

Collaborating to solve wicked problems: The case of child protection

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Family



Kevin (7)
reported by teacher

Kevin (7)
placed under state care

Brother Jimmy (16)
convicted for vandalism

Agency



Social worker



Legal guardian



Parole officer

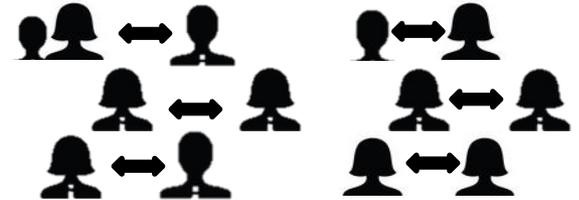
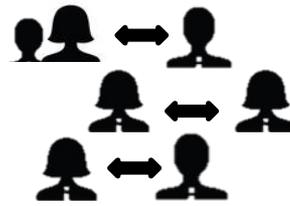
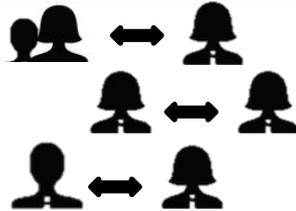
Talks to Kevin and mother, suggests coach

Takes over from social worker, reviews situation of Kevin, places Kevin in foster home

Reviews case of Jimmy, meets during probation

Meetings

Many bilateral meetings between partners

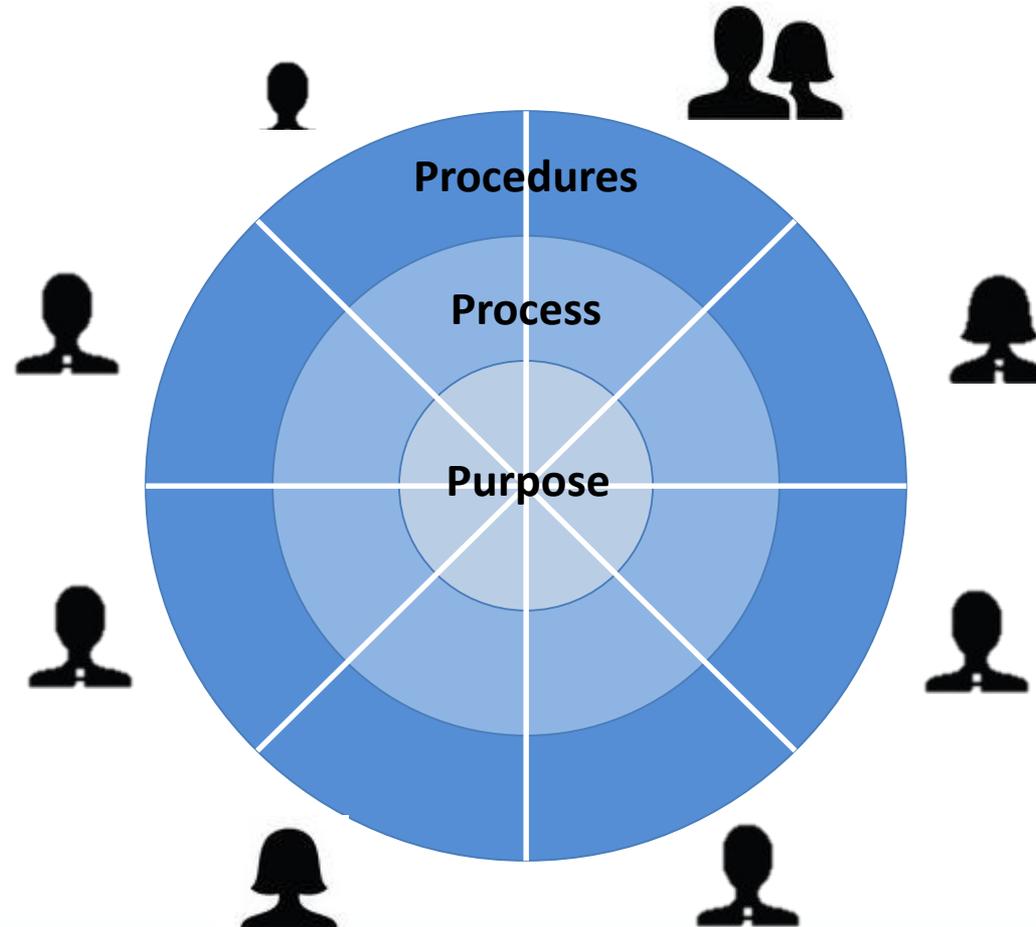


Reports

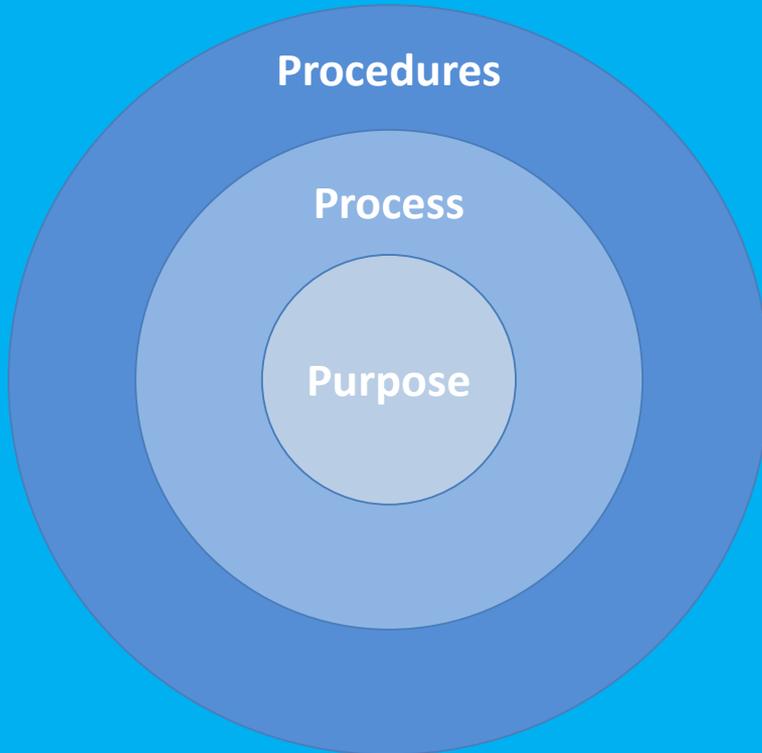
Case reports covering all bases



Collaborations fragmented across actors



Diagnosing and treating collaboration problems



Purpose

How do we find a common goal?

Process

How do we interact with each other?

Procedures

How do we facilitate interaction?



Purpose: Divided by priorities and logics



Front-line workers, experts and clients focus on **professional quality**

- Emphasis on enabling customization and professional discretion



Ministers, managers, and tax payers focus on **organizational performance**

- Emphasis on meeting targets and minimizing costs

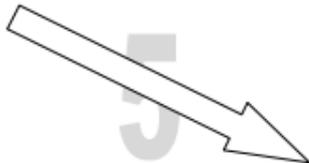


Legislators, involuntary clients, and citizens focus on **intervention legitimacy**

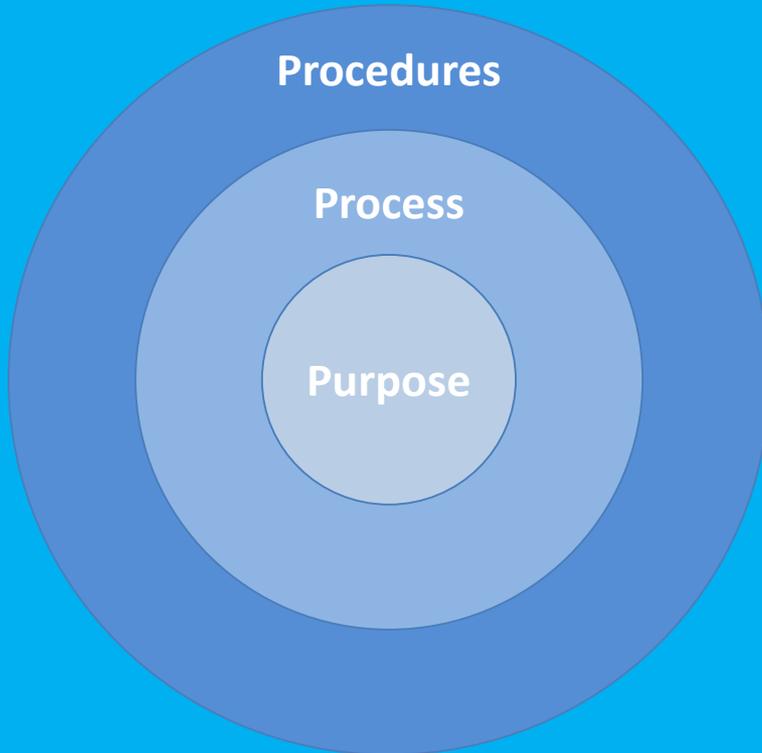
- Emphasis on securing rights and following protocol

If purpose is tied to stakeholders,
how can wickedness be reduced?

Diversity and complexity can be managed, but not eliminated for wicked problems

Diversity → Complexity ↓	Single party	Multiple parties, each having only some of the relevant knowledge	Multiple parties, conflicting in values/interests
Both problem and solutions known (Heifetz Type 1)	Tame problem 1	2	3
Problem known, solution not known (relationship between cause and effect unclear) (Heifetz Type 2)	4	5 	Wicked problem 6
Neither problem nor solution known (Heifetz Type 3)	7	Wicked problem 8	Very wicked problem 9

Diagnosing and treating collaboration problems



Purpose

How do we find a common goal?

Explicate and serve logics stakeholders

Process

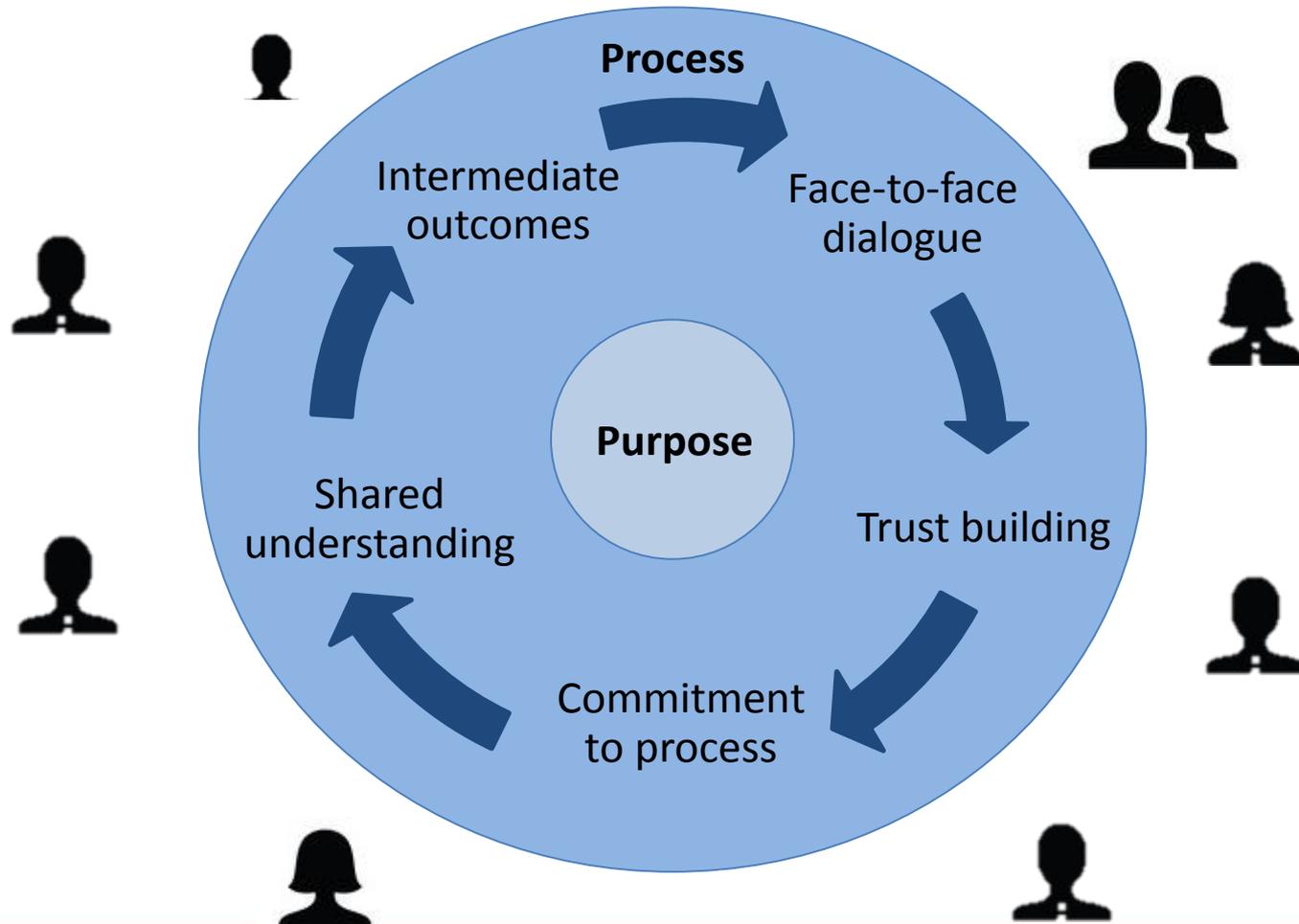
How do we interact with each other?

Procedures

How do we facilitate interaction?



Process as virtuous cycle from talk to outcomes



Interplay of logics needs shared spaces and objects

Order is an illusion



Chaos is a likelihood



Focus is a necessity



Create shared spaces for discussion

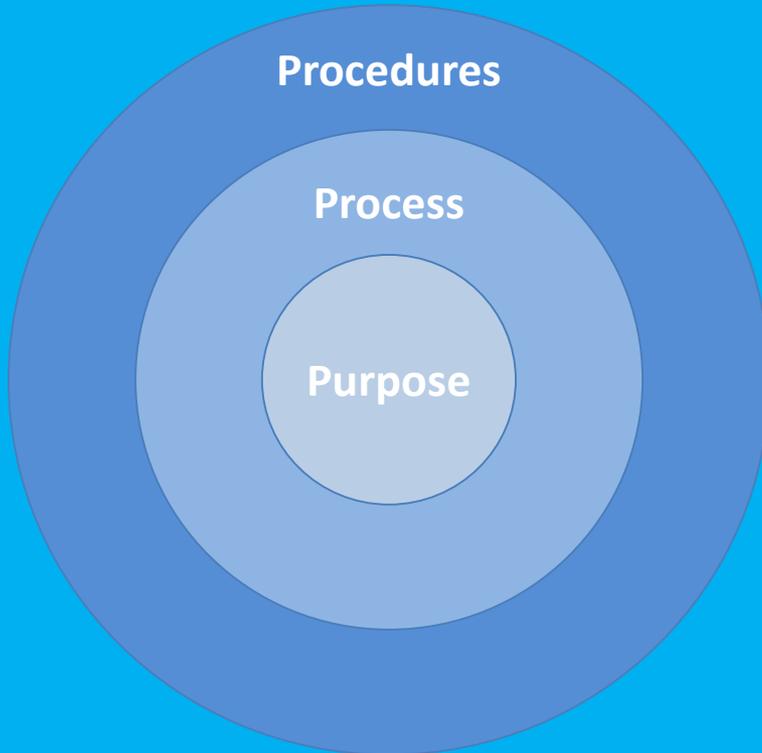
- Design and facilitate meetings, forums, and rooms where network partners can interact
- Do not overburden crossroads with excessive rules, but do monitor sense of purpose

Create shared objects of ambition

- Find and enrich shared objects which appeal to ambitions of all partners
- Focus on concrete individual cases, shared interventions, focal geographies, etc.
- Explore general issues through specific examples

**Aim to channel tensions,
not resolve them**

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Purpose

How do we find a common goal?

Explicate and serve logics stakeholders

Process

How do we interact with each other?

Reinforce cycle around shared objects

Procedures

How do we facilitate interaction?

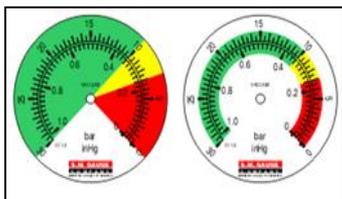


Procedures could serve purpose and process



Rules & Protocols (political vs. professional logic)

- Paper work as part of the job or as part of the craft
- Rules create clarity about what must and what may happen



Resources & Measurement (performance vs. professional logic)

- Tracking asymmetric costs and benefits
- Using numbers as starting point, not summing up

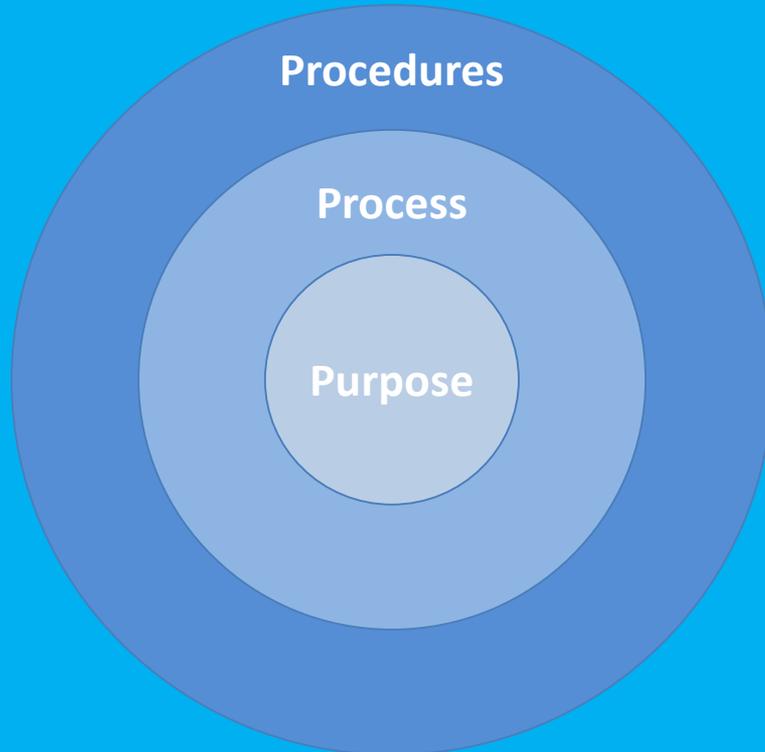


Leadership & Management (performance vs. political logic)

- Convener and mediator of collaborative partnership
- Catalyst for action, wrecking ball purposeless reaction

Constant vigilance required to keep procedures purposeful and relevant

Diagnosing and treating collaboration problems



Purpose

How do we find a common goal?

Appeal to logics of all stakeholders

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Reinforce cycle around shared objects

Procedures

How do we facilitate interaction?

Vigilantly cultivate purposeful rules



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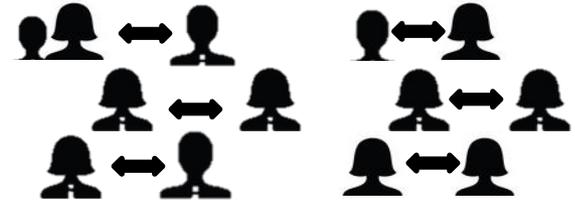
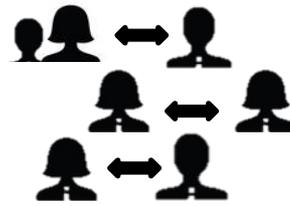
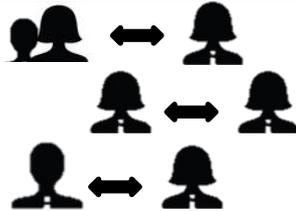
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Kevin (7) reported by teacher

Kevin (7) shows up at school with bruises

Agency



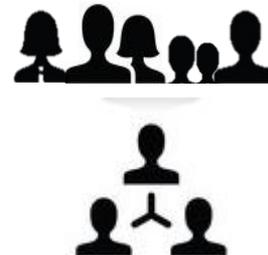
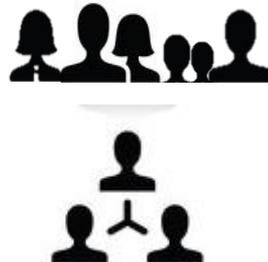
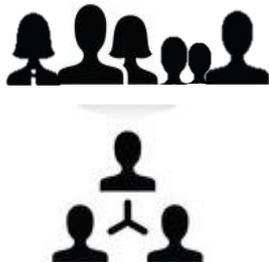
Family worker

Make plan with family and partners, including Kevin AND Jimmy

Review plans together with family and partners, get father to agree to move out to prevent further interventions, arranges further care Kevin and Jimmy

Meetings

Joint meetings with entire family system, coaching with colleagues

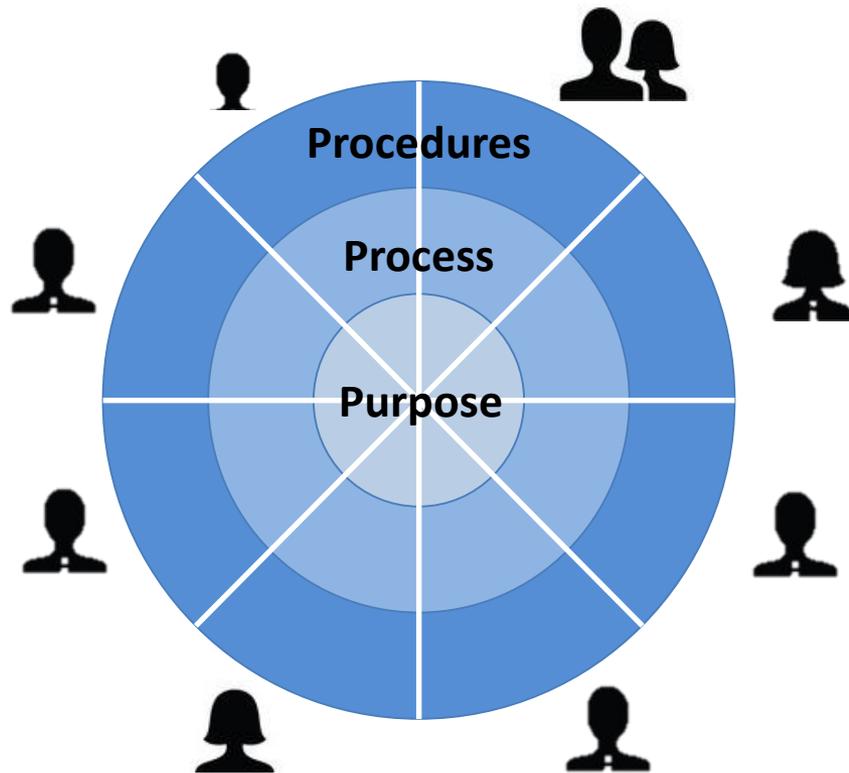


Family plans

Plans updated, tracking safety and progress



Coda: The work of leaders in collaboration



The work of leaders:

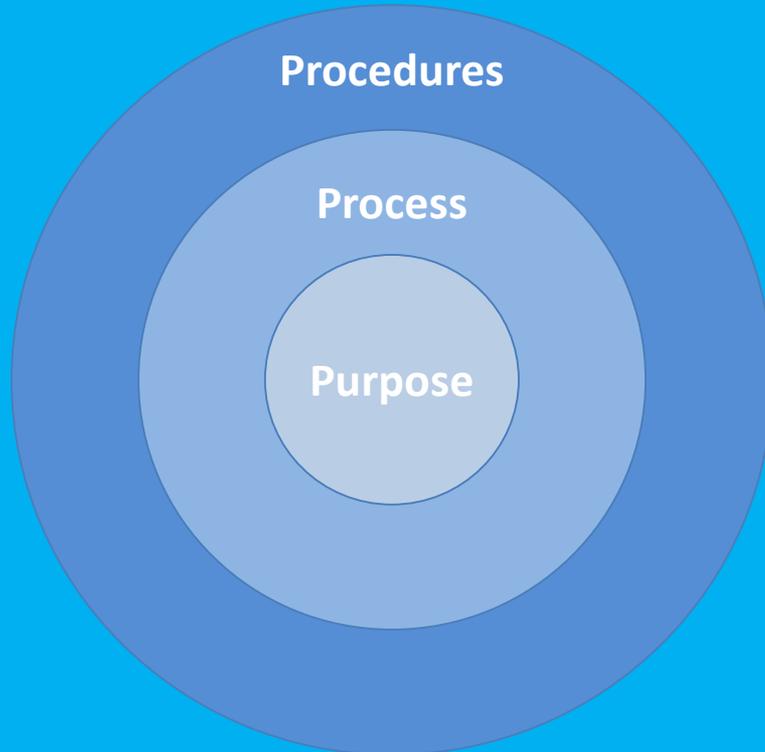
Create space for innovative practices, plans, reforms

Select practices that have proven to deliver results

Embed practices in process and procedures of network

Keep adapting practices

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The challenge of high-reliability collaborations

1. All partners rely on each other to provide error-free contributions to the overall performance.
2. Not all partners are necessarily high-reliability organizations used to dealing with high-risk.
3. And yet: the failure of one partner may thwart the reliability of the whole network's performance.
4. Reliable [integration of] contributions [must be] supported via specific interaction structures and practices that aim at [structural & cultural] integration



Defining purpose and value of government

“Social conditions to be improved, substantive problems to be solved, wants to be satisfied, rights to be vindicated, opportunities to be exploited!”

“Public values are those providing normative consensus about (1) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should be entitled; (2) the obligations of citizens to society, the state and one another; and (3) the principles on which governments and policies should be based”

“Optimize pleasure and avoid pain, attain sense of control, retain positive self-evaluation, develop positive relationships”

How to deal with wickedness: Think systems, collaborate, embed adaptive work

Holistic, not partial or linear thinking – thinking that captures the big picture and the interrelationship of policy problems. Recognize ‘social complexity’ whereby problems are seen from multiple perspectives.

Innovative and flexible approaches – the need for a systematic approach to social innovation by replicating the kind of practices employed by private sector research. Focus on creating a ‘learning organisation’.

The ability to work across agency boundaries – as wicked problems do not conform to the constraints of organisations there is a need to work across agency boundaries.

Increasing understanding and stimulating a debate on the application of the *accountability framework* – existing accountability frameworks may constrain attempts to resolve wicked problems.

Effectively engaging stakeholders and citizens in understanding the problem and in identifying possible solutions – there is a need to understand the full dimensions of each situation through engaging with relevant stakeholders. Behavioural changes, the report suggests, are more likely if there is a full understanding of the issues by stakeholders.

Additional core skills – develop skills in communication, big picture thinking and influencing skills and the ability to work cooperatively.

A better understanding of behavioural change by policy makers – although the traditional ways by which governments change citizens’ behaviour will still be important (e.g. legislation, regulation, penalties, taxes and subsidies), such practices may need to be supplemented with other behaviour-changing tools that better engage people in cooperative behavioural change.

A comprehensive focus and/or strategy – as wicked problems have multiple causes they require sustained effort and resources.

Tolerating uncertainty and accepting the need for a long-term focus – solutions to wicked problems are provisional and uncertain, and this fact needs to be accepted by public managers and Ministers. There are no quick fixes and solutions may need further policy change or adjustment. (APSC 2007: 35-6)