



Active Partners Trust Systems Leadership Workshops:

Introduction to Systems Leadership: how to lead when you're not in charge

Wednesday 25th January 2023, 1.00 pm – 4.00 pm

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Outline for this afternoon

- **Conversation 1:** Context: leading in complexity: *Chat/conversation*
- **Conversation 2:** What to expect; traps to avoid: *Break-out groups*
- **Conversation 3:** What you can do instead: key systems leadership ideas and behaving in ways that lead to change: *Chat/conversation*
- **Conversation 4:** Tools in your armoury: *Chat/conversation*
- **Summing up and next steps:** what's coming up, and one thing you're going to do

Conversation 1:

Context: leading in complexity

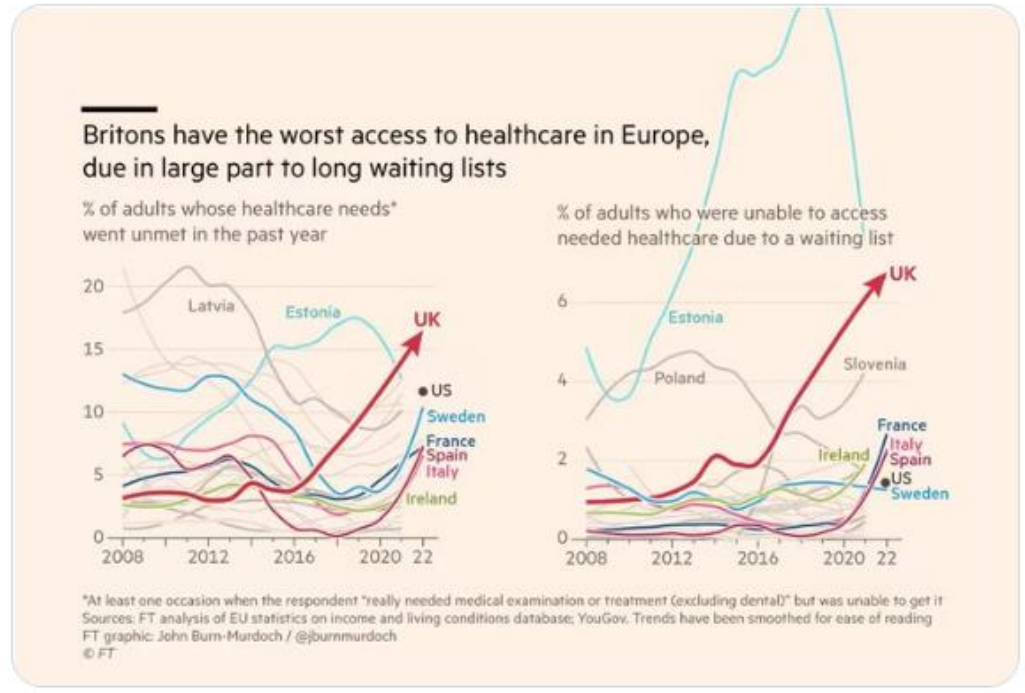


Context: even before Covid, we knew what we were facing. But what we are facing now is bringing these issues into even sharper relief – so we need new ways of leading and working



Sam Freedman @Samfr · 4 Nov
 An extraordinary and grim chart from @jburnmurdoch. Our health system is failing. Partly money; partly money being spent in the wrong way; partly connected systems like social care not working; partly deeper inequality/poverty.

[ft.com/content/de8fc3...](https://www.ft.com/content/de8fc3...)



- 1 TAKE IT SERIOUSLY
- 2 RECOGNISE EFFECT ON PEOPLE
- 3 SEE WHERE PEOPLE ARE
- 4 BE AWARE OF PEOPLES LIMITED POWER
- 5 PUBLIC SERVICES MATTER
- 6 SPEED MATTERS
- 7 THE VIRUS DOES NOT RESPECT THE TOUGH GUY
- 8 DON'T STIGMATISE
- 9 THIS HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN
- 10 WE MUST ALL LEAD

Illustrations @ liveillustration.co.uk and
 Dr David Nabarro

One way of thinking about this: you, or the people you work with, are working in complexity



Simple



Complicated

'Intolerable' NHS crisis to continue until April, health leaders warn

Ministers urged to recall parliament amid warnings patients are dying needlessly due to inaction



More than a dozen NHS trusts and ambulance services have declared critical incidents in recent days, with an overstretched workforce. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

The crisis engulfing the NHS will continue until Easter, health leaders have warned, as senior doctors accused ministers of letting patients die needlessly through inaction.

The Guardian, 2nd January 2023

Complex

So if you want to move things in a particular direction, or to influence, the first thing is to know what you're dealing with

Simple

X causes Y

Complicated

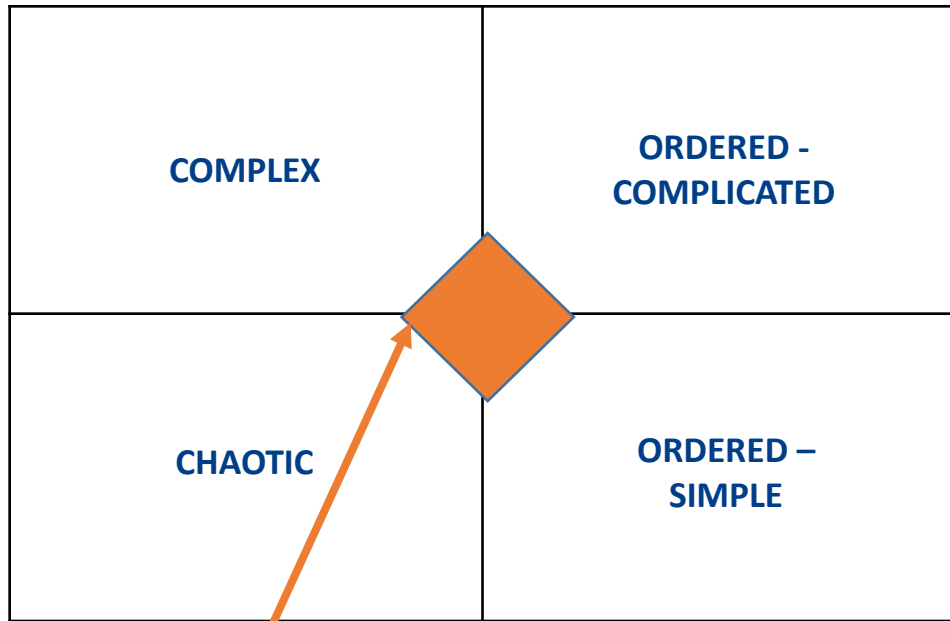
X causes Y, but after a number of expert steps

Complex

No cause and effect –so you can't pull a lever and expect something to happen. You can't predict with certainty in advance: X might lead to Y, but it might lead to something entirely different, or make no difference at all. You'll only know after the event.

Chaotic

No cause and effect relationship – act to regain control



*Cynefin Framework
 Dave Snowden, Cognitive Edge*

Where people can end up: treating a complex issue as simple or complicated, and ending up with chaos

And some things follow....

Does any of this remind you of your work?

- You won't be able to guarantee in advance how – or whether – things will work
- It might involve new – and counter-cultural – ways of working, with sub-optimal systems and processes
- The issue might shape-shift
- There'll be lots of different people/organisations and different sectors; different perspectives and priorities; and politics – large and small 'p'



**Leadership in these circumstances =
RISK AND UNCERTAINTY**

CONVERSATION



Have a think, and then say, or write in the Chat Box:

What's resonating for us in this?

What's complex about what we're dealing with or seeing at the moment?

How does it play out? What happens?

Conversation 2: What to expect, traps to avoid



Firstly, you can get denial. NB This is not a smart move

Two teenagers placed in foster care after weight loss plan fails

Family court judge says parents failed to help severely overweight children and did not understand worry of West Sussex social services



▲ The family was supplied with fitness trackers from the local authority but failed to pass on the data from the devices. Photograph: Paula Solloway/Alamy

“Everyone agrees that this is a very sad and unusual case, of a loving family...[but] both the children are severely overweight...and the parents have shown an inability to help the children manage this condition” *(from the judge’s ruling in the family court)*

“The local authority had provided Fitbits and paid for gym membership for the family, who had signed up to Weight Watchers...

...but months later...there had been no reduction in the children’s weight, and they had not provided recordings from their Fitbits or attended the Weight Watchers appointments consistently.” *(from the report)*

The Guardian, 11th March 2021

Or you can get 57 varieties of push-back.

Ronald Heifetz: *“What people resist is not change per se, but loss”*

Notice these tactics and see them for what they are



- **Default behaviours/tribalism**
- **Obscure language, opacity, lack of clarity**
- **Doing the wrong thing busily/expertly**
- **Endless online/endlessly delayed meetings**
- **Everything has to have terms of reference**
- **Delegating work to the wrong people**
- **Shooting the messenger**

So: consider the extent of what people have lost, not just in the context of health, activity and wellbeing – and factor this in



A new route is needed
Alan Swart/Alamy Stock Photo



You also tend to see this:

People reverting to solutions from what they know....

H/t Keith Grint: Cultural Theory

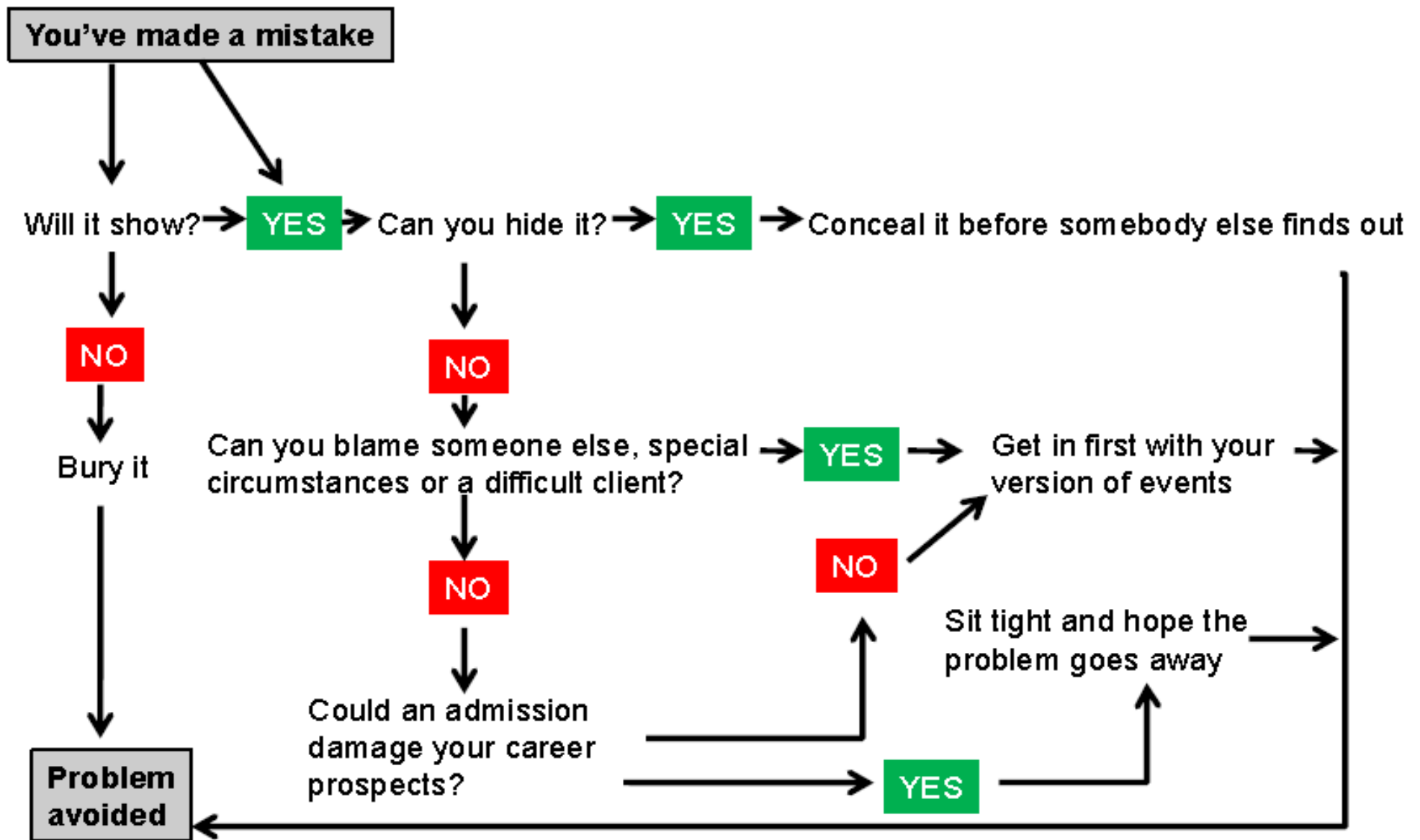
<p>Hierarchical groups: Problem is lack of rules; solution is more of the same: stronger leadership and more rules</p>	<p>Egalitarians: Problem is a change of attitude is needed; solution is asking others what they think</p>
<p>Fatalists: Resigned; problems inherently insoluble</p>	<p>Individualists: Problem is because people are constrained; solution lies in logic, learning and autonomy</p>

Other common responses to recognise and avoid

- **Trying to command and control**
- **Jumping to solutions**
- **Playing the blame game**
- **Pretending it's all a success when it isn't**
- **Putting things in the wrong box**



Watch out for people reverting to blame rather than learning (with thanks to Keith Grint)



Watch out for people trying to pretend everything is a success: Prozac Leadership

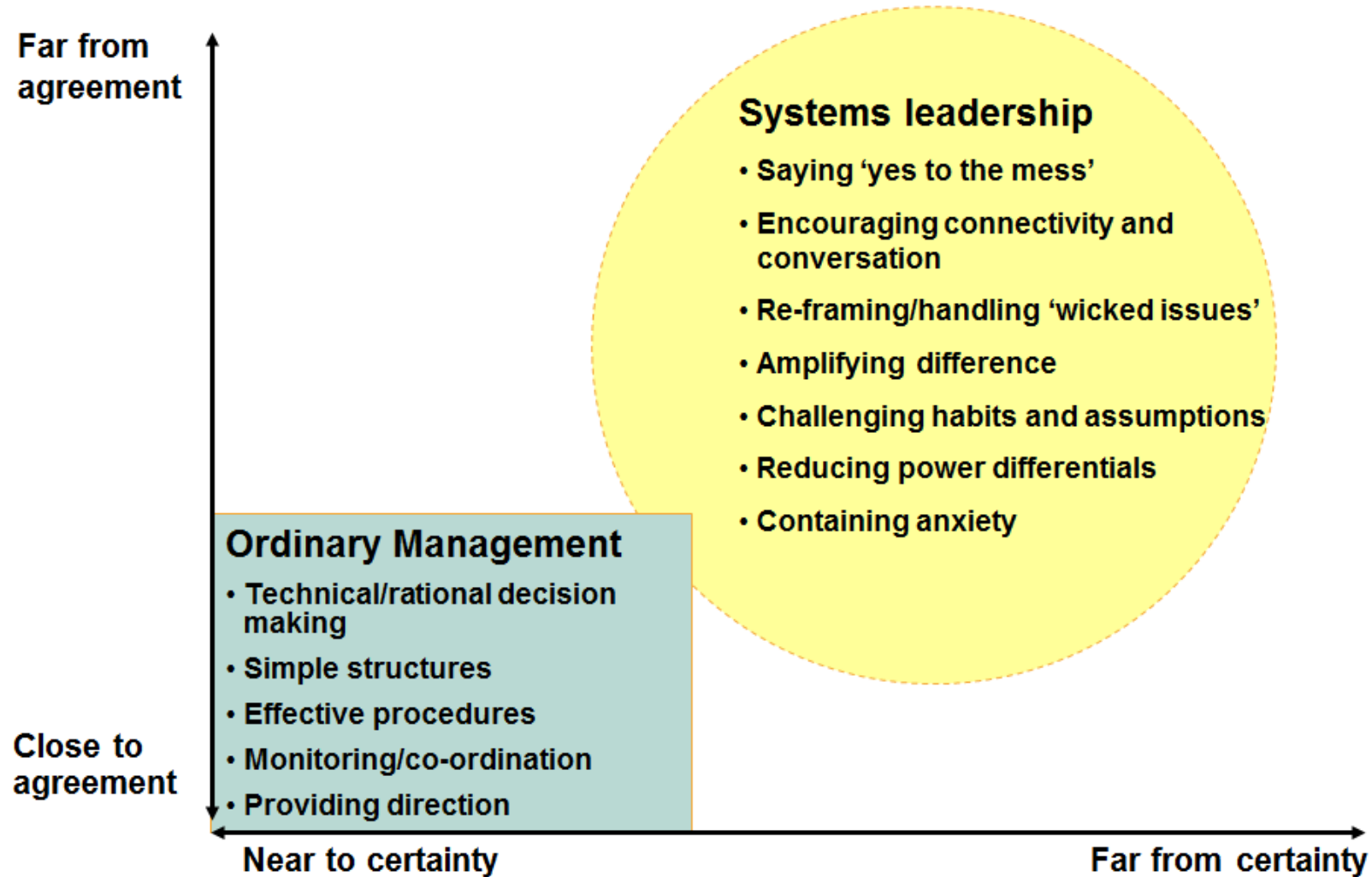
- **Prozac Leadership: David Collinson, 2011**
- **Unremittingly positive approach**
- **Encourages leaders to believe their own propaganda**
- **Discourages people for raising problems, admitting mistakes, focusing on failure**
- **The only people who believe the (corporate) messages are the (corporate) leaders**
- **(Corporate) leaders constantly surprised when things go wrong given how well everything seemed to be going**



**“Many will be looking at our
apparent success”**

Boris Johnson, 27th April 2020

And don't put things in the wrong box: in other words,
don't try and turn complex (leadership) issues into simple or
complicated (management) ones



BREAK-OUT ROOMS



What forms of push-back are we seeing?

Obscure language? Default behaviours? Doing the wrong thing busily? Shooting messengers?

What are the losses people might be perceiving?

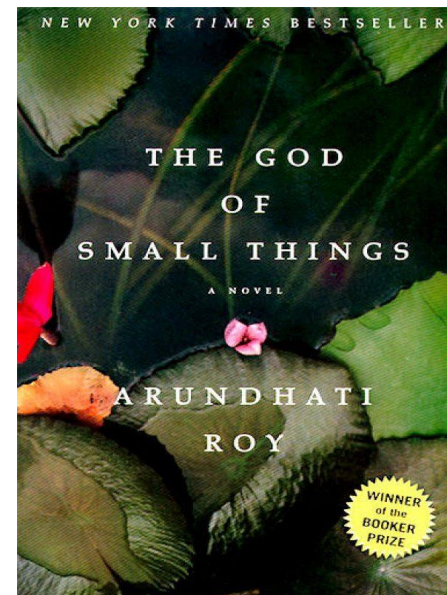
Talk with each other in your groups, then we'll take some feedback

Comfort/Tea Break



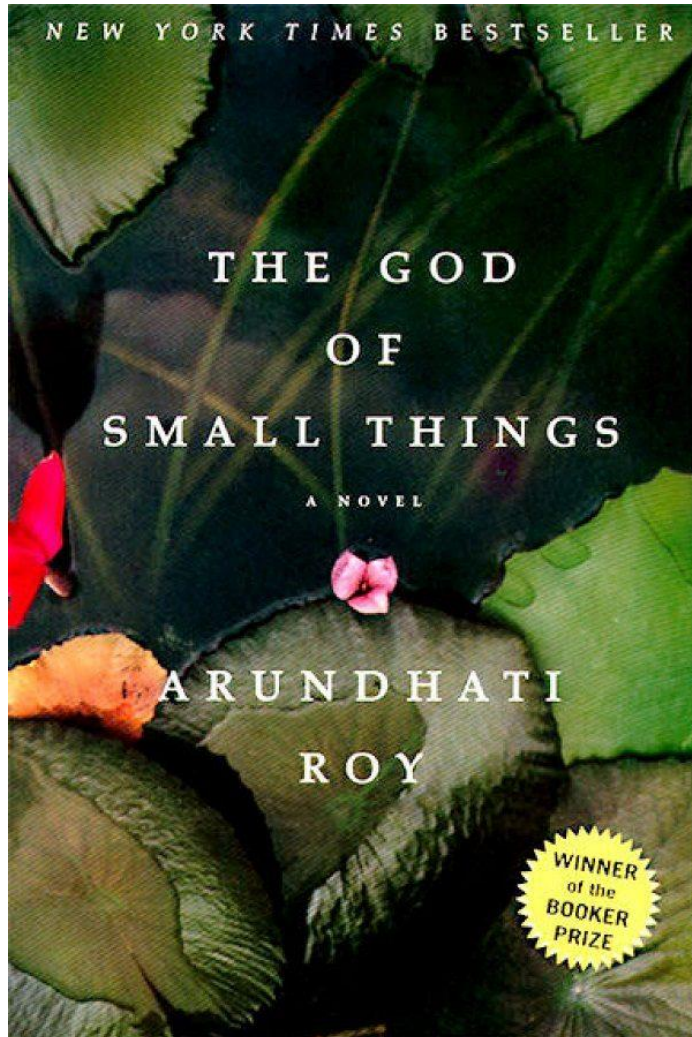
Conversation 3:

**What you can do instead:
key systems leadership ideas and behaving in ways that lead
to change**



What you can do instead

Use adaptive, or systems, leadership approaches



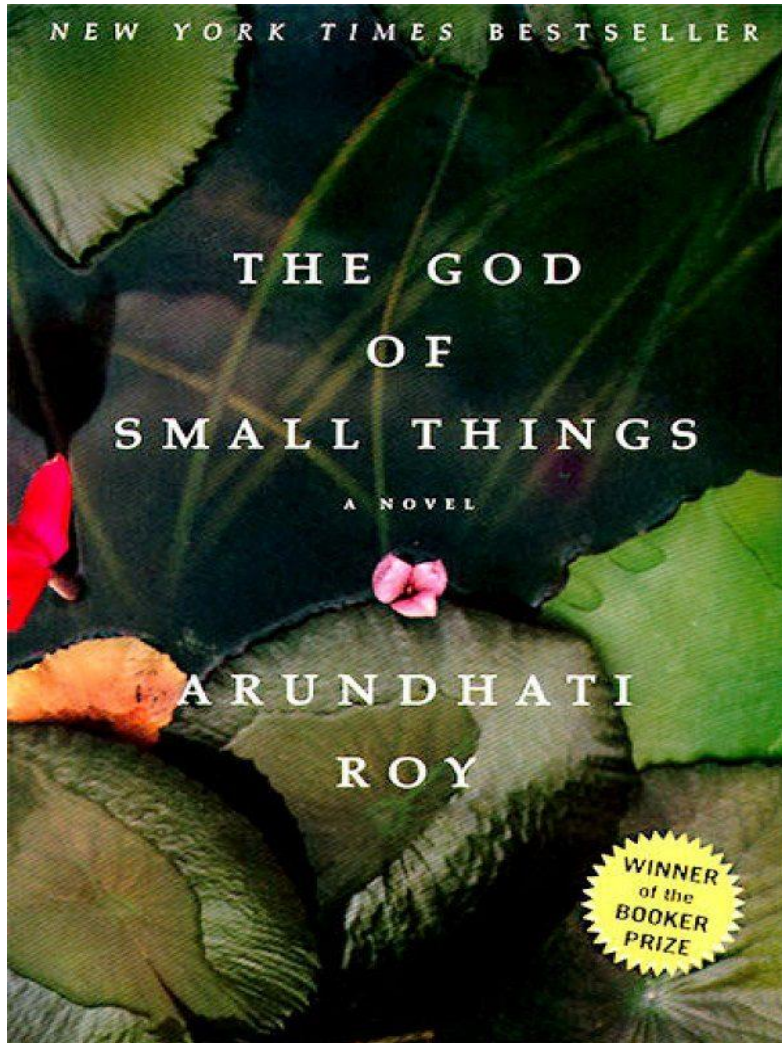
- Take small steps, and accumulate
- See change as small-scale, sometimes unglamorous or mundane, and cumulative
- Do what's practical for you
- You're not in sole charge (no matter what it says on your name badge/job description)

The collaborative leadership of a network of people in different places and at different levels, creating a common purpose and co-operating to make significant change

- Common purpose – what’s your agenda?
- What do you want to do: Why do you want to do it? What will be benefits be?
- Who isn’t in the room?
- Relationships, influence, trust: “Systems move at the speed of trust”
- Partial, clumsy and emergent/evolving solutions: allow for dynamic and changing situations



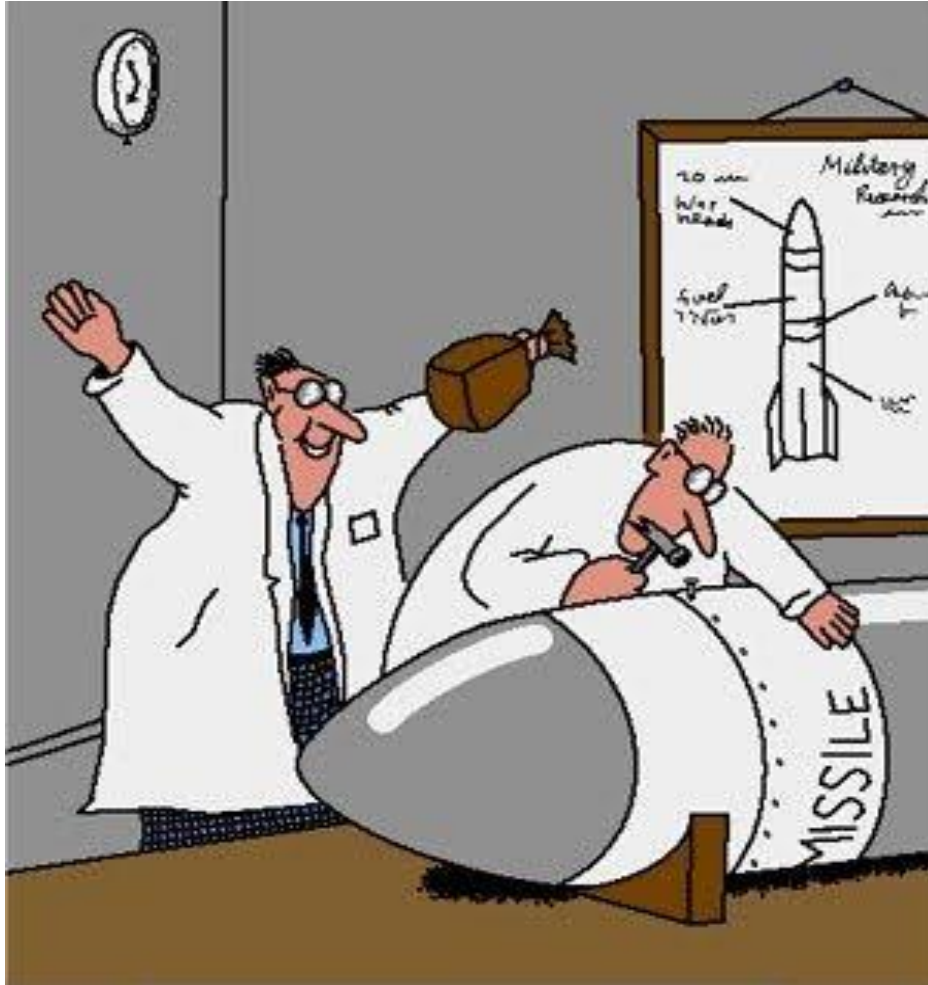
The power of small steps can be transformative



When you have time, have a listen to this 'Pod Save America' 12/11/20 with Stacey Abrams (about 45 minutes in) about starting small and where it can lead:

https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcyc5mZWVkYnVybmVyLmNvbS9wb2Qtc2F2ZS1hbWVyaWNh/episode/ZWNIOTk0YzltM2UzOS0xMWVhLWE1ODctMjM5OTMyMzdiY2NI?hl=en-GB&ved=2ahUKEwiVjr1v_sAhVLT8AKHddrBZgQieUEegQIBRAF&ep=6

Use systems leadership behaviours: they're practical and really help



“The best people practising systems leadership are not described in terms of charismatic heroes or divas, but as thoughtful, calm personalities who are as confident working in the background, supporting and enabling others, as they are in the limelight, leading from the front’.

*From ‘Exceptional Leadership for Exceptional Times’,
Virtual Staff College, 2013*

https://www.leadershipcentre.org.uk/systemsleadership/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/VSC_Synthesis_exec_complete.pdf

Practise and encourage behaviours that lead to change



- Ground things in your values – this is why you're doing this work, in health/wellbeing/physical activity or more broadly
- Get off the dancefloor and onto the balcony
- Make sense of things for other people
- Enable and support other people – give people cover to try out new things
- Cede leadership

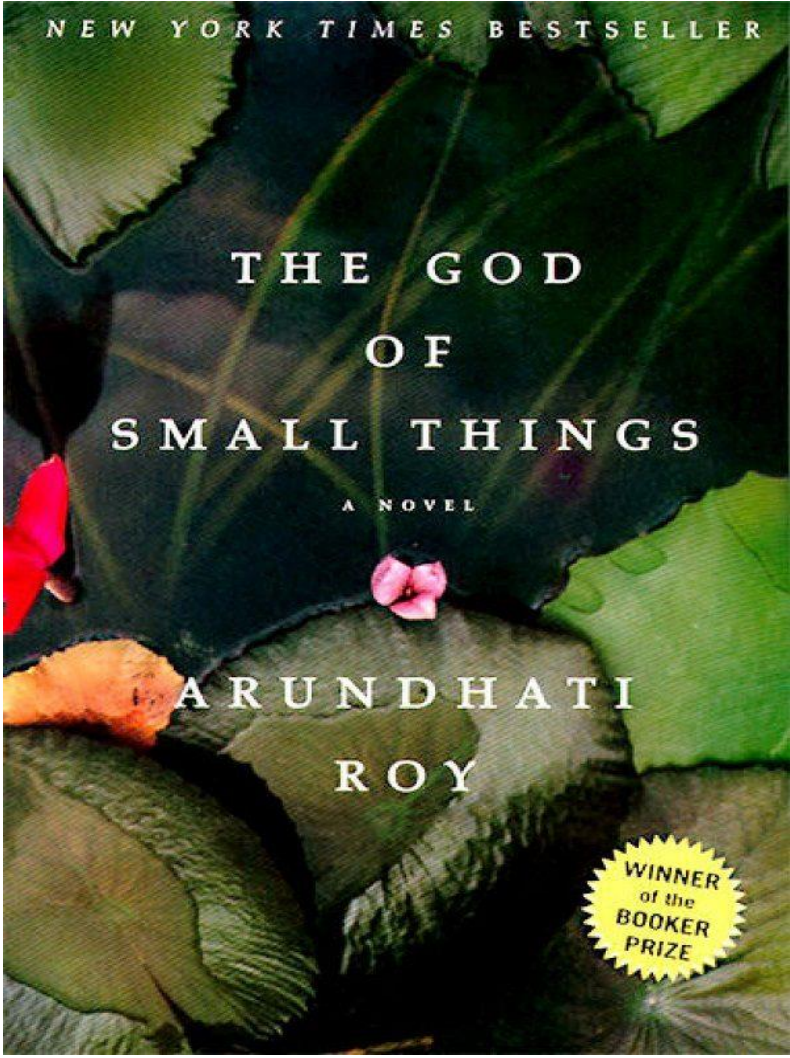
What this can lead to: different conversations, different players, stronger relationships and better outcomes



Adur and Worthing: new ways of relating re: mental health/homelessness
Fundamentally changed outcomes based on creating new capacity re: MH hospital discharge – e.g. mobilised frontline staff and clinicians to make joint visits which led to immediate improvements in discharges; better joint working between police, NHS and prison service.

Calderdale: broad participation in increasing levels of physical activity
Health & Wellbeing Board/Public Heath worked closely with schools and the community: programme included training girls in schools in research methods so they could find out what would help/hinder more participation. Aiming to build social movement.

Q&A: Systems Leadership and behaviours that lead to change



Conversation 4:

Where to start: tools in your armoury

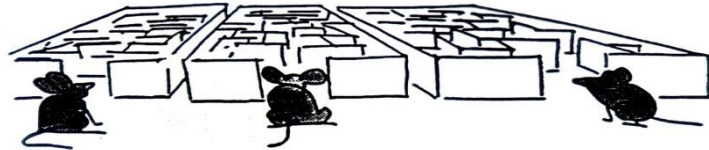


So, where do you start? There will always be reasonable reasons not to do something, or to try something new

- **Biggest danger in complex issues? Work Avoidance**
- **Culture and history are key; geography and politics makes a difference**
- **It takes time and feels messy – and so it can go against cultural grain, external initiatives and financial exigencies – short term priorities can take precedence over long haul**
- **Key is to hold fast to common purpose + values to keep people for the long haul, and to encourage people to see themselves as leading in a system, seeing beyond organisational/departmental roles**



The key thing is to start: don't wait for everything to be perfect You only get change by taking action and giving people agency



Myron Rogers' Maxims: paste these to your wall

- People own what they create
- Real change takes place in real work
- The people that do the work do the change
- Start anywhere but follow it everywhere
- Keep connecting the system to itself
- The process we use to get to the future determines the future we get

And there are some tools and techniques that really help



Getting people to take off their representational hats: Empathy Mapping

What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of us *(as a system)*?



What do they SEE?

What does their environment in their community look like? What surrounds them?

What do they HEAR?

How does the environment influence them? Who really influences them, and how?



What do they THINK AND FEEL?

What goes on in their minds? What's really important (that they might not say publicly?) What moves/matters to them?

What do they actually DO/EXPECT?

How do they work? What do they say to others? What will they do for others? How do they find and support each other?



Who's in our system? Rich Pictures



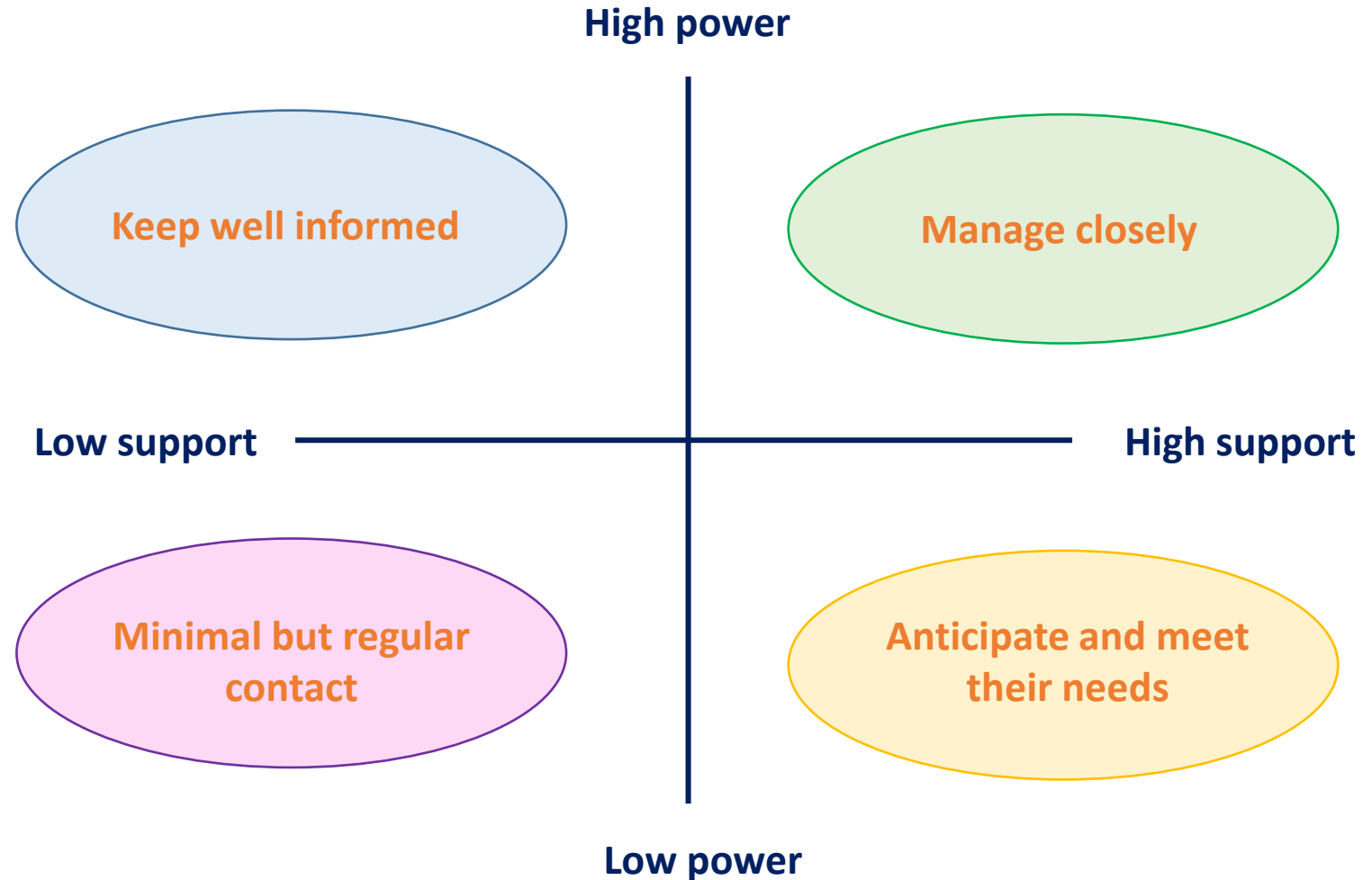
- Not a work of art
- More about ‘what does my/our system feel like?’
- Who’s in the system? What are the relationships? Who isn’t included? Where are you? Or the people you represent?
- As many stick figures as you like or as creative as you like

Then you can actively manage your stakeholders:

Stakeholder Mapping: what's their power and what do they support?

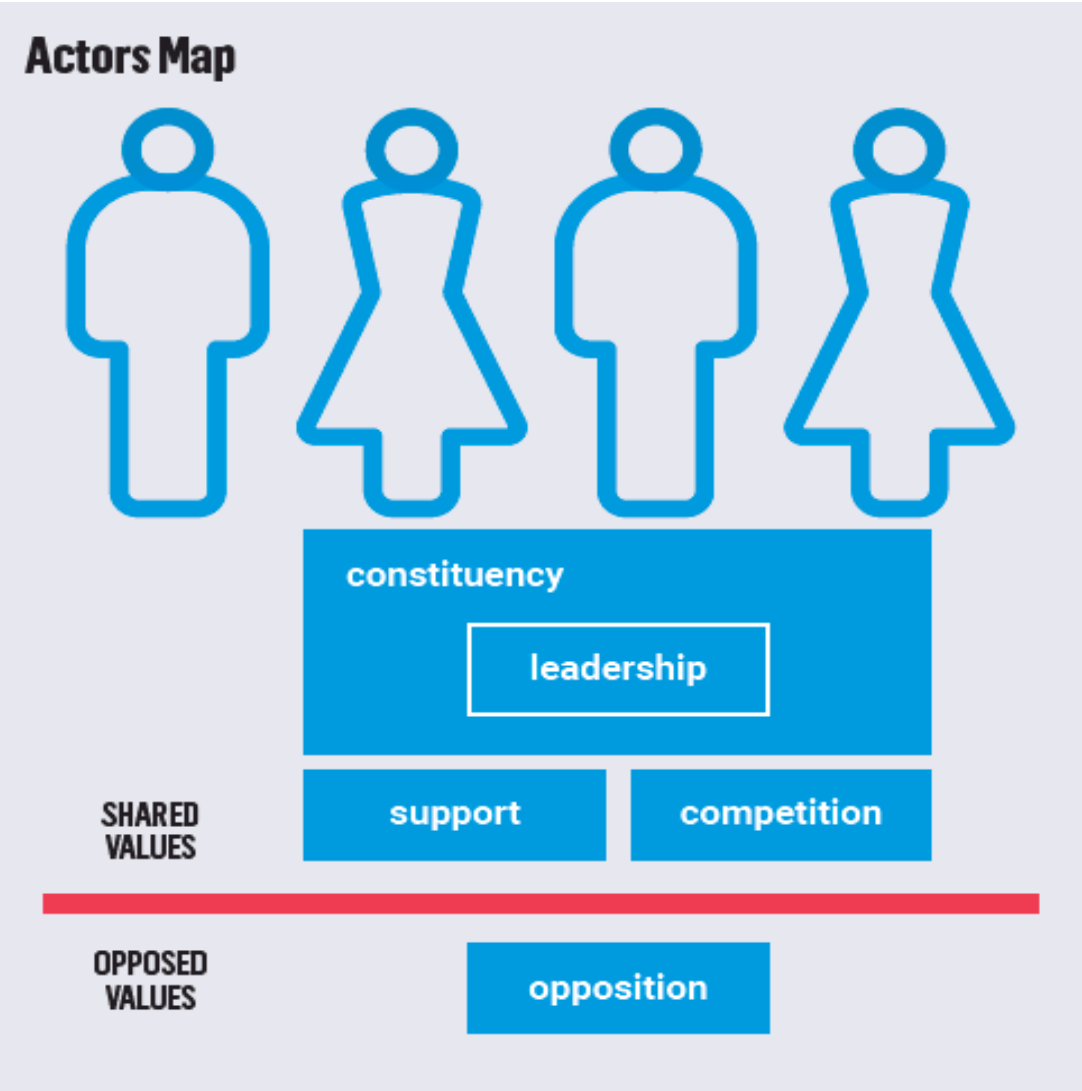
List your stakeholders by name

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E etc



Another way of looking at this: who shares our values?

Actor Mapping



Using Reframing to change perspectives



Frames: culture in shorthand: how we ascribe meaning



Christian Odendahl
@COdendahl

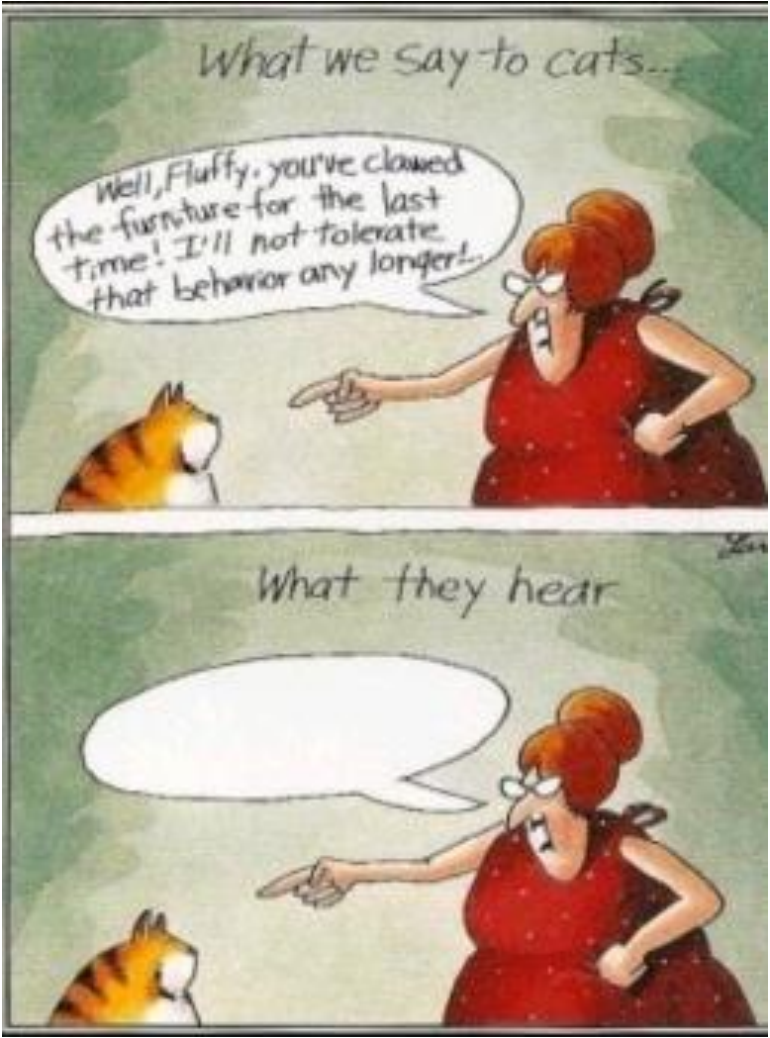
I think I have never seen this before: [#Scholz](#) just dismantled almost every SPD policy towards Russia over the past 3 decades in one speech.

10:34 am · 27 Feb 2022 · TweetDeck

2,473 Retweets 198 Quote Tweets 15.4K Likes

- **Mental shortcuts to images and associations: often based in metaphor: affect the way we think/make assumptions. Often shielding unspoken emotions/deeply held values: ‘This is how we are’**
- **They prime for associations – prisms and prisons. And they can take precedence over facts and rationality**
- **And because they’re continuously reinforced and follow familiar grooves, they can be hard to shift**
- **But once a new frame becomes established, and it’s become widely accepted, the previously unthinkable becomes ‘common sense’. So reframing gives you a way to get people to change their thinking**

Retaliate first. Don't deny: shift the argument onto your territory and think about who your messengers might be



What this can look like in practice: reframing in a homelessness context

Bournemouth



Homelessness as public nuisance

Worthing



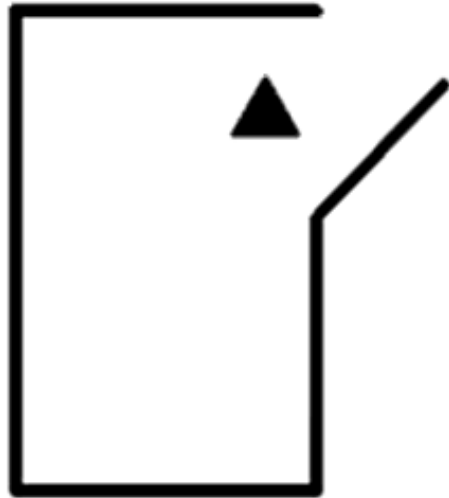
Homelessness as public health

Using different messengers in practice

**We are
Undefeatable, 2020**



And tell your stories. What's happening here?

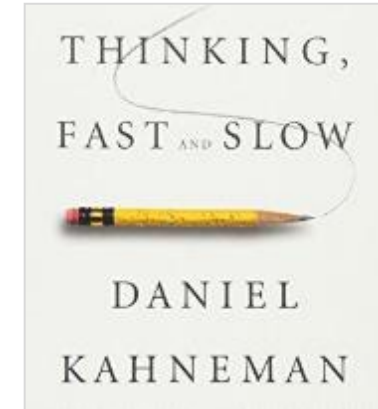


Heider & Simmel - see <http://vimeo.com/48908599>

Stories for a purpose: Public Narrative



Professor Marshall Ganz, Harvard Kennedy School



“No-one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story.”

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*

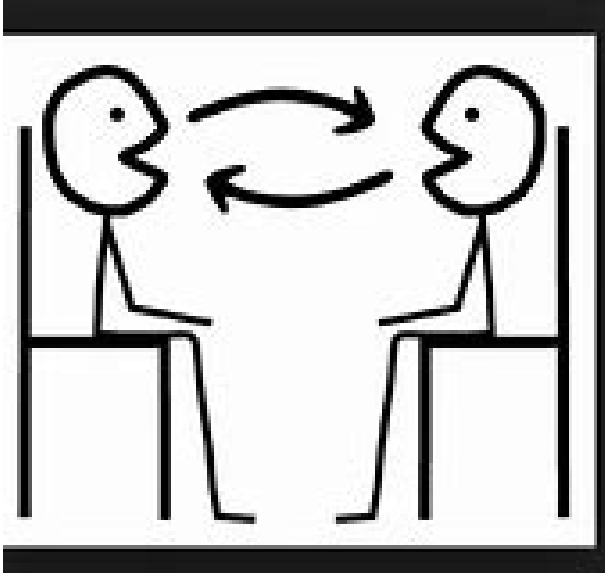
Public Narrative - stories with a purpose – is part of your leadership role

Leadership is taking responsibility for **enabling** others to achieve **shared purpose** in the face of uncertainty

Professor Marshall Ganz, Harvard Kennedy School

What Public Narrative is.... and is not

Public Narrative **is....**



A **skill** to motivate others....
.... to **join** you in **action**

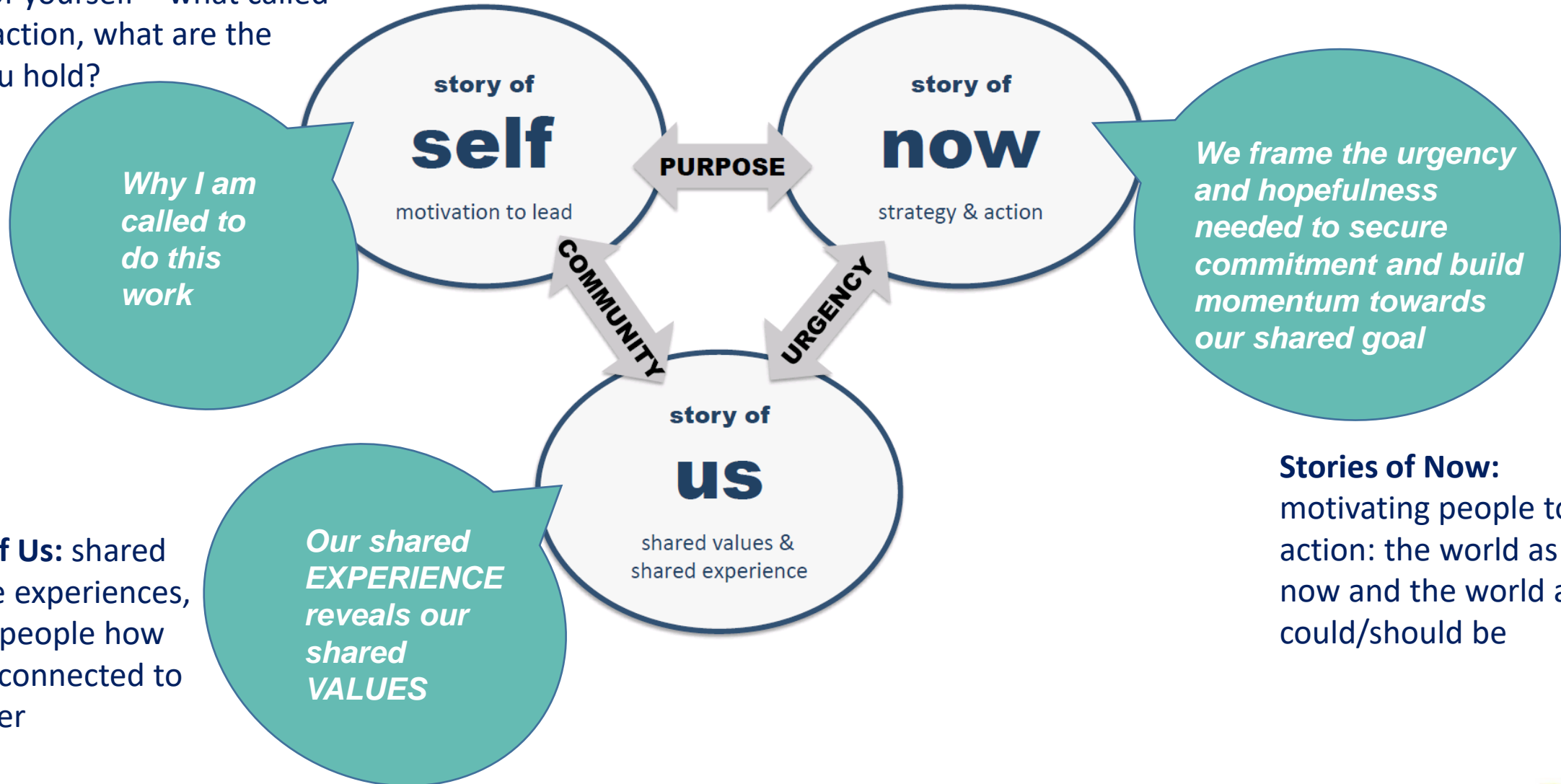
Public Narrative **is not....**



A **script** or a **performance**

The three components of Public Narrative

Stories of Self: giving a public account of yourself – what called you into action, what are the values you hold?

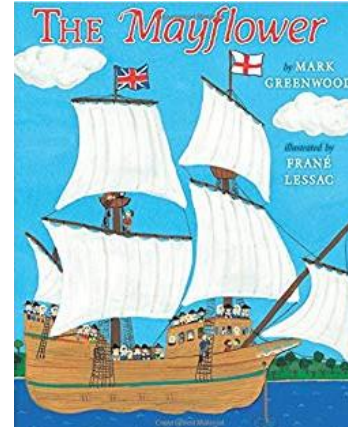


Stories of Us: shared collective experiences, showing people how they are connected to each other

Stories of Now: motivating people to action: the world as it is now and the world as it could/should be

Public Narrative in practice: What you need for a good story

Character:
Facing a challenge and a choice



Advance:
Plot, action, urgency



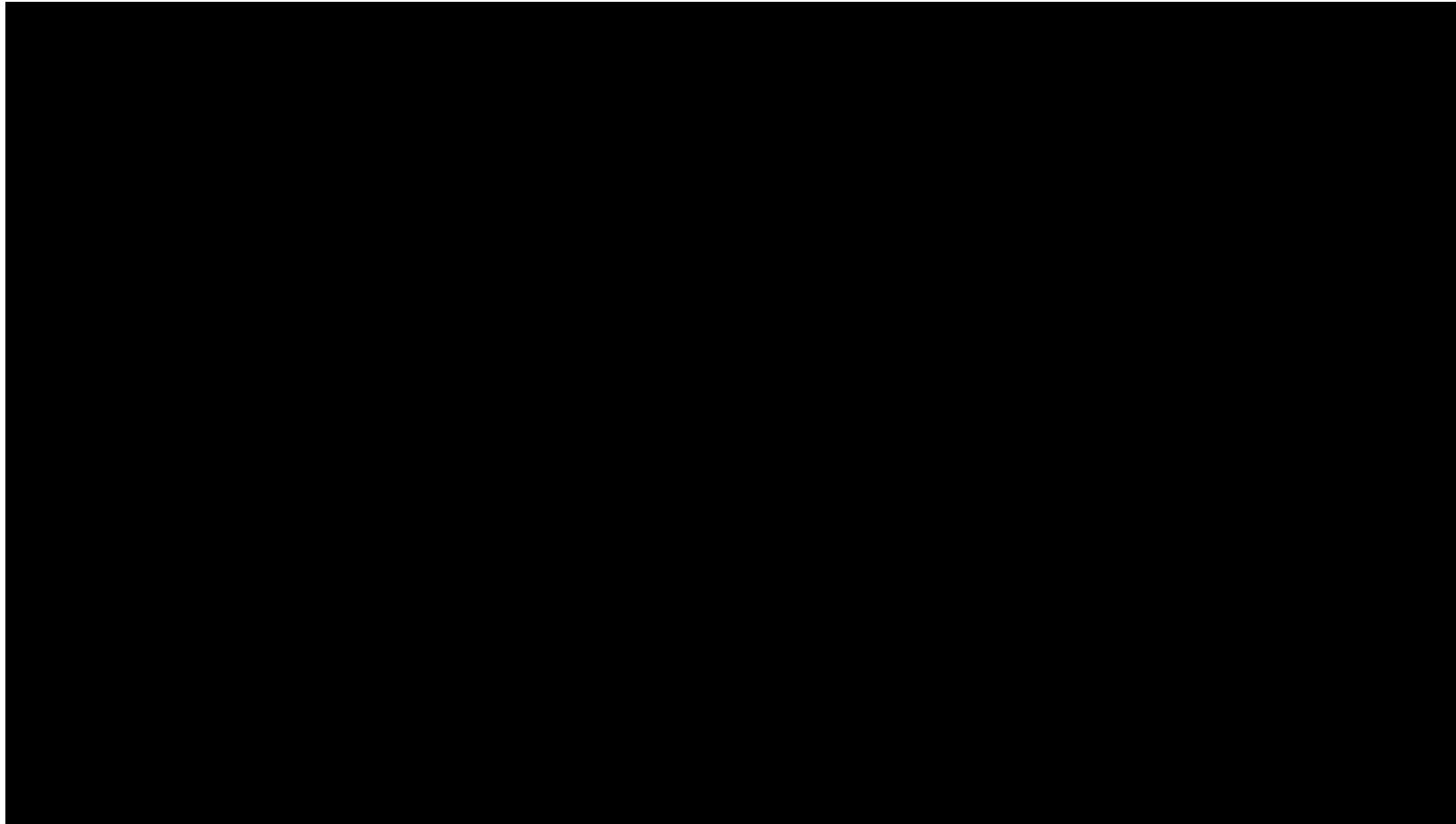
Sensation:
Details, images, senses, pictures



The key thing is to have a go, and to practise.

And learn from other people:

Arnold Schwarzenegger on the storming of the Capitol, January 2021



https://www.youtube.com/watch?edufilter=NULL&feature=emb_logo&v=x_P-0I6sAck

CONVERSATIONS/BREAKOUT GROUPS



What's resonated for us from what we've heard?

What approaches might we try out?

What frames are we using, or seeing?

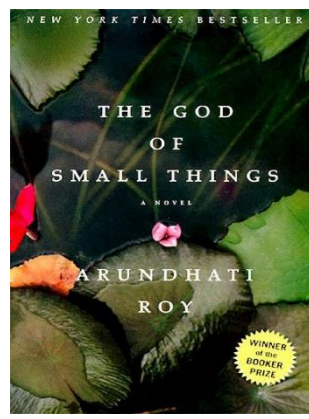
Summing up. So where do you start? A potential ordering (and this will be different for everybody, depending on circumstances)

- Get a coalition of the willing together
- Work on your Common Purpose first of all: **Empathy Mapping**
- What actions/fail-safe experiments/metrics/narratives can we hang off this?
- What's the lie of the land? **Rich Pictures**
- Who do we want to build relationships/trust with, or get to join with us in action? Who can help us lead? Who are our allies/competitors/opposition? **Actor Mapping**
- How do they currently see us (and vice-versa)? **Reframing**
- What are our (public) narratives? How can we adapt them for different audiences? **Public Narratives**

Final thoughts, comments, questions: ONE THING you're going to do



Manage closely



Thank you.

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