

Taking a systems approach: what does it mean for interventions and evaluations?



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Why a system focus for health promotion?

Health promotion in schools & communities is predominantly focused on programs to change individuals' behaviour

- with limited success – piecemeal, fragmented, small effects
- ignores fact that schools & communities are ecological systems

There is a need to take advantage of these systems' structures (inter-relationships, feedback loops etc) to have greater intervention effects

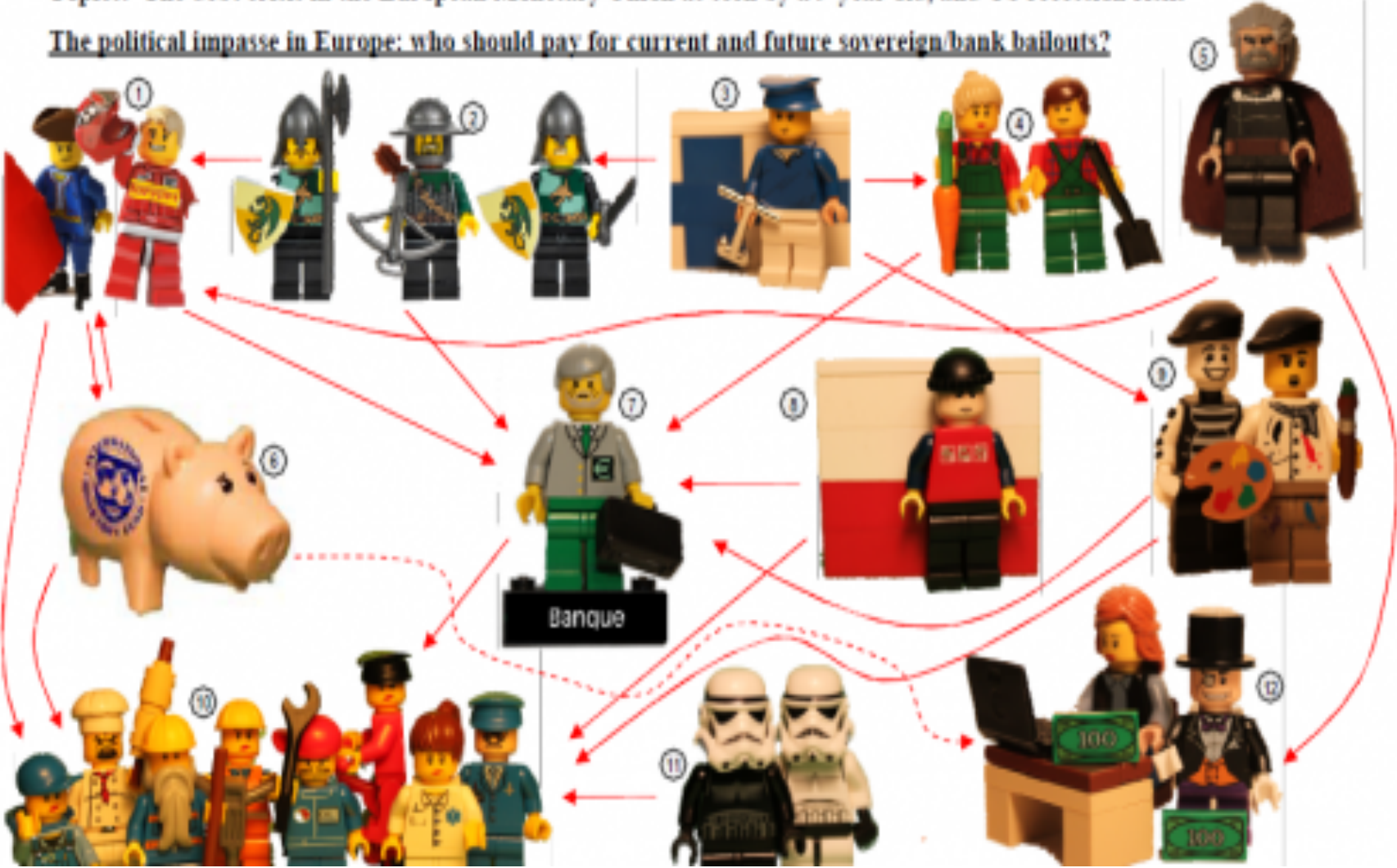
- which means thinking about interventions differently & how we evaluate them

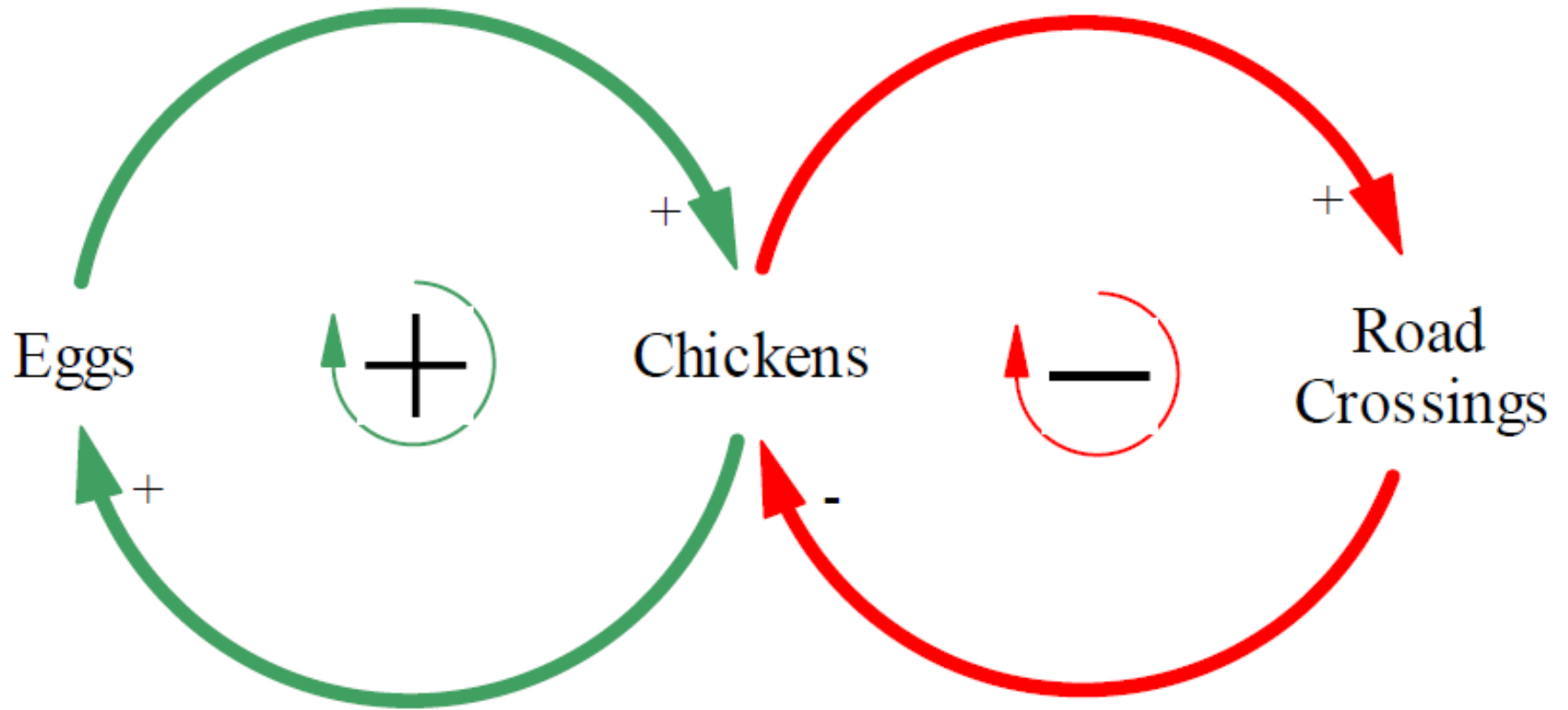
Characteristics of a system



Topics: The debt crisis in the European Monetary Union as seen by a 9-year old, and US recession risks

The political impasse in Europe: who should pay for current and future sovereign/bank bailouts?





Systems thinking: solution for tackling complex issues?



- A way of thinking & understanding complex problems
- Recognises importance of interdependent & reciprocal relationships
- Helps us to understand why piecemeal or program approaches to solving complex problems don't work very well
- Helps to identify new leverage points to bring about change
- Helps us to understand the inter-connectedness between possible solutions/actions



A systems level intervention means...

Thinking differently about the nature of the intervention

Moving the focus from the individual behaviour change to changing:

- Systems structures
- Resources
- Networks and relationships

Evaluating a systems level intervention means



- changing emphasis from individual outcomes to systems processes, impacts and outcomes
- capturing the dynamic nature of the systems & activities that are developed, and local adaptation
- feeding back the evaluation data to contribute to the ongoing development, and implementation of the intervention.

Developmental evaluation approach

(Patton, 2011)



- dynamic
- designed for when the intervention is collaborative & aimed at transformational change
- it does not necessarily require new methods of data collection
- data is used to:
 - to support intervention development & adaptation ie implementation
 - not just for evaluation

Thus the intervention and evaluation are entwined – the evaluation informs the further development of the intervention & responds to the needs of the intervention

Show me how?



Gatehouse Project (~1997-2000)
a school based intervention

PRISM (~1998-2000)
a community based intervention

Gatehouse Project



Process of change designed to make changes in the social & learning environments of the school

Key elements

- School action team
- Critical friend supporting reflective practice
- Use of local data to review school environment & drive change
- Curriculum
- Professional learning
- School processes for monitoring & review

PRISM



Community based intervention aimed at reducing depression in new mothers by promoting a supportive community

- Information kit
- Professional training – doctors & nurses
- Vouchers – for supportive gestures by businesses
- Local steering committee
- Community development officer

Activities contributing to implementation

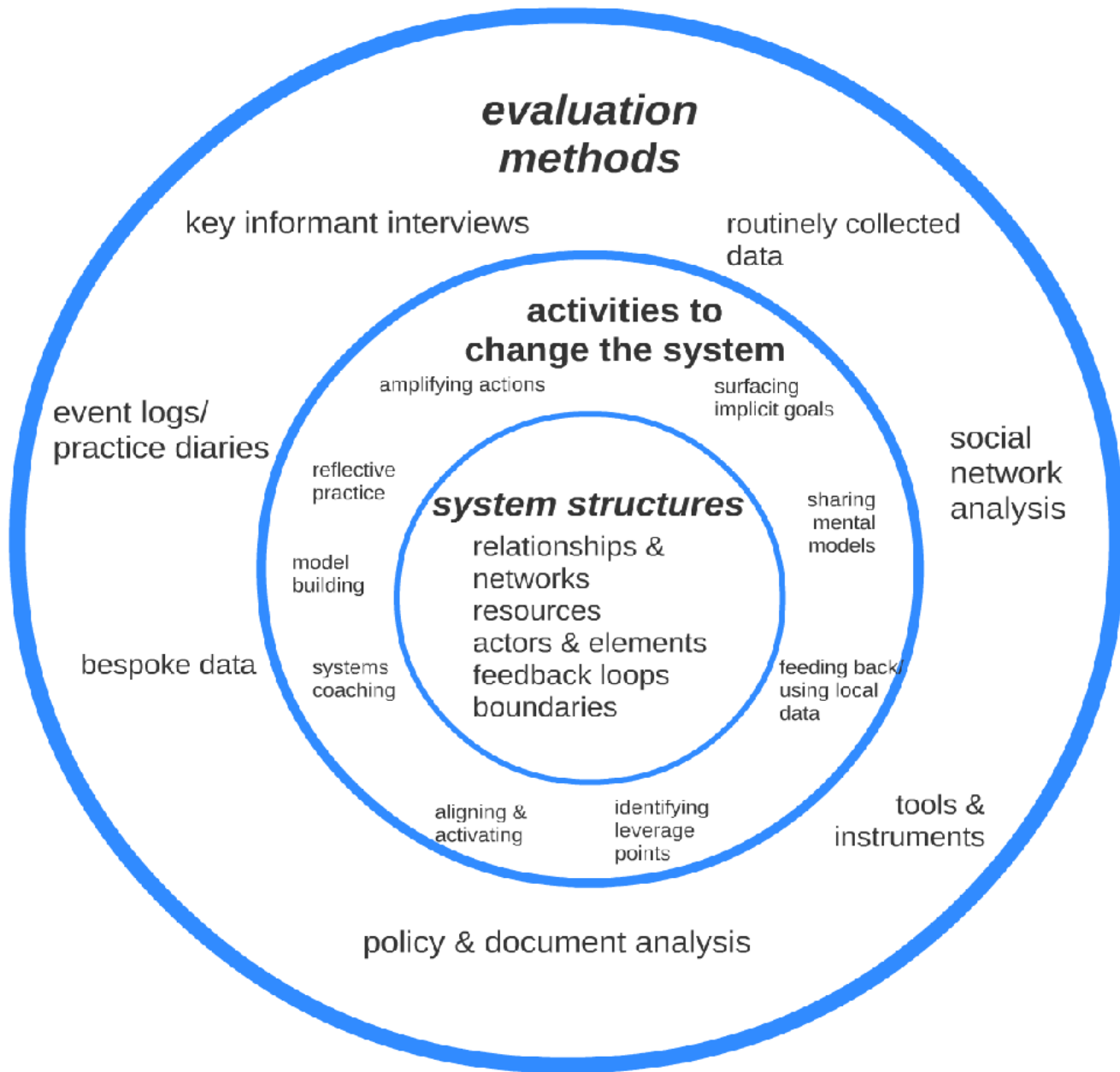


Function	Actions/methods	Evaluation
Surfacing implicit goals; sharing mental models	Staff professional development Diaries	Key informant interviews Diaries
Reflective practice	Critical friend (systems coach) Key informant interviews Event logs & diaries	KII & diaries
Aligning & activating	Feedback of local data; linking to current activities & demands Community development officers	Change in school culture Case stories Event logs
Identifying leverage points	Using local data & knowledge of the system Community development officers	Key informant interviews Diaries Event logs

Reflections



- Tension between intervention as a set of elements & encouraging change in the system/context
- Gatehouse Project *explicitly* used systems thinking language. PRISM system language resided in a separate sister project – Eco-PRISM
- We now realise that explicit use & understanding of systems thinking & systems structures could strengthen health promotion practices & systems level interventions





Conclusion

A number of methods can be used for both the ongoing development & adaptation of an intervention & its evaluation

Can undertake systems change without explicit use of systems thinking or systems language but...

taking an explicit systems approach can strengthen how we develop & implement interventions & how we capture & evaluate systems level changes



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