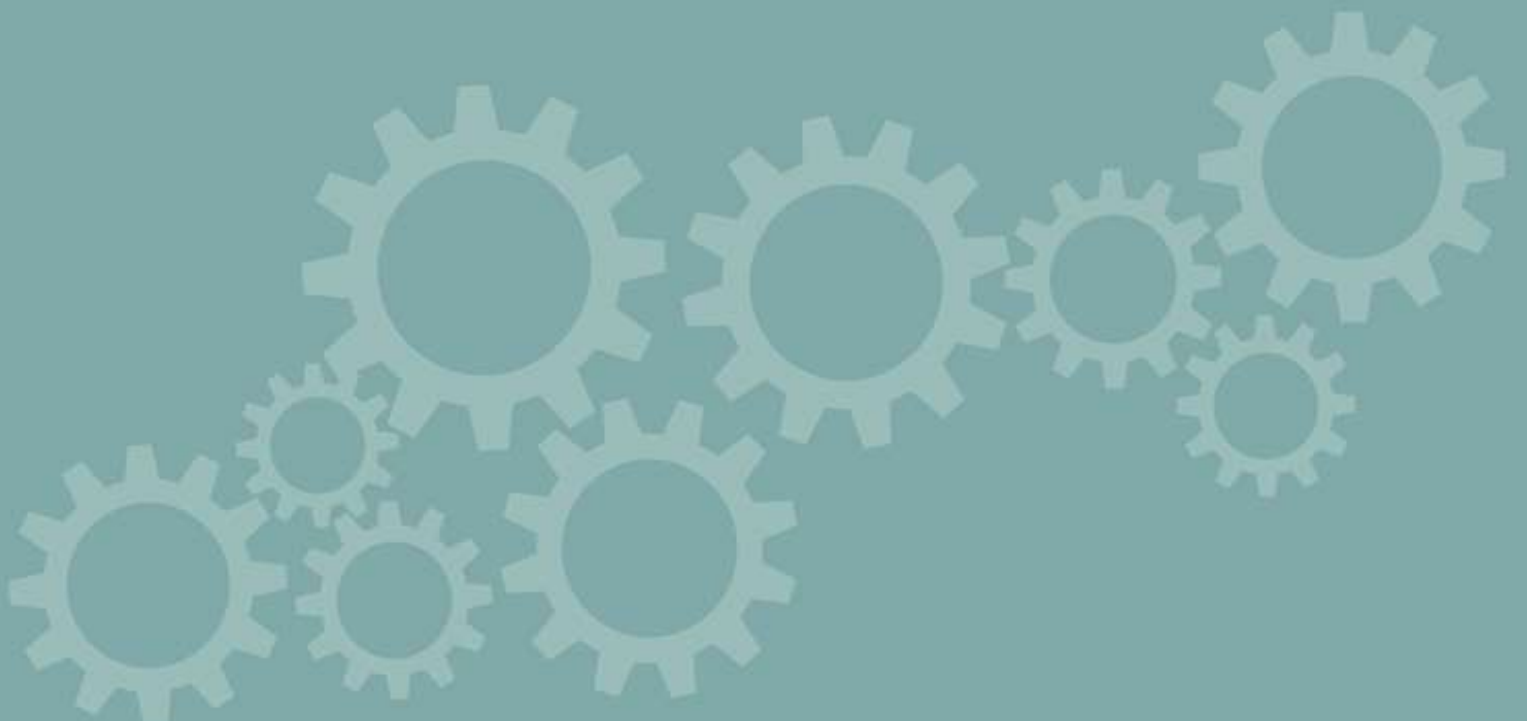

Public Service Leadership:

What Works?

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What Works Scotland (WWS) aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

We are working with Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services (Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) to:

- learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability

A further nine areas are working with us to enhance learning, comparison and sharing. We will also link with international partners to effectively compare how public services are delivered here in Scotland and elsewhere. During the programme, we will scale up and share more widely with all local authority areas across Scotland.

WWS brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, with partners from a range of local authorities and:

- Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Improvement Service
- Inspiring Scotland
- IRISS (Institution for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
- NHS Education for Scotland
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Health Improvement for Scotland
- Scottish Community Development Centre
- SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

This is one of a series of papers published by What Works Scotland to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates to the What Works Scotland Public Service Leadership workstream.

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Things happen if you empower people... if we want our communities to behave like this our staff need to be able to behave like this in their job as well.

Local authority chief executive officer

Introduction

As public services move into their next phase of reform it is clear that the leadership and management approaches of the past are no longer fit for purpose. Put simply, the traditional, hierarchical managerial approaches developed for the industrial economies are outmoded and cannot support the development of the types public services required to meet the cultural and social aspirations of Scotland.

The *Christie Report* (2011) provides a helpful context for thinking about the type of leadership required to meet these aspirations. One local authority chief executive officer (LA CEO) reflected on how Christie had provided a focus and clarity and helped them to reflect on their own leadership:

*C*hristie, I think, helps us to focus on what's good about what we're doing and getting underneath the surface of those types of issues and challenges. That has helped me to give, I think, greater clarity to how I communicate with leaders across the council and how I think about my own leadership focus as well.

(LA CEO)

There is growing sense amongst public sector leaders that Christie has challenged them to rethink their leadership practice and the underlying purpose of their role:

*R*eflecting on the Christie stuff ... I think one of the things that's shifted is, for me, a kind of growing sense that providing a permissive environment is a more significant factor in my approach to leadership than it might have been historically ... in terms of the difference I can make, that seems to me to be territory where encouraging a more permissive environment, which allows more people to contribute, is really important.

(LA CEO)

We have found much support within the field for the ideas and principles associated with Christie. The challenge for the system is to turn this support, and the momentum it has created, into the widespread sustainable operationalisation of Christie's recommendations. Whilst this is likely to require considerable cultural change to uproot the deeply embedded practices of the past, there is clearly a strong appetite for such a shift amongst key stakeholders within the system:

I think it's [Christie] given me permission to assume that these are the principles that everyone should abide by in the public sector, particularly in public sector leadership.

(LA Head of Service)

We have also found considerable support for the idea of maintaining and growing social cohesion across the public services whilst reducing rules and regulation, to foster an egalitarian culture underpinned by mutualistic or self-improving public service organisations. These concepts provide a helpful lens through which to analyse and understand leadership and public service reform and are returned to in more detail in the final section of the report. In our literature review (Chapman, van Amersfoort and Watson 2017) we identified boundary spanners and reticulists as important actors in building trust, relationships, and therefore social cohesion. Again, we will return to the importance of this in the final section of this report.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of our key findings on public service leadership. Here we present a set of insights, which we believe should inform thinking and future developments in public service leadership across Scotland. Specifically, we draw together the evidence from the research literature and our associated publications including the literature review, empirical fieldwork within each of the four What Works Scotland case sites, our community planning survey, data collected during public service leadership workshops and 12 semi-structured interviews with senior public service leaders across Scotland. These data were analysed to identify key themes, patterns and trends (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and triangulated through multiple methods and sources of data. Other strategies used to establish trustworthiness included the search for rival explanations, saturation and member checking (Yin, 2009).

The report is structured in three sections. After this introduction the second section outlines what we have learned from our programme of work and the third section offers a commentary, drawing out some implications for the future development of public service leadership in Scotland.

What have we learned about public service leadership?

Here we present six key messages from the What Works Scotland programme of work on public service leadership:

1. The research literature provides a partial account of leadership practice on the ground

The research literature describes a scene where more traditional forms of leadership coexist with emerging collaborative leadership practice that cuts across traditional political and geographical boundaries. Some, but only a relatively small amount of this, relates specifically to the Scottish context.

Understanding of leadership in the field generally reflects the contemporary characteristics of effective leadership found in literature. In some local authorities there were indications of leadership that went beyond existing understandings of effective leadership. For example, one local authority (LA) we visited is working collaboratively to train and influence their elected members, thus shaping the agenda rather than reacting to and being led by it.

The literature suggests that collaborative activity can be highly political, contextually determined, and often underpinned by long-term personal relationships between key people involved. Incentives to collaborate tend to be focused around responses to local challenges, the securing of increased resources, or concerns about meeting local and national targets. It is interesting to note the paucity of studies that examine failed attempts at collaborative leadership in any detail.

2. Local context plays a key role in determining the emergence and nature of new public service leadership practices

“Relying solely on public sector organisations to provide all local services constrains innovation and creates unhelpful boundaries”

(Commission on the Future of Public Services, 2011, p.34)

Where new and innovative forms of leadership practice are emerging on the ground they have to be understood in relation to their specific context. In some cases national policy drivers and support for these developments play a role in pump-priming or sponsoring developments. For example, in the case of the Pan-Tayside Quality Improvement Collaborative, a precursor to the Regional Improvement Collaborative. However, in other

cases new practices can emerge organically in response to a perceived or identified need within the community or local authority. One Head of Service (HoS) reflected:

[Leadership] has changed so much because the requirement in there is having the confidence to step out, do things differently, make partnerships and collaborations and ... engender the trust of the people round about you"

(LA Head of Service)

Our findings suggest that although government sponsorship and perceived need can be important, both tend to lead to incremental change that is often harder to sustain, either because of lack of ownership of the change within the locality or because of lack of pace. Therefore, these mechanisms tend to be an insufficient catalyst for lasting and impactful change. We tend to see lasting and impactful change when the following drivers underpin government sponsorship or perceived need:

a. Local dissatisfaction with current practice and/or strong imperative for improvement

This may stem from a public reaction to a crisis/system failure or professional desire beyond recognition to rethink roles and responsibilities and service provision to improve outcomes for all of the community as this leader explains:

It's coming out of your sphere or your specialism to understand the bigger challenges that your organisation faces so a lot more knowledge about that. Then to be able to have a kind of ongoing dialogue with them about ... what can we do to improve? And what can you bring to the table to be able to influence that? So back to that understanding that everybody's got something to contribute.

(LA Strategic Advisor)

Such reconceptualisations of traditional role boundaries are often brought about by engagement with Christie and the priorities and recommendations identified within that report.

b. Vision and quest for an alternative narrative

An individual (or small group) within a locality recognises the inadequacy of current ways of working and has an alternative vision for how things might look and work in the future. This leader provides a pertinent example:

Under the new local outcome improvement plan we'll be moving towards five partnership outcome boards which will replace the separate outcome boards

the council had, and separate strategic partnership groups, so we'll be bringing those together, so that essentially the same outcome governance arrangements are in place for the council and the partnership, and we won't have a separate council plan and a local outcome improvement plan, it'll be the same plan."

(LA Community Planning Partnership Manager)

Again, our findings suggest initiatives such as this have often emerged in response to engagement with the Christie recommendations and the broader public reform agenda in Scotland.

c. Changes to local structures

Irrespective of the cause of changes to local structures when local arrangements change new ways of working and forms of leadership can emerge. This often involves the creation of new teams and the blurring of professional boundaries. In some cases this can cause difficulties and be viewed as a negative consequence of restructuring whilst in others this can lead to more innovative approaches:

I think there is now a very well understood headline within local authorities that absolutely gets the benefits of partnership working. And a far greater intolerance of siloed working. Now, we're still organised into services, I think there's probably about 180 different services that are delivered with the council, but the overarching organisational structure is into larger directorates ... which encourages a kind of disregard of service boundaries.

(LA CEO)

These drivers for change can act independently or in combination in different proportions but where they work well, they are context specific. As such, there is no 'one size fits all' solution or response that guarantees success. Rather, changes are very much driven by local needs and priorities. As this (LA Head of Service) explains:

I t's not competition about the outcome, it's not competition about how good we are as public servants, but it's competition about the outcomes for our residents and that's where the privilege in all of this sits.

One common theme underpinning changes to structural arrangements is the necessity to achieve more with less resource. This pressure within the system has led to significant

streamlining and efficiency changes within LAs and changes to contractual arrangements for some staff.

3. Traditional leadership approaches co-exist with emerging innovative practices

“Unless Scotland embraces a radical, new, collaborative culture throughout our public services, both budgets and provision will buckle under the strain.”

(Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011, p. viii)

It is clear from our case sites and engagement across the system that ‘new’, ‘collaborative’ or ‘collective’ leadership practices are not yet sweeping across Scotland, replacing ‘traditional’ forms of leadership as they go. The reality is a more gradual shift with the emergence of new pockets of practice where leaders are working across different types of boundaries. For instance, when new - what might be described as ‘leading edge’ - policy developments create new structural arrangements, in addition to the replication of traditional approaches, we are also seeing the emergence of alternative approaches to leadership that place more emphasis on communication, collaboration and the dispersion of decision-making:

It really is about that change from that traditional way of working with direct line management responsibility, but I guess perhaps for me a more important way of working which is much more around influencing and the kind of inputs that can be derived from collaboration in partnership models where relationships with stakeholders and the influence you can bring to bear is much more about the leadership than necessarily the direct line management responsibilities you have.

(LA Head of Service)

A CEO of one LA reflected:

I think there’s probably more we can do around process in terms of empowering people but I think that that’s something that I need to empower my senior managers to do and that’s what I’m now trying to get them to think about. What can they change at their level to allow their staff to take leadership decisions every day?

(LA CEO)

The relational aspect of leadership arises repeatedly amongst the stakeholders we interviewed. Our evidence suggests that where leaders work more informally with different parts of the leadership hierarchy within and across organisations, moving seamlessly between levels, connecting, brokering, and bonding with individuals, a more networked, non-hierarchical collaborative leadership perspective dominates. One CEO highlights the importance of flexibility and frameworks that support boundary spanning rather than rules:

[W]e can't be governed by lots of rules. There needs to be some frameworks for sure but they need to have enough flexibility to allow them to go out and make things happen and allow them to support other people to make things happen. We need to rethink how we allow our staff to be the very best they can.

(LA CEO)

Conversely, where we see strong formal structures with high levels of delegation this appears to result in less flexible leadership approaches. This might be associated with a disparity of perceptions between senior leaders and their junior counterparts where senior the leaders tend to have a much more positive perception of the organisation. In addition, in some cases, the traditional formal organisational structures remain so deeply entrenched and linked to performance accountabilities that it is challenging to create collaborative spaces, as one CEO reflected:

I think there's a slightly perverse thing going on where the headline narrative from government is around a drive for greater collaboration, partnership and integration at local level, and yet you've got an element of micromanagement by silo, by performance silo from government.

(LA CEO)

Other leaders, such as this CEO, highlight the tension between being driven by evidence-based decision-making and creating space for more innovative activity or 'positive disruption':

There's something about getting a balance in terms of how I lead the organisation between having a strong evidence base for decisions and direction and ... balancing that with an appetite for innovation. So, in my experience, if we're too narrowly driven by evidence you miss opportunities to try and do things that are more innovative or do things that might disrupt the organisation in a way that's positive."

(LA CEO)

Whilst we are cautious about the scale of change on the ground it is nonetheless encouraging that alternative ways of working and thinking about the role of public services in Scotland, as implied by Christie, do appear to be infiltrating the discourse within the public sector. According to this individual, this is a significant step in the right direction:

Some of the topics that would have been slightly to one side of the council's agenda, for example prevention and early intervention, shared resources, collaborative leadership, now they're very much at the centre of what we do. Whether we do them effectively is another matter, but at least they're on the agenda now."

(LA Community Planning Partnership Manager)

Put simply, our evidence suggests there is a steady and emerging inclination towards contemporary forms of leadership that imply a shift away from the traditional practices of the past. This involves boundary spanners and reticulists working across hierarchies to build social cohesion. This will take time to become the cultural norm but the general consensus amongst the stakeholders is that there is an understanding of the need to move in this direction and support for such a shift if the priorities and recommendations identified by Christie are to be fully addressed and realised.

4. New ways of working have further complicated management arrangements and patterns of accountability

"We need to embed openness and democratic accountability and examine the means of control and authority. We believe these broader themes are at the heart of how the future delivery of public services can be improved."

(Commission on the Future of Public Services, 2011, p. 20)

The establishment of new ways of working across the system in developments such as health and social care integration and regional improvement collaboratives (RICs) in education have complicated management arrangements and patterns of accountability.

For example, in Aberdeenshire emerging approaches to system leadership include the strategic ambition of the Health and Social Care Partnership to build community capacity in health and wellbeing, and tackle inequities. The internal structures are complex and

emphasis is placed on effective working both within the partnership itself, and also with an external network of local public, third and community sector organisations.

In RICs new arrangements have shifted some decision-making ‘upwards’ to newly created groups. An example of this is the West Partnership where the Regional Leader has established a team of fellow education directors to lead on improvement workstreams across all eight LAs within the collaborative. This is perceived to have had an impact on the agency of other directors of education, quality improvement managers and officers. For the leaders of the collaboratives the lines of accountability have been matters of debate. The *Governance Review: Next steps* (2017) publication stated that RICs would be:

“Led by a Regional Director, to be appointed by the Scottish Government and provide a direct line of accountability for the performance of the regional improvement collaboratives to Ministers. The Regional Director will report to the HM Chief Inspector/ Chief Executive of Education Scotland”

(The Governance Review: Next steps, p. 35)

Like many elements of public service reform, the implementation of policy ambitions has been mediated by professional voice. Negotiations between central and local government have woven a position whereby the Regional Leads, rather than Directors have been appointed from the current pool of Directors of Education within the RICs rather than by central government. Furthermore, the Regional Leads are held to account through local government mechanisms but have their plans signed off by the Chief Inspector, indicating a dual set of accountabilities. These emerging patterns of accountability are likely to create tensions, both real and perceived and complicate collaborative efforts whereby a simplification of rules and regulations would enable the system to work more flexibly and efficiently.

These challenges notwithstanding, our evidence highlights the strength of will on the ground to bring together public sector stakeholders from different positions and levels of the system in a spirit of partnership and collective ambition. One LA Community Planning Manager provides a pertinent example:

When they come round the community planning table, whether it’s as the community planning board, a strategic partnership or a smaller working group, it’s about encouraging people to take their service head off and put a corporate head on, and start thinking about the fact that they’re not there simply to represent their service or their organisation, but it’s about working as a board member or a team member of the partnership.

(LA Community Planning Partnership Manager)

Similarly, as this CEO explains, constructive collaborative practice is achievable without neglecting accountability:

I suppose recently we've identified a number of priorities where we want to, kind of, push forward work in collaboration – one about a more collaborative approach to managing assets across the geography in our region, rather than being, kind of, siloed by organisation. And so that's one where we're actively tracking. There are bits of work underway, like what's the result of that work? Can we see progress being made? Has that resulted in assets being available and being used in a way that is delivering partnership projects or enabling the delivery of projects by partners in a way that wouldn't have happened before?

(LA CEO)

Overall, our data suggests there is further work to be done to streamline management and vertical accountability structures and build lateral joint responsibility for outcomes. Equally, the evidence we draw upon suggests there are reasons for optimism with public sector leaders in some areas making real efforts to reduce bureaucratic layers and simplify their organisations. In one particular region, for example, they are working for the first time towards a single community plan. According to the CEO:

This has been something that we've been evolving towards; which I think in terms of structures and processes is a pretty strong commitment to the primacy of that partnership work and partnership space because we're on one plan and it's in that partnership space.

(LA CEO)

Overall, across the system there is some excellent practice to build on and we need to create systematic mechanisms to share this practice and ideas across organisations and regions and equally importantly create safe spaces within which high quality professional learning can be facilitated.

5. Leadership is important and improving area within community planning partnerships

In both surveys, respondents were asked about how they feel about the senior leadership of the community planning partnership (CPP) (Figure 24). Respondents from the 2018 survey have a more positive opinion of senior leadership, with 54% of respondents agreeing (39%) or strongly agreeing (15%) with this statement than in the previous survey compared to just 29% of those in the 2016 survey, a difference that is statistically significant. This improvement is encouraging and may be the result of the CEA focusing work in the CPPs on creating the first round of LOIPs, which was an avenue where senior leadership could exercise a new vision for the community planning in their area of influence.

Leadership is key to the success of Community Planning Partnerships.

“Public service organisations should work to extend and deepen a local partnership approach, building on but going well beyond the current community planning partnership model. In particular, there should be a much stronger focus on engaging with people and communities in partnership processes, including the design and development of a pattern of integrated service provision.”

(Commission on the Future of Public Services, 2011, p.72)

Our Community Planning Partnership (CPP) survey in 2016 reported that only 29% of respondents thought that senior leaders articulated a clear vision for community planning. Interestingly there was no significant difference in responses by those working at local or strategic level, nor between managers and officers. Furthermore, only 30% of respondents thought that leadership arrangements across CPPs enhanced community planning. The 2018 survey paints a much more positive picture with 54% of respondents reporting that senior leadership within the CPP articulates a clear vision. It is important to note that this improvement is statistically significant.

A likely explanation for this positive shift is the time needed to build the trust and relationships necessary to articulate the vision. Leaders have had to engage with complex and challenging questions about the ways in which different parts of the public sector can working together.

One Head of Service reflected:

I have had the privilege within the community planning partnership of leading on locality planning in this region. From a very early stage we were thinking about locality ... geographically and emotionally how does that link? How does community planning link with spatial planning? How does it link with the health and social care work? What are we actually saying to our communities? Is this about the services working in a different way, or are we genuinely, emotionally, working in a different way?

(LA Head of Service)

An alternative explanation might be that this improvement be the result of the CEA focusing work in the CPPs on creating the first round of Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIP), which was an avenue where senior leadership could exercise a new vision for the community planning in their area of influence. What Works Scotland identified that changing local structures and projects (like LOIPs) can serve as a driver for changing public service leadership, where new teams and collaborations can emerge and more 'adaptive leadership' styles can develop (Aberdeenshire CPP and What Works Scotland, 2018).

We also found evidence of collaborative decision-making and leadership practice that provides a more progressive outlook as CPPs evolve. For example, in one local authority, an old hospital site was earmarked as a possible location for the development of affordable housing for local residents. However, the valuation of this particular site was less than the commercial market value creating a possible source of conflict. However, the CEO pointed to the maturity of the relationships between partners and the collective acknowledgement of the benefits of this plan as crucial to overcoming this potentially significant barrier:

We were able to have an honest and open discussion about that ... and therefore it didn't become a major conflict point. So, it strikes me that that kind of collaborative environment is now sufficiently mature that you can have those navigation discussions and try and find a way through it rather than it just ending up being an adversarial discussion.

(LA CEO)

Similarly, and encouragingly, we found examples of multiple stakeholders mobilising their knowledge, expertise and intelligence to work together on CPP agendas. For instance, this public sector leader refers to operationalisation of the CPP improvement plan in her region and the collaborative ethos that has facilitated this:

I think that's something which has really influenced how the community planning partnership are taking forward their next improvement plan ... What were the couple of big things that they thought had to be tackled in the city? And could they see in those big issues that there was a role for everyone, that the agencies could all take something away from the table and actually contribute to it?"

(LA Strategic Advisor)

The evidence we present indicates that CPPs provide an important set of arrangements for supporting community planning and empowerment in Scotland. However, for this space to have optimal impact on outcomes all senior leaders across the system must develop a shared vision and be able to articulate this vision across the partnership. Without this vision and an accompanying narrative of success is unlikely.

6. There is a commitment to working across boundaries. For this to become established as routine practice appropriate incentives, checks and balances need to be put in place

"Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve."

(Christie, 2011, p. vi)

Our research suggests that there is a strong commitment to partnership working and collaboration within Scottish public services. However, there are a range of structural and procedural barriers that can prevent effective collaboration. Where leadership is effective these are often overcome at the local level but where leadership is less confident these tend to remain in place and at times are amplified. Some of the common barriers relate to patterns of accountability (see also Finding 4) when working across political and geographical boundaries, others relate to different metrics and performance indicators across geographical and professional boundaries. Resources are often cited as the limiting factor curbing the aspiration of collaborative endeavour and competing national and local priorities can also act as barriers. One Head of Service reflected on the challenge of working across silos:

Public sector still works so much in silos and, you know, I think that will always be the enemy of what we're discussing ... I think that's why there is such an emphasis still on the softer skills because I think very often it does take that approach to jump these barriers around organisational governance structures, accountability, following the public pound."

(LA Head of Service)

There are also cultural barriers to overcome in persuading individuals to step outside of their professional sphere into unfamiliar territory and, as this respondent claims, accept that this may involve compromises:

I think the biggest test in my leadership style is; where am I going to concede to gain? Am I prepared to concede to somebody else because I can see a gain in the bigger picture level, but we may lose out in some ways? I think that's missing from some of the Christie discussions about people ... there's collaboration [but] somebody has to concede.

(LA Executive Director)

However, despite these challenges, our evidence suggests that there is a strong will for this kind of boundary crossing within the public sector in Scotland and an understanding amongst key stakeholders of the benefits that such an approach to working will bring to the communities they serve:

It is a constant reiteration and re-advocacy of what it is we're trying to do and making sure that we constantly take people with us on that journey. And from that point of view that's why I would entirely put aside organisational boundaries and organisational governance and accountability. Because, although these things are barriers and challenges, they can be surmounted.

(LA Head of Service)

In one example from education, this individual highlights the importance of a coordinated and holistic approach to supporting young people that goes above and beyond the traditional educational parameters of the school:

*T*here's only going to be so much that we can do in a classroom and that's where other council services become really important, so whether it's our youth services, whether it's our early years centres, whether it's our sports services, our family support services, social work have got a big role to play, particularly for those children that come from our most deprived backgrounds, so all of them working towards this common objective of securing better outcomes for children is actually what will make the difference in my view."

(LA CEO)

A number of the public sector leaders we interviewed were able to refer to specific examples of emerging inter-agency collaboration within their local authorities such as an initiative aimed at creating what has been termed 'Teams Around The Child' involving support structures from multiple stakeholders that are school-based. They then built upon this model to scale up the support to the wider community:

*N*ow, that can be taken a stage further because we've now got a health and social care partnership. Our health and social care partnership has a whole range of primary care services that it's responsible for delivering and when we created our health and social care partnership we put children's services in there as well".

(LA CEO)

Furthermore, we also found evidence of leaders working together to face outwards and think about they might pool their resources in a more efficient and effective way. In one region, they have been developing a strategy to facilitate multi-agency collaboration for external investment, rather than each of these factions competing for the same funding sources. As one of the leaders involved in this work asserts: *"that's leadership, because you're really trying to cut through the bureaucracy, and to get to the heart of, well, if we want to do something, lets collaborate on it, and let's not be fighting against each other for it."* Much of our data suggests that where leaders are flexible and move themselves and staff across boundaries we see more effective collaboration. This Head of Service reflected on the changing nature of leadership in their LA:

[Leadership] has changed so much because ... there is confidence to step out, do things differently, make partnerships and collaborations and again I think engender the trust of the people round about you."

(LA Head of Service)

Doing things differently, including the movement of staff within and between organisations, enables a flow of ideas and practices and increases understanding of the challenges faced by other colleagues in the system. The development of empathy promotes collaborative spirit and relational trust that sit well with the ideas about human economy and social cohesion that were raised in the introduction. For instance, this leader talks about the importance of liberating their colleagues to make decisions and work independently rather than responsively:

Certainly my approach is one of trying to encourage a permissive culture in the organisation, of encouraging people to be allowed to do stuff, to try stuff and to provide a degree of protection for staff to have that space to do that. Rather than what I would have saw as a traditional old-style leadership, of direction from above; it seems to be that's pretty much redundant now as a modus operandi for leaders in an ambiguous, complicated world. And you get more out the organisation if more people feel they've got a permissive ability."

(LA CEO)

If we are to develop authentic collaboration within the public service sector it is vital that we pay increased attention to developing positive sustainable relationships and empower professionals to have ownership of developments. Furthermore, establishing effective collaborative leadership requires an authorising environment and a supportive risk-taking culture such as that outlined in the examples we provide. For this to become the norm leaders will need to model the leadership practices that they are expecting from their peers and others across the system.

Commentary: Where next for public service leadership in Scotland?

We have concluded that public service leadership needs to continue to move on from the system management approaches of the past to a new approach that develops social cohesion. We argue that in order to achieve the aspirations of Christie these new leadership practices must evolve ‘hand in glove’ with the development of flatter, more collaborative, less regulated, networked mutualistic public service organisations. Grid group theory (Douglas, 1982) helps us to understand where our public service organisations (Hood, 1998) are in this framework and allows us to map progress towards an egalitarian culture underpinned by self-improving organisations (Figure 1).

	Low social cohesion	High social cohesion
High social regulation	Fatalistic culture <i>‘uncertain nostalgic organisations’</i>	Hierarchical culture <i>‘bureaucratic, managed organisations’</i>
Low social regulation	Individualistic culture <i>‘market-based state-funded organisations’</i>	Egalitarian culture <i>‘mutualistic self-improving organisation’</i>

Figure 1: Socio-cultural perspectives on public service reform

For mutualistic public service organisations to be able to lead the change, rather than rely on national prescription to deliver change, we need to develop new forms of leadership practice. Leaders will be required to orchestrate change whilst sustaining their own team/department/organisation or service and engaging authentically with the communities they serve. This is a future where partnerships, networks and federations working laterally with shared, coordinated and distributed leadership across many types of boundaries will provide both the delivery of services and the challenge and support for improvement of services. It will include the development of sustainable, environmentally sound and socially just practices and capacity-building through professional learning and leadership development.

This future requires a cadre of leaders with: the necessary credibility, capacity and expertise to span team, department and organizational boundaries on a routine daily basis; to be comfortable working in multidisciplinary settings where power relationships, hierarchies are blurred and often obtuse; and to manage a set of complex relationships where there are multiple and sometimes competing agendas, visions and values.

Leaders operating in this environment require 'relationship capital' (Morse, 2010) to build and sustain trust and generate and maintain influence. No longer will leaders be able to retreat to their office and rely on positional power or hierarchy to manage change. As we noted in the literature review and our empirical findings also highlight these leaders are reticulists who work collaboratively, spanning boundaries to increase the collective potential and impact of their work.

Reticulists are:

- Skilled communicators: with the ability to adapt their language to specific settings and empathise with others through negotiation and seeing a situation from a range of perspectives.
- Excellent networkers: gain access to a range of settings, seek out and connect up others with common interests and goals
- Strategic in orientation: they can see the 'big picture' and understand how different partners can contribute to achieve common goals
- Contextually astute: they understand how opportunities and constraints within the organisation can influence individual's behaviour
- Problem-solvers: they think laterally and creatively to seek solutions to the challenges they face
- Self-managing: they take risks within a framework that understands organisational capacity. In this sense they have sound organisational skills.

(Chapman, van Amersfoort and Watson, 2017, pp. 8-9)

Put simply, in the future public service reticulists will frame and lead provision of services, and set the direction and support service improvement, in partnership with those engaging with the service. Co-production with service users will become the norm. Not only will this involve moving decision-making much closer to the point of delivery, it will also move us beyond public service producer-capture to fully operationalise the aspirations of Christie.

There are encouraging signs that these new ways of working are beginning to emerge in parts of the system. Within CPPs What Works Scotland has supported collaborative action research in four local authorities to generate and use evidence to improve and reframe practice. This has also involved rethinking roles and responsibilities to lever cultural change by linking leaders at different levels across a range of services and encouraging them to develop a localised agenda for the system improvement:

I think that that's something that sometimes when you're so focused on delivering outcomes and being very task oriented, you sometimes neglect ... and I think that that's the case for large organisations like ours, you sometimes underplay the amount of investment you need to make in cultural change, and this is where the What Works Scotland work was really helpful in that kind of reflection in terms of the way that we work.

(LA Community Planning Partnership Manager)

The findings presented in this report suggest with external support and sophisticated professional learning opportunities public service leadership can rise to the challenge and support the development of a system where self-renewal is generated by public service reticulists in partnership with the communities they serve.

The challenge will be to move from instructive examples of this type of practice to a widespread and coherent approach that permeates all services and communities in a context of diminishing resources and ever increasing expectations. This will involve building leadership capacity at all levels within the system through investment in systematic and high quality professional learning opportunities at all levels within the system.

In order to deliver the professional development required, What Works Scotland recommends that the Scottish Government supports the establishment of an independent Institute for Public Service Leadership. The purpose of this Institute would be to build a cadre of public service reticulists that can fully operationalise the concept of self-improving public services. The Institute should be evidence-led and focus on four key areas of activity:

1. Knowledge exchange

Brokering and facilitating knowledge exchange with policymakers/practice communities by identifying and/or summarising relevant sources of state of the art evidence in leadership processes and strategy for partnerships, inter-professional work, and unique challenges to the future of the public service in Scotland.

2. Consultancy

Consultation in approaches to leadership development using the latest evidence, models, best practices etc. in leadership training and development approaches/action learning etc., assessment approaches, distributed leadership learning, creating a strategy for leadership development etc.

3. Professional learning and study

Focus on professional learning to build capacity across the public services (including Masters and PhD) by linking research student projects to specific research needs of policy makers/practice communities, facilitating and brokering new relationships, and framing questions around emerging issues and designing projects to generate knowledge and deepen understandings.

4. Research and evaluation

Collaboratively generating new research and evaluation. Some research needs and new questions emerge that cannot be answered by existing evidence. This would involve linking researchers interested in developing new projects with community/policy professionals willing to work in a co-productive mode.

We argue that building a community of practice through an Institute for Public Service Leadership that is based around these coordinated and coherent set of activities would provide a dynamic, new and unique space for public service reticulists to lead wide-spread and authentic collaboration necessary to deliver Scotland's ambitious agenda of public service reform.

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