

# SHINE A LIGHT –

## system sustainability, capacity and leadership

### Background and definitions

- Core ideas
- Discussion: Do you agree? What then?

### System capacity

- Five simple practices
- (How) do you assess and support it?

### System leadership

- Five behaviours
- How do / will you do this?



# STRESSECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthy organisations  
need  
healthy systems



# 50 WORD SUMMARY

“The solution is taking a system view,  
not ‘my organisation does this’,  
but **asking some searching questions**  
about **how to focus your resources**,  
**in tune with** the competence and people in the  
wider network.

And most importantly  
**having that conversation**  
**with the people you’re there to serve.”**





Where the ideas come from:

- Lasting Difference toolkit
- Learning from partners
- MBA research



**BACKGROUND**



Sustainability is...

The capacity  
of an organisation, service or system  
to make a lasting difference

- Shelter England: system capacity events
- Future Pathways: sector capacity
- Iriss: ethical commissioning
- MBA research – sustaining *our* capacity



**OUR RESEARCH IN ACTION**

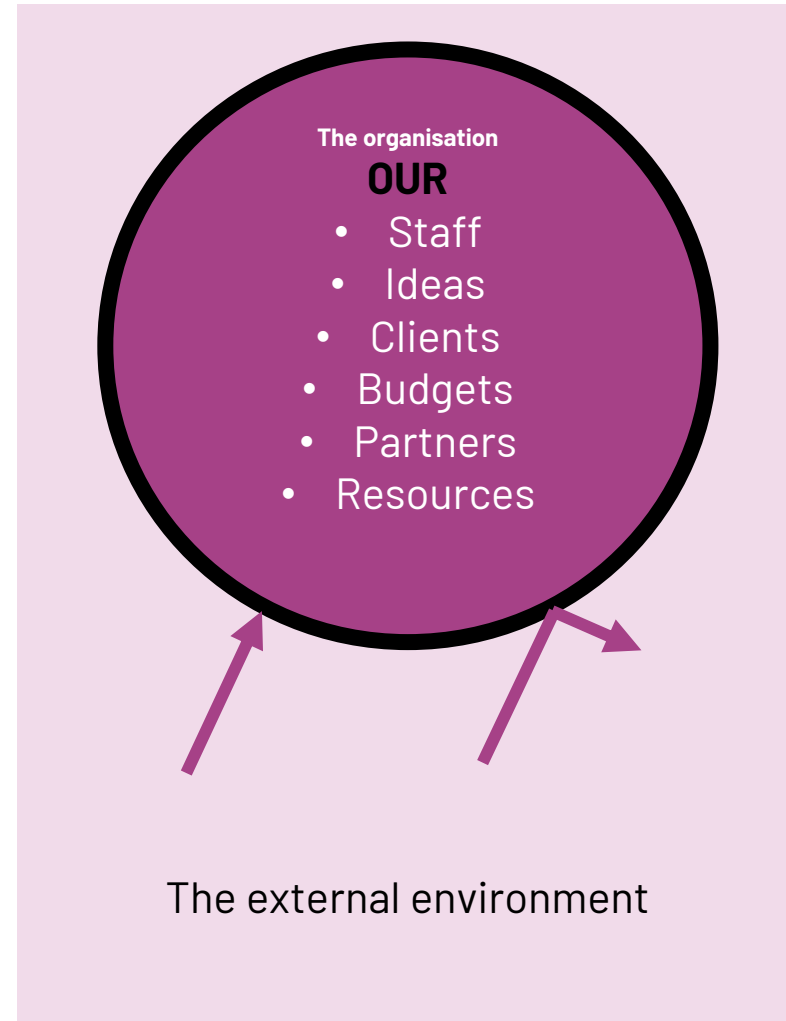
# STRATEGIC INTENT, STRETCH AND LEVERAGE

- Setting an ambition that is *'out of all proportion to resources and capabilities'*
- Stretch and leverage to realise that ambition
- From resource *allocation* to resource *leverage*



# ORGANISATIONAL LENS

<b>Boundary</b>	<b>Solid</b>
<b>Instinct</b>	Protecting; inside out
<b>Leadership</b>	Within organisational boundary
<b>Environment</b>	Hostile, threatening
<b>Resources</b>	Scarce, competed
<b>Relationships</b>	Taking from, protecting against
<b>Likely to say</b>	'It's dog eat dog out there.'  'If we don't, someone else will.'
<b>Result</b>	Unsustainable



# SYSTEMS LENS

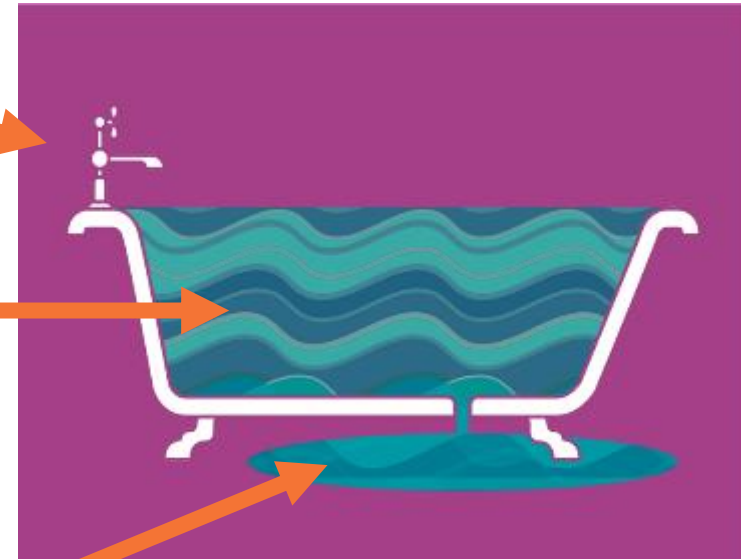
<b>Boundary</b>	<b>Permeable</b>
<b>Instinct</b>	Releasing; outside in
<b>Leadership</b>	Across organisational boundaries
<b>Environment</b>	Friendly, enabling
<b>Resources</b>	Abundant, shared
<b>Relationships</b>	Exchange; collaboration
<b>Likely to say</b>	'The brightest people don't all work for us.' 'If we don't, no-one else will.'
<b>Result</b>	Sustainable organisation <i>and</i> impact



# DEFINITIONS

Range of perspectives on purpose  
Unclear cause and effect  
∴ Unintended consequences

- **System:** any entity which consists of interdependent parts
- **Capacity:** the amount that can be *contained or managed*, or the *ability to achieve* something
- **Leadership:** taking and sharing responsibility for doing the right thing

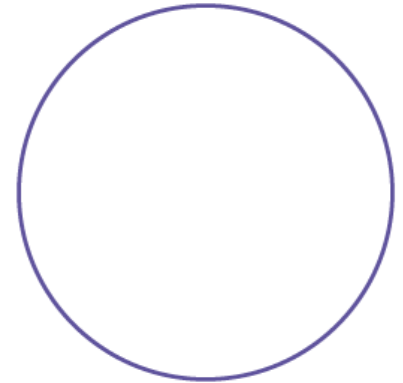



Cyclical, not linear  
Dynamic, not static



# CORE IDEAS

1. You are part of a wider ecosystem





People and communities often feel powerless compared to the organisations they rely on

2. Everyone's influence is limited



3. You already  
shape the  
system.

Might as well  
get good at it.

**EVERYONE'S  
INFLUENCE IS LIMITED.**

**BUT WE ALL  
HAVE AGENCY.**

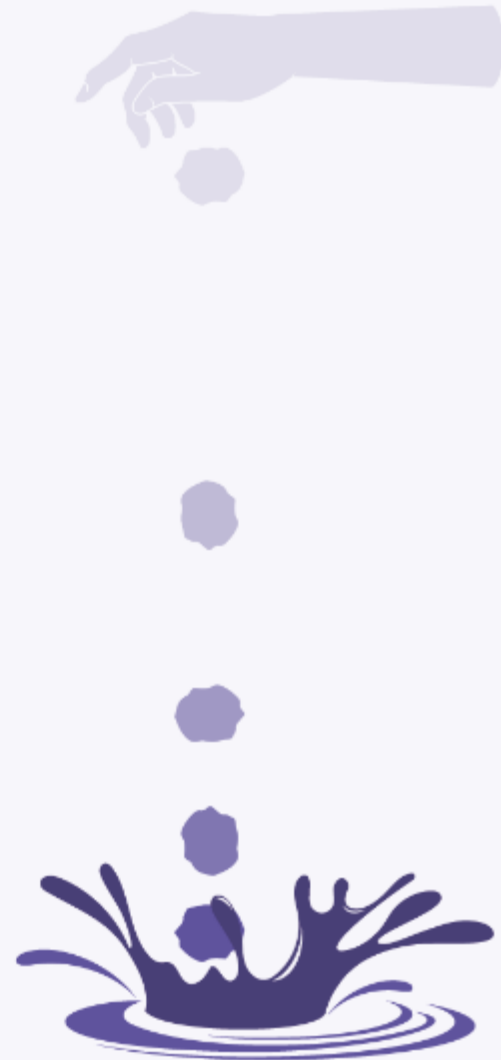
**WE HAVE SKILLS,  
EXPERIENCE AND  
VALUES.**

**WE CAN BE OPTIMISTIC.**

**WE CAN DO SOMETHING.**

**WE SHAPE THE SYSTEM.**

**WE CHANGE THE  
WORLD.**



# THOUGHTS?

1. You are part of a wider ecosystem



2. Everyone's influence is limited



3. You already shape the system.



Do you agree with these ideas?

What would be their implications if they were true?

# SYSTEM CAPACITY

Assess it. Tell the truth. Provide it, build it. Create flexibility. Look out for feedback loops.



**PART TWO**

# 1. ASSESS SYSTEM CAPACITY

- Level of resource

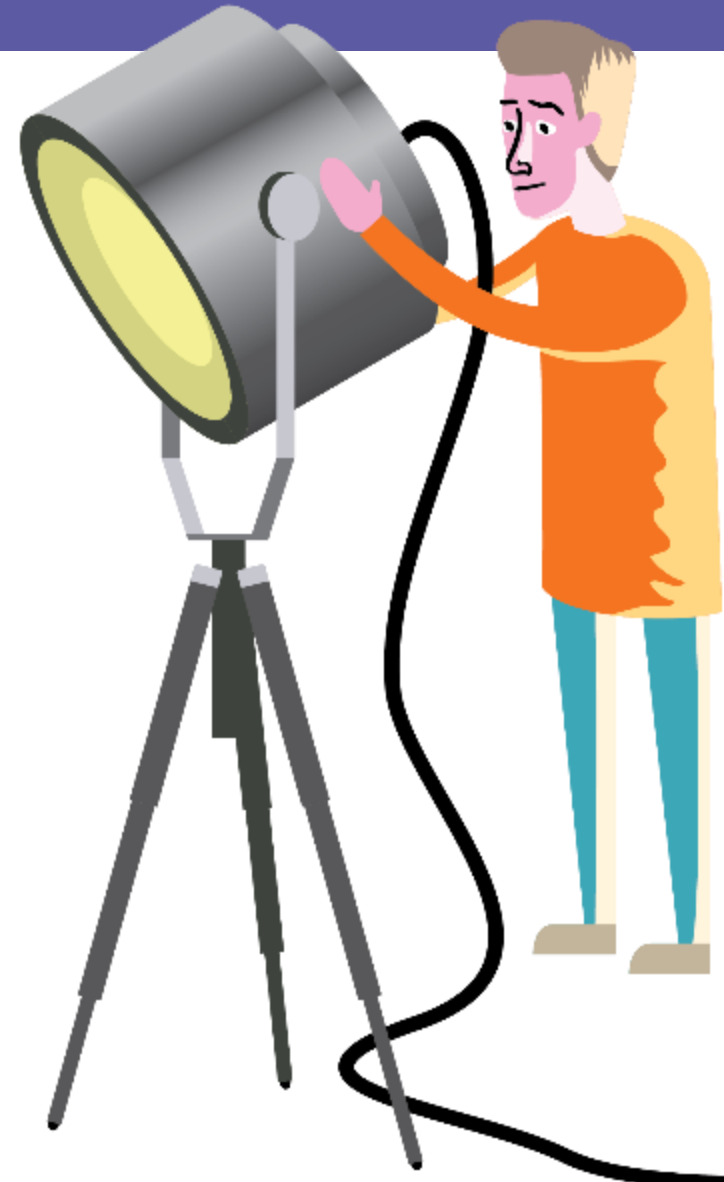
e.g. funding; equity; diversity; workforce quals & turnover

- Levels of engagement

Activism; ownership; involvement; diversity; need / reach

- Extent of coordination

Supports; networks / alliances; innovation / responsiveness



## 2. TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CAPACITY



- Know the true picture

(see indicators above)

- Remove the mask

e.g. working hours; workload limits;  
waiting lists; brave faces

- Name the issue

Be honest with yourself and others



# 3. PROVIDE AND BUILD CAPACITY

- Aim for second order outcomes  
(teach people to fish)
- Share ownership and ideas  
(be valuable not precious)
- Equip others with resources to use in their own ways  
(leverage resource; multiply impact)



# 4. CREATE FLEXIBILITY

- **Work as partners**  
not (just) providers, planners, procurers etc.

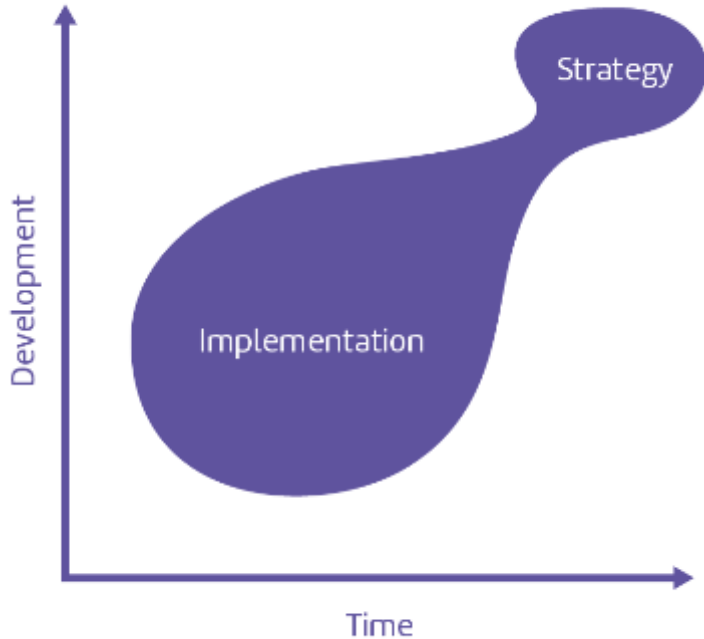
- **Focus on learning**  
(be honest; work flexibly;  
share intelligence)

- **Invest**  
(allow for slack; invest time, don't spend it)

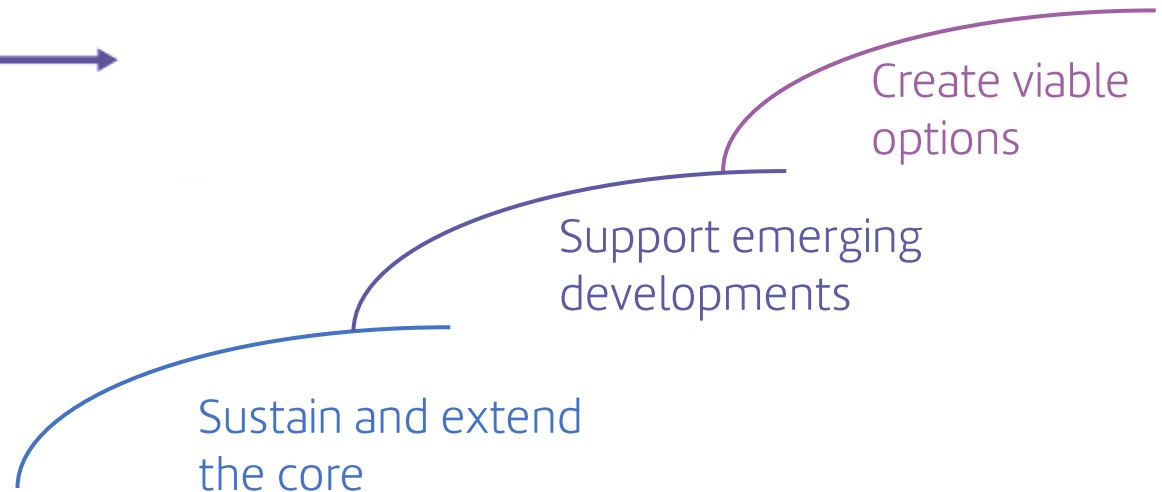
- **Facilitate**  
(work with others – see 'Convening' below)



# 5. LOOK OUT FOR LOOPS AND LAGS



- Eyes on the horizon  
(and help others do the same)
- All three of 'em!



# SYSTEM CAPACITY



(How) do **you** assess it? How do **you** support it?



## PART THREE:

# SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

### UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

1. **CLARIFYING: BEING INTENTIONAL, FACING UP TO HARD DECISIONS**
2. **CURIOSITY: MAKING SPACE FOR UNCERTAINTY AND CREATIVITY**
3. **CONVENING: GENEROUS LEADERSHIP ACROSS ORGANISATIONAL BOUNDARIES**
4. **CHALLENGING: COURAGE AND PERSISTENCE**
5. **CHAMPIONING: VOICES FOR CHANGE**



# FIVE BEHAVIOURS



# PRINCIPLES



- The stated purpose of a system might be different from the purpose it achieves.
- Partners will all have different perspectives. *They may all be right.*
- The most difficult work is often the most effective.
- Small changes can have a big impact.

# PRACTICES



- Be clear about your intentions.
- Work with others to explore system purpose.
- Agree roles, responsibilities and accountability.
- Gather intelligence and use data.
- Make choices and hard decisions, and support others to do the same.

# PRINCIPLES



- Nobody needs permission to do the right thing.
- You can't always give people certainty.
- It is more empowering to involve people in understanding the stress in the system than to buffer them from it.
- People won't step 'up' or step in until others step away.

# PRACTICES



- Keep the focus on the outcome, especially when the process is unclear.
  - Find the bottlenecks that stop things being done.
- Make room for uncertainty and remove fear of mistakes by prioritising learning.

# PRINCIPLES



- The resources are there in the system.
- ‘Your’ resources belong to the people and purpose you serve.
- System leaders recognise when existing approaches aren’t working and commit to using their resources differently.

# PRACTICES



- Work towards achieving what's best for the wider system.
  - Acknowledge you don't have the answers.
  - Provide protected time and space.
- Recognise when progress is not being made. Work around immovable stakeholders.
- Identify the resources available and start sharing them.

# PRINCIPLES



- Systemic changes aren't made on paper.
- Little things can really help to embed new ways of thinking and acting.
- It feels amazing when other people start getting excited about doing things differently.
- Accountability is about taking responsibility for addressing challenges.



# PRACTICES



- Shine a light on the current problem and highlight what's needed next.
- Don't avoid conflict, work with it as a source of creative energy.
- Use evidence and examples to inspire possibilities.
- Use deadlines, public scrutiny and other people, movements and events to sustain the challenge.
- Keep believing in yourself by believing in others!

# PRINCIPLES



- Championing voices for change is the single most effective way to change established systems.
- People who are represented are more likely to have their rights fulfilled than those who are not.
- Everyone has power and resources that can be applied to the system at hand.
- The ideas and energy for systems change are already out there.
- People in positions of power are still people.

# PRACTICES



- Invest in finding out what people want.
- Be prepared to change as a result.
- Facilitate access to voices that don't normally get heard.
- Provide resources to help people find and use their voice, power and other assets.
- Name and navigate power differences.

"Volume"



or



# THOUGHTS?



Do *you* think these are the right behaviours? Anything missing?

How do or will *you* use them?

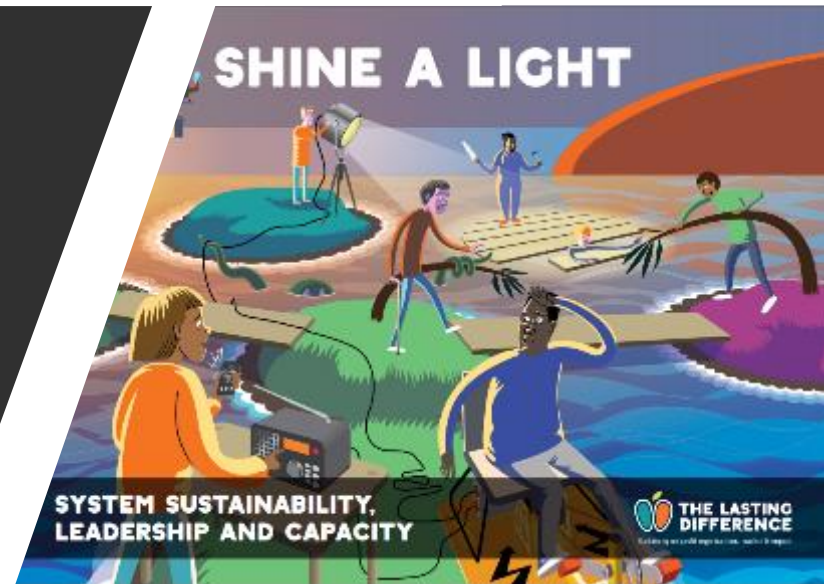
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Questions, comments, feedback?

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