

Easier Commissioning

Achieving results through relationships

Overview

This document provides an introduction to Easier Inc's approach to commissioning and contracting.

It is one in a series of reports that explore what it means - and what it takes - to make work work better.

Throughout these reports there are case examples and links to further resources, many of which are freely available at easierinc.com.

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Introduction

Commissioning in complexity

The world of public service is a complex ecosystem of citizens, families, communities, networks, infrastructure, services, institutions, politics and much more besides. Changes in any one area can have consequences - often unpredictable consequences - across this ecosystem.

For example:

- Adding and providing services can lead to citizens and communities showing less agency and becoming more dependant on support.
- Pairing back or providing fewer services can leave citizens and communities unable to help themselves, tangled in issues or trapped in decline.

This is the nature of complex problems, where issues are non-linear and deeply interconnected; often not open to being solved so much as they are to being held in a **dynamic equilibrium**...

The nature of complex problems

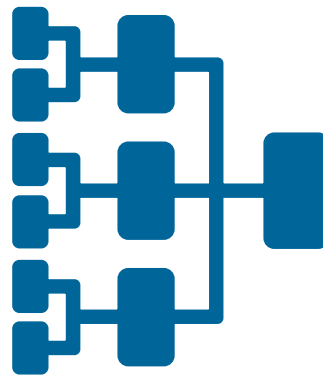


Simple

Some things are simple. Straightforward **cause and effect**. When we do this, we get that.

If we don't much like getting that then we only need to stop doing this.

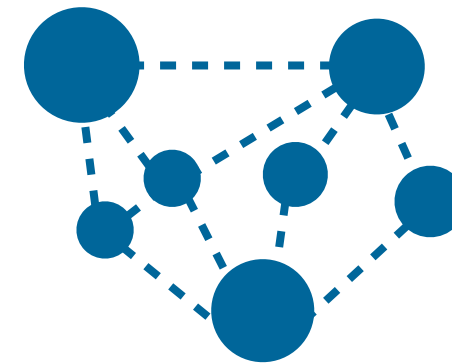
Simple problems can be **solved**.



Complicated

Other things are more complicated. Cause and effect still apply but the challenge is to find the **root causes** or else end up treating symptoms.

Like simple problems though, complicated problems can still be **solved**.



Complex

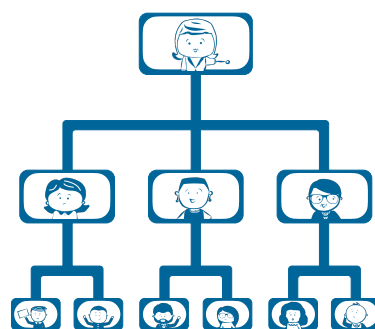
But complex problems are entirely different in nature.

Here, causes and effects are indistinguishable. Each action is simultaneously a reaction. Issues are connected in ways that mean problems are not open to being solved but instead need to be held in a **dynamic equilibrium**.

Success relies on rapid adaptation everywhere

The complexity of public service confounds accurate prediction in detail. The ripple effects that result when action is taken in the complex ecosystem of public service means that uncertainty of outcome is pervasive. Holding the dynamic equilibrium necessary to keep things in balance therefore requires constant and rapid adaptation. This has to happen all of the time and everywhere, telling us that decision-making cannot sit solely or even mainly in hierarchy... perhaps not even solely or mainly within our public institutions. How information, money and the authority to make decisions flow within and between institutions, communities, citizens and citizen groups therefore has to change.

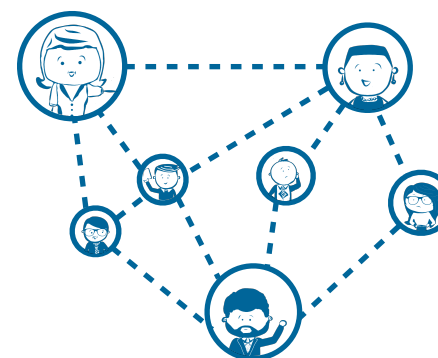
FROM...



Specify & Report

Where what matters is **directed by institutions** through specifications - such as objectives, service level agreements, budgets, strategies and plans - and where adaptation relies on **reporting to institutions** and so is constrained by the cycle time for passing information and decisions up and down **through the structure**.

TO...



Sense & Respond

Where what matters is **discovered** through the interactions between stakeholders, and where adaptation happens in the moment **led by citizens and communities or as close to the point of service delivery and support** as possible. This is facilitated by locating information and authority **with citizens, in communities and where the work of supporting them happens**.

Easier Commissioning

In order to enable this more dynamic, emergent and networked way of working, essential shifts in how public service is managed and commissioned are required...

If traditionally commissioners have...	Then Commissioning 2.0 will require them to...
Specified scope and outcomes at the outset.	Treat scope and outcomes as emergent.
Approached implementation as a pilot or project, where a model is conceived, tested and evaluated (in that order).	Favour action-learning over implementation, where viable new operating models are an outcome of continuous experimentation and where evaluation is baked into that process.
Measured success against predetermined goals.	Develop new measures and learning mechanisms as goals and focus emerge and evolve.
Maintained a safe distance to assure independence and objectivity.	Work hand-in-glove with citizens, communities and providers as an integral part of the process of discovery, interpretation, prioritisation and action-learning.
Used accountability to locate and leverage responsibility with providers.	Emphasise mutuality, shared sense-making, collective endeavour and shared responsibility.
Based evaluation and performance management on what providers can directly control or assumed that providers have material control over delivering what matters.	Maintain a collective and evolving understanding of what really matters across communities and networks, enabling interdependencies and system dynamics to be discussed and translated into shared action for improvement.
Aimed to produce generalisable findings and models that can be scaled and spread to anywhere.	Aim to produce context-specific understandings about what has worked here and why in order to inform ongoing innovation.
Acted as the arbiter of what matters, assuming authority over evaluation and rendering definitive judgements of success or failure.	Act as the guardian of shared principles and values, engaging citizens, communities, providers and provider networks in coproduction, enabling learning and differences in perspective to come forward and be understood; to act as system stewards.



Taking Action

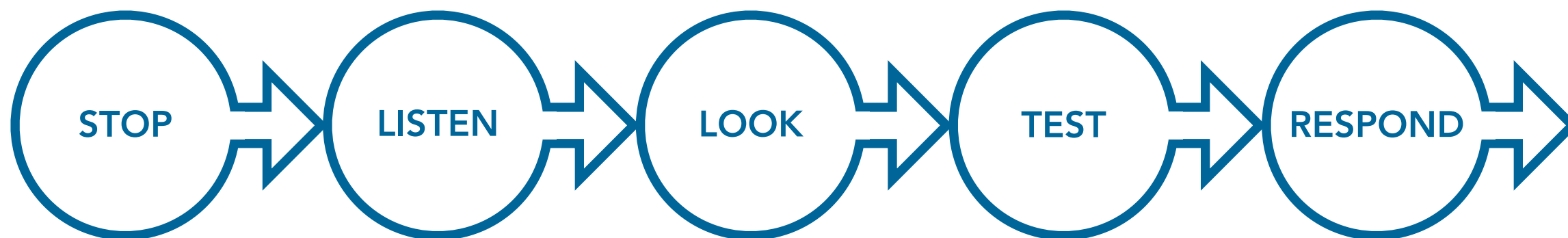
Relationships first

To shift to Commissioning 2.0 it is necessary to address technical challenges, like how to procure and contract for the sort of highly adaptive public service support that citizens and communities can benefit from or how to help citizens and communities have direct access to funding, unmediated by public services.

However starting with technical questions like these is a quick route to nowhere. Until deep mutual understanding, trust and a palpable sense of what is possible has been built between partners, it is almost impossible to reach agreement on the technocratic infrastructure that could hardwire new ways of working or enable them to work at scale.

For this reason, it pays to invest first and foremost in achieving some early **results through relationships**.

To do this we propose 5 steps...



STOP

- Put current roles, measures, contracts, issues, etc to one side in order to step back and see a bigger picture.
- Frame your focus for engagement; not 'what you want to discuss' but 'who you need to connect with' and 'who you need to help connect'.
- Consider how you might bring institutional partners together with citizens and communities in order to understand what really matters and why.
- Think about how you can frame a sense of the difference you hope to achieve by doing this work; a common purpose.
- Treat this purpose as a starting point - a reason to begin the process - rather than a conclusion. A deeper, fuller and more fully owned sense of common purpose will emerge as connection, trust and mutuality grow.

Key elements of the asset based area that this step directly addresses...

✓ Mapping assets	✗ Early intervention	✗ Social Value	✓ Mutualism	✗ Social action
✓ Relocating power	✗ Resilience	✗ Local enterprise	✗ Neighbourhoods	✗ Shared measures

LISTEN

- Explore what matters to each other and why.
- Where is there common ground?
- Where is there existing energy to act?
- How would different people and partners describe their issues and experiences?
- How would they articulate what better / success would look like to them?
- What would they like to see happen or what would they see as a priority to focus on?
- What would get them excited and engaged ?
- What would make them anxious or unable to engage further or fully?

Key elements of the asset based area that this step directly addresses...

- | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| ✓ Mapping assets | ✗ Early intervention | ✓ Social Value | ✓ Mutualism | ✗ Social action |
| ✓ Relocating power | ✗ Resilience | ✗ Local enterprise | ✗ Neighbourhoods | ✓ Shared measures |

LOOK

- What are the patterns of momentum and success or frustration or failure that citizens, families, communities and other partners see today?
- What can you discover together about why these things exist?
- Where do you - individuals, communities, networks, services and institutions - have existing strengths and assets that could be supported, leveraged and grown?
- Where are there gaps or reinforcing loops that create friction between partners or that get in the way of great outcomes?
- How does all of this relate to the common ground that's been defined together and how does it relate to what you have identified really matters to each other?

Key elements of the asset based area that this step directly addresses...

- | | | | | |
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TEST

- Without changing everything all at once and at scale, how can you now take practical steps to test a new way of working together?
- How can you treat this as an exercise in learning together and deepening your growing sense of mutuality and trust?
- What sort of scale will make this:
 - possible (safe to try and safe to fail);
 - worthwhile (big enough or targeted enough to act as a genuine test of a new way of working together)?
- In essence, how will you discover 'the art of the possible' *through taking action together*?

Key elements of the asset based area that this step directly addresses...

- | | | | | |
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| ✗ Mapping assets | ✓ Early intervention | ✓ Social Value | ✓ Mutualism | ✓ Social action |
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RESPOND

- What have your tests of change revealed about the potential to work differently together and what that can achieve?
- What's worked and what has got in the way?
- What have you learned about what it takes to be transparent and mutual in how you act, individually and together?
- Are your relationships now in a position where you can start to turn to the technical questions of how to hardwire, scale and spread these new ways of working together?

If so...

- How can people, process, structure and infrastructure now adapt in order to scale, spread and accelerate what's working (and to resolve what isn't)?

Key elements of the asset based area that this step directly addresses...

- | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|
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Hardwiring

Growing and sustaining results through relationships

While trust and mutuality (and the strong relationships these enable) are essential to developing *Easier* Commissioning they are not enough to sustain it. Without hardwiring the principles and practices that you will have discovered together through the 5 steps (*STOP>LISTEN>LOOK>TEST>RESPOND*) you will leave a lasting vulnerability to being blown off track by wider winds of change. It is important to therefore use the opportunity that strong and mutual relationships give you to start putting in place the technocracy that can make your new ways of being and working together:

- Transparent.
- Adaptable.
- Efficient.
- Sustainable.
- Scaleable.
- Resilient.

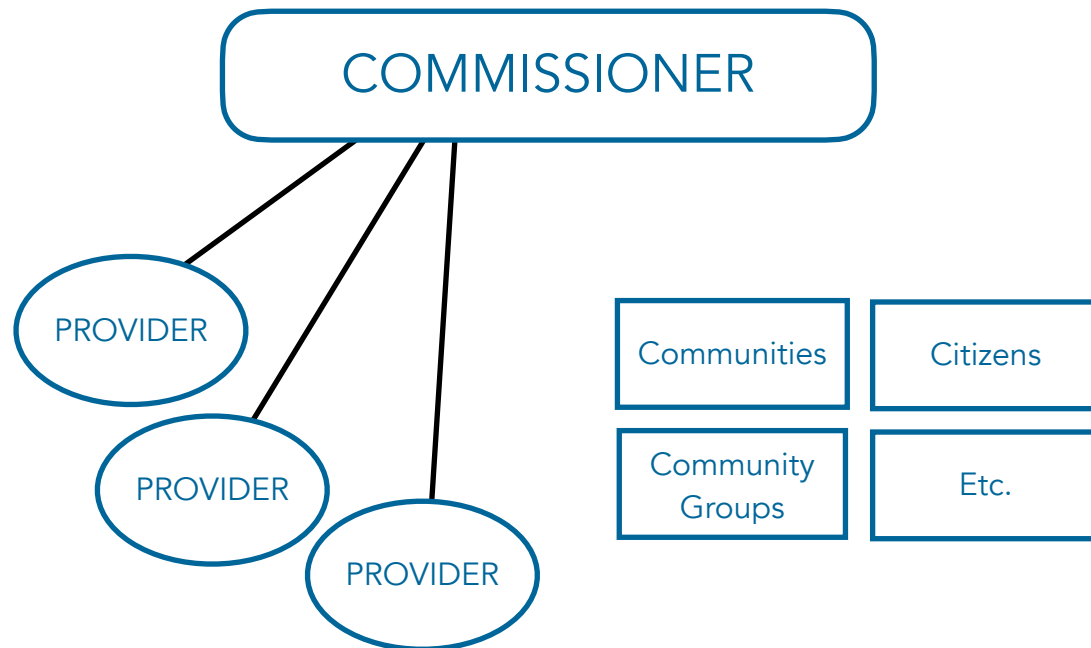
One of the most helpful ways to do this can be to coproduce a **FELLOWSHIP AGREEMENT...**

A Fellowship Agreement is...

- A form of **contract**.
- Providing a vehicle for **sharing risks, responsibilities, opportunities and benefits**.
- Enshrining commitment to:
 - a clear and **common purpose**.
 - specific and explicit **principles and behaviours**.
 - developing specific and explicit **capabilities**.
- Without requiring the creation of a new or separate legal entity.
- Enabling partners to retain their own legal identities.

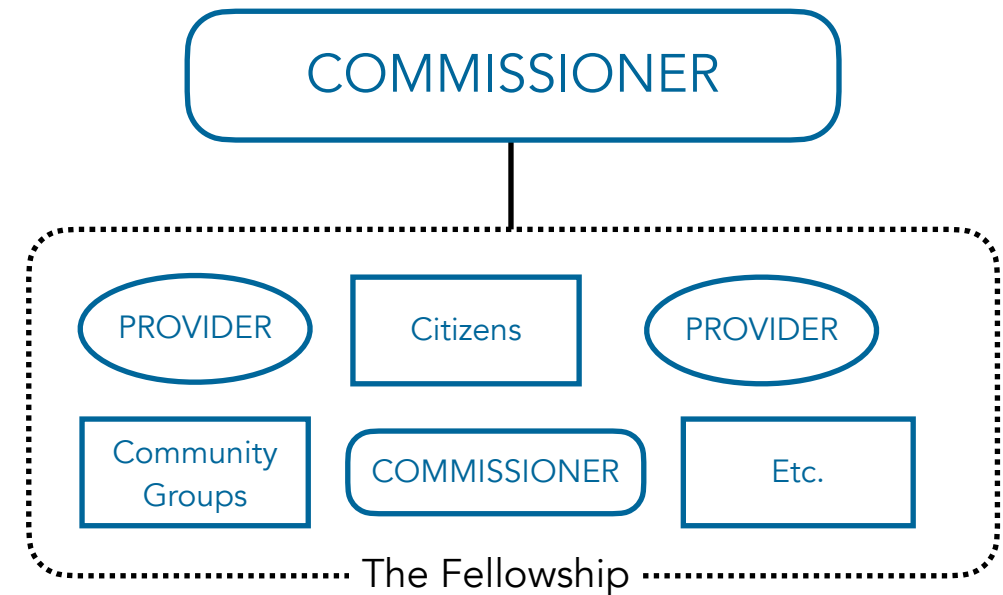
A form of contract...

TRADITIONAL CONTRACTS



- Commissioner acts as 'apart from' / co-ordination.
- Separate contracts with each provider.
- Separate objectives, incentives, etc for each provider.
- Focus on how performance will be judged.
- Emphasis on how disputes will be handled.
- Contracts provide tight specifications.
- Change is slow / hard.

FELLOWSHIP AGREEMENTS



- Commissioner acts as 'a part of' / stewardship.
- One agreement.
- Shared purpose, principles and priorities.
- Focus on how rapid learning and adaptation will happen.
- Emphasis on how mutuality and transparency will be maintained.
- Agreement describes behaviours and capabilities in relationship to a shared purpose.
- Rapid and continuous change is expected.

A vehicle for sharing risks, responsibilities, opportunities and benefits...

The key attributes of a Fellowship Agreement which enable this are:

- Shared purpose, principles and governance.
- Unanimous, principle based and 'best for purpose' decision making.
- No blame and no dispute.
- Integrated priority setting and review.
- Transparent, shared financial and commercial framework that is appropriate to the purpose and composition of the Fellowship.

A clear and common purpose...

The key attributes of a Fellowship's purpose are:

- Not fixed forever; open to evolution as circumstances and insight emerge.
- Describing an outcome or outcomes that are of value rather than activities.
- Not anchored to the needs of any one stakeholder or institution; framed around value to 'the world out there' - a social purpose.
- Clear and easily understood not cluttered with technical language.

NB these 4 tests of a good purpose statement can be useful.

Shared and explicit principles and behaviours...

The essential principles and behaviours for a Fellowship are to individually and collectively show:

- **Leadership** - ensuring that what really matters is always what really matters here.
- **Fellowship** - ensuring that what really matters here includes what really matters to each other.

Underpinning these can be other - typically coproduced - principles and behaviours, which aim to add clarity. A good example are the Lankelly Chase "System Behaviours", which are:

PERSPECTIVE	POWER	PARTICIPATION
• We will view ourselves as part of an interconnected whole. • We will view each other as resourceful and bringing strengths. • We will hold a shared a vision.	• We will share power and actively promote equality of voice. • Decision-making is devolved. • Accountability is mutual.	• We will have open, trusting relationships to enable effective dialogue. • Leadership is collaborative and promoted at every level. • Feedback and collective learning will drive adaptation.

A shared commitment to developing specific capabilities...

Fellowship Agreements benefit when the partners can explicitly identify a few core capabilities that, if developed systematically, will materially improve outcomes for people and communities. What these capabilities are will depend wholly on the scope and purpose of the Fellowship but examples for an asset based community focussed Fellowship might be:

- “To make it easier for everyone to know, grow and show their own strengths, those of others and those of communities”; or
- “To nurture valuable connections between people and communities”.

Identifying capabilities such as these - and creating an explicit commitment to them - significantly improves focus and prioritisation. It also provides an anchor point for partners to review progress and so to innovate and test new ideas for how the capabilities can be achieved and improved.

Summary

Fellowship Agreements are a useful way to hardwire:

- Shared and explicit commitment;
- To working together in ways that promote and maintain mutuality;
- Through clear and shared priorities;
- Towards a common purpose;
- While maintaining the ability to rapidly flex and respond to new insights and changing circumstances.

In so much as this, they provide a useful mechanism to sustain, scale and spread the practice of achieving results through relationships and are therefore helpful in achieving the shift to **Commissioning 2.0**.



Notes:

Notes:



“There are four purposes for improvement: easier, better, faster and cheaper. These four goals appear in the order of priority.”

Shigeo Shingo

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