

# 'Early Action': how to instigate a new policy paradigm

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# Early Action

- Ongoing campaign for more Early Action within social policy
- Idea of Early Action in a nutshell: tackle problems earlier rather than later (fence vs ambulance)
- Preventative interventions vs acute interventions
- Claims made relate to cost savings, improved outcomes, reduced human costs, strengthened communities and economic growth

# Attention and commentary

- High profile attention and reports:
- Graham Allen MP, 2011, 2012
- The Commission on the Future of public Services in Scotland, 2011
- Public Accounts Select Committee, 2013
- New Economics Foundation, 2012
- Nesta, 2012
- National Audit Office, 2013

# Early Action Task Force (EATF)

- Leaders from different sectors, led by Community Links and their Chief Executive David Robinson
- The EATF helped set the Early Action Funders Alliance (including Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Barrow Cadbury and Legal Education Foundation)

# Early Action Neighbourhood Fund (EANF)

*"A key overarching hope is that, if successful, the programme will have produced evidence and learning that will encourage statutory and other agencies to change their strategies, systems, skills and culture to prioritise early action"*

(EANF)

# Early Action Neighbourhood Fund (EANF)

- Initial £5m Early Action Neighbourhood Fund, funding three 'transformational' pilot projects with the following aims:
  - *to test local approaches to early action and prevention in public services*
  - *to build readiness in communities to prevent problems becoming acute*
- Three initial projects to act as testing beds and catalysts for wider change
- To develop a better case for prevention and early action among commissioners and funders - 'catalyse a change'
- Evaluation carried out by CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University

# The evaluation

- Early stages: stakeholder interviews and data scoping
- Emerging findings on the strategic intentions of EATF / EA funding alliance
- Interest in the strategic agency of these actors
- Looking into potential theoretical perspectives and reflecting on initial data (but very early days!)

# Aims of our project

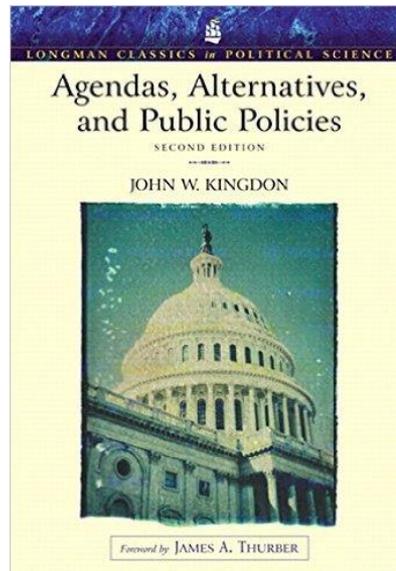
- Overall, to make sense of the attempts of the Early Action Task force and others to bring about widespread, systematic change to public services; a paradigm shift
- How are the EATF and EANF intending to bring about this change?
- What are the main mechanisms through which major paradigm shifts occur
- How likely is it to be successful? Is this part of the future of the voluntary sector?

# Theoretical perspectives

- Identified three theories that might help:
- Agenda setting – particularly Kingdon (1995)
- Field theory – particularly Fligstein and McAdam (2011)
- Institutional logics – drawing on multiple authors
- Each matches to the evidence in different ways, but conflicts in others

# Kingdon's policy windows

- Agenda setting - why do policy makers pay serious attention to some subjects and not others?
- Three streams: problems, policies and politics



# Problem stream

- A problem need to be recognised as urgent and needing a solution
- Helped by a focussing event, feedback or changes to trusted indicators

# Policy stream

- Field experts and specialists in a policy community: academics, consultants, bureaucrats, think-tanks, interest groups, etc.
- Long softening up process: floating and airing ideas, speeches, reports, events and debates
- Ideas are generated, debated and developed, with the most coherent, feasible and attractive surviving
- Key individuals are policy entrepreneurs, who have the resources to drive an idea forwards

# Political stream

- Public opinion, election results, or political administrations.
- The political 'climate' must be right for a solution to be seen as a viable match for a pressing problem

# Policy windows

- The three streams can converge over short periods called policy windows.
- Solutions are matched to problems, or vice versa, and the political climate makes this match possible

# Applied to EANF - problem stream

- Deficit means reductions in spending, but public demands quality of services and there is rising demand
- Attempts to link preventative action due to its potential cost savings, with some success, particularly locally
- Difficulties: lack of evidence or certainty, need to 'double fund' acute and preventative services
- Preventative services probably won't save money in the short term, and longer term is uncertain

# EANF board member

- *"I'm sorry to say, cost, cost benefit I think is a really big... however much people want it to be about 'better', I think in the current climate it really is still going to be about cost savings and cost savings probably over a fairly short time scale."*

# Applied to EANF - policy stream

- The work of the EATF, including the EANF, fits well with the ongoing advocacy work within a policy stream
- Community Links, David Robinson, and the EATF more widely can be seen as policy entrepreneurs
- Based on the number of commentators in favour of preventative action, this work appears moderately successful

# EATF member

- “David Robinson convening a small group of funders...and I suspect the idea came out of that. And I was on that group, because we’re interested in EA..”
- “We’ve known of David Robinson, senior people have known him for a long time, and were very impressed with his approach, so we were very warm to supporting this new initiative”

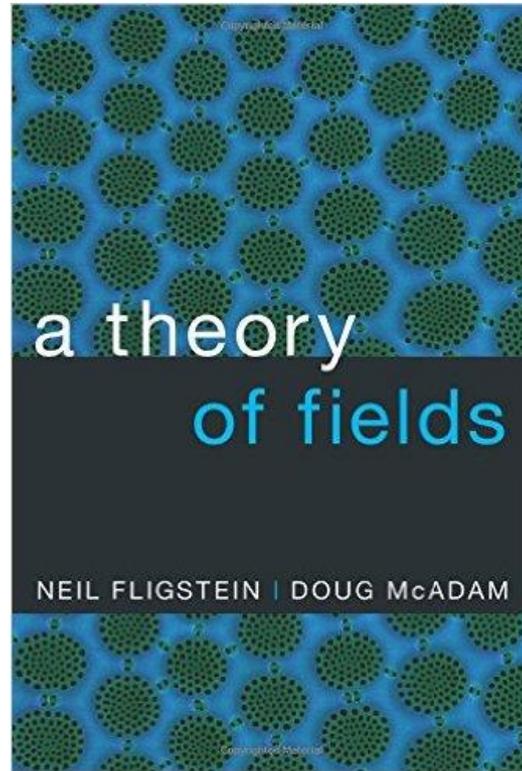
# Applied to EANF - politics stream

- The EANF claimed that prevention featured in the Labour and Lib Dem 2015 manifestos, and it has gained some resonance in Scotland
- Nationally attempts to sway the Conservative government may be drowned out by bigger agendas such as austerity and outsourcing services
- Locally the picture may be more amenable

# Applied to EANF - policy windows

- **Policy window / chance of success** – policy work seems strong but link to austerity problem arguably not strong enough (either too broad or too late)
- Politics unlikely to change much soon.
- Problem definition and political compatibility may be more successful at local level

# Fligstein and McAdam's Strategic Action Fields



# What is an SAF?

- Fligstein and McAdam's theory of strategic action fields to help explain collective strategic action
- SAFs are social orders within which actors interact with knowledge of each other and a set of common understandings
- 'Conception of control' or 'dominant logic'
- Purpose of the field, official and unofficial rules, and the relationships, roles and power resources of the actors

# Power relations

- Incumbents: those with power that favour the current field conception
- Challengers have less power, aren't served as well by the status quo, but begrudgingly accept it
- Assumed that challengers want to be incumbents
- Too limited a division in practice, but highlights the idea of different roles and levels of power in a field

# Applied to EANF - Public services as a field

- EATF can be seen as operating in the very broad field of public services, though there have also been some more limited interventions (aging, early years)
- Public services as a broad field is very stable though, with extremely powerful and embedded incumbents, and huge stakes.
- Strategy may be to influence local, smaller fields to have ripple effect

# Applied to EANF - Voluntary Sector challengers?

- Not clear that EATF or funding alliance are acting self-interestedly, but it is worth noting the voluntary sector stands to gain from EA
- Alerts us to the challenge that many actors stand to lose from a shift to preventative action, and may favour the status quo (not often acknowledged as a barrier)

# Programme lead

“people that were inside of the partner organisation got quite distracted from what the EA programme offer could be and began to feel like it wasn't very different from what they already offered.

So they began to subvert inside of the system, so that essentially they were kind of blocking us. They were overtly saying that we could have access to people, but then covertly blocking us”

# Institutional Logics

*"Society is a system consisting of institutional orders and their associated logics"* (Gawer and Philips, 2013: p1083)

**Institutional logics** can help us to understand the ideas at play within the broad field of public services

- set of rules which guide field participants - their behaviour, decisions, values and beliefs (Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007)
- Set of beliefs and associated practices
- organising principles

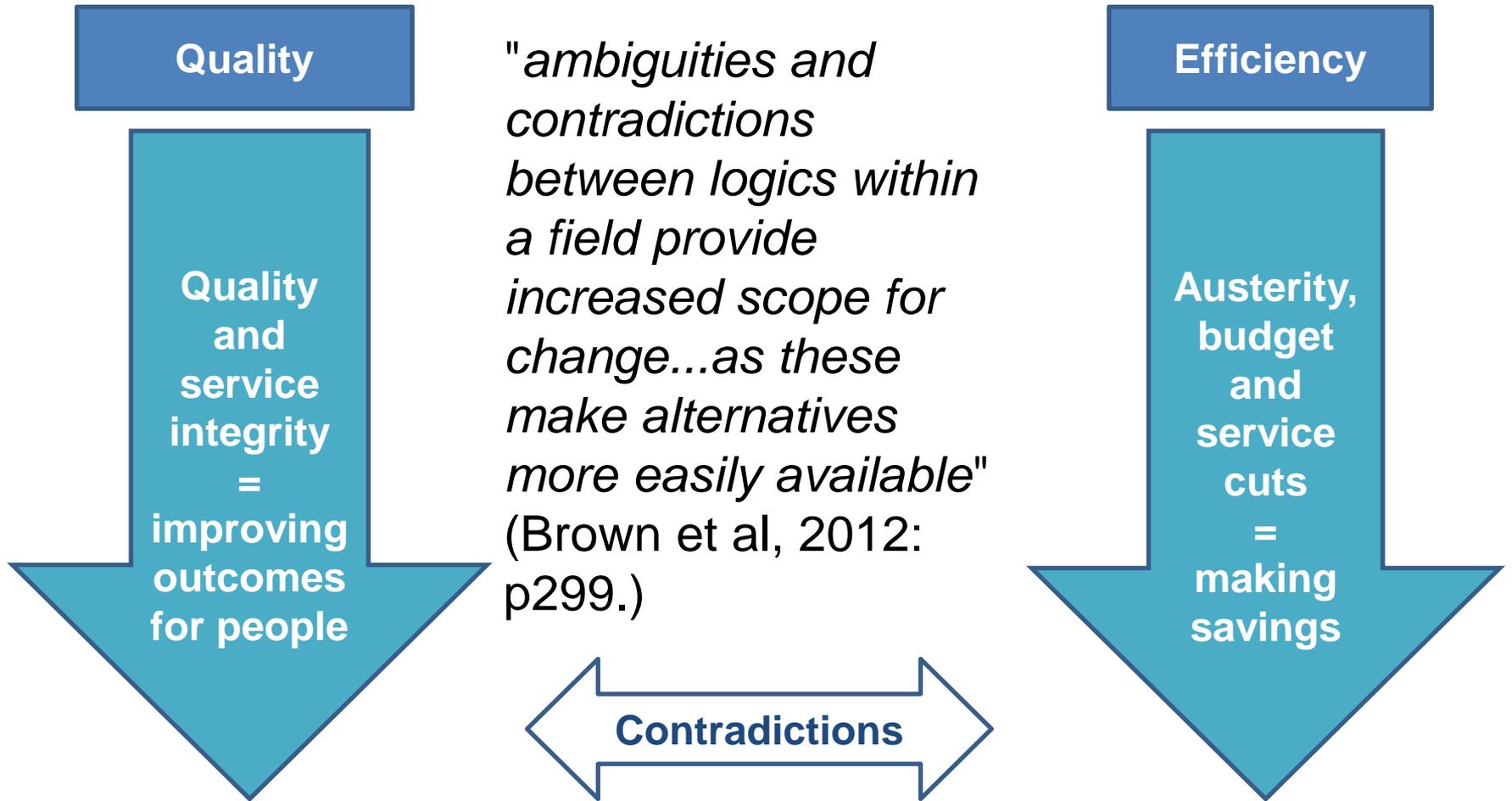
# Institutional Logics – understanding change

- Institutional Logics – a way of understanding changes to the field
- Framing problems and solutions – justifying courses of action



- Multiple logics exist simultaneously - dominance of logics can shift; logics compete

# Competing Logics of public services



# Early Action framed as a solution



- Logics helps actors cope with ambiguity by framing a solution
- Incorporating the contradictions which play out between other logics - but any attempt to resolve ambiguities?

# EANF board member

"We're about trying to facilitate and **encourage structural change** for better social justice and so we would certainly see **a shift in the way money** was spent towards being **much more preventative and early action** and away from emergency, late intervention as being absolutely consistent with our organisational approach"

# Early Action and Institutional Logics

Are the EATF, EAFA and funded projects each working to:

- shift the logic through which we understand the problems associated with public services
- frame what needs to be done differently with public services - planning, commissioning, delivery
- Propose who should be involved

# Problems

- Beyond the current crisis of cuts will the shift be sustained?
- Can the contradiction be reconciled – is Early Action sufficient?

*"For us as an organisation we're a Local Authority, we are now running at 50% less budget than we've had previously in other historical years, 50% less funding to do the same job, and better, than what we've done in the past"*

(EANF local programme partner)

# Problems

- Measuring success – whose quality criteria?

*“It may be that even if, say, this isn’t cheaper, it is much better, so we might want to pick out what the success stories are and advocate for those”* (EANF Board member)

*“If I’m brutally honest, everybody says ‘no it’s not [about cost] but I mean obviously it is costing us a huge amount of local authority budget...but no, it was never ever supposed to be about the money”* (EANF programme partner)

- Are actors at a local level consciously working to instigate a shift in logics – or just get the work done...

# So how do we understand..

- No single theory fits perfectly in terms of explaining it all
- They all help to explain something about the actions / behaviours of key players and the barriers they face
- Is it coherent to combine theories from different disciplines?

# Is Early Action the future?

- It has had some successes as a concept – directly and indirectly
- There are problems – particularly an inherent contradiction between cost saving and changing the way services are delivered
- How and when will we know if it is working?