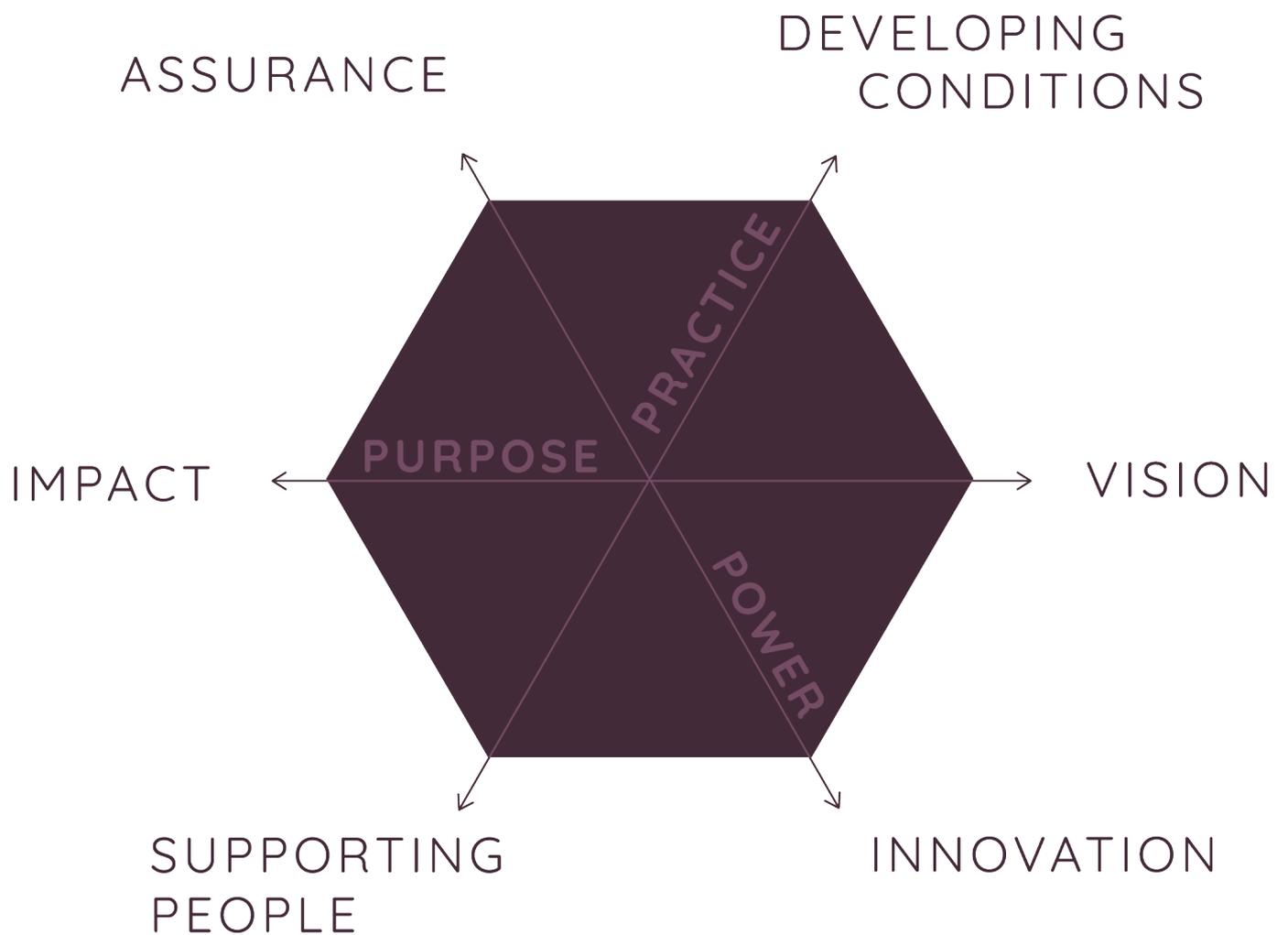


# THE TENSIONS UNDERPINNING THE THREE POWERFUL FORCES OF PURPOSE, POWER AND PRACTICE

---



## We need hold the three forces in creative tension:

### PURPOSE

The purpose of our local systems appeared to be in tension between:

1. **Providing value through impact now** - which places value on how services respond to immediate need, and how provider organisations manage demand at the 'front line'.
2. **Investing in the future** - which means assessing our value as a whole system within a longer-term horizon and assessing our ability to evolve towards a different, better and more sustainable future. This requires individuals, services and organisations to work with communities as one system, to produce value collectively.

### POWER

How power is fostered and organised pulls us in two seemingly opposite directions:

1. **Assuring**: placing power in authority in our systems to stabilise and formalise our activity, in order to be able to best assess and assure the value and effectiveness of each of our roles, processes and services.
2. **This sat in a dynamic tension with the pull to innovate**: to nurture power that can challenge and disrupt existing practices and find new and better ways of delivering value. This often meant distributing power and growing it, for example in the voluntary sector and people with lived experience.

### PRACTICE

In exploring the real and desired practice of our systems, we also saw two seemingly competing tensions:

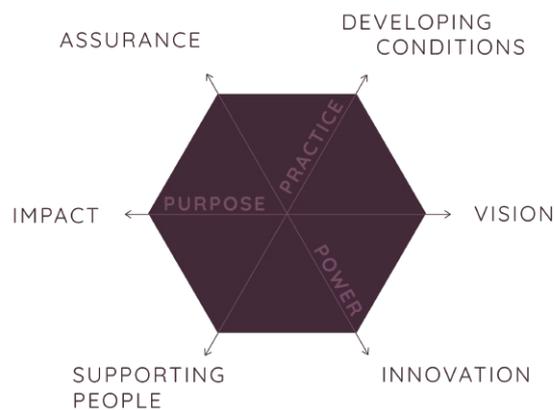
1. **The focus of practice on supporting people** - concentrating our skills, relationships and culture on making sure people's needs are met effectively and efficiently.

**This focus on meeting direct needs sat in tension with a need to create a collaborative environment** that is able to harness and nurture the role of our communities, teams, organisations and cross-organisational relationships to collectively create impact for people. This focus points to all the wider activities in the system that either nurture or undermine new perspectives and new possibilities. This includes the practice of management, leadership, commissioning and governance.

The tensions within each of these three forces do not sit in isolation from each other. For example, if we shift the **purpose** in our systems towards a different future focused vision, this pulls the focus of **power** towards disruption and innovation, which in turn pulls the focus of **practice** towards creating an environment that is able to nurture the new.

Mechanistic systems are characterised by the dominance of the demand to achieve impact now over investing in a different future vision, by the desire to provide assurance over innovation, and by the presence of siloed practitioners supporting individual service users over investment in developing the conditions within which all practitioners work.<sup>1</sup>

Relational systems, by contrast, are characterised by an enhanced interest in the possibilities that come from collectively imagining a different future vision, from innovating, and from creating environments that allow practitioners to explore new solutions. These environments are effective in nurturing and growing innovations, they recognise and try to grow the role, contribution and power of previously undervalued resources, including communities and the voluntary sector.



<sup>1</sup> For example their own mental wellbeing, their ability to collaborate/share resources and learn.

---

### A note on practice

A key element of the Living Well UK programme has been the focus it put on co-producing new shared practice in Living Well MDTs; in other words changing how clinicians, support workers and peer workers assess, plan and support those in need. But we've learnt that practice is much broader and is important at all levels of our systems. This includes paying attention to the need to:

- Create new forums such as Living Well Collaboratives that give practitioners time and space to develop their response to mental health
- Create more enabling, inclusive and future-focused governance structures
- Build relationships and a sense of shared responsibility between practitioners working in different teams and for different organisations
- Encourage and support practitioners to see themselves in and part of a whole system, rather than accountable only to their employing organisations.