



Centre for
Public Impact

A BCG FOUNDATION

Human Learning Systems:

public service for the real world

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collaborate
for social change

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INC

IVAR

 **Northumbria**
University
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ThemPra Social Pedagogy
Community Interest Company

Overview

- You have a choice about how you do public management
- If it feels wrong right now, you can change it





And 35 other people and organisations!



A definition

Public service: purposeful work that
supports **human freedom and flourishing**

(Public service isn't a sector)

*Do you have a **feeling** that there is something wrong with the way that public service supports human freedom and flourishing?*



Our explanation

It feels wrong because it is.

It's not you.

You're not a bad worker/manager/leader.

We have a **public management problem.**

Public Management

How public service is planned and organised

The current public management paradigm

New Public Management: “Markets, Managers, Metrics”

Metrics: social intervention objectives must be measurable

Managers: We create a class of workers whose job it is to test whether desired objectives are being achieved

Markets: The best way to achieve value for money in meeting these objectives is to get organisations to compete to deliver desired metric data

(a fraction of) the evidence

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

A 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*).

NPM creates a simplified fantasy world in which the abstractions of data points substitute for the complex reality of life

Performance data that is routinely gamed

Plans that people know won't happen

Budgets that don't reflect reality

Worst of all: it treats the people we serve as data points, not as full human beings

Two stories

“I knew it couldn’t be the Council, because they offered to help.”

“You realise that we just make this cost information up, right?”



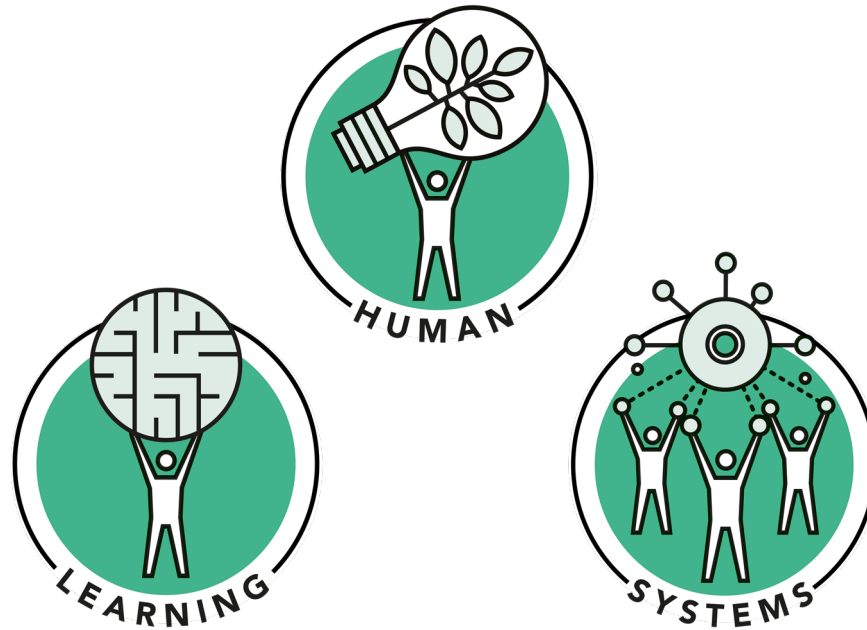
The most important message from our work

You have a **choice**.

If you're experiencing the failures of NPM,
you can choose to do public management differently

Start by **embracing the complexity of the real world**.





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Learning from doing

48 case studies of HLS in practice
29 created specially for this report

From local voluntary sector organisations to national governments

We know what an alternative approach to public management looks like, **because we have seen these people do it.**

Our knowledge is incomplete
So much still to learn.





Fundamental beliefs of Human Learning Systems (HLS)

- The purpose of public service is to promote human freedom and flourishing.
- To understand a human being is to see them in the complex web of relationships that is their lives.

Consequences of these beliefs:

- Only we have the right to determine outcomes in our lives
- Outcomes are created by all the “actors and factors” in my life



The reality of how outcomes are made

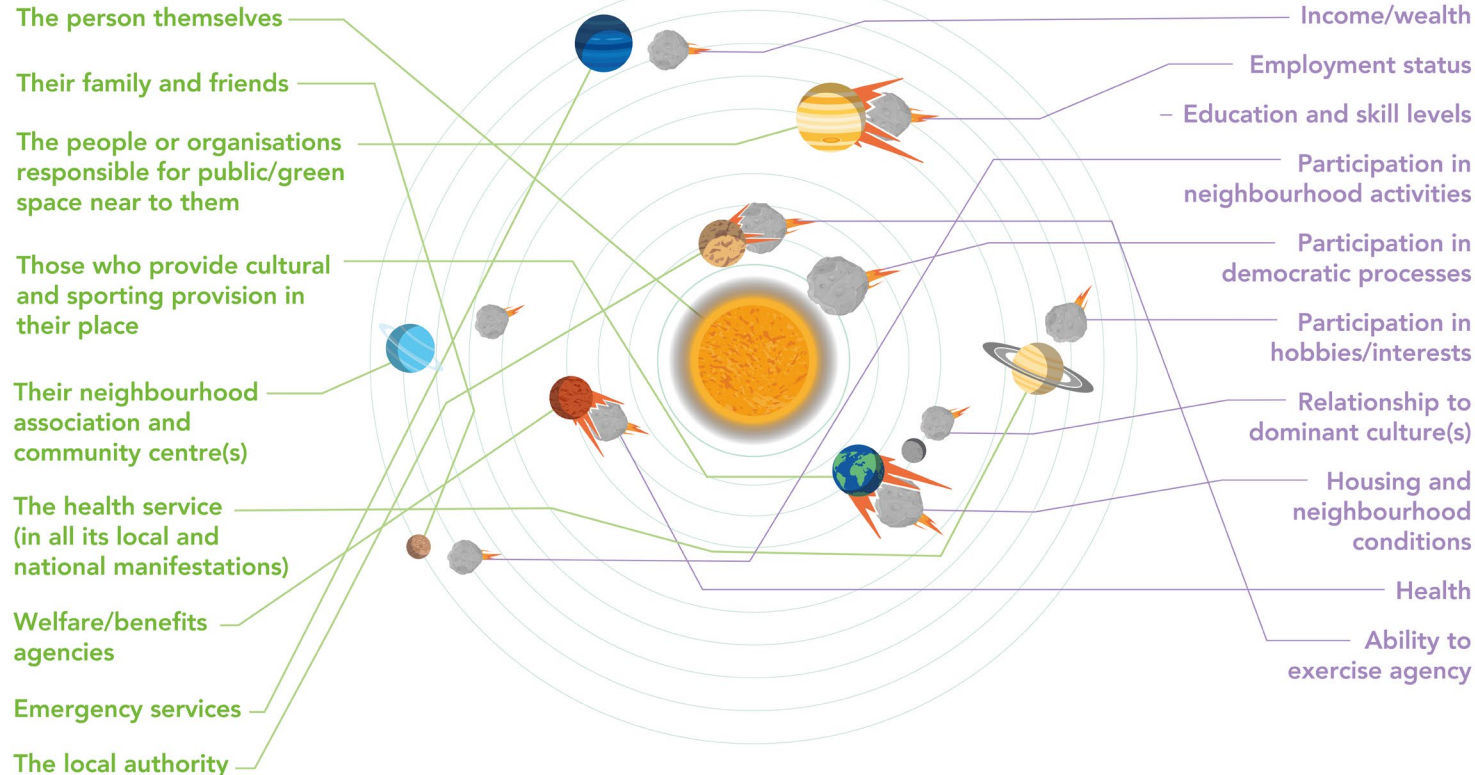
- If we want public service to help create human flourishing (“outcomes”) then we need to understand the reality of how an outcome is created.
- An outcome is the product of the interaction of all the “actors and factors” in a life



Actors and factors which could constitute someone's "life as a system" that creates the outcome of wellbeing (or not)

Actors

Factors



Human public service



'Human' provides the moral purpose of public service



Human public service starts from the **reality of the life of each person**



Human public service is based on **strong relationships** & is **bespoke by design**



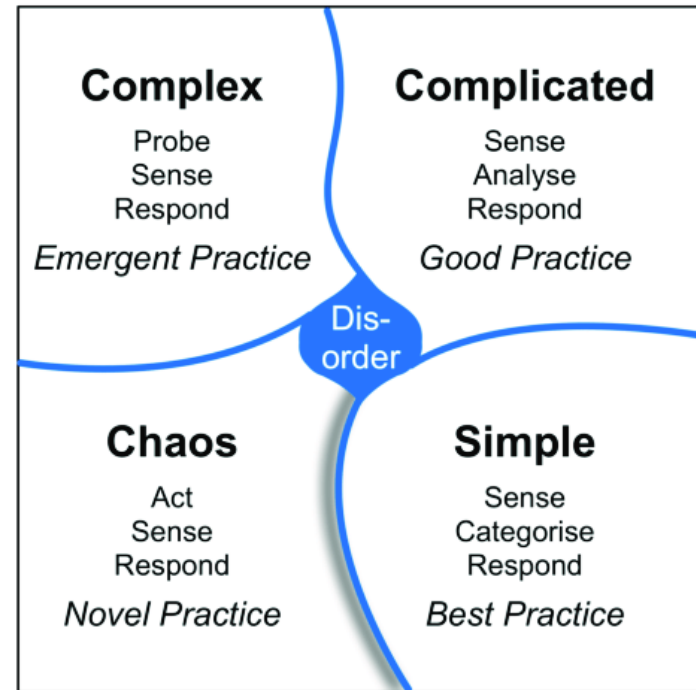


Learning is the management strategy for
public service

How do we manage to help create positive outcomes?

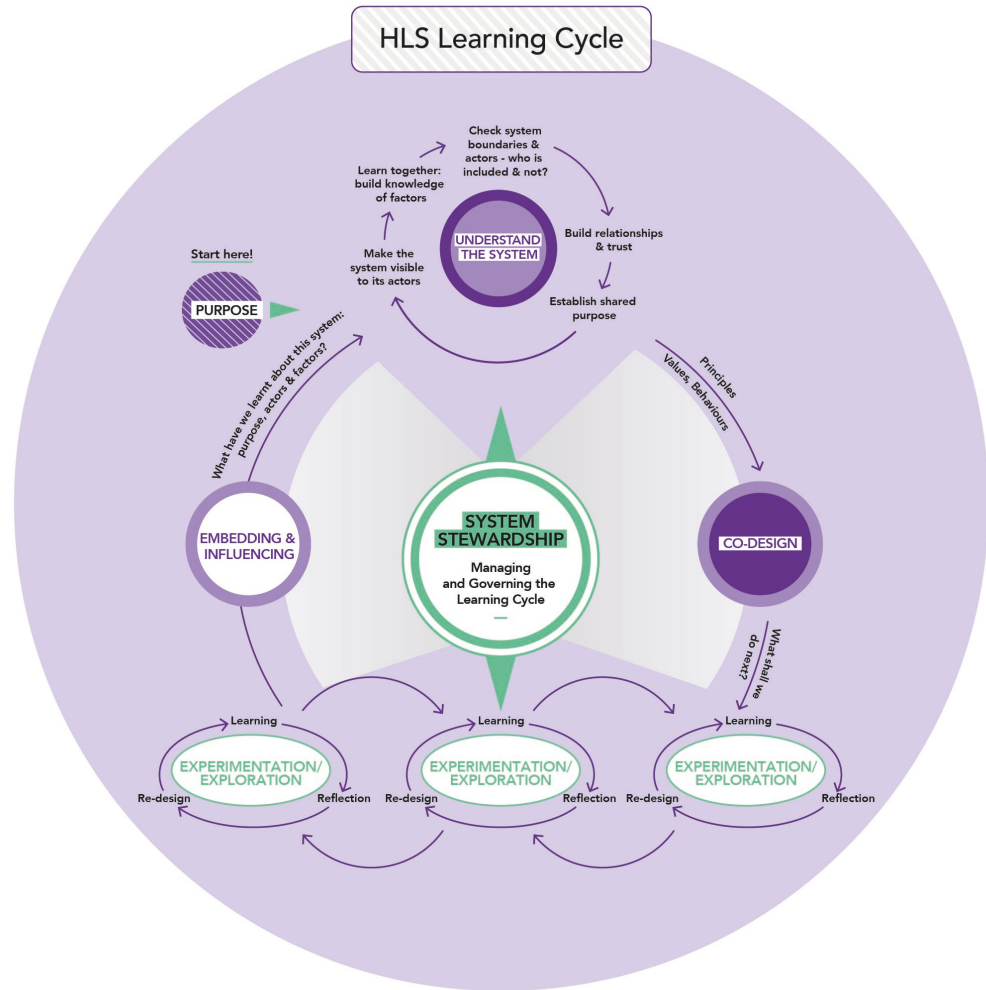
Creating an outcome is complex:

- Each person's life is different
- What counts as an outcome is different
- The way an outcome is made is different
- It changes over time



How could we help someone who experiences chronic pain?

Running a Learning Cycle with each person = Bespoke public service





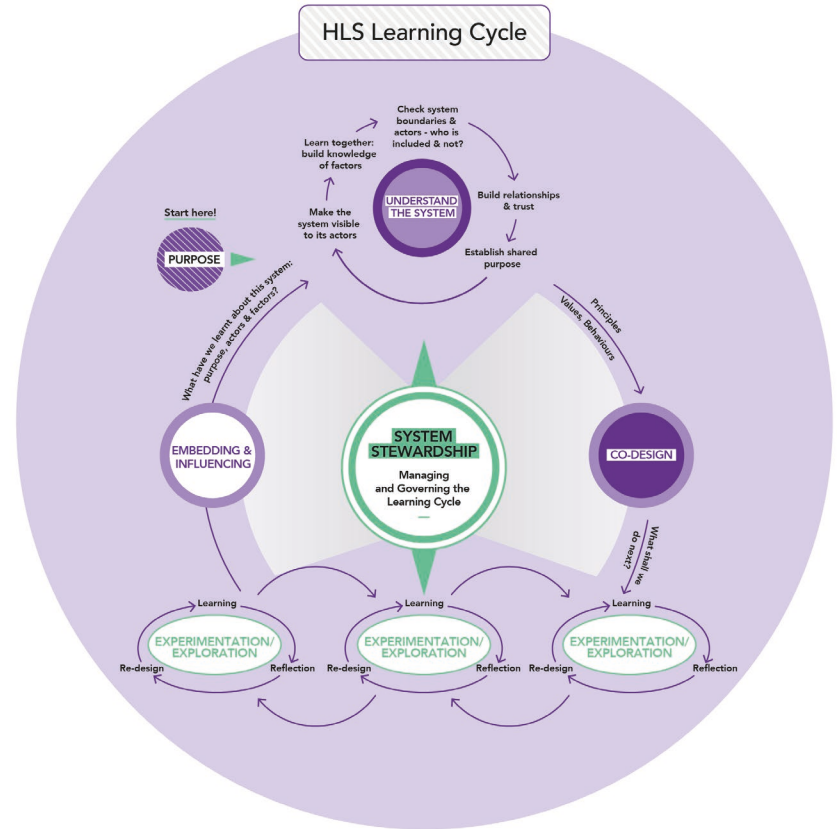


Systems 101

- A “system” is just a way of describing a set of relationships in the world that combine to make something happen
- Systems in HLS - the set of relationships which create a desired outcome (or its absence)

Different system scales

- Person's life as system
- Organisation as system
- Place as system
- Country/region as system



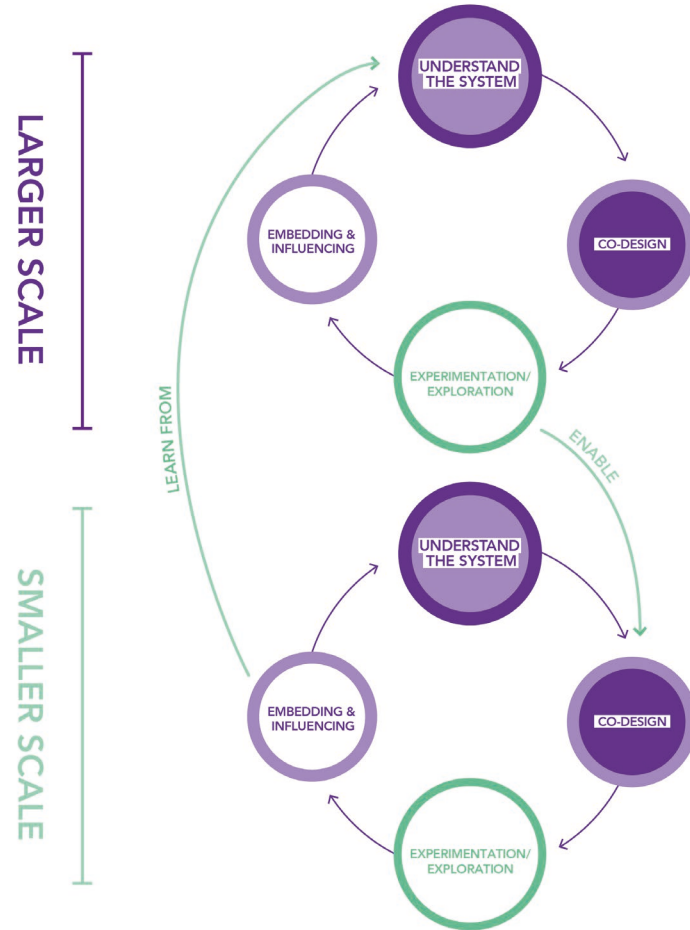
Questions for “organisation” system scale:

“Learning from” questions:

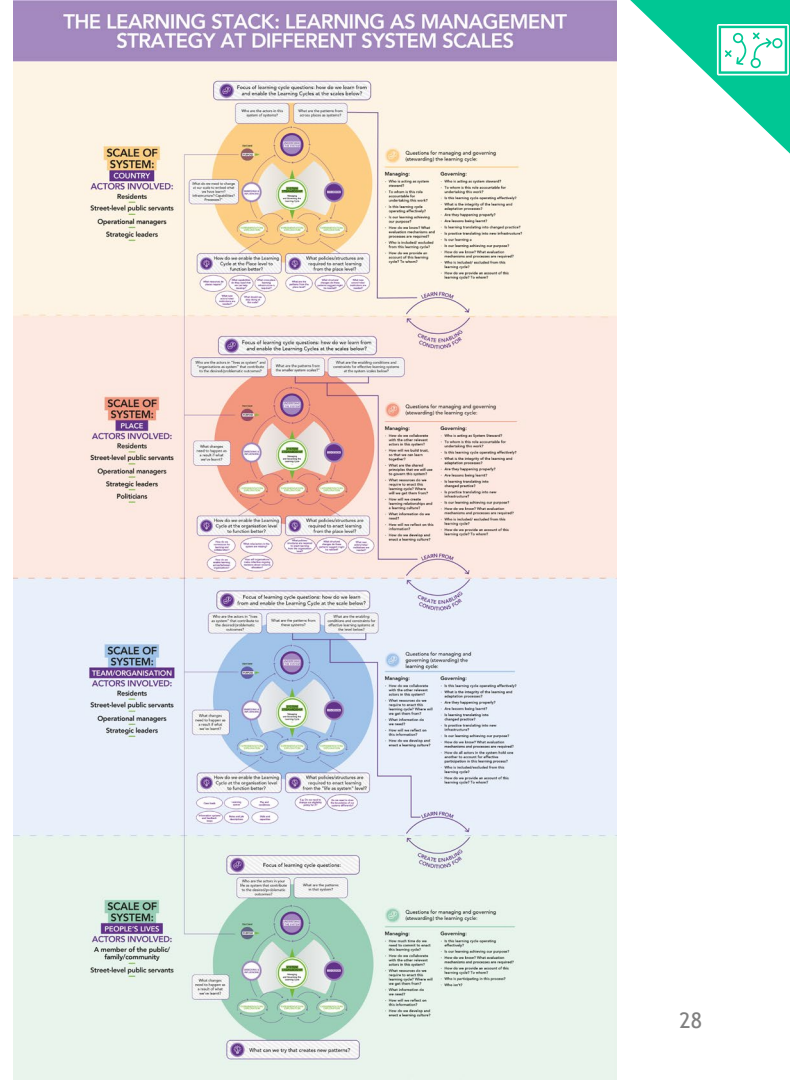
- What patterns do we see from person’s life as system
- What policies do we need to change to enable change for people?
- e.g. do we need to change our housing allocation policies?

“Enabling” questions:

- What are maximum case loads for workers?
- What information systems do we need?
- What shared reflective practice spaces?
- What staff capabilities?



The overall HLS strategy is to create connected Learning Cycles at as many scales as possible





We call the process of managing and governing Learning Cycles, and the relationships between them

“System Stewardship”



Healthy systems

- Healthy systems are learning systems
- Healthy systems cultivate and make use of trust
- Healthy systems are diverse systems
- Healthy systems address inequalities of power

Systems Stewards manage and govern the learning cycle for a system, so as to ensure that it displays these characteristics.



Summary

A **Human Learning Systems** approach is a whole different approach to public management - **starts with the reality of how outcomes are made. Public service for the real world.**

Learning is the management strategy. If you have any management responsibility, your primary task is to create learning environments.

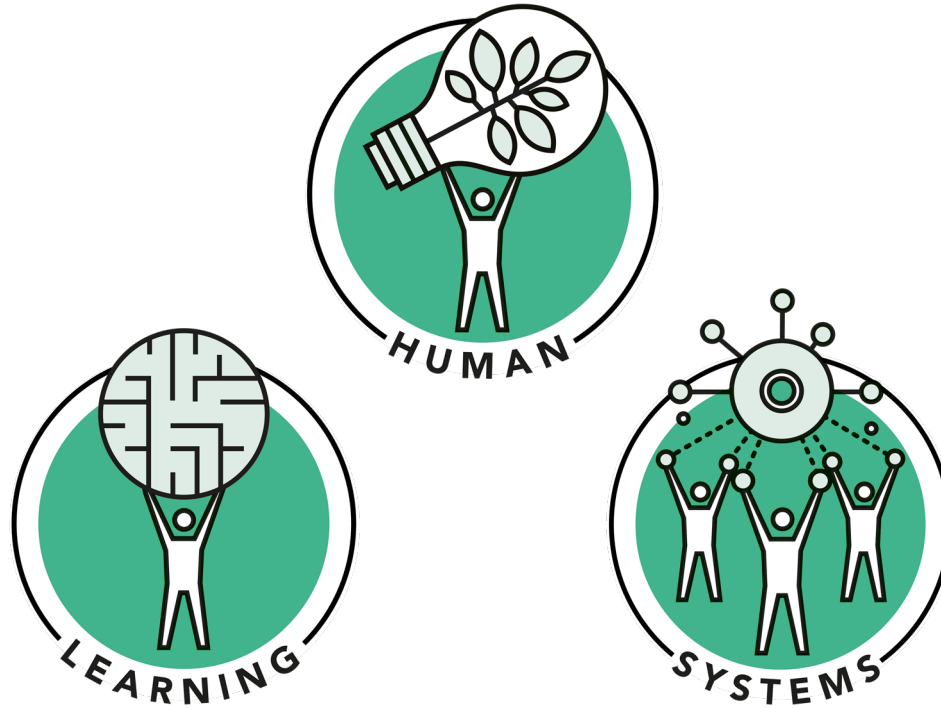
Apply this strategy to all system scales - person, organisation, place, country/region.

Payoff - better outcomes, for less money. Happier people.



Making change

- Paradigm shift can feel daunting, but you can do it
- You can start tomorrow:
 - How will you enable public facing workers to learn with those they support?
 - How will you signal that learning is the strategy for all?
 - What experiments will you create to explore this?



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