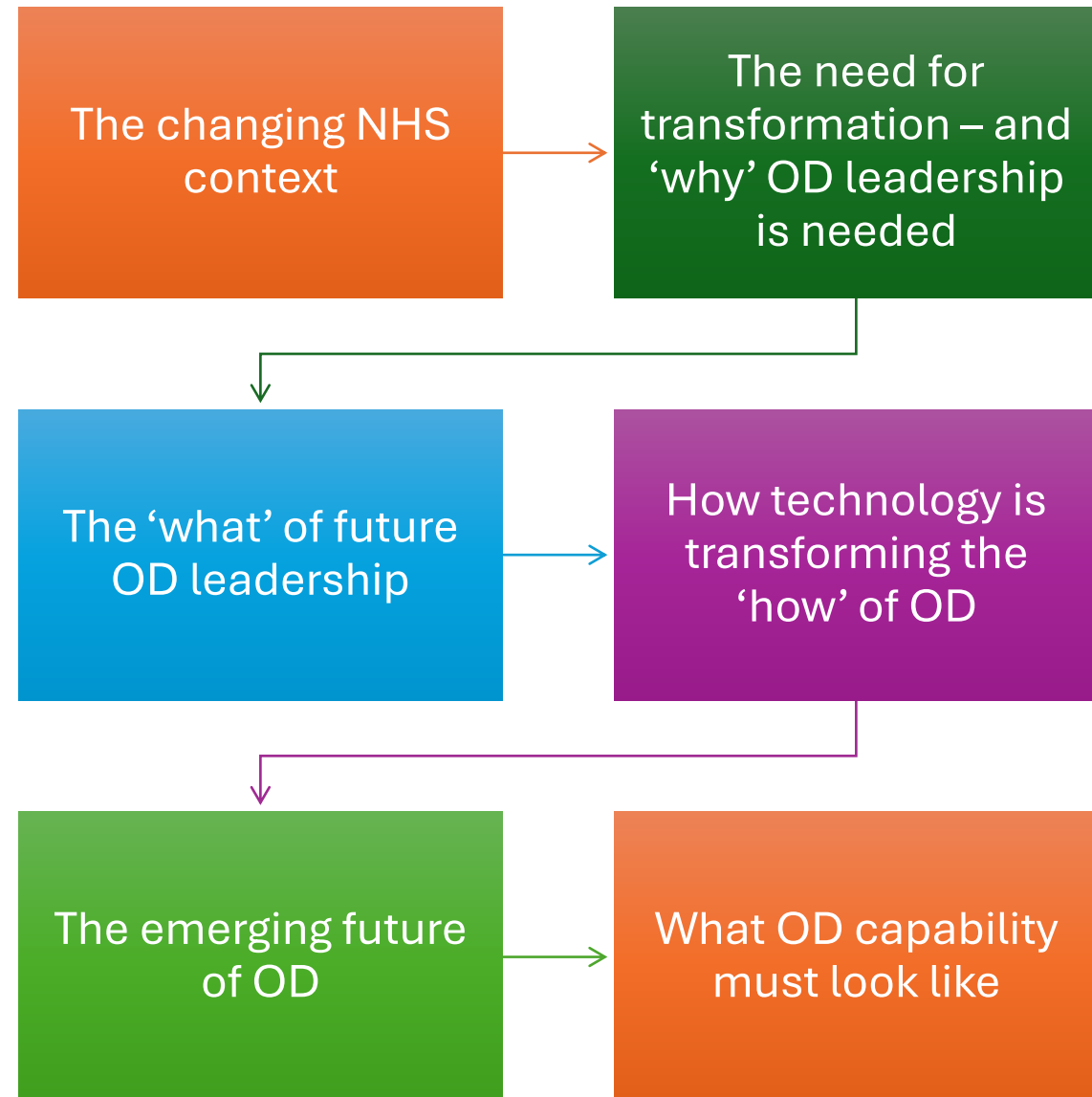


The future of OD

Dr Linda Holbeche,
DoOD, May 7, 2026



Session outline





What is OD?

- OD is a system-wide application of behavioural science knowledge to ensure the development and reinforcement of organisational strategy, structures and processes and to improve organisational effectiveness, health and well-being– at the individual, team or organisational levels.
- **Fundamentally OD is about creating great teams and organisations.**
- Traditionally Organizational Development focuses on:
 - **Aligning** people, processes, and strategy
 - Improving **organizational culture and innovation**
 - Supporting **change, building change capability**
 - Enhancing **leadership effectiveness**
 - Increasing **employee engagement and performance**

Context: fast-paced, broad-based changes



Technology



Demographics



Environment



Institutional



Social values

To rapidly respond to ever changing conditions requires a change approach that leverages complexity while embracing uncertainty; an approach that can temper the effects of volatility while acknowledging the perpetual ambiguity that afflicts us all.

Key pressures facing the NHS

- Record demand and constrained resources
 - Ageing population & multimorbidity
 - Health inequalities
 - Workforce shortages
 - Staff burnout
 - Funding constraints
 - Digital transformation
 - High velocity operating models required
 - The patient journey is not integrated
-
- ***Need for integrated, collaborative systems***





Predictions

Shift to system-wide OD

Support for workforce transformation/
new ways of working

Use of AI

Building coherence/culture

Building system leadership

Hybrid OD

Need for agility, learning and sticking to values

Future NHS Workforce Ecosystem

DIGITAL & AI INTEGRATION

- AI Diagnostics
- Remote Monitoring
- Process Automation



ADVANCED PRACTICE ROLES

- Nurse Practitioners
- Physician Associates
- Clinical Pharmacists



NHS PATIENT & COMMUNITY CARE



COMMUNITY & PREVENTATIVE CARE

- Home & Community Care
- Public Health Initiatives
- Health Coaching



MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

- Integrated Care Teams
- Social Care Collaboration
- Mental Health Specialists
- Allied Health Professionals

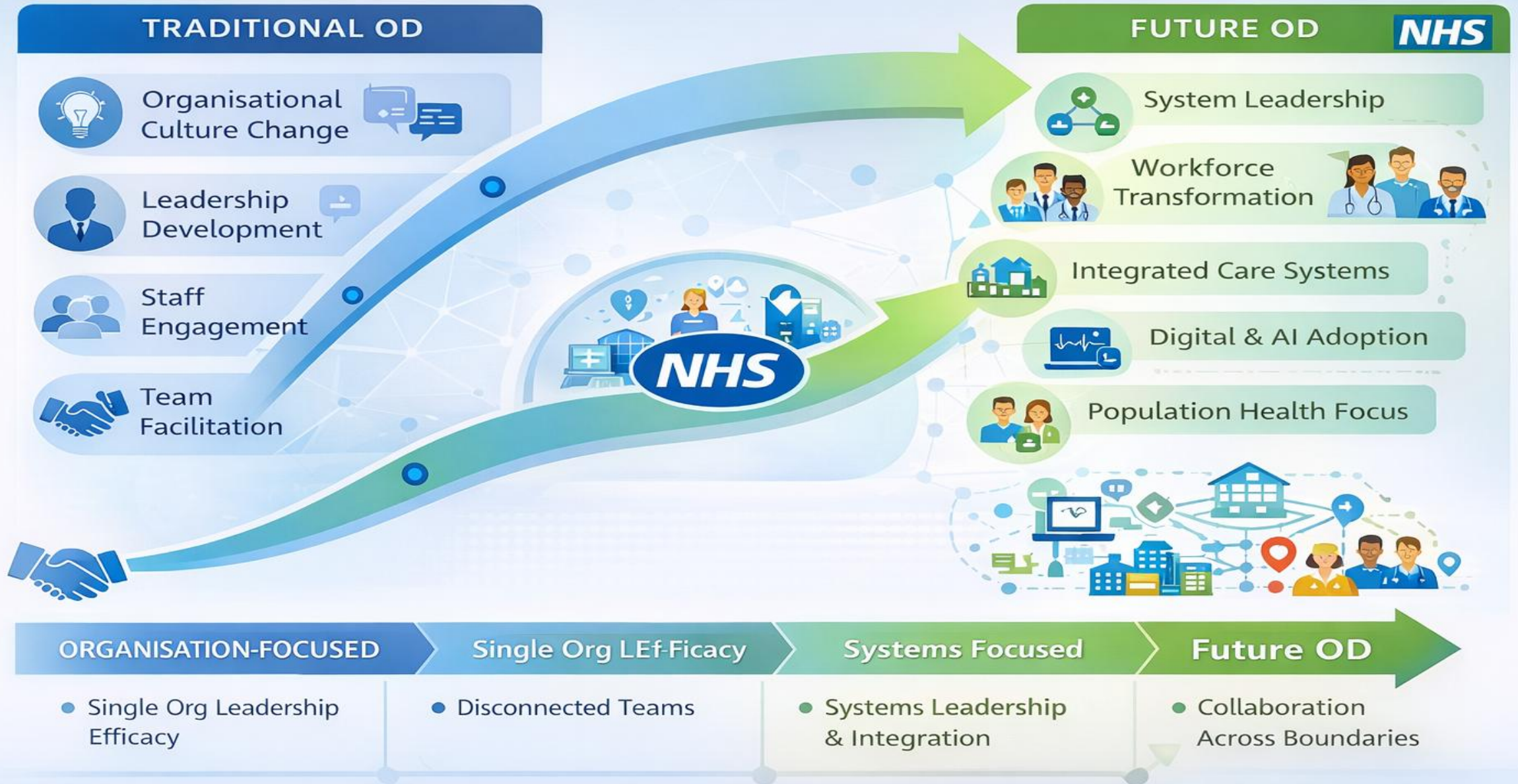


FLEXIBLE & HYBRID WORKFORCE

- Flexible Roles
- Remote & Agile Working
- Temporary & Rotational Staff



Evolution of Organisational Development in Healthcare



This complexity changes the what, why and how of our work

OD becomes an enabler of system transformation through:

1. Workforce transformation, engagement, flexibility and sustainability; redesigning work
2. Organisational agility and resilience - multidisciplinary collaboration across boundaries; building change capabilities
3. Getting management systems and approaches right
4. Building an adaptive, learning culture; team excellence; building coherence
5. Leadership adaptation
6. System leadership
7. Investing in complexity-informed OD capabilities

• ***Which items do you feel are most relevant to you right now?***

Workforce transformation and sustainability

- ***Workforce challenges include:***

- Staff shortages
- Engagement and retention
- Burnout
- Changing skill requirements

- ***For sustainability:***

- Invest in staff: improving pay, providing mental health support, and improving work-life balance to reduce burnout.
- Develop new roles: supporting the transition to new, multidisciplinary roles with proper training and supervision.
- Leverage technology: utilizing AI and telemedicine for efficiency, which requires upskilling staff.
- Ethical leadership: fostering a just and supportive culture to improve retention.

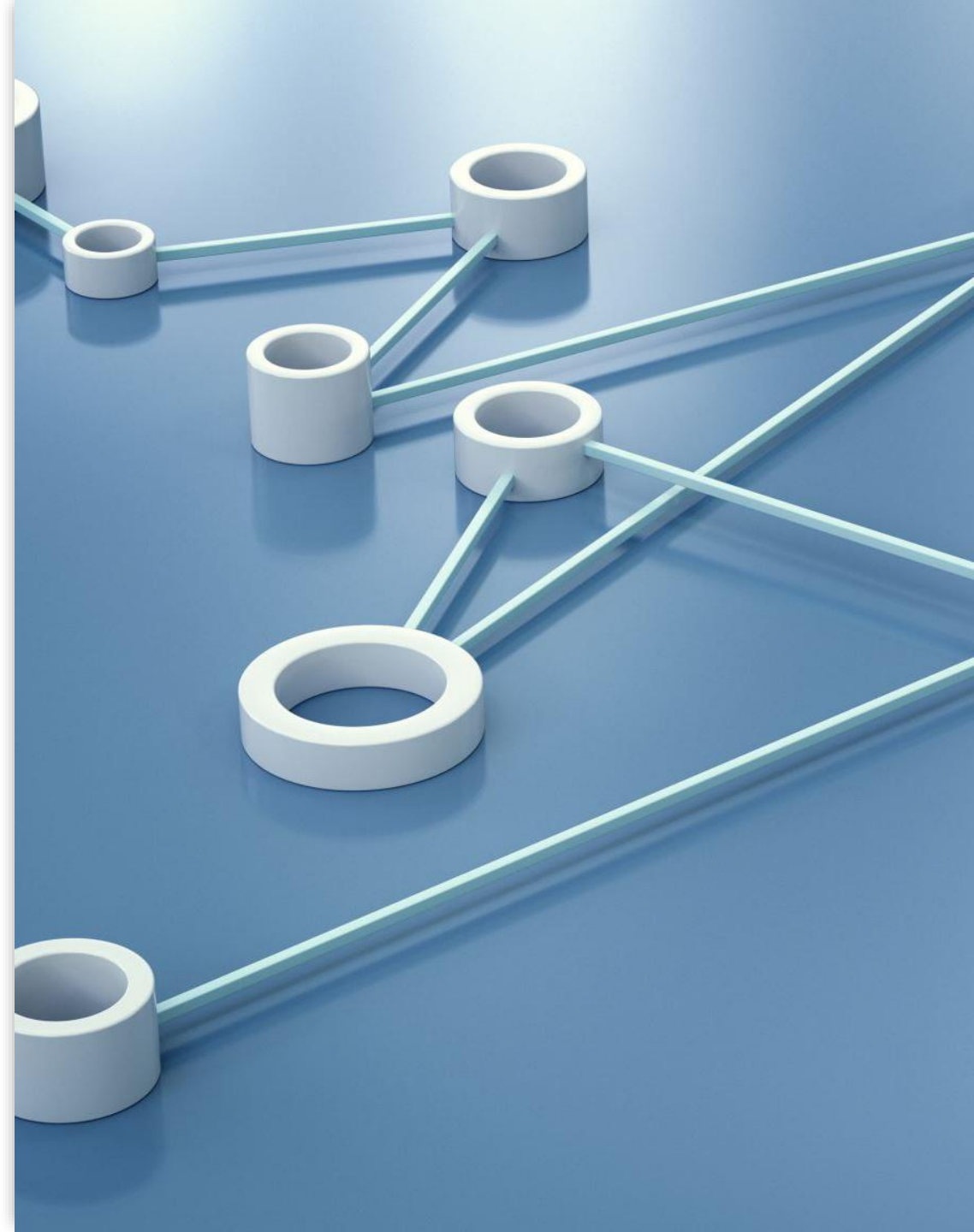


Redesigning work

- **Future healthcare roles will change.** Emerging workforce patterns:
 - Expanded clinical roles
 - Multidisciplinary teams
 - Community-based care
 - Digital-enabled care pathways
 - Expanded advanced practitioner roles
 - Digital-enabled care pathways
 - Hybrid clinical–digital roles
 - Greater community and preventative care
- *However, many technology programmes fail because **work is not redesigned.***
- **Common pitfalls:**
 - Technology layered onto existing processes
 - Staff not involved in design
 - Cultural resistance
 - Skills gaps

Technology alone will not solve workforce problems

- OD must support **whole-system workforce redesign**.
 - Cultural adaptation to technology
 - Role redesign
 - Skills development and new capabilities
 - Team transformation
 - Build agility and resilience
 - Build an agile, adaptive culture

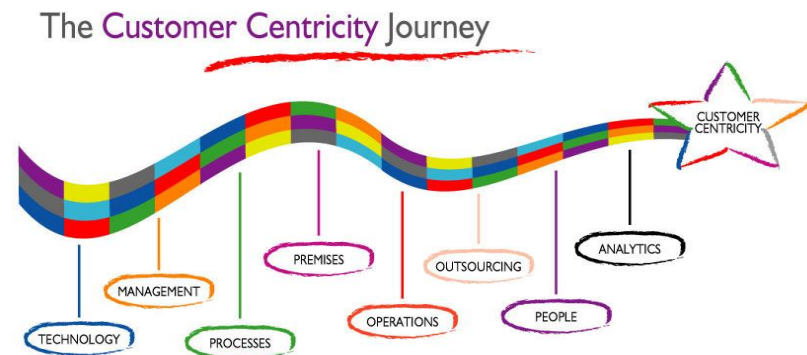
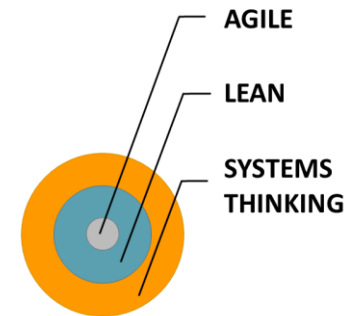


Building organizational agility

“...an organization’s capacity to respond, adapt quickly and thrive in the changing environment.”

(The Agile Organization. 2015, 2018, 2023. Linda Holbeche)

Key concepts: Patient-centric, anticipatory, innovative, adaptable, iterative, experimentation, prototypes, real-time problem-solving, team-based, empowerment, accountable, skilled, co-creation, resilient, shared leadership, learning, shared purpose, communication, participation and involvement, win-win, authentic and values-based, stakeholders, proactive ...



Resilience

Key concepts:

- Anticipation
- Involvement
- Shared purpose
- Renewal
- Learning
- Leveraging knowledge
- Risk management
- Networks
- Employee engagement, well-being, and personal resilience



Organizational Resilience

1 An organizational **culture and structure** that facilitates change within the context of the situation that it faces

2 **People** who are willing and able to give their best in a sustainable way

3 A **learning mindset** in the mainstream business and underlying lean and agile processes and routines to drive innovation

Workforce planning – shift from jobs to skills

Future workforce capabilities include:

- Clinical + human skills
 - Complex decision making
 - Compassionate care
 - Collaboration
 - Digital and analytical skills
 - Data literacy
 - Working with AI systems
 - Digital clinical tools
 - Teaming
 - Change capabilities
-
- *OD can help **develop these hybrid capabilities***

Getting management systems right using digital and AI

- **Digital transformation in the NHS is accelerating e.g.**
 - Electronic patient records
 - AI-supported diagnostics and surgery
 - Automation of administrative work
- *AI can potentially:*
 - Reduce administrative burden
 - Support clinical decision making
 - Improve patient flow management
 - Enhance population health planning
- **Challenges & ethical considerations**
 - Data privacy and employee trust
 - Risk of bias in algorithms
 - Over-reliance on technology
 - Need for human judgement and empathy
- ***OD implications: Ensure effective governance***

An adaptive, learning culture as key to innovation

01

Organizations that embrace experimentation are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; adopt “Execution as learning” (Edmondson, 2008) and disciplined innovation vs “Blame culture”

02

Foster psychological safety and break down silos; build climate of trust around higher common purpose

03

Define, revisit, re-affirm and clearly articulate **organizational values in behavioural** terms and incorporate them into organizational life; involve people in developing values

04

Connect the organization’s purpose and strategy with individual goals and objectives; signal what is valued and hold people to account on both performance and values

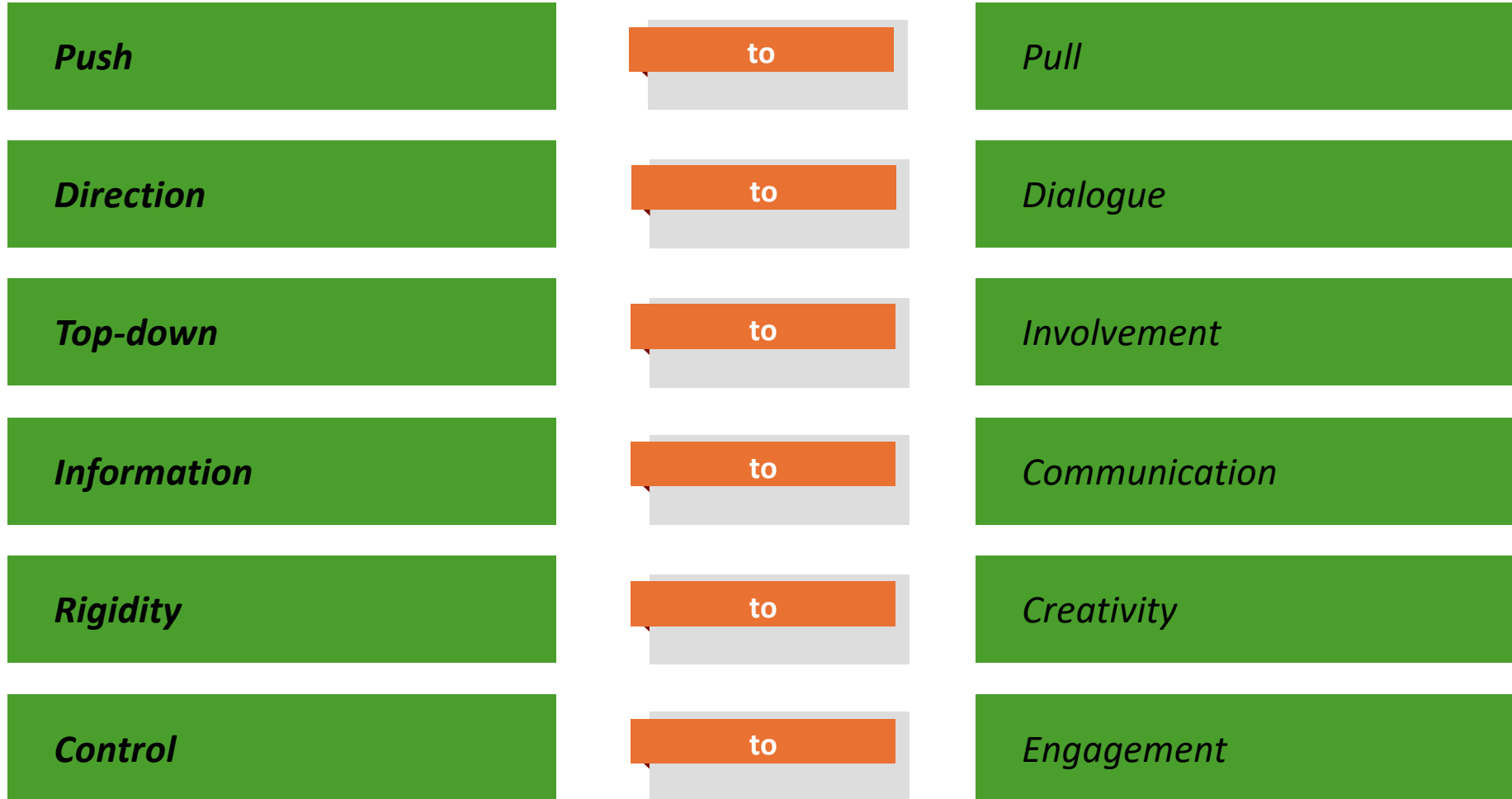
05

Ensure people have access to information and skill development so they can be accountable for decisions

06

Work to enable and embed learning in organization practice – act as knowledge hub, encourage collaborations and knowledge sharing among networks

Implications for change management



Leadership in complexity is less about control and more about creating the conditions for coherence to emerge

1

Prioritize improvement and make it clear there is permission to experiment.

2

Avoid the temptation to provide solutions – focus on framing the problems that need to be solved collaboratively. For instance, ask staff, how can we as a unit better balance improvement and assurance for quality to enable innovation going forward?

3

Harvest ideas – provide process for this to happen – ensure that action is taken to follow up

4

Celebrate even small successes and learning from ‘fabulous failures’ – they matter to the staff involved. Consider how to get improvement stories out there.

5

Bring people together - create regular opportunities for sharing reflections on what is being learned where all voices are heard, with no hierarchy, and show personal openness to learning all the time.



Building system leadership

- **Core purpose:** To improve overall system performance rather than only a single organization's results.
- **System leadership involves:**
 - Collaboration across organisations
 - Shared accountability
 - Leading through influence: working through relationships rather than direct authority
 - Resolving paradoxes
 - Moving from reactive, top-down management to proactive, shared, and networked action.
- **OD contribution involves:**
- **Systems thinking:** Ability to see the larger picture, understanding the whole system and its environment.
- **Creating space:** Facilitating environments and exchanges where new solutions and networks can emerge.



Benefits and key uses of AI in OD

Data-driven Organisational Insights

- Faster and more accurate diagnosis -
 - Analyses employee surveys, feedback, and communication patterns
 - Identifies cultural gaps, silos, and engagement issues
 - Detects hidden patterns humans may miss
 - Example: AI sentiment analysis of employee feedback to assess morale.
- Enables predictive rather than reactive OD
- Scalable interventions across large organizations
- Improved decision-making

Learning & Capability Building

- Identifies organizational skill gaps
- Recommends targeted training programmes
- Measures impact of OD interventions

Team Effectiveness & Collaboration

- Analyses team interactions and workflows
- Identifies communication bottlenecks
- Suggests optimal team structures



Key uses of AI in OD cont.

Change Management

- Predicts employee reactions to change initiatives
- Identifies change-resistant groups
- Recommends communication and training strategies
- Example: AI models forecasting adoption rates of new systems.

Leadership Development

- Assesses leadership behaviours using performance data
- Identifies high-potential leaders
- Suggests personalized coaching plans
- Example: AI-driven leadership assessment tools

Culture & Engagement Analysis

- Measures organizational culture using text and behavioural data
- Tracks engagement trends in real time
- Detects burnout or disengagement risks



Is systems thinking enough?

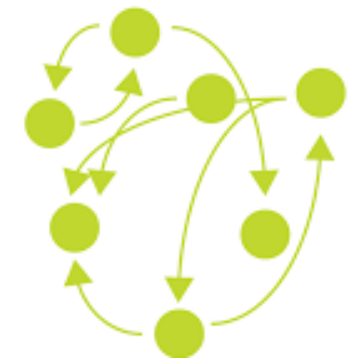
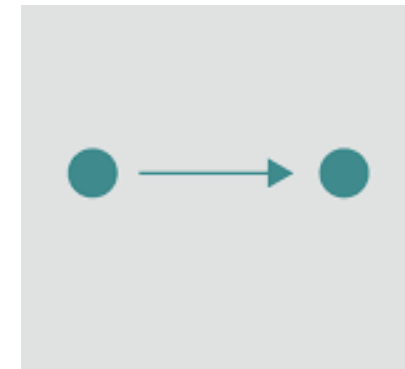


Systems Thinking


“Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes rather than parts, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots, and for understanding the subtle interconnectedness that gives living systems their unique character.”



Peter Senge, author of
*The Fifth Discipline:
The Art and Practice of
the Learning Organization*



The emerging future of OD approaches

- *A wider canvas*
 - *Complexity informed – inquiry-based, patterns, exploration, experimentation*
 - Diagnostic OD
 - Dialogic OD
 - Experiential OD
- 
- *Hybrid OD*

Building coherence

- *“Some of the stuff we're now doing for example is to present a problem to the whole workforce, get them all to go through a series of iterations over a very short period of time until we know the consensus and we know the outliers.*
- *And we can do that in a day as opposed to three months of staff consultation and communication exercises. And that's the real power that complexity science gives you is the ability to do significantly more with less resources when you're working with the natural contours of the system rather than trying to impose a mechanical engineering metaphor onto an organic system. And that's a real shift for organisations who are used to that kind of top-down, we set goals, we cascade them so that they start to make the shift.” (Dave Snowden, Cynefin)*

Hybrid OD (Henosis)



Hybrid OD is a modern, rapid, inquiry-based, foresight-driven strategic learning model.



Modern - Reflects a modern understanding of the role and amplifying potential of integrating diagnostic OD, dialogic OD, and experiential learning together into a powerful, accretive problem-solving methodology



Rapid - The experiential sequence of Hybrid OD is reflective of the iterative method (e.g., Agile/Scrum) whereby self-organized innovation teams deliver value every 2-4 weeks via pre-planned 'sprints'



'Inquiry-Based' - Speaks to the core of the Hybrid OD Model whereby we leverage dialogic or inquiry-based tools and techniques to expose mental models, cognitive biases, and limiting beliefs to bring about transformative change



'Foresight-Driven' - Strategic foresight is where we intentionally seek out, engage with the emerging future to transform the present

Hybrid OD and various complexity-based approaches are an amalgamation of several complementary methods, frameworks, theories, and philosophies:

- *Diagnostic OD*
 - *Dialogic OD*
 - *Experiential Learning (Kolb)*
 - *Bohmian Dialogue*
 - *Agile/Scrum Framework*
 - *Plan-Do-Check-Act (Deming)*
 - *Social Constructionism*
 - *Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI)*
 - *Large-group participatory methods like Open Space, World Café, Theory U, and Circle Method*
-
- *Complexity Leadership Theory*
 - *System Leadership Theory*
 - *Action Learning Theory*
 - *Cynefin Framework*
 - *Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow)*
 - *Strategic Foresight*
 - *Reflective Journaling/Mindfulness*
 - *Toyota Kata/Experimentation*
 - *Human Systems Dynamics + Adaptive action (Eoyang)*

Key OD skills and practice *'-engage the edges'*

- Systems thinking
- Complexity
- Data literacy and workforce analytics capability
- Diagnostic, dialogic and experiential skills
- Empathy
- Strategic influence
- Advanced facilitation skills
- Confidence and resilience in ambiguity

- Organisation Design and job design
- Leadership coaching
- Partnership leadership
- Culture
- Employee engagement, including employee well-being, burnout prevention and alignment with culture

Closing thought

- The NHS is entering a new phase of transformation where:
 - Technology
 - Workforce
 - Care models
 - OD approachesmust evolve **together**
- OD will be essential to making this transformation successful
- ***The future of the NHS depends on its people***
- ***The future of its people depends on OD***



Over to you – as an
OD change leader...

- What are your/your organisation's change and adaptability challenges right now?
- Where is your OD work focused today?
- How much is system-level vs organisational?
- What do you need to do this work?
- Are OD teams involved early in digital transformation?
- What capabilities do you/ your OD teams need next?

In the new world of work

- What are the key external and internal drivers?
- What does the new “normal” organisation look like?
- What organisation culture will instigate behavioural changes to support the “new normal” organisation?
- Work environment - what are the “organising principles” for people, system, and processes?
- What human behaviour will be needed to grow/ nurture the agile, nimble, collaborative way of working?

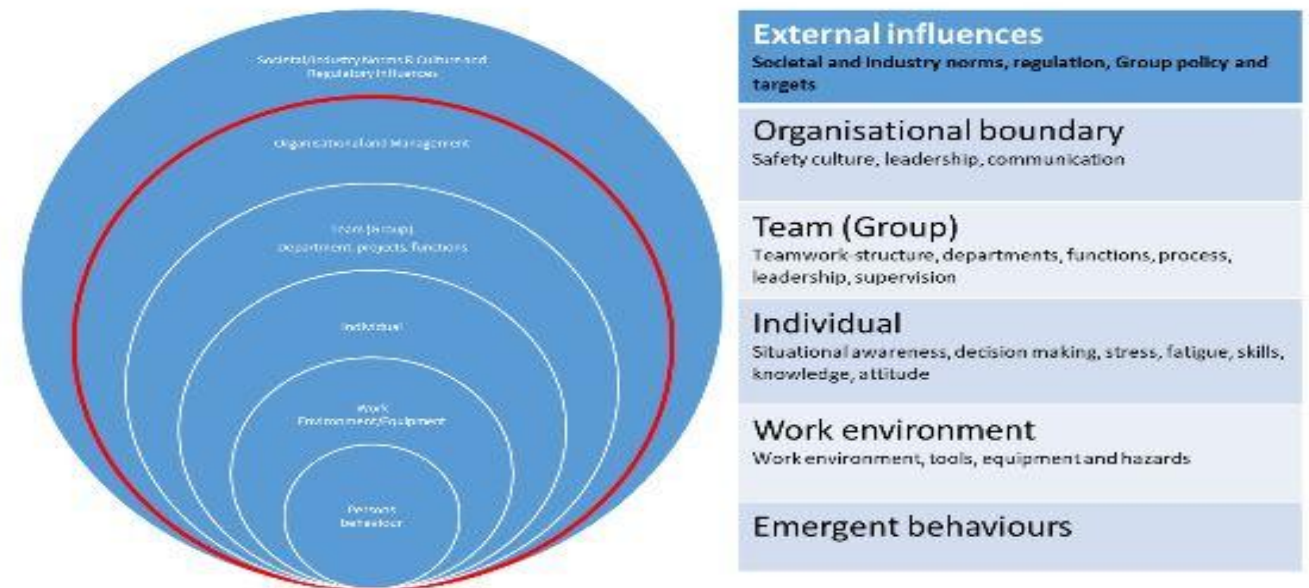


Figure 1: Systems model adapted from Moray, 2000 and World Health Organisation (WHO), 2009