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Commissioning in Complexity:

Human, Learning, Systems

Toby Lowe

Summary

- What does working in complexity mean?
- Implications of complexity for commissioners
- Embracing complexity:



Human



Learning



Systems



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**What does it mean to
work in complex
environments?**



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Complexity

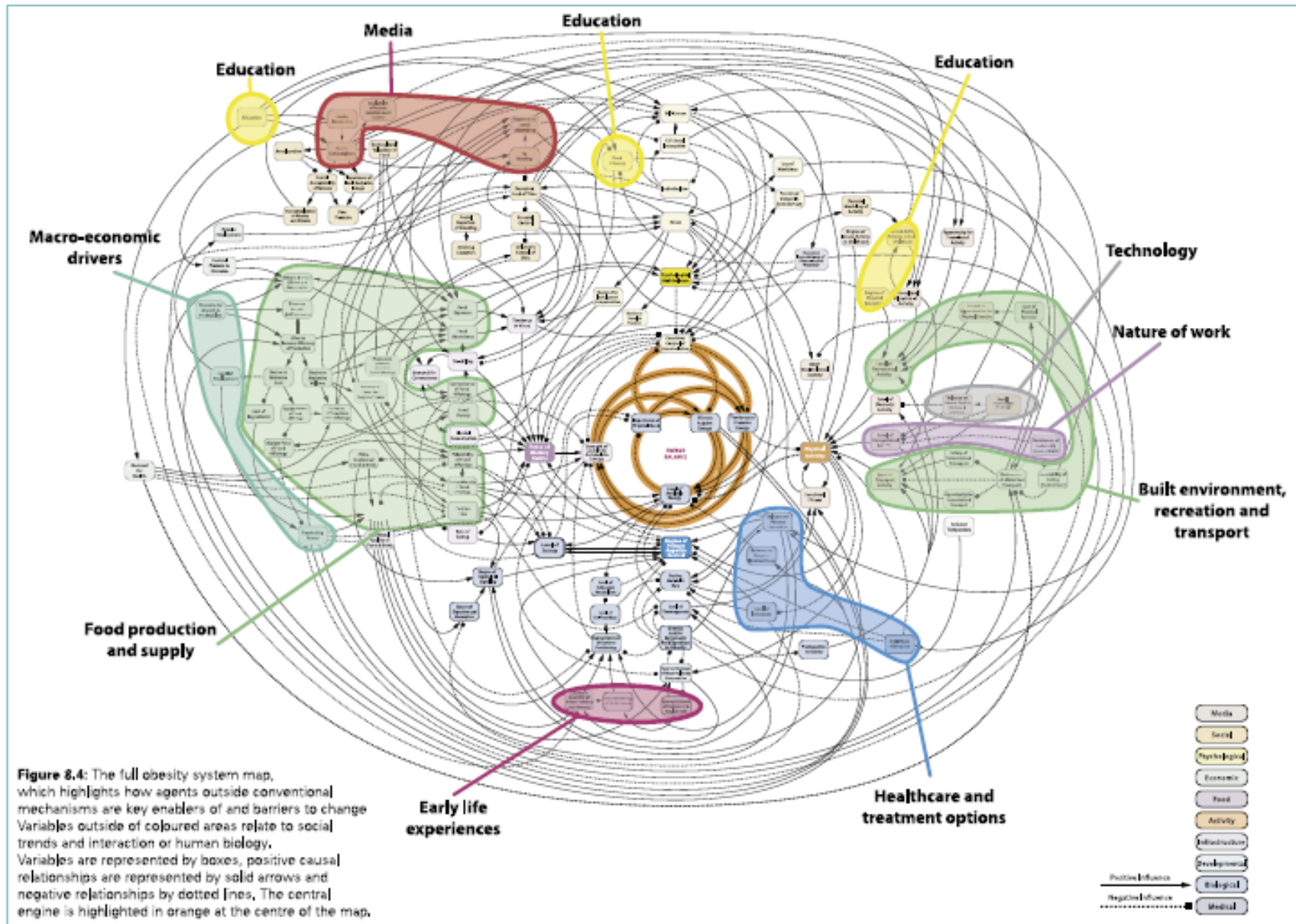
People are complex

Issues are complex

Systems are complex

= embrace complexity, because **life is complex**

collaborate
for social change

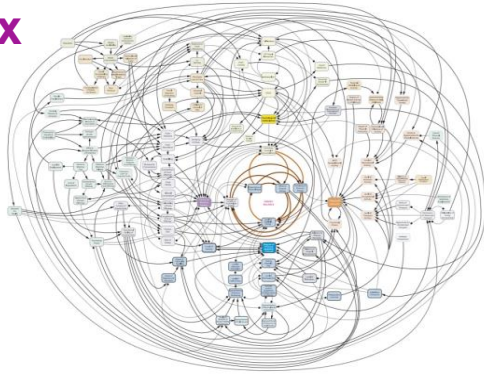




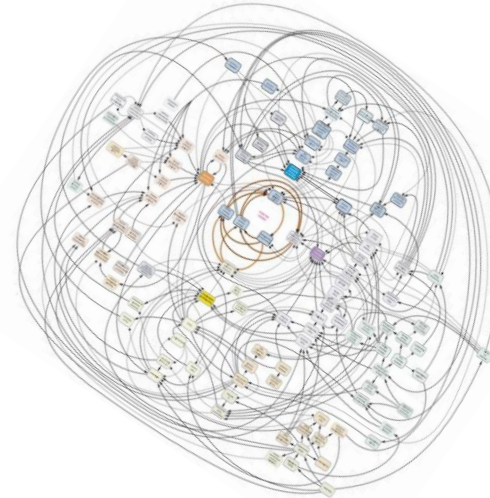
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Human Variety

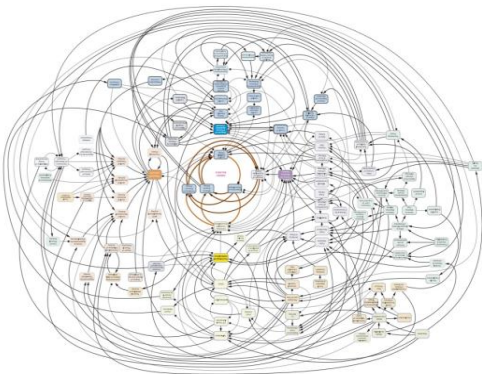
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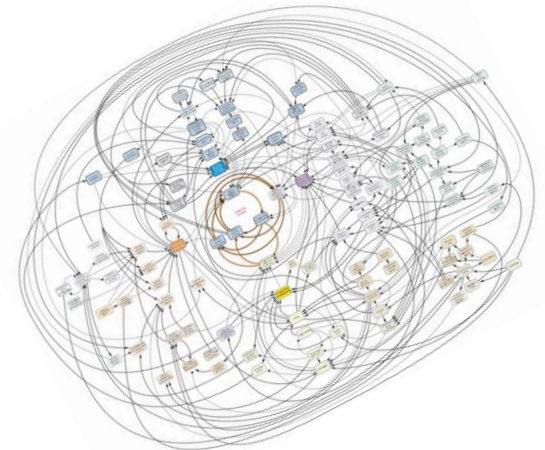
Rob



Toby



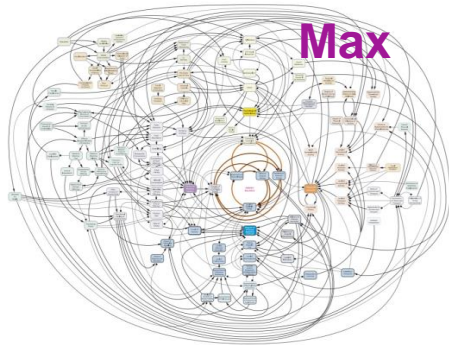
**Mary-
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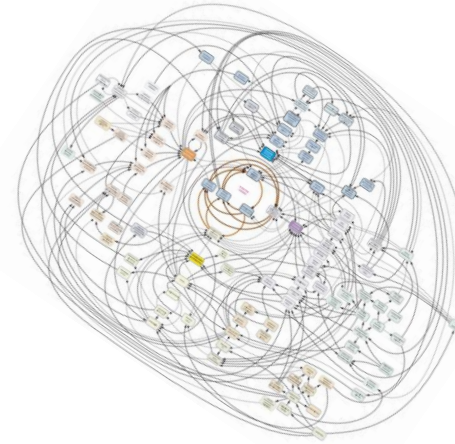


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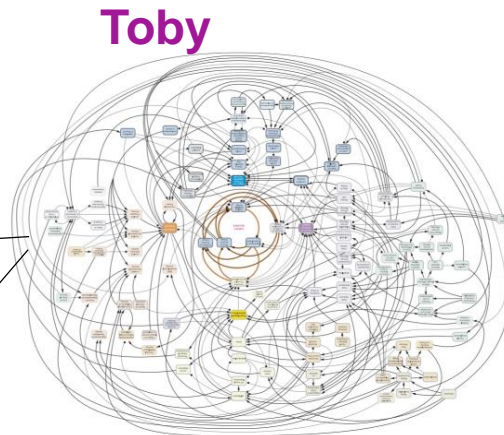
Dynamic complexity



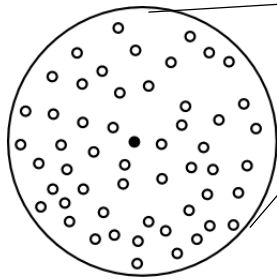
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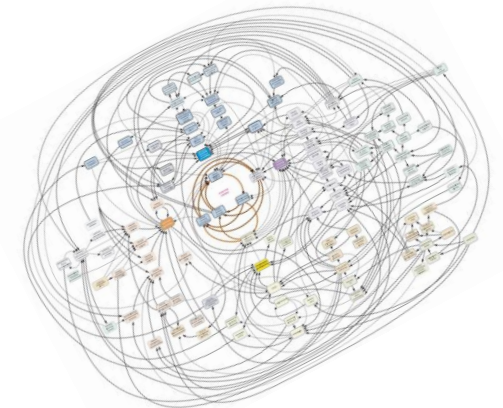
Rob



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Implications for commissioning

**OUTCOMES ARE NOT DELIVERED BY
ORGANISATIONS!**

**The outcomes we desire are emergent properties
of complex systems**

collaborate
for social change

Implications for commissioning

Which means the **purpose of commissioning** changes:

- **Commissioners DO NOT** purchase services which deliver outcomes
- **Commissioners DO** nurture the **systems from which outcomes emerge** - enabling collaboration and coordination

They commission activity which:

- **Responds to human variety**
- **Adapts to change**

Means no more of this....

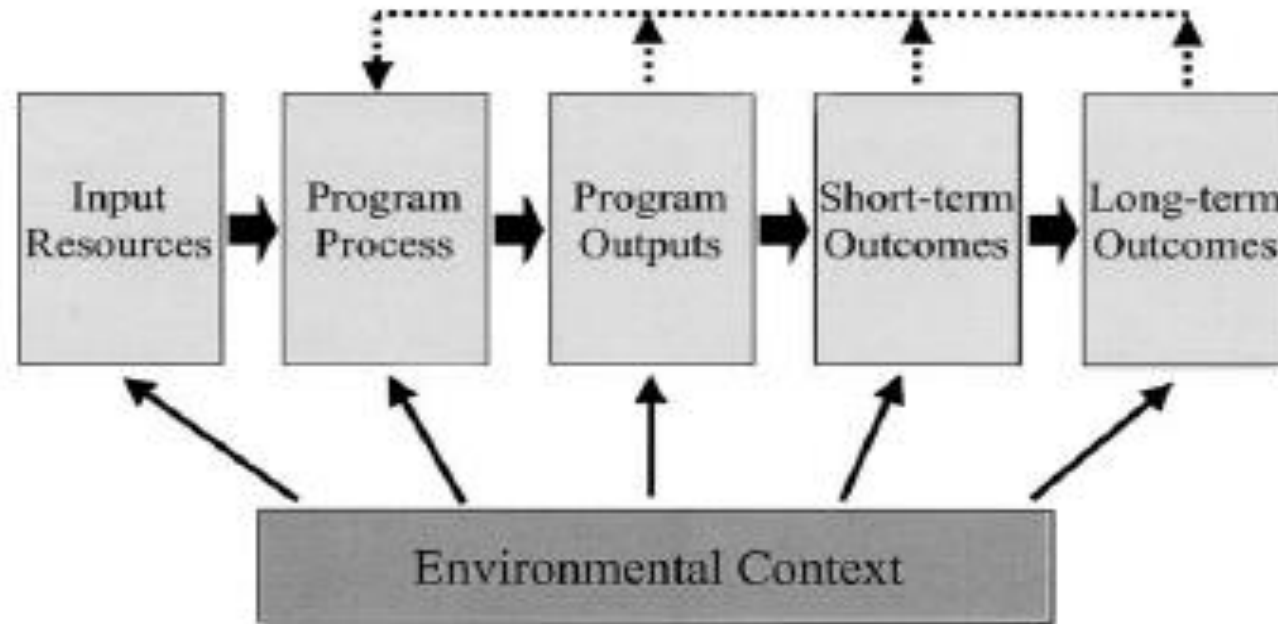


Fig. 2. Program logic model.

Robert Schalock & Gordon Bonham “Measuring outcomes and managing for results”, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 2003



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And this....

No more:

- **Service specifications**
- **Outcome targets**



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So what else can we do?



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A Whole New World: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity

• • • •

Annabel Davidson Knight
Toby Lowe
Marion Brossard
Julie Wilson



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Exploring the new world: Practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity

• • •

Toby Lowe
Dawn Plimmer



Key ideas

Funding, Commissioning and Managing in complexity involves:



Being **Human** to one another: put on your **VEST**



Learning and adaptation: improvement requires continuous learning



Systems: Nurture healthy systems in order to create positive outcomes – be a **System Steward**



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Human

To be Human, put on your VEST:

- Respond to **Variety** of human need and experience
- Use **Empathy** to understand the life of others
- View people from a **Strengths-based** perspective
- **Trust** people with decision-making

For Commissioners means:

- Long term funding
- Funding without Performance Measures/KPIs – they make it more difficult to create good outcomes and they waste time & money
- Fund those organisations you trust to build effective human relationships with people – e.g. Plymouth – £80m, 10 year Alliance contract



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Human

= Public service is Bespoke by Default

Each human being is recognised as having their own strengths and needs.

The job of the social interventions is to:

- Hear and understand those strengths and needs through forming relationships with people
- Respond appropriately to those strengths and needs

“liberating” workers from attempts to proceduralise what happens in good human relationships, and instead focus on the capabilities and contexts which help enable these relationships”



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Learning

Current view: Learning is a phase in social innovation

- Learn & experiment.
- Find “what works”
- Do more of that



Young Foundation, Stages of
Social Innovation



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Learning

In a complex environment, **learning is a continuous process**

We need to continuously adapt to changing strengths and needs of people, and changes in the wider system.

There is no such thing as “what works” – because “what works” is always changing.

“What works” is a continuous process of learning and adaptation.

= funders and commissioners are “purchasing” the capacity for organisations to **learn and adapt**.



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Learning

Using data to learn, not to “demonstrate impact”

- Campbell’s Law: “The more any quantitative indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.”
- Measure only what’s useful for learning
- Qualitative as well as quantitative data

Creating a learning culture:

- Positive error culture
- Removing competition



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Systems

Commissioners take responsibility for the health of the system

What does a healthy system look like?

Lankelly Chase System Behaviours?:

Perspective

- People view themselves as part of an interconnected whole
- People are viewed as resourceful and bringing strengths
- People share a vision

Power

- Power is shared, and equality of voice actively promoted
- Decision-making is devolved
- Accountability is mutual

Participation

- Open, trusting relationships enable effective dialogue
- Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level
- Feedback and collective learning drive adaptation



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Systems

Commissioners set the tone – they are part of the system

“We're not in opposition. They're not our enemy. We all want the same thing. We're not [in] a purchaser/provider [relationship]. We're a collective....”

Let go of the illusion of control

Sharing Power – commissioners as enablers, not controllers

How are you making sure that all voices are heard? And all voices count?

System Stewards

Whose job is it to look after the health of the system?



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Systems

Interested?

Come to the workshop....



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Thanks for listening

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