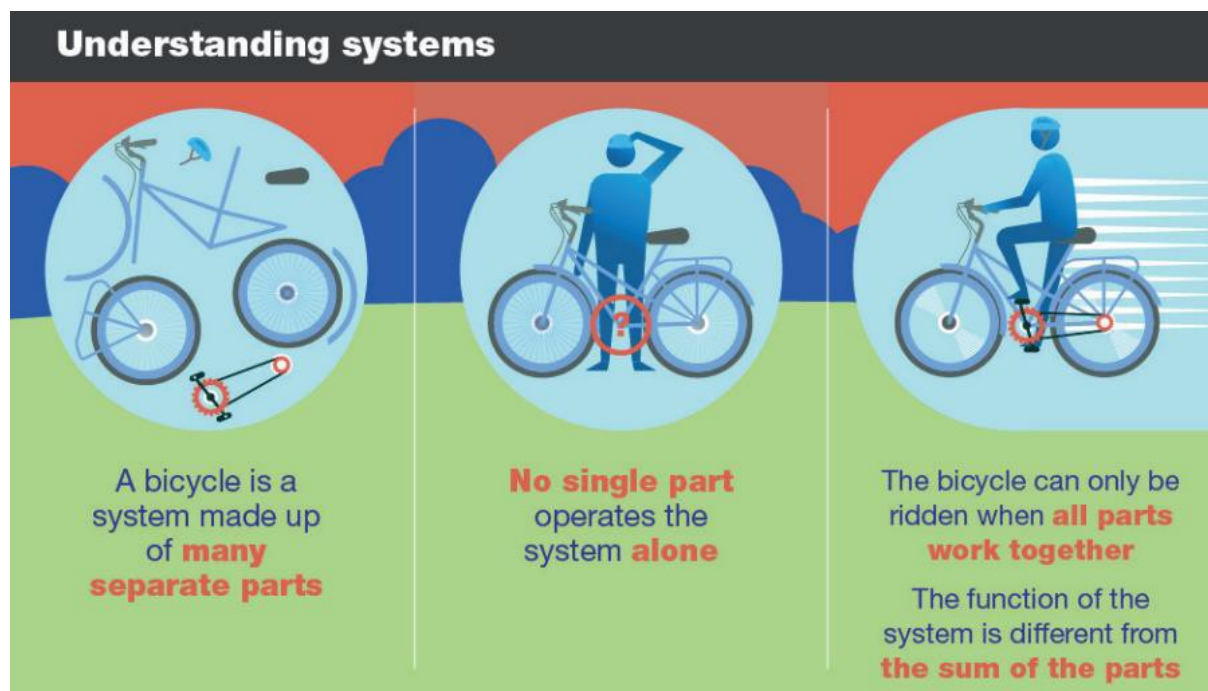


Relational working across agencies

A relationship-centred approach also needs to consider the relationships between professionals across agencies and sectors, e.g. health, education, housing. Close and active connections and working relationships with other key agencies is vital for effective collaboration, solving problems and driving positive change, supporting the integration of services and cohesive pathways of delivery. Cooperation, collaboration and co-production is all-important, with all providers working together in partnership through a whole-system approach, enabled through collective cross-agency leadership and a shared and well-communicated vision and strategy. More specifically, Public Health England has promoted the following '5 Cs' as part of a place-based, multi-agency approach to violence reduction:

- **collaboration** – a whole-systems approach bringing together partners from a broad range of functions, creating a common understanding
- **co-production** with the perspectives of all partners informing the approach
- **cooperation** in data and intelligence sharing, overcoming any barriers
- **counter-narrative** – partnerships promoting positive narratives and aspirations, underpinned by the mobilisation of community assets
- **community consensus approach** – actively involving community members, reducing barriers to engagement, and addressing community-level factors.

A whole-system approach (Public Health England, 2019)



The Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) activity hubs are one example of a local partnership model, based upon personalised, relational, practical and skill-building practice. Our earlier research into community hubs found that staff benefitted from the co-location and multi-disciplinary nature of the hubs, as they could establish cross-agency relationships and seek immediate support from a range of other members of staff.

Multi-agency community hubs



Bridge building and boundary spanning

In the human services literature, one can find the terminology of 'bridge builders' and 'boundary spanners'; bridge builders assist people to connect and engage with other services, while boundary spanners build relationships across agencies to network different organisations and professionals for better collaboration and support. Both roles are important for probation and youth justice; the bridging role can assist vulnerable people to locate and access the right support services and resources at the right time, while boundary spanning can help to overcome barriers, increase connections, enable flexibility, and build resilience in systems.

The language of 'systems stewardship' has also been used to highlight the role of stewards in creating a web of connections beyond organisational boundaries and in building the trusted relationships which are required for effective collaboration. Values such as empathy and respect need to be adopted when working across boundaries and with other professionals, particularly where professional concerns, processes, philosophies, and cultures may differ. Being aware of differing cultures and priorities can help to build mutually trusting relationships, and multi-agency training can be particularly beneficial for practitioners, facilitating discussions regarding different agency perspectives and strengthening roles and expectations.

As part of a whole-person, whole-system approach, it is important that consideration is given to the number of professionals directly involved in the lives of individuals. The practice of having a 'professional for everything' can be counter-productive, with individuals ending up lost in the crowd. People can also find the re-telling of, sometimes traumatic, past

experiences to multiple professionals to be intrusive, challenging and harmful, causing them to withdraw from services and interventions. The video below, produced by Cardiff University (from the 'Keeping Safe?' research project) provides a helpful overview of relationships and relationship-based practice, and emphasises the difference between building a few strong and sustained relationships compared to being required to engage with a wide range of professionals.



Disclaimer: an external platform has been used to host this video. Recommendations for further viewing may appear at the end of the video and are beyond our control.

Commissioning and contracting

Relationships with other agencies can also be considered in the context of commissioning and contracting. Over recent years, alliance commissioning and contracting has increasingly been adopted in health and social care service provision, and a realist literature synthesis has highlighted how alliancing can 'facilitate innovative and collaborative working practices through developing commitment and trust between alliance partners'. Similar potential benefits have been outlined in relation to 'communicative' partnership arrangements.

The following lessons have been highlighted:

- build, sustain and nurture relationships, including beyond traditional services
- it is not a quick fix – the process takes time, effort, determination, curiosity and humility
- role change is required, including redistributing power relationships.

Key references

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