for funders and commissioners.

Taking an HLS approach to funding and commissioning

Adopting a complexity-informed lens

Adopting HLS approaches requires a mindset that embraces complexity. This includes recognising that:

- Outcomes emerge from complex systems, and therefore individual people or organisations cannot and should not be held accountable for outcomes
- Complex systems can't be controlled
- Change and adaptation are inevitable and desirable when working in complex systems.

This mindset – of letting go of the illusion of control – is an essential foundation for developing more human, flexible and collaborative approaches to funding and commissioning. Below, we explore the implications of HLS for funding and commissioning with this mindset as a foundation.

Human

Being human means that we treat each other as fully-rounded human beings in a way that responds to our specific contexts, challenges and strengths.

In many of the HLS case studies, we see examples of organisations and partnerships working in a human way by providing flexible, bespoke support that responds to an individual's specific circumstances. This relies on building trusting relationships and on practitioners having the autonomy to make decisions in partnership with the people they are supporting.

How can funders and commissioners enable this practice?

Fund and commission relational support

Flexible support based on trusting relationships is a key foundation for working in a human way. Funders and commissioners therefore need to prioritise funding organisations that:

- Build effective relationships with those they serve
- Understand and respond to the strengths and needs of each person
- Act collaboratively with others to do so.

Adopting a relational funding/commissioning approach

Funding organisations that work in a relational way is not enough. Traditional funding and commissioning processes based on compliance can undermine and prevent organisations with the motivation and capability to work in a relational way from doing so. The trusting relationship between an individual and the person supporting them – and between the leadership of a delivery organisation and the staff making decisions on the ground – needs to mirror the relationship between a funder/commissioner and the funded organisation.

> *"We start by developing relationships with partners so they in turn can build relationships with the young people they're supporting. Relationships based on trust are essential."*
>
> **(Blagrave Trust – Exploring the new world, 2019)**

Nurturing trusting relationships at all levels, between citizens and providers, between organisations, and between funders and funded, leads to improved outcomes; micromanaging outcomes does not. Taking an HLS approach means that funding is treated as a relational process and that policies and processes support this. The relationship between funders and commissioners and funded organisations is prioritised over a transactional approach where services are "purchased".

As part of developing an HLS approach to commissioning housing and homelessness support, commissioners at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority started by recognising the

need to look beyond a narrow service lens to understand the complexities of the environment that homelessness services were delivering in and the wider needs of communities.

> *"Rather than develop a specification that stated for the next three years: 'you need to deliver these outcomes', the specification needed to allow the provider/commissioner to always evaluate and develop delivery/services to ensure they can respond to the variety of needs demonstrated by the client group, reflect best practice and have a clear learning impact on future delivery and commissioning."*
>
> **(Liverpool City Region Combined Authority)**

A relational approach is a key feature of the Tudor Trust's grant-making process:

> *"Once at the second stage, applications are now worked up in a more complexity friendly way, with less emphasis on getting all the details right ahead of grant-making committees, and more focus on the organisation's context, people, and approach. The process aims to be more flexible, and tailored to the needs of the applicant, using conversations to build a relationship and respond as quickly as possible to a grant request if appropriate. This more intuitive approach places greater trust on Grant Managers' judgements, having recognised that this is a key part of the process in terms of building relationships."*
>
> **(The Tudor Trust)**

This gives grantees the support needed to work in complex conditions, and therefore grantees don't have to *"squeeze into boxes to fulfil a funder's agenda"*.

Similarly, commissioners such as the Plymouth Alliance have prioritised developing honest relationships:

> *"[Building relationships] was necessary, given the previously competitive nature of relationships in a market approach to tendering. We were consciously acknowledging the mistakes of the past whilst also sharing the context of those mistakes and at the same time trying to build empathy and understanding so we could move forward together."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance)**

Adopting a relational approach is not straightforward and raises important questions for funders and commissioners about whom they build relationships with. Responding to diversity is an essential feature of "human" approaches, and to adopt a relational approach that encourages and embraces diversity – rather than reinforcing existing biases and networks – requires funders and commissioners to critically examine their networks and who makes decisions. This includes considering diversity among staff involved in funding and commissioning, and among those who make decisions. There are important initiatives supporting this work, for example:

- The 2027 programme, a collaboration between Ten Years' Time, Centre for Knowledge Equity, Koreo, and the Roots Programme, which aims to increase the diversity of people working in grant-making.
- Efforts to give decision-making power to communities. For example, the Blagrave Trust's Challenge and Change programme – delivered in partnership with the Centre for Knowledge Equity – which delegated both the design of the programme itself and the funding decisions to an advisory group made up of young people for a fund to invest directly in their peers.
- Increasing focus on participatory grant-making/budgeting.

Enabling flexibility

To provide human support, organisations must have the autonomy to respond to whatever strengths and needs they uncover in their relationship with the person they are supporting. Funders are, in recognition of the fact that organisations working on the ground are best placed to make decisions about how to use resources, and to enable the flexibility to adapt as contexts change. Core funding also recognises the importance of funding more than project delivery – of investing in organisational and partnership development to develop the capability and culture for more relational, human ways of working.

As well as providing core funding that can be used flexibly rather than tied to specific activities and outputs, funding needs to be managed in a way that reinforces flexibility. This means no rigid KPIs or targets, because these can never absorb the variety of people's context.

When organisations are freed from reductionist performance management and measurement processes (usually focused on outcomes that can be easily quantified and measured), then energy can be diverted into finding out what outcomes matter to the people they support.

Funders and commissioners need to consider what they are holding organisations to account for and why, and whether these approaches are fit for purpose. How is reporting information being used and is it an unnecessary burden? Greater transparency around this and also how funders and commissioners are themselves held to account is needed. The Tudor Trust are exploring accountability further as part of an action learning project:

> *"An area that we are yet to explore is exactly what reporting will look like. This has been a part of the initial conversations with grant managers, when groups shared with us that they appreciate the freedom, but want reporting and accountability to be clear from the beginning. We are now asking ourselves: is there a balance to be struck, to provide some structure to reporting so that organisations don't feel we will suddenly demand huge amounts of detail that they weren't expecting? One group shared that: 'most funders don't do accountability very well as it is usually meaningless outcomes frameworks or frustrating reports. Accountability…can be really awful when done badly but when done well, it could be really, really useful… for everybody's learning.'"*
>
> **(The Tudor Trust)**

Taking a long-term perspective on funding and commissioning

If time is invested in building relationships between citizens, organisations, funders and commissioners, then trust is built and there is a greater likelihood of positive outcomes. Time and again, "trust" is the word which resurfaces: "trust is a prerequisite for systems change". In order to build relationships, people need to be able to trust one another; in order to trust one another, people need to build relationships, and trust takes time and it doesn't happen overnight.

The focus shifts from organisations having to try to achieve the impossible, which often means improving outcomes over which they have little control in a short space of time, to spending time developing trust and relationships throughout the system.

The Plymouth Alliance have spent many years working on developing long-term relationships through regular coffees and catch-ups with colleagues and leaders to engage in systems leadership, and through convening large-scale learning and listening events for the people of Plymouth to attend.

> *"The trust and relationships built over time have held the alliance together during tough times and situations. This is not to say it is all plain sailing, and sometimes there is tension between organisational and alliance processes, however, members of Alliance Leadership Team are united over the purpose and rationale of the alliance."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance)**

Working together not only meant learning was a primary outcome, but also that greater trust has been developed between colleagues, which in turn led to the enablement of a more human way of working, with people being supported. In addition, the creation of an alliance has meant that competition between providers has been reduced, further supporting the development of honest and collaborative relationships

Learning

Funding for learning

Learning is the strategy for achieving purposeful change in complex systems. *[ref. learning chapter]* As explored in the Learning chapter, this requires some significant shifts in mindset and practice, including proactively building a learning culture and aligning organisational systems and structures to enable it to flourish – encouraging curiosity and creating psychological safety through developing a positive error culture.

If funders and commissioners are serious about taking an HLS approach, they need to work in a way that prioritises learning, not control, at three levels:

1. Funders and commissioners giving the space for, and incentivising, funded organisations to learn, which includes a role for experimentation
2. Funders and commissioners learning alongside funded organisations
3. Funders and commissioners reflecting on, and continually learning about, how to improve their own practice.

These learning levels will now be briefly explored with reference to case

studies actively implementing these strategies in practice.

Levels of learning

1. Funding for learning: ensuring grantees can prioritise learning

> *"We recognise that changing complex systems requires the ability to adapt and change because the context which enables interventions to 'work' is constantly changing. 'What works' is the continuous process of listening, learning and adapting."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation Case Study)**

Dominant approaches to performance management in funding and commissioning have focused on holding people and organisations accountable for delivering predefined programmes of work and predefined outcome targets. This leads to gaming and incentivises organisations to "stick to the plan", rather than having an honest conversation with their funder or commissioner about what they are learning and how they need to adapt their approach to do what's best for the people they are supporting.

As an alternative to a compliance culture focused on meeting predefined targets through prescribed approaches, a positive error culture can lead to improved innovation and performance by promoting ongoing learning (Keith and Frese, 2011). In this context, the role of funders and commissioners shifts from compliance to creating a culture of honesty where funded organisations are encouraged to share ongoing learning and adapt their approach accordingly.

As well as funders and commissioners creating a culture of honesty (which can take time, given the fundamental resetting of expectations and relationships required), they also need to support funded organisations to create the time and space necessary for learning.

Learning is something that can be squeezed out of what is thought of as "real work", and "we don't have time for learning" is often heard.

> *"People don't see learning or dialogue as 'doing', so there can be a narrative that this is a 'talking shop' – 'we need action'. This means it can take time to embed learning."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation Case Study)**

Funders and commissioners can support the prioritisation of learning by considering how funding is managed. Grantees tell how multiple and lengthy report-writing processes can take up valuable time, with the focus being on tangible and measurable results instead of the "invisible" work of systems change, such as critical reflections and learnings (the Tudor Trust, 2019). Funders and commissioners need to shift the focus of performance management from compliance and "proving" impact to enabling learning and improvement.

The following examples demonstrate ways in which funders and commissioners are creating time and space for learning:

- In their funding of systems change work, the Lankelly Chase Foundation are more focused on the how rather than the what:

> *"It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it: the 'how' (the written and unwritten rules and assumptions – the terms of engagement that govern how we all act) are more important than the 'what'. Collectively, we tend to be drawn to actions, models, interventions, policies etc. We might get further if there was more collective focus on the underlying 'how' things are done."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

- The Cornerstone Fund funds partnership approaches led by civil society support organisations, to bring about systems change to build stronger, more resilient communities and improve outcomes for Londoners. The Fund recognises the need for learning and adaptation when addressing complex systemic issues, and aims to encourage this in funders' interactions with funded partnerships:

> *"We are providing funding to go on a journey, to enable a process to happen. We need to have level of acceptance and tolerance for risk."*
>
> **(Funder)**

This has enabled funded partnerships to continually adapt to changing external contexts, experiment when the way forward is unclear, and develop and embed a learning culture with partners.

- Commissioners for the Liverpool City Region are *"led by learning and not operational targets"*, putting learning at the heart of the performance management process. This has included running regular sense-making sessions with delivery teams to adapt to changes in service demand, ensure effective service provision, capture

learnings, and shed light on where commissioners can best support these processes.

- The European Social Fund (ESF) managing agency in Flanders is funding the formation and growth of eight multiagency local partnerships to support young people who have challenging employment prospects. The funding framework is explicitly anchored around pooled budgets and shared sense-making and learning, with partnerships developing their own evaluation frameworks locally, rather than performance measures being predefined by ESF. Because of their national presence, ESF and the public employment service VDAB are working hand-in-hand with each of the local partnerships to define the system stewardship role, based on learning about what the partnerships need in order to flourish.

2. Learning across systems: funders, commissioners and grantees learning together

There are valuable learning opportunities to be gained by collaborating across systems. As explored in the Learning chapter , *"Learning together builds trust, which creates autonomy, which enables adaptation – building a learning culture is its own learning journey."* Creating opportunities for shared learning and sense-making can support funders, commissioners and funded organisations to build understanding, take more systemic approaches and improve practice together.

This requires funders and commissioners to be curious and open to critique and challenge. The Tudor Trust has adapted one of its guiding principles: "making the most of our resources and independence and being open to challenge". Commissioners at Plymouth Alliance ran a large-scale learning event where citizens and organisations in Plymouth came and told their stories, which for the commissioners meant realising that their approach was not working. Lankelly Chase spends a lot of time learning from the organisations they support:

> *"Our codesigned work involved meeting with over 200 people. They helped us understand different perspectives, what role people wanted a foundation like ours to play in the places, what we thought our money could achieve, what we could learn from what others were doing and what we should focus on. We started with individual conversations and soon realised that participatory methods of codesign generated more cross-pollinating ideas, connections and excitement. So we used the formats of World Café and Appreciative Inquiry. This process generated the system behaviours as a collective best-guess about the qualities of healthy systems. These became the focus and bedrock of our place-based work."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

How learning opportunities might look will be dependent upon context. For the Tudor Trust, it has meant a journey of action-learning between the trust and its grantees. This began with a Complexity Learning Event. It was a day when grantees, Tudor Trust staff, and researchers at Northumbria University came together to discuss what complexity-informed and relational grant-making practice meant, and what the implications of such an approach might be.

Often, organisations are looking for more from funders and commissioners than just financial support, an approach known in the funding sphere as "Funder Plus". For example, organisations being funded by the Tudor Trust spoke of the value of the ongoing supportive relationships between grantee and grant managers, as well as a journey of action-learning between the trust and grantees exploring what complexity-informed and relational grant-making practice means and the implications of this (Tudor Trust, 2019). The Plymouth Octopus Project (POP) has found that many organisations require more than just money, and a large part of their work involves engaging and capacity-building with the VCS. The ESF in Flanders has learned of the value of supporting an active community of practice among the emerging partnerships, to proactively share learning, explore challenges-in-common, and seek support from across the region.

Funders and commissioners learning about their practice

As well as funding for organisations to learn, funders and commissioners should prioritise and plan for their own learning. Lankelly Chase has used various methods, including:

> *"Reflective practice to learn about ourselves and the work. We used Systems Coaching to understand the systems (or nested systems) we were part of and our shared purpose. We used Deep Democracy to have better dialogue, build trust, make decisions based on collective insights and address conflict."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

Lankelly has academic partnership support:

> *"We recruited a Learning Partner to help us govern the work as a learning process. We recognised that we didn't want a 'model'; we were interested in a continuous process of learning that would allow us to adapt to the living systems of which we were a part."*
>
> **(The Lankelly Chase Foundation)**

Commissioners and leaders in Plymouth embarked on a nine-month Systems Leadership Programme led by The Leadership Centre, which they cite as invaluable for learning about the complexity of systems change and enabling strong relationships to be built between participants. The Plymouth Alliance manager has recently been forging connections with other alliances, which, although varied in process and setup, find much to be learnt from colleagues elsewhere.

Systems

Systems are the set of relationships and interactions that combine to produce outcomes in people's lives. A "healthy" system is one that produces better outcomes for people, based on collaboration, learning, and shifting power. To take an HLS approach requires funders and commissioners to consider how to realign their funding, on the basis that systems (not projects or organisations) create outcomes. To do so, funders and commissioners need to see themselves as part of the system, with shared responsibility for systems change. The role of funder and commissioner moves from ensuring compliance as "performance or grant manager" to recognising that they have active roles to play in contributing to and nurturing healthy systems.

Key questions for funders and commissioners to consider include:

- Which people/organisations are part of the systems which produce the outcomes I care about?
- How can I convene the system to help it understand itself better?
- How can I allocate, distribute and manage resources so as to build trust as a key asset across the system?
- How can I enable collaboration between actors?

Funders and commissioners as Systems Stewards

The idea of System Stewardship has been explored in both the literature (Davis et al., 1997; French et al., 2020) and in practice. System Stewardship assumes that people who work in the public and third sectors are motivated in their work to support others, generally can be trusted, and therefore do not require top-down control from managers or from funders and commissioners. Funders and commissioners instead take on the role of "stewarding", which can include making sense of the system, nurturing its health, and shaping positive behaviours, such as making connections to parts of the plan (French and Lowe, 2019). Funders and commissioners move to a capacity-building role, shifting away from a "specify > select > fund > report" model to an integrated role where they actively participate in sense-making, experimentation and acting on system-level patterns beyond the control of individual system actors. This means that funders and commissioners move away from being the "performance managers" of funding to being actively engaged in and enablers of complex systems change. To take an HLS approach means funders and commissioners considering how to fund partnerships or "coalitions of purpose", rather than allocating resources only to individual organisations.

As explored in the Systems chapter, taking on an active System Stewardship role depends on legitimacy. Funders and commissioners are sometimes in a position of legitimacy, where they are best placed and trusted to take on a stewardship role. Below, we explore examples where this is the case:

- Lankelly Chase has developed a set of systems behaviours, including how power should be devolved so that people being supported have more agency in decision making (French and Lowe 2019).
- In Flanders, the ESF and VDAB are collaborating closely as national agencies with shared interests in the employment market to understand how they can cocreate a shared system stewardship approach.
- Liverpool City Region redesigned their role of contract and review lead as a Systems Steward role – responsible for developing trusting relationships (between providers and between commissioners and providers), creating spaces for reflection and learning, being led by learning not operational outcome targets, working shoulder-to-shoulder with providers to understand issues on the ground, modelling behaviour, and enabling autonomy for providers.

Funding and commissioning to enable more collaborative, systemic approaches

As identified above, funders and commissioners can sometimes play a useful role as Systems Steward. But they are not always best placed to play this role – other actors may be better connected, more trusted, and closer to the issues, and may already be playing a stewardship role.

At the most basic level, funders and commissioners should explore what they can do to build trust and collaboration among organisations, or at least not incentivise competition. Rather than pitting organisations against each other and asking them why they are more worthy of funding than each other, the focus shifts to exploring the potential of organisations working together and how funders can help nurture this. Rather than funding those organisations who can articulate why they are "better" than other organisations locally, funders and commissioners should instead prioritise organisations who are trusted and connected locally (as well as those that offer "human" relational support). Funders and commissioners should also recognise the costs of investing in enabling collaboration – working in partnership does take more time and coordination than single organisations delivering discrete projects, and this needs to be resourced.

The Tudor Trust, for example, feel they are more "systems servants" than "Systems Stewards" as a national funder. They do not have enough knowledge of local places (or resource) to bring organisations together to collaborate to improve the health of the system.

> *"As we do that, the emerging question seems to be not so much, 'how do we play the role of Systems Steward?' but 'what is Tudor's role within the funding sector?', and in relation to our grant-making, 'how do we support organisations to play their part effectively in their respective ecosystems?' In posing questions in this way, it feels that Tudor then is not so much a 'Systems Steward' as a 'system servant'."*
>
> **(The Tudor Trust)**

If funders and commissioners consider their role as systems servants, they could look to working with and supporting organisations that do play a stewardship role locally. An example is the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation giving funds to POP because POP is embedded in the community and can make decisions on funding based upon knowledge of a local need and how organisations could collaborate.

HLS as an enabler of change: examples from the pandemic

There have been innovations which have happened during the pandemic (for example, in removing bureaucracy, thinking creatively, and collaborating) that we can learn from. Funders and commissioners have a crucial role to play in ensuring we do not retrench back to traditional forms of control, and restart practices that experience has shown us are not necessary.

> *"(There) is this determination that we absolutely must not go back to the way things were. Even for us, we were doing this explicitly HLS way of working, there are lots of practices we must not go back to, I think."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance HLS Webinar, 2020)**

Human

Funders and commissioners who had already taken a relational approach have found that this has supported them through the crisis. Members of the Plymouth Alliance identified that the relationships and trust already developed over a number of years between members of the alliance enabled them to adapt quickly to sudden change:

> *"[COVID-19] has also placed all the values we enshrined in our contract, front and centre, so things like kindness, empathy, openness and trust. Everybody talks about that, everybody is demonstrating that and it's been really affirming for everybody, I think, the way this has, right across the city, been coming to the fore."*
>
> **(Plymouth Alliance, 2020)**

Crises such as the Grenfell Tower fire and COVID-19 led the Tudor Trust to adapt their funding processes and consider some of these adaptations to be progressive, For example, as it became necessary to free up grant managers' time due to increased workload during the pandemic, the stages in the grant decision process have been revised so that less time is spent on grant managers "working up" a grant to put before trustees.

> *"[Instead,] applications are now worked up in a more complexity-friendly way, with less emphasis on getting all the details right ahead of grant-making committees, and more focus on honing in on registering the organisation's context, people, and approach. It aims to be more flexible, and*

tailored to the needs of the applicant, using conversations to build a relationship and respond as quickly as possible to a grant request if appropriate. This more intuitive approach places greater trust on Grant Managers' judgments having recognised that this is a key part of the process in terms of building relationships. These conversations also bring in Trustees earlier in the application, as individual trustees are invited to join conversations with applicants on Zoom, allowing them to meet the people behind the applicant, and understand what they do and what drives them."

(The Tudor Trust)

Learning

Maintaining and creating opportunities for learning is difficult during times of crisis. However, the following cases have not only been able to continue to make time for learning but have found that learning has supported them through difficult times as well, and are keen not to retrench back to "old ways of working" when the crisis has passed.

There are examples of funders and commissioners who have managed to increase opportunities for learning over the past twelve months. The Plymouth Alliance have been able to experiment with new ways of working:

"Prior to COVID-19 there was lots of integration, information sharing and a fairly small-scale focus around experimentation. Once COVID-19 began, the alliance was able to experiment with wholesale changes to the delivery of all aspects of service. In addition, the alliance was able to rapidly prototype and implement experiments; for example, around managed alcohol use in hostels and free vapes for vulnerable people that would have needed weeks of negotiation before."

(Plymouth Alliance case study)

The Plymouth Alliance is using appreciative inquiry, their chosen method of asset-based learning, to capture learning, engage in sense-making, and reflect upon finding in order to inform future practice. They are keen to use the crisis to consider what is important to retain and what isn't: COVID-19 "*meant that governance and regulation could be examined for what is essential and what is extraneous*".

The Tudor Trust have found that simply the act of engaging in learning with each other as part of a group has supported them during the crisis:

"The project Group has been unexpectedly helpful in encouraging a more collegiate approach among Grants Managers and Trustees. Because of the newness of the work, Grants Managers and Trustees found themselves talking and reflecting more about their grant-making. As a result, individuals felt less solitary in their relationships with groups and were able to draw on the knowledge of colleagues where useful, as well as sharing some of the 'emotional burden' of grants management. This more collegiate approach strengthened wider learning practices within Tudor, and helped prepare for the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis."

(The Tudor Trust)

Systems

Funders and commissioners who have played a role in building the health of systems have been able to support funded organisations to adapt and respond to the communities they support.

There are funders and commissioners who have seen the importance of linking together organisations in place to learn from each other in times of crisis. Likewise, a social care organisation being funded by both funders and commissioners, was funded to carry out research for a learning report:

"COVID-19 created an opportunity for change that we jumped on. Driven by commissioners recognising local need – a very important leadership move – a group of VCS, Local Authority and NHS Trust organisations were drawn together to develop a rapid, systemic solution to the over-stretched services and increased need of the borough's most vulnerable people living with serious mental illness. We found ourselves in a position we had not been in before – able to influence a systemic change offer based on our experience and our values, and with the language and frameworks of HLS to support us."

(Likewise)

The role played by local VCS organisations as Systems Stewards has been more important than ever during the pandemic. Recognising the value of and funding this sometimes intangible activity is crucial:

> *"One organisation among the Tudor Trust case studies reported how, during the early days of the crisis, they played an increasing role in sharing intelligence with and joining up services between local public services and other voluntary sector organisations on behalf of their vulnerable user group. These interactions directly impacted users and took resources, but the Director wondered how to understand that activity as something 'billable' and to whom it might be charged. So even though Tudor funds small and medium-sized organisations, it is clear that many play a vital role in their ecology and one that is often not recognised by commissioners and funders."*
>
> **(The Tudor Trust)**

POP has used its existing relationships to continue to collaborate, build capacity and strengthen networks.

> *"COVID-19 has brought home just how vital a healthy and vibrant community infrastructure is. POP has made this a priority from the start of its EFF funding, investing in skills development, building, and connecting networks, micro funding grassroots initiatives, and engaging the change makers of the future."*

This has included working with Plymouth City Council on supporting the vulnerable through the Good Neighbours Scheme and in partnership with local organisations creating the Neighbourhood Care Networks, which have supported community organising and support during COVID-19.

Summary and implications

We have outlined the reasons why funding and commissioning using an HLS framing is important, and what changes funders and commissioners should be considering if they are interested in adopting such an approach.

Taking an HLS approach to funding and commissioning involves:

- Adopting a complexity-informed mindset
- Taking a relational approach
- Funding for learning
- Taking a Systems Stewarding role when appropriate
- Using HLS as an enabler of change, particularly in times of crisis.

Taking an HLS approach to funding and commissioning is not always easy. However, as the examples in this chapter have illustrated, HLS can support funders and commissioners to resource and support social change more effectively in complex and adaptive contexts, something that is particularly relevant for the current time.

Endnotes

1 "funded" represents funding from both commissioners and funders

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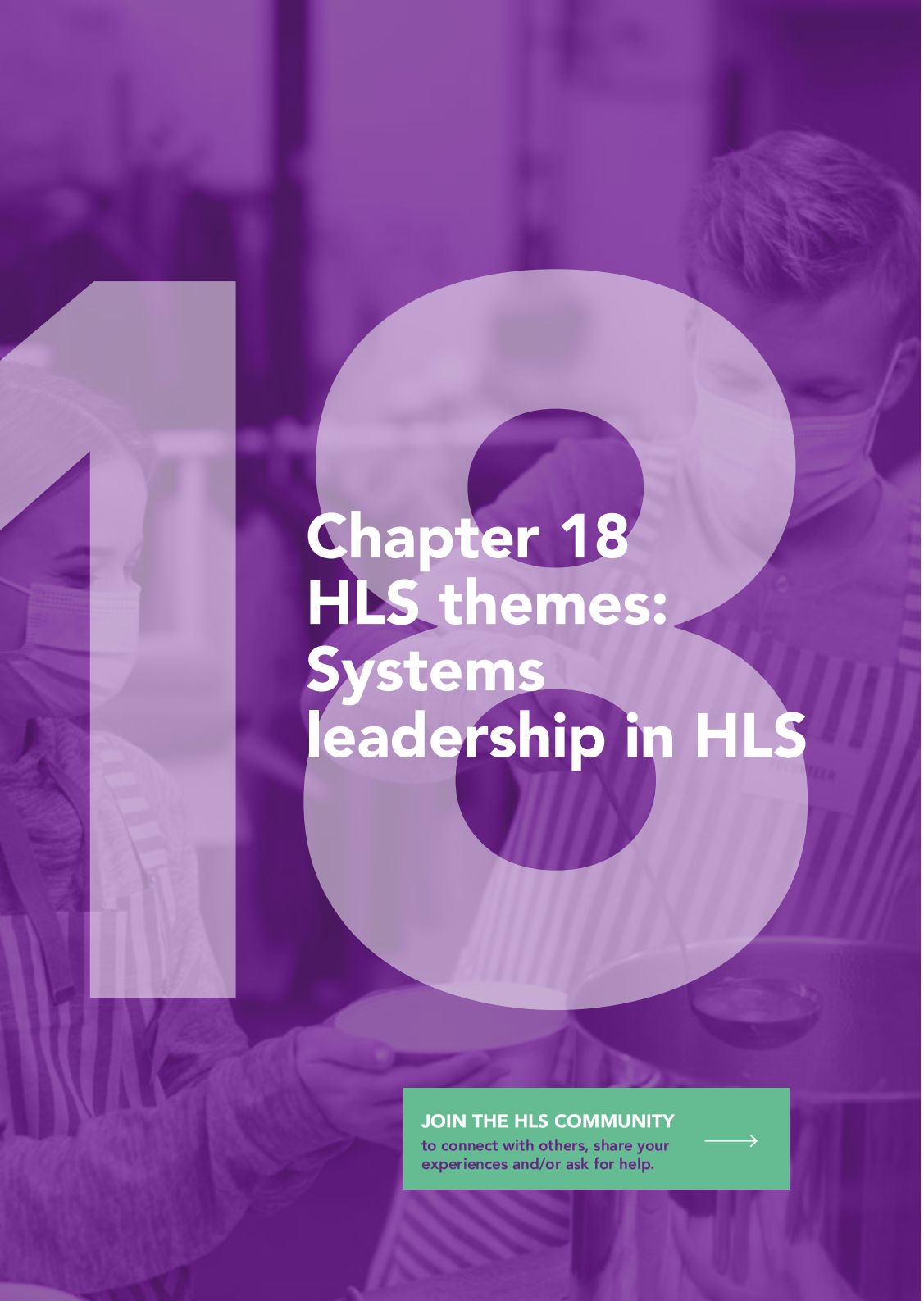

Chapter 18 HLS themes: Systems leadership in HLS

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Systems leadership in HLS

Author: Jeff Masters
Contact the author

Introduction

Central to the HLS approach is the understanding that – in contexts of complexity – outcomes are the product of systems, not individual organisations, programmes or projects. There will be variation at the level of the individual, not least because the Human dimension of HLS can make a huge difference. But, taken in aggregate, system outcomes will be shaped by system conditions. In relation to complex problems like substance misuse, domestic abuse or homelessness, to create repeatable, sustainable change in outcomes requires changing these conditions. This is not to imply a linear relationship between conditions and outcomes or a mechanistic approach to change. The Learning dimension of HLS is a reminder that in contexts of complexity there is no "end state" of perfection. Rather, there is an ongoing need for cycles of adaptation and innovation in the direction of practice that is more HLS-like, holding on to what is strong and improving what is wrong. But if changing system *outcomes* means changing system *conditions*, then changing system conditions requires people to lead and sustain that change. But who are these people and what is the nature of the leadership required? It is our answer to these questions that is the subject of this contribution to the book.[1]

As many of the case studies demonstrate, in contexts of complexity, leadership for improvement within a local system can come from anywhere. It can come from those with a high degree of authority within the system, as in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCA) case study, where the combined authority used its convening power to bring together homelessness organisations to implement a Housing First model. But – as we see in the Wallsend Children's Community which brought together a wide range of groups and organisations and centred the voice of youth – the leadership for change can just as easily come from elsewhere: from actors at all levels and from organisations right across the local system.

These might be people who are developing innovations in practice

which are systemically important. They might be connecting parts of the system that would otherwise operate in isolation. Or they might be bringing a unique perspective or slice of reality that is needed for a durable solution to emerge. This is especially true in relation to the perspectives of those with lived experience, which are critical to the codesign element of HLS approaches, and can too frequently be forgotten, excluded or ignored.

As these examples show, the nature of much of the change required to embed HLS approaches is not of the kind that executive authority can mandate. But neither should it be seen as an either/or: systems change is best achieved as a collective endeavour, partnering across difference, with multiple actors from all parts of the system playing – and being enabled to play – complementary roles.

To understand these differences in roles, and how they can be complementary, in this contribution we draw two key distinctions:

- **First, we distinguish the notion of *authority* (power based on position or informal authority) from *leadership* (the activity of mobilising for change).** Put another way, authority is what a person *has* (or has not), including the informal authority they have developed; leadership is what a person *does* (or does not do) and how they do this.
- **Second, we distinguish *organisational leadership from systems leadership.*** Here the distinction rests not only on the difference between where energy is directed (organisation or system), but also on the currency that defines collaboration within each domain.

Distinguishing leadership from authority

Leadership and authority as we have defined them are obviously closely related, but from an HLS perspective they are different in important ways. Indeed, exercising leadership with authority creates very different opportunities and challenges from exercising leadership without it. It may seem intuitive that it is easier to bring about change if a person has a high degree of authority because of the position they hold or the personal trust and respect they have created. Executive authority, for example, can enable a person to sign off on new organisational policies, priorities or resource allocations. Sometimes our intuition is correct, and those with authority can play an important role in initiating, catalysing and sustaining

the kinds of changes required to give space for HLS practice. In doing so, they can free others to operate creatively within the space they have created.

But, as the case studies show, as a matter of fact it has not always been the case that leadership for HLS style change has come from those with authority. And these case studies also give us clues as to why that might be. This is because not every problem can be solved through the exercise of authority, even when well deployed. This may be particularly true in relation to the kinds of Human and Learning changes to practice that the HLS approach implies, which cannot be commanded.

Paradoxically, having authority – formal or informal – can be an active hindrance to exercising leadership in this context. This is because leading change from a position of authority can mean subverting the expectations others have about what authority should provide. Often we are looking to those in authority to keep things the way they are, providing protection and order. Making change can mean subverting expectations, as change pushes people into the unknown. It can mean including new voices that bring important but disruptive insights, as may be the case for people with lived experience. As a result, such changes can be actively resisted, and consent to authority withdrawn. This is one reason why, as the case studies show, leadership for change is often provided by those operating well beyond their authority.

Distinguishing organisational leadership from systems leadership

The best organisations are defined by a clear sense of collective purpose, with capabilities and resources aligned to achieve it. When describing organisations, it is common to use the language of structure, even if to say it is flat rather than hierarchical. Power relations are well defined, prescribed through contracts, and policed (to greater or lesser degrees) through performance management. In addition, the secure harbour created by organisational boundaries can allow strong cultures that pervade organisations to take root and persist.

Going beyond the domain of organisation and into a local system, the picture is more fluid. Within systems, the currency that defines collaborative capacity are relationships of trust, which can be hard to create and easy to destroy. Memories of betrayal, actual or perceived, can be long, and turn into urban myths as they

get retold. A sense of shared purpose between organisations – even those working on the same issue or problem – cannot be assumed; it has to be created. The existence and alignment of capabilities needed to achieve the goal are even less likely to exist; they need to be built. Authorisation to act can be harder to understand and, in contrast with an organisational context, will likely be more dispersed. But even without formal means of enforcement, power relations can be every bit as real. Indeed, they can become more entrenched and harder to subvert without some of the mechanisms – like collective bargaining or individual job promotion – that exist within organisations to do so.

At the same time, systems have many qualities organisations do not. Indeed, when addressing complex challenges, it is the limitations of the organisational perspective that requires the Systems dimension of HLS. These qualities include the diversity of interests, thought and perspectives systems contain, as well as a much wider range of assets and capabilities. Mobilising and marshalling these system assets and capabilities to optimise their impact is the challenge of systems leadership. It is very different from organisational leadership, asking different questions and demanding different mindsets, qualities and approaches.

Leadership roles

The two distinctions set out above are to provide analytical clarity, not to suggest a preference or hierarchy. For new models of practice like HLS to take root and thrive in healthy local systems, it will require brave and generous leadership exercised with **and** without (or beyond) authority, as well as leadership exercised in the context of local organisations **and** local systems. In the matrix below, we set out the different roles people can play to develop and embed HLS practice within their organisations and local systems, recognising that this will be most effective when this is a collective effort involving partnership across difference. Two points are worth noting:

- First, using a matrix in this way suggests the categories are discrete. Of course, in reality, they are continuous: levels of authority can vary enormously, and a person's focus can be on both organisation and system. Indeed, we hope it will be.
- Second, the matrix is being used to elucidate leadership roles, with leadership being defined by the work required, not by the skills or charisma of those who would lead. This is not to downplay the personal qualities, capabilities and approaches that will help in the activities of system leadership, only to draw the distinction. For effective systems leadership, such qualities are likely to include curiosity and flexibility, authenticity and vulnerability, abilities to build trusting relationships, and a willingness to share power.

		Focus	
		Organisation	**System**
Level of authority	**Higher**	**Examples:** a service commissioner; senior management team member in a local authority; CEO of a small charity **Roles** **Shape strategic direction:** commit to HLS as a way of working, within the organisation and with partners and stakeholders; legitimise a different way of "being" at work; listen; give focus and meaning to the work; be willing to give up control, while retaining responsibility; weave evidence of progress into a clear narrative of change. **Hold space for learning:** create space for human and learning behaviours; hold nerve, allowing time to learn from failure; partner with lower authority actors for insights and to give back the work; remove obstacles to change; capture evidence of progress in a wide variety of ways. **Pace the change:** balance expectations of the old order with the need to transition to the new; allow deviance and promote culture of positive error; model HLS behaviours internally and through e.g. approach to commissioning; celebrate and reward progress; seek perspective and support from outside the organisation.	**Examples:** CEO of a local authority; VCS representative on strategic partnership **System stewardship roles** **Share strategic direction:** strengthen relationships/system conditions; identify shared purpose(s); increase the diversity of voices, perspectives and actors; listen and value difference; convene; give meaning to the work. **Create infrastructure for collaboration and learning:** create and sustain shared space; develop common norms, practices, and behaviours; learn and reflect together; lead by example on e.g. collaborative working, shared budgets, joint commissioning; commission in ways that promote HLS practice; partner with organisations with less authority to shape the systemic environment. **Pace the change:** prioritise trust and relationships; tolerate uncertainty and not knowing; protect vulnerable voices in the system, embrace challenge but keep focused on the problem; respond to the needs of the system; share and celebrate successes; seek allies, advocates, and advisors outside the system and partners within it to create sense of collective bravery.

	Lower	**Examples:** team members; practitioners; head of service • **Direct attention to the work:** use evidence to create urgency; agitate and advocate for change; understand how you contribute to the problem. • **Connect, experiment and learn:** safe-fail experimentation; partner with those in authority to understand their concerns and constraints; create networks and partners across organisations; develop reflective practices and peer-learning networks; listen to people the organisation serves. • **Stay in the game:** continue to meet existing expectations; seek allies, confidants and partners outside the organisation; remain positive and recognise progress.	Examples: VCOs; social activists and campaigners; local businesses; anchor institutions **System stewardship roles:** • **Direct attention to shared work**: increase variety (of interests, perspectives, ideas and practice innovations); agitate for change/ raise the temperature; look for evidence in new places. • **Connect, experiment and learn (system-weaving)**: show up; be brave but open to possibilities; intervene creatively; share safe-fail experimentation; increase system connectivity and strengthen relationships; share learning with and from peers; partner with authority to bring in voices not being heard. • **Stay in the game**: seek allies, advocates, and advisors outside the system; be optimistic about possibility but realistic about progress; celebrate small shared successes.

For those with authority within organisations, the challenge is to create space for emergent HLS practice, protect and nurture it, and manage the process of organisational change. It is to balance expectations of authority of others within the organisation for protection, direction and order, while maintaining a pressure and pace for change compatible with that goal. Put another way, it is deploying the tools of authority to reset the organisational compass towards HLS practice, and creating protected space for progress in that direction. This is both in the way the organisation operates internally and in the changing relationships with its partners and the people it serves. As practice shifts from the old to the new, it is to straddle the gap, honouring what was good and strong in previous approaches, while allowing experimentation and learning to find new ways forward. This could be especially difficult where culture is

entrenched, such as in trying to shift from a culture of blame to a culture of learning from failures and mistakes. Showing that a shift such as this is real will not only take time, but also bravery in holding to the approach when faced with difficult cases. We see a good example of this kind of organisational leadership in the Empowerment case study, where CEO Mike Crowther consciously tried to mirror his own management approach against HLS principles. In doing so, he was seeking to model the change in culture within the organisation he wanted to see.

> *"Our purpose is to use the principles of Human Learning Systems to radically change the way we do things, to be a living example of what can be done when we accept that being human is messy, we are making mistakes and learning from them continually and that our organisational system has to reflect that, rather than seeking to control what it can't really control anyway."*
>
> **(Mike Crowther, CEO Empowerment)**

For those with less authority within an organisation, there is still space for leadership. Here the task is to use the new freedom provided by disruption to order, both for creative experimentation and to agitate for further change. It is to find opportunities to connect with others within and beyond the organisation to strengthen relationships, develop practice, and share learning.

The 'S' in HLS

There is much that can be done from within an organisation to develop the practice of HLS. But, as we saw in the Neighbourhood Midwives case study, organisational commitment may not be enough. To embed the practice and make it sustainable requires a local system that can nurture and sustain the approach. And that local system must be built, consciously and deliberatively. To do so requires people to see beyond the organisational perspective – as important as that is – and to exercise systems leadership. We have already emphasised that systems leadership is most effective as a collective endeavour, the multiplicative impact of people playing different, coordinated roles. We saw this very clearly in the COVID-19 response , which created the conditions for voluntary organisations to develop a more collective and distributed leadership style. But it also generates more leadership. Indeed, Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) define a system leader as "someone able to bring forth collective leadership".

Whatever the level of authority a person has within a local system, they can play a role in multiplying leadership and mobilising collective resources.

Taking on an active responsibility for the health of the local system so that it becomes a place where HLS practice can thrive is the role of system stewardship. For those in positions of authority, this role embraces strengthening relationships across the system and building bonds of trust. It requires an awareness of perspectives that might be missing when decisions are being made, and how they can be heard and accommodated. It includes:

- Developing local systems infrastructure that can sustain collaborative efforts between organisations over the long haul
- Leading by example, modelling HLS practice, and sharing learning
- Commissioning in a way that allows others to adopt HLS approaches
- Looking for opportunities to convene others from across the system at all levels to reflect, learn and problem-solve together, continually building collaborative capacity within the local system.

Finally, having low levels of authority within a local system does not prevent the exercise of leadership, which can have profound effects. As the POP case study shows, it was leadership by people in this square of the matrix who were the prime instigators and shapers of change. They have played crucial roles as "systems weavers" in strengthening connections and sharing practice and learning across local systems.

As we discussed above, when it comes to leadership, authority is a constraint as well as an enabler. By analogy, the absence of authority removes that constraint and creates freedom for action. This, in turn, creates its own feedback loops: establishing realities of innovative HLS practice on the ground, focusing attention, and dramatising the need for change can all make it easier for those in authority to step into the space created and take the action that is needed. This interplay between actors with different levels of authority within the system is important: in very different ways, each can create space for the others to act. Partnering across these differences in "vertical" or cross-hierarchical alliances can create the best of both worlds.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered the nature of leadership required to change local system conditions to support HLS practice, and who could lead this change. As we have seen from the case studies, the answer is that anyone – whatever their position within a local organisation or system – can play a part in leading change. In the matrix we set out, we considered the nature of these contributions, looking from the perspectives of people with more or less authority within their organisations and across a local system. While these roles may be quite different, they are complementary. Systems change is the ultimate team sport, and there is a role for everyone in changing local systems to support and sustain HLS practice.

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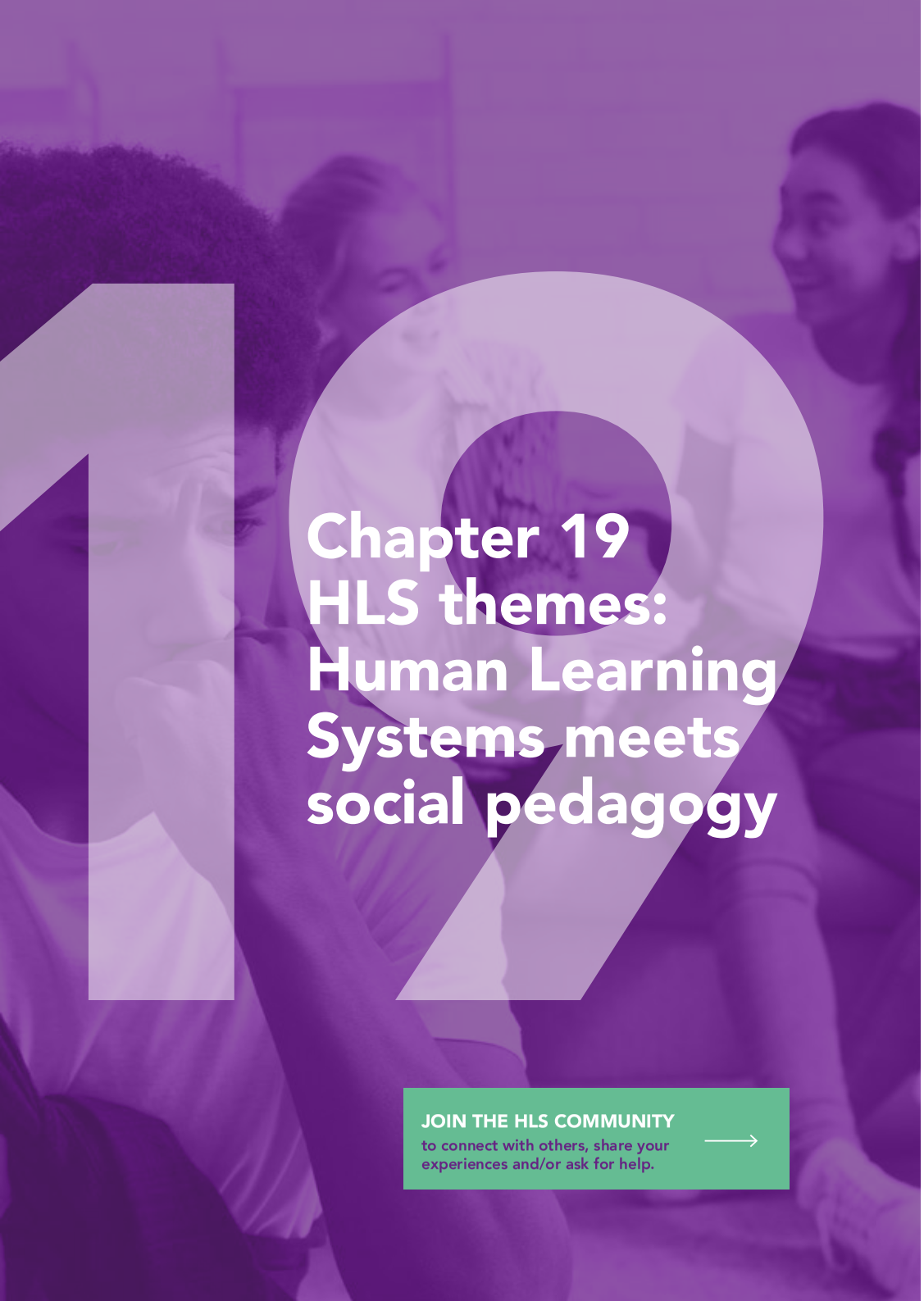
Endnotes

1 The authors acknowledge the debt owed to the teaching and writings of Ronald Heifetz and Peter Senge in the ideas expressed in this contribution.



Chapter 19 HLS themes: Human Learning Systems meets social pedagogy

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Human Learning Systems meets social pedagogy

How a social pedagogical perspective can bring HLS to life

Authors: Lowis Charfe and Gabriel Eichsteller
Contact the authors

> *"Nothing is as practical as a good theory."*
> **Kurt Lewin**

Introduction

As soon as we read "Exploring the New World", the synergies between HLS and social pedagogy were very clear to us. We could see how HLS sets out a strong argument and, importantly, provides a framework that supports the much-needed changes required in organisational working within the public sector. The language used in the report around empathy, compassion and effective relationships that "liberate" workers resonates from a social pedagogical perspective. Because of these connections, the HLS framework is now taught as part of the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership here at UCLan, and *Exploring the New World* has become a key text on the course.

In this chapter, we explain the key synergies between social pedagogy and HLS and how a social pedagogical perspective can help develop healthier systems, learning cultures and relational practice that benefit us all. We outline how the theories and principles used in social pedagogical practice can bring HLS to life as an organisational framework, as they offer navigation points to help guide and develop our direct practice within complex environments. We briefly introduce social pedagogy as a coherent ethical and theoretical framework for relationship-centred practice. Looking at Human, Learning and Systems, we offer a succinct summary of relevant concepts that can help you embed HLS in your direct work and your organisation's culture and systems.

What is social pedagogy?

Social pedagogy offers a holistic way of working with children, young people and adults in ways that support their wellbeing, learning and social inclusion. At the heart of social pedagogy lies a belief that each person deserves to be treated with dignity and possesses unique inner resources and potential, which we can help them unfold. To do so requires meaningful and authentic relationships that enable us to recognise a person's potential, their qualities, strengths and interests, and to create learning situations in which people can experience their resourcefulness and develop new abilities. This is why social pedagogy is often translated as education in the broadest sense of the term, with a focus on learning in the "everyday".

In much of continental Europe, and across Latin America, there is a strong tradition of social pedagogy as an academic discipline and field of practice. Social pedagogues tend to work in a variety of educational and care settings, starting from the early years, through to schools, residential childcare, play and youth work, community and family support, social work, employment support, addiction work, prisons, support for people with disabilities, and care for the elderly. At first sight, some of these settings may not seem to have much in common. Yet, there is a shared ethical underpinning, an understanding that in any of those settings we can make a positive difference, not just for the individuals but actually for society as a whole, if we create an environment that enhances wellbeing, supports learning, human growth and social inclusion through empowering relationships. In this sense, social pedagogy seeks to find educational solutions to social issues by connecting individuals to society and promoting social justice.

The appeal of social pedagogy lies in the fact that it is more than just an approach to social care practice; it is an ethical orientation that can be applied to the whole organisation and the wider sociopolitical context. This is why we believe it is highly relevant for any organisation adopting HLS. While it can provide professionals with a broad range of methods to use, it ensures that our focus is on the deeper purpose of supporting wellbeing, learning and social inclusion – and selecting or developing methods that contribute to these aims and seem meaningful within a given practice situation. This is what sets social pedagogy apart from other current approaches frequently used in UK practice, such as strengths-based, person-centred and "risk-sensible"

models. It is the guiding principle and foundation on which our everyday practice is built on and influences how we then understand and use the approaches mentioned above.

A social pedagogical perspective can be seen explicitly in the case studies of Lighthouse, a London-based children's charity explicitly built around social pedagogy, and Empowerment, a Blackpool-based advocacy organisation has recently introduced social pedagogy to deepen their commitment to relationship-centred practice. The philosophical orientation and key principles are also reflected in several other HLS case studies, such as the Mayday Trust and the Moray Wellbeing Hub.

Indeed, there is a growing network of organisations and individuals in the UK embedding social pedagogy in a range of social work and care services across the life-course, from work with children and families through to adult social care. However, we believe a social pedagogical perspective has relevance across public services and in any area where we work with people, where being human, facilitating learning, and cultivating healthier systems are important. The Diamond Model outlined below illustrates the wider aims of social pedagogy and how these connect with HLS.

The Diamond Model

The Diamond Model is one of the most powerful concepts in social pedagogy and visualises a central underpinning principle: as human beings, we are all precious and possess a wealth of skills, abilities, talents, knowledge and other resources that make us rich in unique ways. There is a diamond within every one of us. Every person has the potential to shine – and social pedagogy is about supporting them in this, to uncover and recognise potential, to draw out a person's inner richness and thus help them feel more resourceful and empowered to create meaningful change in their lives. In facilitating these kinds of positive experiences, social pedagogy has four core aims that are closely linked: wellbeing and happiness, holistic learning, relationship, and empowerment.

Figure 1: The Diamond Model in social pedagogy

Wellbeing and happiness

The first aim ensures a focus on wellbeing and happiness, both of which are core conditions needed for positive growth to happen, underpinning empathic and positive human relationships. In social pedagogical practice, wellbeing is understood holistically, as an integrative term covering physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing, all of which are interconnected. The emphasis on happiness helps to ensure we are concerned with the present, too, and support people in feeling happy in the here-and-now, creating meaningful moments and finding ways to contribute to the greater good. Research on happiness shows that, in the long term, life quality comes from leading a meaningful life, bringing happiness to others, and serving a higher purpose.

What determines wellbeing and happiness is subjective and thus different for each person we work with. In social pedagogical practice, we must constantly keep this in mind, question where we might be making assumptions, and get into dialogue to explore how the people we support experience happiness and nurture their wellbeing. This means social pedagogical practice has to be very context-specific and highly responsive to the individual and the situation rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

The social pedagogical focus on wellbeing and happiness is reflected in the HLS emphasis on human flourishing and can provide valuable insights, for instance drawing on findings from happiness research about how to achieve a high level of quality of life in the long term (see also other chapters on Human and Impact on people and place).

Holistic learning

Wellbeing and happiness are inherently connected to learning processes, as a person's physical, cognitive and emotional state affects how the brain processes information, in which parts of the brain it is stored, and how easily it can be recalled. At the same time, learning should actually make people feel better about themselves and bring the joy that comes with discovering something new and exciting, satisfying one's curiosity, and gaining greater understanding.

Learning and growth are therefore key guiding principles underpinning social pedagogical practice. From a social pedagogical perspective, we conceptualise learning holistically, or as engaging "head, heart, and hands". Reflective of human uniqueness, each person learns in different ways, and we need to account for this in how we create a stimulating learning environment and how we draw on the everyday situations we face to provide positive opportunities for growth.

In addition to its focus on taking a holistic learning approach in our work, and recognising the potential of creating situations where we can learn together with the people we support in practice, a social pedagogical perspective also highlights the need for an emergent learning approach in our organisation. This requires an understanding – and acceptance – that life is complex and uncertain, and that there may not be easy and quick solutions to the problems faced (see chapter on Learning). While this can be challenging, social pedagogy assists us in "sitting with" this uncertainty and see it as a valuable learning opportunity, a part of the journey that supports our "human" development.

Social pedagogy provides us with ethical, moral and theoretical guiding principles and navigation points to direct our practice in complex situations and use our situated professional judgment, rather than unquestioningly apply an evidence-based practice manual. This type of learning requires us to critically reflect on past ways of working, consider our understanding and the narratives that are being used to explain or justify this as well as be open to new ways of thinking and working.

As can be seen in many of the HLS case studies, such as Wellbeing Teams and Empowerment, emergent learning assists us to create "positive error" cultures within organisations, where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. This requires the relationships within teams to be authentic, purposeful and built on trust – and that we acknowledge the tensions and conflicts within relationships and develop the ability to repair relationships when they rupture. As highlighted by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1996), conflict and disagreement need to be seen as an opportunity to learn and grow. Without them, we never progress but instead become apathetic.

Relationships

Within social pedagogical practice, there is a deliberate focus on relationships to support positive growth and change. Relational practice needs to be centred on engaging human-to-human, as equals (see Human chapter) . It requires that we build and maintain authentic relationships that have inherent value and aren't merely a means to an end. Social pedagogy therefore encourages us as professionals to bring our personality into the relationship, which is not the same as sharing private matters or feelings (see 3 Ps below).

Social pedagogical relationships are about being professional and personal at the same time, thus requiring practitioners to be constantly reflective and continually grow our awareness of private aspects (such as unprocessed feelings and experiences) that influence our relational practice. It also demands that we acknowledge the tensions and conflicts within relationships, that we face these and develop our ability to repair relationships when they become tense or strained or break down.

It is also about being curious in wanting to genuinely understand the lived experience and "life world" of the people we are working alongside, no matter how far from our own lived reality theirs may be. By focusing on relationships and creating an environment where every person is encouraged to build trusting relationships with others – and is supported in doing so – we can increase wellbeing, encourage people to take responsibility for others, and help them develop a strong support network, a "relational universe" consisting of friends, family, professionals and people within the wider community.

This way of thinking about relationships systemically will make a lot of sense to HLS professionals. Importantly, social pedagogy pays careful attention to the power dynamics within relationships and how we can ensure a greater sense of equality and recognition within the system.

Empowerment

When thinking about power dynamics, it is important to understand that empowerment is not something that we give to people; we do not empower others. Empowerment only happens when somebody feels they possess agency, have the self-efficacy to take control of their own lives, and are meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect them. This requires an educational approach that enables people to learn about and better understand issues of power and how they can form relationships, where power is used not as a form of control over others but as responsibility for others. This very much links to the concept of psychological safety developed by Amy Edmondson, and an awareness and understanding of the power dynamic within all of our relationships with each other.

In HLS terms, empowerment comes from playing a meaningful role within the wider system and is also connected to the resourcefulness to cope with the uncertainty and complexity encountered in practice.

Empowerment is also aligned to social inclusion and social justice. A growing number of social movements are challenging us to think about the lived experiences of marginalised groups and the dominant cultures and structures that repress their right to flourish. We can learn how to be allies, sharing our platforms to help people hear from groups and individuals who are often ignored and making a positive case for the value of diversity. In this way, we can help create the conditions where marginalised people and groups feel empowered and supported to step forward and to change systems and beliefs that help contribute to a more positive society for us all.

Positive experiences

In order to realise the four areas of the Diamond Model, social pedagogical practice has to focus on providing positive experiences. The power of experiencing something positive – something that makes someone happy, something they have achieved, a new skill they have learned, the caring support from someone else – has a double impact. It raises the individual's feeling of self-worth and recognition, reinforcing their sense of wellbeing, of learning, of being able to form a strong relationship, or of feeling empowered; and by strengthening their positives, the person also improves their weak sides so that negative notions about their self fade away.

This offers an important reminder to organisations interested in adopting HLS: while this paradigm shift might seem like a huge challenge, the ultimate power lies in the positive experience of the difference it can make to both frontline practice and organisational culture.

It is important to highlight the fact that all areas of the Diamond Model are interconnected and inseparable from each other – similar to the three HLS components Human, Learning and Systems. To further illustrate how a social pedagogical perspective can bring HLS to life in your organisation, we have selected some specific theories related to each HLS domain.

Social pedagogy theories that help develop the Human in HLS

Recognising the intrinsic human dignity of each person we support is fundamental to social pedagogical practice. This is why HLS and social pedagogy share an emphasis on kindness, compassion, relationships and bringing our whole selves to work. These values come alive in social pedagogical practice through our *Haltung*.

Haltung

A German term that has no direct English translation, Haltung roughly means ethos or mindset and links to how we express our personal values and deepest beliefs in everyday interactions. It is crucial that we have a deep understanding and awareness of what these are, how they have been shaped, and why they are important to us, as they will always influence how we interpret and respond to the world around us – both in our work life and outside it. Each person has their own internal compass guiding their ethical orientation through life, shaped by their past experiences, and they make their own choices about the extent to which their actions are guided by their values, the extent to which they "show their Haltung".

Within social pedagogical practice, our Haltung should explicitly reflect the Human in HLS – a core belief in each person's human dignity, resourcefulness and unique inherent value. Haltung thus offers a framework that supports values-based relational practice. A social pedagogical Haltung is based on two poles, between which we constantly move: empathic understanding, where experiences or circumstances are familiar to us; and regard, where we cannot draw on similar experiences and need to make sure that our thoughts and actions are based on respect. For instance, as a parent we can have empathic understanding of the challenges of parenting, but we cannot truly understand what it might feel like for a parent to have their capacity to care for their children questioned and assessed by a social worker.

In this situation, a social pedagogical Haltung enables us to show compassion and empathically connect on a human level, while also recognising that the parent's situation will be different from our own, and that we must therefore show regard for their subjective experience being different to anyone else's. This acts as a reminder not to make negative assumptions and "to other" people who have different experiences and views from our own. This also encourages us to recognise and challenge the power imbalance and differentiation that happens between us when we view ourselves as "staff" or "service user". The following concept can help us in this respect, too.

The 3 Ps – the professional, personal and private self

The 3 Ps offers a reflexive framework which allows us to explore, understand and manage the boundaries within relational practice. The three aspects within the framework are:

Professional self

The professional self refers to the professional knowledge we have around relevant issues like legislation and policies, research, theories, methods, and practice experience, and how we use these to guide our practice. We need to be clear about our purpose and focus in working alongside the people we are supporting and have an awareness of the professional engagement with our work. We also need to be open and transparent about our professional role within the relationships and boundaries that surround this.

Personal self

For authentic relationships to develop, there has to be reciprocity, which involves showing (in our actions) and sharing (by what we say) who we are as human beings. Depending on the setting, our role and what feels appropriate in the relationship with the person we're supporting, these aspects will influence how much of ourselves we share. Before sharing personal information or experiences, we need to question how this might help increase reciprocity and empathic connection within the relationship.

It is also important to be able to show our flaws and vulnerabilities, so that we can develop a more genuine, more equal relationship with people. This helps recalibrate the power imbalance inherent in our professional working relationships. It needs to be our own choice which aspects of our personal life we feel comfortable sharing, and at what point we share them in a professional relationship.

Private self

While the personal self is what we bring into professional practice, the private self refers to the part we should keep out. It requires honest reflection and questioning to determine which aspects of ourselves we choose not to bring into the relationship, and this must be guided by our professional insight. It is important not to share experiences we haven't fully processed or which we feel would not be helpful. We should remember that we do not need to share our own experiences of a situation verbally in order to show empathic understanding – we can also show this empathy through our actions.

When working alongside people, we can only develop meaningful professional relationships if we are willing to include the personal and if the boundaries within our own 3 Ps are fluid and context-specific. They will differ depending on who we are supporting and in which situation, and the boundaries will also evolve over time as the relationship strengthens. The more we discuss the 3 Ps within teams, the better we can support each other in making the personal self a central part of our relational practice and in keeping the private self reserved for how we are outside work with close friends and family.

Social pedagogy theories that help develop Learning in HLS

Along with relational practice and social justice, one of the key aspects of social pedagogy is its focus on education and learning. When conceptualised in the broadest sense, learning is linked to human development, growth and wellbeing and also to promoting positive social change. Within professional practice, learning is about a mindset and culture, a recognition that everyday situations and our relationships provide opportunities to learn and develop innovative practice. Within HLS and social pedagogy, creating an environment where learning is encouraged and embedded is therefore fundamental.

Given its educational roots, social pedagogy offers a wealth of theories and concepts to be utilised to help place learning at the heart of how we support people as well as develop and nurture a culture of learning within organisations. Below, we introduce those we believe to be most useful as a starting-point.

Learning Zone Model

The Learning Zone Model is an effective framework for supporting learning in direct practice and within organisations. The model emphasises the need for a supportive environment in which to encourage people to be curious, learn, make new discoveries and increase skill development.

Figure 2: The Learning Zone Model

At the centre is the comfort zone, a place of safety and familiarity. Here, we intrinsically know what to do without giving it much thought and don't need to challenge ourselves, meaning that very little learning takes place in the comfort zone. Nevertheless, it is important within the learning process, as it offers a secure base we can retreat to, where we can process information, and reflect on experiences.

Beyond the comfort zone is the learning zone, where all learning happens. As we move further away from the comfort zone, we stretch ourselves more and deepen our learning. The more we feel supported to explore the outer edges of our learning zone, the more we can cope with experiencing a "temporary loss of security".

At the edge of the learning zone we move into the panic zone, where it is impossible for any learning to take place due to the emotional and physical responses to panic and fear. In the panic zone, experiences become traumatic, prompting a fight, flight or freeze response to the immense stress. This blocks learning, as we focus on either escaping or surviving the situation we find ourselves in.

People will often feel like they are in the panic zone, when in fact they are at the edge of their learning zone; this often feels uncomfortable and insecure, yet they are able to still function and move forward. Learning is still happening, but there may be higher levels of support and reassurance needed to support somebody to remain in the learning zone and not step into the panic zone.

Importantly, the model suggests that these zones are dynamic, either growing or shrinking according to the extent to which we challenge ourselves to leave our comfort zone and the experiences we make outside it. This is why it is important to encourage the people we support to leave their comfort zone. Learning is, after all, about intrinsic motivation.

However, it is crucial to highlight the fact that we must never push somebody to step into any of the zones, but respect their right to challenge themselves – or not – because where each zone starts and ends is unique to each individual and not necessarily visible. For example, sitting on a roof may be part of a builder's comfort zone, but for a social worker this may well be a very uncomfortable situation. The Learning Zone Model is a valuable reflective tool to help people talk about their skill set and identified learning needs, as well as the support they need to face things they feel uncomfortable or unable to deal with.

Reflection and reflexivity

A key aspect to social pedagogical practice is the ability to work reflexively, understanding our position and the impact we have on situations and subsequent responses. This requires that we are eager to learn and adapt from these reflections. Like all work undertaken in the public sector, social pedagogical practice takes place in the "tension fields" of people's everyday life. This often involves individuals, groups, organisations, systems and wider society, which adds to the complex and multilayered aspects of our work, while also requiring the ability to work effectively with others.

As identified in HLS, there is no fixed recipe or manual for how we manage this, but social pedagogy offers guiding principles for us to reflect back on and check that we are acting in accordance with our collective shared values and purpose. It also offers theoretical navigation points that help us reflect on the direction the work is taking. Reflective practice is therefore essential, requiring us to constantly ask questions such as:

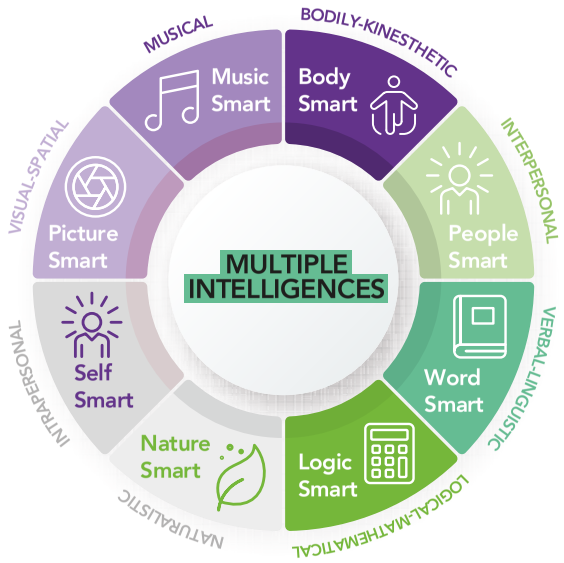
- Is what we are doing ethically right, does it fit with our Haltung?
- Are we on the right path?
- Will this help us meet our shared purpose?
- Do we need to take a different approach and do something else, or trust in the process?

This requirement to "reflect in action and on action" (Donald Schön) and to be inquisitive and professionally curious helps us develop a deeper understanding, recognise the different contexts, explore assumptions, judgments and possibilities, and create change. Reflexive practice supports us in sensing and responding instead of trying to command and control situations. There are a number of reflection frameworks that assist with reflexive practice, such as Greenaway's 4 Fs (Facts, Feelings, Findings, and Futures) and Head, Heart, Hands (based on the work of Pestalozzi). By embedding critical and active reflective practice, organisations can support staff to cultivate and use their everyday expertise and practice wisdom to shape structures and systems that are meaningful and helpful.

Multiple intelligences

Often linked to learning is the idea of intelligence and how we think about people's learning potential. From a social pedagogy perspective, this is understood by using Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. Gardner explains that there are a variety of ways in which humans learn, think, understand and act, and that crucially people are "intelligent" in many different ways. This theory challenges the accepted notion of intelligence being linked to IQ, which divides people into hierarchical categories along a one-dimensional IQ scale. It also highlights the negative impact of this viewpoint on wider society by limiting our understanding of intelligence and meaningful learning opportunities. Multiple intelligence recognises that there is a unique blend that naturally occurs in each of us, and that this is multilayered and diverse. Within this theory, intelligence is seen in a wide range of ways and importantly includes creativity, nature and relationships as aspects of multiple intelligence. It recognises that each person has strengths and weaknesses

Figure 3: Multiple Intelligences Theory



and that, crucially, strengths can be used to help develop skills and knowledge in areas where an individual may not be as competent or confident.

Using this theory and creating learning opportunities that help individuals to use their multiple intelligences not only deepens learning but also enhances an individual's wellbeing and self-efficacy, which in turn increases their knowledge and skills acquisition.

Multiple Intelligences Theory is a helpful framework to use both in direct practice and to assist advancing an organisational culture that cultivates a diverse range of intelligence and the need for learning opportunities that not only plays on a person's strengths but also supports development in areas where they feel less competent. Teamwork benefits from complementary diversity, when people have differing ranges of intelligence that broaden the collective perspective and provide ideas for innovative practice, systems and culture from different vantage points.

Creativity

If we think differently about intelligence, we should extend this broader conceptualisation to how we think about creativity, too. Creativity is an important aspect to social pedagogical practice and can best be captured in the notion of head, heart, and hands. It covers aspects of thinking "outside the box", using imagination and curiosity to think beyond the obvious when seeking to find solutions to challenges and respond to change, seeing these as an opportunity to grow. Alongside this, it is about tapping into our creative energy and working in an environment that nurtures creativity, making it easy for people to feel creative, without fear of things going wrong. Beyond building confidence, being creative is also about practitioners possessing enough skills to use creative activities as part of their work.

As with multiple intelligences, creativity works on different levels and is context- and person-specific. At an organisational level, if the culture supports creativity, this allows staff to work in more flexible and autonomous ways, supporting practitioner wellbeing and building trust. Nurturing a creative mindset also makes people feel better equipped to find solutions to complex problems together and to try out new ideas. By extension, this encourages practitioners to be more creative in how they support people, which facilitates deeper relationships, active participation and meaningful coproduction and collaboration.

Social pedagogy theories that help develop Systems in HLS

As outlined in the Systems chapter, when we refer to systems we mean a web of relationships and interactions between human actors and environmental factors. We can conceptualise systems at different levels: the life of each person we support is a system (hyper-local); our teams and organisation are a system; the interplay between different people and organisations locally is a system; and each nation can be seen as a meta-system. Systems thinking and action is crucial if we want to provide meaningful support, because outcomes in people's lives are influenced by these complex relationships and interactions. So, if we want people to flourish, we must recognise that this does not rely solely on the quality of our support but also on the wider relationships and environmental factors. This is about changing our perspective: instead of *attributing* specific outcomes to our support, we are *contributing* towards outcomes through our practice. Meaningful outcomes require healthy systems, and a social pedagogical perspective can help put systems thinking into practice by considering both the interdependent relationships and the structural aspects that affect direct practice.

The relational universe

The relational universe illustrates relationship-centred practice and highlights the fact that as human beings we are all interdependent and interconnected. The model visualises the diversity of relationships each person has – with family members, friends, professionals (e.g. in education, health, social care), and community members. Each of these relationships forms part of a universe that's constantly evolving, with important qualitative differences in how close or distant, rewarding or challenging, temporary or long-lasting, important or insignificant they are and how much "gravitational pull" they have.

Our role as professionals, therefore, goes far beyond building trusting relationships with the people we support – it encompasses a duty to support people in cultivating their relational universe by developing more positive and meaningful relationships with those people who are important in their lives. (You can find a brilliant example of this in a blog by Nicole Ashworth.) This means we must seek to understand the person's relational universe, without being judgmental or manipulative about relationships we consider problematic. Who is or is not part of someone else's relational universe is not our decision. Our role is more educational and dialogical, designed to enable people to recognise the power dynamics at play in relationships, experience what trusting and positive relationships are, and enjoy a sense of equilibrium within their relational universe. We therefore need to look for both the inherent and potential value of every relationship within a person's universe and how we can help strengthen people's interdependence.

The relational universe can also serve as a valuable metaphor for how we understand interprofessional practice and our own interconnectedness with colleagues, other teams, other organisations, and the (local) communities we serve. This idea is exemplified in the Lighthouse case study, which addresses the process of setting up a children's home in South London. From the outset, the team has focused on becoming part of the local community, introducing themselves to neighbours and other professionals, using local tradesmen, and developing close relationships with key institutions in the community to actively support the home's social and structural inclusion.

This shows the potential when we expand the relational universe metaphor to us as professionals, too, and explore ways in which we can create greater equilibrium in the relationships with the people that are part of our professional relational universe – whether we like their presence or not. In this way, the relational universe can guide us in taking a systems perspective to how we work relationally within HLS both with the people we support and with other actors that form part of the "system of interest" in the lives of the people and communities we serve.

Challenging structural inequalities

Given its concern with social justice, social pedagogical practice requires us to recognise the impact of structural aspects and the ways in which systems can create, perpetuate or increase social inequalities. Social justice issues are inherently complex and can only be meaningfully addressed when we see our role and sphere of influence from a systems perspective, when we critically reflect on how we can engage with other actors in the systems we're a part of and how our practice might overtly or covertly contribute to structural oppression and discrimination. The HLS framework of perspective, power and participation fits nicely within this context.

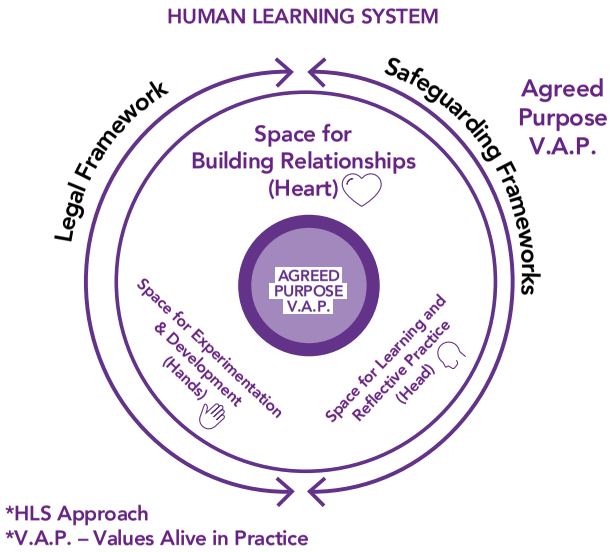
Social pedagogical practice can encourage the establishment of healthier systems that increase collaboration and coordination of the work we do. As explained in the Systems chapter, when we focus on outcomes without paying attention to creating healthy systems, we end up with inflexible processes. Rather, we need to cultivate systems that enable us to navigate the tension fields we encounter in practice (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017) and see the life of a person as a system in itself – embedded in a wider system of people within their local community. This means we can cocreate meaningful "person-shaped" outcomes. Therefore, we need to think about how we develop structures that support relational practice and assist in shared power and decision-making and mutual accountability. Organisational systems should support and enhance the shared purpose of the work and be developed in collaboration with the staff and clients most affected by them.

It is important to conceptualise systems as dynamic and living organisms, as ecosystems rather than static machines. This is not about semantics but about recognising that metaphors are powerful: how we think about systems determines both how we feel about them and act within them. If we think about an organisation as a machine, we might feel that we're just a small cog and that our task is to simply do our job the way we always

have, persistently, without divergence. On the other hand, if we think about an organisation as an ecosystem, we are likely to feel connected and recognised for the important contribution we make, no matter our role, and we actively contribute to the system's health.

Head, Heart and Hands can provide a valuable framework for how we develop healthier and more productive systems within organisations and the spaces we need to create within the existing legal and safeguarding frameworks (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Head, Heart, Hands model



Head: systems thinking and perspective

Within this domain of the Head, Heart and Hands framework, the use of theory, research, policies and past experience are key reflection and navigation points in assisting us to explore systems development.

In working with complexity and uncertainty, the better we understand the systems we're a part of and our role within them, the more meaningfully we can respond and contribute. This can be seen in the case study from The Children's Society, where the focus on understanding systems has helped practitioners better respond to issues around child exploitation.

In a social pedagogical understanding, though, systems thinking is about more than expanding our own understanding of the systems around people, organisations, place, and practice sectors. It's also about how we can help the people we support to see their life as a system, and gain insights into structural aspects and how these affect them. Thus they can engage in systems change and social action, and we can amplify the voices of those who are disadvantaged or not heard in society.

Systems thinking also enables us to see practice issues from a meta-perspective and to look for ways in which the system can be optimised to resolve issues or prevent their emergence in the first place. This helps us avoid the pitfall of "needing somebody to blame". An example of this can be found at Community Circles and their use of Holacracy's Tactical Meetings. These meetings are designed to address any issues that have arisen and are blocking the work from being done. The meeting concentrates on developing good communication and connection between people, so that there can be an open conversation about what people "need" to be able to do their job well. The staff and volunteers have found that there are vast benefits to Tactical Meetings, one of which is an increase in the wellbeing and happiness of staff teams, as there is less miscommunication and problems can be resolved quickly and easily.

Heart: moral leadership and power

Within this domain, we need to give consideration to how organisational systems allow us to be more human in our work and nurture relational practice and human connections. The systems we create are never value-neutral, and the role we play within them will be influenced by our Haltung. Where systems are not aligned to our (or our organisation's) core values and beliefs, we feel the impact of this incongruence. This can diminish our engagement with systems, and so the ethical orientation and moral purpose of any system is crucial.

Irrespective of our role within systems, from a social pedagogical perspective we are all called upon to display moral leadership in our work. By reducing hierarchy, focusing on equity, and working alongside people, we can ensure that ethics are at the heart of collaborative practice. An example of this can be found in the Lighthouse case study. Their ambition to create world-class children's homes and challenge the notion that children in the care system are unlikely to succeed

in education demonstrates a strong moral position that refuses to accept the status quo and a willingness to champion a more optimistic concept of children in care within this specific system.

Moral leadership and the issue of power within systems links to empowerment as set out above in the Diamond Model. As explained earlier, empowerment only happens when people feel they have the self-efficacy to take control of their own lives and the decisions they make. Systems therefore need to support this sense of empowerment and autonomy within their workforce and not dictate or control. This is why it is important that we consider how structures and systems can reduce hierarchical decision-making, recognise that diversity is enriching, and promote trust, autonomy and self-management. HLS explores this in some depth and highlights the need for organisations to shift the decision-making power away from senior management to staff who are doing the face-to-face work, so that they can make quick and responsive decisions in light of the situations they are facing. All of this has to be based on trust between staff and managers, responsible practice in accordance with a clear sense of purpose, active participation and cocreation in setting up effective systems, and improving the organisational culture.

Hands: cultivating relationships and participation

Social pedagogy is about being practical, too, and the final domain emphasises the importance of our active engagement with the systems we're a part of, as these frame the everyday aspects of our work. If we conceptualise systems as living organisms, our role is to cultivate relationships with the people who are part of each system of interest and form new systems of interest. By building alliances, in ways described in the case studies by Lighthouse and Surrey Youth Focus, we can start to heal the fragmentation of the organisational and sector-relevant systems that has been exacerbated by neoliberalism's focus on competition and market mechanisms.

Collective action can lead to systems change, especially where we succeed in amplifying the voices of those who aren't usually heard within the system and supporting people to engage with existing structures. The Empowerment case study describes the work of the Lived Experience Team as an example of what this can look like and why it is relevant. This group of people have experienced multiple disadvantages, such as homelessness and drug misuse, and are working with the council and commissioners to develop collaborative ways of working and designing systems.

Greater systems participation with a view to cultivating relationships with other professional agencies also enables us to better understand and navigate complex systems and structures, gain insights into these systems from a range of different perspectives, and develop a sense of appreciation for the range of contributions made by different people, their expertise and resourcefulness, which we can draw on when encountering difficulties.

Leaders in organisations and Systems Stewards can actively support practitioners' active systems engagement by ensuring there are meaningful participatory processes that genuinely value the skills, knowledge and abilities of each member of staff, as well as recognise their potential to contribute in different but equally important ways. This requires both cultures and structures that support psychological safety, feelings of meaningful belonging, and positive and open communication.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the many synergies between social pedagogy and HLS, and we firmly believe that the use of social pedagogical principles and theory has many practical benefits for organisations developing HLS. This starts with the Diamond Model's notion of each person's uniqueness and inherent value, which encapsulates the Human in HLS. By recognising every individual – whether they're a staff member or a person we support – as a "whole person" embedded within a social context, we can increase self-esteem and motivation within the workforce and staff teams and nurture people's sense of meaningful belonging and purpose.

Social pedagogy also reminds us to look for every person's unique learning potential and that we all benefit when we create an environment (within direct practice and within organisations) where people feel encouraged to learn in their own ways and draw on their creative potential. This is developed through moral leadership that relies on understanding power and is able to reduce hierarchical structures. This encapsulates the Learning in HLS.

The social pedagogical notion of head, heart and hands can make a helpful contribution to the Systems dimension of HLS, as it encourages holistic engagement with, and development of, the systems we're a part of. Systems – the complex interplay of relationships

and interactions which create outcomes in a person's life – exist at different levels, from the microcosm of a person's life to the macrocosm of the entire ecosystem. Social pedagogy can help us better understand and navigate the uncertainties and complexities within these systems, staying true to the values and purpose that underpins relationship-centred practice. It enables us to recognise that all people are resourceful, and that systems are at their best when we create the conditions in which everyone can bring in their individual strengths and unfold their unique potential. It is only collectively, by establishing moral leadership and cultivating systems that place relationships at their heart, that we can achieve healthier systems for everyone.

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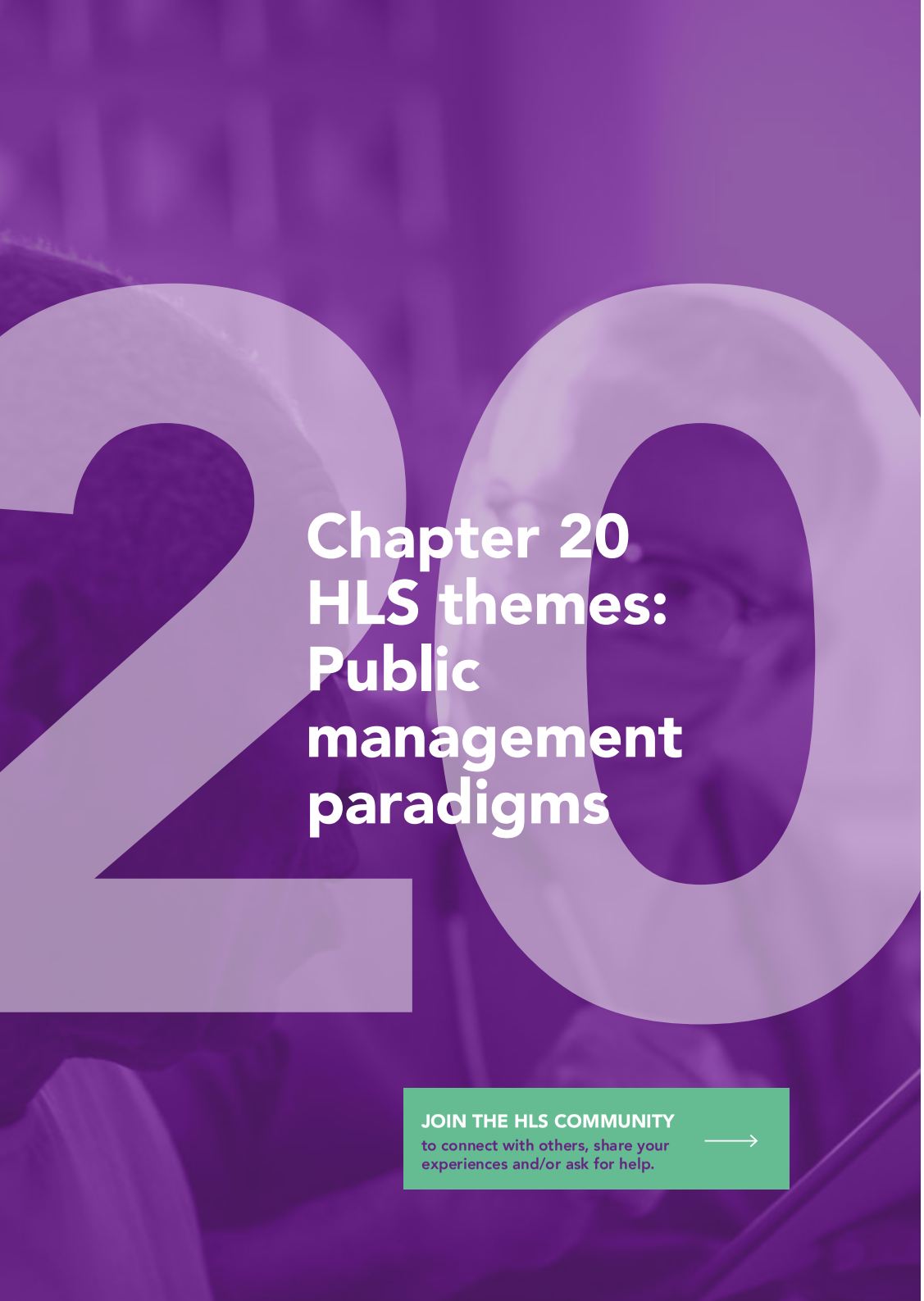

Chapter 20 HLS themes: Public management paradigms

JOIN THE HLS COMMUNITY
to connect with others, share your experiences and/or ask for help.

Public management paradigms

Authors: Toby Lowe and Richard Norman
Contact the authors

In this chapter, we will explore the idea of public management paradigms, and evidence about the effectiveness of New Public Management (NPM), which has been the dominant public management paradigm since the 1980s.

A paradigm is an organising story – a narrative – about how the world is, and how the world can be. As a paradigm, NPM is a set of beliefs and practices which are mutually reinforcing and internally coherent.

When thinking about the public management paradigm that is appropriate for your work, and which paradigm you choose to frame that work, it may be helpful to understand it as a choice about how you wish to view the world. What lens will you choose to help you understand the task of organising public service?

What are the different ways that different public management paradigms view the world?

New Public Management

"Public Choice Theory" is a major intellectual foundation for NPM and contributes these ideas:

- That outcomes in people's lives are commodities that can be specified and purchased through market mechanisms
- That public servants cannot be trusted because, like everyone else, they are self-interested, rational utility-maximisers who (if left unchecked) will use public resources for their own ends rather than creating positive outcomes in people's lives.

From these beliefs have come these prescriptions for the practice of public management:

- Research "what works" and particularly what is "best practice" in public service
- Specify through contracts and targets what is required for the delivery of "best practice" performance

- Create performance systems which use incentives and punishments to control delivery of contracted tasks and outcomes
- Use competition to incentivise public servants and others to "deliver" at the cheapest possible price.

We can see how the beliefs and practices reinforce one another. This is the nature of NPM as a paradigm – it is a mutually reinforcing, internally coherent, whole package of beliefs, mindsets and practices.

Human Learning Systems

HLS has different fundamental beliefs about how public management can create outcomes:

- It believes that outcomes are complex – that outcomes are "emergent properties of complex systems"
- They are different for each person who experiences them (e.g. my wellbeing is different to yours)
- They are made by hundreds of different factors interacting together in a system
- They are dynamic – what makes an outcome changes from place to place and time to time, so "what works" today in this place won't necessarily work tomorrow in a different place
- They are beyond the control of any one of the actors in those systems.

We can see the idea that outcomes are emergent properties of complex systems clearly illustrated by this systems map of the outcome of obesity, produced by the UK government in 2007:

Figure 1: Systems map of obesity.

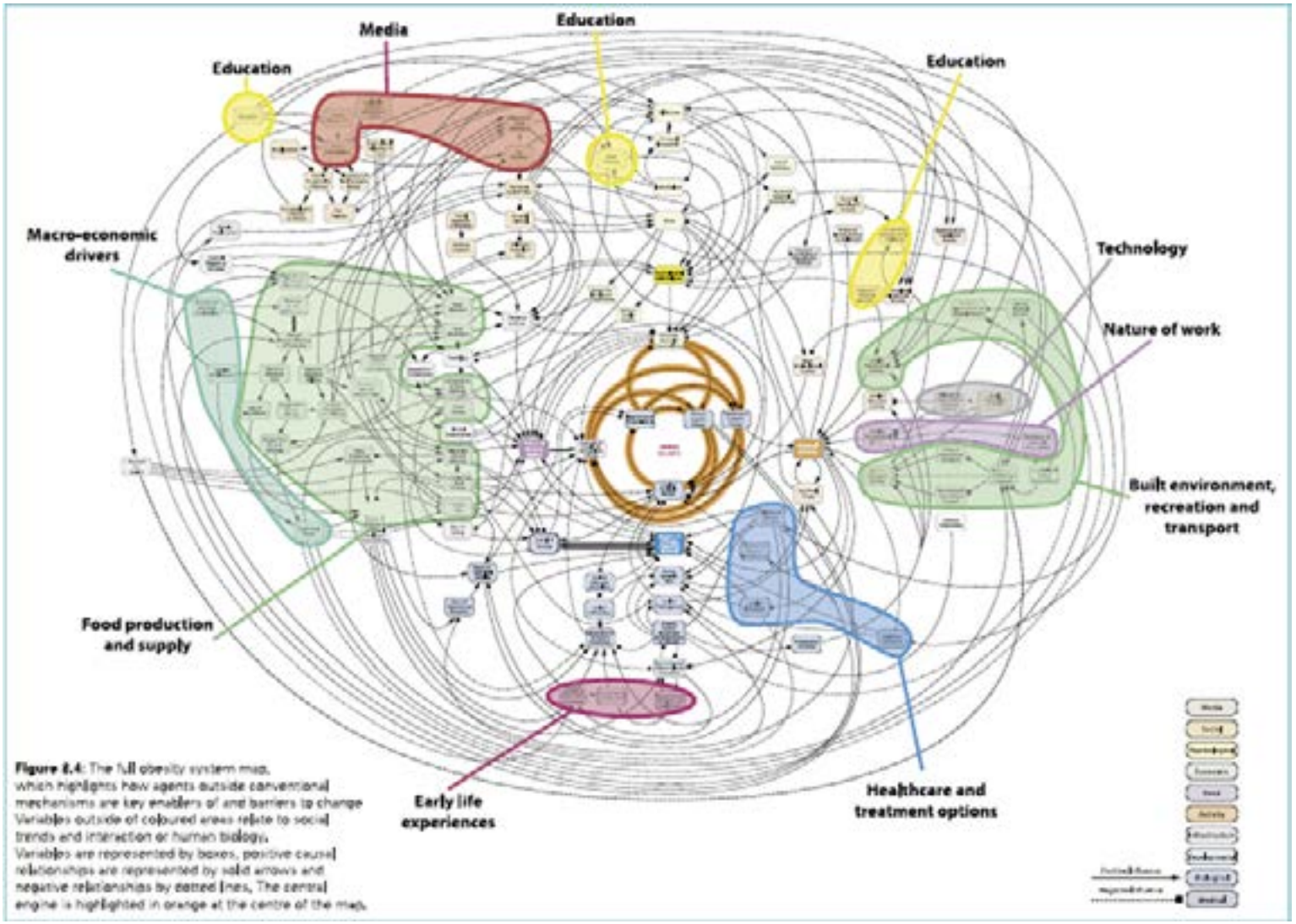

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Figure 1: systems map of obesity

Diagram from: Vandenbroeck, P., Goossens, J., & Clemens, M. (2007), Foresight Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Building the Obesity System Map, London: Government Office for Science

HLS also has a fundamentally different view of human motivation. It believes that public servants are motivated by Mastery, Autonomy & Purpose. To do their jobs well, they require the opportunity to develop mastery over their skills, the autonomy to work in a self-directed way, and the opportunity to serve a purpose greater than themselves (the public good).

To choose one public management paradigm over another is essentially a choice about two things: (1) **how well each paradigm fits with the available evidence** about how the world works (the bits we can't change); and (2) **how well each paradigm fits with our values** about how we would like the world to be. As you can see, this represents two different types of judgment.

What does the evidence say?

There is a significant body of evidence which contradicts NPM's foundational beliefs, and highlights that when implemented in practice, NPM creates significant problems. See here, here, and here for some examples.

The divergence between the claims of NPM to provide a better way to do public management and the reality of its multiple failures has led to the production of a number of books and articles exploring why it is still used, when it creates such significant problems.

> *"'New public management'… was ostensibly intended to create 'a government that works better and costs less'… So what do we have to show for three decades or so of 'NPM reforms? The short answer seems to be: higher costs and more complaints."*
>
> **(Hood and Dixon, 2015)**

We can explore some of the key aspects of this evidence for why NPM is a poor choice of paradigm to help produce outcomes.

How outcomes are made in the real world

NPM conceptualises how outcomes are made in a simple, linear form:

Figure 2: A programme logic model

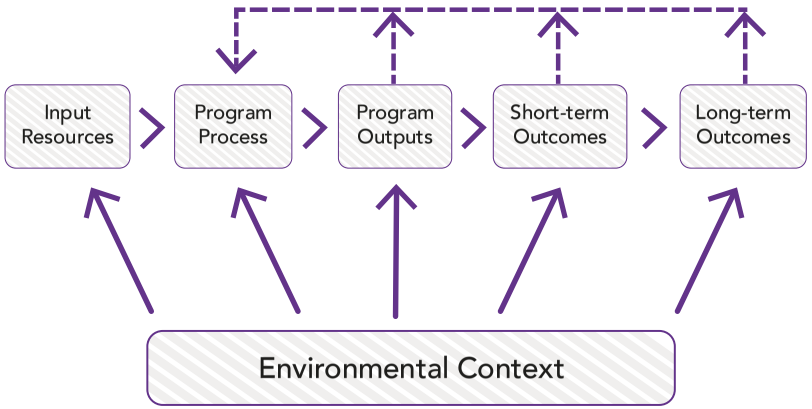

Image adapted from Schalock, R. L. and Bonham, G. S. (2003), "Measuring outcomes and managing for results", Evaluation and Program Planning, 26, 4: 229–35.

However, further research demonstrates that outcomes are not delivered by programmes (or people/teams/organisations) in this way. Outcomes are made by whole systems, as Figure 1 (above) demonstrated.

This is the reality of how outcomes are made – they are emergent properties of complex systems. And the reality of how complex systems work is fundamentally at odds with the core beliefs of NPM. Complex systems are not predictable. Tiny (unmeasurable) variances in the starting conditions of complex systems lead them to produce wildly differing results. What works at one point in time won't necessarily work in another. What works in one place won't necessarily work in a different place. This is the uncomfortable reality of how outcomes are made.

The most devastating evidence of all for NPM is that in complex systems, to the work of any particular intervention. It is not merely difficult, but in fact impossible to do so reliably. This means that it is impossible to "pay for results", because the "results" produced are the work of a whole system, not of any particular programme or organisation. And no amount of fancy mathematical tools or the application of data makes it possible – the impossibility is hard-wired into the way that complex systems function.

But the impossibility of payment by

results in complex environments hasn't stopped people from repeatedly trying it. They keep trying, not because it works, but because NPM needs it. This is the nature of NPM as a public management paradigm – as an internally coherent and mutually supportive set of beliefs and practices. If public service is to deliver outcomes, NPM needs to be able to identify whom to reward and whom to punish within its competitive marketplace. For this, it needs to know who was responsible for outcomes being (or not being) delivered. For NPM, if you can't measure impact, you can't reward and punish, and if you can't reward and punish you can't make public servants do the right thing, and you can't allocate resources efficiently.

Gaming

One of the most significant problems that NPM faces is that it turns the job of public service into the production of good looking data. This is called "gaming". NPM faces this problem because the rewards and punishments it creates for public servants aren't given for real-world performance, they are given for having good-looking data. At best, the data is a thin, abstracted, pauperised version of the real world. At worst, it is an outright lie. A systematic review of research into the effects of target-based performance management systems found that over 80% of studies find evidence of gaming and 74% find evidence of people deliberately lying (Franco-Santos and Otley, 2018).

> *"The most salient unintended consequences of directive performance management systems are gaming, information manipulation, selective attention, illusion of control and relationships transformation."*
>
> **(Monica Franco-Santos and David Otley, 2018)**

And because NPM focuses on creating change in data rather than change in the real world, it creates "perverse incentives" including de-incentivising collaboration and cooperation:

> *"Ultimately, the current system encourages competition, not collaboration. Our service was increasingly being sought out by women, we were building a second team and had a waiting list. But, every woman who chose care with us was a loss of income to other providers in the area. In short, we were being too successful and were seen as a threat, not as a partner."*
>
> **(Neighbourhood Midwives case study)**

The evidence shows that NPM creates what is called a "performance paradox" – the more performance is measured and managed, the harder the task of real-world public service becomes.

Motivation

There has been lots of research done about public service motivation. This research clearly demonstrates that public servants are not motivated in the way that NPM believes they are – they're not simply self-interested, rational utility-maximisers.

And the most damning of all the research findings about motivation is that it isn't hardwired and immutable – it is constructed. People who were intrinsically motivated to do something become extrinsically motivated (will only do something if the appropriate rewards or punishments are in place) when they are placed within an extrinsic motivation context.

NPM does not find selfish public servants, it creates them. It turns people who have an intrinsic desire to serve the public good into people who will only behave in a certain way if appropriately rewarded or punished.

Measurement

The evidence about measurement practices in public service shows that measurement is not the neutral observation of the world that NPM needs it to be. Measurement, when used for performance management purposes, distorts the practices it is intended to monitor.

In his famous essay "Assessing the impact of planned social change", Donald Campbell formulated what has become known as Campbell's Law:

> *"The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."*
>
> **(Campbell, 1979)**

One way to summarise the evidence about the problems of NPM is that NPM creates a simplified fantasy world for managers to live in. It removes the complex mess of the real world and substitutes the thin abstractions of data produced by those who are incentivised to lie. It then pretends that this fantasy world of dashboards and RAG (Red-Amber-Green) ratings is real, and tells managers that their job is to create change in such data. Unsurprisingly, this approach is ultimately wasteful, demoralising and dehumanising.

The limits to evidence

The accumulation of evidence about the consistent failings of NPM might be useful to help explain some of your experiences as a public manager. The dissonance that people feel between their observations of the world, and the story of how it is supposed to work offered by a paradigm, is a classic driving force behind paradigm shift.

However, if you are looking for evidence to prove that one public management paradigm is better than another, then you're going to be disappointed. It is impossible to "prove" that one public management paradigm is better than another, because (for example) HLS asks different questions from NPM, and treats the data gathered differently. You could try to do A/B comparison research using different paradigmatic approaches in different places or times, and gather data on what happens. But how would you disentangle the differences in public management approach from all the other differences between those two places? In a complex system, you can't know in advance what all the important variables will be, and so you cannot control for those differences.

So, evidence will only take you so far.

How does it feel?

Perhaps the most important question from the perspective of each public manager is this: how does working in the current way make you feel? Do you feel a sense of dissonance? Can you make the story of how NPM is supposed to work fit with your experience? Do its fundamental beliefs and values match your own?

If the answer to any of those questions causes you to want to explore an alternative to NPM, then hopefully this e-book is of some use with that exploration.

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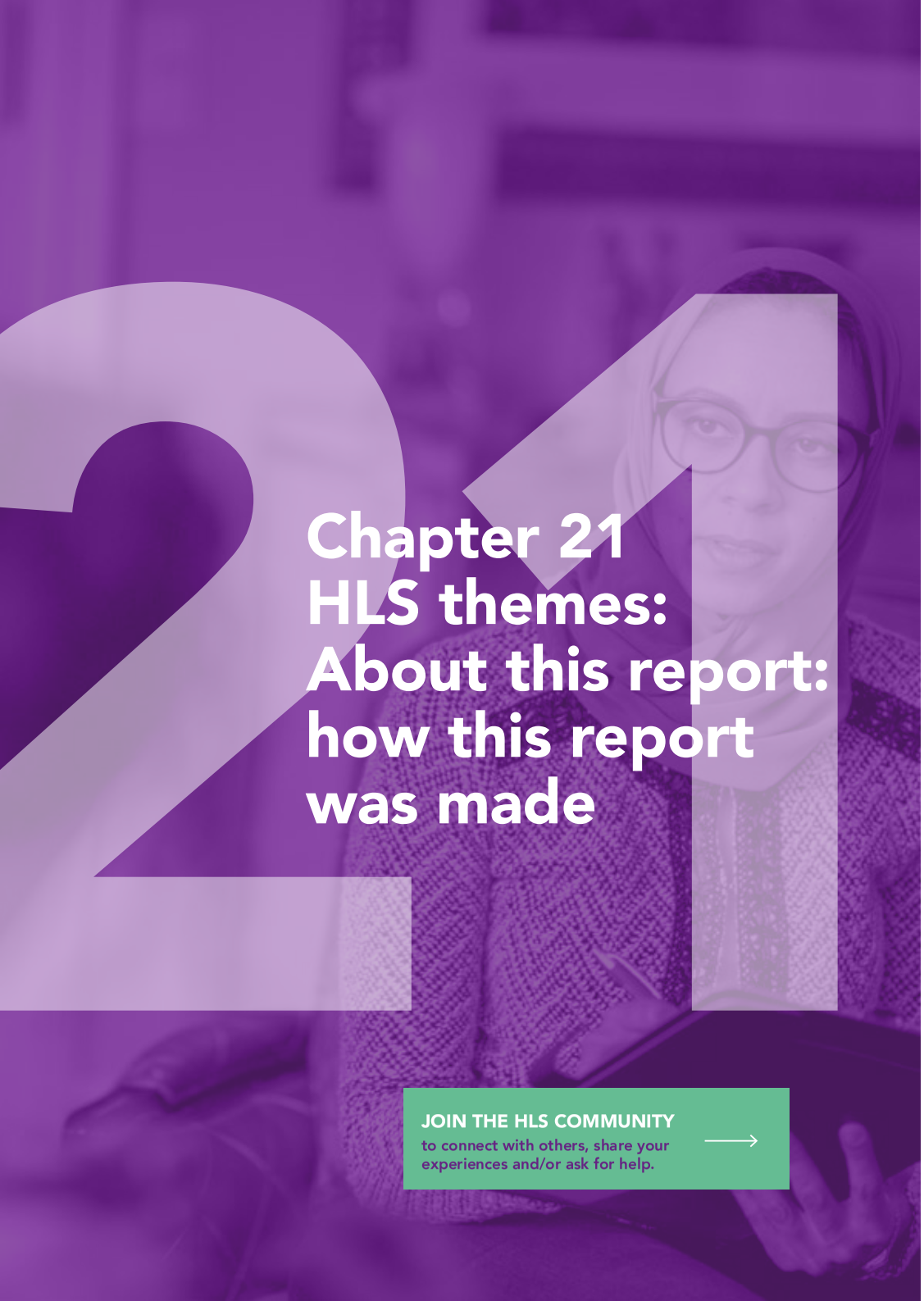

Chapter 21 HLS themes: About this report: how this report was made

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About this report

This report was developed by a working group of the Human Learning Systems Collaborative – a set of people and organisations who have come together to purposefully create a paradigm shift in how public management is done.

The people behind it are:

In alphabetical order of surname, the core group behind this report are:

Andy Brogan from Easier Inc

Gabriel Eichsteller from ThemPra Social Pedagogy

Melissa Hawkins and Hannah Hesselgreaves from Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University

Bridget Nurre Jennions and Toby Lowe from the Centre for Public Impact

Dawn Plimmer from Collaborate CIC

Vita Terry from the Institute for Voluntary Action Research

Guy Williams (freelance Project Manager)

We have also had additional written contributions from:

Lowis Charfe – University of Central Lancashire

Jeremy Cox – JC Thinking

Max French – Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University

Brendan Hill – Bluestone Collaborative

Jeff Masters – Collaborate CIC

Richard Norman – Emeritus Professor of Public Management, University of Wellington

Helen Sanderson – Wellbeing Teams

Mark Smith – Gateshead Council

Rob Wilson – Professor of Digital Business, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University

Case studies

The material in this report is drawn from the incredible work of people and organisations who have been adopting an HLS approach. Find the list of case studies that were produced for this report here. It also draws on experience and knowledge from previous HLS case studies. You can find the full collection of HLS case studies here.

Backstory

We have been seeking to develop complexity-informed approaches for the past five years (and more). Each organisation has its own version of this story. You can see some of these different stories here.

This e-book is the third in a series of reports in which we have sought to articulate our growing knowledge about complexity-informed public management practice. The first two reports, co-authored by Collaborate CIC and Dr. Toby Lowe are:

Collaborate CIC and Newcastle University (2017) A Whole New World – Funding and Commissioning in Complexity

Collaborate CIC and Northumbria University (2019) Exploring the new world: practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity

We have drawn on the insights and knowledge from both of these reports for this work.

Method: coproducing a report

Invitations to produce case studies

Each of the organisations in the core group is part of a network of public and voluntary sector organisations who have been seeking to adopt a HLS approach to public management. Each organisation in the core group invited the organisations they know best to write their own case studies, reflecting on their HLS practice. To support this process, we created a template that would help writers structure their reflections.

Producing the case studies

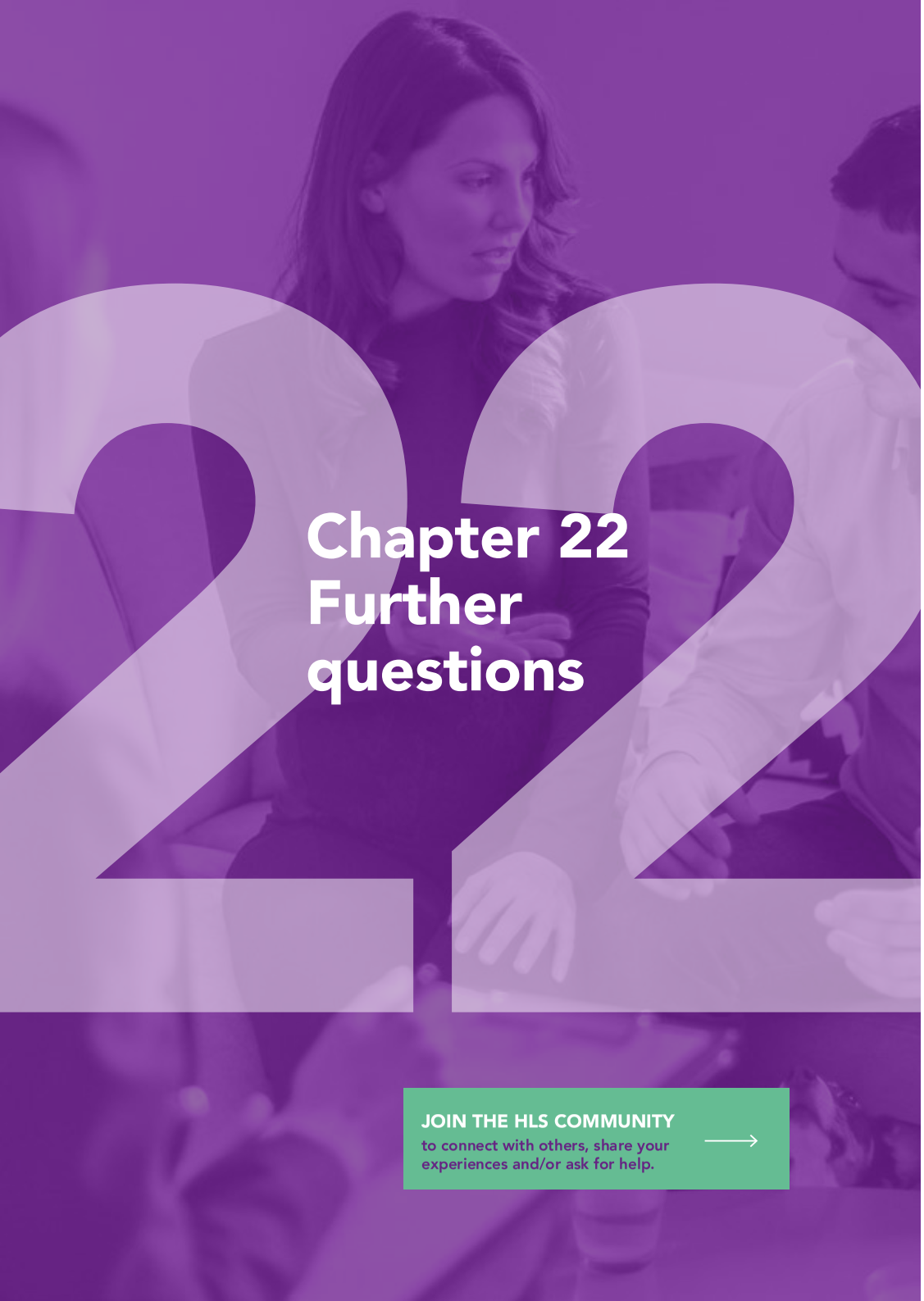
The group issued invitations to 49 different organisations. Of these, 35 organisations responded saying that they would like to write a case study. And of these, 29 wrote a study for this report.

In addition, the Centre for Public Impact have undertaken research with the Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) of the UK Government, and the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) to coproduce these case studies with those organisations.

Sense-making and report-writing

- The report authors ("we") developed an analysis template, and analysed the case studies we were each connected to
- We gave each case study to the author of a different case study, along with the analysis template – and asked the case study authors to analyse that study

- We invited all the case study authors to share their analyses with one another at a sense-making session. This was a process of sharing what each practitioner had seen in the other studies, and then identifying patterns amongst the findings of these analyses
- Following this "shared sense-making", we invited organisations to review and revise their case studies
- We collated their sense-making and our own analysis to write this report
- Each author wrote drafts of their own chapters
- We shared our drafts with one another to check for commonalities and tensions
- We shared our draft chapters with external reviewers
- We edited and revised the chapters to produce final text.



Chapter 22 Further questions

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Further questions

As we have highlighted throughout this report, we are only at the beginning of understanding Human Learning Systems (HLS) as an alternative approach to public management. Here are some of the questions we think it will be useful to explore next. We have grouped them into different thematic areas.

What is the appropriate scope of HLS as public management practice?

We have established the principle that HLS is a useful public management paradigm for public service which seeks to create outcomes in the real (and therefore complex) lives of people. Our case studies are replete with examples from what some call "human services" (public service that directly supports (groups of) people: health and wellbeing, social care, education, community development and so on). We have also seen examples from less direct services, such as planning control.

In practice, we do not know the full potential scope of the HLS approach to public management. Could it usefully apply to economic development? To transport planning? To refuse services?

Deepening our understanding of implementing a learning strategy

The Learning Cycle

How can the Learning Cycle model be improved? What range of experiences is currently missing? Does it need to look different in different contexts/scales?

Managing Learning Cycles

What are the detailed questions that managers need to ask at different system scales, in order to manage their Learning Cycles effectively?

Governing Learning Cycles: exploring accountability

What are the different legal mechanisms by which learning cycles are governed?

How do these relate to the emerging alternative forms of accountability?

The whole area of accountability in complex environments requires further exploration. The good news is that we have seen promising ideas and practices which begin to show what accountability can usefully mean in different contexts. However, there is

significant practical and conceptual work still to do. For example, does complexity require a switch from "holding to account" to "helping to account"? Or is the switch from "accountability for results" to "accountability for learning" sufficient? Do different systems require different forms of accountability? For example, does accountability need to look different for politicians and public service workers?

Systems Stewards and Learning Partners

In this report, we identify two different roles that enable "healthy systems" to be nurtured. The Systems Steward role has overall responsibility for the health of a system – do the actors collaborate and learn together effectively? Do they trust one another? And so on. The Learning Partner role supports organisations and systems to undertake the Learning Cycle well in their context: how will you help actors to understand the system? What experiments will you codesign, and how will you run those processes equitably? How will you learn from those experiments? And so on.

There are a number of questions about both what it means to play these roles in different contexts – for example, what are the capabilities and skills required for these roles? Does System Stewardship work better as a distributed leadership responsibility? Or is it better as one person's role?

There are also significant questions about how the roles fit together: What are the boundaries of these roles? How can they complement one another (rather than get in each other's way)? Do they need to be played by different people/organisations?

Relationship to other paradigmatic fields

Relationship to politics

We have seen a small number of politicians embrace an HLS approach to public management. For example, it seems to fit well with the Finnish approach to Humble Government and the Plymouth Council's cabinet and scrutiny committee have seemed very supportive of the HLS approach there.

However, the HLS as a public management paradigm seems to sit ill with a "command and control" version of politics in which politicians make explicit target-based promises – "I promise to reduce recorded crime by 10% this year", etc.

What forms of politics provide a mutually supportive environment for an HLS approach? How might such forms be encouraged?

Relationship to the media

The way in which the media has learnt to hold politicians and public servants accountable is also intimately connected with NPM. How can the media support accountability for learning? And for "helping to account"?

Relationship to digital working

Very few of the current HLS case studies have a strong digital component. Why is that? Given that digital technology has the potential for transformational change, what is the appropriate relationship between HLS approaches and digital working?

There is work to be done to explore how the "digital transformation" work that many public services are undertaking connects with HLS. At its best, this digital transformation work shares some underlying ideas and practices (for example, Human-Centred Design). However, we have seen too much digital transformation which seeks to turn relational services into transactional ones, in the mistaken belief that this form of standardisation will reduce costs.

System scales

There are many questions to explore concerning system scales, and the relationship between different scales of system. Firstly, is there a better way of articulating the idea of systems with different scope than "scale"? (In writing this, I wonder whether "system scope" might be a better term).

Secondly, in this report, we identified four scales, because we saw those in the case studies. What other relevant scales are there? How do Learning Cycles manifest themselves at those scales?

There is also a functional analysis to managing and governing Learning Cycles at – and between – system scales that requires further exploration. There may be value, for example, in applying a Viable Systems Model analysis to the actors in learning systems. There is definitely an aspect of these relationships that we're currently missing.

Finally, the relationship between system scales requires further exploration. There are two aspects to this. The focus we have seen from the case studies so far mostly involves systems at larger scale looking downward for their learning – they learn from the scale below. This seems appropriate, as it roots the learning of systems in the real-life experience of people using public service. However, is this learning as unidirectional as it seems? How do lower-scale systems learn from those above?

The biggest gap in our understanding of practice in this area is the horizontal (and diagonal?) relationships between

Learning Cycles. How does this relate to the question of how system boundaries are drawn and maintained? What are the mechanisms by which horizontal and diagonal relationships between Learning Cycles are usefully enacted? For example, at a national level, how can public service systems designed to create a thriving sustainable economy learn with, and from, education systems? And how can they both learn with health systems? And social care?

What is required of national-level actors to enable cross-system learning?

National scale questions

As the most recent area of exploration for Human Learning Systems public management practice, there is still significant areas for further exploration. We will explore a few of these now.

Policymaking

What happens to the traditional (at least in a UK context) role of policymaking at a national government level? We have seen elements of a practice that gives us clues about the way in which policymaking changes in an HLS context.

We can see that applying HLS public management practice at a national government level has a transformative effect on how the task of policymaking is conceived. Again, we can refer to the Finnish Government's "Humble Government" thinking. In policy terms, they refer to a learning strategy applied to policymaking as "experimentalism":

> *"Top-down steering is replaced by a continuous and repeated or iterative circle in which policy goals set at the political level are amended in light of new information arising from the "ground", where a policy is to have effect. Experimentalism thus requires a humble approach to policymaking, as actors must be ready (and allowed) to change their mind as new information arises. A humble approach is fundamentally a process for building trust."*
>
> **Annala et al, 2021**

We can see how this approach could impact on different areas of policymaking:

Change in policy focus – learning as policy

We can see that a significant amount of the focus of policymaking changes in an HLS context. Rather than specifying what public service should do at a national level, the creation of learning strategies becomes the job of policymakers. Many of the crucial policymaking questions shift from "what is it that we want public service to deliver?" to "how can public service learn to serve people better at a local level?"

Coproduction of policy with local actors

Some aspects of public service may still require national-level frameworks, in order to establish "guardrails" and common reference points. In these cases, national policymakers operating in an HLS way seem to take a coproduction approach, convening dialogue among local actors, and contributing national-level knowledge. An example of this can be found in the Finnish National Curriculum, the most recent iteration of which was developed using a coproduction approach, bringing local and national actors together.

Who do we need to be working in public services and why

If HLS informed thinking takes hold across range of public service and policy areas, this will in turn have a significant impact on how those policy outcomes and services meet and interact with their public via our workforce. What different relationships will be required between that workforce and their public and how will the value and content of the 'offer' change. How can our existing workforce be supported to adapt and how can we reset the dial for the new?

Horizontal learning across government

As we can see from the diagram in the Learning chapter, there is a horizontal as well as a vertical aspect to learning across public service systems. For example, how can public service systems designed to create a thriving sustainable economy learn with and from education systems? And how can they both learn with health systems? And social care?

There are growing examples of this form of cross-system learning and adaptation at a place level. What is required of national-level actors to enable cross-system learning?

We strongly suspect that our conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between horizontal and vertical learning and System Stewardship needs work. How does the task of managing and governing a Learning Cycle at one scale connect with the task of building learning infrastructure which spreads knowledge between systems?

Community as system

Community is a very important (but frequently misused) concept in

public service. This report could have explored in greater depth the question of how we understand communities as systems, both in terms of the public service work that is done in and with communities, and how "community" fits into our conception of different system scales. We know that this is important work to do. Further exploration of this can be done by looking at the existing case studies. There is also scope for expanding our understanding by developing new case studies in this area.

Disrupting systems and creating healthy systems

Most of the case studies that we have seen use the tactic of nurturing healthy systems as a way to create positive outcomes. A small number use the tactic of seeking to disrupt systems which create negative outcomes. What is the relationship between these two tactics? Can they be pursued simultaneously?

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June 2021

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Perspective

Ethical and relational leadership in a complex world: the use of the Human Learning Systems and social pedagogical leadership framework to navigating complexity

Lowis Charfe[1,*]

[1] School of Health, Social Work and Sport, University of Central Lancashire, UK
* Correspondence: lcharfe@uclan.ac.uk

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the complexities and challenges facing social work and social care organisations. Using theory, ethics and practice, this article aims to critically explore an ethical and relational approach to leadership that can help navigate complexity in social work in the UK. Explaining the emerging Human Learning System, this article argues that this paradigm can offer an alternative to the new public management, with its focus on the three core aspects of *markets*, *matrix* and *management*. Key to this discussion is the social pedagogy leadership framework, which aims to assist the navigation of complexity in direct practice and support positive organisational cultures and systems as discussed within the Human Learning System. The leadership framework is informed by the principles of social pedagogy, which are seen as an ethical philosophical approach to leadership and direct practice. It places human relationships and rights within

the everyday and at the heart of leadership and organisational change – as Berit Bae has stated, human rights must be applied in the everyday, not just in certain situations. Using the philosophical principles and core ideas of social pedagogy and the Human Learning System, the framework is designed to support leadership, which is relational and ethical at its core, while also assisting the navigation of uncertainty and the complexities of the work undertaken by modern social work and social care organisations.

Keywords social pedagogy; leadership; ethics; relational; complexity; Human Learning Systems; management

Introduction

In the UK, there is growing awareness and recognition that not only is social work and social care facing a funding crisis after years of austerity policies, but there is also a growing crisis within the workforce made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic (Butler, 2021). Against this backdrop, the sector continues to see growing demand for welfare services, coupled with supporting children, their families and adults who are experiencing multiple and complex needs (Fish and Hardy, 2015). Positioned within this situation, this article aims to explore the impact and importance of the introduction of ethical standards and the effect and influence they have on leadership, as well as the central role they play in anti-oppressive and human rights-based practice. The author would like to state from the outset that they acknowledge and admire the work that UK social workers undertake in very difficult situations and to highlight that this article is not critical of their everyday practice. Most people are drawn to the profession because of a desire to challenge inequality and social injustice, as well as to support positive changes in people's lives (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). This desire often clashes with social work procedures and systems (Pawar, 2019) and can lead to feelings of moral distress (Weinberg, 2009). This article sets out an argument that the profession therefore needs ethical and relational leadership that supports social workers to adhere to these deep-rooted moral values and desire to work in anti-oppressive ways.

Focusing directly on leadership, this article does not add to the discussion around the differentials and connections between management and leadership (Sullivan, 2016). The rationale being that ethical leadership, from a social pedagogical viewpoint, is situated in the *everyday* practice of all practitioners and is not reliant on authority, job title or managerial position with organisations.

Starting in the 1990s the UK has seen a steady shift within social work from befriending and offering assistance to more formalised statutory services and packages of care and support. Ruch et al. (2010) have highlighted the damaging effect that moving from a 'welfarist approach' to the 'marketisation of welfare' (p. 23) has had on the relation aspect of support being offered by social work. Moving it from 'nurturing and supportive to contractual and service orientated' (Ruch et al., 2010, p. 23). Government agendas, legislation and policies have shaped and presided over this ideological shift (Evans, 2016).

Since the 1980s one of the most dominant forces in shaping the administration of public services such as social work has been the new public management (NPM) paradigm. Based on the three pillars – markets, managers and metrics – and underpinned by public choice theory (Ferlie et al., 1996), it aims to manage outcomes with significant emphasis on 'standards and performance measurement' and to provide 'value for money' by increased competition (Worsley and Wylie, 2020, p. 79; Evans, 2016), standardised assessments and packages of care. NPM fits squarely into the conservative paradigm (Krumer-Nevo, 2016), asserting that these market forces, standardised processes and outcomes (Evans, 2016) are the best way to deal with *poor* individuals and families, and laying the blame for the inequality and poverty that the poor face squarely at their feet due to the perceived character deficits that they are said to display (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). People – whether staff, individuals or families receiving packages of care or support – are viewed as inherently untrustworthy, selfish and in need of control (Lowe et al., 2021). With regard to leadership, NPM states that this lack of trust means that people must be managed by extrinsic motivation, punishment and reward (Evans, 2016; Lowe et al., 2021), with a continued push for *professional* practice as the means of a command-and-control management strategy (Laloux, 2016).

In more recent years there have been discussions and debates about the ongoing issues with NPM around the lack of real service reform and improved outcomes for service users within the sector,

which has led many to argue that we are now in a post-NPM world (Reiter and Klenk, 2018). But no matter what terminology is used – whether it be NPM, post-NPM or new public governance – there are still fundamental problems in the direct practice and operation of public services such as social work and social care (Hood and Dixon, 2015; Evans, 2016). These are largely systemic issues such as large caseloads, workforce burnout, the ongoing impact of poverty and lack of early support services due to austerity measures, coupled with growing multiple and complex needs. As Evans (2016) has rightly highlighted, poorly designed systems and processes will always overshadow any well-meaning and ethically based practice. Therefore, much more focus and support is required for leadership that assists the development of day-to-day practice within public services that are ethically rooted in supporting humans to flourish (Cottam, 2021) and helping people live a good life (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2019).

The development of 'leadership' and professional practice

Within social work and social care there is a growing emphasis on leadership, its link to professional practice and the importance of this in the direct work undertaken by social workers (Scourfield, 2018; Worsley and Wylie, 2020). To highlight this link, the two largest UK social work organisations play a major role in defining what is meant by the terms *professional* and *leadership* in everyday practice. Social Work England is the regulatory body that holds individual social workers' registrations in England, and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the largest independent membership organisation for social work professionals. The professional standards held by Social Work England (2019) and the Codes of Ethics held by the BASW talk about professional development and the links to leadership. The professional capabilities framework (PCF) also held by BASW (2021) is more explicit, with domain 9 of the PCF titled 'Professional Leadership'. This domain sets out how students and social workers need to be engaged in personal and collective leadership in order to advance 'social work's purpose, practices and impact' (BASW, 2021, n.p.).

As Sullivan (2016) stated, 'Social work is a mission-drive and values-based profession' (p. 54). As a result, transformational leadership has been seen as a way of developing effective leadership within the profession. The major stumbling block with this approach has been that it is embedded in a managerial approach, focusing on efficiency, value for money and meeting outcomes (Kinder, 2012) all modelled on a business approach (Lawler, 2007). Yet, due to the relational, moral and human rights-based aspects of the nature of social work – that it is at its core a *public service* and that leadership is enshrined in the professional capabilities of the profession (Sullivan, 2016) – there is a need to consider the importance of ethical leadership and how it can support practitioners to in their everyday practice.

If we can acknowledge that paradigms such as NPM have a very limited impact in finding solutions to reducing inequality in a complex world, then a solution that focuses on simple answers is not a silver bullet. What is needed is a complexity-informed paradigm that supports professional practice underpinned by ethics and theory. From a social pedagogical perspective, and using Bauman's (1993) work on postmodern ethics, ethical leadership is grounded in the belief that as there are no universal ethical codes, we must take personal responsibility to act ethically. Being able to live and work within complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity means that we must develop a moral and ethical competency that is not technical, rational or instrumental (Bauman, 1993). Social pedagogical leadership supports practitioners to understand and embed this in their practice.

Social pedagogy and the Human Learning System: their synergies and use as a basis for ethical and relational leadership

The Human Learning System (HLS) began based on research by Collaborate CIC and Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University. It has grown to include the Centre for Public Impact and various third-sector organisations working to support the progression of HLS within the public sector in the UK and internationally. Working with a complexity-informed approach, the three aspects of *human*, *learning* and *systems* focus on how people involved at all levels within public service can embrace *the messy* to provide better social outcomes (Lowe and Pilmmer, 2019). A core aspect of this is the development of cultures that support ethical and relational leadership, that does not seek to grab and maintain power or authority, but rather be system stewards (Lowe et al., 2021) that take a *distributed leadership* stance (Bolden, 2011) in supporting organisational and practice changes.

There are many synergies between how HLS and social pedagogy can support ethical and relational leadership, the first and most obvious is the focus on the relational as central to social pedagogy and the *human* part of HLS. As with social pedagogy, the *human* domain in HLS is based on recognition of diversity and inner held strengths of each individual and the importance of the relational aspect of any leader (Lowe et al., 2021). Masters (2021) has highlighted the importance of qualities such as 'curiosity and flexibility, authenticity and vulnerability, abilities to build trusting relationships, and a willingness to share power' (p. 367), seeing these as fundamental in building empathic, authentic and trusting relationships that are the foundation stone of all social change (Lowe et al., 2021). With regard to ethical and relational leadership, a focus on learning aligns with the understanding of the complexity and uncertainty of the work that social workers deal with on a daily basis. There is never a clear answer to problems and therefore there need to be ongoing 'cycles of adaptation and innovation' 'holding on to what is strong and improving what is wrong' (Masters, 2021, p. 363) and embedding learning from these cycles. Learning, like relationships, is seen as critical in pushing social change forward. Creating cultures and supportive environments where learning is embedded in all areas of practice with the remit of enabling continual improvements and using data to support this learning is vital (Lowe et al., 2021). Again, the synergy with holistic learning set out in the diamond model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012) and Gardner's (1992) multiple intelligence theory is clear to see. Finally, *systems* are the connections and relationships that exist within society, as well as being members of communities and organisations. This recognises the interdependence that we all have. For positive social change to happen, there need to be healthier systems with collaboration and co-production at their centre. With regard to ethical and relational leadership, within the system domain, both informal and formal authority must be acknowledged and understood. It must also be accepted that authority can be a hindrance and create barriers to positive change. As Masters (2021) has stated, we all look to leaders with authority to 'keep things the way they are, providing protection and order' (p. 365). The power structures and dynamics at play must also be acknowledged as part of ethical and relational leadership. HLS highlights that the most effective leadership creates a shared purpose and agreed ethical practice between practitioners and organisations within the public sector (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021).

There are some synergies between HLS and social pedagogy, even though they are distinctly different. Where social pedagogy is embedded in public sector practice in other countries, the human rights aspect of the poverty-aware paradigm (Krumer-Nevo, 2016) is used not only to direct practice but also to challenge structural conditions that lead to inequality. In the UK, it could be argued that social pedagogy has so far focused mainly on direct and relational practice and that there is a need for an equal focus on using human rights to challenge structural discrimination and inequality. Social pedagogy has an important part to play in helping to shape ethical and relational leadership within this human rights and anti-oppressive paradigm.

From a social pedagogical perspective and based on Bauman's (1993) work on postmodern ethics, ethical leadership is grounded in the belief that as there are no universal ethical codes we must take personal responsibility to act ethically. Being able to live and work within complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity means that we must develop a moral and ethical competency that is not technical, rational or instrumental (Bauman, 1993). Social pedagogical leadership builds on this and, at its core, is focused on human flourishing, with care and responsibility for others (including colleagues and other professionals, as well as the individuals and families that we work alongside). It develops processes that support contextualised decisions, embraces creative practice by active subjects and has an understanding of universal human rights that informs all aspects of moral life. Social pedagogy leadership also accepts that knowledge is co-constructed and recognises the values of people's unique potential and their differing perspectives of the world around them. It also invests in capacity building and developing human capital (Sergiovanni, 2005); encouraging cultures of care, curiosity, reflexivity and learning, as well as understanding the importance of relational practice (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). Leadership should be based on acts and recognition of solidarity (Honneth, 1995), reducing *otherness*, seeing relationships as a basis of knowledge and co-learning, and as central to the co-production of knowledge and practice.

Professional practice and the *professionalisation* of social work – the devil is in the detail

Before turning the discussion to leadership, it is important to critically reflect on the terms *professional* and *professionalism*, due to their continued link to leadership. In his book on social work leadership, Scourfield (2018) began his discussion by exploring these terms and went on to link them to the competencies set out for social work practice. It is important to acknowledge that the link between the terms *professional* and *leadership* is not unique to social work but can be found in wider discussions of leadership within the public sector (Masters, 2021). Scourfield (2018) acknowledged that the terms *professional* and *professionalism* are socially constructed and can be interpreted in various ways, adding to the complexity of a common definition and understanding. He went on to state that the terms are linked to knowledge and expertise and the ability to be 'trustworthy, consistent and ethical', as well as reflective in practice (Scourfield, 2018, p. 23). It is curious that *leadership* is often prefixed with the word *professional*, and that if not used together, leadership seems to appear less valid and will not adhere to the required professional standards. These terms are overused and yet rarely defined, and when combined they become vague and meaningless. That is not to say that professionalism is not important. There is a growing obsession around professional practice and the professionalisation of social work, social care and other public services. To say that something is professional does not make it so.

It could be argued that this increased attention on professionalism in social work and social care is linked to a steady shift in focus on developing professional competencies in practice. Social work has moved from befriending and offering assistance to more formalised statutory services that provide packages of care and support; requiring practitioners to work in what is seen as a professional manner (Ruch et al., 2010; Worsley and Wylie, 2020), thus, we are told, requiring higher levels of professionalism in practice.

There is no question about the need for legal frameworks and principles, policy guidance in direct practice, and that levels of professionalism are necessary. This is especially true when considering the complex welfare and safeguarding issues faced in the direct work undertaken by social workers. Yet the overreliance on systems, the standardisation of assessments and procedures, the focus on outcomes and an obsession with evidence-based practice has led to the *professionalisation* of social work practice. How social workers comply with formal systems, follow manualised approaches to practice (Harbo and Kemp, 2020), meet targets, outcomes and timescales, as well as recording their work on IT systems, have become the primary indicators and signs of a *competent* and *professional* social worker. Yet, this focus on efficiency and certainty in reaching and fulfilling the *desired outcomes* denies the realities, complexity and challenging nature of modern social work practice (Harbo and Kemp, 2020; Smith, 2020). It also draws us away from the 'purpose, practices and impact' (BASW, 2021, n.p.) intended to underpin professional leadership. As highlighted by Lowe et al. (2021), this push by the NPM approach has led to social workers and managers being made to operate in a 'magical fantasy world' (p. 17).

If we are being forced to work within and navigate this magical fantasy world that is dehumanising to all involved (Lowe et al., 2021), while professional leadership is about 'purpose, practices and impact' (BASW, 2021, n.p.), then there needs to be a discussion around the part ethical and relational leadership can play in the reshaping practice, organisations and systems. If the focus on an often-misunderstood term such as professional leadership has played a part in leading to a more technical approach to social work, then I argue that there must be a shift to developing *ethical leadership*, guiding a move away from the technical rational approach to practice (Trevithick, 2014). The framework that I have developed aims to assist with the development and embedding of ethical and relational leadership in all aspects and levels of practice and organisational culture.

A move to ethical leadership in the *everyday* and *organisational*

Both concepts of *leadership* and *ethics* have been widely debated individually alongside the complexity of finding common definitions, understandings and implementation into everyday practice (Corbella and Ucar, 2019). This article does not intend to contribute directly to these debates but rather uses them as a starting point for the social pedagogy leadership (SPL) framework.

The distinction between leadership and management continues to be debated and argued with regard to exploring the term *leadership* and is reductive in nature. It naturally leads to one being seen

as better than the other, rather than seeing the interconnectedness and need for both depending on the context and situation. I therefore focus on what I see as the two important domains within which they operate: the *everyday* and the *organisational*. As Masters (2021) has stated, 'neither should … be seen as an either/or: systems change is best achieved as a collective endeavour, partnering across difference, with multiple actors from all parts of the system playing – and being enabled to play – complementary roles' (p. 364).

When exploring everyday leadership it is important to acknowledge the leadership skills of individual and small collectives of social workers in collaboration with people receiving support, to push forward positive and ethical practice. Everyday leadership does not require any formal responsibility within an organisation, such as being a team leader or in a management role. Rather, it is about focusing on the position or power that we must all make positive changes within the everyday that can support well-being, learning and growth (ThemPra, 2017), as well as the development of HLS within practice and organisational culture and systems. As highlighted in the HLS (Lowe et al., 2021), there are real limitations to believing that experts have the answers to complex problems. In complex environments and when dealing with uncertainty there is no one expert who has all the answers; what is needed is collaboration and learning from a range of people who have knowledge that can be used to find healthier solutions. This also acknowledges that social workers are not experts with all the answers to the problems; rather, they have the skills and ability to work in a more equitable way, trying to reduce power dynamics and being open to working in partnership with the people that they support to promoting system change (Lowe et al., 2021; Social Care Futures, 2021). As BASW (2021) has highlighted in its code of ethics, leadership is about developing direct practice and knowledge that ultimately helps to provide better support to the people accessing or engaged with social work services.

The *organisational* acknowledges the more formal aspects of leadership within organisational structures, systems and policies. Within the current NPM systems, it sits with people who have managerial roles and responsibilities. Both these aspects of leadership should be regarded as important and interdependent if there is to be a significant shift within the working practices and delivery of services within the public sector. The SPL framework explained in this article is based on the belief in ethical leadership and the moral purpose of the work undertaken by social work organisations. Set out in the human domain of the HLS there is an acknowledgement that at the heart of all public services is the shared aim of supporting people to flourish (Cottam, 2021). Therefore, the systems that are developed play a vital role in enabling and assisting practitioners, teams and organisations to fulfil this moral purpose. It is in advancing and improving these systems that ethical and relational leadership has an important part to play. As Lowe and French (2021) have stated, we can feel so overwhelmed by the interconnection and 'complex webs of relationships, interactions and interdependencies' (p. 77) that we feel unable to effect positive change. Ethical and relational leadership can assist organisations and teams to define their 'system of interest' (Jackson, 2019), to identify and put a boundary around an aspect of the wider system and the relationships within this section that they feel are important to focus on changing. In doing so, ethical and relational leadership ensures that these decisions are made equitably, with openness and transparency around power dynamics, and that the core moral purpose of the work is at the centre, anchoring all decisions. It also helps embed the behaviours that nurture healthier systems, as identified by Lankelly Chase (Nabatu, 2020), which focus on perspective, power and participation.

SPL framework and its use in practice

> A human business like a human being is both incredibly complex and utterly simple.
>
> (Keswin, 2019)

This epigraph captures the essence of the human business of social work. It also links to the much-used social pedagogical phrase, 'it depends' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019), which acknowledges that context is everything. Social pedagogy acknowledges that there is no simple intervention that *works* to tackle a problem and, as Biesta (2010) has stated, that is why 'What Works' does not work. Complex social issues do not have simple one-size-fits-all solutions and social pedagogy supports us to be able to work with uncertainty, tension and complexity by the use of guiding principles and navigation points (Jensen, 2018). But to be able to do this effectively there needs to be supportive organisational cultures, healthy and supportive systems and an awareness of the ecosystems that we work within (Laloux, 2016).

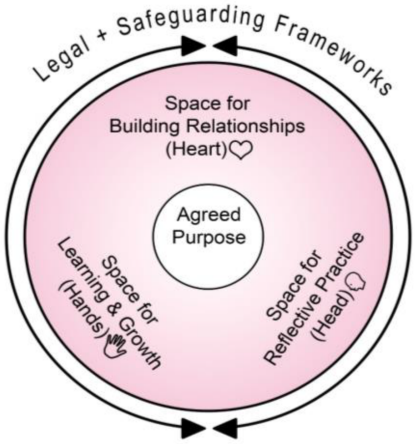
Due to the complex nature of the work and the world around us, it also means that the framework I have developed is not a list to be worked through or a recipe to be followed (Lowe and Pilmmer, 2019; Rothuizen and Harbo, 2017). Rather, this is a map with an anchoring point in the middle that links us to our ethical orientation and the moral purpose of our work. It gives us navigation points to reflect on and guide the development of our ethical and relational leadership as we traverse the complexities of working with human beings as part of social work organisations and wider social systems.

It is important to be clear about what is meant by *systems* from a social pedagogical leadership point of view. This focuses on the web of relationships and interactions between human actors and environmental factors and conceptualises systems at different levels. These can be seen as 'the life of each person we support is a system (hyper-local); our teams and organisation are a system; the interplay between different people and organisations locally is a system; and each nation can be seen as a meta-system' (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 389). It is crucial to consider systems' thinking and action if we want to provide meaningful support, as outcomes in people's lives are invariably linked to and influenced by these complex relationships and interactions (Lowe et al., 2021). If the moral purpose of our work is human flourishing, 'we must recognise that this does not rely solely on the quality of our support but also on the wider relationships and environmental factors' (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 389). This then requires a change in perspective, and instead of attributing specific outcomes to the support given, we understand 'that we are contributing towards outcomes through our practice' (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 389). Meaningful outcomes require healthy systems, and a social pedagogical perspective can guide the development of systems thinking and the embedding ethical and relational leadership into practice by the use of theories and practice that focus on interdependent relationships and the structural aspects of direct practice.

Legal and safeguarding boundaries

Key aspects of the SPL framework (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021) are outlined in Figure 1. At the outer edges is the boundary of the legal and safeguarding frameworks within which all social workers operate. This starting point of the framework is aimed at assisting practitioners to strengthen their ethical and legal literacy by first understanding the legal and safeguarding policies and processes within which they work – how the various laws and policies direct and shape their role and remit; how these influence their spheres of interest; and how these shape and define everyday practice and organisational culture. It is important that ethical and relational leaders understand the use of legislation and policy in supporting positive change, as well as the positive change to the organisational systems. Central to this is the importance of human rights and, as Bae (2012) importantly points out, these are rooted in the everyday and not just in certain situations when professionals or legislation deem them to be necessary. These cannot be ignored and should be understood through the social pedagogical lens of social justice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019). Social pedagogy leadership demands a high level of legal literacy that focuses on the ethical foundations and *Haltung* (the value base and moral compass) of each piece of legislation and policy. How these can be used to challenge, support or empower people to take control or make positive changes within their lives are matters that a social pedagogy leader should be considering. This also links to human rights and protections and draws on Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, which identifies that wider social recognition happens only when laws and policies uphold our moral and legal rights as citizens. Honneth (1995) argued that this aspect of recognition connects to the ability to develop a sense of self-respect: only when we are aware that we have legal protections do we know that we are a valued member of society. As Smith et al. (2017) have written, 'One becomes a bearer of rights if socially recognised' (p. 15).

Figure 1. SPL framework (Source: Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 392)



Agreed purpose

At the heart and direct centre of the framework in Figure 1, and anchoring the work of social workers, is the agreed purpose (Charfe and Gardner, 2020). HLS identifies the importance of the moral focus, social pedagogy leadership is centred on a shared understanding of this agreed moral purpose – the framework asks ethical and relational leaders to assist practitioners to have a clear understanding of the moral purpose of their work. We are therefore required to discuss with our colleagues and gain an understanding of this shared moral purpose. On an organisational level, it also requires that ethical and relational leaders hold managers and organisations to account and that clear systems are in place to support people to flourish (Lowe et al., 2021). This relies on much more than just having a mission statement defining the intended purpose, it is more about how organisations and the systems that they develop actively assist practitioners to work towards this moral aim. It is about organisations allowing the development of a culture that supports everybody to stay rooted to this moral purpose. As Laloux (2016) argued, we are all searching for ways to improve collaboration and cooperation within an organisational culture that also nurtures our abilities and allows us to flourish in our work. We need to understand and be aware of our own moral compass and value base, as well as that of the organisations we work for. This, and the shared purpose, should be something that we continue to reflect back on and check that our actions demonstrate these are alive in practice at all levels (Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

Space for relationships, learning and development: navigation points of the framework explained

Between the legal and safeguarding boundary and the agreed purpose at the centre is the space for every aspect of the work undertaken to be guided by the head, heart and hands (Smith and Whyte, 2008). There are clear and defined links between this social pedagogical theory developed by the social reformer and educator Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and the three domains of the HLS. Pestalozzi identified the need for balance between the three aspects of our *head*, *heart* and *hands* for the promotion of true social pedagogical practice (Charfe and Gardner, 2019).

The three aspects of head, heart and hands aim to aid ethical and relational leaders to facilitate continuous reflection on how we stick to the moral purpose of our work and keep our 'values alive in practice' (Charfe and Gardner, 2020). Leaders need to reflect on where and how there is space for building relationships, space to critically reflect and learn, and space to experiment and develop, which are all anchored to the shared moral purpose of the work being undertaken.

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Space for building relationships: where and how does this happen in practice?

With clear links to the *human* in HLS, the SPL, used within the everyday, supports ethical and relational leaders to consider and develop opportunities that allow true relational practice to be developed. This relational practice is underpinned by a human rights approach (Krumer-Nevo, 2016) that promotes 'symbolic capital'; challenges 'stigmatisation, discrimination and 'Othering', and 'hears the voice' and recognises the 'knowledge of poor people' (p. 5). This focus on the *relationship* acknowledges our interconnectedness and interdependence, as well as ethical practice and the importance of leaders developing space for active participation and collaboration to promote positive change. 'Irrespective of our role within systems, from a social pedagogical perspective we are all called upon to display moral leadership in our work. By reducing hierarchy, focusing on equity, and working alongside people, we can ensure that ethics are at the heart of collaborative practice' (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 393). Using social pedagogical theories such as the three pillars (Charfe and Gardner, 2019) to guide the professional boundaries of these relationships, or the common third (ThemPra, 2017) using everyday activities to build relationships, can be helpful within everyday SPL.

With regard to SPL in the organisational, the framework requires people with leadership responsibility to reflect on spaces where relationships between staff, teams and the wider organisation can be built and sustained. These are based on mutual trust, recognition and psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019). As Hoffer Gittell (2016: vii) has stated in her relational organisation theory, 'Organizational change does not start with the adaptation of new structures … Rather, it starts with participants changing their patterns of relationships'. According to Hoffer Gittell, these important relationships are characterised by having the key ingredients of shared goals, knowledge and mutual respect. Whether considering the everyday or organisational aspects of the SPL framework, the key points are that every aspect of public sector work is rooted in the real lives of people with important webs of interconnected and interdependent relationships (Lowe et al., 2021). These must be recognised and nurtured at all levels for positive social and organisational change to happen.

Space for learning and reflective practice: where and how does this happen in practice?

As Thompson (2009) has held, some local authorities and public sector organisations do not foster learning or reflective environments and can have an *anti-learning culture*. Instead of focusing on evidence-based practice, which has led to a more manualised approach to practice (Harbo and Kemp, 2020; Smith, 2020), the SPL framework takes an approach of evidence-enriched practice (Andrews et al., 2020). This requires ethical and relational leaders to use theory and research as navigation, learning and reflective points to guide practice rather than following a prescribed course of action.

Social workers work within a complex world of uncertainty and as a result there is a need for flexible practice that can only truly happen with reflection and reflexivity. There may not be easy and quick solutions to the problems faced, and while this can be challenging, social pedagogy assists us in 'sitting with' this uncertainty and seeing it as a valuable learning opportunity, a part of the journey that supports our human development (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021). This type of learning requires us to critically reflect on past ways of working, to consider our understanding and the narratives that are being used to explain or justify this, as well as being open to new ways of thinking and working. Within this domain, ethical and relational leaders need to be able to support reflection and reflexive practice with a focus on the use of the everyday as a learning opportunity to explore systems and practice developments. Social pedagogical reflective tools and frameworks such as Greenaway's (1994) *facts*, *feelings*, *findings* and *future*, as well as the SMITTE model, can be helpful (Molbaek-Steensig, 2019).

At an organisational level, SPL highlights the need for an emergent learning approach in practice and organisations. This supports ethical and relational leaders to understand and accept the complexities and uncertainty of the work we are undertaking. Within HLS there is an emphasis on moving away from targets and outcomes and towards developing a positive error culture where reflection and learning drive improvements. Social pedagogy sees learning as driving growth and that the ability to

adapt practice as a result helps to improve organisational functioning as well as ultimately meaningful person-shaped outcomes (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021).

The skilling-up of the social work and social care workforce is not enough on its own to make the changes that are so urgently needed, and therefore within the *organisational* level, ethical and relational leaders must find ways of assisting embedding learning into everyday practice at all levels. Using data as a means of supporting learning, and not just providing proof of outcomes and targets being met, is crucial (Lowe, 2020). It is also not about the management or control of staff; rather, learning is seen as fundamental to every aspect of helping to make an organisation or staff team flourish by developing skills and knowledge around autonomy, trust and appreciative enquiry. Linking to learning as a management strategy, Lowe (2021) has highlighted the important points of co-design and co-creation of knowledge and the importance of this being used to design not organisational systems or programmes, but an environment where there is a shared purpose and space to experiment and reflect on the learning that takes place. Ethical and relational leaders play an important part in the nurture and growth of these spaces.

Space for experimentation and development: where and how does this happen in practice?

One of the current issues with social work and social care is strategic planning – where the aims, goals and development of the work is decided more often than not by strategic management and performance management groups (Evans, 2016; Lowe and Hesselgreaves, 2021). These groups are often far removed from actual day-to-day practice or service delivery and the plans they devise are filtered down through the organisation. As Lowe and Hesselgreaves (2021) have pointed out, 'those at the top set the strategy and then seek to control the action of those below, extrinsically motivating them to follow the strategy through the use of performance management's reward and punishment mechanisms' (p. 58). Again, this becomes a command-and-control strategy (Laloux, 2016) that is ineffective when working with complexity.

From an everyday leadership viewpoint, the SPL framework aids ethical and relational leadership to pay attention to the *doing* and from a social pedagogical perspective it is important that this is done in collaboration with the people that we work alongside. It is also about enabling the co-construction of navigation points and guiding principles to make situated professional judgements in a complex world. In everyday practice, ethical and relational leaders need to feel confident in their use of creativity and be able to think outside the box, to try something new, using creativity as applied imagination (Robinson, 2001) to experiment. This is crucial when understanding that what has worked once may not work every time. Creativity and experimentation are important in helping develop new skills and knowledge, including cooperation and sharing, self-assertion, self-control, being able to take turns, and empathy (Ogden, 1997, cited in Storo, 2013). This domain of experimentation and development, also helps cultivate and utilise critical thinking, questioning, reflection and curiosity, as well as developing creative practice (Eichsteller et al., 2014).

From a leadership perspective, Lowe and Hesselgreaves (2021) have made the important point that 'Outcomes cannot be purchased or "delivered", they have to be explored. If we care about outcomes, then the purpose of our leadership practice is to enable this learning and exploration to happen effectively' (p. 56). Within the organisation, SPL can encourage ethical and relational leaders to develop environments for exploration within legal and safeguarding boundaries. HLS has developed an effective learning cycle (Lowe and Hesselgreaves, 2021, p. 60) underpinned by the awareness that managers and strategic planners do not and cannot predict the correct outcomes of the work being planned. Therefore, there must be a safe environment for exploration and experimentation and learning that shapes redesign if needed (Lowe and Hesselgreaves, 2021). Overseeing these learning cycles, ethical and relational leaders (Lowe and French, 2021) can support active engagement and ensure that there are 'meaningful participatory processes that genuinely value the skills, knowledge and abilities of each member of staff, as well as recognise their potential to contribute in different but equally important ways' (Charfe and Eichsteller, 2021, p. 395).

Conclusions

There is a growing awareness of the need for radical change within the social work and social care, with more organisations questioning the effectiveness of NPM in setting organisational cultures and practice (Evans, 2016; Lowe, 2021). The negative effects of which are deeply felt within current social work practice (Harbo and Kemp, 2020; Smith, 2020). From this, there is a paradigm shift happening with the development of HLS that centres on the moral purpose of the work. With relational practice, learning and more human systems being central to HLS, there are clear synergies with social pedagogy.

Informed by ethics as first practice (Moss, 2001), the SPL framework supports the development of ethical and relational leadership. The framework, using a complexity-informed approach, has been developed as a navigation tool and guide for reflective points and not a manualised approach for dealing with the complexities of current public sector working (Harbo and Kemp, 2020). Linking to key aspects of social pedagogical theory and practice and HLS, it helps practitioners, managers and organisations reflect on and manage the complexities of social work and social care while anchoring them to their *moral purpose*, with the aim of supporting the flourishing of every human involved.

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Making Sense of Power and Politics in Everyday Practice through the 3 Ps

"One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love... We've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Martin Luther King, Jr. August 16, 1967 "Where Do We Go From Here?" Speech Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, GA

Introduction: A Desire to Help Others

Since the death of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020 increased the visibility and expansion of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, there has been greater discussion about how to be a 'good ally' and support disadvantaged groups and social movements in order to eradicate discrimination and oppression in the world around us (Eddo-Lodge 2020; Reid 2021). As social work educators working with students, graduates and experienced practitioners, we have noticed that many students apply to social work degrees with the desire to be part of wider positive social change and act as a 'good ally' to disadvantaged groups within society. This determination is echoed within the social work profession more widely, as most social workers are drawn to this profession out of a desire to 'help' people (Ruch et al 2010; Trevithick 2011) and feel that this is a vocation instead of just a job. Part of this vocational pull is about taking a stand and challenging social inequality whilst supporting disadvantaged groups to gain greater power.

Social justice has been at the heart of social work practice for the past few decades (Cunningham & Cunningham 2014) and forms one of the core aims contained in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles held by the International Federation of Social

Workers (IFSW 2018). The statement sets out clearly that in the promotion of social justice, all social workers should challenge 'discrimination and institutional oppression', 'respect diversity', 'build solidarity', make sure people have equal access to the resources they need, and importantly challenge 'unjust polices and practices' (IFSW 2018). In the UK, the British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics also highlights the importance of social justice and human rights. Section 2.2 of the code states that 'Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work.' (BASW 2021). As Krumer-Nevo (2016) states, 'the ethics of solidarity translates into practice when social workers take a stance and behave as partners of their service users in their struggle' (p1802).

To work in solidarity and as partners requires awareness and understanding of power dynamics and how they operate in relation to discrimination and oppression on structural, systemic and personal levels as well as the intersectionality of discrimination. Social work education and training plays an important role in assisting students and practitioners to understand the implications of these dynamics as well as how the ethical principles, the professional codes and standards for social work and human rights can become alive and central within their practice instead of remaining abstract concepts or tick box exercises that reinforce discriminatory practice and oppression (Charfe & Gardner 2020).

As we explore in this chapter, the Danish social pedagogical concept of the 3 Ps (Jappe 2010) – the *Professional, Personal* and *Private Self* – can help practitioners make sense of power and politics within a practice context that requires them to navigate systems which frequently challenge their values base. The 3 Ps invites critical reflection on questions such as: How might their personal attitudes towards power and politics benefit social workers in their professional capacity and enable them to work in an authentically anti-oppressive way? Do they hold views which do not enhance their ability to meaningfully support the people they work alongside and which should therefore be kept private? By offering an accessible yet nuanced framework, social work students and practitioners can explore answers to these and related questions together with others and recognize that these answers very much depend on contextual factors, meaning that they require professionals' situated judgment.

Professionalizing Social Work in Complexity – the Need for Ethical Foundations

With a growing focus on relationship-based practice and the ability to work alongside people who are receiving welfare and social work support, it is important to consider the connection with values and ethics (Corbella & Úcar 2019). It is here that the aspirations to work in anti-oppressive ways can quickly clash with social work procedures and systems that expect students and practitioners to enforce the state's powers and be politically neutral (Pawar 2019), even though social work practice and political standpoints are inextricably linked (Gray & Webb 2013; Krumer-Nevo 2016). This expected social work neutrality, we argue, is related to the ongoing focus on professional capabilities and competencies in practice, which has characterized the professionalization of social work practice. In the UK, 'social work has moved from befriending and offering assistance to more formalized statutory services which provide packages of care and support, requiring practitioners to work in what is seen as a "professional" manner' (Ruch et al. 2010, p23). This, the argument goes, relies on higher levels of professionalism in practice, which increasingly focuses on meeting requirements, such as the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW 2018) and the Professional Standards held by Social Work England (2020).

To be clear, we do not argue against the need for professionalism in the direct work undertaken by social workers, given the complex and challenging nature of the work. Yet the over-reliance on frameworks, the standardization of assessments and procedures, a reductionist focus on outcomes and a misplaced obsession with evidence-based practice in complex practice settings has led to the technocratic 'professionalization' of social work practice. How social workers comply with formal systems, follow manualized approaches to practice (Harbo and Kemp 2020), meet targets, outcomes and timescales as well as record their work on IT systems, has become the primary indicators and the signs of a 'competent' and 'professional' social worker. These expectations equally apply to social work students (Krumer-Nevo 2016). Yet this focus on efficiency and certainty in reaching and fulfilling the 'desired outcomes' denies the complexity and challenging nature of modern social work practice (Harbo and Kemp 2020; Smith 2020). This impacts on social workers' and students' ability to navigate the ethical dilemmas, power dynamics and complexities in their day-to-day work. As Featherstone and Gupta (2018) suggest, this can be seen as 'ethical trespass', for there is often no clear and defined answer to a complex situation within the direct work undertaken by social workers. This highlights 'the need for ethical talk to be embedded into organisational cultures of reflection and dialogue' (Featherstone & Gupta 2018, p18). Worryingly, in his research with 148 Spanish social workers and social educators, Vilar

(2014, cited in Corbella & Úcar 2019) found that 80 percent of these professionals did not have adequate support systems to help them deal with ethical and complex decisions that challenged their own values. This shows that much of the professionalization agenda in social work has missed a crucial point and disenfranchised practitioners from their ethical motivation by casting them both as more powerful than the people they support, whilst simultaneously reducing their power to make autonomous decisions. As a result, social workers can feel powerless within systems that, with their relentless focus on measurements, targets, key performance indicators (KPIs), managerialism and procedures, have increasingly become dehumanizing (Lowe & Eichsteller 2021).

In navigating the complex and uncertain environment of direct practice as well as social and political structures and power dynamics which form the backdrop for practice, students and social workers often find themselves working within systems that are in opposition to their value base. Approaches such as relational, person-centered and strengths-based practice have gained substantial traction in social work and revealed the discord between how social workers wish to practice and what their organizational system requires them to do. Whilst these social work approaches recognize the importance and centrality of relationships for impactful social work, highlighting that 'the relationship is the intervention' (Fewster 2005), they rely on systems that allow practitioners to feel connected to their values and do what is right instead of what is correct. Where systems are in opposition to their sense of moral purpose, practitioners can experience 'moral distress' (Weinberg 2009). As Weinberg (2009) argues, this is different from facing ethical dilemmas, where a practitioner has a choice of options. When a professional experiences 'moral distress', they feel unable to do what they believe is morally right when facing a complex or challenging situation due to the situated power dynamics and belief they are unable to, or restricted in being able, to do the 'right thing' (Weinberg 2009). Otten and Gahan (2021) draw the connection between moral distress and occupational burnout in social care, thus further highlighting the severe long-term consequences of expecting practitioners to work in organisational settings that have alienated them from their values and ethical motivation.

Relational practice means that students and practitioners must have the knowledge and skills to work in collaboration with the people they support, whilst addressing the power dynamics in relationships (Ferguson et al 2020). To minimize the power differential, these must never be transactional relationships - which the terminology of 'service user' and 'professional' suggests. Practitioners must instead seek to build human-to-human relationships in which

they apply the notion of walking in front, walking alongside, and walking behind the person they support, depending on what the situation requires. Based on their research of British social workers' interaction with families in child protection settings, Ferguson et al (2020) suggest the term 'holding relationships', which they define as 'relationships that involve reliability, critical thinking and good authority, getting alongside service users, developing their life skills and connecting with them in intimate, emotionally meaningful and containing ways' (p224). In forming holding relationships, social workers need to connect with the lives of the people they support 'on two levels: the external—their quality of life, poverty, housing, practical child care skills and so on; and the internal—their "self", caring capacities, sense of self-efficacy and emotional, unconscious relational experience' (p224). Both these levels are of equal importance.

To form meaningful human relationships requires social workers to focus on 'being with' instead of 'doing to' people (Eichsteller & Holthoff 2012; Smith 2020), engaging with a view to learn with the people they support about what their life looks and feels like, what they enjoy and struggle with, and what they feel has an impact on their quality of life. It is central to acknowledge that social workers are not all-knowing experts holding the answers to the problems, but instead require the skills to work dialogically, engaging in a more equitable and morally grounded manner, trying to reduce power dynamics and being open to working in partnership with the people they support. However, to truly work towards social justice and help the people they support to gain greater recognition (Honneth 1996), social workers must not only form authentic interpersonal relationships but also attempt structural and social changes that reduce or eradicate disadvantage.

More equitable and collaborative social work practice also requires awareness and understanding of the role politics and power plays in shaping practice through legislation, social policy and political ideology, which frames things such as the funding of welfare services as well as influences cultural attitudes to disadvantaged groups, who may serve as convenient scapegoats in order to gain political capital. As the social work profession, we often focus on the macro aspects of the interplay of power and politics which can leave us feeling powerless and conflicted. Yet, as the Brazilian educationalist and philosopher Paulo Freire argued, there is always an ongoing battle which leads to conflict within modern society, centered around power and control. Societal change only ever comes about as a result of overcoming this struggle, and we need to be aware that conflict has an important function, because the opposite of conflict is not consensus but apathy (Pouwels 2019). Apathy leads to

cultures of silence and ongoing unchallenged oppression, which dehumanizes the oppressed. Education and critical reflection therefore play an important part in assisting students and practitioners to understand and navigate these power struggles, the conflicts and everyday ethical dilemmas in the lived experience of direct social work practice. As Shaull writes in his foreword to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000, p34):

'Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it; or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.'

In other words, education is either in service of the existing power structures and the status quo – or it enables the liberation from these power structures and a more equitable redistribution of power. To the extent that social work is an educative profession, it is therefore important that students and practitioners enable the people they support to participate in the transformation of society. This is a political endeavor and thus requires a nuanced understanding of how social workers can bring aspects of power and politics into their practice.

The 3 Ps: A Framework for Understanding Power and Politics

As social work educators we are responsible for helping students and practitioners deepen their understanding of power and politics and why these are highly relevant dimensions of relational practice. In our experience, the Danish concept of the 3 Ps – the *Professional, Personal* and *Private Self* – enables students and practitioners to critically examine their role in this respect. In the below exploration of the model, we draw on our work supporting students and practitioners to illustrate how this nuanced engagement with these three aspects can be achieved authentically – and what is lacking when students don't have a framework that requires such differentiations.

Having played a key role in Danish social pedagogical practice for some time, the concept has been significantly developed by Jappe (2010) but is not yet well-understood within an Anglo-Saxon context. The *Professional Self* focuses on the specific knowledge and expertise we expect students and practitioners to acquire, such as an in-depth understanding of relevant interdisciplinary theory, insight into the legal, ethical and professional frameworks for social work, interpersonal and methodological skills to engage with the people they will be

supporting, and self-reflective skills to critically examine how best they can fulfil their professional role. Professional standards, codes of conduct and both regulatory and societal expectations towards the social work profession further shape what being a professional means. As these professional aspects keep evolving, it is also part of the *Professional Self* to be committed to continuous professional development. Importantly, as has been argued elsewhere by Ruch, Turney and Ward (2010), Ferguson et al (2020), Garavan (2013), Smith (2020) and others, meaningful relational practice requires social workers to engage authentically, bringing their full self into practice.

Social work students are thus called upon to complement their *Professional Self* with their *Personal Self*, bringing their own values, life experiences, interests, and personal qualities into practice, as these can increase the quality of support and deepen the human-to-human relationships at the heart of social work practice. An uplifting example of this was provided to us by a British social worker for adult care, who took part in a recent course on Relationship-Centered Practice. She talked about a hospice choir that includes both staff, patients and their families, all singing together as equals (staff do not wear their uniform) and providing an inclusive group also to bereaved relatives, who can continue their involvement in the choir. The shared passion for singing and connection brings everyone together on an equal basis. Contrary to the message still too often received by social workers in practice – that it is not professional to be personal – the 3 Ps argues that both are essential. Instead, what should be kept out of professional practice is the *Private Self*.

The *Private Self* includes experiences that are irrelevant for practice, interests and life aspects that an individual would share with close friends or family but otherwise keep to themselves, or experiences that are too raw and unprocessed to bring into the *Personal Self*, as they would likely cloud the worker's professional judgment, have an adverse impact on the person they support or negatively affect their relationship. For instance, a social worker who has personal experience of bereavement might choose to share their experience in certain situations to tactfully support a grieving carer, but might equally feel unable to do so without breaking down into tears and needing support, which would likely compound the carer's pain. In this case, the worker might be still be able to draw on their own experience to develop a more empathetic relationship, knowing that just being there for the other person can be more meaningful than trying to find the right words in a situation where there are none.

Crucially, where these boundaries between the *Personal* and *Private Self* are drawn is flexible and contingent on factors such as:

- The quality of the relationship built between the social worker and supported individual (it might feel more natural and appropriate to share some insights with another person where the social worker has built a trusting relationship for some duration than to share the same details at the start of a new relationship),
- The worker's own personality and sense of authenticity (some people are naturally more open and happier to share a lot about themselves than others), as well as
- The context and purpose of the support (it can be situationally relevant and help create a more meaningful relationship if a social worker might share with a young person in care that they too have experienced being away from their birth family as a child and can genuinely understand the young person's sense of loneliness, sadness and worry).

This fluidity requires from social work students and practitioners a high level of (self-)reflection to make a professionally informed decision about where to draw the line in any given situation. For instance, in conversation on a recent Relationship-Centered Practice course, a mature social work student talked about supporting a young woman who had had a miscarriage. The student herself had recently experienced this herself and was deeply affected by the situation. The 3 Ps helped her make sense of what was going on for her, reaffirm her decision to keep this traumatic experience to herself, and to work out with her supervisor what support she felt able to offer to the young woman and what support she needed herself.

This example shows why the 3 Ps is such a valuable model for social workers. It offers an opportunity to develop a highly reflective mindset, drawing on concrete examples from practice situations, and to exercise self-care by supporting students and practitioners in processing key issues from their *Private Self* that have otherwise the potential to 'spill over' into professional practice.

Understanding the Professional, Personal and Private Aspects of Power

By stimulating reflection about how workers can show their own humanity in their interactions with the people they support, the 3 Ps offers practical ways to consider issues of power. As part of the *Professional Self*, social workers hold formal authority and have clearly

defined duties to act on behalf of the welfare state. Students must become aware of the power they will hold as social workers, the responsibilities that justify this position of power and the implications for a profession committed to addressing social inequality and supporting disempowered individuals and groups. The *Professional Self* must therefore include critical self-reflection on, and awareness of, the power dynamics present in the relationships they build with the people they support, the structures and systems they are part of as professionals and how these affect – for better or worse – the realization of greater equity.

There are of course situations where social workers need to exercise their formal power, and for good reasons. In such situations it is perhaps even more pertinent for students and practitioners to critically examine how they conduct themselves when they hold greater power and how they can exercise their power without making the other person feel humiliated or at their mercy. The 'humanization of the person' (Garavan 2013, p8) should remain the ultimate purpose. This is where social workers are called upon to instill a sense of humanity on behalf of the systems they represent, but also to reclaim some of the power they have lost within highly proceduralized systems.

Practitioners' own sense of disempowerment within such systems can narrow perspectives to seeing power as a zero-sum game, in which one party only has power when the other party doesn't, gaining power requires taking someone else's power, and the only way to share power is by giving it up. Such a narrow perspective within a disempowering system can lead to social workers holding on to the limited power they have, thus further reducing opportunities to achieve greater equity. It is therefore important that students and practitioners have a more multi-faceted understanding of power as a generative force that can spread in the same way that a candle's flame can light another candle without getting extinguished. Leadbeater (2020) highlights this point by stating that 'commitment to a cause, person or community can bring into being a power that grows by being generous but also focused, professional, efficient and prepared to learn new knowledge and skills. It comes from work that is not just a set of tasks but a calling' (p6). He builds on Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. by suggesting that what we need in social work settings is a fusion of power and love 'as a commitment to a person, relationship, community, company or team, so they can achieve their full potential' (p6).

A professionally nuanced understanding of power should also be reflected in the practical methods used by social workers to promote empowerment, enable individuals to articulate

their views and exercise their right to be heard, as well as amplify their voices and advocate on their behalf. A commitment to meaningful co-production – to ensuring that 'people who use services [are] being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them' (Think Local Act Personal 2022) – is another competence connected to the *Professional Self*.

The *Personal Self* requires critical self-awareness on power aspects around informal authority and the ways in which social workers 'carry' their own power and privilege, how they come across and engage with others to connect as equal human beings. It raises questions about how they can role-model principles that bring out their humanity, for instance by showing empathy, humility, and their own human flaws – their willingness to learn from their own mistakes instead of hiding these behind a glossy professional façade. Krumer-Nevo (2016) suggests that, in order to overcome the imbalanced power relations, social workers must stand in solidarity with the people they support. She emphasized that this is not merely a professional task but requires genuine personal commitment to empathize with people experiencing disadvantage within a context of 'public (and professional) prejudices strengthened by neo-liberal attitudes that perceive their poverty as being their own fault' (p10). The 3 Ps framework enables social work students and practitioners to demonstrate that their solidarity reaches to the core of who they are as human beings and is a central part of their *Haltung*[1] (Eichsteller 2010; Charfe & Gardner 2020).

The *Private Self* acts as a safeguard against practitioners' unconscious and uncritical use of power and privilege, particularly in situations where their life experiences and background may limit the extent to which they are able to empathically connect and truly understand the cumulative impact of another person's experiences. This should not stop social workers from trying to show empathy but make them aware of their status and privilege and the power these confer. As movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and debates related to LGBTQ+ rights have highlighted, it is all too easy to be oblivious to the fundamental ways in which White male hegemonic ideas have permeated everyday life in Western societies, causing a multitude of everyday micro-aggressions experienced by those who are less privileged. As degree-level qualified professionals, social workers are arguably in a position of elevated social status, certainly in comparison to the people they support. This is not something they should hide or be ashamed of but means that they must carefully consider the implications of this power differential and determine which aspects of their lives to keep private, because they would not add value to the support provided.

Importantly, practitioners engaged in helping professions should also critically examine what constitutes help and how they conceptualize this term, so that they avoid problematic notions of the White Savior or the Knight in Shining Armor, which cast them in a superior role as a rescuer and thus convey a clear power imbalance that needs to persist in order to serve the hero narrative (Watts 2017). Responding in such a manner would fall firmly within the *Private Self*, where the practitioner's own needs trump those of the people they support.

If social workers conceptualize power as highly nuanced, instituted by nation states and legislative frameworks, but also shaped by people's subjective experiences and complex social processes which confer privilege to some groups, then they need to take a multi-dimensional approach to reflect on how they carry, use and share their power. It is valuable to involve colleagues as well as the people they support, whose perspectives can help to become aware of areas where a social worker might be incongruent or unconsciously biased, where the balance between the *Professional, Personal* and *Private Self* might be out of equilibrium. After all, the definition power of what being a 'good ally' and showing solidarity actually means lies with the people who encounter disadvantage and discrimination.

Understanding the Professional, Personal and Private Aspects of Politics

The 3 Ps also enables social work students and professionals to consider how they integrate a political dimension in practice. At the level of the *Professional Self*, their professional values and codes of ethics entail an obligation to engage in the political arena and raise social justice issues, both by supporting disadvantaged groups to be heard in political decision-making processes and to advocate on their behalf where opportunities for their direct engagement are limited. Politics can be conceptualized more broadly than engagement in democratic decision-making though, with Reisch and Jani (2012) arguing that it should include a focus 'on how power shapes the allocation of rights, access, opportunities, status and resources—including workers' time, skills and information' (p3). Hence how social workers make use of their status, time, skills and information is a form of political agency and raises questions about whether social workers put these resources in service of the people they support or the systems that they are a part of.

Being a social worker includes a commitment to find educational means to create social change, to facilitate the transformation of society instead of seeking to perpetuate the status quo (see Freire 2000; Giroux 2011). This is not a politically neutral activity but requires

social workers to stand with those who are disadvantaged (Krumer-Nevo 2016) and contribute to decolonizing the systems they are part of, to support disenfranchised groups in their struggle for recognition (Honneth 1996), and to help wider society become more inclusive. As social professionals, we are also required to possess critical awareness of political ideology and paradigms that are dehumanizing and divisive, environmentally damaging, scapegoating vulnerable groups and minorities in order to further political agendas that benefit those in power. Thus, if we are serious about empowerment and committed to enabling the people we support to have greater power and involvement in society and the protection of our ecosystems (IFSW 2022), we cannot be politically neutral.

Social professions are closely connected to practitioners' own values and personal commitment to social justice and human rights. At a *Personal Self* level, the political dimension is reflected in practitioners taking personal responsibility for educating themselves about political issues and in their individual political engagement (to the extent that this supports their professional integrity). To many professionals, social work is more than just a job, and their determination to address social inequality might mean that they are engaged in civic and political action in other parts of their lives too, in ways as varied as volunteering in their community, talking to their local political representatives, being involved in petitions, consultations, demonstrations, unions, and encouraging other members of their community to engage in democratic processes. This personal commitment to civic engagement in political processes is thus closely related to their professional role, which is why we argue that it deserves being part of the *Personal Self*, that it forms part of the core identity not just of who we are as social workers but also who we are as human beings. As the slogan goes, the personal is political; the values expressed in every action entail a political aspect. Taken together, these actions tell a story about how we would like the world to be and the extent to which we take responsibility for bringing our vision to life.

It is important to differentiate between how social workers can authentically nurture the democratic and political engagement of the people they support and where their *Professional Self* should draw the line between the *Personal Self* and the *Private Self*. For instance, nurturing political interest in young people by discussing current affairs, welfare issues and social justice aspects is an important part of upbringing and requires that practitioners bring in their *Personal Self*. Talking young people into joining a certain political party or campaigning for the social worker's preferred political candidate would certainly cross the line by placing in the foreground the social worker's own needs and private ambitions. These

aspects would therefore fall within the remit of the *Private Self*. Similarly, social workers might hold views that are not in accordance with social work values, for instance being anti-abortion for religious reasons, or biased against specific social groups. As human beings, none of us are free of discriminatory biases, meaning that it is the professional responsibility of each social worker to recognize their own biases and consign them as much as possible to the *Private Self*. For self-evident reasons, the more conspiratorial, offensive or discriminatory these views are, the more firmly they need to be kept out of practice and in the *Private Self*.

To reiterate a crucial point, we are not suggesting that aspects kept in the *Private Self* are necessarily negative or harmful. They are human, because they are part of who we are as human beings. Whilst we might seek to keep the *Private Self* out of practice, there are also situations where this might be difficult or where professional experiences affect the *Private Self*. Furthermore, in addition to being expected to keep private any aspects that would undermine the professional purpose, every social worker has the right to decide what they do not wish to share about themselves.

The below table provides a high-level summary of the above descriptions, extending Jappe's (2010) original outline translated by Harbo (2010) by adding power and politics as explicit categories.

3 Ps MODEL	**Professional Self**	**Personal Self**	**Private Self**
Basis:	Professional competence	Objectivity	Subjectivity, emotional
Knowledge / insight:	Theoretical knowledge e.g. laws & policies	Processed experiences, self-awareness	Own experiences (more or less processed)
Actions characterized by:	Analysis, methods, evaluation	A sense of situation, empathy	Emotive, chance
Approach to collaboration:	Multi-disciplinary	Eagerness to collaborate	Pursuing one's own agenda
Needs:	Others	Others /own	Own
Power:	Formal authority Critical self-reflection and awareness of	Informal authority and self-awareness / role modelling	Unconscious and uncritical use of power and privilege

	power dynamics and structures Empowerment, co-production and advocacy as professional methods	Ability to connect equally as human-to-human Humility, owning human flaws	Trapped in drama triangle Incongruence
Politics:	Professional values and codes of ethics Critical awareness of political ideology and paradigms Educational action is political action Political representation of minority views Addressing structural inequalities	Personal values and commitment to social justice and human rights Taking a stance – social work is more than just a job The personal is political	Own values which clash with social work values Party-political propaganda Conspiracy theories and holding views that violate human rights

Figure 1: The 3 Ps (translated by Harbo (2010), adapted and expanded from Jappe (2010))

Social work practitioners and students face ethical and complex dilemmas and decision-making on a daily basis within their direct work. Being able to navigate the complexities of relational practice can mean that social workers focus on ensuring that relationships are positive and that they are working in harmony with others. Whilst this is an important aim to pursue, it is equally valuable to acknowledge the tensions that often exist within these relationships and to consider what their relevance is. In ancient Greece, 'harmony' meant the bringing together of different parts to benefit the whole, which includes the tensions that exist (Yeung, 2020). And according to Freire (2000), conflict and tension play an important role in ensuring that cultures of silence and oppression do not go unchallenged, as this would lead to the continued dehumanization of certain groups within society and the denial or ignorance of their human rights. The 3 Ps helps us reflect on different aspects of ourselves and how we 'show up' as practitioners. It facilitates reflection about complex and nuanced dimensions around power and politics, invites us to engage in dialogue to become aware of our blind spots, own our human flaws, and provides a place for our private feelings and experiences,

thus ensuring that they are not adversely influencing our practice. It enables us to share power, feel connected with our moral and ethical purpose and thus realize human rights in our encounters. This gives meaning to our professional standards and brings them to life. In the below case study we illustrate why the 3 Ps offers a simple yet nuanced framework to guide situated professional judgment and stimulate critical reflection on practice situations where students or practitioners might feel challenged and experience a tension between their professional role and their private needs.

The 3 Ps in Practice: A Case Study

During a tutorial session with a social work student, the tutor and student discussed the key learning experiences the student had experienced whilst on her practice placement. The use of the 3 Ps framework helped highlight and explore an internal conflict the student had experienced. The student had been working at a Women's Refuge, supporting women and their children who had experienced domestic abuse. As part of the placement and to meet the professional requirements to qualify, the student had run group work sessions. It became clear very quickly that the women had very negative views of professionals, in particular social workers, and voiced their opinions and discussed their experiences openly. This left the student conflicted, and, in order to protect the positive rapport she was building with the group, she decided not to tell them she was a student social worker herself. Reflecting on the fragile bonds we can have in relationships and how quickly trust can be broken, the tutor and student discussed this decision in detail during the tutorial. Linking to the 3 Ps, it is not often that we hide the *professional* role we have and move this into the *private* aspect of ourselves. Thinking about the importance of authentic and genuine relationships, our expectations and the demand for honesty we often make of others, this ethical dilemma and subsequent decision by the student would have damaged her relationship with this group of women sooner or later. If they had found out that she was withholding such a crucial detail about her professional role, her lack of honesty would no doubt have provided another example of why they should never trust a social worker. Feelings of discomfort and avoidance, which were rooted in her *private* aspect, dominated and influenced the student's decision. Had she critically reflected on this from the *professional* and *personal* parts of the 3 Ps, she would have been able to work out a strategy to address this ethical dilemma, minimizing her internal

conflict of denying her professional identity, acknowledging and accepting the negative experiences these women talked openly about, attempting to build authentic and trusting relationships, and thus using this situation as a positive learning experience for her own professional development. In turn, she might even have helped the women recognize that not all social workers are the same and that, by working alongside the social work student, they were able to help develop more positive social work practice based on an understanding of the women's lived experiences. This would have meant using her formal power in ways that created connection instead of division and to recognize the political significance of standing in solidarity with these women not just as an individual but as a professional. This solidarity would also have helped the women understand their human rights as well as underpinned the student's practice. Thus, using the 3 Ps more consciously and critically reflecting on power and politics from the outset could have had a powerful effect in this challenging situation.

The 3 Ps within a Human Rights Context

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

Eleanor Roosevelt (1958)

Human rights are based on the principle that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood' (United Nations 1948). This means that, as human beings, we do not need to demonstrate a certain behavior or meet a specific requirement to gain them, but automatically acquire human rights by nature of being born into the human race. As Eleanor Roosevelt highlighted, these rights exist in every aspect of our lives, in the small everyday interactions we have with each other. Within a social work practice context, human

rights come to life through the professional and personal attention we pay to realizing them. In her research around the human rights of children to participate, Bae (2012) remarks this is not a *right* that should only happen in certain situations and contexts. Just as other human rights, the right to being involved should be 'taken into consideration in various kinds of everyday activities' (p54). For example, the wishes and feelings of children should not be sought merely because the UK's Children Act (1989) makes it a legal requirement that all Section 47 family assessments address these. Using a human rights perspective and the 3 Ps framework, this should be embedded into our approach of working alongside children and their families. In relation to adult social care, well-being should not be something that should be looked at merely with regards to a Care Act (2014) assessment but should underpin the focus of all support offered to an adult at risk.

Using the 3 Ps framework to inform our human rights approach sharpens our awareness of the political and power dynamics in the everyday and at the micro level at which people experience power and powerlessness (Krumer-Nevo 2016). Instead of seeing ourselves as the benevolent professional who is able to give up and share our power or be a 'good ally', it offers an opportunity to critically reflect and change the way we see ourselves and our relationship to the people we support (Woodhead 2005). By focusing on the power and political dimensions of human rights, we are able to proactively change our direct practice and move away from a purely needs-led approach towards more meaningful dialogical practice that engages people as inherently valuable, deserving of human dignity and our recognition, and able to contribute with their everyday expertise and insight into their own lives. Using the 3 Ps framework helps bring this approach to life in direct practice and highlights the need for systems that support meaningful relationship-building to enable people to thrive and feel included in their community.

In attempting to humanize systems, the social work profession can join forces with changemakers in public services who are developing *Human Learning Systems* (see Lowe et al 2021; Charfe & Eichsteller 2021), a complexity-informed paradigm that offers a radical departure from New Public Management to focus public service on achieving genuinely meaningful outcomes with people in the real world. In this sense, *Human Learning Systems* demonstrates that we can successfully integrate a generative understanding of power and love into practice. It is also worth exploring Indigenous philosophies such as the African philosophy and practice of Ubuntu (Mayaka & Truell 2021), which reflects a much richer understanding of power and interdependence than usually found in Western social work

practice, which has been centered around ‘individual responsibility’. At the heart of Ubuntu is the philosophy that ‘people’s identities are continuously developing in the context of their reciprocal relationships with others, and thereby, through supporting and nurturing others, one’s own identity and life quality are enhanced. Ubuntu focuses on the inclusivity of everyone within a community, their responsibility to others and to the wellbeing of the environment to ensure success for their own and future generations.’ (Mayaka & Truell 2021, p651). This understanding of the interconnectedness of each of us is also part of the participatory development of social protection systems. Within Western social work, the focus of social protection is always situated on responding to, and addressing, an issue only once it has been highlighted or investigated. In contrast, social work founded on Ubuntu uses ‘traditional learnings, the progression of knowledge, […] ongoing communal evaluation of current social concerns, risk analysis of future social crisis and that all members of the communities are essential actors in the prevention of harm’ (p652). Social protection and welfare systems are developed from these principles. Both *Human Learning Systems* and Ubuntu show that a different world is possible for social workers to achieve greater coherence between their *Professional Self* and their *Personal Self* and help create systems that reflect a more inclusive approach to how we share power to create greater equity. We need to recognize that power and politics are not oppositional or negative forces but important perspectives that assist us in instilling human rights as a foundation and navigation points for social work practice. When we start from what we have in common as human beings, based on principles such as the interdependency highlighted within social pedagogy (Charfe & Gardner 2019) and the interconnectedness at the heart of Ubuntu, we are able to build a deeper understanding of what the political aspects of our work are. We can use this understanding to become partners in challenging inequality and injustice and stand alongside disadvantaged groups, co-creating welfare systems based on learning, progression of shared knowledge and participatory approaches to the development of social protection systems that enable people to thrive, have a sense of meaningful belonging, find connection and solidarity within our eco-social world.

Conclusion

The 3 Ps can help social work educators prepare students and practitioners for how they can best engage as authentic human beings to build meaningful relationships with the people they support. The everyday challenges and complexities characterizing social work practice

require social workers to continuously and critically reflect on their own power and privilege, and how they can create the conditions in which the people they support can experience a greater sense of empowerment. The 3 Ps offers a valuable framework for critical and nuanced reflection on power and love from a *professional* and *personal* perspective in ways that acknowledges the boundaries between the *Personal* and *Private Self.* As Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently highlighted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, power and love must not be seen as opposites but as complementary. This is why extending conversations with students and practitioners about power can meaningfully include reflections on what love might mean from a *professional* and *personal* perspective and which aspects should remain *private.*

Social work's commitment to human rights and social justice imply that it is a political profession concerned with addressing the unequal distribution of power and supporting disadvantaged people and groups in their struggle for recognition. Many students continue to come into this profession because of their values and their eagerness to make a positive difference. In supporting this desire and professionally framing these ambitions appropriately, social work educators can use the 3 Ps to explore the synergies and possible contradictions between a *professional* understanding of political social work practice, *personal* determination to stand in solidarity, and *private* political motivations or ethical views that are misplaced in practice or detrimental to the support.

The systems that social workers are part of within their organizations, in their locality, and as a profession can make it challenging for students and practitioners to work in ethical and relationship-centered ways, to genuinely share power with the people they support and to ensure that disadvantaged people have sufficient political agency to be listened to by decision-makers. Social work educators can refer to the 3 Ps to help students prepare for these disempowering experiences and work out how they can be effective systems stewards (Lowe et al 2021), taking *professional* responsibility for building trusting relationships with others in these systems, and keeping alive their *personal* determination to improve the eco-social conditions for the people in their care and in their community. In the inspiring words of Margaret Mead, 'never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'

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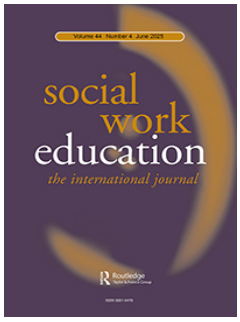
Notes

[1] Haltung is a German term referring to the extent to which a person is authentic in how they guide their actions by their deepest beliefs and values. It asserts that values are brought to life in interactions.



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Lowis Charfe

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Who's got the power?: A social pedagogical exploration of power, the important element within relationship-based practice

Lowis Charfe

School of Health, Social Work and Sport, University of Central Lancashire, Ireland, UK

ABSTRACT

This article introduces the reader to the Danish social pedagogy concept of the 3 Ps, which assists in helping social workers to set out the boundaries between the *Professional*. *Personal* and *Private* in relationship-based practice. A key aspect of relationship-based practice is the ability to work in an anti-oppressive way, and a critical awareness and ability to understand and analyze power is central to this. The author and her colleague have developed the 3 Ps framework to focus in more detail on the issue of power, to assist social workers and students to address this within their everyday practice. This focuses on a social worker's *approach* to the purpose of their work, being aware of the *needs* and whose needs are being met as well as formal and informal *power* dynamics. The framework aims to assist social workers and students to consider their everyday practice, addressing the issue of power and supporting anti-oppressive practice.

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Power; relationship-based practice; social pedagogy; boundaries; empowerment

Introduction

As a response to the rational technical approach (Trevithick, 2014) in social work, there is a growing refocus on relationship-based practice in contemporary social work here in the UK (Ruch, 2018). Relationships, and a social worker's ability to build, sustain, and maintain these, are once again being seen as central to everyday practice (Ingram & Smith, 2018; Monteux & Monteux, 2020). This focus on relationship-based practice has also been strengthened by being a central theme within the recent final reports of both independent reviews of the Scottish and English children's social care systems. (The Scottish review, The Promise (2020)) highlights the importance of positive and loving relationships for children and families. Contained within the workforce development section, there is a broad focus on assisting professionals to develop relationship-based practice, with the use of self in 'bringing their whole selves to work' and being 'supported to be human with the people they work with'. Social workers need to be able to manage the core aspects of their work such as risk management 'in relationship-based rather than process driven ways' (The Promise,

CONTACT Lowis Charfe lcharfe@uclan.ac.uk School of Health, Social Work and Sport, University of Central Lancashire, Eden Building, Victoria Road, Preston PR1 2HE, UK

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2020, p. 100). Echoing the same sentiments and beliefs, the English Independent Review of Children's Social Care (McAlister, 2022, p. 21) in their executive summary states 'that it is loving relationships that hold the solutions for children and families overcoming adversity. While relationships are rich and organic, children's social care can be rigid and linear.' The review goes on to highlight the importance of relationship-based practice throughout and that the solution is to have social care systems that 'realigns to focus on the health of relationships' in all aspects (McAlister, 2022, p. 36).

Relationship-based practice operates within the complex and uncertain work of social work. As Ferguson et al. (2022) and Monteux and Monteux (2020) argue, critical exploration and understanding of the key features, depths, types, and places that these relationships operate in is needed. There needs to be continued critical exploration of what is meant by positive, strengths-based, relationship-based practice and how social workers develop the skills and abilities to build, sustain, and maintain these in their everyday work. With important contributions from social work researchers and academics such as Ferguson et al. (2022), Ruch (2018), the details of relationship-based practice are being investigated to help develop understanding around complexity informed relationship-based practice. As with many aspects of social work theory, there are differing definitions offering explanations to assist in understanding what relationship-based practice is. The Relationships Project (Robinson, 2024), a collaborative network being developed here in the UK to support the growth of relationship-based practice, define it as putting:

relationships first. It unlocks potential and meets need by positioning meaningful and effective relationships as the first order goal, both an end in itself and the means by which other goals will be achieved.

The focus on meaningful and effective relationships is also a core philosophy of social pedagogical practice in recognition that empowerment and change does not happen if there is no meaningful participation (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). With regard to social work Ruch's (2005) definition also echoes the above, stating that relationship-based practice is the conscious use of relationships by a social worker no matter what their professional setting, and is explained as:

'an important source of information for the practitioner to understand how best to help, and simultaneously this relationship is the means by which any help or intervention is offered . . .' and 'involves practitioners developing and sustaining supportive professional relationships in unique and challenging situations . . ..' 'and requires practitioners to re-evaluate their styles of practice and sources of professional knowledge in a social work context of complexity and uncertainty' (Ruch, 2005, p. 113).

Aligned with this social work approach, social pedagogy places the centrality of working toward equitable relationships at the core of any work between a professional and the person or family they are providing support to (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). To briefly explain, social pedagogy is an ethical and conceptual orientation for addressing social inequality through relationship-centered and educational approaches (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). Social pedagogy, therefore, can offer a nuanced practical understanding of power within relationship-based practice. One of the core concepts the author believes is beneficial in

supporting social workers to address the power dynamic within relationship-based practice, is the Danish social pedagogical concept of the 3 Ps (Jappe, 2010). This social pedagogical concept supports the exploration of boundaries within relationship-based practice.

The Danish development of social pedagogy is rooted in daycare institutions where the focus was on positive social relationships and the countering of poor social conditions (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017). This contrasted with the more educational approaches set out in the definitions of Karl Mager and Adolph Diesterweg in mainland Europe at that time (Cameron & Moss, 2011). This concentration and emphasis on the importance of the relationship has continued to underpin Danish developments. Today, it still plays a central role in the child/person centered approach taken by Danish social pedagogues (Jensen, 2011; Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017). The social pedagogical concept of the 3 Ps aids social pedagogues to critically reflect on the 'professional' role within relationship-based practice. Whilst the 'personal' aspect assists critical self-reflection about what parts of ourselves we bring into relationship-based practice. Finally, the 'private' sets out what aspects of ourselves we are not going to share as we navigate complex and ethical relationship-based practice. Along with my colleague, (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024) we have further developed the 3 Ps framework to include a focus on power. This article will explain the framework and how it can be used to support the exploration of boundaries and ethical dilemmas faced daily by social work practitioners, as well as power dynamics that sit within these relationships embedded in an anti-oppressive, relationship-based practice approach. The framework has been successfully used with social work students in modules focused on developing both an understanding of and the skills for relationship-based practice. One example is the third-year module *Relationship-Based Practice in Social Work* at UCLan, taught to final-year students as they prepare for their final placement. The framework has served as a valuable teaching tool to support critical analysis, reflection, and discussion around boundaries and power dynamics. Students are encouraged to draw on real examples of power dynamics they have encountered during placements, exploring the origins and nature of that power. Using the framework, they are then guided to critically reflect on these experiences and consider how to address power dynamics in ways that support anti-oppressive practice, promote inclusion, and foster equity.

The 3 Ps concept explained

Boundaries are needed within all human relationships (Sudbery & Whittaker, 2018) and provide us with feelings of safety and security. The boundaries needed within relationship-based practice can often be difficult to navigate and develop alongside strengths-based and anti-oppressive practice and the complexity of contemporary social work practice (O'Leary et al., 2013). As Hem and Heggen (2003, p. 106, cited in Ruch et al. 2010) identified, there is always tension between 'a social worker being a "friendly professional", who is able to be intimate but also distant'. In navigating these complex aspects of relationship-based practice, the social pedagogical concept of the 3 Ps can be highly useful. Used within Danish reform pedagogy (Rothuizen & Harbo, 2017) where social pedagogical practice focuses on individual growth and wider social reform using

relationship-based practice, the concept of the 3 Ps has been developed by Jappe (2010). It consists of the three elements and boundaries between the *Professional, Personal,* and *Private* self. When used in practice, it assists social workers to critically reflect and examine their understanding of the boundaries they have or are developing with each individual or family they are working alongside (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). It supports the development of authentic relationships by exploring the nuances and boundaries between our professional self and the *use of self*; which parts of our personality and private life do we share to help form authentic, genuine, supportive, and caring relationships (Ingram, 2013; O'Leary et al., 2013; Ruch, 2018).

The *Professional Self* requires social workers to be open and transparent about their role and remit when working alongside individuals or families. Being clear about the 'purpose of our engagement' with individuals or families (Gardner, 2019), and the legal frameworks that direct the focus of the engagement are important. It is also essential that the support and guidance the social worker can offer within their role but also the limitation to their engagement is explained to. The *Professional Self* also links to the:

> 'specific knowledge and expertise we expect students and practitioners to acquire, such as an in-depth understanding of relevant interdisciplinary theory, insight into the legal, ethical and professional frameworks for social work, interpersonal and methodological skills to engage with the people they will be supporting, and self-reflective skills to critically examine how best they can fulfil their professional role.' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024)

Within the *Professional Self* is also the understanding and compliance with professional standards held by regulatory bodies such as Social Work England, and professional codes of conduct. As well as an awareness of societal expectations around what constitutes professional social work practice.

The *Personal Self* links to the *use of self,* which is very much discussed in contemporary social work practice (Ruch et al., 2010). If relationships are the most critical resource that a social worker has, these need to be authentic and genuine (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). Therefore, the *use of self* and an understanding of how this manifests itself in the direct work is key to the development of authentic relationships based on positive, anti-oppressive social work practice. Within this element of the framework, social workers need to reflect and consider what aspects of themselves are they willing to share; alongside what is appropriate given the purpose of the relationship. This includes their 'own values, life experiences, interests, and personal qualities' that if brought into their practice 'can increase the quality of support and deepen the human-to-human relationships at the heart of social work practice.' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 5). From a social pedagogical perspective, it is acknowledged that there is no professional without being able to be personal within relationship-based social work (Charfe & Gardner, 2019).

The third element is that of the *Private Self*. For effective relationship-based practice, there must be a clear understanding of the boundary between the *personal* and *private*. Social workers need to be able to work out the aspects of their *private* life that they should not share with the people they are working alongside. Again, this is very individually determined and linked to experience, skills, and roles. Social workers need a high level of self-awareness and reflexivity to be able to manage this boundary (Gardner, 2019). As a rule of thumb, any experience that has not been fully processed and feels too emotionally raw should not be shared as it will 'likely cloud the worker's professional judgment,

have an adverse impact on the person they support or negatively affect their relationship.' (Charfe, 2025). However, a social worker can still draw on these private experiences and emotions to assist them in having empathic understanding (Mührel, 2008, cited in Charfe, 2025). This will demonstrate itself in their behavior and body language and not in the spoken words they choose to use and demonstrates the value of empathy being alive in their practice (Charfe & Gardner, 2019).

Social work: the paradoxical situation of being powerful, feeling powerless, and an expectation to empower

Using Foucault's (2002) theory on power is valuable in critically analyzing its place within relationship-based practice. The academic discussion and critical exploration of power are varied and contrasting (Karim, 2023) and there is not enough space for a detailed discussion here. Unlike other postmodern theorist such as Lukes (2005), 'Foucault (1982) regards power as relational and fluid in its manifestation, rather than something which is possessed and exercised' (Karim, 2023, p. 1062). Foucault's theoretical approach lends itself to the focus of the centrality of relationships and the exploration of power within these using the social pedagogical 3 Ps framework. Foucault (2002) maintains that power is a core element of all human relationships and that it is present in all relationships no matter a person's position within a social structure (Gilbert & Powell, 2010; Taylor, 2014). If power, as Foucault (2002) states, is ever present, it is imperative that it is explored and understood with regard to relationship-based social work practice. This awareness of power dynamics within relationship-based practice aligns with the ethical principles of social justice, rights, anti-oppressive practice, and empowerment that underpin social work practice (O'Leary et al., 2013), as well as with social work approaches such as, strengths-based and person-centered practice. The author therefore believes that it is advantageous for social workers and students to be given space and time to reflect and understand how power works within these relationship-based approaches. It is also useful to have the ability to identify the relevant power bases they navigate within their everyday practice. This knowledge can assist them to meet but also enshrine into their direct work the national and international professional standards held by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2018) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014). Social workers sit within a paradoxical situation where they find themselves equally powerful and powerless in systems that often cause moral distress and burn out (Weinberg, 2009). This also relates to the term *moral injury* (Williamson et al., 2021, p. 453), where there is a 'strong cognitive and emotional response that can occur following events that violate a person's moral or ethical code'. It is this conflict to a person's deeply held beliefs and values that can cause the distress and feelings of powerlessness. This is also set against the paradoxical situations and expectations placed on social workers to promote and support the empowerment of disadvantaged and marginalized people and social groups.

Powerful: By nature of the legislative aspect directing and framing social work practice, social workers have a high level of legal power. This gives them a legal mandate and duty to make decisions that could and often do have an effect on nearly every aspect of an individual's or family's life. As Gilbert and Powell (2010) state the social work practice of

assessment, risk management and care planning leads to high levels of surveillance and power. A lack of legal and ethical literacy around this legislative and practice power can lead to oppressive and inhuman practice even if carried out unintentionally (Tedam, 2021). Due to the complex nature and uncertainty of social work, there are often no clear or defined answers or solutions to addressing these complexities within the direct work undertaken by social workers (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). This can lead to what Featherstone and Gupta (2018) highlight as *ethical trespass*. Coined by the Canadian social work researcher Weinberg (2009), *ethical trespass* is, an important concept or social workers to be aware of, especially in relation to power. This concept relates to 'the harmful effects that inevitably follow not from our intentions but from our participation in social systems and processes' (Featherstone & Gupta, 2020, p. 837). Therefore, the need for awareness of the likelihood of *ethical trespass* means that as practitioners, social workers have to be able to confront and reflect on their positions and the power that is afforded to them. A critical understanding of the role but also, the power held within the law, in promoting human rights and social justice is therefore essential (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2016).

Powerless: A major paradox within social work practice is that even with the weight of legal power behind them, social workers can regularly feel quite powerless within social work systems. As the famous quote (attributed to both Spider-Man and the French Revolution) states *with great power comes great responsibility*. Yet it is this weight of responsibility and a desire to 'do the right thing' and work in anti-oppressive ways that can often lead to a moral and ethical collision with systems and procedures that enforce the states powers and social control (Pawar, 2019), sometimes resulting in moral distress (Weinberg, 2009) and burn out. Given the contextual and ethical dimensions surrounding the everyday decisions social workers make, many consistently ask themselves *how do we know we are doing the right thing*? As Evan (2016) rightly highlights, poorly designed, oppressive systems and processes will always overshadow any well-meaning and ethically based practice. A clear example of this paradoxical situation can be seen in a recent example explained to the author. As a team leader responsible for a large team of social workers, this particular individual was voicing feelings of powerlessness in the fact that, though they had the power to remove children from their families, they did not have the power to top up a travel card for a family. This decision had to be agreed and permission granted by a service manager, two positions above them, leading to feelings of powerlessness and frustration on a daily basis, hampering quick responses to families and negatively impacting on their relationship.

Empowerment: A key misconception around empowerment is that social workers create and produce it. The author has often heard social workers and students say that they empowered the person they are working with. True empowerment is not something *given to* but rather something that is developed within an individual. Empowerment happens when an individual can make sense of the world around them, has the power to make decisions, and experiences a greater sense of agency in all or key aspects of their life (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). A social worker's role in the empowerment of people, as Krumer-Nevo (2016, p. 1802) states, happens 'when social workers take a stance and behave as partners of their service users in their struggle'. This partnership helps build the self-efficacy and self-confidence needed for a person to become empowered (Freire, 1998/2001). To work as true partners within an equitable relationship 'requires an

awareness and understanding of power dynamics and how they operate in relation to discrimination and oppression on structural, systemic and personal levels as well as the intersectionality of discrimination' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). An understanding of the intersectionality of discrimination and the part power plays in this is important. As Tedam (2021) writes, people's identities are complex and have a diverse range of social categories woven within them, such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and age. The power or lack of power within these social categories and their intersectionality can lead to discrimination and oppression, but conversely also grants the power to oppress. As she rightly states, it's therefore imperative that social workers have the ability to understand the intersectionality of discrimination and the impact of this when working anti-oppressively (Tedam, 2021).

Social work and social pedagogy perspectives on power

Foucault (2002) argued that certain groups or socioeconomic classes within society do not hold all the power that in fact 'power circulates via a myriad of social networks penetrating deep into the far corners of social life playing out its effects through the everyday interactions of autonomous individuals' (Gilbert & Powell, 2010, p. 6). As Ferguson (2011; Ferguson et al., 2022, p. 210) states, this understanding of power assists social workers to practice 'critically in ethical ways that take account of power relations and structural inequalities, using 'good authority'.

A core ethical principle of social pedagogical theory and practice is the ability for social workers to work in partnership and alongside the people they support, building equitable relationships (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). As Petrie (2020, p. 4) states, social pedagogy demands that we work 'alongside' people as a supportive, egalitarian presence'. However, this can be challenging and complex when faced with safeguarding, statutory duties, and legislation that gives social workers power over making decisions in people's lives. Therefore, a critical understanding of the bases of power assists in anti-oppressive, ethical practice where social workers are able to use 'good authority' (Ferguson, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2022, p. 210).

The 3 Ps framework sits alongside other concepts and methods of understanding and navigating power in social work. These include the four aspects of power developed by Thompson (2006), the matrix of power relations created by Tew (2006), and more recently, the 4D2P framework created by Tedam (2021) and the Power Informed Practice framework by Karim (2023). In contrast, the 3 Ps framework (Jappe, 2010) concentrates on the boundaries between the *professional, personal,* and *private* within relationship-based practice of a social pedagogue, social workers, or students. The 3 Ps framework has been further expanded (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024) to support social workers and students to critically reflect on power and their positionality (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019) within the relationships they are forming with the people they work alongside. This not only relates to the people they are providing support to, and their families, but also colleagues and other professionals in recognition of the multi-agency element of contemporary social work practice. Unlike the frameworks mentioned above, the 3 Ps, framework is underpinned by standpoint theory (Hall, 2020), requiring students and social workers to explore and develop a deeper and more distinctively personal understanding of how their own social and

political experiences have shaped their view and use of power. The framework facilitates more reflexive thinking, which England (1994, p. 244) describes as 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self'.

An important aspect in the critical exploration of power is firstly an understanding of the types of powers that are at play in our direct relationships with each other. These types of power come from an individual's perception of what power (or lack of power) they hold and can be seen in three categories:

dependent, independent, and interdependent (or collective) power. Dependent power is based on formal roles or influence over others, which, while sometimes necessary for protection or guidance, can be easily misused and become oppressive. Independent power arises from within the individual, grounded in self-confidence, skills, and self-worth—enabling people to act autonomously without relying on external validation. Interdependent power, on the other hand, emphasizes the collective nature of human relationships, where cooperation, solidarity, and mutual support build shared strength—described as 'power with' rather than 'power over.' (Reitz & Higgins, 2021, p. 271). Recognising these types of power encourages social workers and students to move beyond control-based models of practice toward more ethical, empowering, and relational practices.

The ability to work anti-oppressively is to be keenly aware of where power is operating from and in what manner (Tedam, 2021). The author believes that the classic study by social psychologists French and Raven (1959) offers a useful framework to critically analyze power dynamics inherent in relationships. The work of French and Raven (1959) is still seen as a seminal text in the study of power and, in relation to the focus of this article, assists in the understanding of where power can originate from; an important aspect when considering the three domains within the 3 Ps framework.

To summarize their work, French and Raven (1959) identified five bases of power—legitimate, reward, referent (personal), expert, and coercive. Legitimate power stems from formal authority, though it is limited by others' acceptance of that authority and can be resisted, as seen when individuals disengage from social workers. Reward power is dependent on individuals valuing the incentives offered, an example of which could be seen as regaining access to children through compliance with a child protection plan. While coercive power, based on fear or punishment, can lead to resistance and false cooperation. Personal or referent power is rooted in personality and relational skills and is crucial for anti-oppressive, empowering practices. Expert power comes from knowledge and qualifications, emphasized in social work through ongoing professional development and co-production with service users.

If we require social workers to practice ethically and use their power 'with' rather than 'over', there must be the strengthening of critical reflection and understanding around the types and bases of power within relationship-based practice. An awareness that the dynamics within relationship-based practice also has an influence on the different power bases, especially when considering statutory requirements and safeguarding responsibilities. It is therefore helpful, the author argues, to have a practical framework to assist social workers and students in reflecting on these.

Using the 3 Ps to explore power in relationship-based practice

In developing the 3 Ps framework further, we have not only focused on the boundaries within a relationship but importantly the power dynamics within these. This expansion of the 3 Ps assists social workers and students to become more aware of the power dynamics and structures contained in their relationship-based practice. This awareness helps them to consider how to challenge negative power while also understanding how to use power as 'good authority' (Ferguson et al., 2022, p. 210) when developing ethical and anti-oppressive practice. They can question in whose name and best interests they are using the power and authority that they have, as well as identifying the types and bases of power. Using the 3 Ps supports practitioners to identify power structures but also the power they have within their professional relationships. It aids critical self-reflection on their understanding of ethical practice. Based on a human rights perspective and supporting the development of anti-oppressive practice grounded in social justice (IFSW, 2014), the framework can assist social work practitioners and students to consider how they are going to manage the complexity of practice and the power and powerlessness they will face.

The model explained

Approach to social work

In the top row is the title Approach to Social Work. Here social workers are asked to reflect on their attitude and beliefs with regard to the *purpose* of their *Professional* role and work. This critical self-reflection will assist a social worker to understand how their beliefs shape the manner in which they approach their work. From a social pedagogical orientation, and an anti-oppressive stance, social work is based on human rights, social justice, collaboration, and partnership working. This partnership working not only relates to other professionals but importantly with the individuals/families they are working alongside. Having a high level of legal and ethical literacy is vital in informing the understanding of the power a social work has and how this power can be used to build equitable relationships and promote positive life changes and increase well-being for the person/people being supported. As discussed above, social workers can be incredibly powerful and have high levels of formal power. It is therefore apposite that they critically reflect and 'examine how they conduct themselves when they hold greater power and how they can exercise their power without making the other person feel humiliated or at their mercy.' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 9). This links clearly to the *Personal* element of the 3 Ps. A willingness and ability to genuinely work collaboratively and alongside the individual and understand why this is fundamental to relationship-based and anti-oppressive practice. Using the *Private* to again reflect and check that they are not pushing forward their own ideas or agenda or believing that they know what is best in response to the situation and needs of the person they are supporting (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024).

It is also important to acknowledge within this element the powerlessness social workers can feel, and the narrow perspective often attributed to power; seeing it 'as a zero-sum game, in which one party only has power when the other party doesn't, gaining power requires taking someone else's power, and the only way to share power is by giving it up.' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 9). The impact of this can be that an

individual social worker can try and hold on to the limited power they feel they have, thus having a negative impact on their ability to build an equitable relationship. Having a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which power operates can shape power 'as a generative force that can spread in the same way that a candle's flame can light another candle without getting extinguished.' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 9).

A case illustration of this was experienced by the author during a tutorial with a student. The student was working as a social worker within an Adult Social Care team and was due to hold a statutory review meeting to re-assess a care package for a woman who had been assessed to be in the latter middle stages of dementia. According to staff in the care setting and the previous social worker, this woman had been assessed as lacking capacity. With what was perceived as limited communication, she was therefore not going to be present at the meeting. During the tutorial, the student asked how they could use a more social pedagogical approach to working with this woman. We discussed the student's standpoint and how they viewed their professional role. It became very apparent that they felt levels of ethical trespass (Featherstone & Gupta, 2018) and wanted to be more person-centered as well as upholding this woman's human rights. As a result, the student decided, much to the dismay of the other professionals and care staff, that the woman needed to be present, as decisions made in this meeting would have a direct impact on her life. The student believed and understood that the other professionals involved felt pushed for time and that this meeting would now be much longer and less straightforward. The woman attended the meeting and the student worked hard with care and compassion to find ways that the woman could communicate her wishes to them with regard to the key decisions being made. That she was able to understand these, allowing the student to gain more detailed understanding of what mattered to her. She thanked the student at the end, and this was the start of the student building a stronger relationship with her based on respect and decisions made with 'good authority'. As well as the student working in an anti-oppressive way that was an important aspect to what they saw as a key purpose of their work.

Needs

In the second row, the focus is very much on reflecting on *needs*, requiring social workers to ask *whose needs are being met?* Within the *Professional* element, there will be legal and organizational expectations and requirements placed on the social worker, such as assessment and legal timescales, organizational aims, and remits (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Being open and transparent about these are important. Taking a relationship-based and anti-oppressive approach (Tedam, 2021) to practice, using a person-centered way of working, means that the needs of the individual being supported will be the guiding focus. Social workers need to be able to reflect and have an awareness of their own needs in relation to the work which falls within the *Personal* element of the framework. How does a social worker marry the needs and person-centered way of working with the needs they have to meet the statutory and organizational requirements they have placed on them? This requires a high level of openness and transparency and the skills to build a supportive relationship with clear boundaries where each person is aware of their role and position within the relationship. One where there is an equitable balance of each other's needs (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024).

Using the *Private* element of the framework will assist the social worker to make sure that they are not pursuing their own needs. This is not always done in a malicious or controlling way, but out of a desire to help or assist people. A clear case illustration of this was explained to the author during a tutorial with a social work student. The student was halfway through their final placement and was explaining what work they had been involved with. They described spending 3 hours with a street sex worker where together they had developed a clear plan of what support and various actions the sex worker would take over the coming weeks. The student then explained their feelings of annoyance when the sex worker left the written plan on the table when they left the building, leaving the student feeling they had wasted their time. When I asked the student to consider who the plan was for, they reflected that in fact the plan had been more for them. They acknowledged that this was very much linked to their need to feel like they were doing things that were worthwhile and supporting people to make positive changes. After further discussion, the student realized that in fact, they had not wasted their time and that the sex worker had spent some valuable time with the student, who had clearly showed that they cared about them and their situation. This assisted the student to carry on developing a relationship with the sex worker, based on care and respect.

Power

The final row of the framework has a specific focus on power. Within this section social workers are prompted to consider the formal power dynamics that are present in their *Professional* role and their own understanding and practice of this formal power. This column asks that they consider the power base and types of power at play within their work (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Linking back to human right based and anti-oppressive approach to practice, the social worker must consider legal, policy, and organizational procedures that can be used to support their *Professional* practice. Aiding them to work in partnership, supporting individuals and families to become empowered and using advocacy skills as a professional method to their work (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024).

Within the *Personal*, social workers need to be critically aware of the informal power they may bring and how they use these to develop positive relationship-based practice based on anti-oppressive and human rights. Critical self-reflection as well as role modeling is required here as well as being able to work alongside (Petrie, 2020) and in partnership, whilst also being open to showing our flaws and limits to our knowledge and abilities (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Being able to sit comfortably with the fact that as social workers we do not have the solutions or answers to every problem. Sometimes the most important thing a social worker can do is be present, listen, and offer recognition to the person they are working alongside.

This then links to the *Private* element and the ability to become aware of any unconscious or uncritical use of power and privilege. Research by Fuchs et al. (2019) shows the importance of being critically aware of what they term *Advantage Blindness*. Being aware and understanding the bias that we hold but also the advantages and privileges that have assisted us in getting to the professional positions we hold. As they state 'Our research finds the idea of being advantaged to be uncomfortable for many senior leaders' (Fuchs et al., 2019). Even though their research relates to business leaders

the theory is beneficial as within the field of social work it can also be difficult to face and accept the privileges we may have. As with *Needs*, this lack of awareness or acceptance does not always come from a desire to misuse the power advantage gives us. A perfect case illustration of this comes from the author and their work as part of a co-produced project with a group of care experienced young people. Wanting to make the first on-line meeting with this group, interesting and engaging, the author used several on-line platforms and digital tools in planning the rough outline of the meeting. As the young people joined, the author realized that the majority were using their mobile phones, making it difficult for them to access the digital tools easily or at all. The author realized that she had not considered the advantages she had, such as good internet access and an up-to-date laptop all provided by the university she works at. This was not the same for the young people and so the session had to be quickly altered. Subsequently, the author reflected on the advantages she had and made sure that future sessions were equitable and not about her own needs. Thus, highlighting the importance of critical self-reflection and reflexivity within relationship-based practice.

Conclusion

To conclude, in acknowledgment of the importance of anti-oppressive and relationship-based practice, the power dynamics within these relationships is a critical aspect that needs to be explored and understood. Within formal educational settings and training courses where students and social workers are being taught about relationship-based practice, the reality of power needs to be covered in some detail. The author developed and has used the 3 Ps framework to aid teaching and create space to critically reflect and explore the issue of power, needs, and approach to social work with regard to relationship-based practice. The framework offers prompts in the *professional, personal,* and *private* domain, to aid individuals to reflect and consider their own relationship-based practice. The 3 Ps framework can be utilized as an aid, alongside other frameworks, by lectures and trainers as a teaching tool. A critical awareness of the types and bases of power can assist social workers and students to be more critically self-aware of how power operates within their everyday work. An understanding of the situational dynamics that can influence a base of power is important in raising awareness and limiting the negative impacts of these. Set against the complexity and uncertainty of the everyday direct work undertaken by social workers, the application of the 3 Ps framework can assist in developing this awareness and understanding, it can facilitate the use of power to work in more equitable and anti-oppressive ways using 'good authority' (Ferguson, et al. 2022). The author is also aware that there needs to be further evaluation of the effectiveness of the 3 Ps framework and that future research is required to assist in increasing the robustness of the framework. However, the author believes that the use of the Danish social pedagogical concept of the 3 Ps can support social workers and students to develop anti-oppressive practice, by assisting them to critically explore, reflect, and address the differing aspects of power at play when working with individuals and families.

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I'VE GOT THE POWER! A SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL EXPLORATION OF POWER DYNAMICS IN RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICE WITHIN PUBLIC SERVICES

Lowis Charfe

University of Central Lancashire, UK

ABSTRACT

In response to the impact of New Public Management (NPM), there is a growing awareness of the importance of relational leadership and practice in public services, with organizations looking for guidance and support in developing this. The expanding human learning system (HLS) network of people and organizations is an example of the breath of interest and commitment to service reform that places human flourish at its heart. To effectively develop relational leadership the uncomfortable issue of power must be surfaced and explored if ethical relational leadership is to be truly established. To aid this, I have developed a framework that expands the Danish social pedagogy model of the 3 Ps to assist relational leaders to address and challenge issues of power within relational working. This chapter sets out to explain how to apply this to the organizational context and direct work of public services so that there is more transparency around the inherent power that we navigate within our human relationships that are at the heart of all public services.

Keywords: Social pedagogy; relational public services; human learning systems; disempowerment; leadership; power dynamics; 3 Ps framework; professional self; personal self; private self

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INTRODUCTION

> One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love... We've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realisation that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love. Martin Luther King Junior (1967, cited in Leadbeater, 2020)

Over the last few years, there has been a refocusing on and reclaiming of relational practice and how it can be embedded within public services, from direct practice, organizational systems to organizational culture. The growing human learning systems (HLS) (Lowe & Pilmmer, 2019) network demonstrates the wide range of individuals, organizations, institutions and professional bodies looking for guidance and support on how to place relationships at the heart of what they do. This has been coupled with a growing awareness and discussions around the limited impact of New Public Management (NPM) to provide real service reform and improved outcomes for people receiving services within the public service sector (Worsley & Wylie, 2020). As Evans (2016) has rightly highlighted, poorly designed systems and processes have impacted and overshadowed any well-meaning and ethically based practice within the public sector. It is clear that there is a growing appetite to redesign and transform organizational systems and culture, as well as the day-to-day practice, within public services so that it is ethically rooted in supporting humans to flourish and helping people live a good life (Cottam, 2021; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2019).

This focus on how public services can become more 'human' (Lowe & Eichsteller, 2021) is fundamentally about reconnecting public services with their moral purpose and in doing so recognizing the importance of relationships. A part of the complex nature of this work is the inherent power dynamics contained within relational practice, which are often over-looked. This chapter's objective is to offer a contextual exploration of this issue while also answering the question of how the use of social pedagogy can assist in the development of relational leadership and practice, based on the HLS ethos of supporting human flourishing (Lowe et al., 2021). The HLS approach helps explain 'why' relational practice is important, and it is argued here that social pedagogy offers guidance on 'how' to develop this (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2021).

The contextual argument set out in this chapter concentrates on the use of the social pedagogical 3 Ps model. With the help of my colleague Gabriel Eichsteller, we have developed it to support critical exploration and a deeper understanding of how issues of power within relational leadership and practice can be addressed. Due to the relational element of power (Foucault, 2002; Reitz & Higgins, 2020), which is discussed further in this chapter, the application of this framework can be applied, not just to the everyday practice of public sector workers but also to the management structures and multi-agency work that takes place within these organizations.

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As this chapter puts forward an argument for the use of a Danish social pedagogical method, a brief explanation of social pedagogy and the synergies with the relational developments happening with public services is needed. Before I offer an explanation, I think it's important to highlight the point that, due to the manualized approach (Harbo & Kemp, 2020) embedded in NPM, people desire a clear, concise and defined explanation. The danger with defining social pedagogy and HLS in these terms often risks them being used in an 'instrumental' manner, which in turn continues the status quo and does not lead to challenging systems or supporting the radical change desired in these complex environments. To reflect the complexity of relational leadership and practice within the environment public services operate in, social pedagogy is also complex and multi-layered. In response to questions of how social pedagogy can address any given issue or circumstance the social pedagogues will often say 'it depends' (Charfe & Gardner, 2019).

To be clear from the start, social pedagogy is not a method or approach. It is an ethical, theoretical and practice orientation that embeds reflexivity, all of which shapes the way we understand and respond to the world around us (Charfe & Gardner, 2020; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). It differs from a paradigm (Lowe & McIntosh, 2023), even though it shares many of the same elements, as it is not a new shift in thinking but rather something that already has a long historical tradition in many European and Latin American cultures and societies (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). A more apt description is offered by Hämäläinen (1989) who states that social pedagogy is a meta-theory that can assist us to understand social issues through a relational and educational lens. Education here is understood in its broadest sense, and to use relational leadership and HLS (Lowe et al., 2021) terminology, we would see this as *learning*. Building on Hämäläinen's (1989) definition, Stephens (2013) offers the analogy of a lens, describing the social pedagogue as someone who views the world through the lens of social pedagogical values, thoughts and actions. It is therefore not a method that can be picked up and used in certain situations and disregarded in others but, rather, an approach that centres on deeply held beliefs, ethical, relational and theoretical practices. To return to Hämäläinen's (1989) assertion that social pedagogy is a meta-theory, he writes that within it, it also contains social pedagogical theories, concepts and methods that people who are not social pedagogues can utilize. For example, the 3 Ps model focused on in this chapter can be used in addressing power dynamics in relational practice even though someone using it may not fully understand social pedagogy or in fact be a social pedagogue.

In explaining social pedagogy further, we should understand two core elements. The first is the ability to work alongside and 'be with' people through relational practice. The second is the application of 'pedagogical solutions to social problems' (Stephens, 2013, p. 27), using educational (learning) approaches to develop individual, organizational and social change while promoting social justice. We can see here the synergies between social pedagogy and the arguments being put forward for relational working and reform within the public sector (Wilson et al., 2024). And it is because of these and the focus of social pedagogy on 'the deeper purpose of supporting wellbeing, learning and social inclusion and

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selecting or developing methods that contribute to these aims and seem meaningful within a given practice situation' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2021, p. 376): that I would argue social pedagogy has a lot to offer to the growing debate around relational leadership. The use of it in both theory and practice, alongside the HLS approach, can greatly enhance leadership and practice and assist in the cultivation of true relational leadership within public services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is already a wide range of published texts and research findings around the issue of power and relational leadership and practice, as well as organizational change. One of the first and most notable is the work of social psychologists French and Raven (1959), who identified five bases of power and argued that leadership and power are inextricably linked. They stated that the success of leadership can be linked to the different bases of power which influence leadership behaviour and communication (French & Raven, 1959). As a seminal piece of research, their work has formed the basis for further research developments in the field of organizational management and leadership studies. More contemporary studies include the work of Zhao et al. (2016), who explored the relation power base, which was added by Raven (1996 cited in Zhao et al., 2016) to the original five bases. Their research found evidence of direct and indirect relational power, and that leaders and managers that lacked positional power were often able to use relational power to deal with complex issues. They stated that 'the ability to develop good interpersonal relationships with others becomes the most essential quality a leader needs' (Zhao et al., 2016, p. 526). They also stressed that more research was needed to assist in understanding how relational power operates in different settings, countries and cultures. 'Speaking Truth to Power', the 5-year study by Megan Reitz and John Higgins (2017, 2019) looked at power dynamics within organizations and found that power is very much alive in public service organizations and that it continues to silence staff at the cost of 'relationships, creativity, engagement and performance' (Reitz & Higgins, 2020, p. 270). As a result of this lack of performance, and, as argued for by Wilson et al. (2024), there is a growing case for the need to move from the *transactional* nature of public services to the *relational*. Within the current research, the discussions and developments around relational public service reform focus on the issue of shared power and decision-making (Cottam, 2021; Glover, 2023; Lent & Studdert, 2021; Lowe et al., 2021a; New Public Alliance, 2020). While this continues to be highlighted as important, it overlooks the issue of power dynamics and how to address these within the more direct and relational aspects of public service leadership and practice.

For clarity, when the term 'power' is used in this chapter, I will be using the theory put forward by Foucault's (2002). His theory is useful in critically analyzing, exploring and understanding power in the context of relational leadership within public services. There is a varied field of academic discussion and competing theories around power (Karim, 2023). These include such postmodern

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theorists like Lukes (2005) who conjectures that it is importance to understand the source of power, which he claims comes from three key elements: decision-making, agenda setting and thought control. In contrast, 'Foucault (1982) regards power as relational and fluid in its manifestation rather than something which is possessed and exercised' (Karim, 2023, p. 1062). Foucault (2002) maintains that power is a core element of all human relationships and that it is ever present in all relationships no matter a person's position within a social structure (Gilbert & Powell, 2010; Taylor, 2014). For Foucault (2002), certain groups or socioeconomic classes within society do not hold all the power. He argues that this belief is a misconception and that in actual fact 'power circulates via a myriad of social networks penetrating deep into the far corners of social life playing out its effects through the everyday interactions of autonomous individuals' (Gilbert & Powell, 2010, p. 6). This can be clearly seen in the *systems* element (Lowe & Pilmmer, 2019) within the HLS paradigm. This element of HLS also acknowledges the complex web of relationships that form the systems that we operate within and that it is these relationships that shape the outcomes sought (Lowe et al., 2021). It is this acknowledgement of the centrality of relationships within Foucault's theoretical perspective of power that underpins the contextualized standpoint of the extension to the 3 Ps model we have developed (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024) to assist in exploring power (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Using a social pedagogical methodology, the connection between theory and practice is of utmost significance when working with complexity and social change. As Freire (1970) highlighted, knowledge, dialogue and action inform critical reflection that pushes forward transformational change in society. He termed this as *praxis* (Freire, 1970) and the 3 Ps model is a reflexive praxis model aimed at expanding knowledge through open dialogue that assists in evolving an individual's direct practice.

The 3 Ps Model Explained

The 3 Ps (Jappe, 2010) is a Danish social pedagogical model that is widely used by social pedagogues to consider and develop appropriate boundaries within their relational practice. The concept has three aspects: the *professional*, *personal* and *private* (Charfe & Gardner, 2019; Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024; Jappe, 2010). The *professional* relates to the role and remit we have within the relationship; while the *personal* aspect assists critical self-reflection about what parts of ourselves, we bring into relational practice; finally, the *private* sets out what aspects of ourselves we are not going to share as we navigate complex and ethical relational practice. The 3 Ps model supports the development of authentic relationships by exploring the nuances and boundaries between our professional self and the *use of self*; which parts of the our personality and private life do we share to help form

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authentic, genuine, supportive and caring relationships (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). For a more detailed explanation, you can read more about the 3 Ps model ThemPra's website (https://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/key-concepts-in-social-pedagogy/the-3-ps/).

From a social pedagogical perspective, the centrality of relational practice is key, but for me, this starts with the mindset and value base of the individual – what we call Haltung in social pedagogy (Charfe & Gardner, 2019; Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011). To read more about Haltung, go to the ThemPra webiste (https://www.thempra.org.uk/social-pedagogy/key-concepts-in-social-pedagogy/haltung-in-social-pedagogy/). As can be seen from the literature written about relational leadership and practice, when it comes to power, the focus is often on the structures and *how* power operates. To take the public sector field of social work as an example, there have been several models and frameworks (Karim 2023; Tedam, 2021; Tew, 2006; Thompson, 2006) aimed at assisting individuals to understand power dynamics. These all focus on how power operates either broadly within society or the systems professionals work within. In contrast and to return to the importance of mindset, we (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024) have expanded the 3 Ps model to focus on critically reflecting on positionality and power (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Underpinned by standpoint theory (Hall, 2020), the expansion of the 3 Ps model we've created explores and delves deeper with a more distinctively personal understanding of how our own social and political experiences have shaped our views and use of power. The framework facilitates more reflexive thinking which England (1994, p. 244) describes as 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self'.

Using the methodology of reflective conversations (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), the 3 Ps framework has been used as a teaching method in lectures and training sessions. Creating a space and offering navigation point (Jensen, 2018) to guide the discussions around an individual's understanding of power. Again, reflecting the key point within social pedagogy and HLS that relational leadership and practice operate within complexity and therefore a manualized (Harbo & Kemp, 2020) and instrumental approach limits the ability to radically change practice, systems and organizational culture. The 3 Ps is a contextualized framework that is not based on normative or prescriptive decision-making, but rather hermeneutic understanding (Keane & Lawn, 2015). The discussions and reflective conversations have helped students and participants to think about their understanding of power but also how they are going to adapt their practice to address power imbalances and work in more equitable ways within their relational leadership and practice.

DISCUSSION

The 3 Ps Framework in Practice

Reitz and Higgins (2020, p. 271) state: 'To be interested in others is more than a technical skill, it involves a specific life philosophy – a fundamental curiosity and humility. A commitment to "power with or for" rather than "power over".

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Utilizing Gadamer's hermeneutics theory (Keane & Lawn, 2015) supports the curiosity and understanding that Reitz and Higgins (2020) state is important to move beyond the technical. We have kept the three headings of *professional*, *personal and private* as these are an important part of exploring our understanding of power through a relational lens. We often have power and authority within our *professional* roles which at times is certainly linked to our position within an organization. We have authority to enact and enforce laws and policies, to assess people and their situations, to command actions and determine outcomes. Within the *personal* aspect of the 3 Ps, we also have our own views on the role and remit of the job we do and the way that we apply the power and authority we have to certain situations. I would argue that the *private* domain is the most important when it comes to relational leadership and practice. As human beings, our first reaction to a situation often stems from the *private* feelings we have, and they will cloud or direct the *professional* response we give. It is this domain along with the *personal* that helps us to develop the conscious application of relational leadership and the positive direct use of power that we have (Zhao et al., 2016).

Let's now look in more detail at each of the sections outlined in the Table 1 (translated by Harbo, 2010, adapted and expanded from Jappe, 2010 and cited in Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024) below:

Approach to Public Service Work

In the top row is the title approach. Here, practitioners are asked to reflect on their attitude and beliefs in the purpose of their *professional* role and the work they do. What do they think are the important aspects of their job? Why do they come to work? This critical self-reflection assists us to understand how our beliefs shape the manner in which we approach our work. If you believe your *professional* purpose is to support human flourishing, to help people live a good life then that will influence the view of the work you do and how you interpret and

Table 1. The 3 Ps (Professional, Personal and Private) of Self.

	Professional Self	Personal Self	Private Self
Approach (To public service work)	Rights based Human rights Multi-disciplinary Relational	Eagerness to collaborate and work in partnership with. Understanding the need to walk alongside somebody.	Pursuing our own agenda. Thinking that we know best due to our professional position.
Needs	Others	Others/Own	Own
Power	Formal authority. Critical self-reflection and awareness of power dynamics and structures. Empowerment, co-production, and advocacy as professional methods.	Informal authority and self-awareness/role modelling. Ability to connect equality as human-to human. Humility, owning human flaws.	Unconscious and uncritical uses of power and privilege. Advantage blindness (Fuchs et al., 2019) Wanting to rescue people – drama triangle. Incongruence

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understand your remit and role. A positive example of this can be seen in the work of Changing Futures Northumbria and the liberated method they use (see Example of Practice, HLS, 2024). Their two Rules and five Principles (Smith et al., 2025) sets out the very clear purpose of the work they do, which has been translated into direct relational leadership within all aspects of the team and their direct practice. There is a commitment to relational practice, and as an organization, they provide all staff with support to meaningfully embed this *professional* approach into their direct practice, moving from the transactional and bureaucratic, to a relational way of working. With regards to staff recruitment, they focus on the knowledge and skills a person has and not on how well a person may fill the caseworker role (Example of Practice, HLS, 2024). This links clearly to the *personal* element of the 3 Ps; a willingness and ability to genuinely work collaboratively and alongside the individual, which is key to a building, maintaining and sustaining trusting relationships. We need to reflect on our ability to work in partnership and check out our understanding of this and how that might change depending on circumstances and with different relationship we have. With regards to relational leadership, as Reitz and Higgins (2020) highlight that this also requires an awareness of how others interpret our role and the expectations they might have of us. How these expectations might affect openness to collaboration and work in partnership with others who might see leadership in hierarchical terms. The *private* domain prompts us to reflect and check that we are not pushing forward our own ideas or agenda or believing that we know what best to do in answer to the situation and needs of the person we are supporting (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). This is key in being open to work in truly relational ways and can be challenging for relational leaders who may have outcomes and deadlines to meet as well as organizational and external pressures.

Needs

The second row emphasizes the necessity to reflect on *needs*, requiring practitioners and relational leaders to ask *whose needs are being met?* Within the *professional* element, the purpose of public services is to be public servants and meet the needs of the people we support. In a very honest account, Mike Crowther the CEO of Empowerment (an advocacy project based in Blackpool) highlights the negative impact of not reflecting on this question with regards to the *professional* aspect of the work (Crowther, 2021). He emphasizes the limited impact and lack of positive change made to the lives of the people he and his organization were supporting, as well as the unhappiness of working in ways that were incongruent to what the perceived approach and focus of the work was. As Laloux (2016) highlights in his research around self-managed teams and TEAL organizations, the focus of command and control in NPM does not lend itself to towards helping the staff to flourish, knowing that they are not meeting the moral purpose of their work.

This links to relational leaders and practitioners being able to reflect and have an awareness of their own needs in relation to their work which is focused on in the *personal* domain of the framework. There will be legal and organizational

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expectations and requirements placed on them depending on which area of the public service they work within. This will include things such as assessment and legal timescales, organizational aims and remits. Being open and transparent about these is important. But there will also be much more personal needs that a relational leader will have, such as being in a position to find solutions and answers to problems, being on time for meetings, etc. This section asks questions such as how do they manage their needs with a relational way of working while also meeting the needs they have in adhering to the statutory and organizational requirements that are placed on them? This requires a high level of openness and transparency and the skills to build a supportive relationship with clear boundaries where each person is aware of their role and position within the relationship, and there is an equitable balance of each other's needs (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Using the *private* domain of the framework will assist practitioners to make sure that they are not pursuing their own needs. This is not always done in a malicious or controlling way but out of a desire to help or assist people.

Power

The final row of the framework has a specific focus on power. Within this section, relational leaders and practitioners are prompted to consider the formal power dynamics that are present in their *professional* role. What is their own understanding of these, and how does it influence their practice? This column asks that they consider the power contained within the formal authority they have such as enacting and enforcing laws and policies, assessing people (including staff) and their situations, to command actions and determine outcomes (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Being able to have high levels of legal and ethical literacy that then inform their understanding of the power and authority they have linked to a leadership position and role is vital. Relational leaders and practitioners need to be able to use legal powers to build equitable relationships and promote positive life changes and increase well-being for the person/people being supported, as well as their own staff team. Relational leaders and practitioners can be incredibly powerful and have high levels of formal authority and power. It is therefore apposite that they critically reflect and 'examine how they conduct themselves when they hold greater power and how they can exercise their power without making the other person feel humiliated or at their mercy' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 137).

It is also important to acknowledge within this domain, the powerlessness public sector workers and leaders can feel, and the narrow perspective often attributed to power; seeing it 'as a zero-sum game, in which one party only has power when the other party doesn't' and that 'gaining power requires taking someone else's power, and the only way to share power is by giving it up' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 137). The impact of this way of thinking can be that an individual practitioner may try and hold on to the limited power they feel they have, thus negatively impacting further on their ability to build an equitable relationship. Having a more in depth understanding of the ways in which power operates can shape power 'as a generative force that can spread in the same way

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that a candle's flame can light another candle without getting extinguished' (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024, p. 137). An excellent example of how this can become a reality can be seen in the Brent Care Journeys Example of Practice (HLS, 2024). This was a 'pioneering strategic alliance between Barnardo's and the local authority of Brent (London)' aimed to develop a systemic change within the children looked after and leaving care system (Brent Care Journeys, HLS, 2024). The power structures alive within the care system in England is complex and multi-dimensional; from the tension between statutory services within local authorities and the third sector; commissioning of services to multi-agency working. Finally, and most importantly, the disempowerment of children and young people within the looked after system (Wood & Selwyn, 2017). To challenge these inherent power differences, Brent Care Journeys first recognized that systemic change only happens when people with lived experience have more power and agency. They created situations and environments where there were flatter power structures to help share power and authority and did this by using the focus of 'learning' and the conscious use of empowering language. All expertise and knowledge were seen as equal when developing systemic change. There was also total transparency about who was/is powerful, and they were brave enough to 'disrupt and redress this' (Brent Care Journeys, HLS, 2024). They did this by making conscious efforts to place lived experience at the core of their team, so they could shape the direction of the work.

Moving on to the *personal* domain, relational leaders and practitioners need to be critically aware of the informal power they may bring and how they use these to develop positive relational practice based on anti-oppressive and human rights (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). Critical self-reflection is required here as well as being able to work alongside (Petrie, 2020) and in partnership while also being open to showing our flaws and limits to our knowledge and abilities (Charfe & Eichsteller, 2024). We need to be able to sit comfortably with the fact that as public sector workers, we do not need or have the solutions or answers to every problem. Sometimes, the most important thing a practitioner can do is be present, listen and offer recognition to the person they are working alongside. Again, referring back to Brent Care Journeys (HLS, 2024), we can see this action and the positive systemic changes that happened as a result. A relational approach to address issues of relational power that helped them redefined boundaries as 'care' that meant the project team used their personal skills to develop clear, fair, safe, warm, trustworthy and accountable relationships. But the most important part was the *personal* ability and awareness of each team member to 'place themselves in situations that are uncertain' and be able to 'own this characteristic' (Brent Care Journeys, HLS, 2024). This requires individuals to understand and return to the shared purpose of the work focusing on their understanding of the 'why' (Sinek, 2019) they are doing what they are doing while avoiding reverting to hierarchical positions and using their power to make decisions when situations become difficult. Also paying attention to unity and well-being was important and being able to acknowledge this on a personal level, which then was supported by the relational leaders and relational activism (Brent Care Journeys, HLS, 2024). As previously mentioned with regards to the *private* domain of the 3 Ps, this often shapes the instant reactions or thoughts we have to a

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situation or person. Constant self-refection on the feelings we have with regards to power and our responses to it is important in relational leadership. This aspect of the 3 Ps supports us to become more aware of any previous unconscious or uncritical use of power and privilege. Being aware and understanding the biases that we hold, but also the advantages and privileges that have assisted us in getting to the professional positions we hold, is key. As with *Needs*, this lack of awareness or acceptance does not always come from a desire to misuse the power advantage gives us. However, we do need to be much more aware of these privileges and make sure that we do not continue to allow entrenched power dynamics to carry on existing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

To move from the transactional approach in public services to a relational one that supports not only the people who receive services, but also the staff that work within these, is complex, uncertain but also exciting. And, I would argue, morally justified. As I've discussed in this chapter, power dynamics within relational leadership and practice must be surfaced and addressed if there is to be lasting positive change within the public sector. Where do we start and what have we learnt from organizations and relational leaders so far? What do relational leaders need to do to address power? It's challenging and complex, but here are what I believe are the two most important starting points.

First is the importance of mindset and an awareness of the values that support the moral purpose of public services. As discussed in the *professional* domain of the 3 Ps, we have to be able to reflect and be transparent and open about what we understand the moral purpose of our work to be, or, as Sinek (2019) states, 'the why'. There must be a wiliness to keep returning to this as our navigation point, the stake in the ground that tethers us to our moral purpose. There should be an understanding of and a commitment to the need for transparency and openness about the power and authority we have. This understanding should be used when trying to shape positive systemic change and create real meaningful opportunities for collaboration with people who have lived expertise of public services. Therefore, from a *personal* perspective, our own mindset matters, and how we understand what is meant by relational leadership, relationship-based practice, collaboration and power will all shape how we enact these in our practice.

One of the risks and dangers is that relational leadership becomes the newest fad and trend and a phrase that is used without real relational action. The incongruence between positive mission statements and aims with the reality of what is experienced by somebody using a public service is a well-known frustration. Therefore, the moral purpose and ethics of relational practice have to be felt and experienced in the way relational leaders support their staff to embed this into their everyday direct work and organizational structures. Having an open mindset and a belief in being able to work in collaboration with people, sharing power and using power for positive means, is a fundamental starting point. The ethics and values of relational practice have to be felt in the direct work at every level. Therefore, the recruitment of people who not only have this value base and

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mindset but also are able to embed this into their work is essential. The 3 Ps framework has been designed to assist reflective conversations to begin this process.

The second and final recommendation recognizes the different and complex nature of public services and that, because the *context* of the work matters, it is difficult to highlight certain infrastructures, resources and approaches without it becoming yet another tool kit or manual. Therefore, what needs to happen is much more reflexive thought and actions, relational leaders need to pay attention to the relational and power dynamics (good and bad) throughout every aspect of an organization and system. Focusing on relational spaces where the use of relational practice can be supported and nurtured while addressing issues of power and authority. Relational leaders need to be aware of the everyday examples of power that are inherent within organizations, examples such as seating, the language used and where the work takes place (in communities), and how to flatten these power structures.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter argues the key to change is making sure that any organizational system, policy and procedure is viewed through a relational lens asking the following questions:

- How does this support and nurture relational practice and who's needs are being met?
- Who is missing from the conversation and being part of the organizational changes and how do we make sure they are genuinely included?

Finally, an important aspect of this that has been highlighted by some of the HLS Examples of Practice is the importance of coaching and/or supervision at all levels to protect and foster relational practice. Having spaces where open dialogue and learning can happen that then shapes the direct practice and system changes is key and this needs to happen at all levels of an organization. To support both of these key recommendations, this chapter has expanded and developed Jappe's (2010) 3 Ps model to help people not only begin discussions but also address the importance of power in shaping their own relational leadership and practice. Because as we know, with power comes great responsibility.

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