With our distinctive appreciation of complexity and the identification of dynamic capabilities that support it, we now turn towards how these capabilities might be mobilised in the real world, and what the practical implications are for those seeking to address outcomes within a complexity frame. In this chapter we explore a novel approach to implementing a complexity-informed management practice in public and non-profit organisations, HLS (Lowe and Plimmer 2019; Lowe et al 2020a; 2020b; 2022; Lowe et al 2021b). We describe the principles of HLS and its genesis into a substantial service reform coalition involving more than 300 organisational members, drawing on evidence from a rich cohort of case studies. This chapter seeks to examine HLS as an applied model of public service reform which responds explicitly to the four complexities outlined in Chapter 3. The capabilities proposed in Chapter 4 are then applied in an analytical capacity to explore how HLS might meaningfully engage with this alternative worldview.

We highlight a strengths-based perspective implicit in HLS, which illustrates how reformers have harnessed agency, assets,
and capabilities to purposefully embed more human, learning-oriented, and systemic practices in service contexts. The relational work involved in this is central to this examination and offers a lens through which we can understand the struggles, strategies, and investments involved in service reform practice in organisations and places. We inspect the HLS case study evidence closely to examine how far complexity frames of reference take us in understanding HLS practice.

**Origins of HLS and basic theoretical components**

Human Learning Systems is used to describe the emergent practice, ideas, and principles of many people and organisations who have been exploring complexity-informed approaches to commissioning, funding, leadership, strategic, organisational management, and service delivery alternatives to NPM. At the core of HLS is a concern for how organisations continually learn and strive to achieve value through emergence with a range of stakeholders through a ‘Learning as a Management Strategy’. To understand value and outcomes while accounting for complexity means privileging human diversity, curiosity, and collaboration in how outcomes are created. Thus, the fundamental ethos of HLS espouse human agency, relationships, and flourishing as a moral purpose of public service, learning as a management strategy to ensure public services help people in their complex life contexts, and systems, not singular services of organisations, as the requisite unit of analysis for understanding how outcomes are created. To review HLS further, we take each element in turn.

The first is re-establishing the interests and needs of the ‘human’ in the design and delivery of services, to counter the corrosive effects of substituting life experiences with proxy indicators inherent in performance management and metric-focussed service design and performance management (Lowe and Wilson 2017; French et al 2021a). HLS views each person’s life as a complex system and seeks not only to appreciate the
experience of complexity through the lens of individuals and their relationships, but claims that this is necessary to establish any understanding of value in the context of each person’s life as a complex system (Lowe et al 2022). The human element of HLS describes the individual focus for needs and outcomes, and how services can respond by drawing on their strengths, capabilities, and relationships with those they collaborate with, as well as those they co-produce service with. Finally, the human element articulates the nature of the networked ‘human’ work involved in complexity-informed service by recognising variety, building empathy, building an asset/strengths-based approach, and trusting that those serving in public and voluntary and community service organisations will act on intrinsic motivation (the public service ethos) to help and meet the needs of other human beings. To understand what counts as flourishing for each individual, and to be able to remain abreast of how that is continually re-articulated, means investment in a relationship and dialogue about these meanings, and also an appreciation that human need in its fullest sense falls significantly outside of the bounds of the current state provision of public service.

The second component, ‘learning’, has, in NPM approaches, been subverted by externally imposed performance management systems to support monitoring and reporting. These NPM agendas have demanded particular types of data which distort the storylines told to senior managers and regulators, thus equally distorting the potential for outcome data to tell real stories about real-life needs. HLS views learning as an emergent process of social innovation in response to local contexts (Lowe et al 2022). It also aligns with complexity theory’s perspective that linear thinking in non-linear contexts will hinder learning by failing to account for feedback loops, effect delays (Sterman 2002), and the heterogeneity of human responsive behaviours. Those who have honed their descriptions of HLS practice also provided details of how they embed learning, inspired by approaches to action learning including appreciative inquiry,
reflective practice, learning communities, and rapid learning cycles. In many cases iteration, experimentation, investment in learning capacity, and data usage for ‘positive error cultures’ are evident.

Finally, the ‘system’ element of HLS refers to how managers and practitioners perceive that outcomes are produced: to reflect the complexity of people’s lives, public services cannot respond as single services and responses are inadequate if they are not continuously emergent. This dynamic, adaptive perspective on public services describes how heterogeneous agents and agencies within a particular context respond and adapt to the actions of each other, and in the case of public services, those they serve. Therefore, the work of HLS practitioners involves building relationships and trust between agents, and finding common ground, as well as acknowledging dissonance (Blackmore 2010), and exploring their ‘system’ together. One way of thinking about this is the idea of a ‘system of interest’ (Jackson 2019).

For HLS the ‘system of interest’ at any given time is the set of relationships which combine to afford or constrain the production of an outcome. Systems can be reflected (and linked) across various scales, all complex, from a person’s life to an organisation, a place, or a country (Lowe et al 2021a). The challenge with this approach is the human and organisational limitations of being able to see the whole view. Therefore, in this chapter we will further explore what ‘system’ means in an HLS context and how this lens helps practitioners to govern complexity.

HLS has grown in scale and significance and become more expressive of the experiences of diverse case organisations who have ‘experimented’, reflected, and shared their stories. There is a certain ‘real world’ advantage and persuasion that HLS has over purely theoretical public management reform trajectories, which is established in its inclusive co-production process, embodied in the membership of the HLS Collaborative and in the co-writing of its recent report.
(Lowe et al 2021b). What started out as a piece of research with 15 funders and commissioners, has since 2017 become a shared language used by policymakers and practitioners internationally to make sense of complexity-informed public management practice.

The case study approach to telling HLS stories

HLS has been informed by scholarly engagement with complexity in management and organisation theory, and by work in the application of complexity theory to public management (Pell et al 2016; Lowe and Wilson 2017; Pell et al 2020; French et al 2021a; Lowe et al 2021a). It is also a practice-informed approach which has been shaped by ongoing conversations which has so far involved over 300 commissioners, managers, and practitioners in a range of public service sectors, and with charitable funders, philanthropic organisations, and delivery organisations in the voluntary and community sectors. Co-production has increasingly been a core operating principle and expression of HLS in practice. Here we outline the approach taken to the production of the case study data, and to its analysis.

A narrative case study design was used to develop stories of practice from each case context. Case studies are purposefully designed as a method of capturing phenomenon in real-life contexts, and in the definition provided by Stake they can serve as ‘both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning’ (Stake 1995). An organising group of HLS ‘champions’ (consultancy organisations, practitioner pioneers, and academics) was established to oversee the curation of these case studies. Invitations to write case studies were sent to 49 organisations known to the organising group for their pioneering work in September 2020. Case study authors were asked to use a template to ensure consistency in the key areas covered and members of the organising group were assigned to support case study authors based on
pre-existing relationships and familiarity. Once the initial versions of case study drafts were written, consent was gained from each author to share with other members. A member of the organising group extracted data using an analysis template based on the HLS framework, and these were then shared with a second analyst which ensured consistency in the extraction of data. This process was also iterated, with certain elements modified for clarity, to put forth more information, or to sense-check interpretations.

Following this first round of analysis, we invited authors to share and read each other’s case studies, to gain further insights and identify patterns to discuss at a sense-making session with all authors. The session was recorded, and a summary was circulated to support revisions. This iterative process of collective sense-making and co-writing built stronger shared narratives, identified the barriers and tensions encountered, and brought forward early indications of what had been achieved through adopting an HLS approach.

At the end of this process, 29 case studies were finalised and published in a public report (Lowe et al 2021b). This chapter has sampled these, along with an additional 10 accounts previously written by other organisations but using comparable templates. This case study material was self-submitted and written mainly from an organisational perspective, so was rooted in a process of reflective self-assessment. However, the methodology incorporated some degree of peer review with analysts in the organising group meeting monthly to discuss what patterns they were identifying from the written cases, sense-making sessions, and their own discussions, to produce an updated expression of HLS in the publication of an e-book: Human Learning Systems: Public Service for the Real World (Lowe et al 2021b).

Some of the case studies have been co-authored with ‘learning partners’ (Hesselgreaves et al 2021) from, among others, the Centre for Public Impact, Easier Inc., Collaborate, and Northumbria University. Therefore, the case studies we
have drawn upon (see Appendix) include many whom the authors of this book have a long-term working relationship. All the interpretations presented here are subjective and heuristic.

**Case studies**

Each example of HLS in practice presents an emphasis in its narrative across the ‘human’, ‘learning’, and ‘systems’ elements. Figure 5.1 illustrates the heuristic structure used to analyse where case studies tend towards in their narrative emphasis. The examination presented here is a necessarily partial picture of an emergent practice, and not a definitive representation.

Where a case study’s emphasis was balanced across more than one of these elements, that case study is plotted (with a star) somewhere between elements, depending on the extent to which each element features. Plotting the case studies this way enables us to discuss the merits of each element in the context

**Figure 5.1: The template of HLS narrative case studies**

![Figure 5.1: The template of HLS narrative case studies](image-url)
of complexity, capabilities, and perspectives on outcomes, as emphasised by the narrative presented in the case studies.

**Human stories as a lens for understanding value**

First, we focus on those cases with descriptions of ‘Human’ assets and consider what this tells us about alternatives to outcomes-based performance management. The first observation is that this cluster of case studies shown in Figure 5.2 is characterised by third sector organisations: grassroots organisations, community interest companies, or in some other form community-led or community-situated organisations. The lack of statutory obligations may offer them affordances in their delivery which supports flexibility in responding to the variety of human need.

These cases adopt language that focuses on needs, stories, and struggle. The expression of need is usually with an emphasis on empowerment and equity ‘emphasising those who have barriers to engagement’ (Aberlour Child Care Trust)
for all in the system including organisational staff. Moray Wellbeing Hub even considered equity as a key decider in choosing a Community Interest Company over a charitable organisational formation, as it reflected diversity and equity in their values. However, many of these organisations see needs that are fundamental and basic and respond with fundamental and basic provision: ‘fridge and freezer, washing machines, clothing bank, library and family rooms’ (Aberlour Child Care Trust).

Case studies which intentionally seek to break such strong and cyclic associations between situational factors accept the challenge that social problems are created by multiple, interdependent factors, and are usually socially entrenched, in line with compositional complexity. For others, this aligned more with experiential complexity, ‘we “see” the individual and not just their needs’ (Help On Your Doorstep). Because these perspectives on a flourishing life are so individualised, outcomes were similarly in flux, their creation characterised by ‘no formal process …’ (IVAR evaluation report of Help On Your Doorstep). Storytelling was a common writing approach taken to compiling case studies when experiential content was at the forefront. Cases often described detailed accounts of decision making, informed by values, emergent behaviours, and often by intuition: ‘Our story of change has developed in a much less schematic way, driven by intuition, a sense that we were doing the right thing (without always being able to articulate why, except that it was better and more honest than what others were doing) …’ (Coast and Vale Community Action).

What is particularly striking is the intertwining of the stories of the authors, their colleagues, and those of the communities they serve. In many cases, the authors chose to suspend their identity as professionals altogether: ‘I can only help another person by being human and empathetic to him, I don’t have to be an expert, like a psychologist to help another’ (Vinarice Prison).
This focus on individuals, their experience of life, and the connection made between individuals and those in service conforms to experiential complexity, which acknowledges the unique experiences of the individuals encountering causal conditions and understanding what needs, strengths and priorities might inform a service response: ‘Being human, working through trusting relationships and being committee to an ongoing process of learning and reflection often feels far from intuitive’ (Aberlour Child Care Trust).

The narratives of need and struggle from all in the stories demonstrate a deeply held ‘human’ emphasis which may reflect the traditional missions of, and community-facing nature of voluntary and community sector organisations and highlight how this compassion-driven focus on experiential complexity can be at personal and emotional cost.

Table 5.1 shows how, as well as illustrating how different complexities are addressed by the human element of HLS and how needs are meet through establishing what is important to people, these cases also provide insight into what capabilities are being exercised. Drawing on the discussion in Chapter 4, stewardship capability seems most closely related, holding strong parallels with being trusted to operate based on values, ethics, and professionalism, rather than control.

Learning as strategic intent

Figure 5.3 positions a collection of case studies in which learning was a particular emphasis in their narrative. Learning as an established mode of organisational change is inherent in these organisational strategies, but it is notable how learning and working towards a positive error culture now makes its way into the mission statements and operational fabric of some:

Our purpose is to use the principles of Human Learning Systems to radically change the way we do things, to be a living example of what can be done when
Table 5.1: Human narratives as expressions of complexity and capability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HLS</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Complexities for outcomes-based management (nature of the work)</th>
<th>Capabilities (nature of the capability)</th>
<th>Implications for outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Seeing and describing struggle and need, and public servants place themselves in this narrative</td>
<td>Experiential (variety and compassion work)</td>
<td>Stewardship capability (operate based on values, ethics, and professionalism, not control)</td>
<td>An individual’s experience is the lens for understanding value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human needs are structurally linked</td>
<td>Compositional (public health work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we accept that being human is messy, we are making mistakes and learning from them continually and that our organisational system has to reflect that, rather than seeking to control what it can’t really control anyway. (Empowerment)

As well as the expected contribution that learning has for enabling change, these cases offered detailed descriptions of learning which support two other strategic purposes. The first was using learning as a strategy to support and deepen relationships, and in turn, systemic wellbeing. This type of strategy prioritises more personalised experiences of learning as a social endeavour with wellbeing as a core concern. For example, Empowerment described how deeply personal and emotional learning work was, through their use of social pedagogy (Hatton 2013; Hämäläinen 2015). The Collective Impact Agency described how learning events were established specifically with a purpose for designing change, but became spaces which fostered relationship building: ‘Slowly, the

Figure 5.3: Plot of human and learning narratives
group came to the explicit realisation that prioritising the time to deepen the relationships was more important at this time than delivering a project that would be externally visible … the collective decision to prioritise and dedicate time for relationship-building felt profound’ (Collective Impact Agency).

Second, some used learning as a strategy for supporting the governance of systems change. Learning was often enacted as a formalised and in some cases proceduralised process. Although systems of learning used to support a governance strategy can produce impactful effects across the learning organisation and system, close attention should be paid to the potential risks of a learning system moving from a function of embedding learning for governance, to entrenching learning for an unexpected form of performance management. One community-based case study reported struggling with the creation of an organisational coaching system:

within a governance or ‘assurance’ framework, robust enough to satisfy the rigorous regulatory environment in which it operated … We felt as if we were drowning in the endless requests for evidence that our procedures were sufficient and the production of raw data to demonstrate compliance with targets and standards. (Neighbourhood Midwives)

This group was still required to serve an existing outcomes-based performance management system, highlighting the challenges for community organisations to enter into alternative accountability relationships. One national-level case study did implement a cross-place learning system:

The value of a national body convening a space for shared learning on emerging practice is now being formalised and embedded into all ihub quality improvement and service redesign programmes … as a
national improvement organisation, we recognise that the theoretical discourse on change and improvement can be intensely polarising with ongoing debates as to whether change is primarily driven through a focus on relationship and conversation or through a focus on process and system design. Our belief is that we need both as in real life the outcome is defined by a complex interplay between system/process design and people/relational issues. Accordingly, our improvement approach focuses on both the objective reality of process design and the more subjective world of relationships. (Health Improvement Scotland)

In addition to employing learning strategies in response to dynamic complexity and for relationship building, case studies also utilised learning strategies to navigate governance complexity by assembling multiple agents to coordinate around bespoke solutions to unique problems even in rigid external governance frameworks (though this endeavour appears easier for government learning systems with statutory obligations). Meanwhile, some cases remained assertive in paying close attention to the individualised experience of distinct outcomes, often focussing on sharing learning in real time about current problems and cases. Learning, then, operates across a number of complexities in layered configurations, supporting adaptive capability by catalysing change from action and reflection and by brokering learning relationships across external teams and organisations. These relationships are summarised in Table 5.2.

*Investment in systemic relationships and learning to produce outcomes*

Systems work is, so far, the most widely interpreted and least well-defined of the HLS elements described in the case studies. Cases which emphasised this element of HLS are shown in Figure 5.4. In HLS organisations, systems work refers to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HLS</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Capabilities (nature of the capability)</th>
<th>Implications for outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Learning as a strategy for enabling change</td>
<td>Dynamic (learning infrastructure to create conditions for change)</td>
<td>Adaptive capability (adapting routines of work based on new information)</td>
<td>Learning is the mechanism by which unique human needs and relationships are embedded in strategic purpose, ensuring continual revision of outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning as a strategy to deepen relationships</td>
<td>Experiential (relational work)</td>
<td>Stewardship capability (understanding relationships as value-creating)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning as a strategy to support governance, processing and formalising sense-making about evidence and action</td>
<td>Governance (investment in trans-boundary learning)</td>
<td>Coordinative capability (constructing inter-organisational relationships as resources)</td>
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</table>
the unit of analysis to which purpose is applied (Lowe et al 2021b), and from which outcomes are produced. In the analysis presented here we can build on this by considering what resources systems provide, and what resources they need, to function as intended.

Most case studies were working within an austerity context where agency and resource constraints made systemic approaches challenging to establish. Some cases focussed on stitching parts of the system together by brokering relationships, although this did not always extend to involve external parties. As shown in strategy links closely with coordinative capability, but could also respond to both compositional and governance complexities by enabling different agencies to integrate resources to tackle shared social challenges:

Originally the programme set out to achieve its aims of reducing social isolation and obesity by dividing its programme into 3 streams; the built environment, new models of care and community activation. Over time it became apparent to Bicester Healthy New Town
(BHNT) stakeholders that a systems-based approach was needed, as the value seemed to be added when the 3 streams interacted with each other … BHNT developed its role as what the stakeholders are defining as a system connector … In order to enable such interaction to take place. (Bicester Healthy New Town)

Bicester Healthy New Town found system convening to be its greatest challenge, demanding significant effort in ‘understanding the system’, including engaging in peer learning and undertaking system mapping work. This developed adaptive capability by enabling the organisation to recombine elements to respond to individualised needs.

Working in this way recognises that outcomes are produced by whole systems rather than individuals, organisations or programmes. Consequently, to improve outcomes, we need to work to create ‘healthy’ systems in which people can co-ordinate and collaborate more effectively utilising a strengths-based approach. This approach results in better experiences, better outcomes and it has potential to increase collaboration, enable innovation, build employee motivation, and deliver cost savings. (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority)

In several cases, such as Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, the Plymouth Alliance and Sobell House, the commissioner-provider relationship and contracting arrangements were redesigned based on a shared systemic understanding of purpose. These structural arrangements helped embed coordinational capacity at a system level and broker a broader range of resources to bear in tackling compositional complexity. These cases typically invested first in building collaborative infrastructure, however all also demonstrated a clear emphasis on inter-organisational learning within collaborative relationships. Table 5.3 summarises the
Table 5.3: System narratives as expressions of complexity and capability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HLS</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Complexities (nature of the work)</th>
<th>Capabilities (nature of the capability)</th>
<th>Implications for outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Coordination efforts of multi-agency inclusion as expressions of system behaviours</td>
<td>Compositional (collaborative work)</td>
<td>Coordinative capability (leveraging system resources)</td>
<td>Outcomes are created through the adaptive investment, provision, and use of collective resources, including learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative learning about systems</td>
<td>Experiential (relational work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding and contracting learning at the systems level</td>
<td>Compositional (investment work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
relationships between capabilities, complexities, and the system element of HLS.

**The ‘central cluster’**

The cases used as exemplars of ‘Human’, ‘Learning’, and ‘Systems’ were chosen because of an emphasis in self-reported case studies of a particular element. Most case studies emphasised only one or two of the elements rather than all three. The HLS report (Lowe et al 2021b, p 100) claims that ‘Human’, ‘Learning’, and ‘Systems’ are so internally consistent that they are examples of each other: where we see one, we will find the others. However, we find this is not always the case: each case study faced unique challenges and articulated clear strengths with certain elements, but most often not all of them together. This may be a self-reporting bias, a lack of awareness, or perhaps it could represent an effect of prioritisation.

Here we examine the properties of a significant minority of case studies where descriptions of H, L, and S were more balanced (those denoted in the central quadrant of Figure 5.5). Here we examine what commonality those in the ‘central cluster’ – the oval in the central quadrant.

In addition to developing the capacities and capabilities discussed so far, cases in the ‘central cluster’ benefited from the compounding effects of investing in learning as a management strategy (Burnes et al 2003), which invariably included the appointment of, and in most cases co-authorship with a learning partner (Hesselgreaves et al 2021) (some called these actors ‘thinking partners’). This involved brokering an externally facilitated learning process to ‘hold uncertainty and complexity and communicate theoretical content’ (Stirling Council and the Robertson Trust), enhancing adaptive capability by providing opportunities to reflect on learning and consider how it might inform change. Table 5.4 relates the characteristics of these ‘central cluster’ cases to the capabilities and complexities.
The investment in learning as a management strategy was apparent in other investment decisions, which devolved budgets to learning teams (for example Wellbeing Teams), financial investment in learning processes (for example Stirling Council and the Robertson Trust). This was also evident in these operational decisions and the conduct of decision making in senior leadership teams, which in several central cluster cases was based on what people had noticed about key metrics, collective analysis, and sharing successes and failures through their learning processes.

The learning process is governed by everyone within Mayday who lives the learning culture of constant reflection and ‘challenge and be challenged’. The process of listening, reflecting, challenging and changing is continuous and underpins all of our work. (Mayday Trust)

Wellbeing Teams have demonstrated an ability to learn and adapt rapidly. Our self-managed model, emphasis on bringing the whole person to work, focus on self-care
Table 5.4: The ‘central cluster’ narratives as expressions of complexity and capability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HLS</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Complexities (nature of the work)</th>
<th>Capabilities (nature of the capability)</th>
<th>Implications for outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Central Cluster</td>
<td>Investment in learning resource</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Dynamic capability (stewardship, coordinative and adaptive capabilities together illustrate a dynamic value proposition where complexity is invested in, rather than minimised)</td>
<td>The practice of HLS is itself in a wider infrastructure of resources which support the conditions for systems to produce outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning drives operations and decisions</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(investment in capabilities to make complexity governable)</td>
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and use of technology to support and spread learning has made it possible for this to happen and for significant changes to roles and structure to be introduced quickly and effectively. Our handbook was rewritten six times in its first eighteen months to reflect the learning over that period. (Wellbeing Teams)

These cases offer an important insight into a strategic purpose not only focussed on improving practice, but on fostering the necessary conditions for coordinative, adaptive, and stewardship capabilities by investing in and embedding strategic learning processes. For some, this was experienced by steeping themselves in learning about systems thinking and complex systems approaches (The Children’s Society). For others it was internalising a ‘systems steward’ role as their strategic approach to enabling systemic health (Wallsend Children’s Community).

The ‘central cluster’ of HLS cases demonstrate that outcomes are produced as a result of deep systemic learning, which must be understood as a crucial strategic investment. Investment in learning capacity seems critical to develop the infrastructure and dynamic capabilities necessary to tackle systemic social change, and conversely, in enabling these dynamic capabilities and learning infrastructures to contribute to enabling an HLS practice to thrive.

Summary

In this chapter we sought to analyse how an emergent public sector reform community has responded to HLS and exhibited the dynamic capabilities required to initiate a trajectory away from an RTOC-orientation in management strategy. The relationships between the elements of HLS and the four complexities and three requisite dynamic capabilities we have developed in previous chapters are summarised descriptively in Table 5.5, and visually in Figure 5.6. HLS illustrates the potential for a public management practice where desired
outcomes are viewed through a relational ‘human’ lens, delivered with learning as the mechanism through which needs and relationships are embedded in strategic purpose and capabilities, and supported by investment in a learning infrastructure, ensuring practice is responsive to the local challenges at hand. We have found that learning is often about relating (learning about people, learning with people about systems and from systems, learning from people about their stories), but that ‘being human’ (rather than delivering more technically efficient services) provided the motivation and momentum for a change in direction.

However, this exploration has highlighted that a wholesale HLS approach is more achievable in circumstances where funds and scope for influence/system leverage are present.
### Table 5.5: Human Learning System narratives as expressions of complexity and capability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Human needs are structurally linked</td>
<td>Compositional (public health work)</td>
<td>Stewardship capability (operate based on values, ethics, and professionalism, not control)</td>
<td>An individual’s experience is the lens for understanding value</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seeing and describing struggle and need, and public servants place themselves in this narrative</td>
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<td>Coordinative capability (constructing inter-organisational relationships as resources)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.5: Human Learning System narratives as expressions of complexity and capability (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Implications for outcomes</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Funding and contracting learning at the systems level</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Central Cluster</td>
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<td>Governance (investment in capabilities to make complexity governable)</td>
<td>Dynamic capability (stewardship, coordinative and adaptive capabilities together illustrate a complexity value proposition where complexity is invested in, rather than minimised)</td>
<td>The practice of HLS is itself in a wider infrastructure of resources which support the conditions for systems to produce outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning drives operations and decisions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The necessarily varied response to human strengths and needs means that HLS practice must be contextualised to a scaled-down system of interest, usually at a place-level. Some examples of HLS (the ‘central cluster’) signal that, although HLS seeks to help create conditions for better relational outcomes, the model by itself has certain conditional needs to flourish and become sustainable as a practice. These include investment in infrastructure and capabilities (asset-based dynamic capabilities, not just the funding and commissioning of practices or services) and the support for learning environments which allow for bespoke collaborative decision making and the institutionalisation of learning. This is partly to avoid reinventing the wheel — rationalist systems can reproduce themselves and crowd-out learning and emergent practice at the local level.

The data we have considered here (summarised in Table 5.5) is provisional and intended to generate discussion and debate rather than summative judgement about the success or not of HLS. Without an open process of reflection, debate, scrutiny, and dialogue about the struggle which its operating contexts present, HLS might well find its own philosophy of learning used against it, accused perhaps of not ‘walking the talk’. Human, learning, system elements all help to mobilise a multi-faceted, polyphonic, and collective account of how public service can be delivered to promote improvement. This would be both across the spaces of citizen and staff wellbeing and flourishing inter-institutional relations in localities, and in some cases, a sustainable future for an alternative management practice seems to be in sight. However there remains much work for the researchers and practitioners involved to develop the potential of HLS further still, and provide critical assessments of how, and in which circumstances, an HLS approach can lead to better outcomes.