

Thinking about 'complexity' in arts and dementia evaluation

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Questions

- What is complex about arts and dementia?
- Why might that matter to us?

I think most of us, if we are really honest, know very little about **JUST HOW** complex things are and how to make sense of them. Each of us only has a limited perspective and certain experiences.

As individuals, communities, organizations, we see the world through a limited lens.

Individuals,
Communities, societies,
Organisations and
Factors we only
have partial
understandings
of systems.
And how
we BELIEVE
things should
work
and how
they actually
work are
often
drastically
different.

Developing and evaluating complex interventions

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Developing and evaluating complex interventions: the new Medical Research Council guidance

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Evaluating complex interventions is complicated. The Medical Research Council's evaluation framework (2000) brought welcome clarity to the task. Now the council has updated its guidance

What makes an intervention complex?

- Number of interacting components within the experimental and control interventions
- Number and difficulty of behaviours required by those delivering or receiving the intervention
- Number of groups or organisational levels targeted by the intervention
- Number and variability of outcomes
- Degree of flexibility or tailoring of the intervention permitted

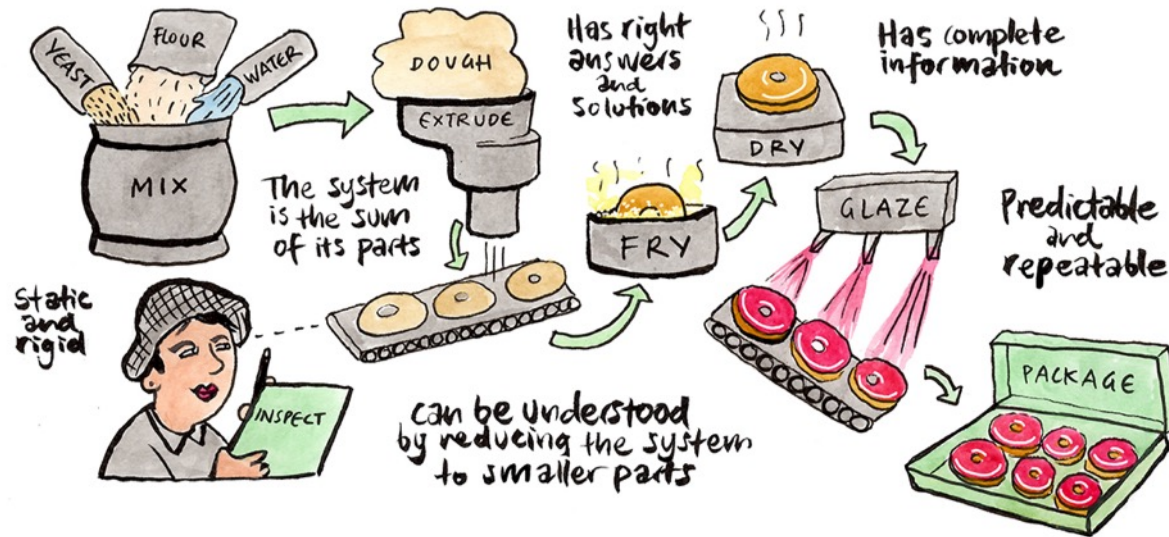
(Craig et al. 2008)

How might this help us evaluate?

- Need **good theoretical understanding** of how intervention causes change
- Thorough **process evaluation** to identify implementation problems
- **Sample sizes may need to be larger** to take account of extra variability
- Identifying single primary outcome may not make best use of data; **a range of measures** needed
- Ensuring strict fidelity to protocol may be inappropriate; intervention may work better with **adaptation to local setting**

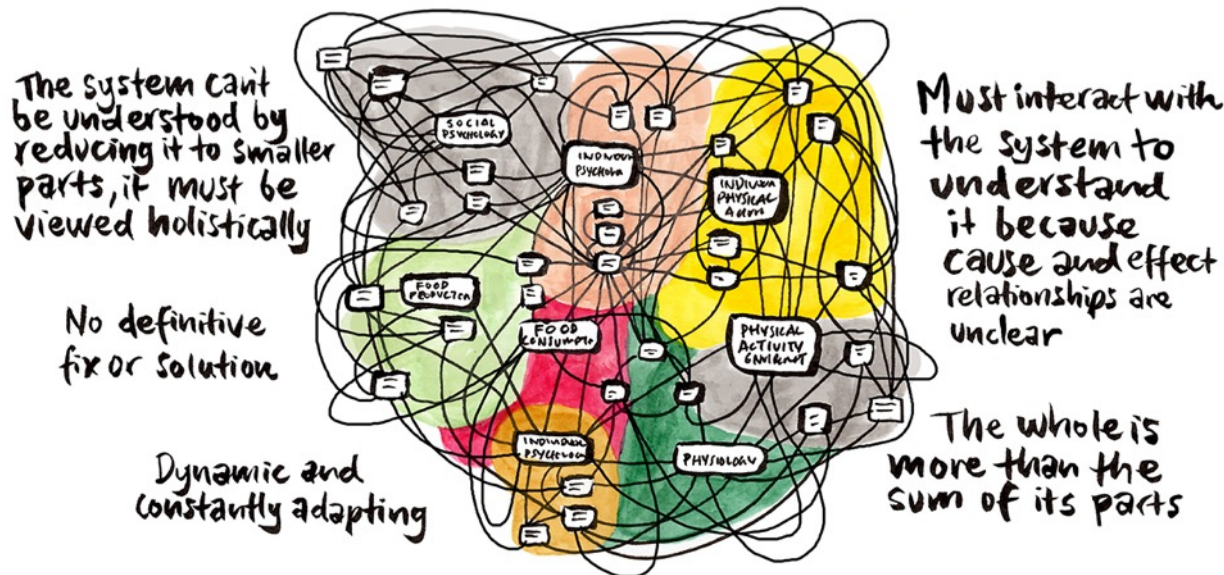
(from Craig et al. 2008)

The simple organised system of a doughnut factory



Simple
system

The complex adaptive system of obesity in the UK



Complex
adaptive system

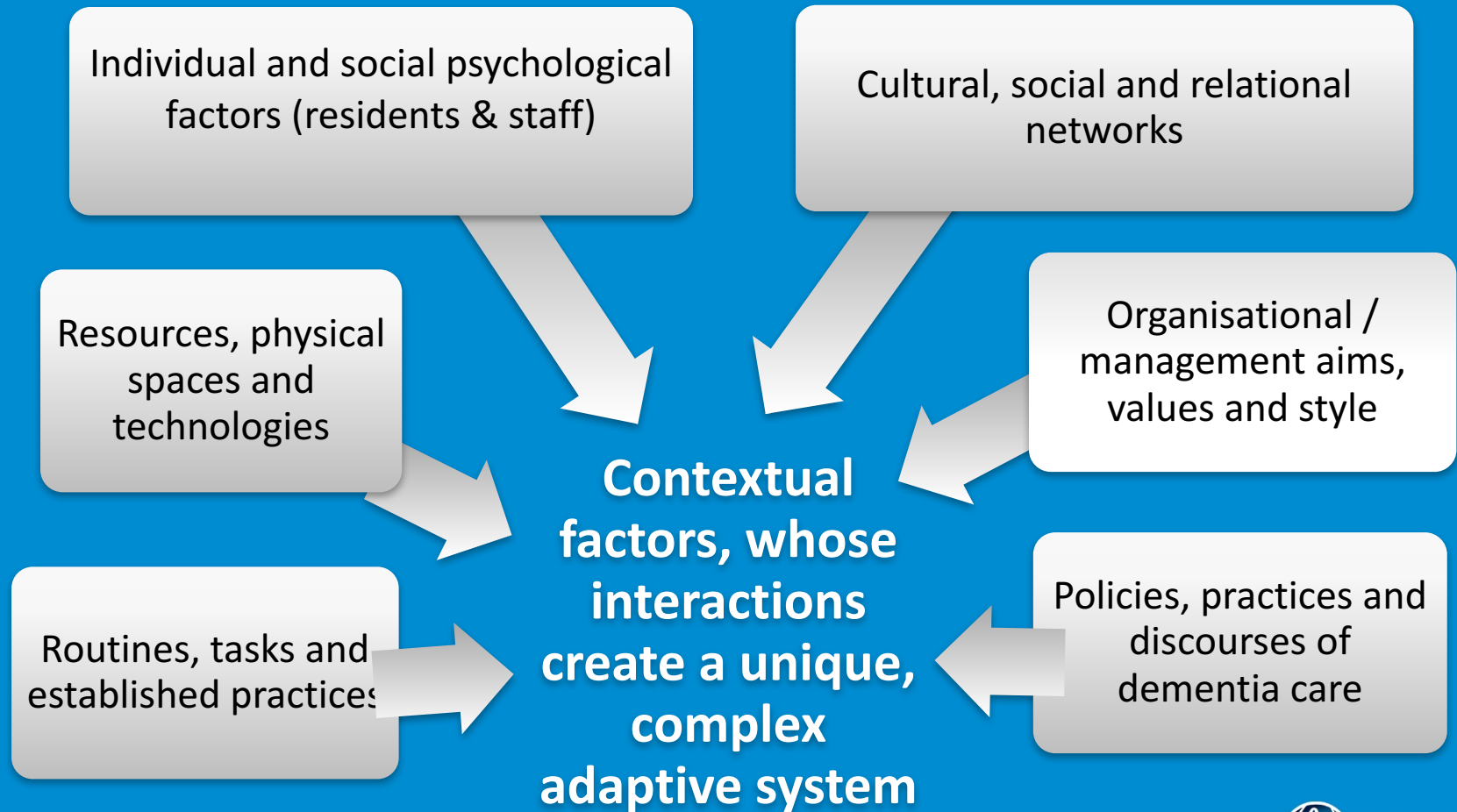
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Interventions as events in systems

‘Interventions might be best thought of as a time limited series of events, new activity settings and technologies that have the potential to transform the system because of their interaction with the context and the capability created from this interaction.’

Hawe, P. et al. (2009) Theorising interventions as events in systems,
Am. J. Community Psych, 43, pp.267-276

The complex system of a care home



Challenging environment for evaluation (and arts practice)

- Aligning values
- Building strong relationships
- Creating research designs that work
- Struggling with ethics
- Managing logistics of data collection
- Experiencing emotional distress

A conundrum

‘[T]he conundrum that we have found ourselves pondering is why, if there is so much evidence of the efficacy of the arts in health and social care, it is so little appreciated and acted upon.’

Lord Howarth, Foreword to *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* 2017

Different aspirations...

‘With other commissioners, they under... you know, the aspirations are different I think [...] they’re still thinking about it as – this is an intervention for people with dementia to enhance wellbeing – which it undoubtedly is but that’s... but the thing that is the legacy, I suppose is the word, is what you leave behind with the care staff. If that is an experiential shift for them then that is more likely to have long lasting impacts.’

Arts practitioner, talking about working on projects
with a particular care home group

...from fixing a problem to reshaping a system?

‘Instead of asking whether an intervention works to fix a problem, researchers should aim to identify if and how it contributes to reshaping a system in favourable ways.’

Rutter, H. et al., 2017. The need for a complex systems model of evidence for public health. *The Lancet*, 6736 (17), pp.9–11



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<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/tandem-phd-studentship.html>