

Why Finland seems well placed to enact systemic governance?

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SCiO Finland
Aalto University, Otaniemi
(Espoo)

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The Open
University

1973 Russ
Ackoff
messes &
difficulties

Don Schön 'high
ground of technical
rationality & swamp
of real-life issues
(1980s)

A VUCA
world
(1987, US
War
College)

The
polycrisis
(Morin 1998)

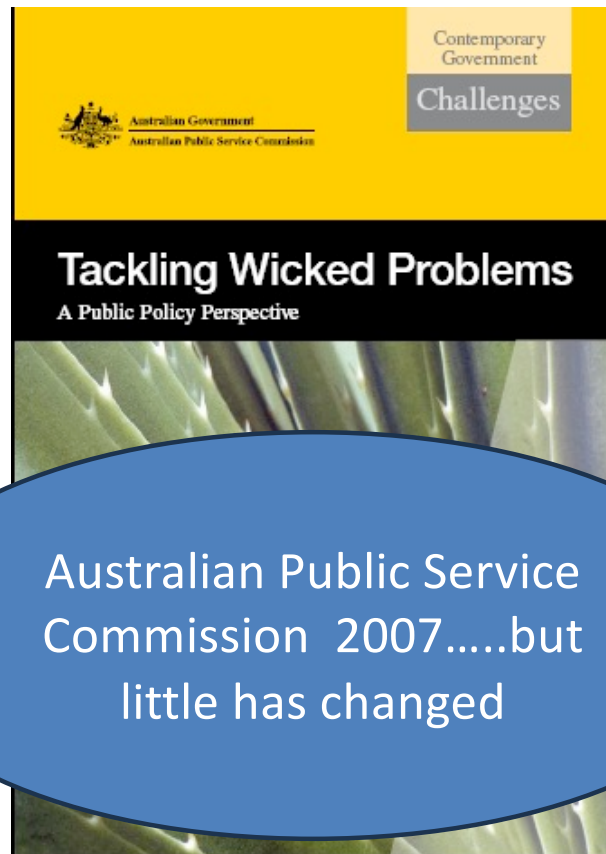
50 years of praxis failure in governing

1970 'Global Problematique'
in 'The Predicament of
Mankind' Report to the Club
of Rome

Rittel & Webber 1973
'Wicked & Tame
Problems'

Churchman, C.W., 1967. Wicked problems.
Guest editorial. Manage. Sci. 14 (4) 141–142.

Not being aware of, not using, the distinction 'wicked/tame problem is a framing failure in a SITUATION OF CONCERN...institutionalising failure, praxis failure is the result...



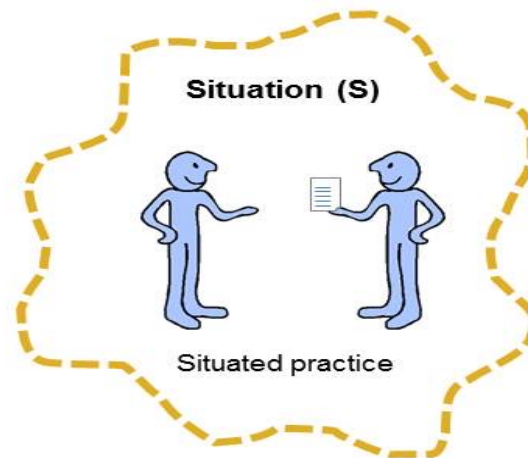
Australian Public Service
Commission 2007....but
little has changed

What do these issues have in common?

- *Climate change*
- *Biodiversity conservation*
- *Obesity*
- *Indigenous disadvantage*
- *Land degradation*
- *River catchment managing*
- *Transitioning towards water sensitive cities*

....these issues exemplify consistent systemic failure of public policy: on-going framing/praxis failure

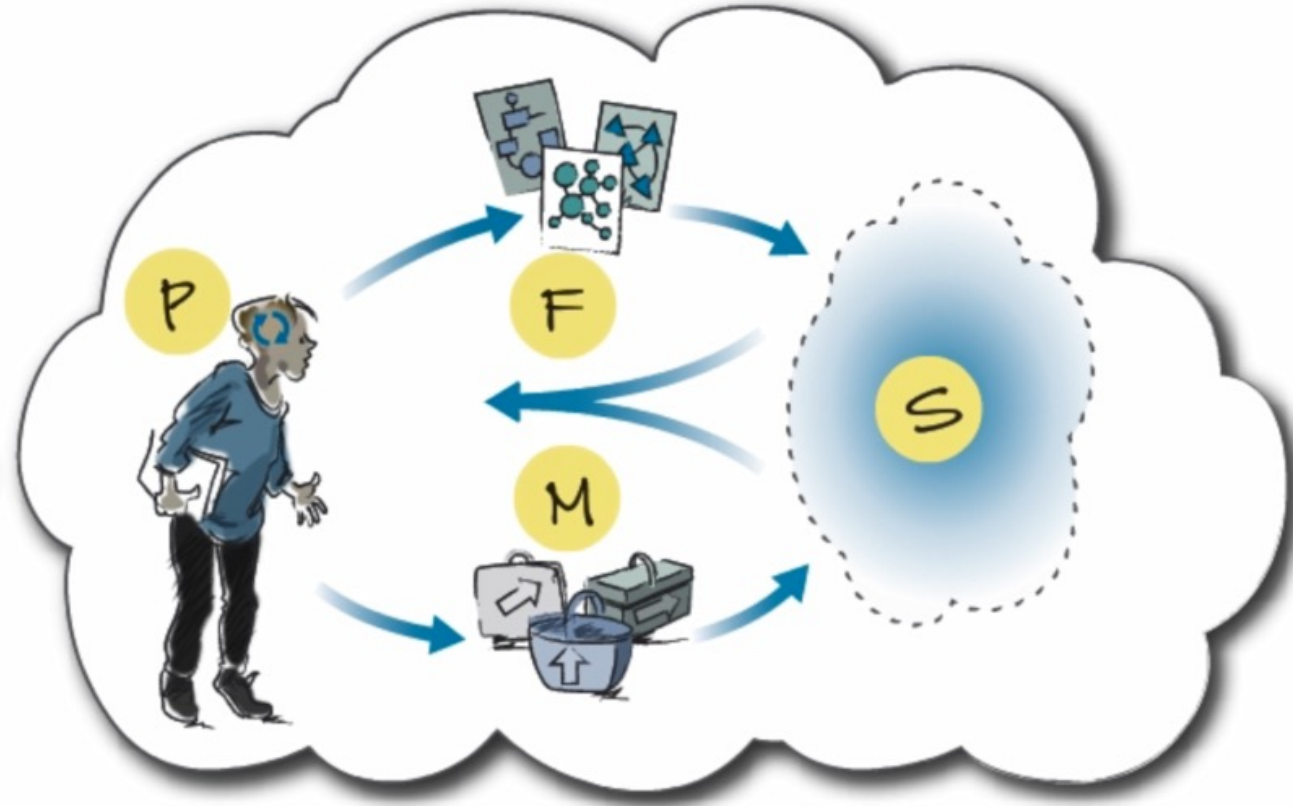
**You are all engaged in multiple forms of practice:
what do you as a practitioner do when you do what
you do?**



**All practice (doing) is
situated
and embodied**

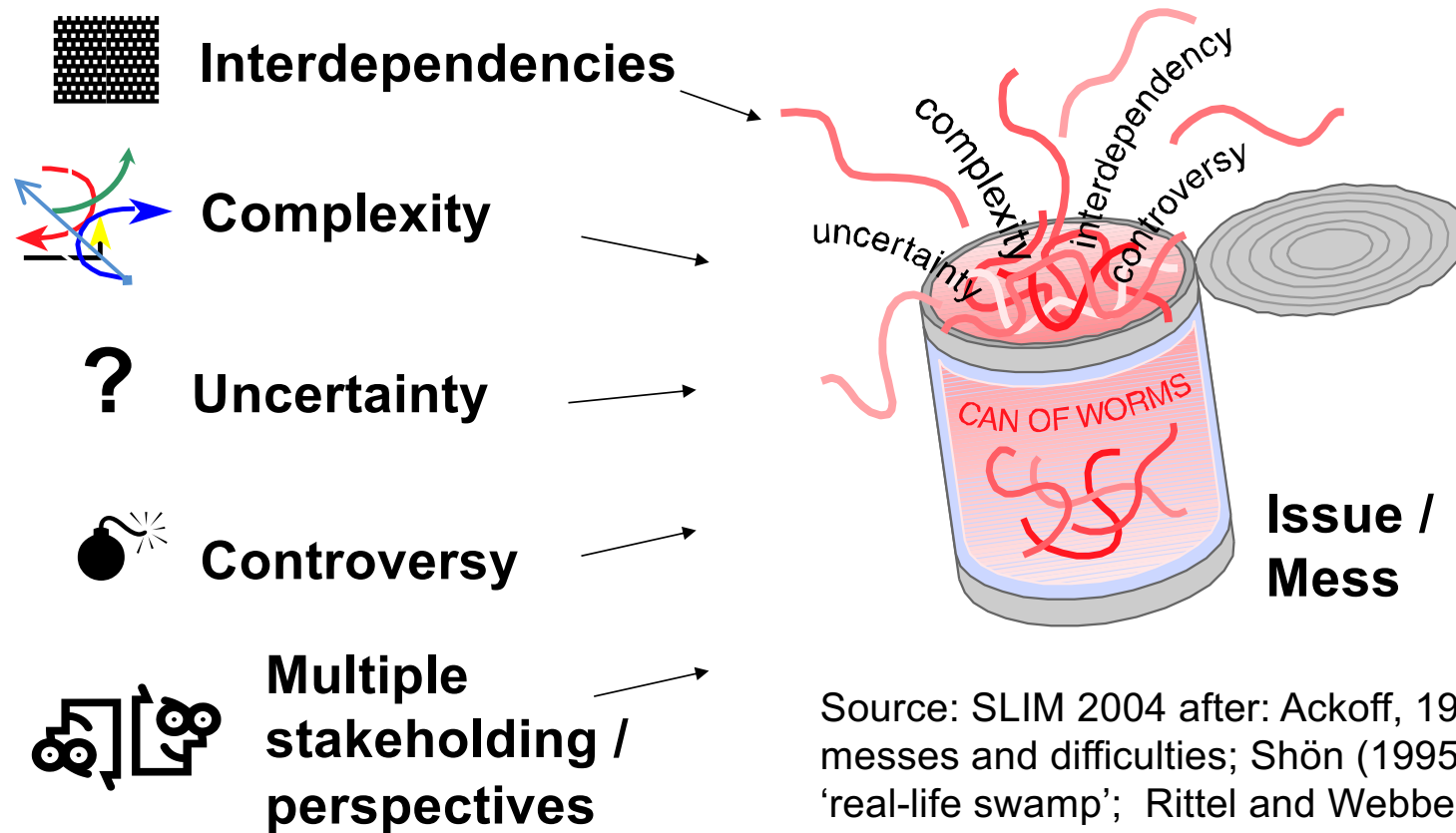
Take responsibility for your own practice in systemic terms

Where are my possibilities for learning and change?



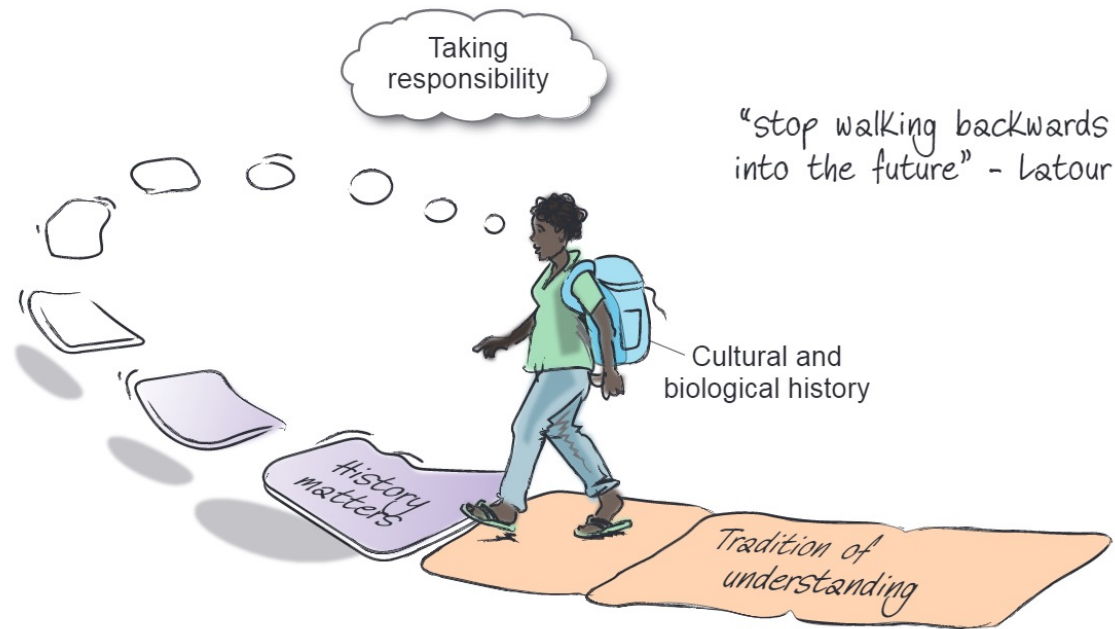
P, practitioner with unique tradition of understanding; F, framework (theory choices); M, methodology or method; S, situation ...how framed etc

F is a framework of ideas chosen purposefully (or in place without awareness) as well as a framing choice for a practice situation



Source: SLIM 2004 after: Ackoff, 1974 – messes and difficulties; Shön (1995) - the 'real-life swamp'; Rittel and Webber, (1973) - 'wicked' and 'tame' problems.

What do you do when you do practice?



What can we each say about the 'pathway' we have laid down since our conception such that we can now be concerned about the doing of professional practice e.g. governing, agricultural practice, student practice, research practice, systems practice etc?

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Towards systemic governing...

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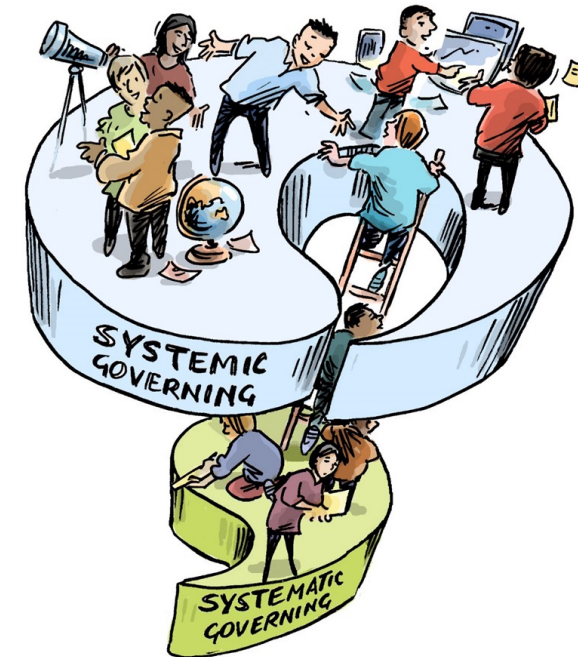
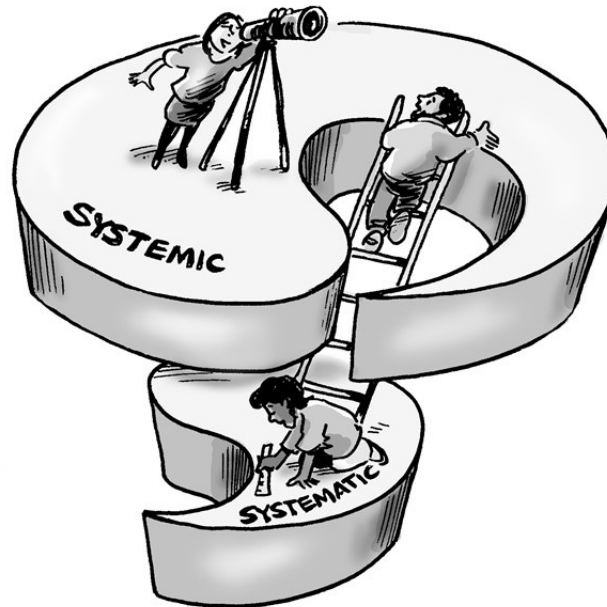
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Systems practice is composed of systemic and systematic praxis (systemic or systematic governing).

Systems thinking in practice (STiP) combines Systemic + Systematic praxis

Transformational change requires thinking and practice that is systemic + systematic

Together these constitute an holistic response (a DUALITY not a DUALISM)



We need to climb beyond the mainstream, systematic paradigm but not abandon it totally

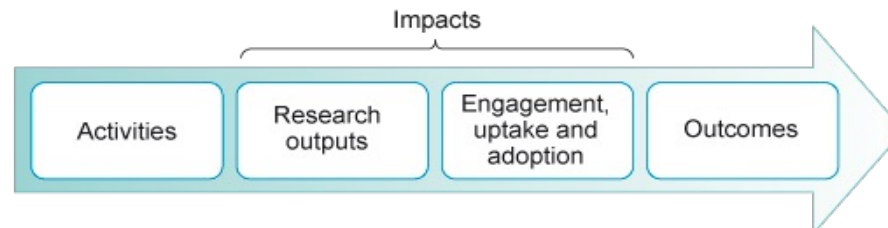
Systematic praxis needs abandoning in all but special situations

Versions of the linear, systematic, model of communication, knowledge and technology transfer have been found wanting, yet remain pervasive.

Outmoded models of cognition have shaped policy design, advisory practices, curricula and teaching and institutional designs

Targeting Outcomes

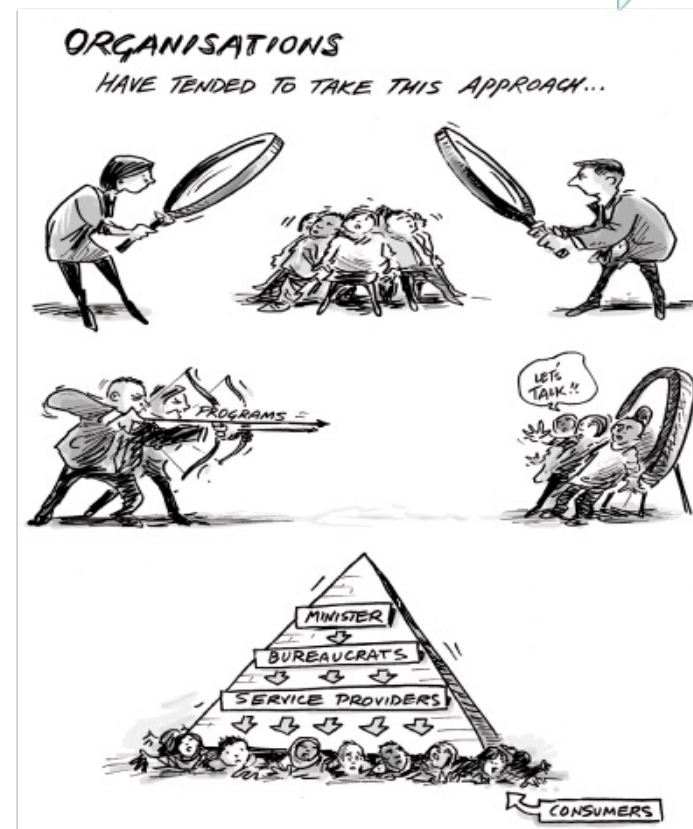
Any project teams need to answer:
 1. what research outputs the project will deliver?
 2. how will these link into a path to impact?



Manifestations:

- Logframes
- M&E practices
- Evidence-based decision making
- Targets, goals
- Deliverables
- Knowledge assets

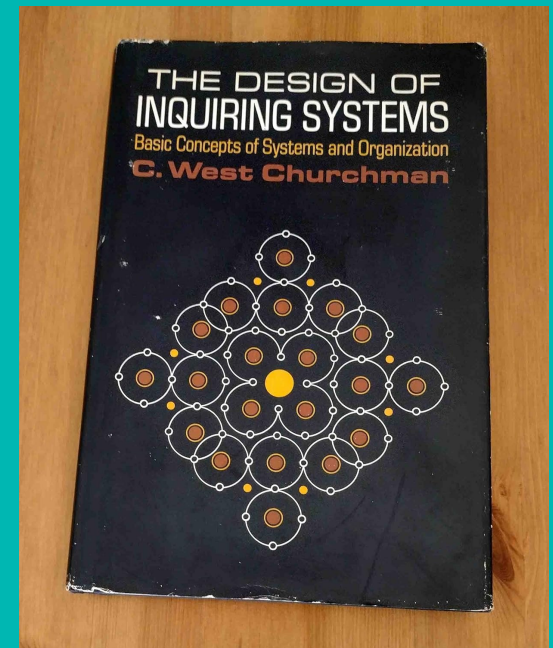
"At a strategic level, there will be 10 high level targets to ensure the aid program is effectively managed and delivering on key Government priorities."



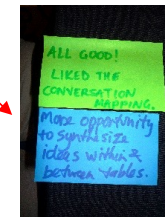
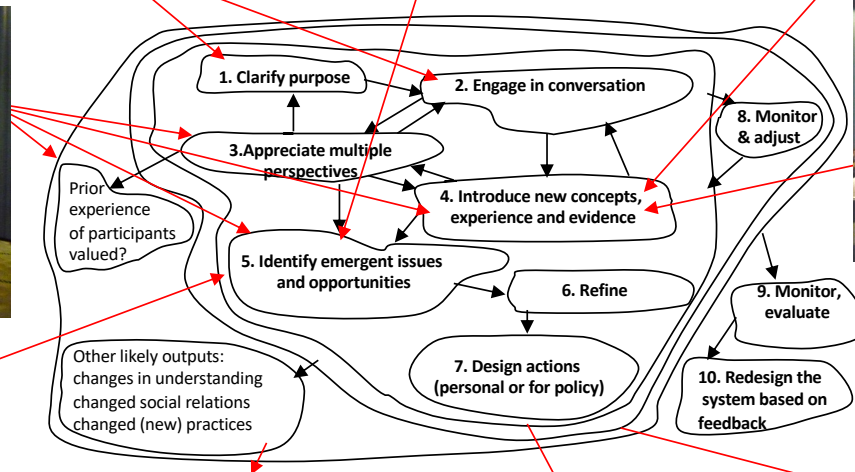
Systemic governing praxis demands new forms of inquiry & co-inquiry :

Inquiry is

'reflective learning in the literal sense.... it is the thinking about thinking, doubting about doubting, learning about learning, and (hopefully) knowing about knowing'
(Churchman 1971 p. 17).

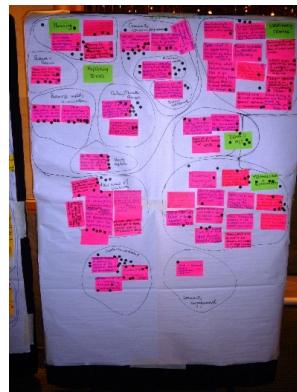


In practice....



System maps...

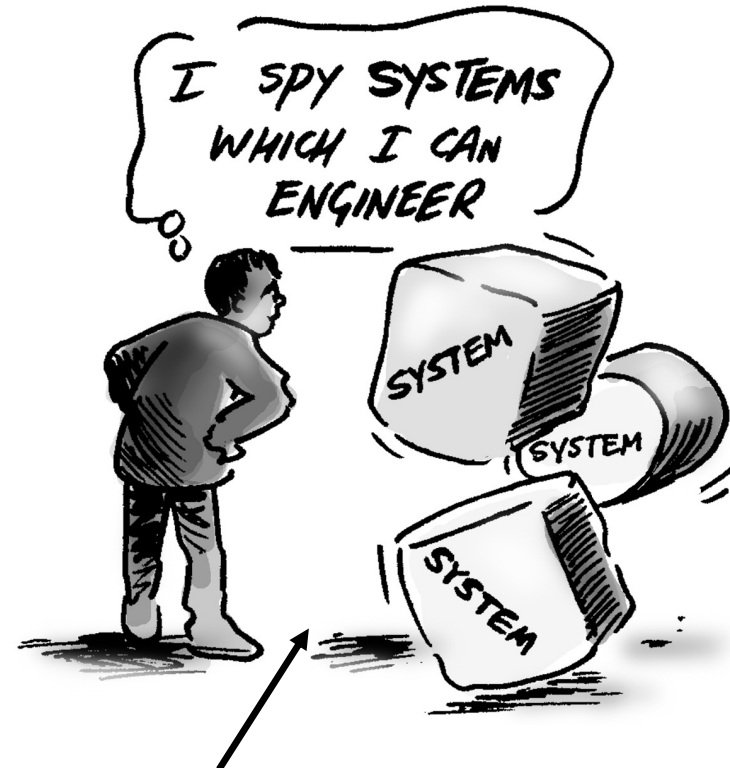
Systemic co-inquiry in action: transitioning to water sensitive cities, Australia



Creating favourable initial starting conditions in your situated practice: start with Situation? or System? A choice to be made



Systemic (systems as epistemologies)



Systematic (systems as ontologies)

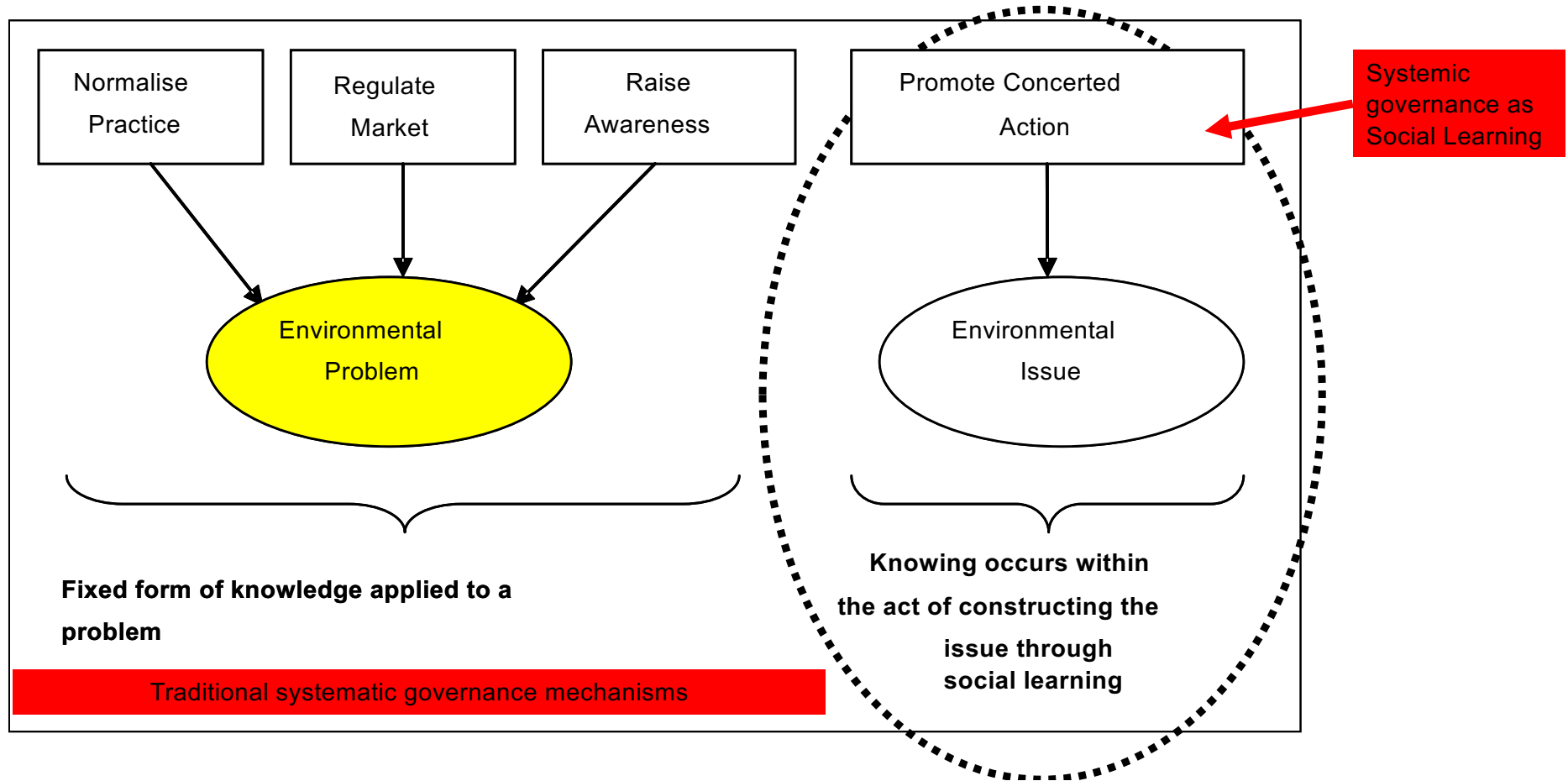
Some systems concepts that contribute to a systemic (theoretical) 'framework of ideas' (systems literacy)

- Perspective
- **System**, systemic, systematic, system-of-interest;
- Purpose - purposeful; purposive
- Boundary, boundary judgements;
- Emergence
- **Hierarchy, layered structure, network**
- Feedback - +ve and -ve feedback
- Control
- Communication
- **TRANSFORMATION**

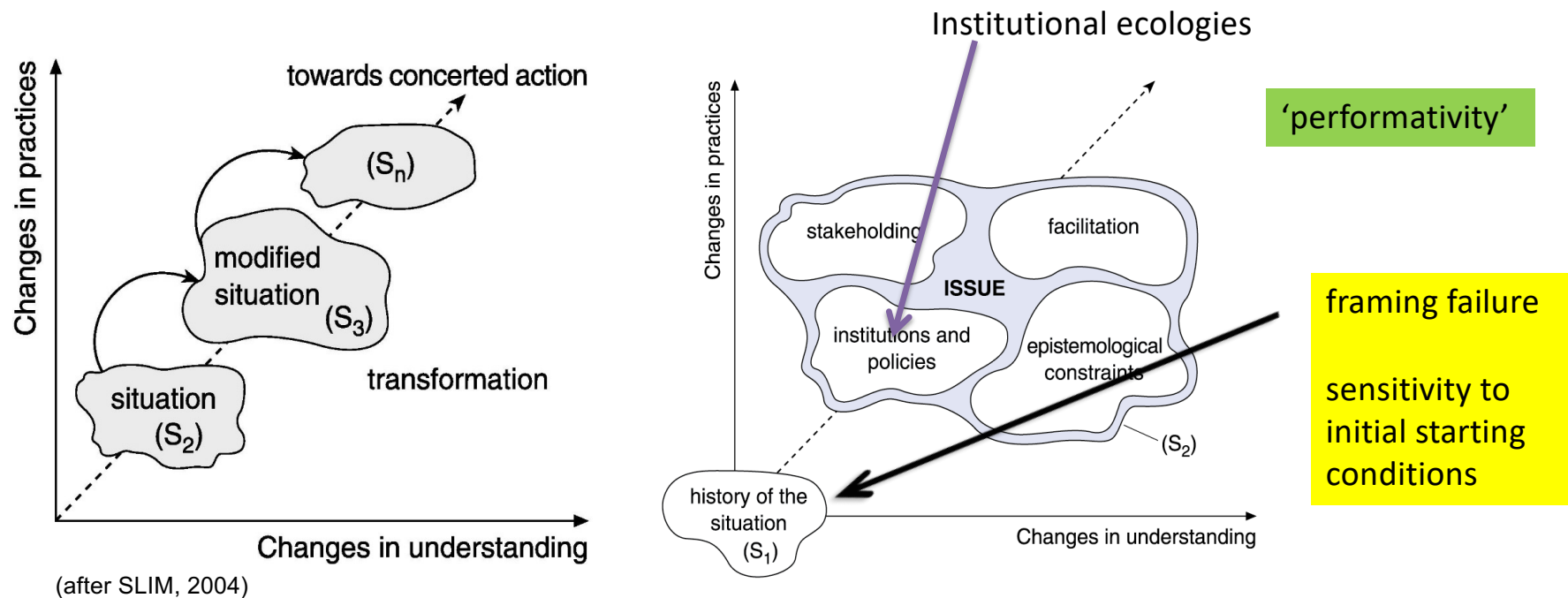
Four metaphors for governing that draw on cybersystemic thinking (Ison & Straw 2020)

- Sailing/steering - reformulating the cybernetic feedback metaphor for governing
- The praxis of governing as orchestrated social learning
- Governing as guided improvisation and emergence
- Governing as trajectory-correcting co-evolution

The praxis of governing as orchestrated social learning



Institutional ecologies and affordances for transformation

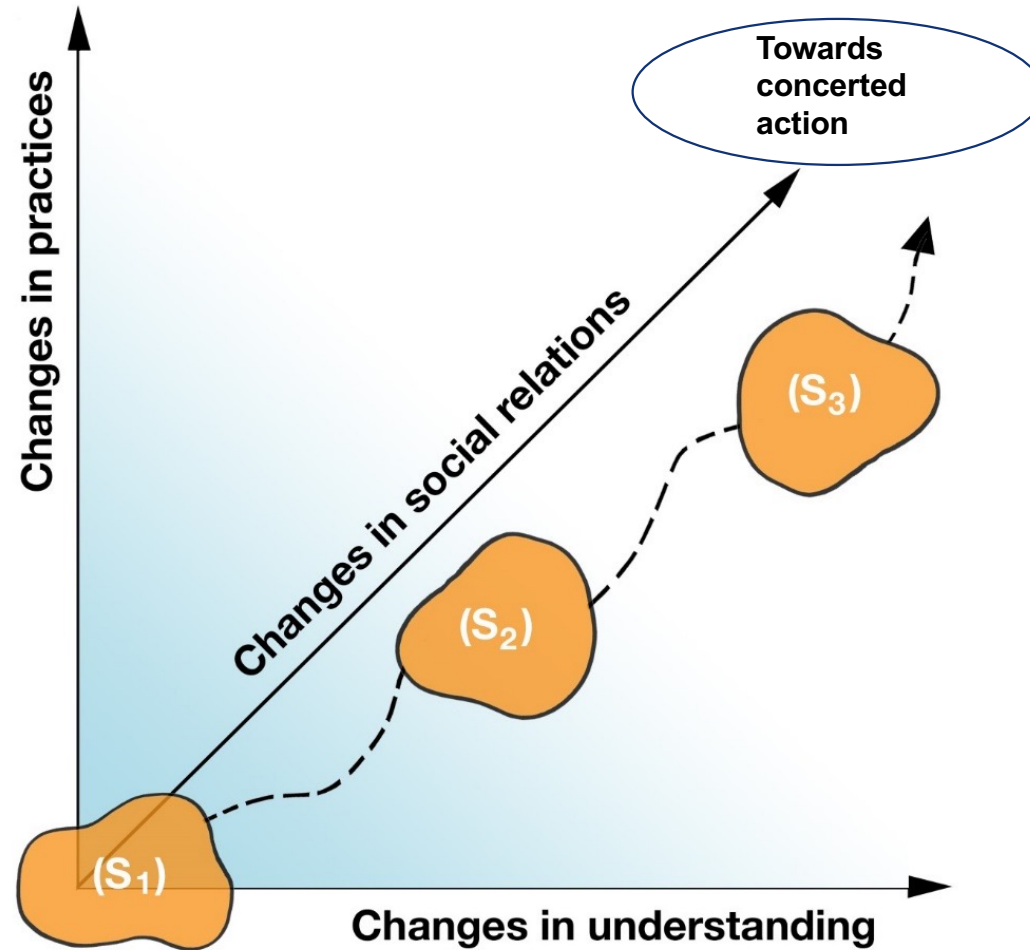


Transformations towards/through social learning are almost universally constrained by (i) institutions (or social technologies) - their complexity, affordances, praxis effects (performativity); reifications etc; (ii) framing failure and (iii) overall performativity

Social learning as situational transformation through concerted action – learning from co-learning is critical

Transform situations (S) not systems

Use Systems Thinking in Practice (STiP) to help transform situations



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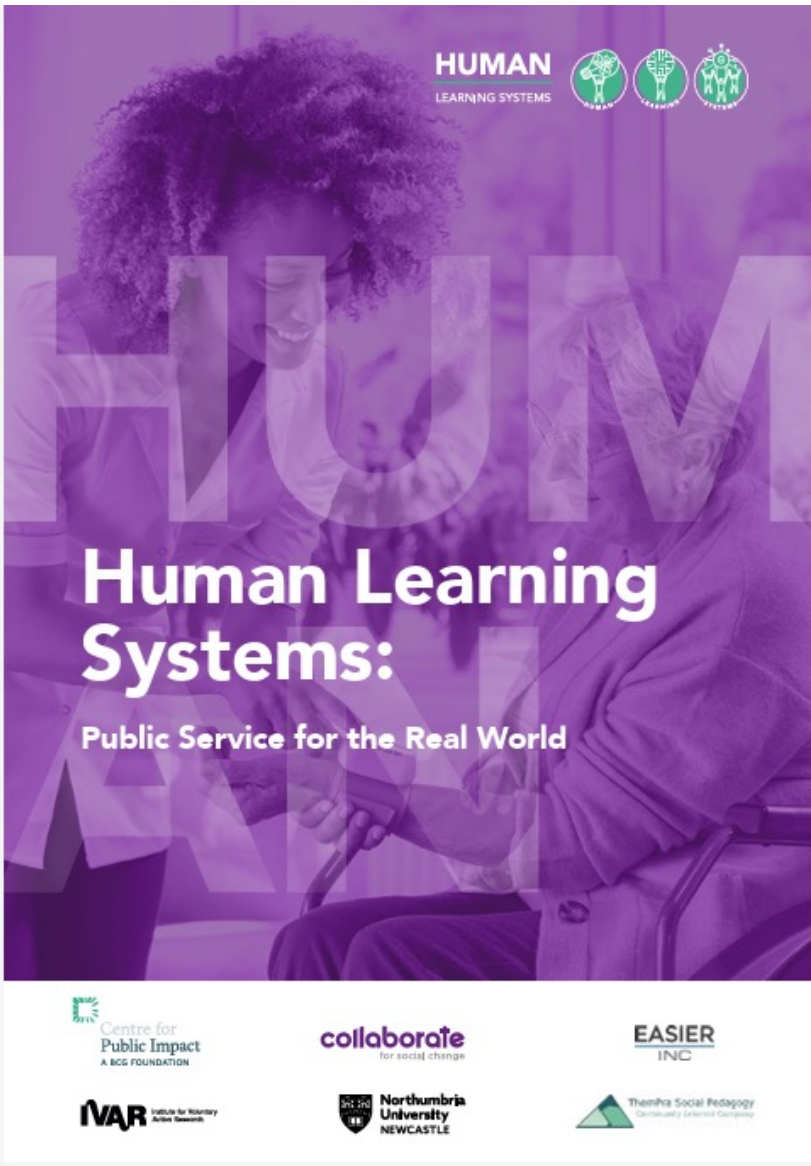
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Learning from Finland....

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A redefined role for national government – as a trusted learning partner

Taking an experimentation approach helped build a community of practice and emphasised the importance of learning together. "It was not about the outcome," said Olli-Pekka, "but about how people reached that outcome. The whole idea is to create learning loops inside the national education system to connect the local and national levels."

He has seen many national educational strategies fail, "because the national and local levels were too far from each other and they didn't know each other's reality. Learning loops are needed to create credibility and reliability – two elements of trust that glue the entire system together."

The participants focused on learning together and were unafraid to test and revise their solutions. The Innovation Centre staff found that this "experimental development reduces risks because it helps identify the weaknesses of a potential solution at an early stage, to halt particular development paths and shift to a new direction and solution".

<https://centreforpublicimpact.org/resource-hub/learning-as-a-strategy-to-improve-national-education-insights-from-the-finnish-national-agency-for-educations-innovation-centre/>



GOVERNMENT'S ANALYSIS,
ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Mikko Annala, Juha Leppänen, Silva Mertsola, Charles F. Sabel

Humble Government:
How to Realize Ambitious Reforms Prudently

<https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/hls-real-world.pdf>

According to the case study published by Prof Toby Lowe (2021) based on interviews with Olli-Pekka Heinonen, there were five key takeaways in terms of achieving (and sustaining) the Finnish experiment with ‘humble government’ and what we call ‘systemic governance’ (see Ison & Straw 2020)

Lowe, Toby & Heinonen, Olli-Pekka – see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmuMZLUsrzU> (Accessed 26th February 2024)

Lowe, Toby 5 Lessons from Olli-Pekka Heinonen and the Finnish National Agency for Education.
<https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/interview-with-olli-pekka-heinonen-5-lessons-from-the-work-of-the-innovation-centre-in-the-finnish-national-agency-for-education-edufi>

Humble government: the role of central government

- support local learning and experimentation;
- not to dictate and manage implementation of policy and practice.
- [in education] to create context which provides a growth environment for each and every child
- enable experimenting with experimentation
- In order to offer trust, central government needs to 'let go of control' and support the autonomy of people working on the ground. The role of the leader should be to protect processes that support localised capacity building.

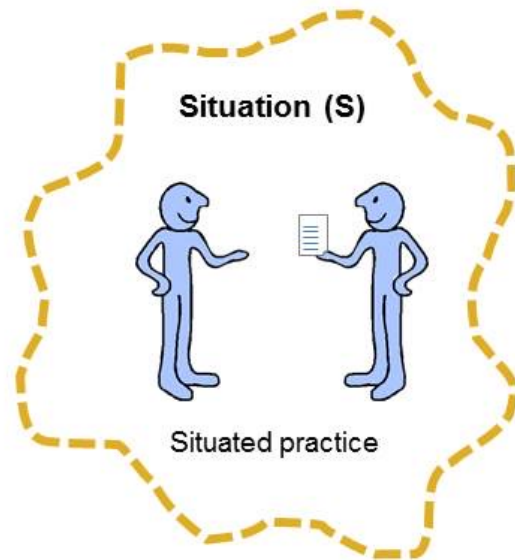
Humble government: the role of central government

- **‘Let’s forget scaling.’** This is a radical change of innovation method. Usually, innovation is about conducting experiments in order to find the ‘right’ answer.
- [in our work we turn to systemic design or codesign which may grow out of systemic inquiry/co-inquiry]
- rethink accountability: shift away from traditional hierarchical accountability towards peer-to-peer accountability.
- **forget target-based performance management** systems (these are systematic at the expense of the systemic)

‘Humble’ or ‘systemic’ governance

- These five key considerations are consistent with cybersystemic understandings and the design and enactment of systemic governance.
- **But are these the only key ingredients?**
- How easy/hard is it to design, implement and sustain in practice these innovations?
- **Are they immune from changes in government?**
- What capabilities do practitioners need so as to inhabit this way of governing and secure success in the longer term?

Some principles about practice: Reframing what practitioners do when they do ‘governing practice’



All practice (doing) is situated and embodied

- i. all observations require an observer, observing;
- ii. everything said is said by someone to someone (we live in language);
- iii. all knowing is doing;
- iv. all being, knowing and doing is relational;
- v. all observers, practitioners, actors have a history, a tradition of understanding, out of which they think and act
- vi. institutions and technologies mediate practice
- vii. we humans live with a desire for explanation - science is a practice ...it realizes scientific explanations

Cyber-Systems is a praxis: how can we add it to what do we do when we do what we do?

...a so-called humble approach to policy-making based on experimentalist governance could help the government in living up to its pledges. In this context humility means that policy-making begins with an acknowledgement of the prevailing uncertainty and is thus built as a continuously iterative process, in which actors are willing to (and allowed to) change their mind as new information arises.



Thankyou