

Is quality improvement enough?

Why we also need methods for deep, systemic change in healthcare

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Healthcare Management Division
25th July 2025

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*"Tomorrow belongs to those
who can hear it coming"*
David Bowie
Heroes



Is quality improvement enough?

Why we also need methods for deep, systemic change in healthcare

Orientation to this session

- Welcome and aims for the session – 10 minutes
- A plenary provocation – 30 minutes
- Catalyst conversations – 40 minutes
- Review of learning and reflections – 10 minutes





We have been working through a process of inquiry to develop these ideas with hundreds of leaders and improvement practitioners in health and care globally over the past five years.

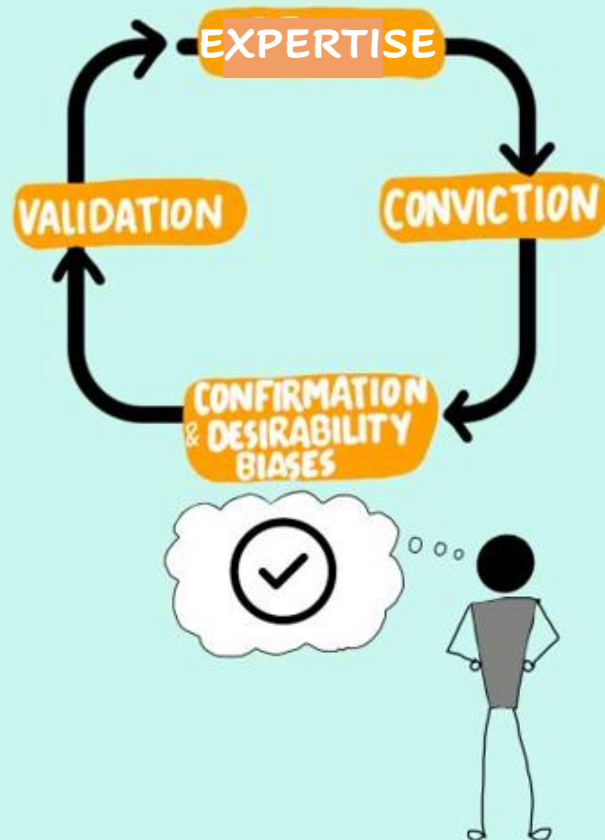
What we will share today is a work in progress, that we hope you will help us to continue to develop

Some principles for working together in this PDW

- Go with the flow
- Everyone has a voice
- Everyone helps everyone else
- Focus on strengths and solutions
- We collectively take responsibility for some great conversations



How an expert thinks



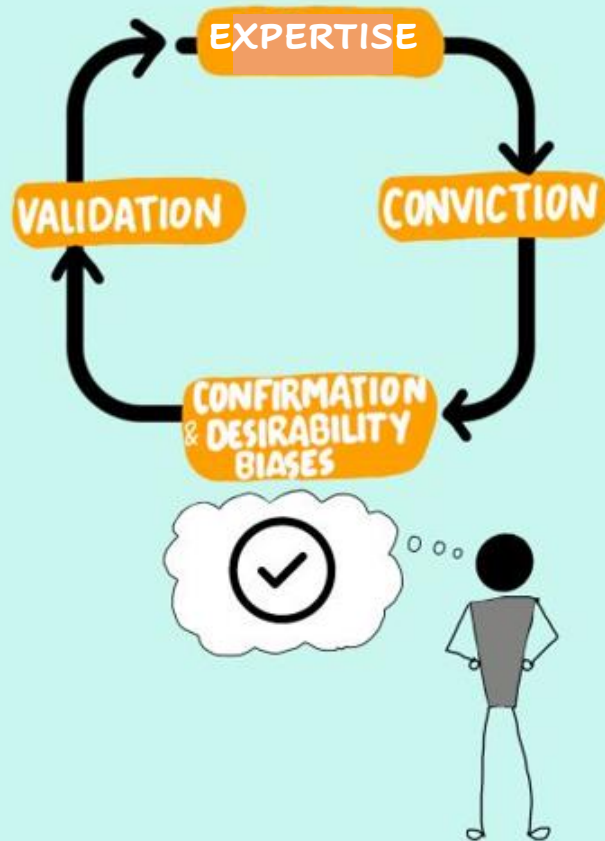
SKETCHNOTE BY ANUJ MAGAZINE 14TH-DEC-2021



“*Many times experts fail because
they are experts in a past version
of the world*
Vikram Khosia

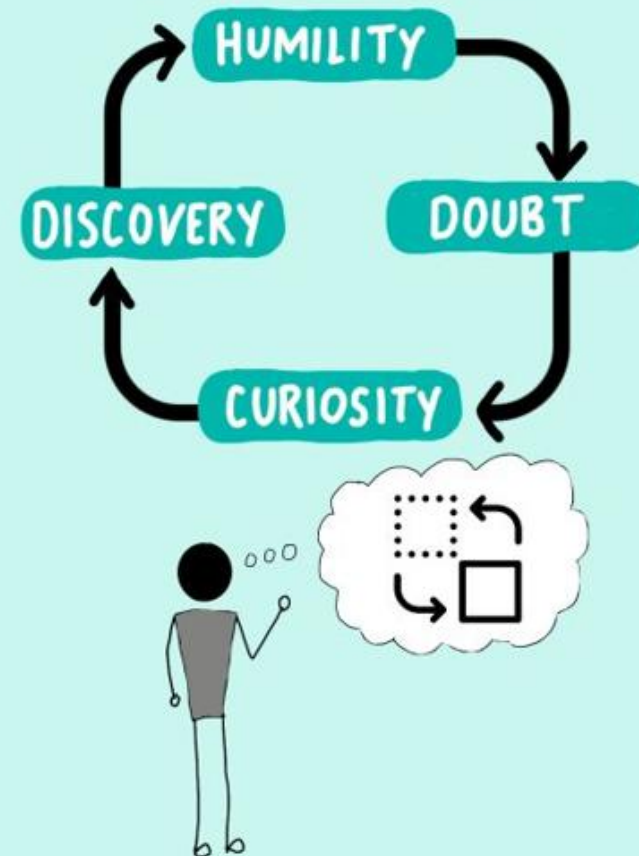


How an expert thinks



SKETCHNOTE BY ANUJ MAGAZINE 14TH-DEC-2022

How an explorer thinks



Based on the book "Think Again" by Adam Grant



Three modes of organising for improvement in health and care

1.	Doing things well	Delivering services effectively and consistently, in line with established standards; adherence to agreed ways of working; detecting deviation from planned performance, restoration of performance.
2.	Doing things better	Continuous improvement of existing processes and pathways to enhance outcomes; identifying areas for improvement and using systematic improvement methods to achieve advances.
3.	Doing better things	Adopting innovative approaches, technologies and/or strategies that fundamentally transform care delivery for superior outcomes; rethinking established methods and testing/implementing solutions that address the key goals of the service

They are interdependent and we need to do all three.

Batalden and Foster's "Quality 3.0"

Quality 1.0

Thresholds

"Basic" standards used to certify acceptable performance and capability

Formal processes for review, documentation and external audits and a system for public notice and recognition.

Quality 2.0

Systemic approach

Organisation-wide systems for best disease management

Focus on the processes, pathways and systems of care, reduction of unwanted variation, outcome measurement and collaborative work practices.

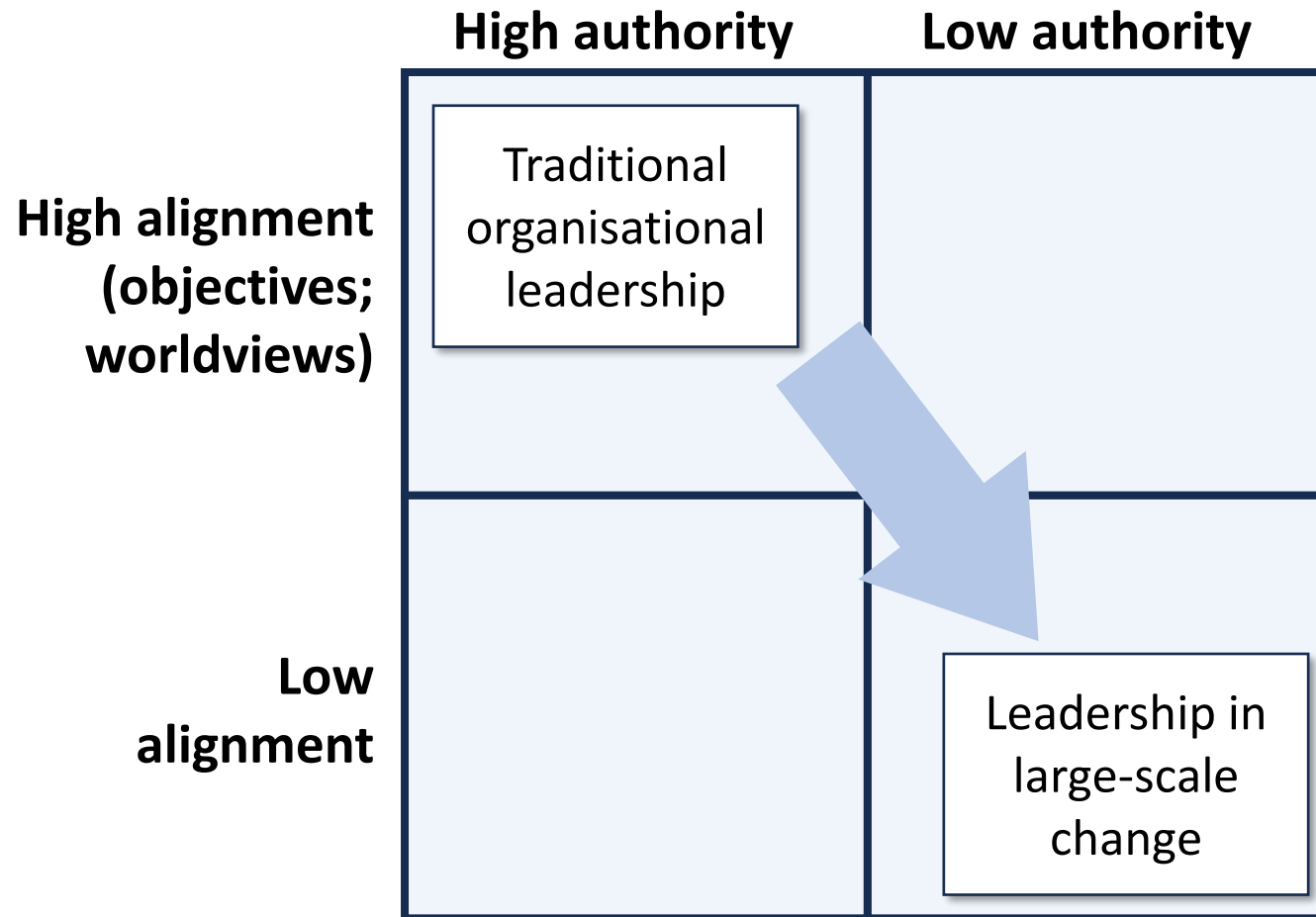
Quality 3.0

Coproduction of health

Improving the value of the contribution that healthcare services makes to health

Radically rethinking the meaning of 'service' and 'value', and considering both relationships and activities in the context of the coproduction of health and care services

Distinctive challenges of leadership in large scale change

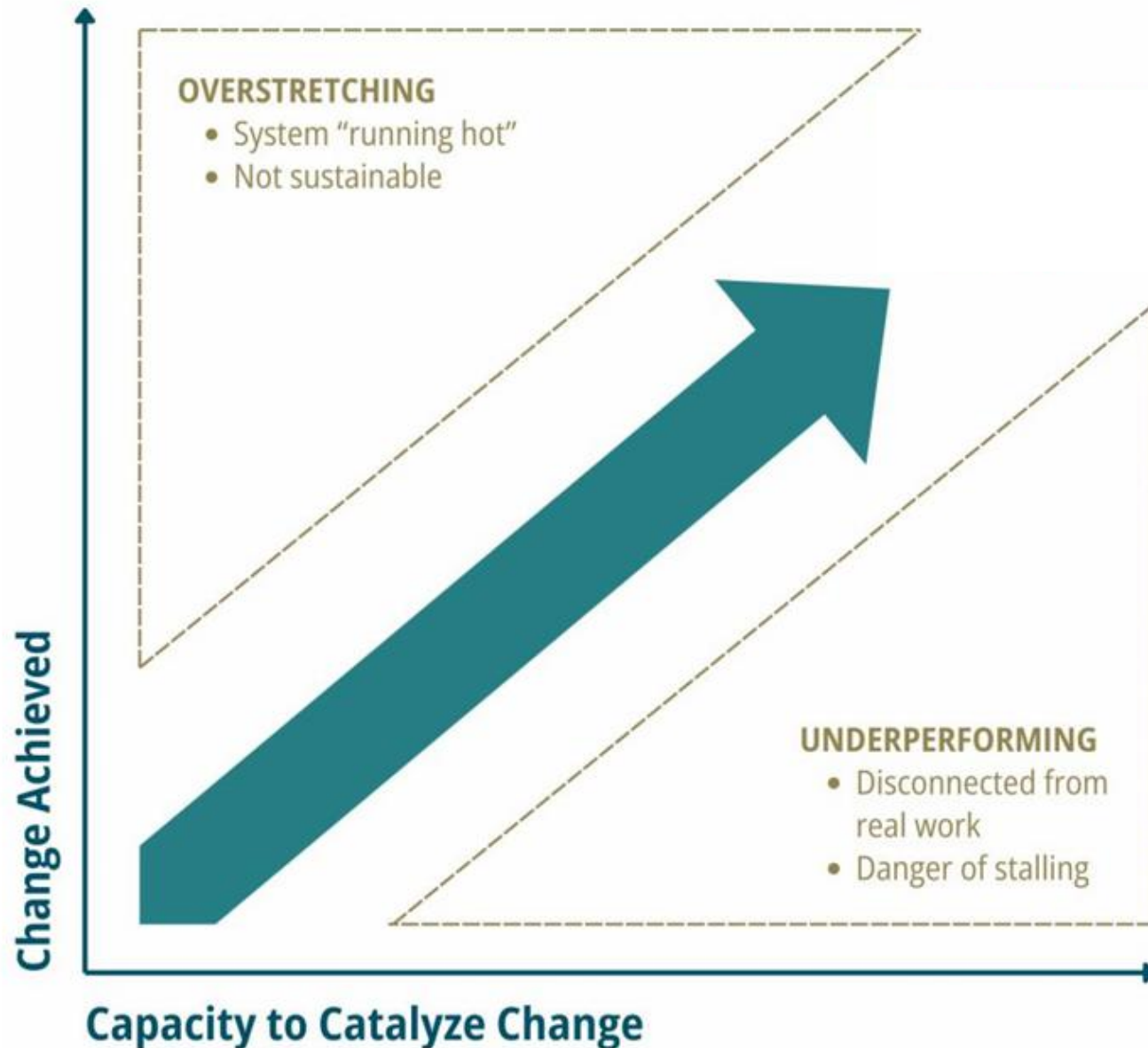


For **large scale change**, we need to:

- **Mobilise the energy and leadership** of many across many different contexts
- **Coordinate across many diverse boundaries** and multiple types of diversity
- **View complexity and coordination costs** as critical constraints

Source: Nathaniel Foote, TruePoint Center, building on a framework by Herman B. Leonard, Harvard University

Tension between long and short term goals for change



Staying in the 45-degree zone:

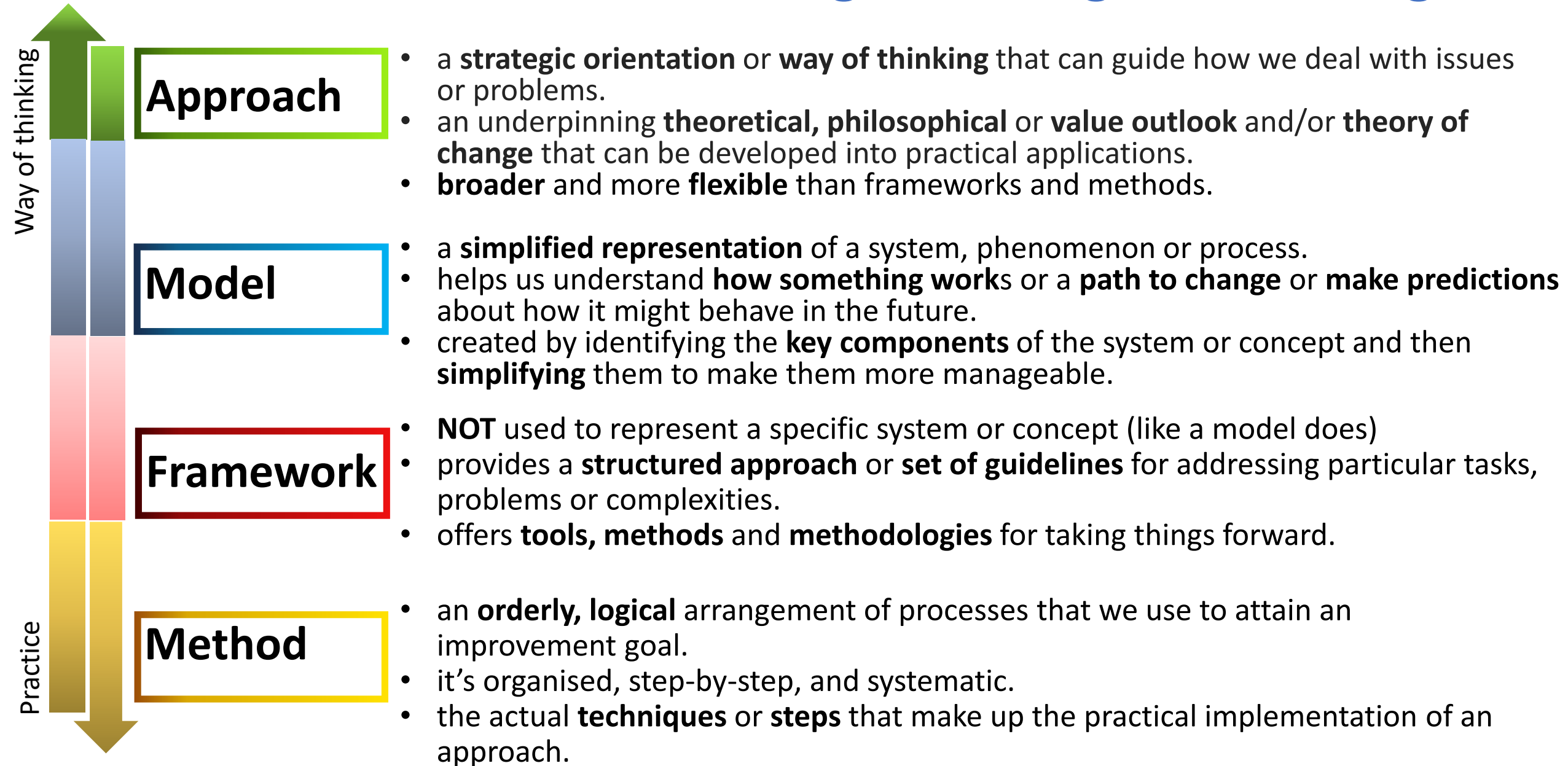
- Deliver today
- Build for performance tomorrow

Source: chapter three “Setting the near-term action agenda: what and how much to include” in *Leadership for large-scale change: distinctive challenges, emerging responses*, Aspen Institute and the Higher Ambition Leadership Alliance (April 2025)

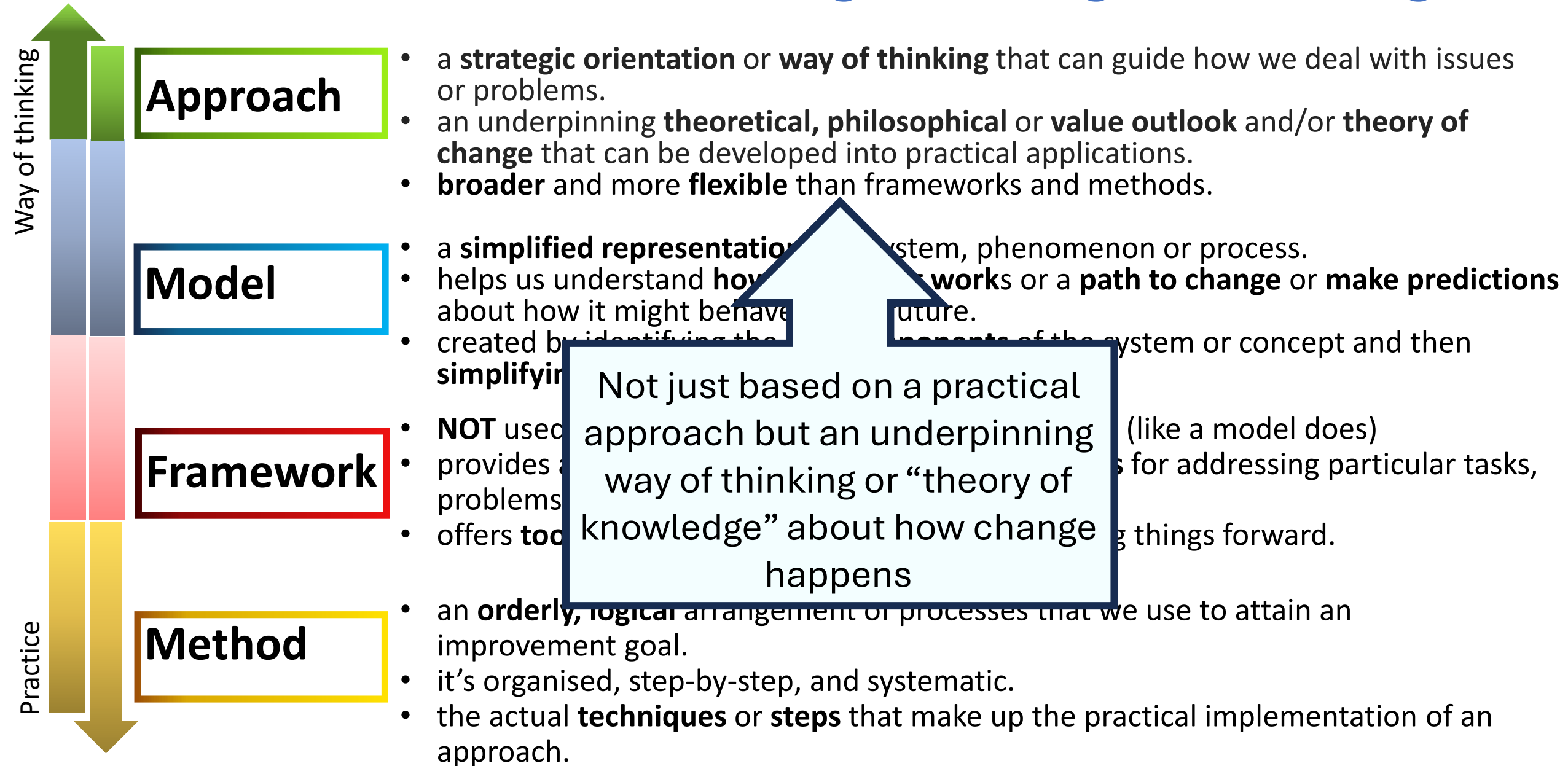
Three modes of organising for improvement in health and care

			Ratio in 2000	Ratio in 2025
1.	Doing things well	Delivering elective services effectively & consistently, in line with established standards; adherence to agreed ways of working; detecting deviation from planned performance, restoration of performance.	20%	60%
2.	Doing things better	Continuous improvement of existing processes & pathways to enhance outcomes; identifying areas for improvement & using systematic improvement methods to achieve advances.	30%	30%
3.	Doing better things	Adopting innovative approaches, technologies &/or strategies that fundamentally transform care delivery for superior outcomes; rethinking established methods & testing/implementing solutions that address the key challenges in reducing waiting times	50%	10%

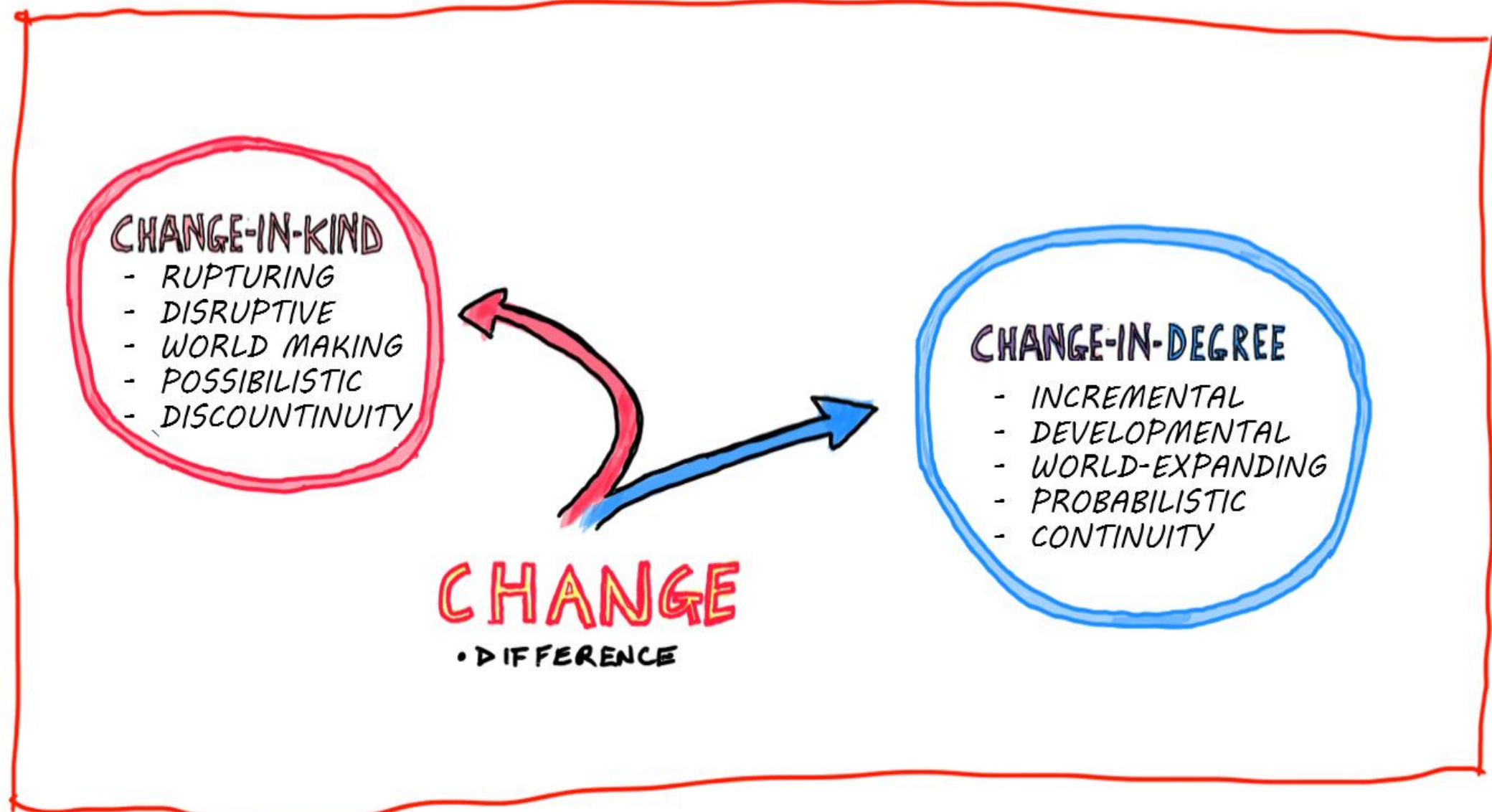
What level should we be thinking at for large scale change?



What level should we be thinking at for large scale change?



Much of our current change practice is designed for “*change-in-degree*” when we also need “*change-in-kind*”



Recurring and interrelated themes in approaches to enabling large scale change

Moving together towards a shared direction

Changing yourself as a resource for change

Co-producing change: "with" & "by", not "to" or "for"

Setting up systems for experimental learning & unlearning: "doing the right next thing"

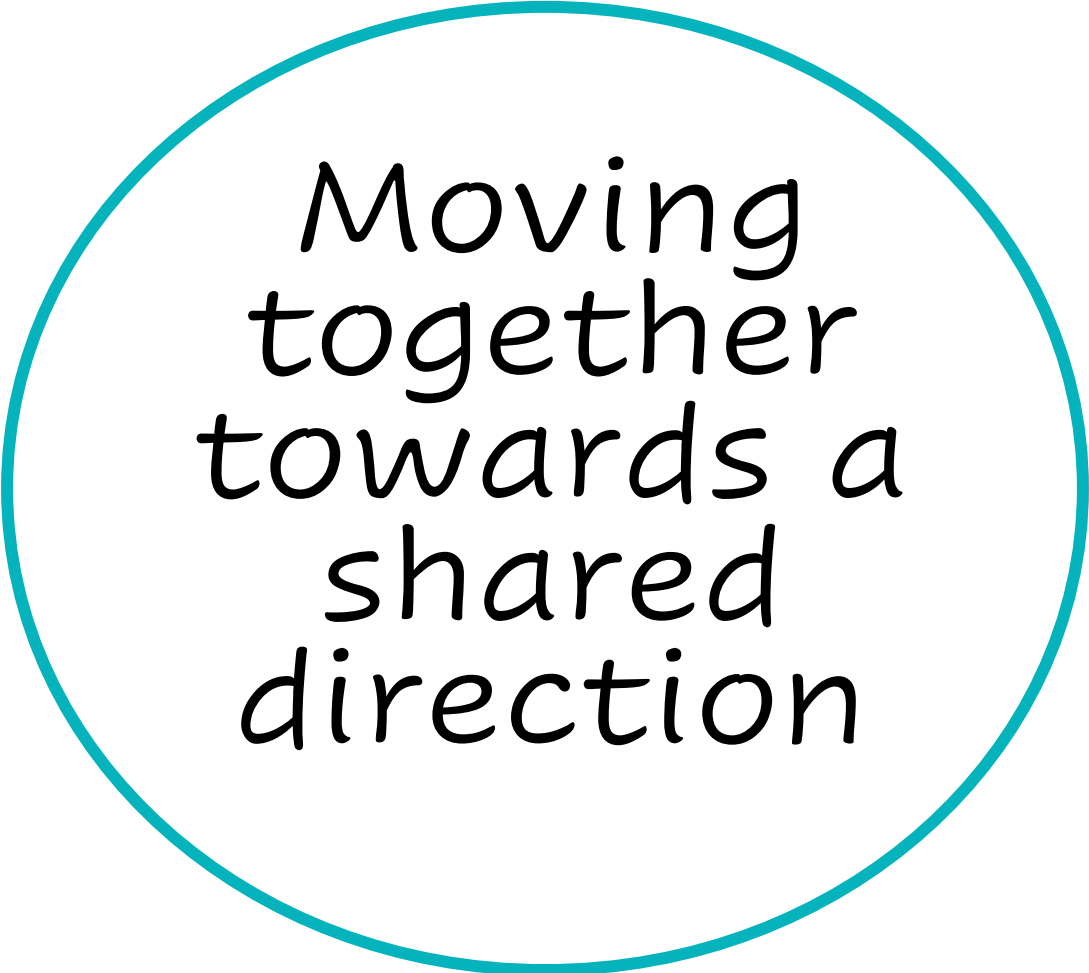
Shaping networks to shape opinions

Creating the conditions for emergent change

Leading people through transitions in situations of uncertainty

Developing leaders everywhere: sustainable systems of distributed leaders

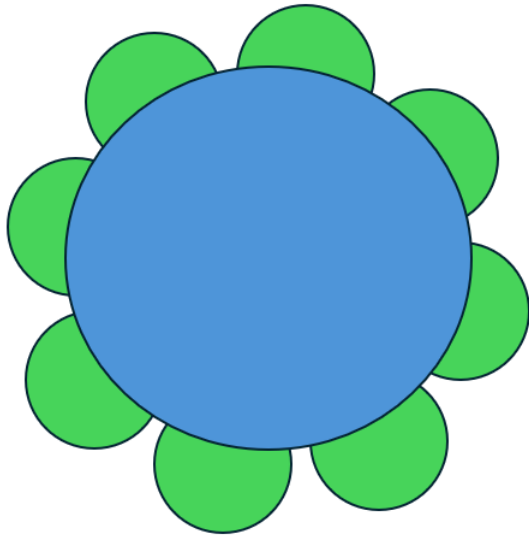
Building power: a spectrum of allies AND working through pillars of formal power



Moving
together
towards a
shared
direction

A growing debate for systemic change: Do we focus on shared purpose or shared inquiry?

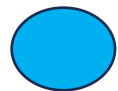
In change across a system, the predominant thinking is that we should start the work from a place of shared purpose or shared aim



Therefore, we tend to focus on the collective agenda, rather than the agenda of individual leaders
This brings high complexity and coordination costs and can sap the energy of individual leaders



Individual agenda

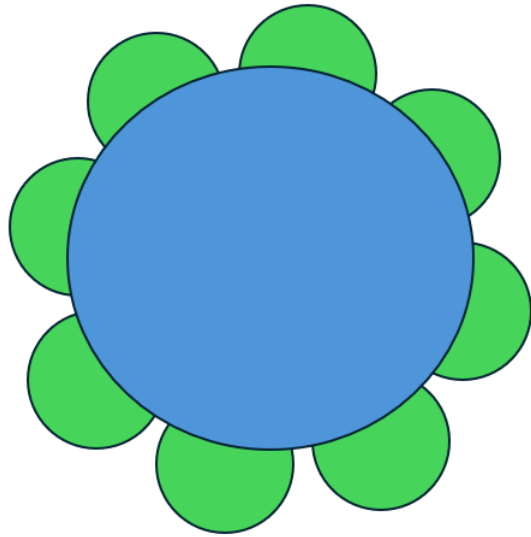


Collective agenda

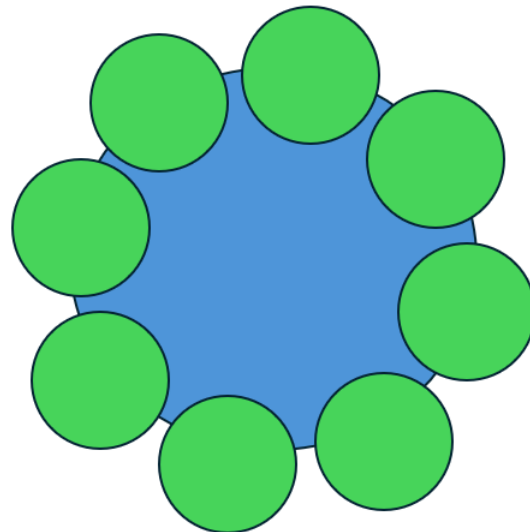
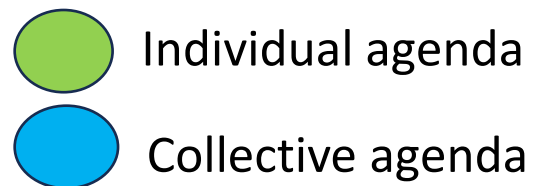
A growing debate in large scale change:

Do we focus on shared purpose or shared inquiry?

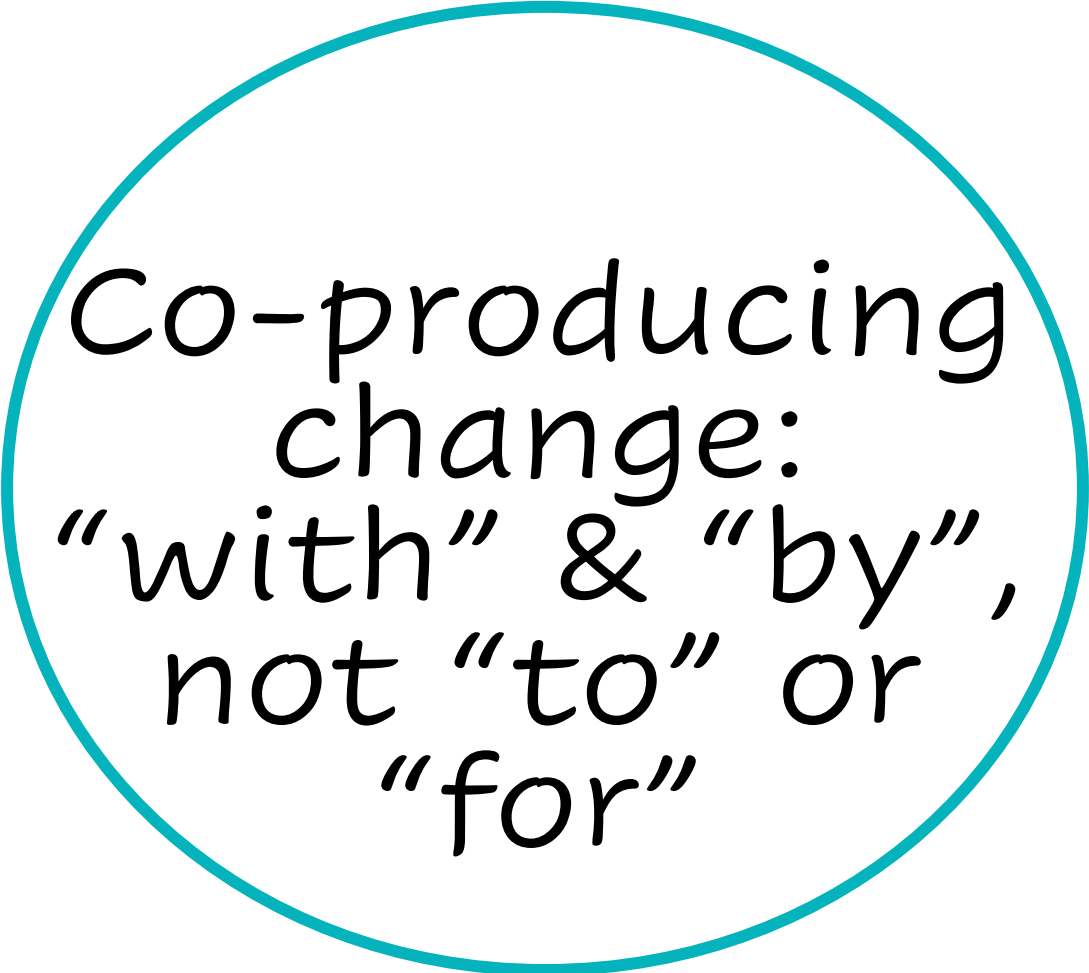
In leading large scale change across a system, the predominant thinking is that we should start from a place of shared purpose or shared aim



Therefore, we tend to focus on the collective agenda, rather than the agenda of individual leaders
This brings high complexity and coordination costs and can sap the energy of individual leaders



We might waste much less leadership energy if we help each individual leader advance their own agenda more effectively; collaborative initiatives arise as a byproduct of shared inquiry and shared learning



Co-producing
change:
“with” & “by”,
not “to” or
“for”

Patrik

Christian

Britt-Marie



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neSv7TdsLgk>

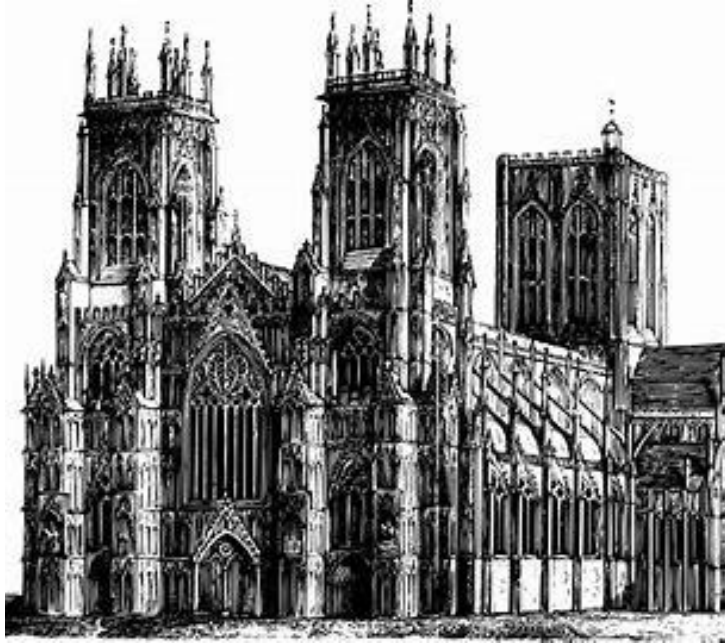
Networked health care: Rethinking value creation in learning health care systems

[Øystein D. Fjeldstad](#), [Julie K. Johnson](#), [Peter A. Margolis](#), [Michael Seid](#), [Pär Höglund](#), [Paul B. Batalden](#)

First published: 05 December 2019

<https://doi.org/10.1002/lrh2.10212>

Bring a brick, not a cathedral



A cathedral

A complete and fully formed idea that you are emotionally invested in and attached to.

It can block collaboration in its tracks.



A brick

Create the space for each person to contribute (a brick).

You help them have an emotional connection to the collaborative process

Brick by brick, you start to create something better than what one person would have done alone.

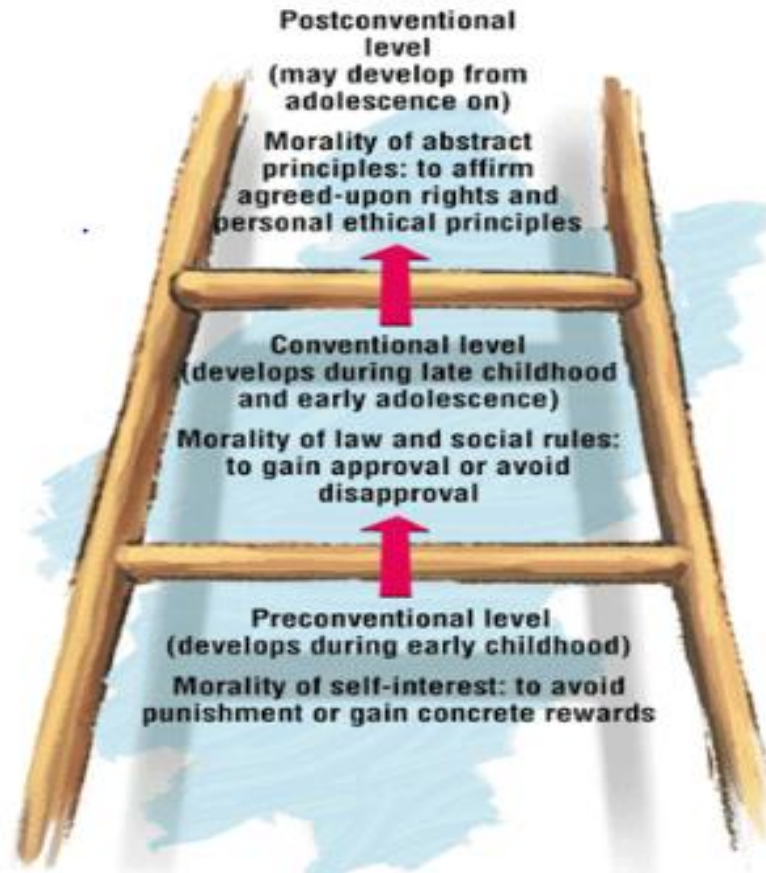
Source: Ally Muller



Changing
yourself as a
resource for
change

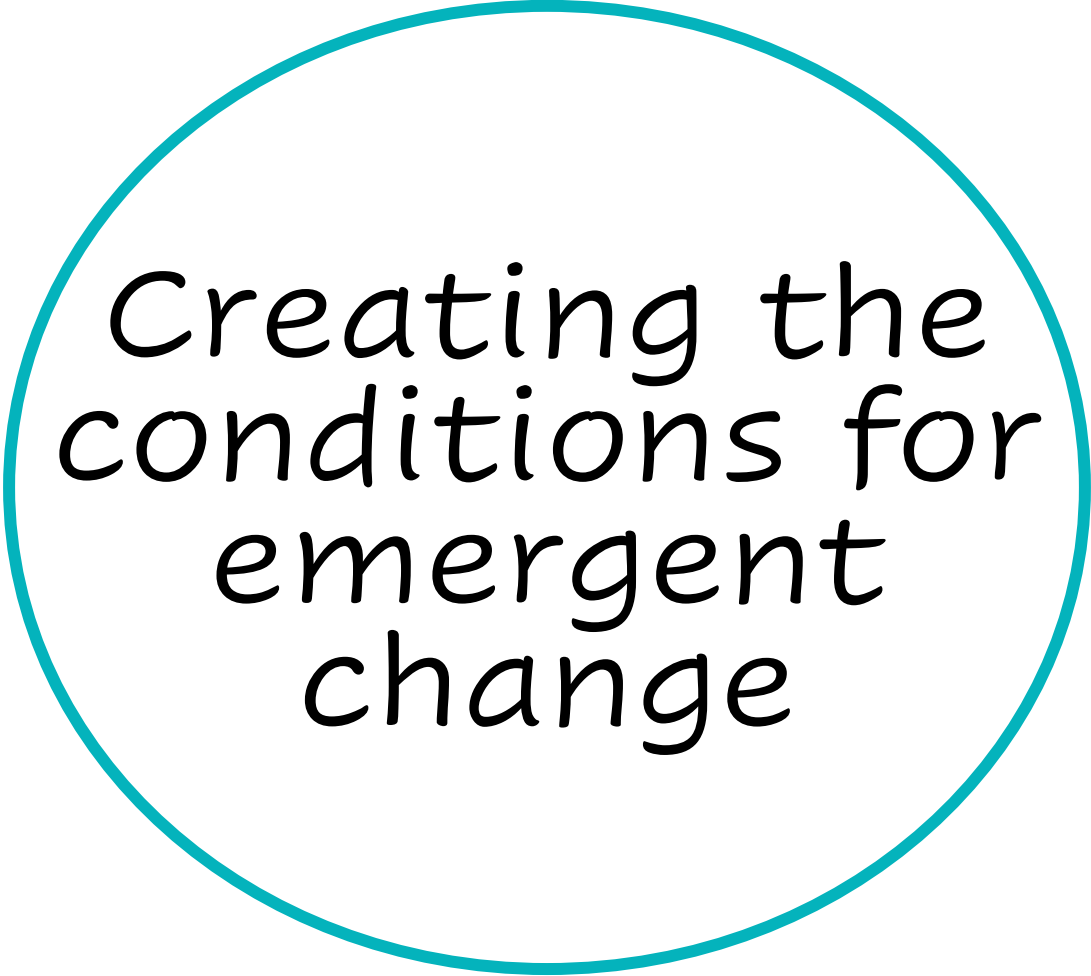
Post conventional change leaders

Current global trends call for leaders who can mobilise energy across multiple networks and demonstrate a high level of maturity in dealing creatively with increasing complexity, uncertainty, diversity, and multiple paradoxes



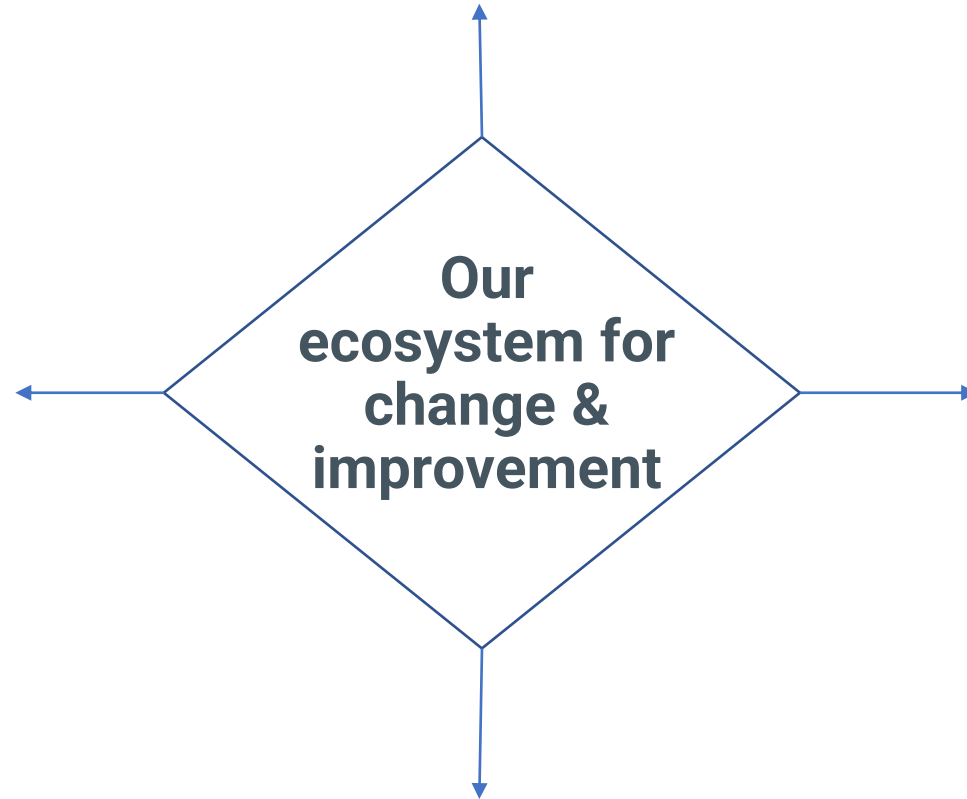
Source: Kohlberg's stages of moral development

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- Kegan, R. and Lahey, L. (2009). *Immunity to change*
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- Petrie, N (2015) *The how-to of vertical leadership development*
- Rooke, D. and Torbert, W.R. (2005). *Seven transformations of leadership*. *Harvard Business Review*



Creating the
conditions for
emergent
change

Creating the conditions for emergent change



Source: adapted
from a model by
Bill Bannear

People with passion or
motivation to take action

People with the authority or
mandate to drive change

Voice of intent



Source: adapted
from a model by
Bill Bannear

People with passion or motivation to take action

People with the authority or mandate to drive change

Voice of experience

People with lived experience of the issue and its context

People who will be a user of, or affected by, the changes we make

Voice of intent

Our ecosystem for change & improvement



Source: adapted from a model by Bill Bannear

People with passion or motivation to take action

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Voice of experience

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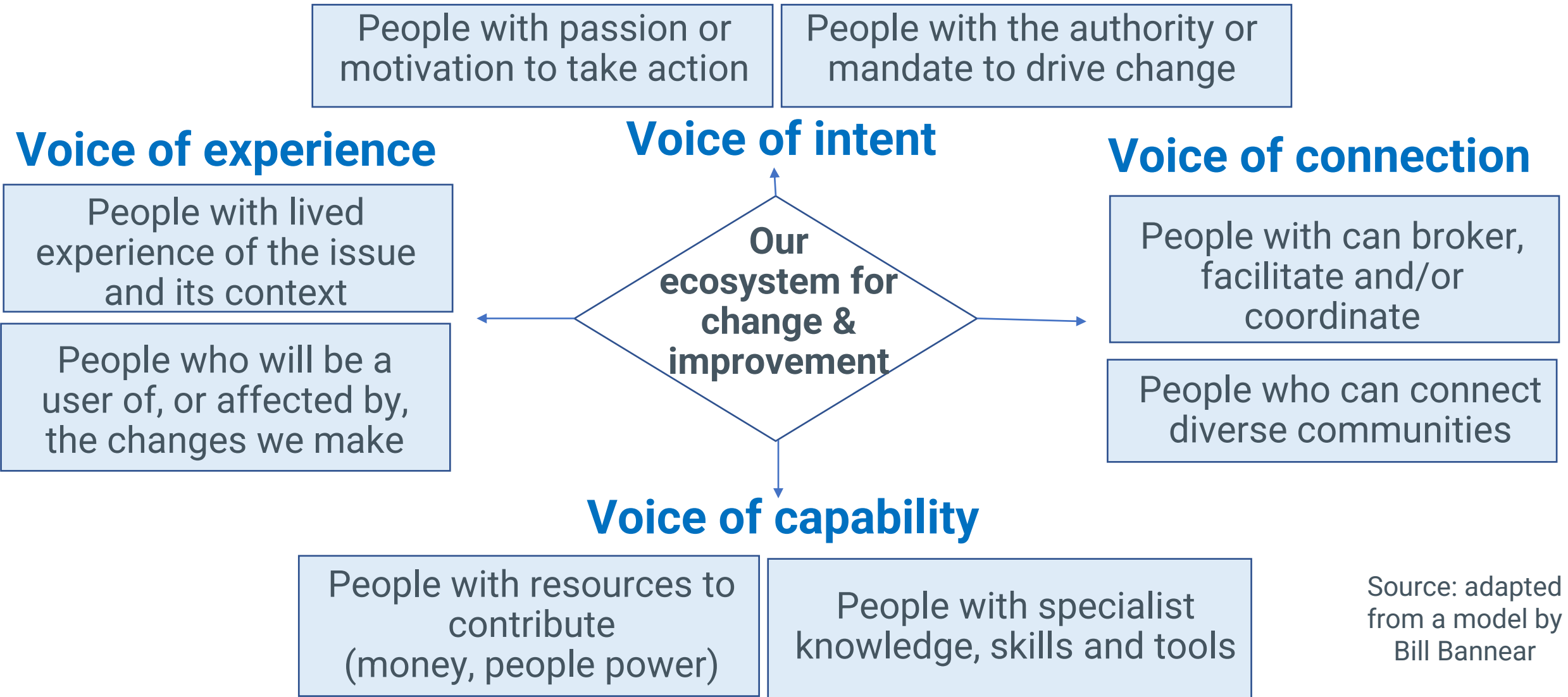
Our ecosystem for change & improvement

Voice of capability

People with resources to contribute
(money, people power)

People with specialist knowledge, skills and tools

Source: adapted from a model by Bill Bannear



Creating the conditions for action

People with passion or motivation to take action

People with the authority or mandate to drive change

Voice of experience

People with lived experience of the issue and its context

People who will be a user of, or affected by, the changes we make

Voice of intent

Our ecosystem for change & improvement

Voice of connection

People with can broker, facilitate and/or coordinate

People who can connect diverse communities

Voice of capability

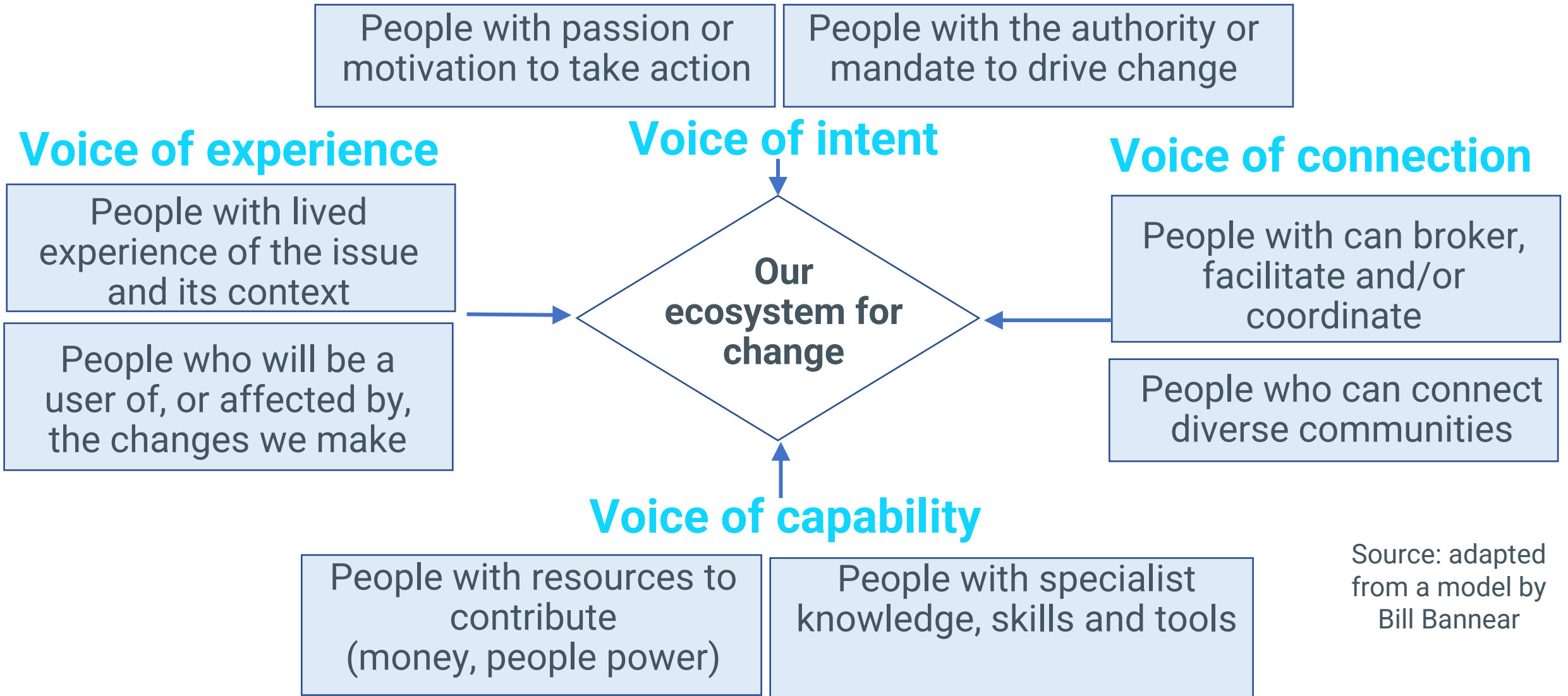
People with resources to contribute (money, people power)

People with specialist knowledge, skills and tools

Source: adapted from a model by Bill Bannear

How do we connect people who want to do something, with people who can help and support them, while staying grounded in real world need and experience to ensure it works?

Who needs to be part of our change process?



Source: adapted from a model by Bill Bannear

How do we connect people who want to do something, with people who can help and support them, while staying grounded in real world need and experience to ensure it works?

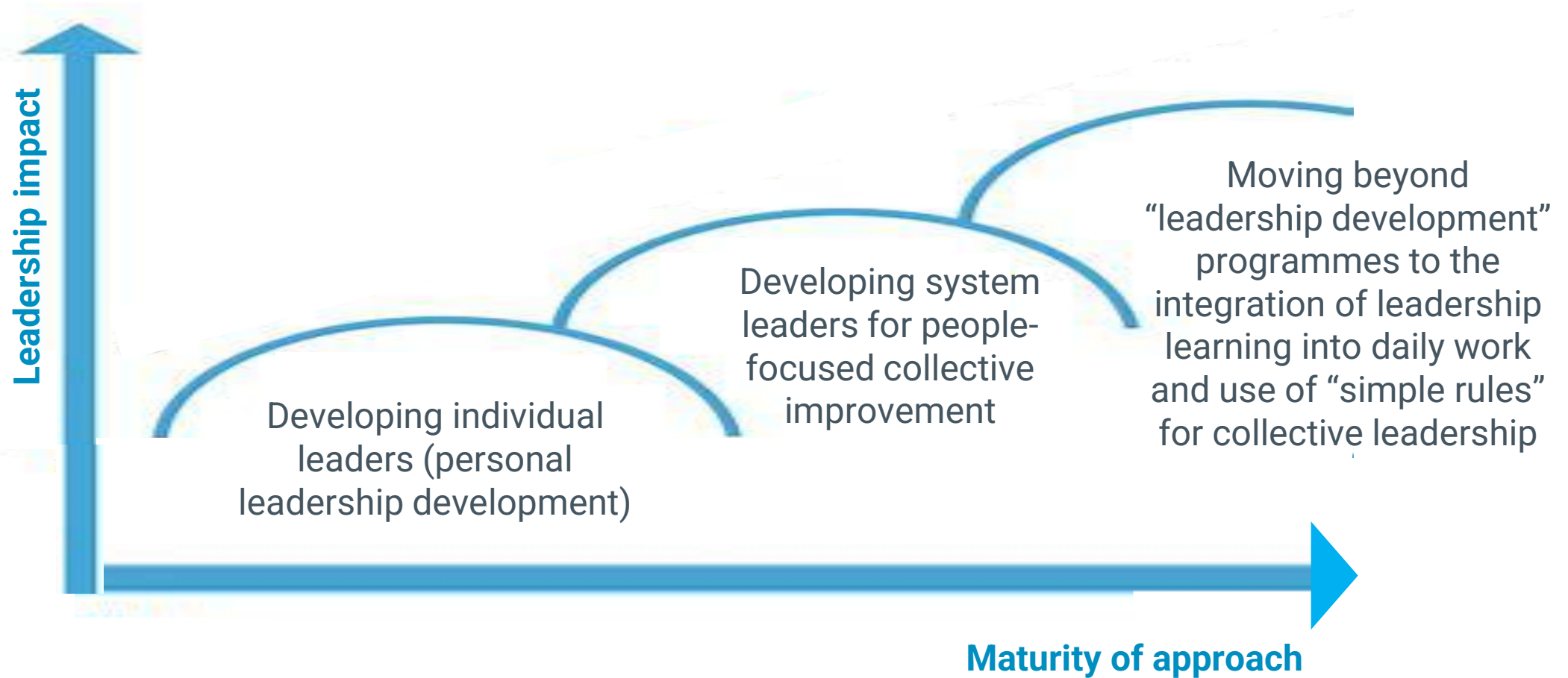
Creating the relational conditions for emergent change

- Identify the different capabilities needed to get traction on an issue and create the relationships and networks for them to connect.
- Less centralised designs and roadmaps, and more structures that enable distributed leadership and emergent action.
- Starting to value relationships as a key outcome in their own right.



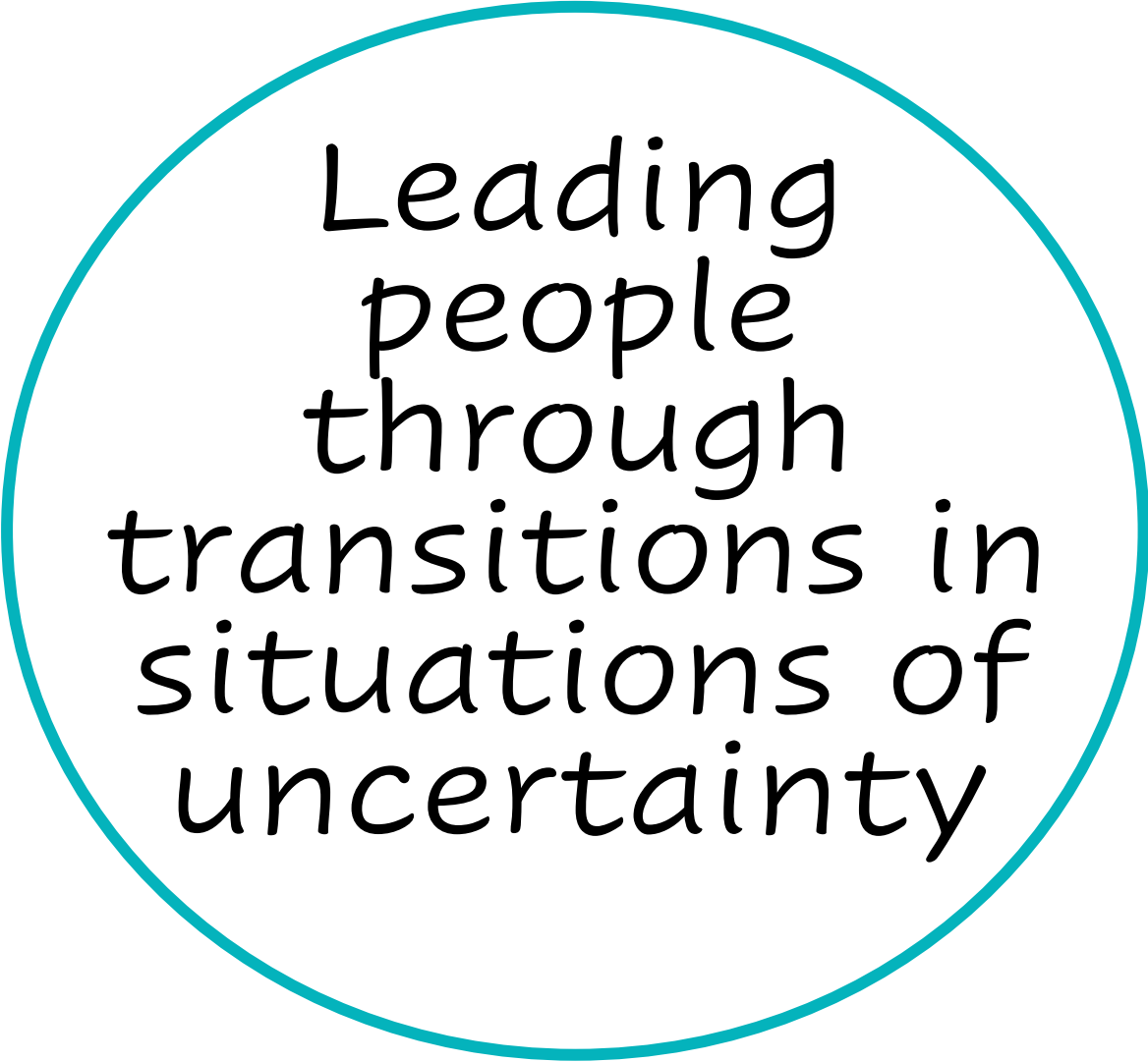
Developing
leaders
everywhere:
sustainable
systems of
distributed
leaders

Transformations in leadership development in Jönköping Region, Sweden



Fabisch et al (2024) Transformations towards an integrated leadership development system – a longitudinal study in a high-performing public organization. *Leadership*





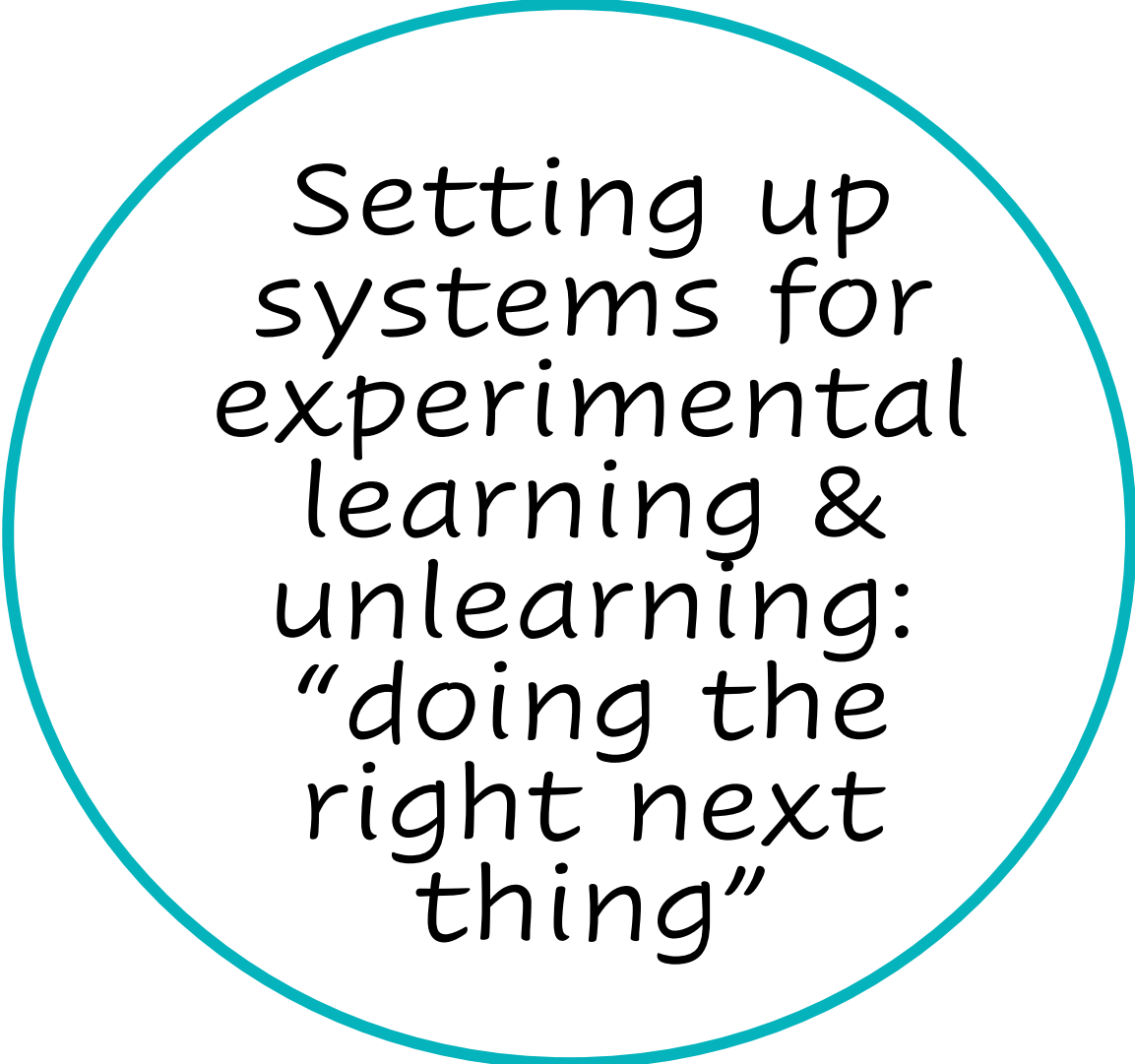
Leading
people
through
transitions in
situations of
uncertainty

“Belonging” and “unbelonging”

- Ingredient of ten missing in leading transformational transition is the ability to look for and work with deeper systemic forces at play
- “Belonging” is a growing theme in large scale change, esp. in the context of equality, diversity and inclusion
- Deborah Rowland and colleagues say we also need to consider “unbelonging”
- *“building others’ capacity to detach from past loyalties... and being able to stand at a distance from any strong belief group to allow novel solutions to emerge”*
- Rowland *et al*’s research positions the active focus on both belonging and unbelonging as a key differentiator for leaders tasked with guiding organisations through large-scale, uncertain change
- Leaders who can name and work with both the pain of loss (un-belonging) and the creation of new forms of connection (belonging) help foster genuine engagement and build sustainability through transitions

Rowland, D., Brauckmann, N., Thorley N. (2022) How to get your team on board with a major change, *Harvard Business Review*.

Rowland, D., Pivcevic, P., (2022) *Leading change post pandemic: belonging*, London School of Economics blog

A teal-colored circle is centered on the page. Inside the circle, the text "Setting up systems for experimental learning & unlearning: 'doing the right next thing'" is written in a black, handwritten-style font. The text is arranged in seven lines, centered within the circle's boundary.

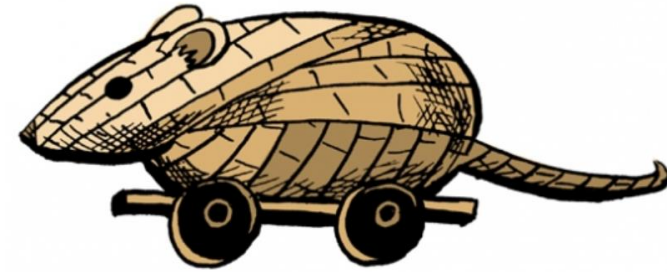
Setting up
systems for
experimental
learning &
unlearning:
"doing the
right next
thing"

Unlearning

Before we can adopt new habits, behaviours and processes, we must first create new space in our brains. We have to "unlearn" the lessons of old – a concept supported by decades-long research. Unlearning occurs "when organisations proactively question long-held routines, assumptions and beliefs". Studies show organisational unlearning is crucial to maintaining organisational viability

Be a "Trojan mouse"

Having many people across the system who have the skills and agency to test out small, well focussed changes to address complex problems (Trojan mice) nearly always works better than large pilot and roll out projects (Trojan horses).

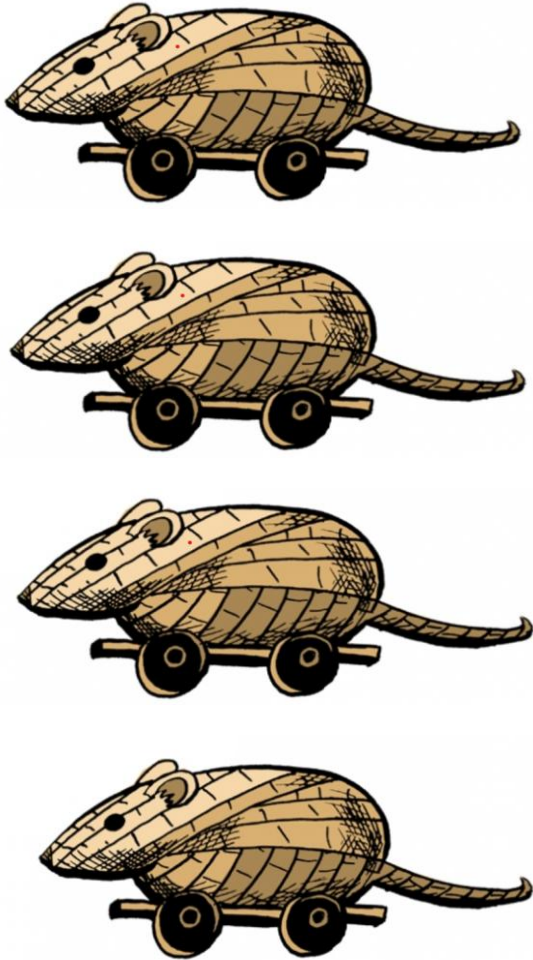


"Trojan mice... are small, well focused changes, which are introduced on an ongoing basis in an inconspicuous way. They are small enough to be understood and owned by all concerned but their effects can be far-reaching. Collectively a few Trojan mice will change more than one Trojan horse ever could."

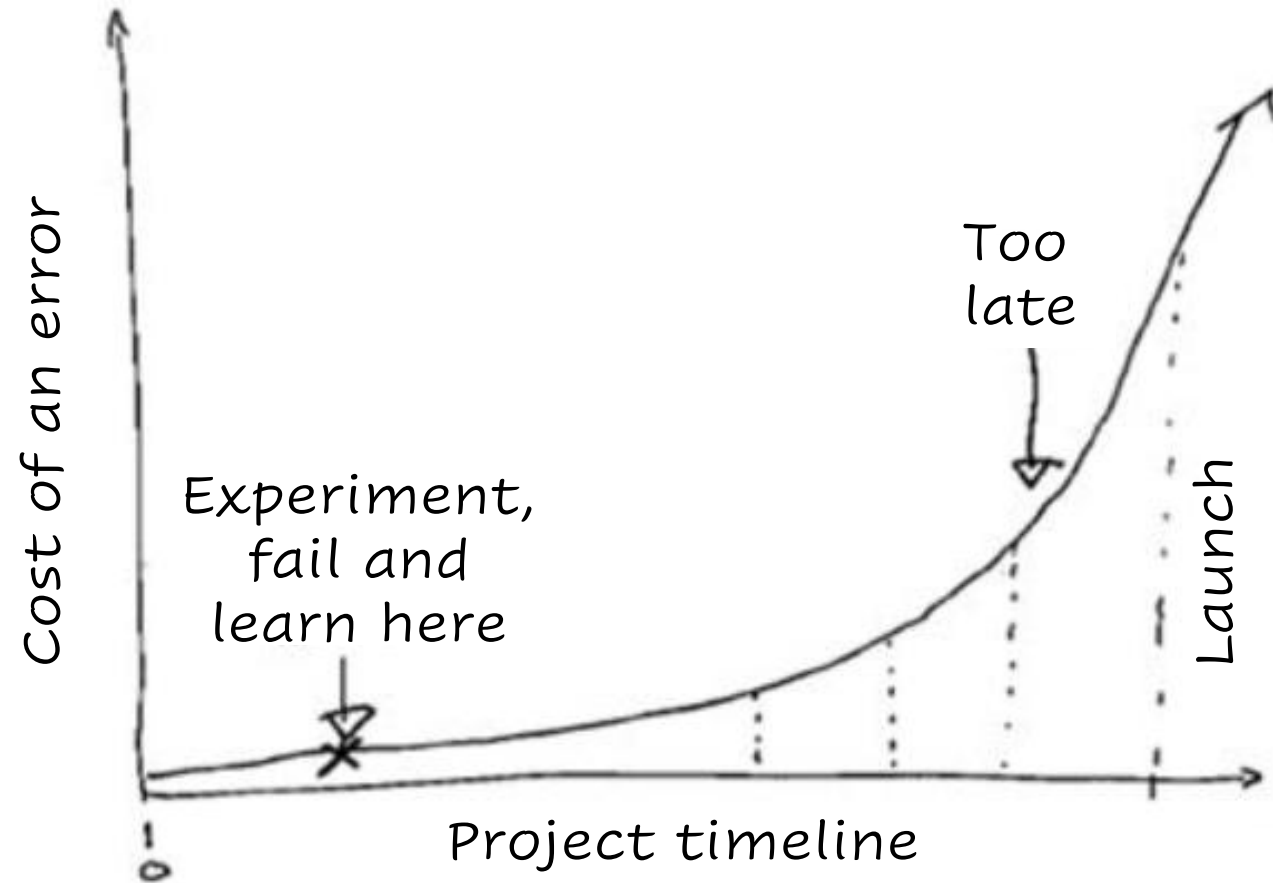
(Jarche, 2012).

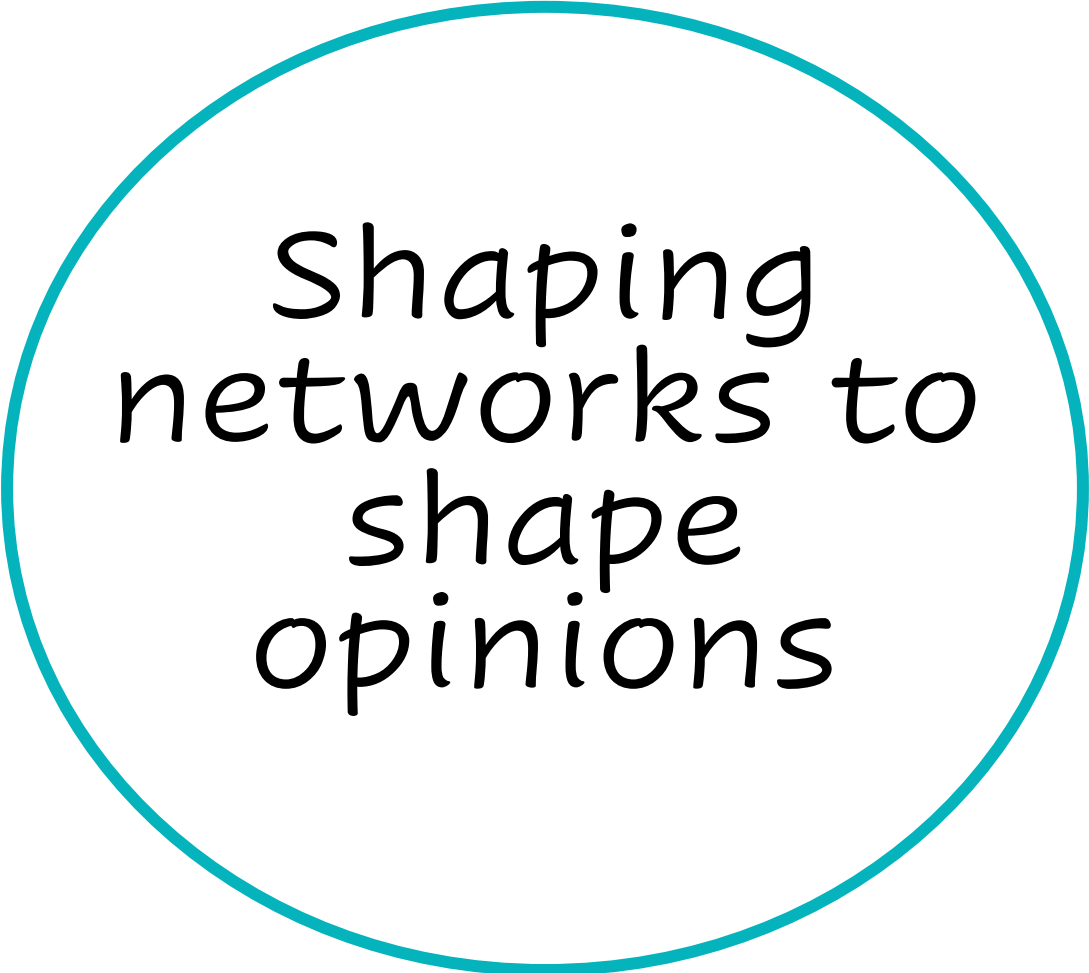


Trojan mice fail often, fail early and learn greatly

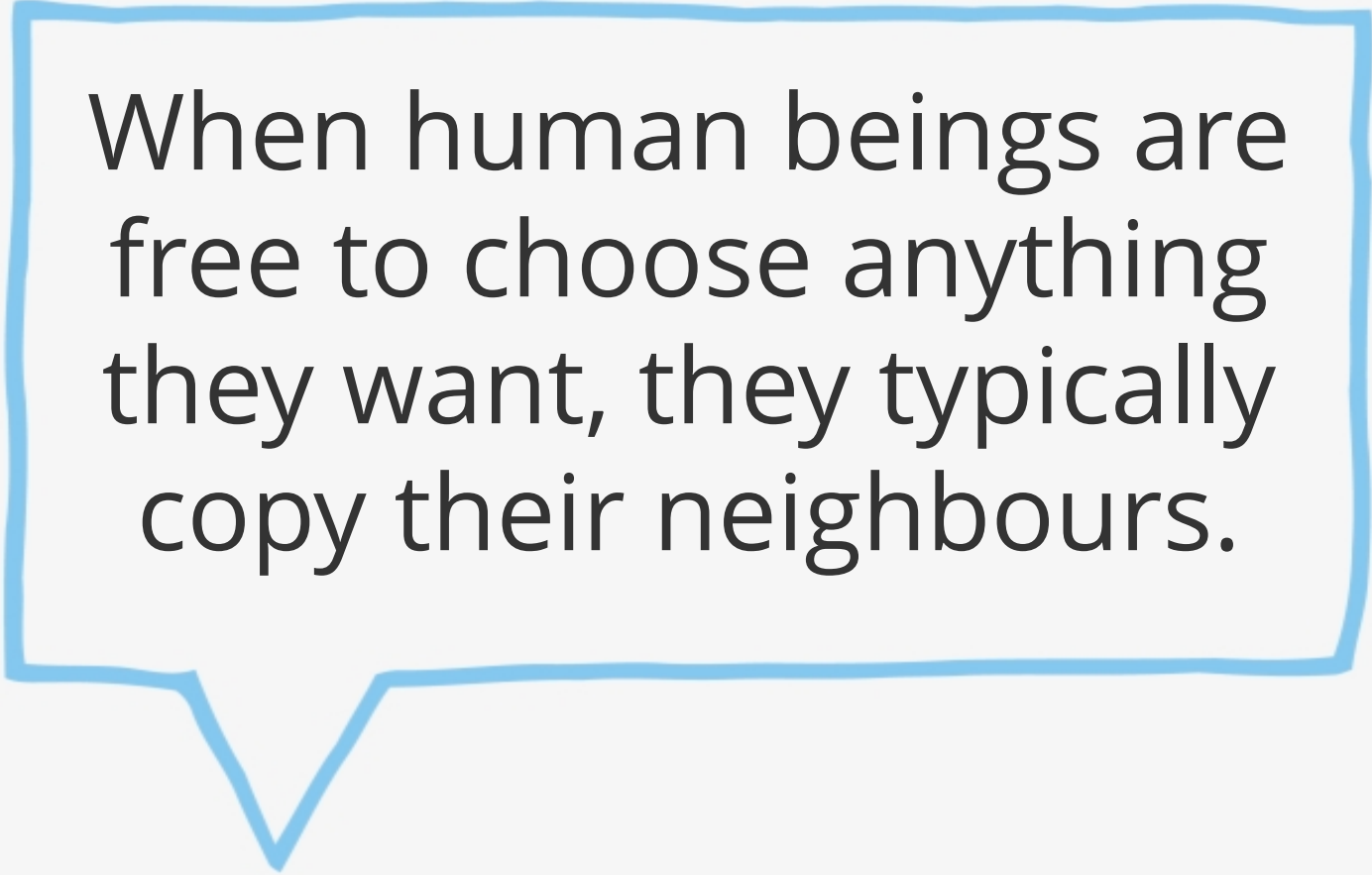


(Illustration by Elizabeth Beier)





Shaping
networks to
shape
opinions



When human beings are free to choose anything they want, they typically copy their neighbours.

Eric Hoffer

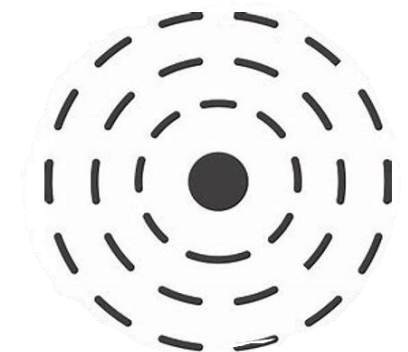
on the importance of peers and why we place trust and confidence in them

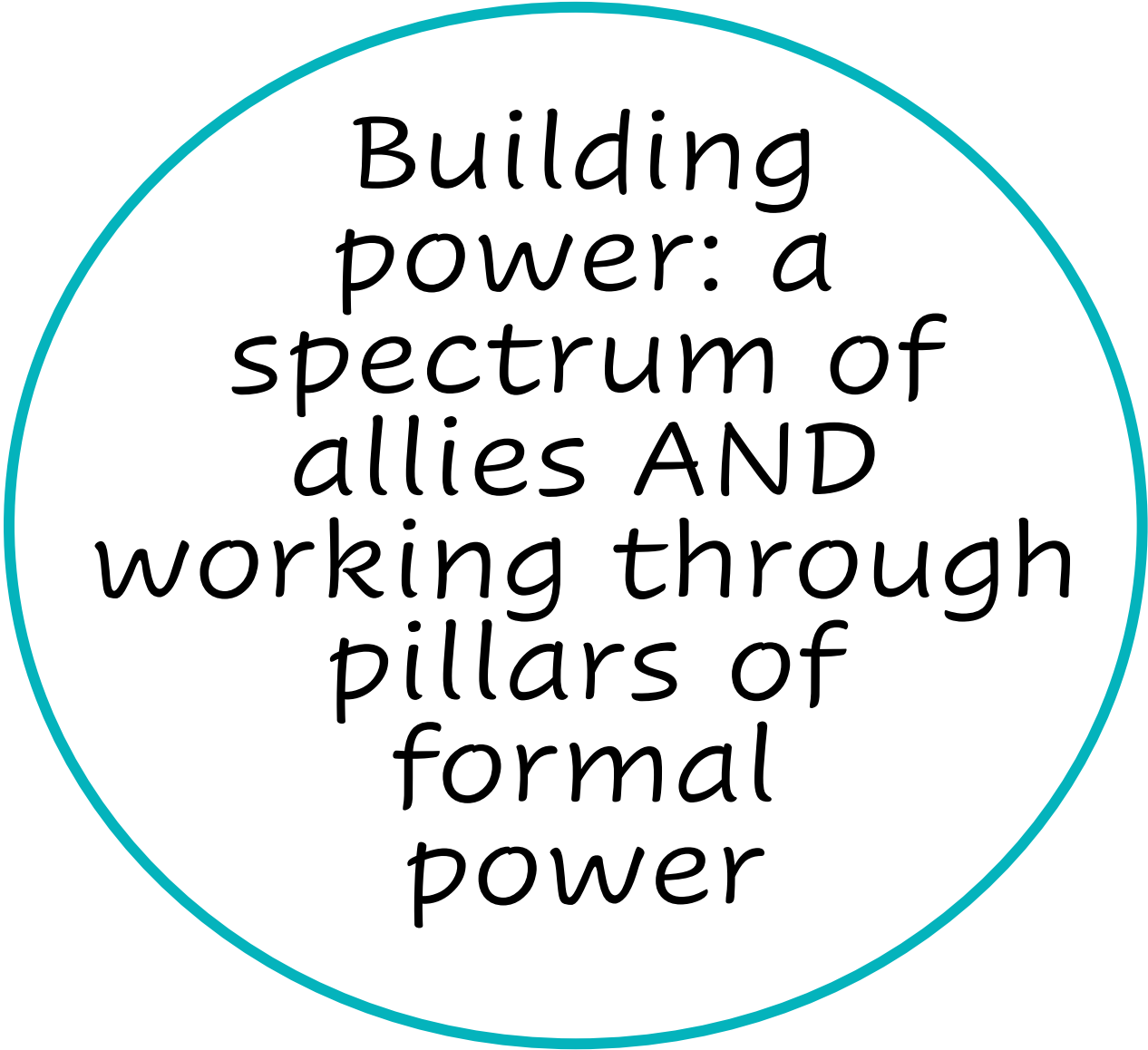
Greg Satell: “Don’t try to shape opinions, shape networks”

- People don’t change their opinions as a result of “effective communication”
- The best indicator of what people do and think is what the people around them do and think
- Working to shape opinions is fruitless unless we are able to shape the networks in which ideas, attitudes and behaviours form

a

Source: [Greg Satell](#)

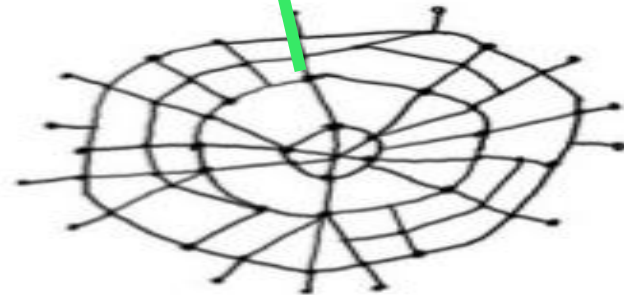
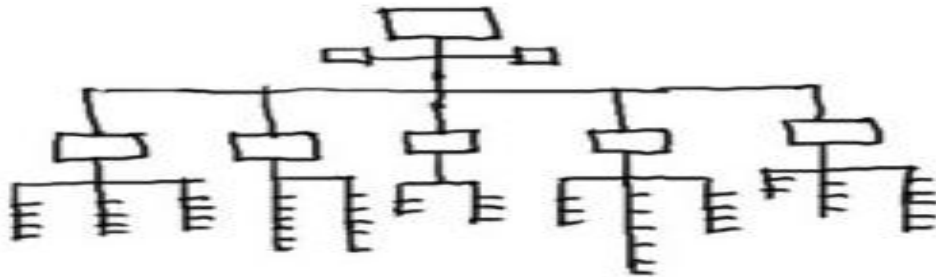


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Building
power: a
spectrum of
allies AND
working through
pillars of
formal
power

Change via cascade versus change via informal influence

If we want to get the same level of influence for change through top-down cascaded change as we do through informal influencers, we need four times more people



Source: Jeppe Hansgaard, Innovisor

We have asked our practitioner community which themes are part of their current change and improvement practice



MOST likely to be an aspect of their current change and improvement practice

- Moving together towards a shared direction
- Leading people through transitions in situations of uncertainty
- Co-producing change: “with” and “By”, not “to” or “for”
- Changing yourself as a resource for change

LEAST likely to be an aspect of their current change and improvement practice

- Creating the conditions for emergent change
- Building power: a spectrum of allies AND through pillars of formal power
- Setting up systems for experimental learning and unlearning: “doing the right next thing”
- Shaping networks to shape opinions

- There is a different theme on every table
- Choose the theme that you would like to discuss with others:
 1. Moving together towards a shared direction
 2. Changing yourself as a resource for change
 3. Creating the conditions for emergent change
 4. Leading people through transitions in situations of uncertainty
 5. Co-producing change: “with” and “By”, not “to” or “for”
 6. Developing leaders everywhere: sustainable systems of distributed leaders
 7. Setting up systems for experimental learning and unlearning: “doing the right next thing”
 8. Shaping networks to shape opinions
 9. Building power: a spectrum of allies AND through pillars of formal power
 10. The overall set of themes

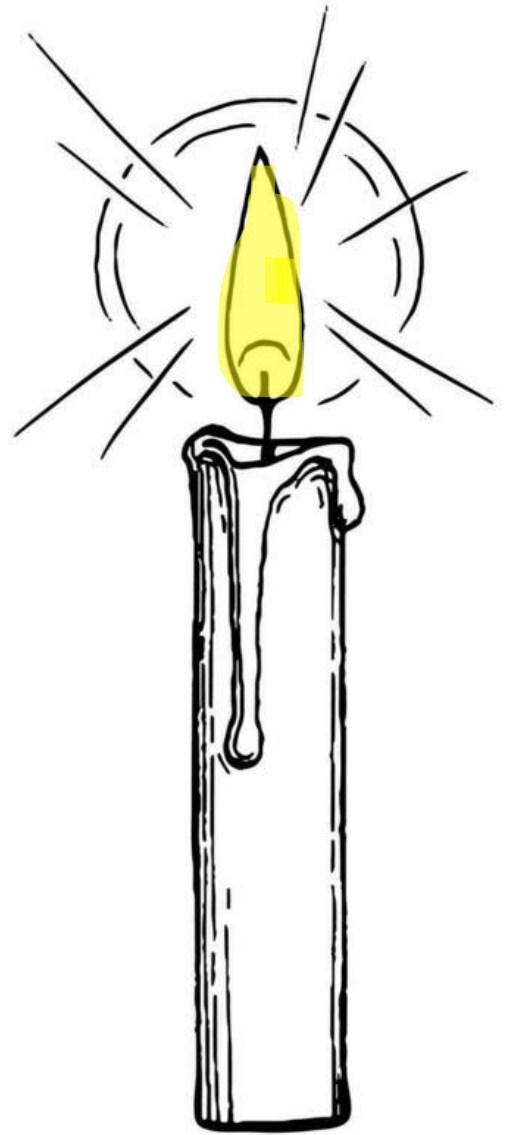
- Start with open questions. Start with questions like, *“Why did we choose this theme?” “What was interesting about what we heard?” “Where do you see opportunity? Challenges?”*
- Embrace silence. Give time for people to think and start contributing.
- Restate contributions and what you’re hearing. Ask for differing points of view and encourage people to build on each other’s thoughts.
- Capture ideas, phrases and questions. Draw diagrams of what you’re hearing. This helps people think about the content and contribute more.
- End the discussion with participants suggesting what to keep in mind beyond this conversation

Reflection and closing remarks



***Are we filling a
bucket or
lighting a
candle?***

Beth Tener



Our contacts

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To sign up for the Research
Insights Newsletter from the
Warwick Business School
Centre for Organising Health
and Care Research:



Extra references

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