

Human, Learning, Systems + Likewise

From individuals to eco-systems



Likewise

7 minutes to:

- * Briefly introduce us
- * Sharing our journey as a learning organisation
- * Annotating how HLS has given the confidence to scale up our approach
- * Magically revealing that what applies in the context of supporting people with serious mental illness applies to EVERYONE



Who are Likewise?

- * Sex workers and homelessness (1980's) to health and social care (today) via time banking, community centres, and all that jazz
- * Learning, doing, belonging



Learning in the support work

- * Space for unpredictability, complexity
- * Avoiding assumptions – seeing the full human
- * Power sharing and mutual challenge
- * Supported by structures



Covid changes everything

- * From inward to outward
- * From reluctant co-operator to active collaborator
- * Took on the learning role
- * Used HLS as grounds for confidence in our approach...

Learning in the system

déjà vu?

- * Space for unpredictability, complexity
- * Avoiding assumptions – seeing the full human
- * Power sharing and mutual challenge
- * Supporting structures – trickier



Intro

HLS, and particularly this new iteration, has given us more confidence in applying what we do with the people we support to what we do with the system. As we go, have a listen for how the things I talk about in terms of support work in mental health apply to the areas you work in. The resonance, I hope, will be as apparent for you as it has been for us.

Context - where we started, what we do now, how we've started working systemically - and how that gives us confidence in the scaling of learning practices.



Learning 1 - Individual

We realised, a good few years ago, that learning was central to good support work. It just makes sense. Fundamental - the learning mindset is the only one that makes space for **unpredictability and complexity** of each individual. Gives you space to pick up on things you might not have otherwise seen, gives client space to surprise you. Gives you a chance to understand their meaning-world, rather than imposing your own.

Key element of this is in **not making assumptions**. It's very, very easy to do this, especially with people. Sex workers, schizophrenic, refugees - host of labels that cloud reality. Learning keeps you open to the breadth of that reality, helps you find the space for change, for moving away from that label or, where people are attached to the label, to expanding it.

Deal with **power imbalances**. Gives the other person things to bring the table - genuine **mutuality** - allows for more agency and decision-making with the person who knows best - the person living their reality. This does not mean not challenging - **each perspective has value**. What's important is that perspectives are shared, rather than one dominating another.

Humans get bored if they do the same thing over and over again. They also get lazy, cuz our brains are designed to minimise expended energy. We become increasingly unable to recognise new patterns. Prioritising the learning mentality, and building in **structures to support learning** - reflection, supervision, ongoing learning spaces - somewhat compensates for that. Variability, noise - bringing in volunteers another members of staff into a relationship. Recruiting for learning.



Covid

Covid comes in and shakes everything up. Move from being suspicious of commissioners and NHS actors, to deep collaboration and genuinely liking them through a joint-response project. Volunteered to hold learning/evaluation (people really liked it, treated it as if it was genius when in fact all it is is talking to people). And we learnt...



Learning 2 – Systemic lens

It's all exactly the same, just a different context - *because we're still dealing with humans.*

Accepting the complexity of the system - not as a big bad monolith, but this Jackson Pollock of moving parts, each one with strengths and weaknesses, perspectives we can learn from and be surprised by. Not us sitting outside being all holier-than-thou, but us in it, learning, being open. being vulnerable.

Assumptions about commissioners - were wrong! Understanding the complexity of their realities - in particular the pressures, incentives - allows us to re-humanise, build relationships, and gives each partner space to understand the others meaning-world. As soon as this is limited, the whole thing starts creaking. All about closeness and humanity.

Power imbalances - commissioners repeatedly and actively giving us permission to bring ourselves to the table; AND challenging us where our thinking doesn't align with structural realities, or bringing in the value of more psychological perspectives.

Learning structures - these are harder, unless active resource is given - still in a world where resource is tied to doing. Doing doesn't work without a lot of resource given to learning, and the kind of learning that requires trust.

