

Chapter 18

HLS themes: Systems leadership in HLS

Systems leadership in HLS

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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	<p>Examples: a service commissioner; senior management team member in a local authority; CEO of a small charity</p> <p>Roles</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Examples: CEO of a local authority; VCS representative on strategic partnership</p> <p>System stewardship roles</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

	<p>Lower</p> <p>Examples: team members; practitioners; head of service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Examples: VCOs; social activists and campaigners; local businesses; anchor institutions</p> <p>System stewardship roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
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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 deliberately. 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

Human Learning Systems meets social pedagogy

How a social pedagogical perspective can bring HLS to life

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“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?

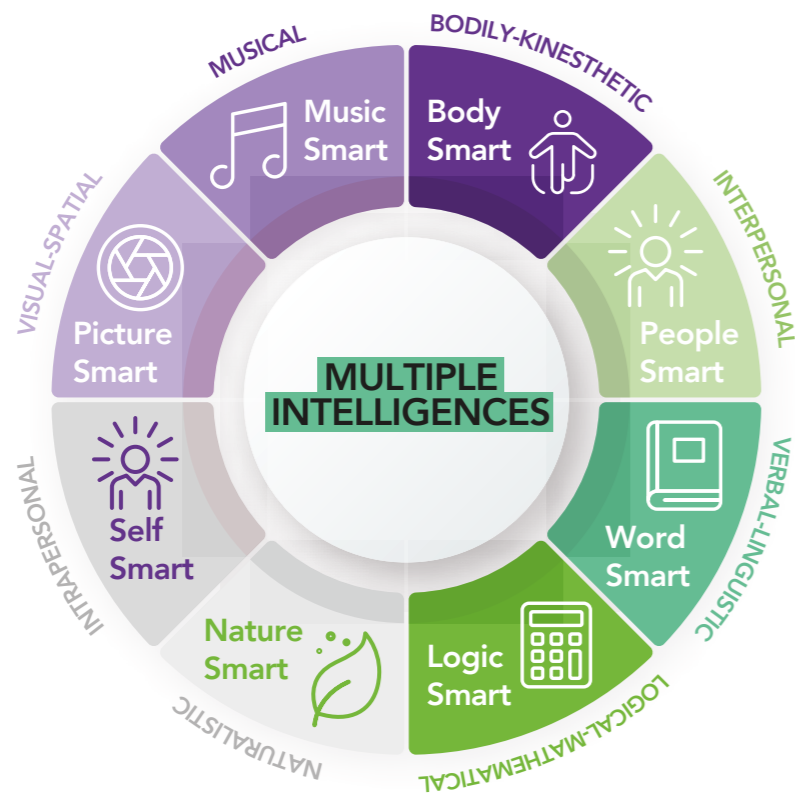
This requirement to "reflect in action and on action" (Donald Schön) and to be inquisitive and professionally curious helps us develop a deeper understanding, recognise the different contexts, explore assumptions, judgments and possibilities, and create change. Reflexive practice supports us in sensing 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.

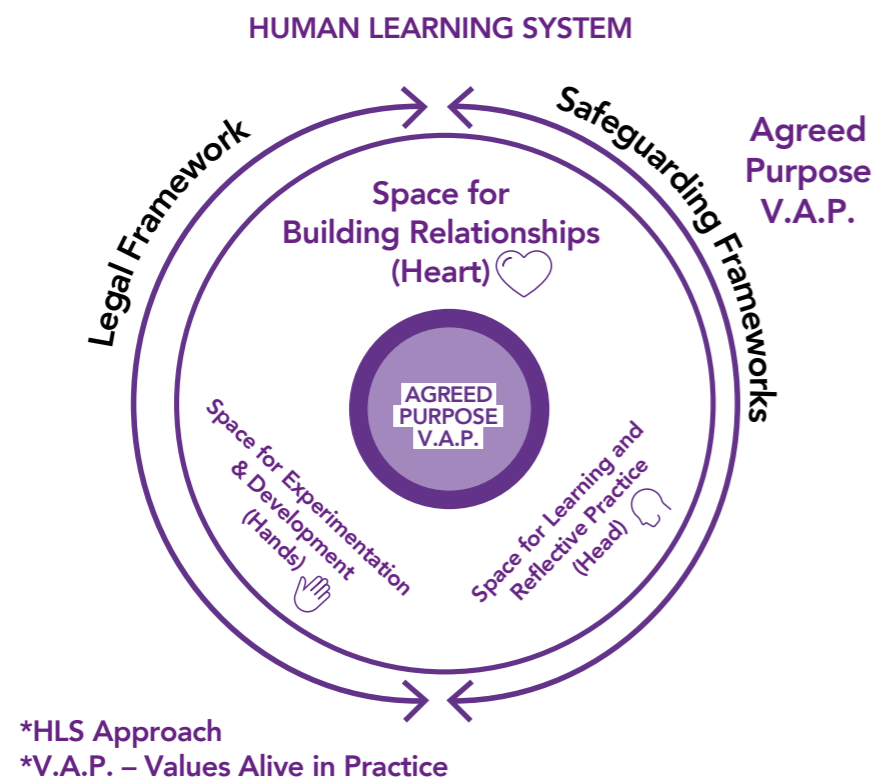
Social pedagogical practice can encourage the establishment of healthier systems that increase

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.

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.

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).

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

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.

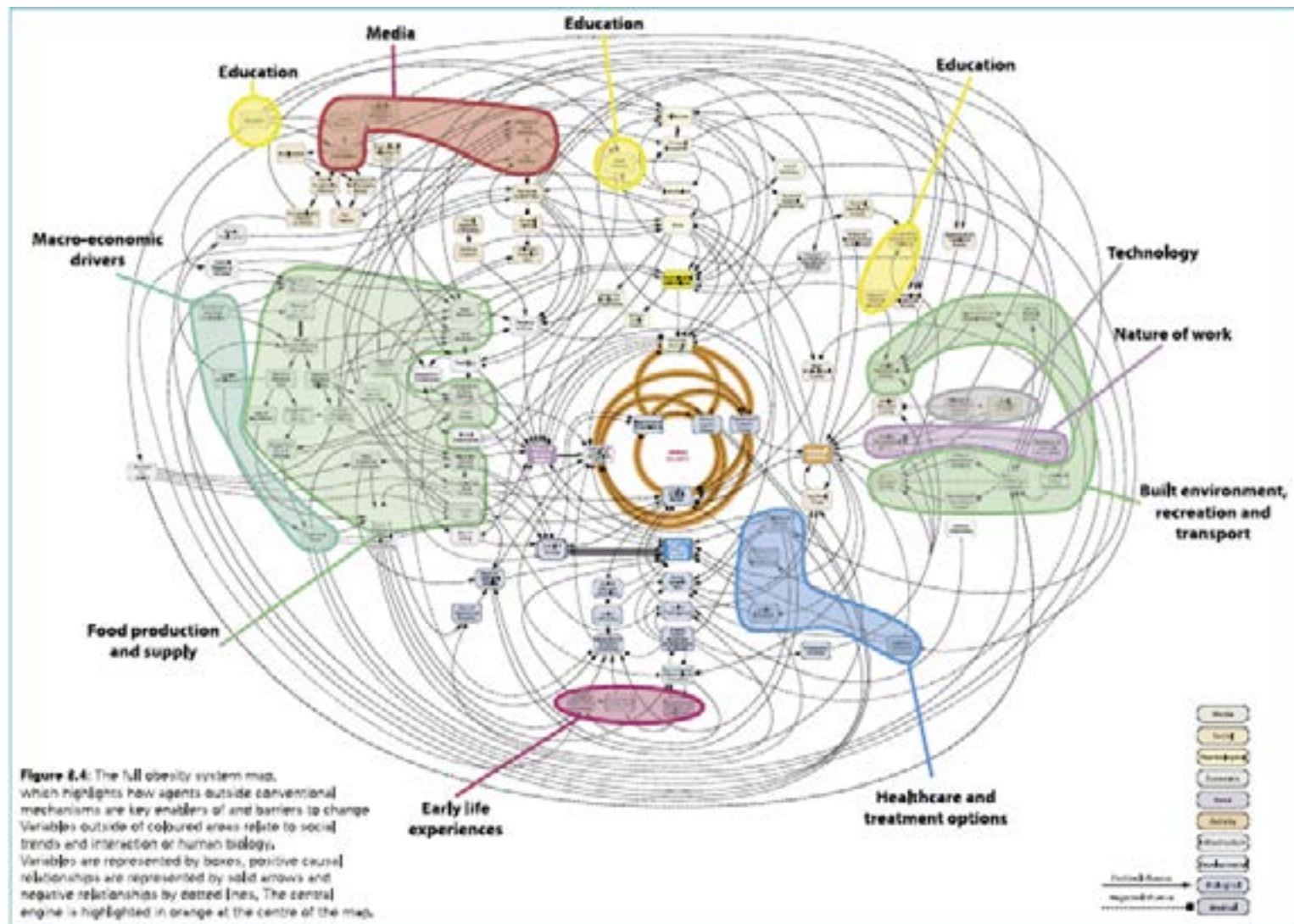


Figure 1: systems map of obesity

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:

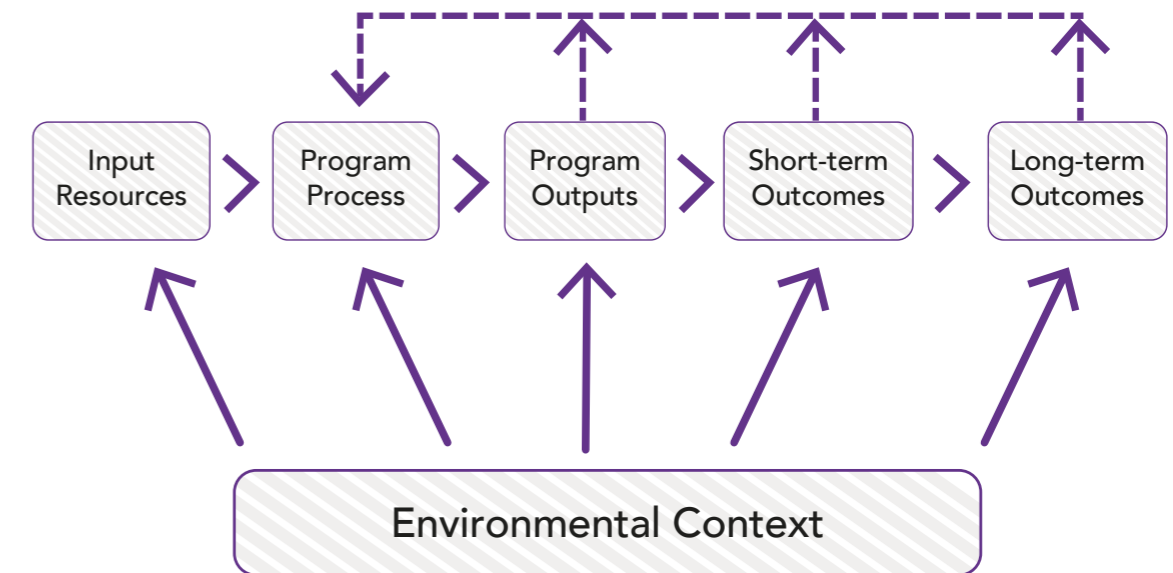
Figure 2: A programme logic model

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

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:

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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

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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