

Case Study:

Herts and West Essex Integrated Care System

Systems Leaders Group Development



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Introduction

Throughout 2021-22, health and care organisations were responding to the challenges of pandemic and recovery and building upon collaborative platforms that continues a journey towards Integrated Care Systems.

Herts and West Essex (HWE) Integrated Care System (ICS) health and care leaders identified that to thrive in this environment, the ability to respond to changing conditions and adapt the way the system is lead is essential. The pace of change highlighted by the proposed legislative changes on integrated care created the opportunity for system leaders to reconsider how development of the ICS is approached.

Whilst the infrastructure, governance and the design of the ICS progressed, the need to adopt a developmental programme within the ICS Systems Leaders Group; the “engine room” of the ICS was identified in order to continue to effectively lead the ICS development journey. The group therefore embarked upon a systems OD journey, where 19 health and care Chief Executives and Directors explored and co-created future ways of systems leadership and working within a systems OD developmental framework.



Background

[HWE ICS](#) is well developed and has historically experienced good ways of working. The ICS is split over two large local authorities; Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council. As legislation progressed through parliament for the formation of ICSs, there had been some debate concerning the boundaries across Essex, which could have impacted the partner organisations within HWE ICS and therefore the makeup of the System Leaders Group, however, clarification of these boundaries issues was finalised in July 2021, enabling renewed focus on the ICS development journey.

Work, therefore commenced in the autumn of 2021 to co-design a systems OD approach, with the first System Leaders workshops commencing in November 2021. This was a dynamic period for ICS establishment and concurred at a time of senior leadership turnover, particularly for NHS CEOs. New CEO appointments were made for three of the five NHS Partners formally based within the ICS footprint, the last of these postholders commencing role in July 22. The transitional backdrop to this work is a particular challenge for ICS development.

Approach

From a development perspective, the Systems Leaders Group supported the ethos that adopting an approach to 'organisational and systems health' provides a key advantage, especially within current climates. Shifting the focus to 'organisational and systems health' enables a sharper focus on delivery of ICS performance today, while ensuring the broader system can adapt and renew for an uncertain future. Initial mobilisation of the programme took place in September 2021. A series of conversations were held with each system leader to help inform the programme, content and sequencing of key aspects.

Participants were also asked to complete the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict tool, as part of the pre-work.

An overall programme was co-designed with the HWE senior leaders, comprising a series of workshops and group coaching interventions. The aim of the programme was to co-create a high performing System Leaders Group with aligned systems thinking and clarity for the ICS, its people and partners.



The overarching framework for success had a strong evidence base and a data driven approach to embedding 'organisational health' through a high performing team. Research shows that leaders and organisations who balance delivery today with the health of the organisation are more sustainable in the longer term, with more engaged and motivated people delivering better results and outcomes for patients and residents.

System Leaders workshops were held in November 2021 and January 2022. Given the pandemic, this was the first opportunity for several system leaders to meet face to face. The aims of the sessions were to:

- feedback the outcome of the initial diagnostic
- explore Thomas-Kilmann and the team snapshot profile for managing conflict
- begin defining the role, purpose and vision for the group and its place in the ICS governance structure
- shape ways of working and the development of a set of operating principles or team charter with underpinning behaviours.

Participants

Members of the HWE Systems Leaders Group are CEOs and Directors from Hospital, Community, Mental Health, Clinical Commissioning Group and Councils/Social Care. In total there were 19 participants within the programme, contributing to the co-design, delivery approach and within the interventions/workshops.

Outcomes

Three core aspects of ICS development were considered by the System Leaders Group:

1. Impact:

A focus on exploring and codesigning future ways of working within the ICS. Working with emergent operating models to focus on vision & strategy and importantly the degree of autonomy, decision making & self-management.

2. Performance:

Enabling effective and high performing teams will be critical to future success. Simply doing more of the same isn't a viable option to maintain and increase performance and productivity within the ICS and across the health and care system.

3. Culture:

Creating psychology safety and developing trust among individuals and teams will enable the level of changes required and the pace demanded. In doing so, creating space for innovative thinking and continuous improvement is vital to a commitment culture.

Operating principles for the HWE System Leaders Group were underpinned by a framework for the HWE Systems Leaders Group to collectively focus upon four areas for:

- Cohesion
 - Alignment
 - Clarity
 - Culture
-



Learning and Insights

Senior system leaders need dedicated development space to consider the relational, cultural and architectural implications of new ways of working that shift from organisational sovereignty to collective responsibilities and accountabilities within an ICS. Whilst the formal processes and structures of ICS development provide the framework for decision-making and assurance, they do not offer senior system leaders the less formal environment to build trust, relationships, and psychological safety across health and care sectors.

Three CEOs within the ICS have left organisations as a result of retirement/change of role and further leadership changes have occurred during ICS transition. Changes to the makeup of senior system leaders impact the ability to progress systems development. This is currently not an uncommon occurrence across health and care organisations, where leaders have postponed retirements and movement during pandemic and as legislative changes for ICS statute have progressed. Systems development is therefore an on-going need that will require flexible and adaptable approaches to accommodate changes in senior leaders and multi-faceted interventions, to enable on-boarding and induction into systems responsibilities.

During this programme there was also systems OD for CCG transition and planning for ICB Board development. The complex nature of ICSs and multiple levels of subsidiarity results in the need for ICSs to manage a range of systems OD interventions concurrently. Making the connections to these separate but related interventions is imperative to ensure a joined-up approach to ICS development.



Observations and Next Steps

The Senior Leaders changes has enabled a stock take and refresh to this development approach.

To maintain the focus on system leadership development whilst new CEOs take up roles, HWE ICS have continued with less structured development time, focussing more on the development of stronger interpersonal links and thus building trust and relationships, with the intention to restart more structured support in autumn 2022.

The programme will re-commence over the Summer 2022 and will coordinate with wider ICS development workstreams.

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