

How do complex systems change?

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A critical realist study of the influence of psychological empowerment on practitioners' engagement with systemic innovations in the child protection system

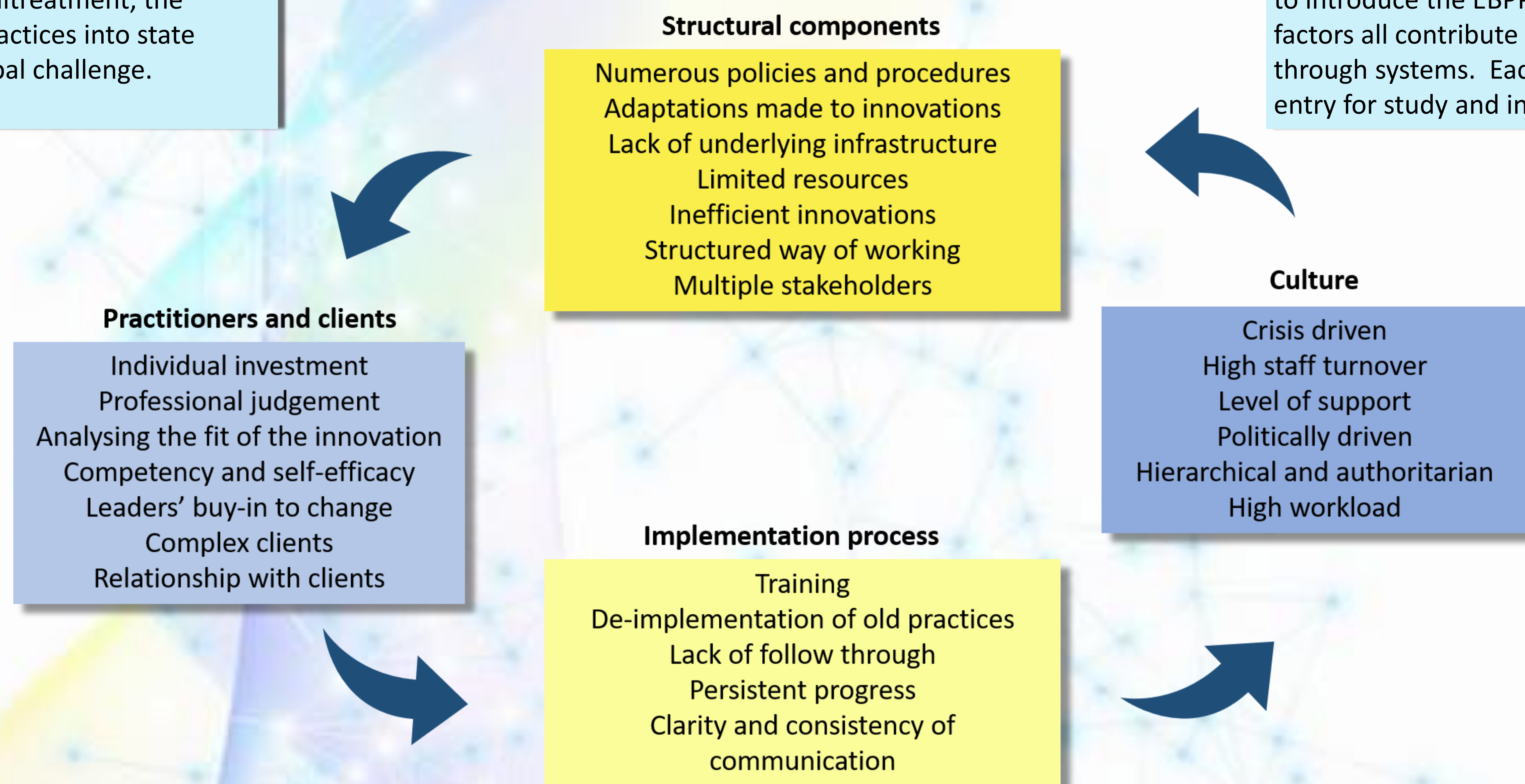


Why it matters?

Despite a range of reforms in the last two decades, the rate of children receiving child protection services continues to rise. In 2018-2019 170,000 children required child protection intervention across Australia. Although a range of evidence-based practice and policies (EBPPs) have demonstrated success in reducing maltreatment, the integration of these practices into state systems remains a global challenge.

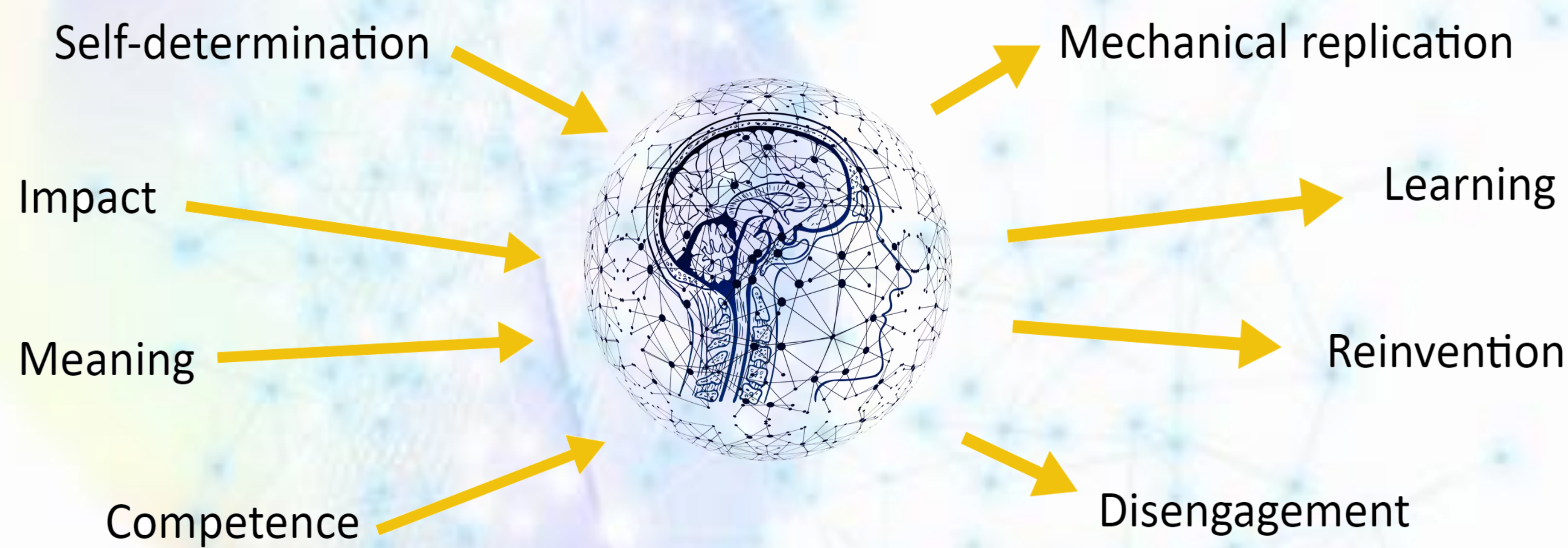
What we already know

There are numerous factors that have been found to influence the use of EBPPs in child protection systems. These factors are broadly categorized into: the structures within system, the cultural way of working in child protection, the individuals practicing and receiving services, and the process used to introduce the EBPP to the system. These factors all contribute to how EBPPs move through systems. Each component offers an entry for study and intervention.



What we are seeking to understand

This study explores how individual practitioners choose to engage with an EBPP and have it influence their practice. A range of responses have been theorised, including where a practitioner disengages from the EBPP, reinvents the EBPP to fit with their previous style of working, follows the instructions of the EBPP exactly, or learns and grows to fully embrace the principles behind the EBPP. Alongside analysing these factors independently, the study will also explore psychological attributes and their influence on the choice of engagement style with EBPPs



Phase 1

- National Survey to determine:
1. How empowered do child protection practitioners feel in their role?
 2. How do child protection practitioners engage with EBPPs?
 3. Are those concepts related?

Phase 2

- Semi-structured interviews to explain:
1. How do child protection practitioners view their role when engaging with EBPPs?
 2. What are the causal mechanisms behind the results of Phase 1 data?

Phase 3:

- Analysis of data to identify:
1. Factors that influence practitioner's choice of engagement with EBPPs
 2. Practice solutions for system leaders implementing reform

References:

1. aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/child-protection
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3. Spreitzer, G. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442-1465.



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