What is systems thinking and how can it help me and my area?

Safia, Laura, Ollie

"*Systems change, systems thinking, place-based approaches, system dynamics, interdependencies, complexity...*"

Confused....?
Us too.

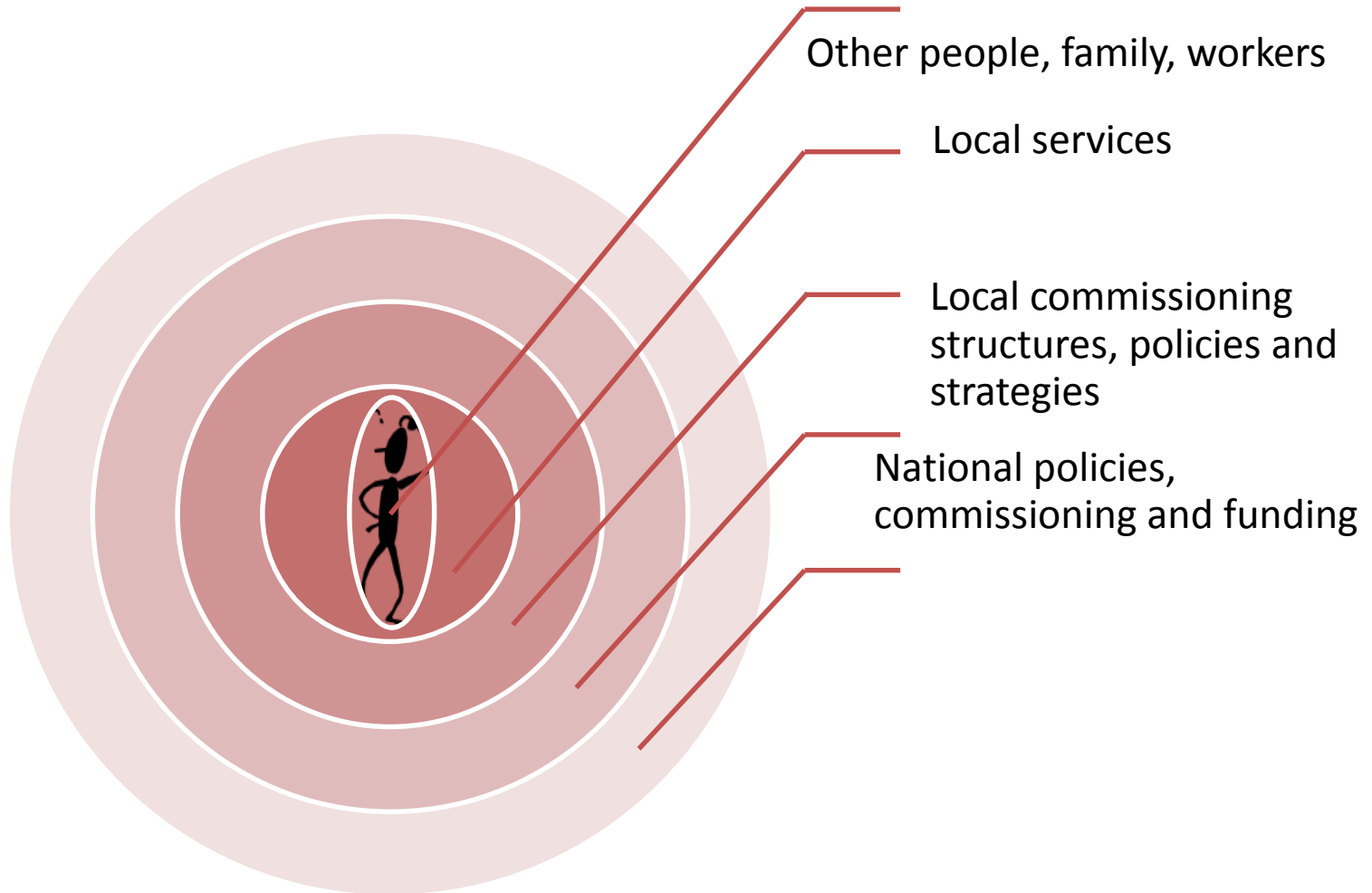In this session we want to look at three key questions in a practical way:

1. Why bother thinking about systems?

2. What does it mean to do "systems thinking"?

3. What practical tools can I use to get started?

1. Why bother thinking about systems?

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What does "the system" mean to you?

Other people, family, workers

Local services

Local commissioning structures, policies and strategies

National policies, commissioning and funding

- A system is made up of: **parts** (people, things, cultures, policies, processes) and the **relationships** between these

- Systems contain: **purposes**, **assumptions** and **vested interests** (that are not always obvious)

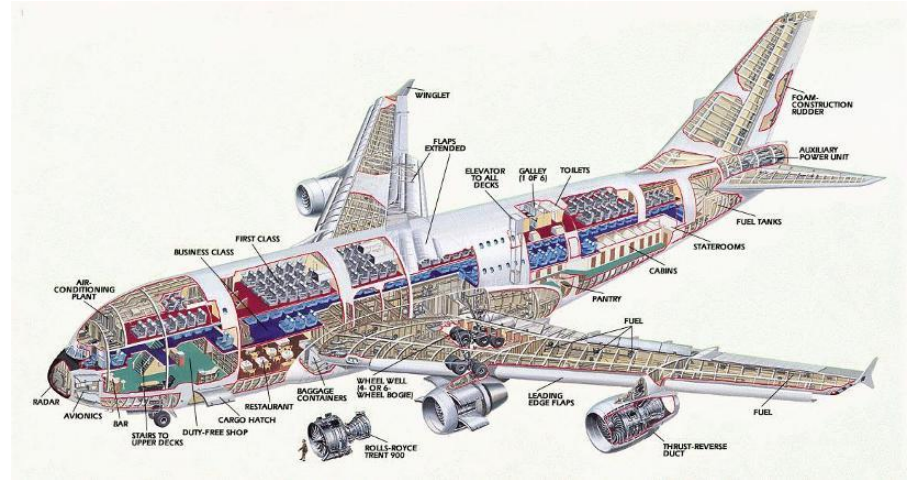- Often systems have adverse consequences: **systems fail**
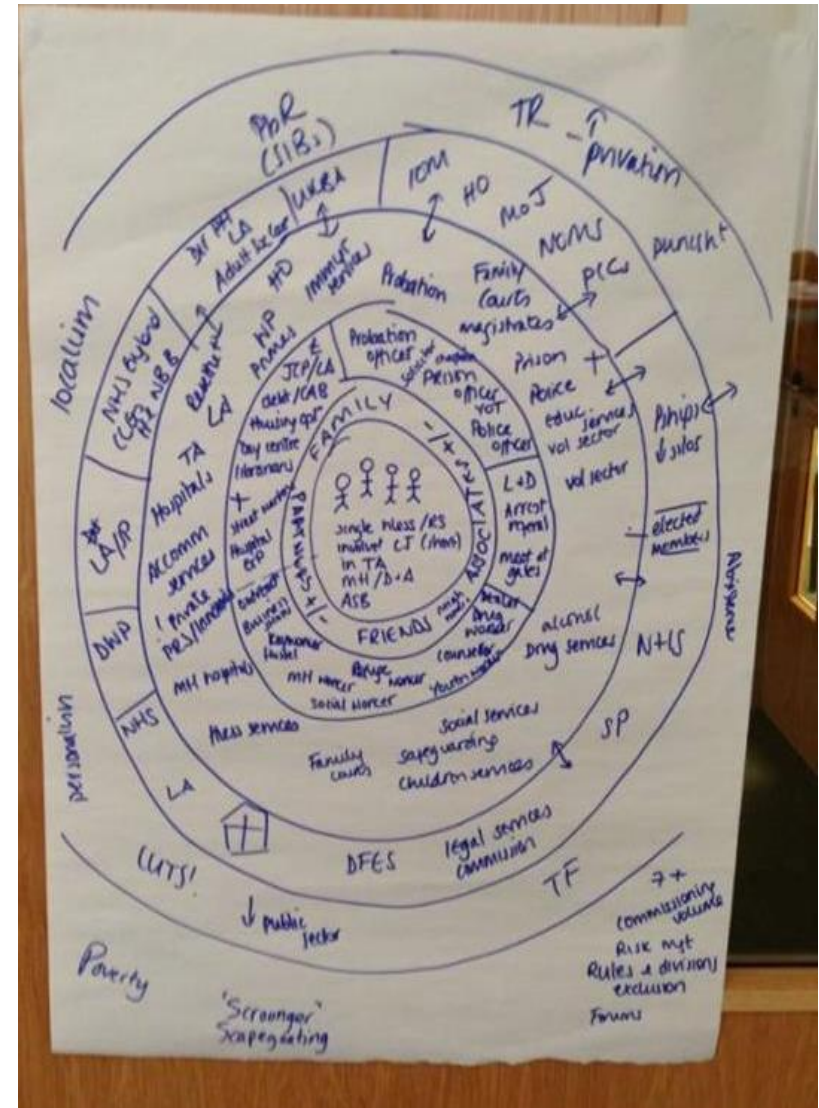
Three kinds of problems in the world...
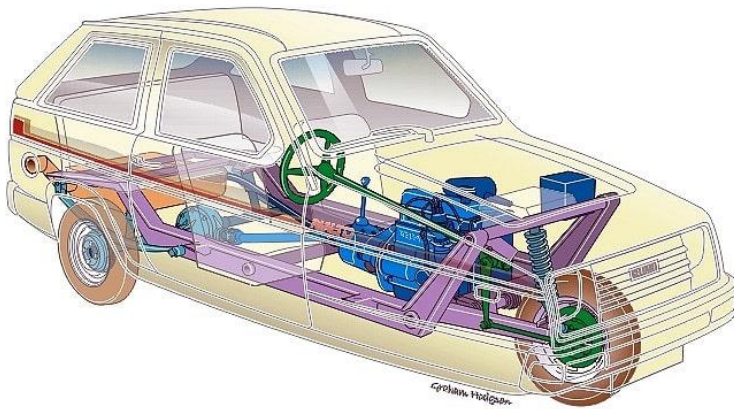
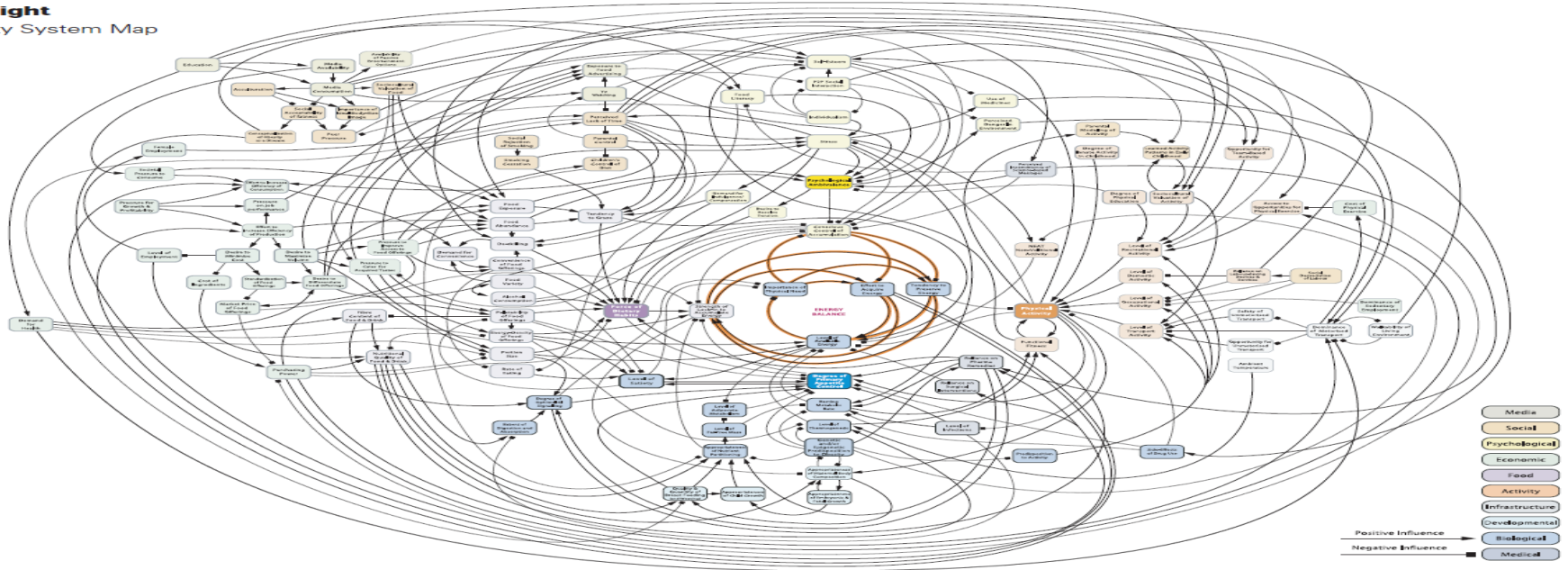1. Simple   2. Complicated

- Both are ultimately linear and mechanistic.
- In essence, there is a 'problem and a 'solution'
- If you know how, you can diagnose the fault and fix it

Three kinds of problems

Foresight
Obesity System Map

3. Complex

- These are not linear or mechanistic.
- If we treat them like they are, we will make them worse.

- Multiple disadvantage, obesity, climate change, etc.
- So we must act in a different way...we must become "system thinkers"

2. What does it mean to do "systems thinking"?

System Thinking behaviours:
Pairing exercise

System Thinking behaviours: pairing exercise

- (A) Holistic and interrelated vs. (B) Separate and linear
- (A) Focus on purpose vs. (B) Focus on processes
- (A) Comfortable with uncertainty and vulnerability vs. (B) Needing to know all the answers
- (A) Collaborative leadership vs. (B) Hero leaders
- (A) Being open vs. (B) closed mind-set
- (A) Data for learning vs. (B) data for evidence
- (A) Step-by-step improvements vs. (B) seeking the optimal solution
- (A) Trust and relationships vs. (B) targets and goals
- (A) Reframing the problem vs. (B) Assuming you know what the problem is
- (A) Seeking accommodation vs. (B) seeking consensus
- (A) Reflect on your own role in the system vs. (B) see yourself as separate from the system

3. What tools can I use to get started?

Causal loop diagrams

- Negative and positive loops
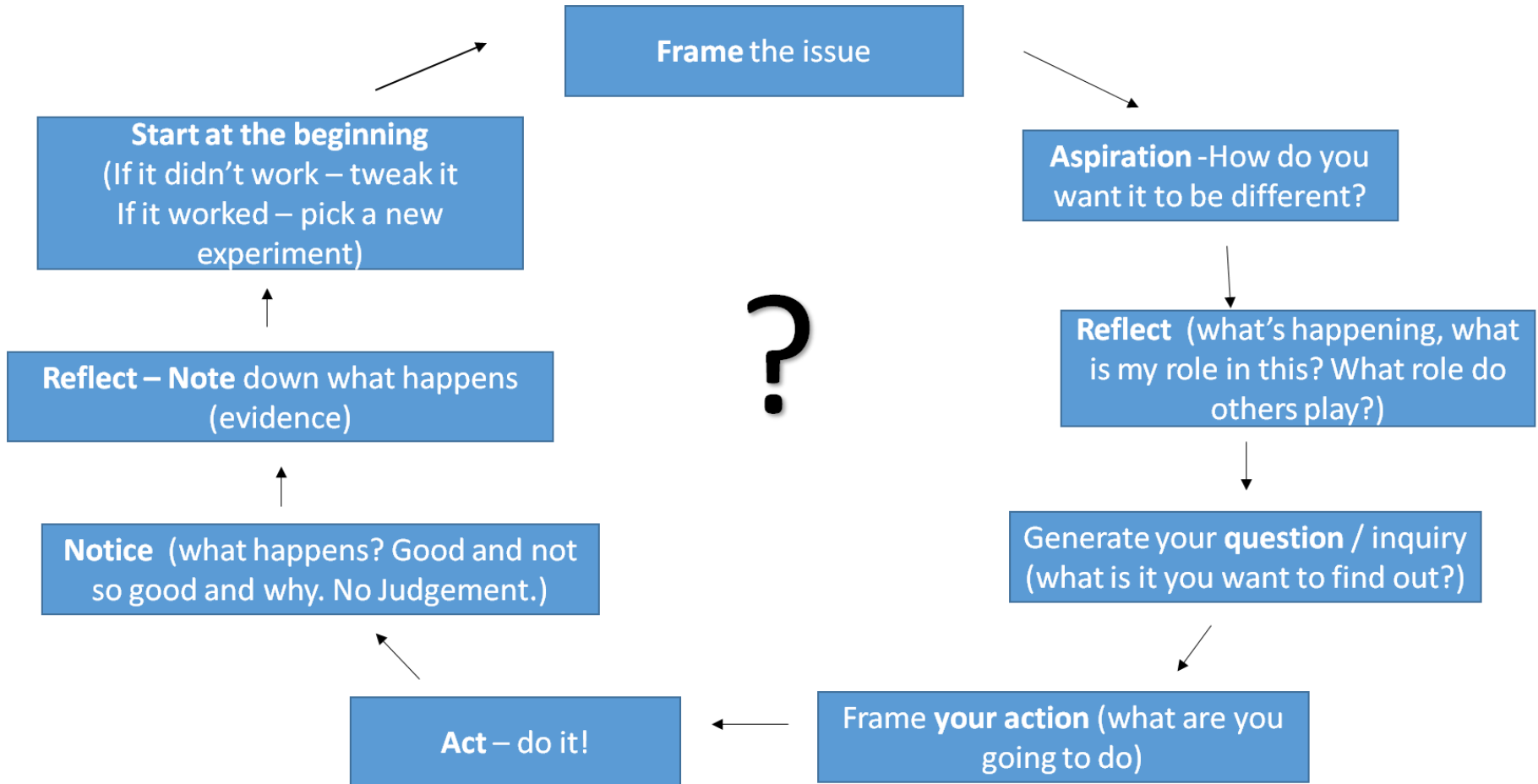- Where can you intervene to change things?
-Ask Why? Why? Why?
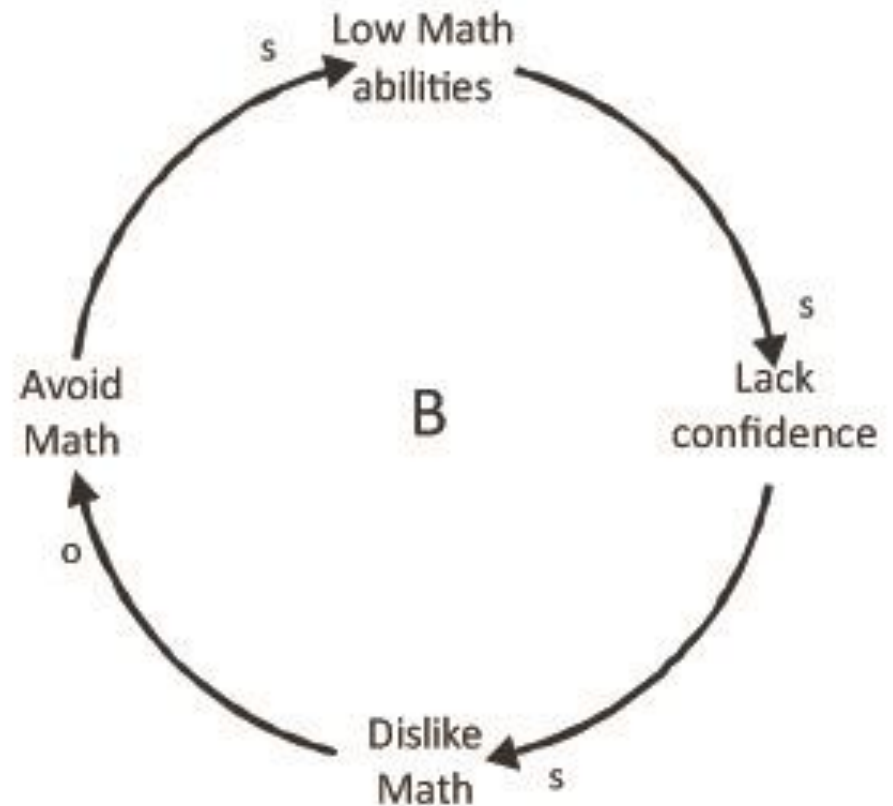
Causal loop diagrams

- Let's build one...

Action experiment / action inquiry

- Opportunity within your role to reflect on **how and why** something works the way it does, with the **intention to improve it.**

- Causes us to **reflect on the assumptions** we hold on an issue and **test the capacity for change.**

- Action inquiry is **a state of mind/ a way of being** rather than a prescriptive process you learn and recreate from others.

- To try and do things differently **(active)** - rather than to just analyse what's wrong.

- Looks forward, whereas analysis of a problem looks backward.

Frame the issue

Aspiration - How do you want it to be different?

Reflect (what's happening, what is my role in this? What role do others play?)

Generate your **question** / inquiry (what is it you want to find out?)

Frame **your action** (what are you going to do)

Act – do it!

Notice (what happens? Good and not so good and why. No Judgement.)

Reflect – Note down what happens (evidence)

Start at the beginning (If it didn't work – tweak it If it worked – pick a new experiment)

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Thank you

oliver.hilbery@meam.org.uk

laura.greason@meam.org.uk

safia.cragg@meam.org.uk

www.meam.org.uk

@meamcoalition