

Considering Context in Health Systems Research



Lucy Gilson

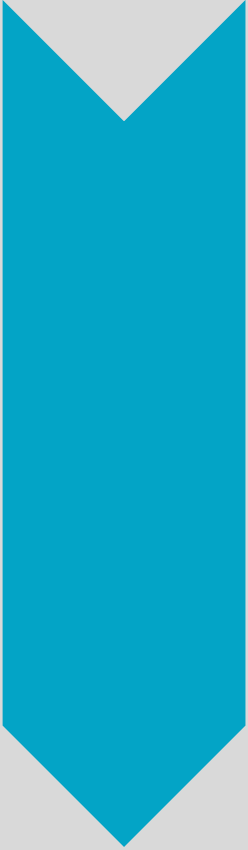
University of Cape Town/
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine



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HSR: key questions

- 
- What interventions can strengthen health systems & promote health?
 - How can successful interventions be scaled up - made more widely available?

The Challenge for HSR

'...the context specificity of [this] research constitutes a major challenge....

it is extremely difficult to draw generalizable conclusions...'

AHPSR, 2007

Addressing the challenge

1. What features of context need to be considered by HSR?
2. How can these contextual features be considered?
3. How can policy lessons be drawn from HSR?



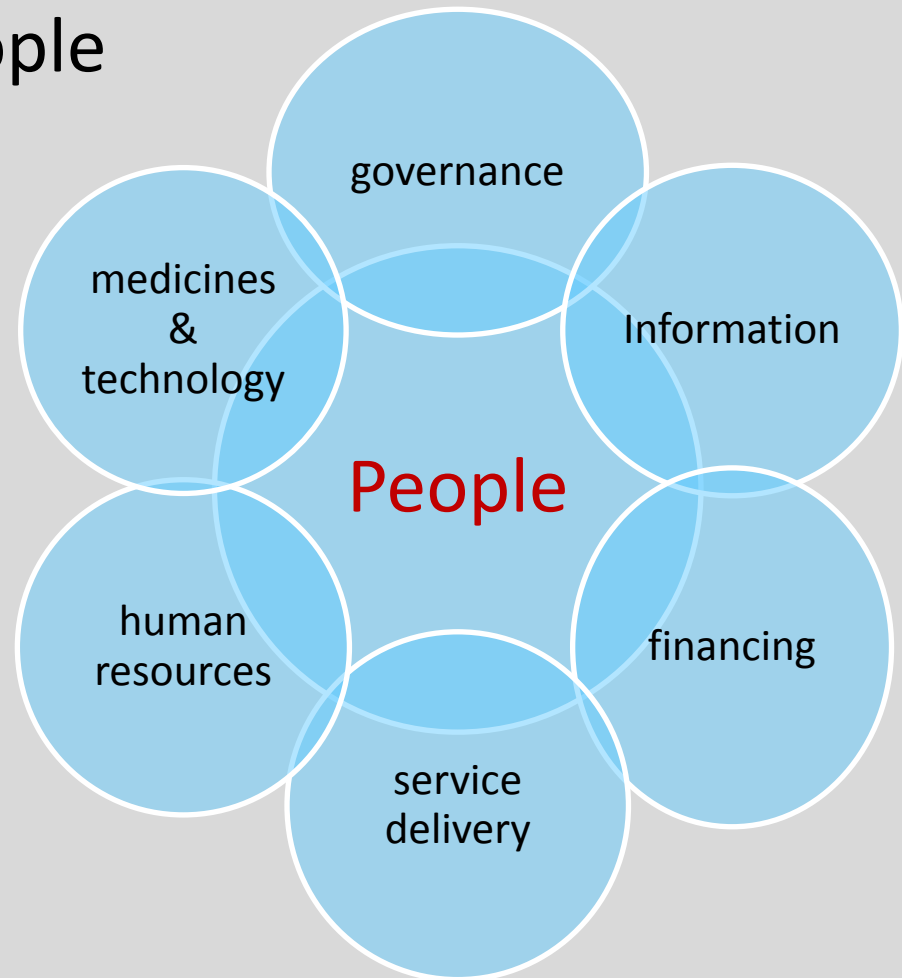
Recognising health system complexity

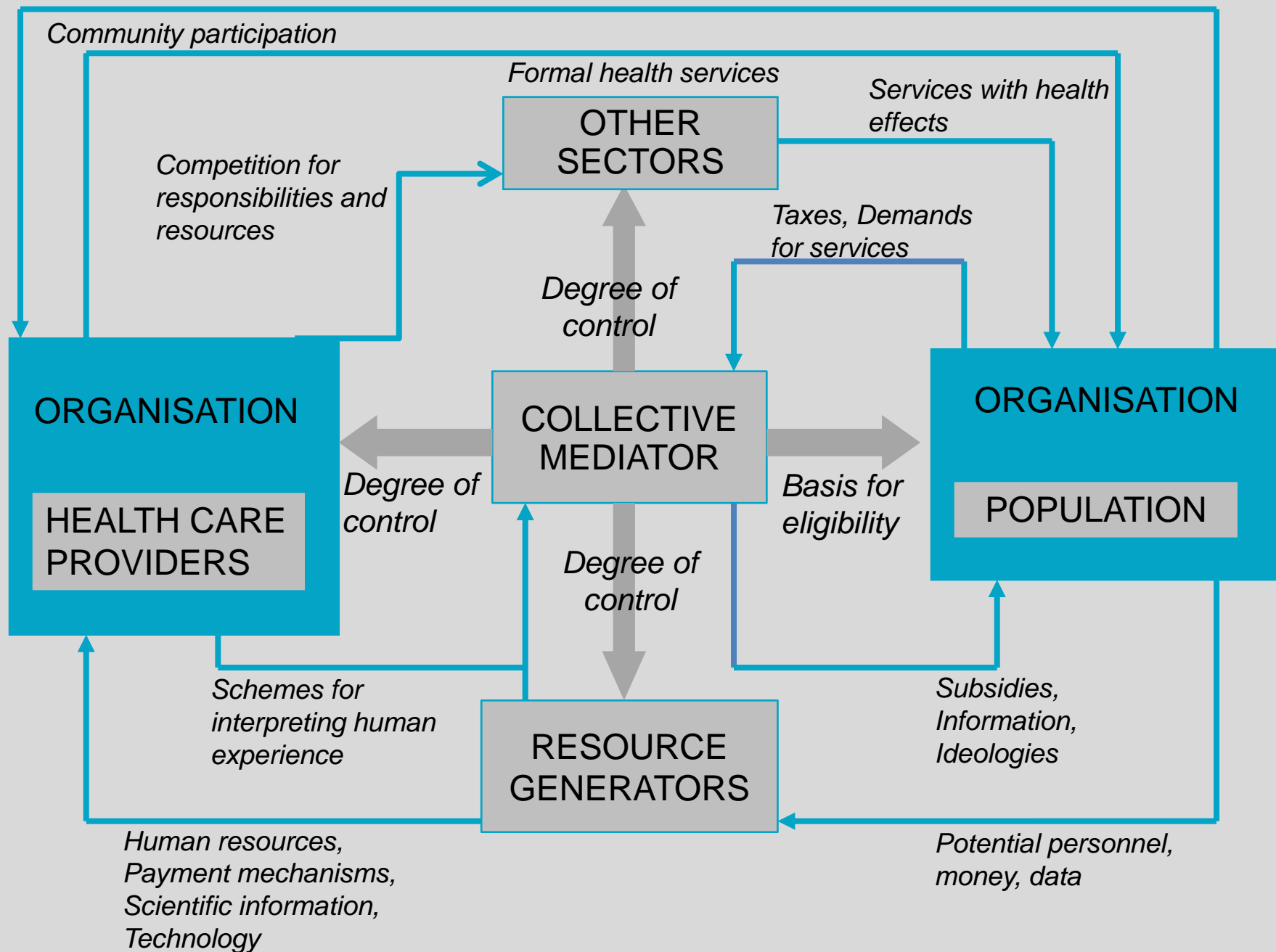
Recognising complexity

Health systems are dynamic & interconnected systems at whose heart are people

‘It is the multiple relationships and interactions among the building blocks ... that convert these blocks into a system’

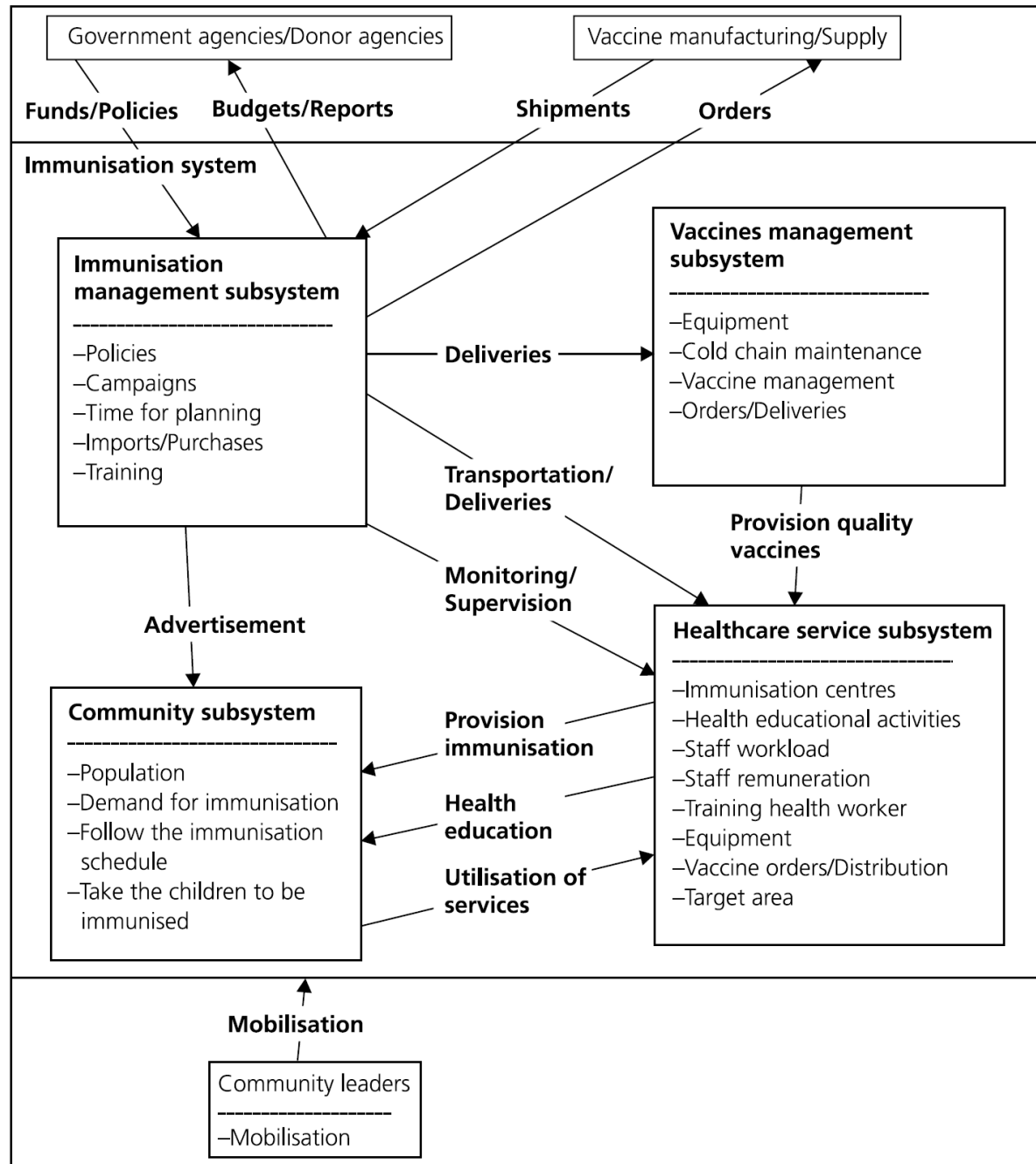
De Savigny & Adams, 2009





Recognising complexity

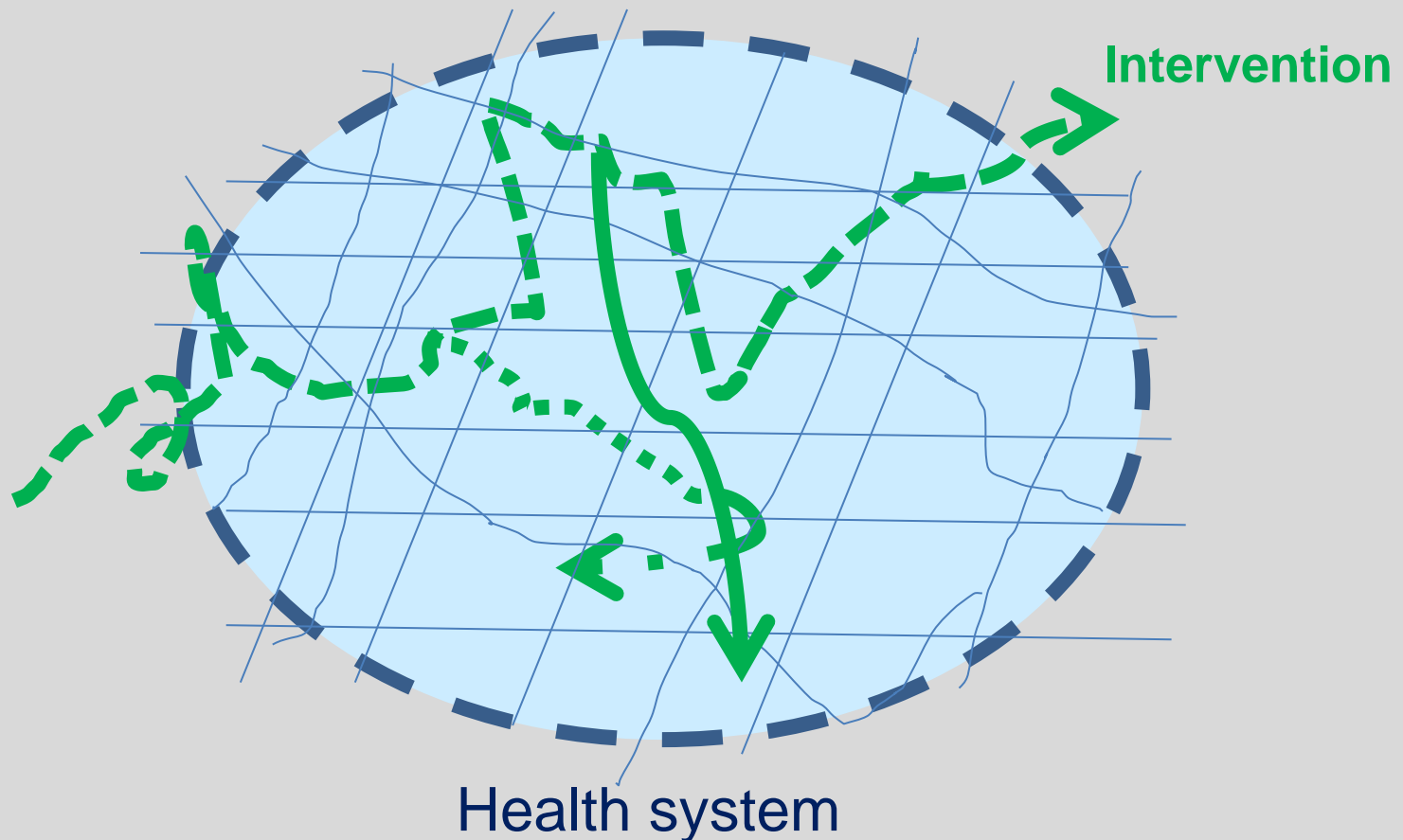
Health system interventions involve long chains of implementation



*The Ugandan immunization programme:
Rwashana et al. 2009*

Recognising complexity

Health system interventions have unpredictable paths of implementation



Recognising complexity

Human Resources for Health



Open Access

Research

Health sector reforms and human resources for health in Uganda and Bangladesh: mechanisms of effect

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The Dynamic Responses Model

Health worker
dynamic
responses

De-facto
system

De-jure
system

*Health system as
experienced by
patients*

*Formal health
system*

Health system complexity

Rooted in the people &
relationships that are at heart
of every health system and
intervention within it



Features of context relevant to HSR

Context matters: interpreting impact findings in child survival evaluations

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Three sets of baseline context features mediate between health system interventions & outcomes:

- a) population & health features
- b) other programmes/interventions with similar goals
- c) characteristics of the health system

Victora et al. 2005

Policy interventions that attract nurses to rural areas: a multicountry discrete choice experiment

D Blaauw,^a E Erasmus,^a N Pagaiya,^b V Tangcharoensathein,^b K Mullei,^c S Mudhune,^c C Goodman,^c M B M Lagarde^d

Objective To evaluate the relative effectiveness of different policies in attracting nurses to rural areas in Kenya, South Africa and Thailand using data from a discrete choice experiment (DCE).

Methods A labelled DCE was designed to model the relative effectiveness of both financial and non-financial strategies to attract nurses to rural areas. Data were collected from over 300 graduating nursing students in each country. Mixed logit models were used for analysis and to predict the uptake of rural posts under different incentive combinations.

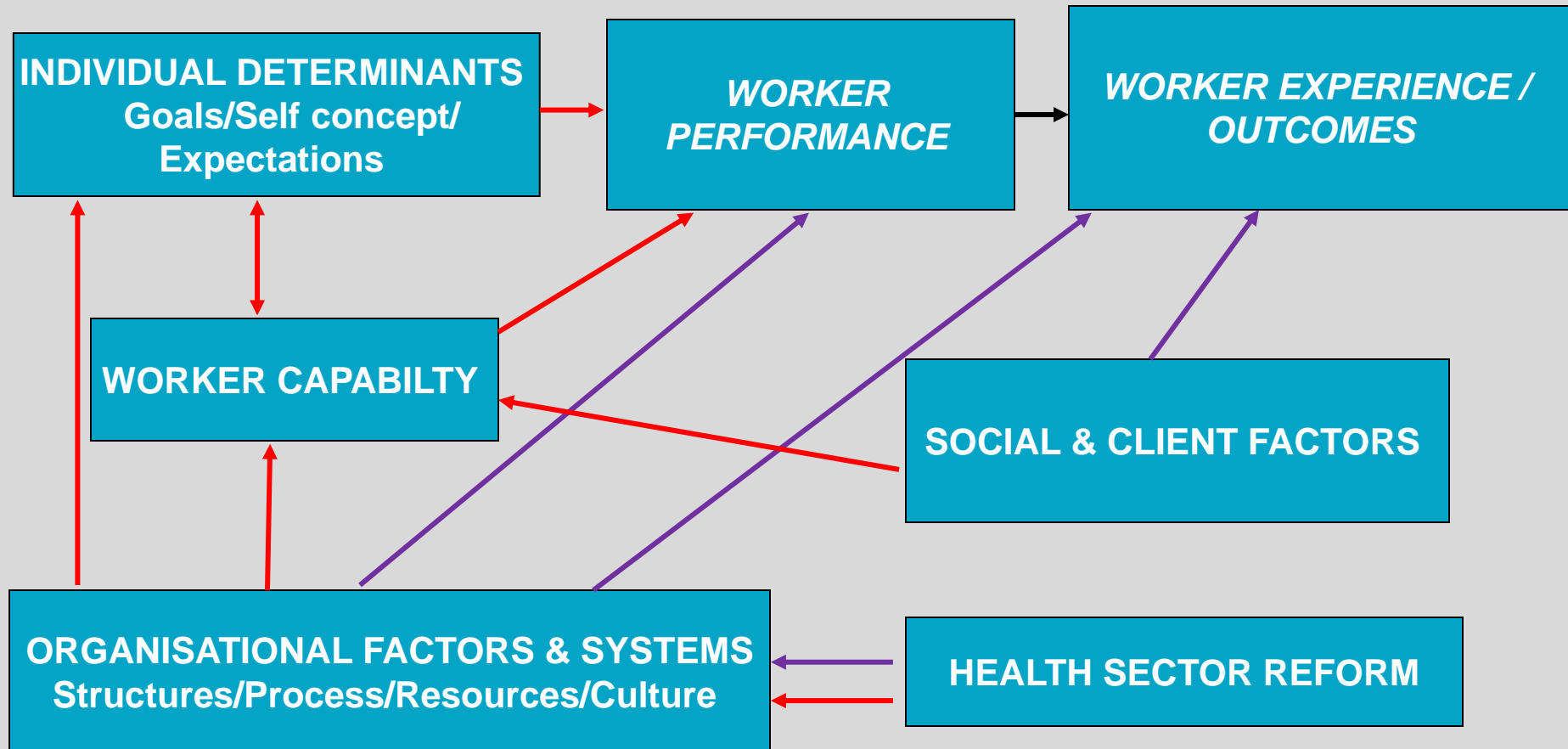
Findings Nurses' preferences for different human resource policy interventions varied significantly between the three countries. In Kenya and South Africa, better educational opportunities or rural allowances would be most effective in increasing the uptake of rural posts, while in Thailand better health insurance coverage would have the greatest impact.

Conclusion DCEs can be designed to help policy-makers choose more effective interventions to address staff shortages. Intervention packages tailored to local conditions are more likely to be effective than standardized global approaches.

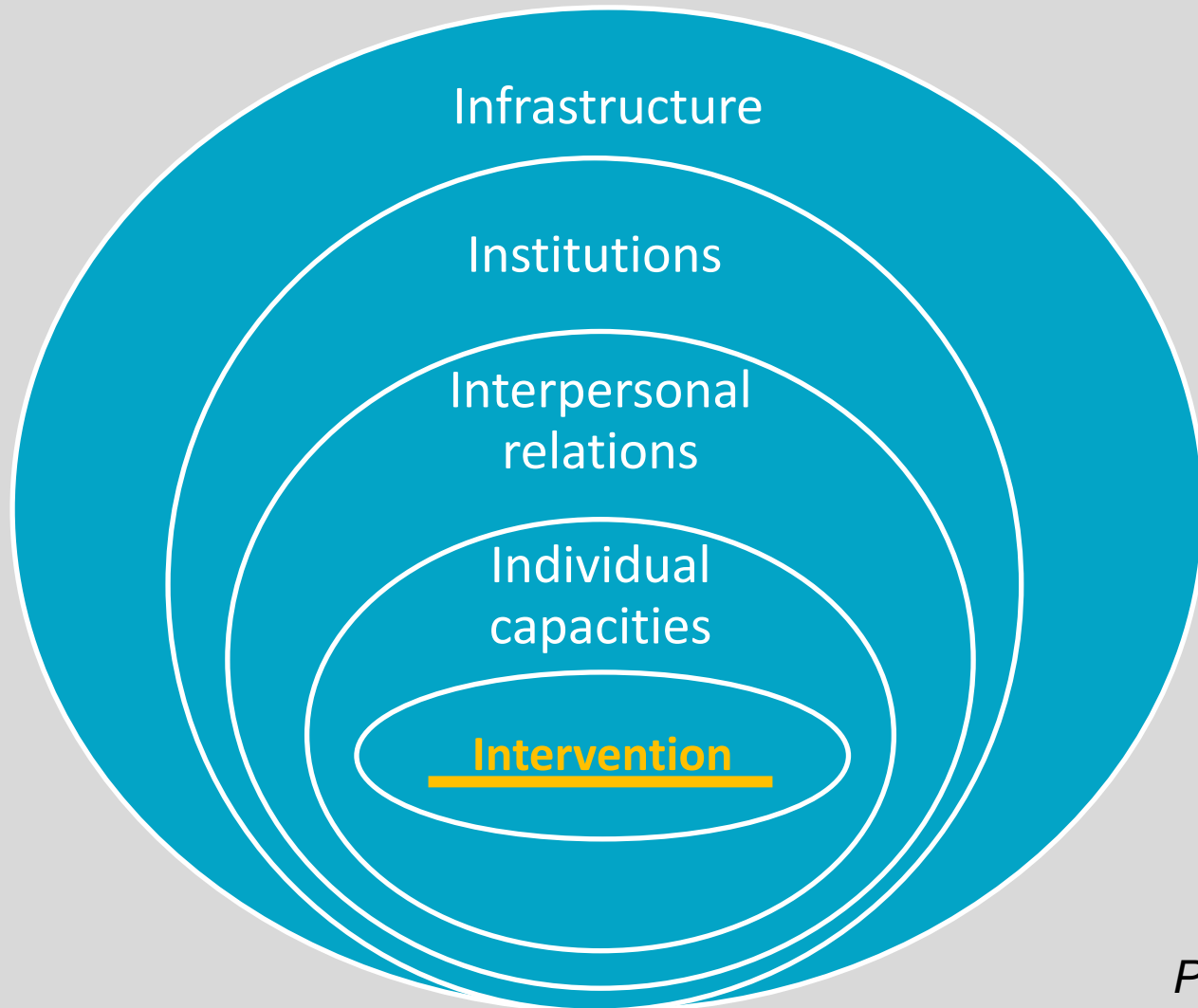
‘...it has been shown that different countries require completely different combinations of human resource policies’

Une traduction en français de ce résumé figure à la fin de l'article. Al final del artículo se facilita una traducción al español. الترجمة العربية لهذه الخلاصة في نهاية النص الكامل لهذه المظلة.

Influences over health worker performance



The critical realist view of context







- 1) Work in public health
- 2) Live in South Africa:
high HIV burden, large
treatment programme



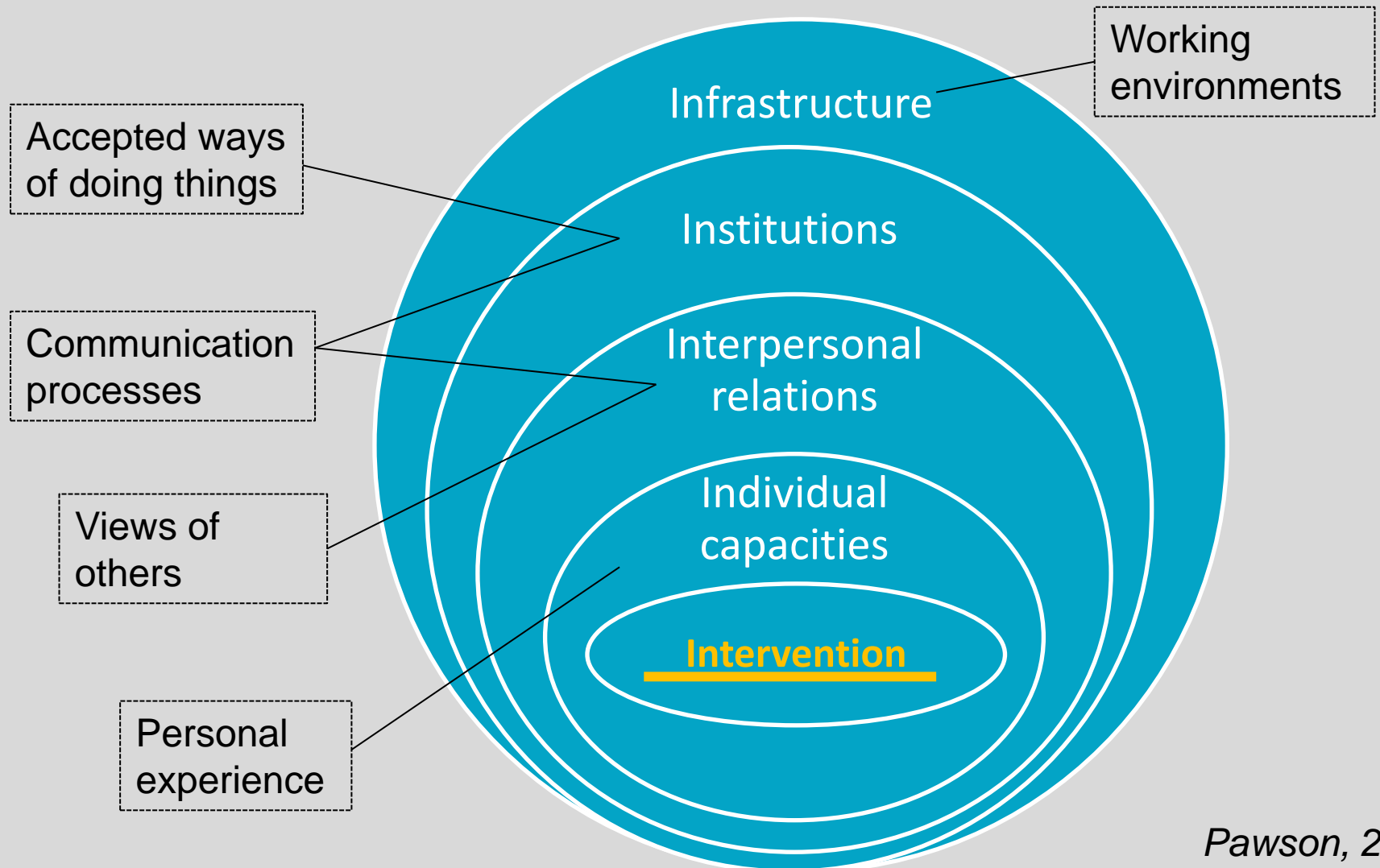
Interpretive acts underpin intervention implementation

2003 South African CHW policy

Lehmann & Matwa, 2008

- seen primarily as the '*stipend policy*'
- not fully implemented
- access undermined

Interpretive acts reflect context





HSR strategies for considering context

Overall approach

Inductive & multi-method research programmes
comprising quantitative and qualitative
analysis

Atun and Menabde, 2008

New approaches to evaluation



A
standardised
set of
activities

*A standard set of
steps in a change
process*

*A critical event in the
history of a system*

The PRISM study

- Primary & community based care to promote maternal health after childbirth
- Evaluation:
 - Consider *system context*
 - Prospective & retrospective data collection
 - impact logs to develop timeline
 - inter-organisational network surveys
 - field worker diaries
 - key informant interviews

Hawe et al. 2004b

Using case studies

‘a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence’

Robert Yin



Pergamon

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PII: S0277-9536(98)00168-3

Lee et al, 1998

FAMILY PLANNING POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN
EIGHT LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES: A COMPARATIVE
POLICY ANALYSIS

KELLEY LEE*, LOUISIANA LUSH, GILL WALT and JOHN CLELAND
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Health Policy Unit, Keppel Street,
London WC1E 7HT, U.K.

**A cross-country case
study:**

**What factors influence
the development of
strong family planning
programmes?**

- 4 pairs of countries: each matched on socio-economic characteristics but of different programme strength
- Comparative analysis within & across pairs
- Three factors enable development of effective FP programmes:
 - a) coalitions among policy elites
 - b) spreading policy risk
 - c) organisational & financial stability of programme

Generalising from case studies

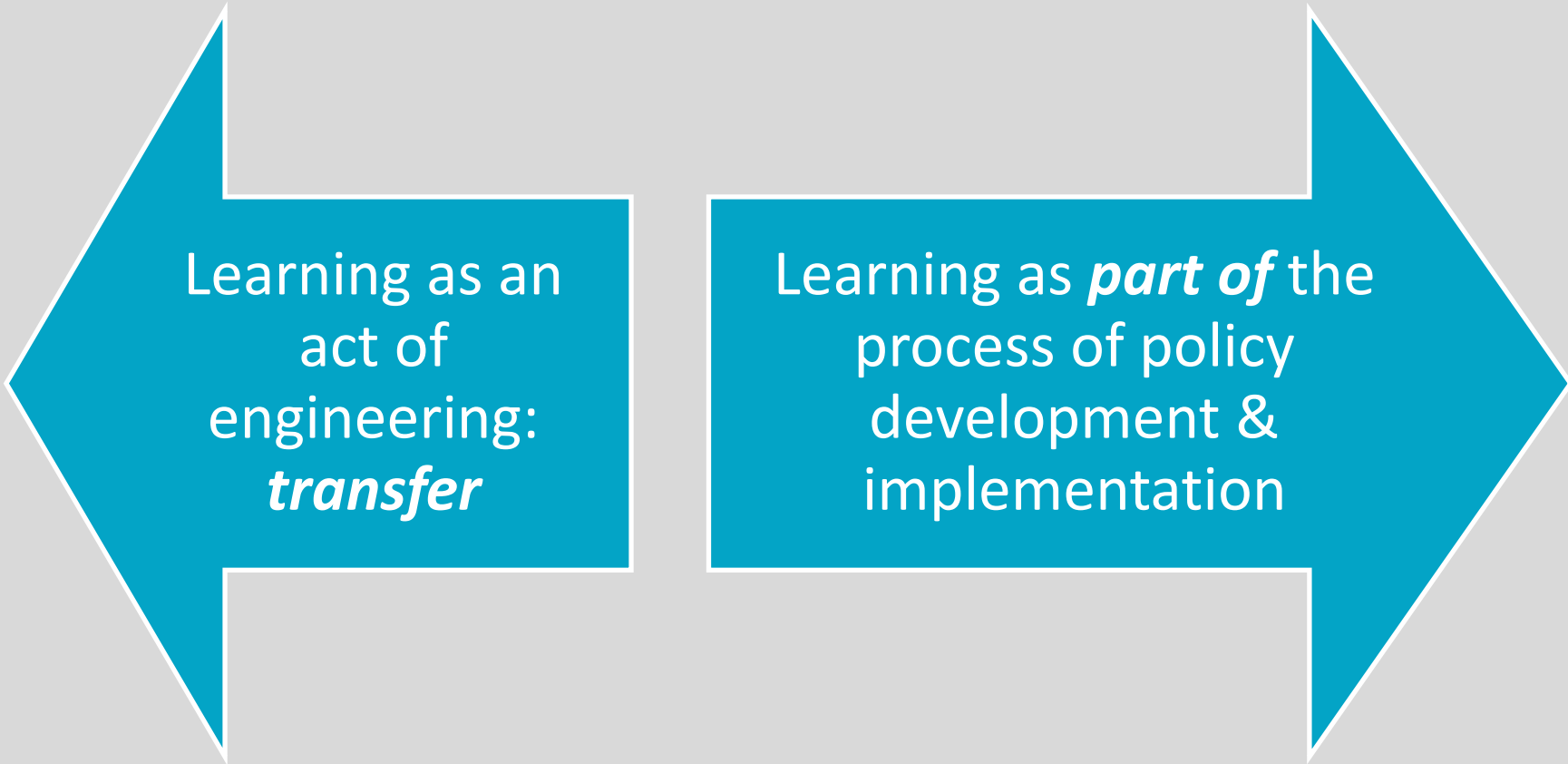
Analytic generalisation:

- Develop 'theoretical insights' by comparative analysis across multiple cases
- These insights are universal enough to have relevance in other settings



Drawing policy lessons

What is learning?



Learning as an
act of
engineering:
transfer

Learning as *part of* the
process of policy
development &
implementation

What is a policy lesson?

- Not a photocopy of an intervention elsewhere
- An adaptation of interventions observed in other contexts
- Developed by 're-contextualising' theoretical insights from elsewhere within a new context

Rose, 2005

Research to support learning

*Critical
reflection*

*Learning
through
doing*



Action
Research

The job of the health system researcher

*'...is to illuminate the processes of change and experience that they observe...
to make a contribution ... to the social process of understanding or promoting change.'*

Barnes et al., 2005

