

# Working in Complex Systems, Creating Safer Communities Part II

Building on our sold-out event from September 2018, we were delighted to have Dr Toby Lowe and Annabel Davidson Knight join us to further explore what approaches those of us working in complex systems (like community safety) can take to get the best outcomes. They also shared findings from their latest publication with Collaborate, providing practical examples and insights for people eager to develop new ways of working.



The event began with a lecture that outlined what it means to work in complexity and how we can best do this. Attendees were then split into small groups to discuss what a successful approach to complex working might look like within their organisations.

You can view Dr Lowe's full presentation [here](#), and the Youtube video from the event [here](#).

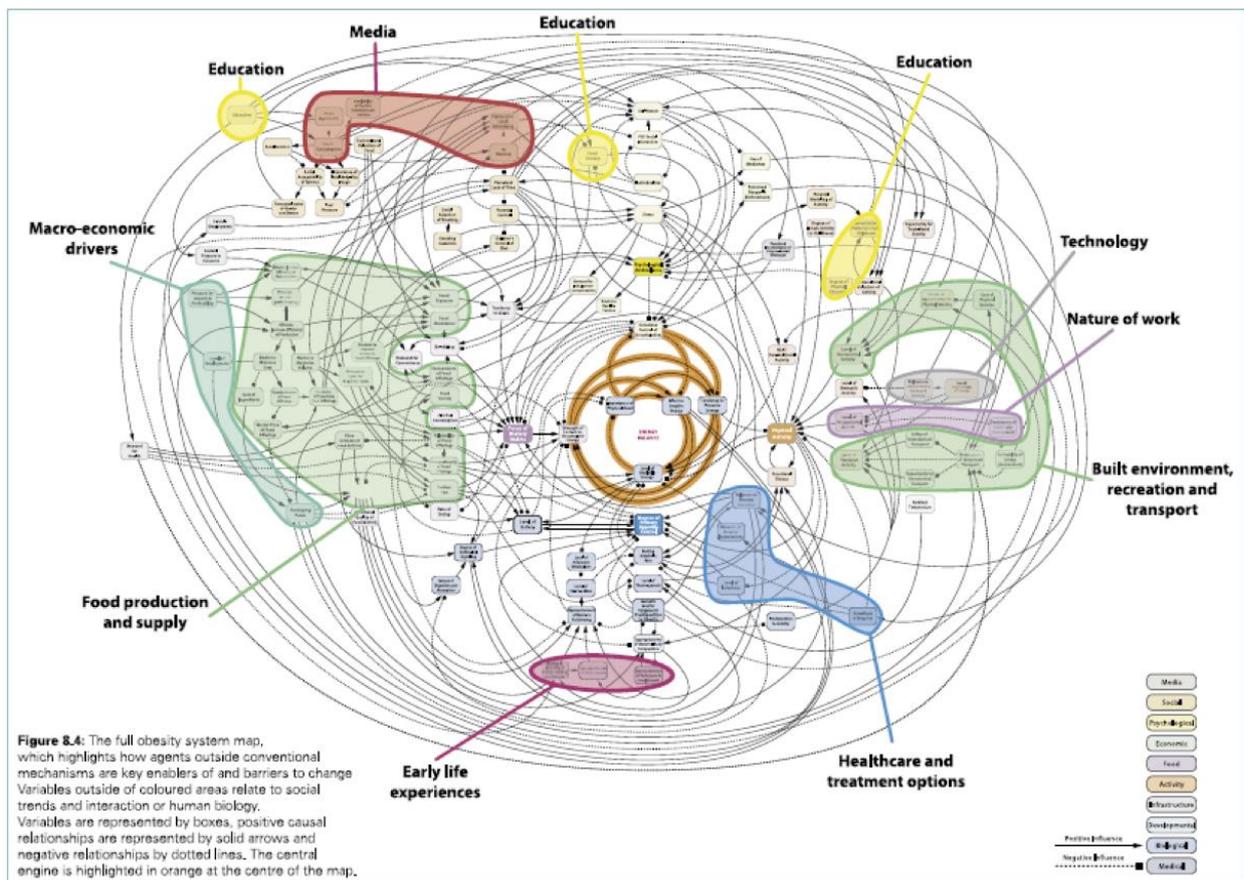
For information about Part I of this event (September 2018), click [here](#).

## Context

Complexity is a way to better describe how outcomes are really made. We know we are in complex territory when:

- The people/community we are working with have a different set of strengths and needs, and these are all relevant to the outcomes produced
- Outcomes are being produced by many factors interacting together in an ever-changing way
- People are working in systems that are beyond the control of any one of the actors in the system.

The diagram below provides an example of a complex system. It details the full obesity system map, highlighting how agents outside conventional mechanisms are key enablers of and barriers to change. It provides an example of how complexity and interconnected a system can be. It would be impossible and impractical to hold any of the one sectors featured in the diagram accountable for overall obesity levels. The system that produces safe communities is similarly complex and this has implications for performance management for community safety partners.



Dr Lowe explained that outcomes are actually achieved by collaboration between complex systems. This requires us to:

- Be **human** to one another: put on our VEST (respond to **variety** of human need & experience, use **empathy**, view people from a **strengths-based perspective**, **trust** people with decision-making)
- **Adapt to change** – the context in which social interventions are undertaken constantly changes – by learning.
- **Shape systems** whose behaviour cannot be reliably predicted, and which no one controls.

*'The more any quantitative social 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.'*

- **Campbell's Law**

For funders this means:

- Long term funding
- Funding without performance measures/KPIs - *these only give the illusion of improvement.*
- Fund those organisations you trust to build effective human relationships with people
- Support learning and adapting within organisations: improvement requires continuous learning.

*"Outcomes are not delivered by organisations"*

## Learning

- Learning is crucial for working in complexity – but it is not just a phase of social innovation, it must be continuous.
- There is no such thing as "what works" – because "what works" is always changing.
- Learning is enabled by:

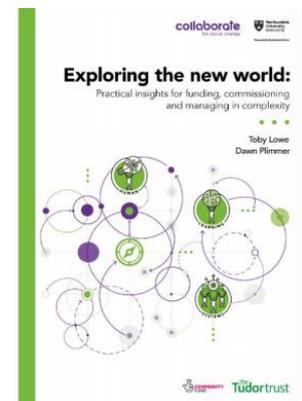
- Funding learning, not 'results'
- Creating a positive error culture
- Formal and informal spaces for learning
- Using data to learn

## Healthy systems, not organisations produce good outcomes. What does a healthy system look like?

System Behaviours (via Lankelly Chase Foundation):

### 1. Perspective

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



### 2. Power

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

### 3. Participation

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

## Building a Movement

- A movement is building around Human Learning Systems (HLS) practice all over the country, with pilots taking place everywhere from funders (e.g. Tudor Trust) to local government.
- Collaborate are supporting organisations to pilot HLS approaches through advice and support and are looking for people who would be keen to do a pilot. If you are interested – contact [annabel@collaboratecic.com](mailto:annabel@collaboratecic.com)
- Finally, things you can do are:

- Use the language of Human Learning Systems
- Act as a champion. How can you use your leverage with others?
- Explore funding/managing in an HLS way. Where would you start?

## Attendance and feedback

Of the 20 people who attended, most were community safety practitioners, and some were from third sector organisations.

We used an online survey using Survey Monkey as a way of collecting feedback from participants.

**The attendees gauged their knowledge of working in complex systems as at around 26% before the event and gauged their increase in understanding at 79% after the session.**

The main 'take away' or things 'they would do differently' were around knowing what data we are measuring and how best to measure it. Attendees noted that this is a collective effort, not the responsibility of one organisation alone.

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*"I will change how I ask grantees to report on their projects. I will prioritise persuading senior leaders to accept complexity and adapt the way in which we measure things and what we use them for"*  
**Participant on how their work will change going forward**

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It was great to see attendees beginning to consider how their work will change going forward.

- 100% of people who responded gave the speakers' inputs 5 stars.
- 100% of people rated the conversations as 4 or 5/5 stars.
- 83% of people rated the networking as 4 or 5/5 stars.
- 50% of people rated the venue as 4 or 5/5 stars.
- **100% of people rated the overall event as 4 or 5/5 stars. Everyone said they would attend another SCSN event.**
- Improvements mentioned were mostly around the venue, which we will take on board.

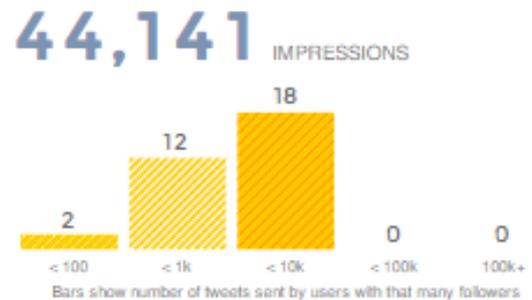
We also had a Twitter # for the day with 32 tweets and 13 retweets about the session reaching 21,284 accounts.

## #SCSNComplexity

### ESTIMATED REACH

**21,284**  
ACCOUNTS REACHED

### EXPOSURE



### Final word

We'd like to say a big thank you to our speakers on the day – Dr Toby Lowe and Annabel Davidson Knight - and our participants for asking questions and engaging in enriching discussions.

There is a sense of this movement developing in Scotland and at SCSN we are keen to support this. At SCSN we are going to continue these conversations in our network and continue embedding these approaches and principles in our own organisation and the work we do. We are also going to think about how we can continue share this learning more widely and what we can do to support the creation of healthy systems in community safety, support practitioners to take a Human Learning Systems approach and consider how to monitor performance in complexity.

If you attended this event, watched the input on our YouTube channel or want to get involved, you can [Join the movement](#) on Knowledge Hub. The "Complexities" group has over 300 leaders from across the world, resources, and a forum to ask questions.

We'd love to hear about your experiences working in complexity going forward. You can get in touch with us at [info@scsn.org.uk](mailto:info@scsn.org.uk) or 0131 225 7772 / 8700. You can also keep in touch with what we're up to at [www.safercommunitiesScotland.org](http://www.safercommunitiesScotland.org) where you can also sign up for our monthly newsletter. Or Like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).