4.1

SYSTEMS PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE:
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

Long before the homelessness sector started collecting comprehensive data on clients and their histories, it was widely known anecdotally that the policy failures or shortcomings of other sectors was a key contributor to the growing homeless population. Despite rarely being conceived as associated with homelessness, the policies (or lack thereof) of correctional facilities, mental health institutions and child and family services at times results in the discharging of individuals into homelessness. A service provider closely involved in system planning in Calgary recalls that "a couple of years into [executing] the [homelessness] plan we realized, 'Oh my God. All of these other systems are involved in it too.'"[1] Yet local policymakers and the homeless sector partners have little to no influence on these vast independent institutions of care, mainly situated at the provincial level of jurisdiction, which generally do not conceive of themselves as associated with the problem of homelessness.

To another service provider in Vancouver, "we [the traditional homeless serving sector] remain where people filter down to. We end up inheriting [who] no one else wants, [who] don't fit anyone else's mandate, or that they choose not to have them fit their mandate."[2] For example, when the child welfare system claims that they have a no-discharge (into homelessness) policy, yet skirt around that by allowing 'self-discharges,' the problem of non-compliant youth funnels into the homeless sector. Similarly, when resources for mental health services cover a mere fraction of those in need, the burden is felt most in the homelessness sector. Finally, when correctional institutions, Indian and North Affairs Canada (INAC) and even increasingly Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) fail their most vulnerable populations, the burden falls on to the homelessness sector. Narratives such as the ones provided from Calgary and Vancouver abound in homelessness policy communities across Canada. Indeed, the data emerging from cities suggest that such associated sectors and institutions and their policy gaps are overwhelming homeless-serving agencies, such that, if left unchecked, threaten to overwhelm gains made within the traditionally defined homelessness sector in terms of coordination and integration.

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1. Confidential interview. April 22, 2014.

2. Confidential interview. February 13, 2014.

Homelessness is thus a systemic public policy problem, involving numerous sectors, institutions and agencies and therefore requires integrated system responses in terms of governance and policy. This chapter responds to the need for a conceptual framework to understand and guide efforts towards system planning and integration from a governance and policy perspective. An integrated 'system' is characterized by a coordinated set of policies and programs aimed at aligning services to avoid redundancies, increase efficiency (e.g. reduce wait times), facilitate information sharing and learning in the policy community and provide an unbroken care experience for individuals and families facing homelessness or precarious housing. It is a significant governance challenge, but one that is necessary to tackle as a means towards ending homelessness in Canada. This chapter thus articulates a conceptual framework for collaborative governance focused on what is known as 'horizontal' system integration: a more centralized approach to planning, management and service delivery across a network of organizations and institutions within and across sectors.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of systems-oriented thinking. From here, I articulate three principal axes of integration: (i) the sectors to be integrated, (ii) the type of policy or service, and (iii) the source of authority or activity (Browne, G., Roberts, J., Gafni, A., Byrne, C., Kertyzia, J. & Loney, P., 2004). Following that, I consider collaborative governance as a means through which to achieve system integration, representing what some scholars call a 'collaborative advantage' – a result that could not be achieved by any organization working alone. The third section of the chapter articulates a conceptual framework to guide efforts towards system planning and integration via collaborative governance, identifying five key elements: (i) boundary identification and expansion, (ii) reconciling competing values in the system(s), (iii) leveraging interdependencies, (iv) leadership and external control and (v) system feedback loops. I also contemplate associated barriers and opportunities for each. The concluding section reflects on the challenges, but also the necessity, of collaborative governance for system planning and integration to end homelessness.

SYSTEM-ORIENTED THINKING

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What does it mean when one refers to the 'homelessness sector'? Traditionally, this refers to homeless shelter providers, drop-in centres and outreach workers. Yet this conceptualization of what constitutes the homelessness sector is not only far too narrow, but is also temporally biased towards thinking about homelessness in reactive terms, at the expense of other proactive or preventative efforts. While numerous examples of such narrow conceptualizations of homelessness abound, the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) (as well as its predecessor the National Homelessness Initiative) is an illustrative example. It is a nationwide, though small-scale, homelessness funding program for Canadian communities, yet one that prohibits the use of funds towards the construction or provision of affordable housing. Instead, funds must be used towards services or programs more narrowly defined as addressing chronic and episodic homelessness.

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how the child welfare system is related to homelessness until we understand that 20–45% of homeless youth were associated with that system and as many as 58% in some jurisdictions (Choca, M. J., Minoff, J., Angene, L., Byrnes, M., Kenneally, L., Norris, D., Pearn, D. & Rivers, M. M., 2004). Likewise the corrections system is associated with homelessness to the extent that discharge policies and reintegration programs are failing at their objectives. For example, research from New York City has identified that 11% of those released from incarceration experience post-release shelter stays, which amounts to over 4,000 shelter users in the 14-year period of study (Metraux & Culhane, 2004). Research in a Canadian context echoes these findings, revealing uneven supports for those discharged from correctional facilities across provinces, with many simply receiving a list of shelters for accommodation (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2009). And further, when mental health services cannot keep up with demand, this has significant implications for the stability of the lives of individuals who are precariously housed. Research across western countries continually shows that homeless individuals are disproportionately likely to suffer from personality disorders, with some estimates as high as 71% of the homeless population in some jurisdictions (Fazel, S., Khosla, V., Doll, H. & Geddes, J., 2008). Statistics like these are signifiers of a failure to diagnose, support and appropriately house those who struggle with mental illness. As such, these broader systems are in fact closely associated with homelessness and in fact the failures of these systems feed into the homelessness sector.

One of the major governance failures of homelessness is that there is a lack of ownership of this issue (Hambrick & Rog, 2000). A systems lens to the governance associated with homelessness therefore recognizes that policy changes in one area can have dramatic consequences – positive or negative – to other areas in the broader system. For example, child welfare policies and procedures that effectively discharge youth into

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homelessness when they are unable to place or retain youth into foster care creates significant pressures in the traditionally defined homelessness sector. Thus what are perceived as 'savings' or 'efficiencies' discovered and exploited in one system may in fact merely be pushing the problem into another sector at great consequence to the target population needing the support. Alternatively, when the corrections system develops (and faithfully implements) policies against discharging with no fixed address and effective programs to reintegrate individuals in society, this takes pressure off emergency shelters and drop-in centres. Yet these are big systems, the governance pressures of which are immense and often at odds with pressures in other systems and thus establishing coordination among them is a monumental, though necessary, task.

Thus the coordination of these various systems such that a coherent policy framework exists without major disjunctures or cracks through which vulnerable individuals and families fall is essential to improving policy outcomes (Foster-Fishman, P. G., Nowell, B. & Yang, H., 2007; Gaetz, 2013). Research on interagency collaboration by Bardach (1998) hypothesized that "substantial public value is being lost to insufficient collaboration in the public sector" (11). Peters (2007) likewise contends that "while individual programs must be made to work well, so too must the assembly of programs in government as a whole. At a minimum the programs within a particular area of policy should work together effectively" (74). Thus for implementation scholars like Peters, policy (or system) coordination is one of the important tasks of contemporary governance. Though many scholars espouse the claim that collaborative governance institutions or networks can 'solve' coordination problems, others warn that network structure and design also matters. To Thompson et al. (1991), "a possible disadvantage for networks is that very large-scale coordination via informal means becomes extremely difficult as the range of social actors expands" (15) (see also: Goldsmith & Eggers, 2001).

With a given policy context, system integration is a term used to describe a policy framework that covers the spectrum of needs of the target population as well as policies that work in a cohesive fashion (i.e. do not work at cross-purposes). An example of two homelessness-related policies working at cross-purposes would be (i) an aggressive outreach program to link street homeless persons to services and (ii) a bylaw that criminalizes sleeping in public squares and parks. They work at cross-purposes because the bylaw will drive the street homeless into the shadows (places they will not be discovered) and thus further away from accessing services. System integration and coordination is a feature of public policy that scholars and practitioners should care about not because of a desire to homogenize policy or reduce experimentation, but rather as a basic goal of competence and effectiveness in complex policy domains with many moving parts and institutional silos. Thus "coordination implies the bringing into a relationship other disparate activities and events" such that "disjunctures can be eliminated" (Thompson et al., 1991: 4). Coordination is about smoothing over potentially conflicting objectives and actions of agents and agencies in complex policy fields, not necessarily the imposition of a single policy instrument or philosophy. The public administration literature has long engaged with the pathologies associated with institutional silos (Aucoin, 1997; Pierre, 1998) and homelessness is a policy issue with several levels of government, even more bureaucratic agencies and departments as well as considerable role for the charitable sector and civil society.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE INTEGRATED?

As we think about governance frameworks that may lend themselves to more effective systems planning and integration, we must conceptualize what it is that needs to be integrated as it relates to homelessness. Browne et al. (2004) provide a helpful starting point by laying out a model and a means to measure such policy and service integration. To Browne et al. (2004), there are three principal axes to conceptualize: (i) the sectors to be integrated, (ii) the type of policy or service and (iii) the source of authority or activity.

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On the first axis, it is first critical to conceptualize which sectors are within the catchment zone of homelessness. The traditionally defined homelessness sector provides the starting point, which consists of the emergency shelter and support services such as drop-in centres and basic needs provisions. Yet the aforementioned associated sectors of mental health and addictions, other primary health care, child welfare, corrections, social assistance and affordable housing are the next most obviously related sectors to homelessness. Less often identified, though nonetheless critically important, sectors include education, employment and training, and enforcement and policing.

The second axis to conceptualize is the type of policy or service. For too long, many decision makers have conceptualized homelessness policy and services solely in terms of emergency services and basic supports. Yet there are also other types of interventions and policies that represent a more comprehensive and strategic response to homelessness, including early intervention and prevention. As a result, systems-oriented thinking demands a wider lens through which we conceptualize and execute homelessness policy and services, and in particular a rebalanced emphasis on prevention and early intervention as opposed to a heavy emphasis on reactive services after an individual experiences homelessness.

The third axis, and perhaps the most difficult to address through integration, is the axis pertaining to respective authorities and jurisdictional mandates. Included on this axis are organizations associated with the funding and regulation of activities related to homelessness, which can be public authorities, private market authorities and non-profit or community organizations. While not always the case in the past, and though certainly not universal across Canada, the non-profit sector associated with homelessness has become more integrated and less-siloed in recent decades, in part due to scarce resources but also due to networking and funding opportunities that incentivize partnerships and integration at the service level. The private sector authorities associated with homelessness are rarely part of the conversation as partners towards ending homelessness, but they (particularly private market landlords) are central actors towards generating a more comprehensive and effective suite of policies and programs. And finally the most essential governance challenge associated with systems planning and integration is with respect to the variety of public authorities whose policies, regulations and spending programs touch homelessness, and it is essential that they have more coherent alignment with the homelessness sector. All three levels of government have responsibilities that touch on the issue of homelessness, whether it is affordable housing and zoning, street bylaws and policing, mental health and addictions, child welfare, domestic violence or corrections. The respective public authorities across all three levels of government must jointly devise a cohesive policy framework such that service gaps and policy disjunctures are eliminated, otherwise spending and regulations risk being inefficient and interventions for homeless individuals are more likely to be unsuccessful.

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COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN PURSUIT OF A COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE

Systems planning and integration alone will not end homelessness. Adequate and sustained funding commitments from government in this regard are essential components on which all of this hinges. Canada is quite far from what many observers estimate is required in terms of investment from all levels of government to substantially address homelessness (Brownlee, 2014; Gaetz, Gulliver & Richter, 2014; Pomeroy, 2014). Experts and advocates argue that the affordable housing investment under Prime Minister Harper recently is not even half of what is required of the federal government in order to adequately address Canada's vast affordability deficit (Shapcott, 2014). Yet at the same time, simply allocating more money

towards housing and homelessness alone will not be effective without a strategic orientation and policy framework that ensures that the various sectors and public authorities are working towards the same end goal. As such, scholars increasingly point towards collaborative or network governance as a key governance mechanism towards systems planning and integration (Peters, 2007).

Collaborative governance can be more precisely defined as "a method of collective decision making where public agencies and non-state stakeholders engage each other in a consensus-oriented deliberative process for inventing and implementing public policies and

procedures for managing public resources" (Johnston, Erik, Darrin Hicks, Ning Nan & Jennifer, C., 2011: 699). Collaborative governance is often justified, implicitly or explicitly, on the basis of what Huxham (1993) has termed the collaborative advantage – that they are created to resolve policy and coordination problems that could not be achieved by an organization or a government department acting alone (for a Canadian example in the context of homelessness, see Doberstein, 2015). There are so many moving parts and related sectors that touch the issue of homelessness that it is essential that there is not only interagency collaboration within the sector, but also inter-sectoral networks (e.g. homelessness, housing, mental health, corrections, child welfare, etc.), otherwise innovative solutions in one area will merely plug a single hole and the flow of the problem will simply become more intense elsewhere. Significant social change to end homelessness demands that we upset the status quo, which is maintained and constrained by the systems we live within (Seidman, 1988).

As such, there is broad agreement that some form of network governance or collaborative governance is essential to effectively address homelessness in our cities, in part because it will lead to achievements that would not otherwise be possible in a siloed organizational context. It is represents a "synergy that can be created through joint-working" (Vangen & Huxham, 2010: 163). Studies in collaborative governance literature have tended, until recently, to view this governance trend through a mostly positive lens and simply assume that a collaborative advantage is realized by virtue of a network's existence (McGuire, 2006). This is despite Huxham's (1993) early warnings and subsequent empirical studies (summarized in Huxham & Vangen, 2005) that the collaborative advantage is not always evidenced in practice given the difficulties of managing the complexity of the institutions, actors and their competing interests, leading instead to "collaborative inertia" (Vangen & Huxham, 2010: 163). Yet many suggest that collaborative governance networks hold promise to produce superior system coordination to that found in traditional, more siloed bureaucratic policy planning and decision making.

Systems Integration from a Governance Perspective

That is, despite its intuitive appeal, the outcomes of formal systems-level governance efforts towards coordination and integration are challenged by a lack of evidence (Hambrick & Rog, 2000).

Efforts towards systems planning and integration can occur at multiple levels, from the closest to the ground with service integration all the way up to the policy level from government. Systems integration at the service or program level is a critical piece and is the most likely to be achieved and sustained. There are numerous examples of system planning at the service level, including coordinated access and assessment, case management and other integrated models of service (Hambrick & Rog, 2000). Yet integration at the governance and policy level represents perhaps the steepest challenge, not only in terms of marshaling together the major players to act in a concerted fashion, but also in terms of demonstrating a tangible impact on services and outcomes. That is, despite its intuitive appeal, the outcomes of formal systems-level governance efforts towards coordination and integration are challenged by a lack of evidence (Hambrick & Rog, 2000). This is no doubt partly due to the fact that is it difficult to change these big systems, but also because many systems integration efforts have not fully conceptualized the dynamics and properties of the environments and contexts they are endeavoring to reform. Systemic change is both the most difficult to achieve and sustain, but also perhaps the most critical to grapple with in order to generate the transformative change that systems-thinking envisions (Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007).

There has been considerable research into systems-oriented thinking as it relates to social service provision, and in fact homelessness in particular, given the fragmentation of services and the lack of capacity of clients to navigate such a complex system. It is a sector that has evolved segmentally and thus is more often characterized as a patchwork system than a strategically planned suite of services. Most services and programs have been developed and have evolved incrementally: housing separate from social services, which is separate from health services, mental health and employment and each has a separate funding stream, different set of rules and usually a separate service location (Hambrick & Rog 2000). Given the expansive research in social services arenas in relation to system planning and integration (Ivery, 2010; Midgley & Richardson, 2007; Peirson, L. J., Boydell, K. M., Ferguson, H. B. & Ferris, L. E., 2011), we can distill a number of critical features of design and relationship management from a governance perspective, transforming and expanding on Browne's (2014) three axes specified earlier. Important features of systems integration from a governance perspective include: boundary identification and expansion, reconciling competing values in the system(s), leveraging interdependencies, leadership and external control and system feedback loops. Each are articulated and connected below.

The major gap in homelessness systems integration from a governance perspective is that the boundary is far too narrowly defined as to the issues associated with homelessness and therefore the governments, organizations and institutions implicated.

Boundary Identification and Expansion

The first critical task of conceptualizing systems integration from a governance and policy perspective is to identify and expand the boundaries of the system. Boundaries determine the inclusion and exclusion of relevant government ministries and departments, stakeholders and issues that are considered connected to homelessness. The conceptualization and reconceptualization of boundaries, according to Midgley and Richardson (2007), is definitional to "systemic intervention," which they define as "purposeful action by agent[s] to create change in relation to a reflection upon boundaries" (171). The authors also suggest a "boundary critique" – that we critically reflect upon the boundaries we create, as they are associated with particular values and invoke different meanings (172). Foster-Fishman and Behrens (2007) likewise claim that it is fundamental to the efficacy of systems change endeavors that system boundaries are conceptualized and expanded. What Foster-Fishman et al. (2007) call "bounding the system" includes problem definition and specifying the "levels, niches, organizations and actors in the process" (202). The major gap in homelessness systems integration from a governance perspective is that the boundary is far too narrowly defined as to the issues associated with homelessness and therefore the governments, organizations and institutions implicated. In fact, systems-oriented governance ought to not even conceptualize boundaries before instead first discussing values and objectives, from which boundaries may then be formed. Otherwise, when starting with boundary specification we fall quickly into familiar notions of what is involved in generating and sustaining homelessness (Midgley & Richardson, 2007).

Barriers to Boundary Identification and Expansion

The principal challenge for homelessness systems integration is the narrowly defined nature of homelessness policy and governance. Among the general public and even policy makers, the homelessness sector is generally perceived to consist of the emergency shelter system and support services such as drop-in centres and basic needs provisions. It is no surprise that this is the case. The first iteration of the federal homelessness program, the National Homelessness Initiative (2000–2007), was aimed principally at targeting emergency-based needs. Yet homeless counts across Canadian cities and subsequent research have identified very close links between homelessness and other sectors not traditionally conceptualized as part of the policy conversation. This includes the associated sectors of mental health and addictions, other primary health care, child welfare, corrections, social assistance and of course the affordable housing sector. When we talk about boundary expansion as an initial objective related to systems change, identifying the links between these associated sectors and homelessness is essential. Increasingly as well, additional sectors have been identified from research and the testimony of those with lived experience drawing in education, employment, training and enforcement and policing sectors.

Despite research to support the expansion of boundaries of the homelessness system, there are barriers to drawing these sectors into a broader policy discussion. First, many in the associated sectors do not perceive their primary, or even secondary, mandate to be associated with homelessness and thus resist being lured into this policy community. For example, the corrections and justice system would likely claim that their primary mandate is to detain and rehabilitate criminal offenders, and they are therefore not focused on the policy environment that exists once they are released. Second, time, expertise and financial resources represent significant barriers to their engagement in terms of policy and programs, as the corrections system, for example, cannot alone be everything to every client. Third, jurisdictional and legal barriers exist across sectors that may harden boundaries between obviously related sectors. Canada is a federal system, with constitutionally protected provinces with autonomy from the federal government, many of which jealously guard their jurisdiction and resist definitional slippage or backdoor attempts to legislate within – or even share information across – one level of government's boundary.

For example, since the first iteration of the National Homelessness Initiative, now called the HPS, the federal government prohibited local communities that prioritize and allocate their funds from investing in affordable housing units, as this is in their view a provincial government mandate. The federal government did not want local communities to use this money to allow the provincial governments to back off their own affordable housing investments. Thus a boundary is legally erected and reinforced through policy and programs, even if it makes little sense from a systems perspective. As communities become more mindful of system disjunctures like the examples above, they must make compelling arguments to eliminate arbitrary boundary distinctions within the system and expand the sectors that research and experience demonstrate are related to homelessness. In some contexts where the constitutional division of powers represent hardened boundaries unlikely to be overcome easily by relationship building among bureaucratic leaders (e.g. Quebec-Canada relationship), the task becomes one of managing the politics of power sharing within preserved boundary distinctions (e.g. special Quebec-Canada agreement on HPS).

Reconciling Competing Values and Knowledge

The second critical feature of systems integration from a governance perspective are the values and beliefs that undergird our social imaginaries associated with homelessness. To many systems theorists, this must be the starting point, even before boundaries are specified, as values and beliefs frame the objectives and understandings of the issue and thus ultimately are what subsequent policies, collaborations and interactions stem from. One point of resistance around systems integration is based on a perception that this implies a single rationality dominating and being imposed on sector elements. This was, in fact, the agenda of the earliest systems thinkers in the 1960s, who envisioned centrally planned and engineered systems from the top down. Yet this movement died when the limits of rational planning were exposed by such attempts. As a point of contrast, contemporary systems thinking demands that we acknowledge and work through the multiple rationalities rather than try to achieve a single 'objective rational policy' (Midgley & Richardson, 2007).

Though counter-intuitive, contemporary systems thinking involves less emphasis on top-down engineered collaboration and integration, and is instead conceived fundamentally as "a discourse that has a community of people who are engaged with it, with fuzzy boundaries on the edges" (Midgley & Richardson, 2007: 170). This implies engaging with multiple stakeholders in developing "rich pictures" of a problem definition and system solution, reflective of the diversity of knowledge and values rather than imposing an objective reality (Checkland, 2000: 22). This is not inconsistent with a simultaneous drive towards more and better data to inform understandings of the homelessness experience and service system, provided the interpretation of that data is an open and deliberative process. Research in public administration is conclusive that top-down imposed integration inattentive to the multitude of values and beliefs in the sector invariably results in failure because front line workers will often reject or evade policy mandates that conflict with their values (Klein & Sorra, 1996). Thus a framework of shared beliefs across the system is an essential ingredient in collaborative system integration efforts (Smith & Wilson, 2008). Thus before the system can be shifted and status quo upset towards transformative change, we must understand different perspectives on the problem's definition, and acknowledge the subjective nature of system conceptualizations around problem definition, system boundaries and solutions (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007).

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BARRIERS TO RECONCILING COMPETING VALUES & KNOWLEDGE

It is one thing to say that in order to be successful in systems change efforts towards ending homelessness that we need to better incorporate competing values and knowledge from across systems, and a whole other matter to actually do this and have something coherent and feasible emerge from such collaborative problem definition efforts. Consultations, networking events and collaborative problem solving efforts are good at generating a long list of different perspectives, values and solutions, but less frequently is there a coherent distillation of ideas resulting from it. The reconciliation of competing values and knowledge is the key challenge in system change efforts – it is not about achieving consensus, but rather finding ways for different ways of conceptualizing issues associated with homelessness to fit into the broader policy framework.

Key objectives in this context, therefore, are to locate and deliberate root causes of systemic problems by identifying system parts and their patterns of interdependency that explain the status quo, and use this collated information to identify leverage points that will cultivate major change (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). This does not imply that all belief systems are equally valid or must be incorporated, but rather serves as a starting point in a discursive process that engages system members in "ongoing opportunities to discover and alter their worldviews," thus providing the mechanisms for "shifting mindsets and fostering system change" (Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007: 195). Such attention to the normative basis for understanding homelessness and the governance and policy response across levels, within niches and among actors, is essential to identify areas of support for and resistance to system change. That this is a difficult step is indeed an understatement but it is a necessary step, as we know that policy actors and service providers on the ground who do not buy into the values embedded in the system will find ways to evade it. As such, credible and sustained efforts must be made through institutionalized committees and networks to share knowledge and contemplate values, such that they can collectively identify areas of agreement and contention and reconcile them to the fullest possible extent in order to move forward towards systems change (Concordora, 2008).

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LEVERAGING INTERDEPENDENCIES

One of the central tenants of organizational theory as it relates to systems integration is the notion of interdependency. That is, organizations and institutions are interdependent pieces within a broader system; the actions of one will impact the conditions in other components of the system (Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007). Current understandings of systems highlight that most systems contain a complex web of interdependent parts. Thus systems-oriented thinking rejects conceptualizations of sectoral autonomy to the extent that that allows for narrow visions of goals and accountabilities. As such, all systems integration efforts must identify the component pieces of the system, thereby defining its boundaries, but also appreciate and conceptualize the interdependencies and relationships among the various elements of the system. Thus mapping the system is only a first step – drawing the various pathways and connections and interdependencies is what generates a system-oriented framework. What is essential to appreciate at this stage are the implications of truly understanding interdependency in the context of homelessness. It means that an intervention that is effective in one element must not necessarily be assumed to be effective in another element. Indeed, Provan and Milward (2001) explain that certain effectiveness criteria in a particular category or intervention may have an inverse relationship with effectiveness at another level. The implication of this is that leveraging change in one part will lead to the desired outcome only if concurrent and appropriate shifts happen in the other elements of the system (Foster-Fishmann et al. 2007).

BARRIERS TO LEVERAGING INTERDEPENDENCIES

Once system boundaries are identified (and ideally expanded, thereby capturing more elements related to homelessness), considerable work must be devoted to mapping out the respective interdependencies in the broader system. That is, once the respective sectors associated with homelessness are brought into the policy community, their specific relationship to other sectors in relation to policy, program and populations must be articulated. This is challenging work that is bound to result in disagreement, conflict and perhaps even resentment. For example, many youth homeless shelter providers identify the failures of the child welfare system as a key driver of the problem of youth homelessness that they attempt to address. Yet at the same time, members of the child welfare system may refer to the criminal justice or K–12 educational system as the true root of the problem. Likewise the addictions sector will often point to their interdependent relationship to the mental health sector, pointing to inadequate mental health services and programs that lead to self-medication and abuse of illicit and unsafe street drugs. This is not principally a story of blame avoidance – though that may be present to some degree – but rather a reflection of the layers of complexity in society and our institutions that contribute to homelessness, thus demanding more strategic and integrated policy responses.

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Yet for each of these examples of interdependencies articulated above as challenges, there are also positive interdependencies or relationship features. For example, from a purely cost savings lens, many of these interdependent features of the homelessness system would find efficiencies – and thus improved effectiveness of their interventions – through cooperation and establishing policy coherence that counteract trends of reciprocal 'dumping' of problems into other sectors. Yet the question of cost savings in the context of a federation like Canada is a difficult one to conceptualize, as the cost savings from actions in particular sectors may be realized in other sectors and thus the incentives to act are less direct. For example, a municipal government investing in affordable housing for chronically homeless individuals may ultimately save the health care system money, but that is a provincial expenditure and policy domain. Changing incentive structures from a sectoral or institutional-specific lens to a systems lens requires high-level leadership, detailed in the section below.

LEADERSHIP AND EXTERNAL CONTROL

Systems change and integration cannot occur without leadership. As mentioned above, one of the central problems in homelessness governance and policy is a lack of ownership of the issue. Ministries and departments in government with narrow mandates can too easily evade fundamental responsibility. At the same time, however, there is good reason in some respects to retain the traditional idea of bureaucratic autonomy, as it promotes accountability and responsibility for their particular mandate in the broader system. Both dynamics can be true at the same time. Yet what this implies is that there is a need for a central brokering institution and leadership that can bring coherence to the system. Thus even though organizations and institutions may recognize interdependencies, self-coordination at a policy level is unlikely to occur naturally. Administratively, this is simply very difficult to do and to maintain without sustained and empowered leadership. Institutional scholars have long noted that organizations can be incentivized to collaborate even without tangible gain if they face leadership mandates or pressures to conform to norms in their environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Larger scale systems change can be envisioned to also mean consolidation of federal or provincial funding programs, thus truly leveraging the unrivaled authoritative role of the state to direct tax dollars and regulate the behaviour of agencies and actors.

Generally speaking, senior governments – provincial or federal – are best equipped to use their authoritative policy levers, in addition to persuasion and inspiration, to assume the leadership and brokering role. This has been the case in the United States, in which the federal government includes a requirement that coordination (in the form of planning) occur at the local level in order to access funds (Hambrick & Rog, 2000). Similar, though weaker, incentives are in place by the Canadian federal government via the HPS, but it is a vague – and therefore unenforced – mandate of cooperation and one that leaves far too many sectors untouched. Larger scale systems change can be envisioned to also mean consolidation of federal or provincial funding programs, thus truly leveraging the unrivaled authoritative role of the state to direct tax dollars and regulate the behaviour of agencies and actors. Yet norms of ministerial responsibility and bureaucratic autonomy within governments, not to speak of across governments, represent challenges to joint policymaking and investments and thus needs strong leadership to push sectoral fiefdoms towards system change efforts.

BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP AND EXTERNAL CONTROL

Appropriate and stable leadership is therefore an essential feature (and challenge) of systems change and integration (Doberstein, 2013; Ivery, 2010). If not present, the capacity of organizations and institutions downstream will be limited and the priority may revert to maintaining organizational capacity for survival rather than the collective goals of the systems effort. Thus a brokering organization – which may be a central agency of government, a ministry or even a community foundation with wide legitimacy – must reside at the centre of the collaborative governance effort to link the overlapping elements and interdependencies to generate a coherent system, and must possess key sources of legal and jurisdictional authority to drive change. This is critical for systems change efforts, as research has identified legal and policy issues as the biggest barriers to change (CWLA, 2006). Systems leadership must have access to important governance and policy levers to drive change, including legislation, policy, regulations and resources to be deployed across levels and elements within the targeted system (Foster-Fishmann & Behrens, 2007). While shared understandings of problem definition are fundamental, legislative frameworks and incentives assist in framing the mandate and act as powerful tools to motivate agency and organizational engagement and compliance (Horwath & Morrison, 2011). Such mandates from leadership are necessary, but not sufficient, as articulated above. The mandates must be workable, reflect agency and organizational purposes and represent jointly held values.

Broker organizations also assume responsibility for bringing together the segments of the system, facilitating collaborative development and generating mechanisms for communication and learning. The sustainability of collaborative governance efforts towards systems change is essential to ensure progress, but is inherently challenged by (i) often relying on voluntary participation by government and community partners, (ii) the diversity of actors that have different conceptions and norms of decision making, which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict and (iii) the time required to build trust (Ivery, 2010). Strong, authoritative leadership is therefore required to serve as the backbone of such collaborative governance, but service agencies also need to be co-owners of the system change efforts (Horwath & Morrison, 2011). Bottom-up driven change is indeed part of this story of systems planning in Calgary, for example – agencies have stepped up, changed or enhanced their mandates and agreed to work together to solve complex issues – but to try to create a coherent system of autonomous agencies, interview respondents suggest that you also "need the core centralized… like the Calgary Homeless Foundation or some sort of governing body to push the plan [with] consistent messaging. You need that core [coordinating body] to put that together."[3] Systems change and integration is premised on stable leadership, but that does not imply an unchanging leadership structure. In fact, Alexander, J. A., Comfort, M. E., Weiner, B. J. and Bogue, R. (2001) argue that while continuity helps foster the stability necessary to move forward toward long-term goal achievement, leadership renewal and change can infuse a system with fresh ideas and new energy.

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3. Confidential interview. April 25, 2014.

SYSTEM FEEDBACK LOOPS

Consistent with the notion of interdependency is the conceptualization of feedback loops in the design and management of a system. It is helpful to conceive of a homelessness system in ecological terms, meaning holistically and with an appreciation for the interconnectedness of constituent elements (Peirson et al., 2011). Once interdependencies are identified, collaborative policy making must model the impacts of system refinements, appreciating the successive impacts of policy and program changes throughout the system. Also critical to identify in the context of interdependencies are relationships and patterns in the system that reinforce the status quo or prevent system change. Foster-Fishman and Behrens (2007) warn us that a shift in one part of the system, such as a policy or regulatory change, will only transform the status quo of the broader system if that change prompts or leverages necessary changes in other parts of the system. This involves appreciating the potential for delayed reactions to actions and their consequences throughout the system, as well as anticipating unexpected consequences from actions that can create new conditions or problems (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Thus ecological principles of interdependence, cycling of resources, adaptation and anticipating future change are central to system-oriented governance design and management (Peirson et al., 2011).

BARRIERS TO SYSTEM FEEDBACK LOOPS

Promoting a shift towards an ecological conceptualization of homelessness policy and governance represents a challenge because traditional governance rules and norms of responsibility, autonomy and accountability are designed to resist such efforts. The fragmentation of policy and governance emerged as a solution to the increased complexity of government action and responsibility, and the bureaucracy was designed as the most effective means to perform such tasks (Wilson, 1989). Yet the fragmented bureaucracy may have outlived its function, particularly given more modern expectations of inclusive and collaborative policy planning and decision making. But we reside in a context with new governance problems, like homelessness, using old governance solutions like fragmented bureaucracies and this represents a barrier to harnessing positive system feedback loops.

Despite rhetoric that suggests otherwise, government ministries and departments largely reside in traditional bureaucratic norms that privilege autonomy and thus remain heavily siloed. Sectoral or ministerial silos in the context of homelessness are reinforced in part due to legitimate concerns over confidentiality and the privacy of individuals experiencing homelessness. Systems integration demands sharing information about clients and the involvement of large institutions such as police and hospitals in this context makes information and data sharing an especially difficult, though essential, task. The methodical implementation of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in cities across Canada points to the opportunities and challenges associated with sharing information about clients among agencies and departments for the purposes of tracking client experience across the system, while also protecting their identity from wide exposure (see for example, Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011).

At a higher level of collaboration, there are encouraging examples in a number of jurisdictions when bureaucracies engage in joint planning, data sharing and shared responsibilities such that system feedback loops can be harnessed. The Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness is one such example featured in this volume. The Quebec government's policy framework on homelessness and poverty is another example of one that integrates 10 provincial ministries, including health and social services, immigration, justice and corrections, and education to drive system change. Yet consistent with claims made above of the necessity of a central backbone or brokering organization, there is a clear leader among them – the Minister of Social Services – to coordinate the effort and hold primary accountability.

One strategy to encourage this type of collaboration is a 'small wins' approach, breaking down the larger systems change task into smaller achievements, from which system members can build trust and demonstrate that progress can be made (Johnston et al., 2011). It is thus important to build an environment of trust and cooperation such that when areas of more intense disagreement or controversy are broached, there is a foundation of small wins or policy gains. Howarth and Morrison (2011) also emphasize that "double-loop learning" is a key aim of collaborative governance efforts, such that it is not simply agencies receiving top-down directives to integrate and establish productive feedback loops, but on the ground experience feeding up to change those very directives (371).

Table 1, below, summarizes the conceptual framework articulated in the previous sections, which specified the features of systems integration and the respective potential barriers.

TABLE 1 *A Conceptual Framework for a Systems Lens to Homelessness Governance*

Features of Systems Integration	Barriers
Boundary identification and expansion	1. Primary vs. secondary mandates 2. Lack of cross-sectoral expertise 3. Legal and administrative rules
Reconciling competing values	1. Shifting mindsets 2. Mollifying resistance to new ideas
Leveraging interdependencies	1. Mapping the layers of complexity of institutions and policy 2. Shifting incentive structures to avoid sectoral 'dumping'
Leadership and external control	1. Securing appropriate, stable, empowered leadership 2. Establishing a brokering organization with legitimacy across sectors 3. Managing conflict and trust in collaborative governance
System feedback loops	1. Information sharing across sectors while respecting privacy 2. Balancing 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' feedback loops

DISCUSSION

Systems planning for homelessness on a grand scale – from the macro policy level, through to the institutional level and down to the ground level of organizational coordination – is not widely practiced in Canada. Yet to the extent that systems planning in this context exists, it is mostly focused on horizontal integration, meaning using a centralized approach to planning, management and service delivery across organizations within a sector (e.g. traditionally defined homelessness sector) or between other relevant sectors (e.g. corrections, mental health, child welfare, etc.). Put simply, it means repositioning the (mostly) autonomous agencies and institutions that engage with the homeless population toward a common framework and strategy, such that none are working at cross-purposes or making the problem worse for each other.

This means not only thinking about how services within the traditionally conceived homelessness sector are coordinated and aligned, but also how the failure of large institutional systems of corrections, mental health and child and family services to serve their most vulnerable clients in part fuels the homelessness crisis. A helpful metaphor used by one respondent in Calgary to describe the theory behind system planning is to "think of it almost ecologically in terms of conceptualizing a number of components that work together in a holistic fashion. One thing feeds into another."[4]

Reflecting on the historical experience of Calgary within the homelessness sector, there were hundreds of millions of dollars being invested, but "they were just disconnected… like a chaotic road system," according to former Calgary Homeless Foundation CEO Tim Richter (Scott, 2012: 177–178). It is no wonder why homeless individuals were at times unable to navigate their way to support and stability. To Richter, decision makers needed a clearer map of the 'road system' to more effectively serve clients, but also a better sense of the bottlenecks and dead-ends and ultimately "a 'system of care'… [meaning] clearly defined roads home" (Scott, 2012: 177). And an essential quality of leadership and transformative change is that "you

have to be willing to say doing better means that you [previously] did something that wasn't as good… and that you have to let go of what [you were] doing."[5] This is a lesson that ought to be internalized across the broader homelessness system.

Building bridges within the homeless serving sector requires more than charismatic leadership and a willingness to admit and correct past failures, but also strategically seizing on windows of opportunity to create change. Often this means taking advantage of leadership turnover in non-profit agencies or government ministries to make a case for change. And while waiting for leadership turnover does not amount to a grand strategy, others suggest that it is more about learning who are your natural advocates in large complex institutions or bureaucracies and leveraging them to create change in the system. One policy maker confirmed that "when you meet those people in this field and there are those opportunities, you want to grab them because [there are] a lot of people who are stagnant and don't want to take risks and aren't willing to change."[6] Careful to emphasize that diverse perspectives are essential to good policy planning, this respondent also stressed that the key task is "just balancing [inclusion], because we're reinvigorating [the system]."

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4. Confidential interview. April 24, 2014.

5. Confidential interview. April 25, 2014.

6. Confidential interview. April 22, 2014

One homelessness service provider interviewed said that even ostensibly positive policy change at the top is often not enough: "Health Services has a zero discharge into homelessness [policy], but [for that to] trickle down to the social workers in each hospital is just a very, very complex thing".[7] So part of the challenge for those in the homeless-serving sector is to make the case to the other feeder systems that "we are there dealing with the same people around similar issues, so how can we collaborate and communicate better and work alongside each other instead of against each other?"[8] Many are sympathetic to this argument, but some are more skeptical that there is an easy solution, because the solutions that will be effective involve a fundamental reconceptualization of some of the ways we think about mental health, corrections, child welfare, social assistance rates, affordable housing and even poverty. To some respondents, these are conversations that political and policy elites have limited interest in entertaining, yet are key to ending homelessness.

To one respondent, "the crux of it is: who benefits? The reality is right now I think the benefit of being able to dump this [problem] into non-profit settings is really cheap, compared to system [reform] costs. There's nothing cheaper [in the short-term] than keeping people in a shelter. I think until the benefit to perpetuating the status quo shifts, we're not going to get cooperation. Why? Because the reality is most of these systems are to a large extent being driven by the Treasury. It's hard to convince the average taxpayer that we should put a higher burden on you in the short term in order to change this".[9]

"Health Services has a zero discharge into homelessness [policy], but [for that to] trickle down to the social workers in each hospital is just a very, very complex thing".

7. Confidential interview. April 25, 2014.

8. Confidential interview. April 22, 2014.

9. Confidential interview. April 22, 2014.

CONCLUSION

"The social services world always has to do Band-Aid solutions and quick fixes to make up for other systems and their dysfunction." [10]

Affordable housing is undoubtedly the most significant barrier in the system, and despite efforts by some municipalities and provincial governments to enhance investments with their more limited revenue sources, thus far it is not a conversation that the Government of Canada appears willing to seriously entertain with sufficient long-term financial support – in fact, the federal government has been incrementally reducing its investment in affordable housing in recent decades. Gaetz, Gulliver and Richter (2014) estimate that 100,000 units of affordable housing have not been built in the last 20 years due to cancelation of or reduction in affordable housing investments.

In summary, the important features of systems integration from the homelessness governance perspective articulated include: boundary identification and expansion, reconciling competing values in the system(s), leveraging interdependencies, leadership and external control, and generating system feedback loops. Systems change efforts must be collaborative across sectors, and collaborative governance is often justified on the basis of what Huxham (1993) has termed the collaborative advantage – that they are created to resolve policy and coordination problems that could not be achieved by an organization or a government department acting alone. Systems change towards ending homelessness is fundamentally dependent upon leveraging that collaborative advantage. The conceptual framework articulated in these pages offers a way of thinking about the opportunities and challenges associated with systems change efforts from a governance lens.

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10. Confidential interview. April 21, 2014.

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