

Exploring collaboration within and  
between criminal justice and welfare  
systems: The perspective of front-line  
Liaison and Diversion workers

by

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## Summary

**Background and aims.** Offender rehabilitation is a key strategy wielded by criminal justice system to engender reintegration of offenders into society (Armstrong, 2012; Ministry of Justice UK, 2013). As the vast majority of the prison population grapples with some sort of vulnerability (Sinha, 2010), judicious rehabilitation strategies have to address clusters of correlated needs and provide multifaceted solutions (Andrews & Bonta, 2016). To that end, the involvement of welfare services in the rehabilitation process has been suggested as a means to advance the state of the art forward (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Strype, Gundhus, Egge, & Ødegård, 2014).

In the England and Wales, the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services assist specifically vulnerable offenders when they are first in contact with criminal justice system by diverting them, when commensurate, to health and other care services (James, 1999). As such, L&D's objective is to engender integrated rehabilitative interventions orchestrated between criminal justice and welfare systems (Kodner & Spreuwenberg, 2002).

Over the past thirty years, L&D services have been locally funded and managed (Reed, 1992), but in 2014 the national government in England introduced a new model for the service. The policy, which among other goals pursues the standardisation of practice across the country, states that L&D services should facilitate integrated rehabilitative interventions between Criminal Justice System and Welfare Services to improve health and social care outcomes (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). However, the challenges of policy implementation (Fuglsang, 2010; Lipsky, 2010; Lippke & Wegener, 2014) as well as practice standardization (Clarke, 2013; Hill & Huppe, 2014) are widely discussed in the literature, and the introduction of a new national model for L&D services is engrossed in these discussions. Thus, the aim of this

study is to respond the over-arching question: *How is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion?*

In order to investigate the role of L&D services as a conduit of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems upon the introduction of the new national model, the aim of this study has been operationalized through two research questions, as follows:

- I. How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?
- II. What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?

The focus on the perspective of front-line workers is due to an existent proclivity for the studies on interagency collaboration to focus on the organisational/service level rather than the standpoint of front-line professionals (Disley et al., 2016; Parker, et al., 2018). Thus, this research attempts to contribute to filling an empirical gap in the study of prearrest/pre-sentence models of collaboration in light of the perspective of front-line workers.

**Theoretical framework and research design.** The research builds upon a theoretical framework that is, by and large, predicated on Activity Theory to make sense of the street-level interactions between criminal justice and welfare services. Since the overlap between interagency collaboration and street-level bureaucracy is still relatively underexplored (Hupe, 2014; Hupe & Hill, 2016), this research also contributes to filling a theoretical gap in both kinds of literature by

investigating the impact of street-level interagency collaboration on policy implementation.

The study drew upon a representative qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) deployed with the goal “to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation” (Yin, 2009, p. 48). The case study focused on collaboration through the perspective of front-line L&D professionals as well as workers from neighbouring organisations in criminal justice and welfare systems. Data analysis followed a template analysis method (King, 2012).

**Findings.** The results of the study provided the following evidence:

- *A utilitarian approach to policy implementation.* L&D front-line workers grapple with equating are embroiled with the implementation of standardised rules in light of local contingencies. Consequently, they develop coping mechanisms to equate policy and reality.
- *Fragmented IT systems hamper agencies to dovetail their strategies.* Each organisation runs independent information technology (IT) systems (primary communication tool in the context studied) that are impervious to other agencies, which renders interagency collaboration intractable.
- *Interpersonal relations to square organisations’ goals with a system of subpar quality.* Front-line workers have strived to establish interpersonal relationships in order to circumvent systemic limitations and promote collaboration.

In light of the findings, the over-arching question posed in this study can be briefly responded as follows:

**How is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion?**

Consolidating a homogeneous model across the country has proven to be an intractable process that requires fine-tuning over time. One of the reasons for this is the nature of the systems and structures that pre-existed the L&D national model, and, therefore, do not condone the expectations of the new policy. Organisations in criminal justice and welfare services do not seem to be in conditions to implement the transformations proposed by the diversion agenda, and bringing discrete services together has been a challenge for L&D workers. The findings demonstrate that professionals from neighbouring services are amenable to work in tandem with L&D despite the elusive role of the organisation. The national model clarified responsibilities to an extent, but the other services still have to become more familiarised with L&D's attributions so to avoid overlapping and optimise collaboration.

Furthermore, the research questions that operationalised the study can be briefly addressed as follows:

**How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?**

In England and Wales, the idea of criminal justice and welfare systems working in tandem to address the needs of vulnerable people entering the criminal justice system is not up for grabs amid decision-makers (Ministry of Justice UK, 2013). The government introduces general strategies aimed at galvanising collaboration between agencies and expects them to be spread out at the street-level of public service organisations, but there seems to be a gap between the policies instructions and their actual implementation in practice (Hill & Huppe, 2014), which is usually justified by the fact that front-line workers operate under bureaucratic constraints and with limited resources (Lipsky, 2010). Such scenario could also be observed in the case of the L&D services. The results of this study provided evidence that the

implementation of the national model for L&D was contingent on local circumstances and front-line workers' discretion.

Dealing with instructions that were unvaryingly implemented across L&D sites by the new national model, the front-line staff used their discretionary judgment based on professional values and ethics to decide whether specific instructions of the national model were feasible. There was a prioritisation of tasks engrossed in their goal of supporting vulnerable people and promoting collaboration (which they perceived as their 'core-work tasks') in detriment of ancillary administrative tasks (which they deemed as 'housekeeping chores'). In this sense, it was interesting to notice that members of the L&D services prioritise client support and collaboration over policy implementation and practice standardization, which, however, renders the introduction of the new policy contingent on the ethics of the individuals at the front-line.

**What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?** Prearrest/pre-sentence strategies of rehabilitation tend to be predicated on collaboration between L&D, the police, court and organisations in the welfare system so that vulnerable individuals are timely diverted into appropriate care. The findings of the research point to an increased use of IT as the default means of communication both within and between organisations. However, given the complexity and the scale of services provided by organisations in criminal justice and welfare services, most of the investment in IT systems has been made on an individualised basis. In other words, discrete systems have been implemented across services without any form of central intervention, which has led to IT systems growing in a piecemeal fashion with limited links between them. The fragmentation engendered by local arrangements over the years have turned IT programmes into a collaboration impediment rather than enabler. Alternatively, front-line workers have strived to establish interpersonal relationships in order to

circumvent systemic limitations and promote collaboration between services.

Another contradiction is that policy implementation has been a challenge to L&D front-line workers. There is a need to adapt the national model to local circumstances, which means not always following the policy. This has been contributing for the elusiveness of L&D's role and ultimately impairing interagency collaboration.



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## Appended papers

- I. Rocha, P., & Hean, S. (2020). Tracing the Historical Development of a Service Model for Interagency Collaboration: Contradictions as Barriers and Potential Drivers for Change. In S. Hean, B. Johnsen, & L. Kloetzer, *Collaboration, innovation and organisational learning in Penal Systems*. Routledge, (In peer review).
- II. Rocha, P. (2019). *Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care*. International Journal of Social Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering, 2(6), 831-837.
- III. Rocha, P., & Holmen, A. (2020). *Performance-Based Policy in Offender Rehabilitation: Limitation or Innovation for Liaison and Diversion Organisations and Their Front-Line Workers?* Probation Journal, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550520926578>.
- IV. Rocha, P. (2020). *Where is the Primary Contradiction? Reflections on the Intricacies of Research Predicated on Activity Theory*. Outlines, (Accepted – Publication in September 2020).
- V. Rocha, P. (2020). *Personality Traits as Mediating Artefacts within the Subject: Considerations on How to Move Activity Theory Forward*. Theory & Psychology, (In peer review).

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Empirical Background**

Offender rehabilitation is a key strategy wielded by criminal justice system to thrust reintegration of offenders into society (Armstrong, 2012; Ministry of Justice UK, 2013). To that end, engaging offenders in rehabilitative interventions is paramount to their eventual desistance from further criminal behaviour (Fazel & Danesh, 2002; World Health Organisation, 2005; Fazel & Wolf, 2015). As the vast majority of the prison population grapples with some sort of vulnerability (Sinha, 2010), which includes mental health problems, substance misuse and/or learning disabilities (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014), judicious rehabilitation strategies have to address clusters of correlated needs and provide multifaceted solutions (Andrews & Bonta, 2016). In this sense, the involvement of welfare services in the rehabilitation process is crucial to boost the offenders' chances of remaining crime-free (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Strype, Gundhus, Egge, & Ødegård, 2014).

Attempts to improve interagency working practices between criminal justice and welfare services are reflected in European and international policy (Department of Health, 2010; Department i Helse og Omsorg, 2013; World Health Organisation, 2015). When interagency collaboration engenders co-provided care, mental health outcomes improve, reoffending rates decrease, and the financial costs incurred by the taxpayers supporting prison and health services drop (Bond & Gittell, 2010; Roman, 2012). The problem is that policymakers and service leaders have been suggesting generic integration devices that tend to disregard challenges faced by front-line workers at street-level such as the misalignment of organisational working schedules, logistical issues and limited resources (Hean, Willumsen, Ødegård, & Bjørkly, 2015).

In the context of offender rehabilitation in England and Wales, a public service called Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) is one means of promoting collaborative interactions between organisations in criminal justice and welfare services. L&D assists specifically vulnerable offenders when they are first in contact with criminal justice system (police custody and court) by diverting them, when appropriate, to health and other care services as early as possible in their trajectory through criminal justice (James, 1999). As such, L&D is a model of funding, administration, organisation, service delivery and care designed to engender connectivity, alignment and collaboration within and between differentiated sectors (Kodner & Spreeuwenberg , 2002).

Over the past thirty years, L&D services have been locally organized (Reed, 1992). During this time, central levels of the government have repeatedly tried to standardize L&D practice across England (James, 1999). In the most recent attempt to unify the service, the national government commissioned a review to map the situation of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in criminal justice system (Carter Review of Prisons, 2007). The study resulted in a report (Bradley, 2009) that reiterated the importance of having L&D at the police custody and courts in order to enable successful diversion of vulnerable individuals into hospital (James, 2000) and other services in education and social care (McGilloway & Donnelly, 2004).

Drawing upon the findings of the review, policymakers and service leaders devised a national model aimed at homogenise L&D practice across the entire country (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). The model specifies outcomes to be equally achieved by all L&D sites and compares results to what is established in the policy. Funding for the service is then based on performance. This formula was initially implemented in a few forerunner locations (called ‘wave one’ sites) in England on April 2014. This thesis investigates the perspective of front-line workers of one of these sites as well as the perspective of



front-line workers from neighbouring services in criminal justice and welfare services in the same setting.

In light of the above, the aim of this thesis is to respond the over-arching question “*How is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion?*” The focus is pointedly on the perspective of front-line workers in order to explore a different angle regarding models of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems, as traditional research tend to emphasise on service level outcomes (Parker et al., 2018). In other words, by investigating the perspective of L&D front-line workers on the role of the service as a bridge between criminal justice and welfare services, this study is able to move closer to unravelling why interagency collaboration is still challenging to be achieved at the street-level regardless the willingness demonstrated by organisations to work in tandem.

## **1.2 Theoretical background: Interagency collaboration in offender rehabilitation**

There has been increased focus on interagency collaboration as a means to address the challenges of vulnerable individuals coming in contact with the criminal justice system (Department of Health, 2010; Department i Helse og Omsorg, 2013; World Health Organisation, 2015). However, the literature on interagency collaboration builds on a wide range of interchangeable terms loosely wielded to explain the same phenomenon, i.e. organisations working in tandem. This engenders a conundrum for those striving to differentiate interorganisational relationships from interagency collaboration.

Terms such as interagency, multiagency, multisectoral, for example, have been used to specify the relationship between different organisations (Statham, 2011; Williams, 2012). In addition, terms such

as cooperation, collaboration, coordination and integration have been adopted to describe the increasing levels of formalisation such relationship embodies. Table 1 below clarifies the different levels of interagency working.

Table 1 – Increasing levels of formalisation (Frost, 2005)

<b>Nomenclature</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Cooperation</b>	It is when organisations work together towards consistent goals and complementary services without losing their independence
<b>Collaboration</b>	Describes organisations working towards the common outcome of addressing issues of duplication and/or gaps in service provision
<b>Coordination</b>	Organisations working together in a planned and systematic manner towards agreed upon and shared goals
<b>Integration</b>	Different organisations become one in order to enhance service delivery

Although this study is, by and large, concerned with the idea of collaboration, the above taxonomy allows for a degree of transferable characteristics to be equally observed in every joint initiative: information sharing, common decision-making and coordinated interventions (Statham, 2011). In England and Wales, public policy has followed these ideas and promoted various collaboration models to be operationalized by agencies in both criminal justice and welfare systems (Home Office Department of Health, 2000; UK Crown, 2007; Department of Health, 2013; Department of Health and Concordat signatories, 2014; Home Office UK, 2014; Home Office, 2015) with the goal to improve health and social care outcomes for individuals and lowering service costs (Home Office UK, 2014).

Amid models of collaboration, it is natural that the majority focuses on prearrest/pre-sentence diversion of vulnerable individuals, as timely intervention is crucial to avoid unnecessary incarcerations (Clayfield, et

al., 2005; Herrington, et al., 2009; Earl, et al., 2015; Winters, Magalhaes & Kinsella, 2015). More specifically, the tendency I could observe in the literature was that the majority of studies reported on prearrest/pre-sentence models of collaboration involving the police and services in both criminal justice and welfare systems. On that note, the initiative that was mostly mentioned in the appraised literature was the Crisis Intervention Team. This American-based model qualifies police officers to manage vulnerable individuals and to provide them with treatment instead of arrest (Laign, et al., 2014; Boscarato, et al., 2014; Winters, Magalhaes & Kinsella, 2015). Other models of prearrest/pre-sentence collaboration can also be found in Australia (Herrington, et al., 2009), Canada (Winters, Magalhaes & Kinsella, 2015) and USA (Clayfield, et al., 2005).

In England and Wales, there are studies done on both information-sharing within welfare services and between welfare agencies and organisations in other sectors (Jenkins, 2014). Besides, there is also research on interagency work in the context of offender rehabilitation (Phillips, Considine, & Lewis, 2000; Atkinson, Jones, & Lamont, 2007; Williams I. , 2009; Oliver , Mooney, & Statham, 2010), and even on models of collaboration involving the police and mental health care organisations (Parker et al, 2018). Among the reported (James, et al., 2010; Earl, et al., 2015; Great Britain Home Office, 2015), the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) was a prominent example of collaboration attempting to avoid unnecessary imprisonment. As opposed to the Crisis Intervention Team in the USA, L&D relies on the introduction of specialists in police custody and court settings to provide on-site assistance to criminal justice professionals in their goal to identify and support vulnerable individuals (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). Although technically L&D is a form of postbooking jail diversion (Parker et al., 2018), i.e. after arrest took place, the service also supports those who voluntarily present themselves to the police

(therefore, not arrested). Thus, for the purposes of this study, it can also be considered a form of prearrest/pre-sentence collaboration.

Another particularity observed among the appraised studies was the proclivity to suggest interagency collaboration as a means to resolve the inability of criminal justice front-line professionals to autonomously address the needs of vulnerable people (Fenge, et al., 2014). Their point is that it would be expected from professionals in the police and court to be trained to recognise and handle vulnerable individuals since they are often the first public services to interact with people (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2015), but research has shown that vulnerabilities are often unrecognized and poorly handled by front-line professionals in criminal justice systems. The consequence is the imprisonment of people who should otherwise be treated in the community. Hence, the suggestion that the involvement of welfare workers is crucial to improve health and social care outcomes (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009).

Above all, however, I could also notice that most of the studies are flanked to a perfunctory analysis limited to report and/or describe the existent collaboration models. No deeper understanding of functioning of these initiatives was generally developed, despite their current implementation within policing. Moreover, a considerable part of the literature seemed to take organisational/service level outcomes as the parameters for assessment of the success of the models (e.g. arrest rates, diversion rates and referrals to other services) and put little emphasis on the perspective of professionals at the front-line (Parker et al., 2018). In this sense, I identified a possibility for exploring the perspective of front-line workers on the roles and functions of L&D acting as a facilitator of collaboration between criminal justice and welfare services. In doing so, this study offers more than a simple description of the model. It explores the challenges of interagency collaboration realised at the street-level and wields Activity Theory as an overarching framework dovetailing both the thesis and papers together.

### *1.2.1 The role of front-line workers in interagency collaboration and policy implementation*

In England and Wales, the idea of using interagency collaboration as a means to tackle the problem of increased vulnerability in the prison population is championed by the national government (Ministry of Justice UK, 2013). As a consequence, there are several top-down policies bestowed by central levels of government attempting to foster collaboration between organisations in criminal justice and welfare services. The government surmises that these directives will be disseminated at the street-level of public service organisations and make no contingency plans. However, there are circumstances occurring at the street-level that hamper the uncomplicated diffusion of policies instructions (Hill & Huppe, 2014).

In this thesis, the terms front-line workers or street-level professionals, staff and employees are wielded interchangeably and refer to street-level bureaucrats in the public service sectors (Lipsky, 2010). According to Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats are employees at the operational level of public service organizations who interact directly with the public and benefit from discretion in their decisions concerning issues of service provision (Lipsky, 2010). Having thus defined the notion of street-level bureaucrats, the author proceeded to explain that these professionals are constantly developing coping mechanisms to square top-down expectations and limited resources in the daily work, which renders them into actual policymakers with a strong aptitude to sway policy implementation (Lipsky, 2010).

The idea of introducing new solutions in the public sector through top-down policy is contested in the literature (Fuglsang, 2010; Lippke & Wegener, 2014), especially in cases where policies introduce a

performance-based approach to stimulate implementation<sup>1</sup>. Fuglsang (2010), for example, posits that new ideas in the public sector should emerge through interaction and not top-down with the use of remuneration as a stimulator. Likewise, Clarke (2013) stated that the economic strains imposed by performance-based policies force front-line workers to be rebellious if they want to “establish a culture where creative thinking and reflective practice can inform delivering a service that better understands the individual and supports their efforts to rebuild their lives” (p. 111). It is in this scenario that the idea of street-level bureaucracy becomes paramount.

Lipsky’s lessons have endured because he was able to capture the bureaucratic obstacles faced by front-line workers who have to equate top-down policies with their responsibilities at the street-level.

The notion of coping mechanisms – responses developed by street-level bureaucrats to deal with the challenges engendered by incommensurate resources, few controls, indeterminate objectives and discouraging circumstances (Lipsky, 2010) – is still germane in today’s public administration and substantiates the role of street-level bureaucrats. However, it is also judicious to expand on the street-level bureaucracy literature.

Traditionally, there is an empirical focus on front-line workers operating within the boundaries of their own professional fields, for example, social workers allocating care payments (Ellis, 2007), cops policing the streets, teachers teaching school children, and counsellors providing vocational rehabilitation support (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Nevertheless, the scenario currently is that street-level operations are prone to transcend the boundaries of a specific professional field and require workers to collaborate with each other beyond the limits of their

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, performance-based policy can be understood as the use of remuneration to motivate public organizations to achieve desired goals (Herbst, 2007).

own organizations as part of the street-level bureaucratic process (Halliday, et al., 2009).

In the end, because the traditional perspective of street-level bureaucracy seems to constrain its analysis to practices within the boundary of a specific professional field (Hupe, 2014; Hupe & Hill, 2016), the overlap between interagency collaboration and street-level bureaucracy is still underexplored. Thereby, this research contributes to filling a theoretical gap in both the interagency collaboration and the street-level bureaucracy literatures by investigating the role of street-level bureaucrats in the realization of collaboration between agencies.

### **1.3 *The research aim and research questions***

Serendipity was kept at bay when the research questions came about. The literature appraisal carried out at the beginning of this research project (see section 1.2 above for more details) pointed to a proclivity in the literature to prioritise service level outcomes as means to gauge the success of models of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems (Bradley, 2009; Disley et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2018). To that end, this thesis's aim to respond the over-arching question "*How is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion?*" is relevant because it contributes to filling a theoretical gap in both interagency collaboration and street-level bureaucracy literature, namely the investigation of the impact of street-level bureaucracy in the realization of collaboration between agencies through the perspective of street-level workers themselves.

To operationalize the mentioned aim, two research questions were proposed:

- I. How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?

The goal of the first research question was to explore interagency collaboration at the interface between criminal justice and welfare services upon the implementation of a new policy aimed at standardise practice across all L&D sites. The emphasis on how L&D front-line workers would fathom their role in this new scenario relates to the literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) and policy implementation at the front-line (Fuglsang, 2010; Lippke & Wegener, 2014). It also helps to make sense of how the new policy has impacted interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems, which is ultimately realized by those working at the street-level. Thus, the research question not only informs the aim of this thesis but also can stand alone as a contribution to relevant discussions in the literature about street-level bureaucracy and policy implementation.

The first research question was mainly addressed – although not solely – in the appended papers I to III. By exploring how L&D front-line workers perceive their role in the current scenario, I tackled matters such as professional discretion at the street-level and development of coping mechanisms to square top-down policies and circumstances found at the street-level such as, for example, misalignment of organisational working schedules, logistical issues and limited resources (Hean, Willumsen, Ødegård, & Bjørkly, 2015). These are topics I have addressed in the mentioned papers and discuss further in chapter 5 of this thesis.

- II. What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?



The goal of the second research question was twofold: First, to inform the aim of the research by addressing potential challenges emerged from the introduction of a policy that aimed at equalise practice across L&D sites without necessarily taking into account local idiosyncrasies. Second, the research question – which draws upon concepts belonging the Activity Theory – aims to be a stand-alone contribution to discussions around the theory and is mainly addressed in the appended papers III to V. The concept of contradictions (introduced in chapter II below) was used as the frame through which the difficulties derived from the implementation of the new policy were examined. An activity theoretical analysis of the current scenario of collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems was central for the purposes of this research, as recommendations for further development were mainly predicated on the tools and strategies provided by Activity Theory.

All in all, there is no dichotomy between parts I and II of this thesis. In a fluid manner, both research questions are responded throughout the thesis and the appended papers. That is not to give the body of work comprising the second part of the thesis an ancillary character. Each paper has its relevance argued for later on in this thesis (see chapters 4 and 5) and dovetails with at least one of the research questions posed in this study. However, in general lines, the contribution of each paper can be summarised as follows:

- Paper I (the book chapter) traces the historical development of L&D with emphasis on contradictions as barriers and potential drivers for change.
- Paper II builds on the timeline produced by paper I and narrows down on the general practice of L&D services currently.
- Paper III directly adds to paper II by concentrating only on part of the general practice of L&D services currently, namely the challenges faced by front-line workers while trying to operationalise collaboration upon the introduction of a performance-based policy (the new national model for L&D

services).

- Paper IV provides a hindsight account on the intricacies of field research predicated on activity theory.
- Paper V provides a critical analysis of the potential theoretical shortcomings in the current study and conceptualises a way forward.

Besides being both empirically and theoretically addressed in the appended papers, the research questions are also dealt with and further discussed in chapter 3 (where they are articulated through the lenses of cultural-historical activity theory and issues such as data collection, units of analysis and key concepts observed are clarified), in chapter 4 (where the most important points discussed in each one of papers are identified), and in chapter 5 (where I present a more comprehensive discussion of the research questions contribution in light of the thesis topic).

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of two parts.

Part I: Chapter 1 introduces the research background, aim and research questions. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the research. Chapter 3 presents and discusses the research methods, design and deliberates on the trustworthiness of the research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study by discussing how they were addressed in the appended papers. In chapter 5, there is a discussion of the case findings, the contribution of the research and recommendations for future research.

Part II: five individual papers whereby themes such as interagency collaboration, street-level bureaucracy, the impact of performance-based policy on collaboration at the street-level and activity theory are further discussed.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guided the research. Herein, I introduce the model that underpinned the empirical work of this study, i.e. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), and dovetail it with the notion of innovation reified through front-line workers in the public sector services. The combination of CHAT and street-level innovation engenders a holistic framework designed to avoid heuristics and bootstrap promising creative discussions on intricate issues that disrupt good practice; therefore, suitable for the exploratory purposes of this study. The chapter ends with a link between the research questions, their grounding in the theoretical framework adopted, and their contribution to the achievement of the research aims.

### **2.1 Activity theory**

#### **2.1.1 *The origins of activity theory: The four generations***

Activity Theory is a term encompassing several theories concerned with the developmental processes of practical social activities (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009). It has its origins in the Soviet Union, but it only became known in the West after the 1970s. Ever since it has been primarily used in the fields of education and information systems.

In activity theory, there are three central tenets across an array of interpretations and adaptations of the theory, as follows: 1) Every activity is object-oriented (Foot, 2001); 2) Artefacts and tools mediate the relationship between the subject and object; and 3) Contradictions trigger developmental expansion cycles within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987). These assumptions were based on the ideas of Marx, who championed that human nature is determined and continuously changed through productive activity.

It is when the elements of an activity system do not resonate with each other that challenges (or contradictions) appear in the system. As a consequence, the subject of the activity might be impaired in achieving their goal (or object) and the desired outcome. These contradictions can be construed as “sources of change and development” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137), as they have the potential to become influential factors that galvanise systemic transformation through a process of ‘expansive learning’ (Engeström, 2001) (more on these ideas in the next section).

Engeström (1987) identifies the relationship between subject, object and mediating artefacts of activity as the ‘first generation’ model of activity theory, and uses a triangular model to depict such dynamic, as represented in figure 1 below.

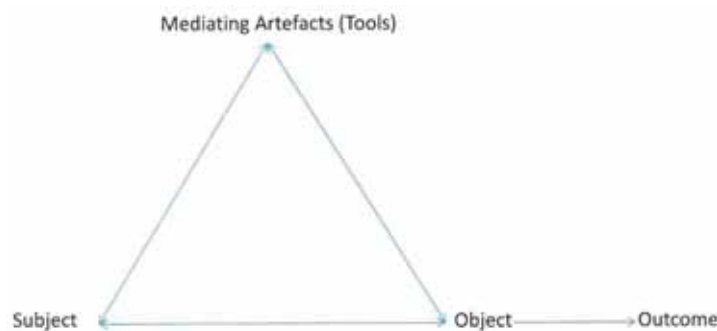


Figure 1 – Vygotsky’s triangular model of the activity system (adapted from Engeström, 1987)

The ‘second generation’ activity theory expands the original triangular model by adding a new basis of rules, community and division of labour (Engeström, 1999). The new basis (three bottom elements, as seen in figure 2) creates the context in which the relationship subject-tool-object pan out. Rules, community and division of labour have a direct impact on the object, subject, tools/artefacts, although not necessarily directly visible during the activity. The arrows represent the mediating relationship between the elements: subject and object mediated by artefacts/tools, the impact of community on the subject is mediated

through the rules that they have to adhere to, and on the object through the agreed division of labour, and so on.

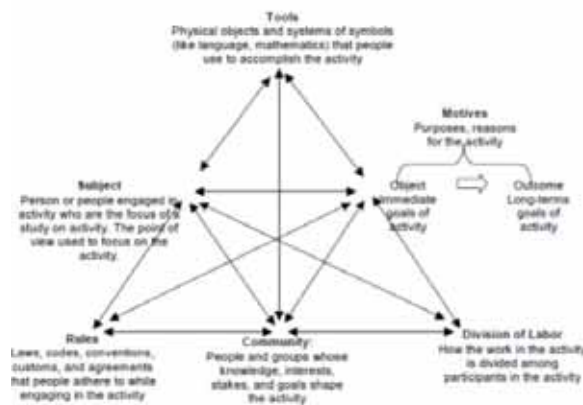


Figure 2 – Second-generation activity system (Kain & Wardle, 2019)

The main advantage of using activity theory over other sociocultural theories is its emphasis on practical activity (Engeström, 1987). Engeström’s activity system models the structural components of activity and provides concepts under which to investigate and explain their transformation. However, as explained by the author, the high level of specification and interdependence of human activities these days requires the study of activity systems as a network rather than a unity of analysis. By investigating only one activity, the researcher may risk having a partial understanding of the object being produced, overlooking accessory activities that are equally important. In multiple activity systems, the object develops from an initial state to a collective construction in relation to its context. In the end, the shared object between activity systems is constructed together during collaboration (Engeström, 2001).

The contribution of the ‘third generation’ (also known as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory – CHAT) is to analyse multiple activity systems simultaneously (Engeström, 2001). In the offender rehabilitation

context, these systems might be two adjacent services that have common goals working together, for example, the police custody officers collaborating with Liaison and Diversion workers to screen, assess and divert vulnerable individuals when they enter criminal justice system.

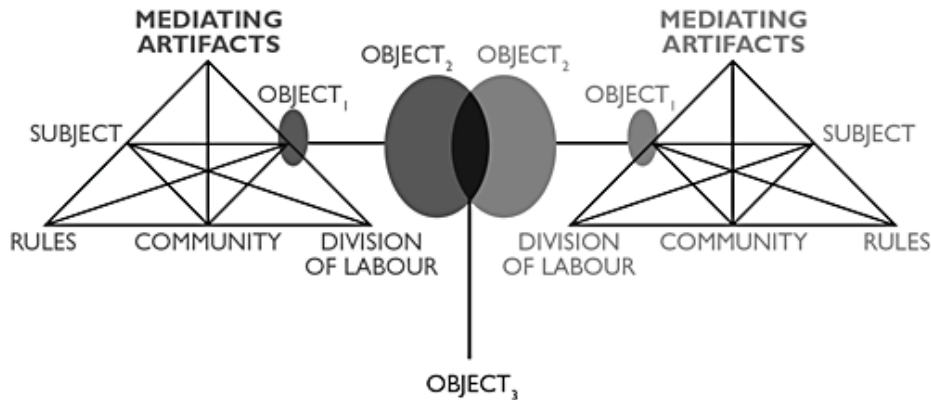


Figure 3 – Representation of a minimal unity of analysis in the third generation of CHAT (Engeström, 2001)

However, Engeström himself has already indicated that the time has come for the development of a ‘fourth generation’ of activity theory and has suggested that the future of the theory is in constructing “sustainable viable resilient alternatives to capitalism especially understood as the neoliberal global regime” (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016, p. 93). As he explained, CHAT is still treating activity systems as reasonable well-bounded units of analysis, but now there is a need to address social production and peer production that make the structure of activity systems obsolete (Engeström, 2009). After that, several scholars rushed to sketch out the fourth generation of activity theory, but no specific agenda was in place (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019). As a consequence, attempts to develop a new generation of activity theory have come out uncoordinated and the literature is elusive as to the issues addressed by the fourth generation. As it is, there seems to be strands of literature focusing on two different points, namely alternatives to capitalism (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016) and post-bureaucratic capitalism (Dandoy,

2017). These strands address the same analytical problems but offer different solutions. While the former focuses on the development of interventionist tools to guide social and peer production, the latter emphasises on the development of new analytical and conceptual tools to address the same issues (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019).

As it is possible to infer, the pillars upon which the fourth generation of Activity Theory stands are still feeble, which means that I could not condone recommendations for its use in this research. Hence, the adoption of CHAT (the third generation of activity system) to investigate interagency collaboration between organisations in criminal justice and welfare systems.

However, I agree with Engeström that it is necessary to advance Activity Theory and I fathom this study as a potential contribution to moving activity theory forward, although not necessarily in the way suggested by the Engeström. Finding alternatives to capitalism appears to be an audacious objective for a descriptive theory that has yet a few shortcomings to address before it can attempt to move into the political arena and pre-empt the current capitalist social formation. For more on criticism to CHAT and the way forward, see section 2.1.4 as well as appended papers IV and V.

### *2.1.2 Activity systems, contradictions and expansive learning*

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) draws upon Vygotsky's understanding that consciousness is bequeathed to the individual through activity (Vygotsky, 1987), i.e. consciousness does not exist in abstract. Thus, human beings must be analysed in tandem with their activities and not as a separate entity, which amalgamates individuals and activities into a unity of analysis (Engeström, 1987).

Activity system is a concept that represents a collective. It is a complex notion that symbolises collaborative relations between people in object-oriented activities mediated by tools, division of labour and rules (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). In the activity of criminal justice workers, for instance, the object would be the enforcement of the law and protection of the community. On the other hand, in the activity of welfare services professionals the activity would be the welfare of patients.

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, three are the main principles guiding activity theory: 1) Every activity is object-oriented (Foot, 2001); 2) Artefacts and tools mediate the relationship between the subject and object; and 3) Contradictions trigger developmental expansion cycles within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987). In the previous sections, the ideas of object orientation and artefact mediation have been addressed, but it is also important to explore what contradiction represents for CHAT.

As explained by Kaptelini, Kuutti and Bannon (1995), activities are not impervious units. They are constantly affected by other activities and other changes in their environment. These external interferences sometimes cause imbalances on the elements of an activity. In CHAT, the term contradiction represents a tension that can happen on four non-exclusive levels: within elements (primary level), between them (secondary level), between different developmental phases of a single activity (tertiary level), or between different activities (quaternary level). Activity theory sees contradiction as sources of development, as activities are virtually always in the process of working through contradictions and creating new improved activities.

*Primary contradictions* represent the first level and occur within the elements of a given activity. According to Engeström (2001), primary contradictions follow from the Marxist notions of the discrepancy between the exchange-value and the use-value in capitalist socioeconomic formations, but that is a contested claim in the literature



(see appended paper IV). In capitalist societies, everything and everyone has a use-value (a fundamental existence) that is in opposition with their exchange value (their perception as commodities in a marketplace). This opposition characterises primary contradictions. For example, doctors working to assist their clients (use-value) but being remunerated for their effort (exchange-value) (Foot, 2014). In this case, the contradiction exists within the element ‘object’ of the activity system, as doctors work both to assist clients and to make a living.

*Secondary contradictions* happen between elements of an activity system. An example of secondary contradiction could be between a policy (rules) constraining doctors to address a specific topic with their patients and a diagnostic protocol (tools) that requires that specific topic to be addressed (Foot, 2014).

*Tertiary contradictions* happen between the old object and the new object of an activity system after an intervention, or organisational change has taken place. For example, a student might go to school aiming to play with his classmates (old object), but the teacher intervenes to make him study (new object) (Engeström, 1987).

Finally, *quaternary contradictions* take place between the central activity system and neighbouring activities. Turning back to the student-teacher example above, if the student reacts with resistance to the teacher’s attempt to make him study, there is a case of quaternary contradiction.

In CHAT studies that have multiple activity systems as a unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001), contradictions tend to be structural tensions within and between these systems. In the case example of this thesis, an activity-theoretical study in which the unity of analysis comprises organisations in both criminal justice and welfare systems, potential contradictions within and between these activity systems can function as driving force to expansive learning cycles that ultimately lead to transformation across

all the interrelated activity systems and potentially innovation in the public sector.

The process of expansive learning galvanises mutual learning leading to a new activity where the shared object is engendered through solving the contradictions existent in the old activity (Kerosuo, Kajamaa, & Engeström, 2010). An expansive learning cycle is a stepwise process that starts with the emergence of a state of need in an activity (step 1). The need state is the moment where the subjects start questioning the activity they are participating. This questioning can be characterized as a tension within a constituent component of the activity system. As seen above, a tension within an element is defined as a primary contradiction (Engeström, 1987). Hence, it possible to say that a primary contradiction gives start to a need state and kicks off the expansive learning cycle.

The need state leads to a second phase where the primary contradiction transcends the limits of a constituent component and becomes a tension between elements of the activity system. This type of secondary contradiction is defined by Engeström as double bind<sup>2</sup> (Engeström, 1987). In a successful expansive learning cycle, the subjects analyse the existent contradictions (step 2) and have a breakthrough where they model new solutions for the activity (step 3). New solutions include the modelling of a new object as well as new instruments for the activity.

The new solution modelled in step 3 has to be examined and tested to ensure effectiveness (step 4). Upon examination, necessary adjustments

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<sup>2</sup> According to Bateson (1972), double bind is a communication dilemma that causes an individual inner contradiction. For example, when someone tells you 'Be spontaneous'. If you are not spontaneous, then you are not following the advice. However, if you are spontaneous you are still not doing what you are told to because following the advice is not being spontaneous.

Engeström (1987) leveraged the concept of double bind by turning an individual dilemma into a social one. In an expansive learning cycle, a double bind is a social dilemma that requires joint co-operative actions organized between elements of an activity system to be resolved.

are made, and a new model emerges. The new model is implemented in the old activity system (step 5). During the implementation, contradictions can occur between the old and the new models. These are tertiary contradictions (Engeström, 1987); for example, employees can resist the use of new instruments. Therefore, the implementation process requires reflection on the expansive learning cycle that is being carried out and its consequences (step 6). Besides, in the process of stabilization of the new activity, quaternary contradictions can also occur between the new model and its neighbouring activity systems (Engeström, 1987). Once these quaternary contradictions are tackled and the entire expansive learning cycle has stabilized the consolidation of a new practice takes place (step 7).

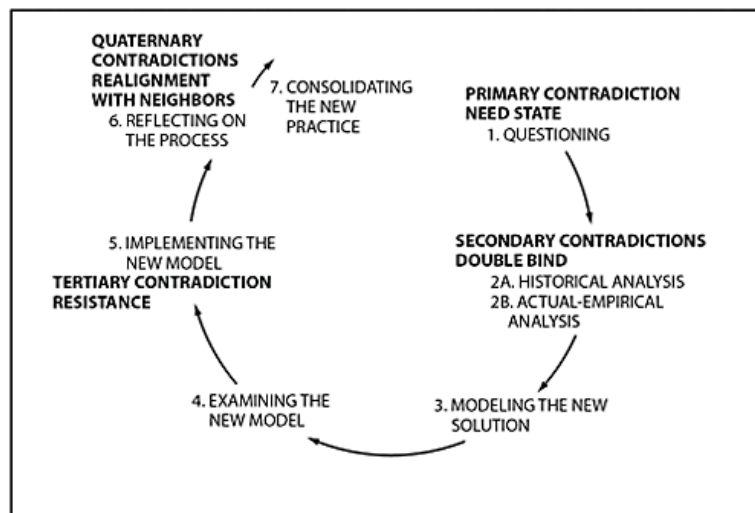


Figure 4 - Expansive learning cycle (Engeström 2001)

The expansive learning cycle is a heuristic device. Ideally, the described steps would be followed, but in practice they hardly are. What is important to understand is that the expansive learning cycle represents a process of construction and resolution of successively evolving contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). It is through the resolution

of contradictions that transformation emerges and every change in the *status quo* is a form of innovation.

The activity-theoretical notion of expansive learning cycle is in line with the understanding espoused in this research that innovation emerges organically from practice as an incremental process corollary of cumulative learning process where new ideas build upon the ones that already exist, which is an understanding widely supported in the literature (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Sundbo, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Van de Ven et al., 2008; Toivonen & Tuominen, 2009; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011).

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, more effective models of collaboration are required at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems (Fenge, et al., 2014). Innovative ways to address the challenges of a rapidly changing workplace environment make a case for the espousal of a theory capable of making sense of interagency collaboration in the context. CHAT has been used successfully and extensively in the research of organisational settings in a range of contexts, for example, organisational studies (Blackler & Regan, 2009), human resource development and management practices (Gvaramadze, 2008), and organisational and individual learning (Engeström, Kerosuo, & Kajamaa, 2007). However, the use of CHAT to study collaboration in the offender rehabilitation setting is still an idea underexplored with little research done on the challenges of front-line interagency collaboration between criminal justice and welfare services.

At the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems, working is challenging because of the clash between two distinctive cultures, namely a focus on security issues versus an emphasis on health and social care outcomes (Fenge, et al., 2014). In this scenario, the possibility of tensions between activity systems increases. In a setting with existent contradictions, there is opportunity for innovation attained through cycles of expansive learning. Therefore, CHAT was the selected theory

to explore and explain innovation through front-line interagency collaboration between criminal justice and welfare systems.

### ***2.1.3 Expansive learning and power relations***

The literature on power relations does not provide a unified conceptualization of power (Hardy & Clegg, 2006; Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Diefenbach, By, & Klarner, 2009; Fleming & Spicer, 2014), which makes Max Weber's classical definition still relevant. As Weber explains (1972), power is represented by one's ability to impose their will in a social interaction, even in cases when opposition is present. In this vein, power is not a material possession that can be acquired, but rather an inherent relational phenomenon between subjects (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

With regards to Activity Theory, however, one cannot discuss power relations without acknowledging the influence of Marx's ideas. Such influence can be observed in the theory's adoption of concepts developed by the thinker, e.g. 'contradiction', 'commodity', 'use-value' and 'exchange-value'. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that, just as it is in Marxism, power relations are paramount for Activity Theory.

Marx's ideology posited a fundamental power conflict between the bourgeoisie – oppressors who controlled the means of mass production of commodities – and the proletariat – an oppressed class without use-value because they were treated as a commodity, and suggested communism as the solution to flatten the power-based existent hierarchy (Marx, 1848/2014; 1867/2018). Activity theory is fundamentally predicated on Marxism, which was influential on the work of Vygotsky. Having read Marx from his youth in the revolutionary climate of Russia in 1917, Vygotsky had his view of psychology shaped by *Das Kapital* (seminal work by Marx) and even stated that psychology needed its own *Das Kapital* (Sève, 2018).

The riveting ideas introduced by Marx have impacted not only Vygotsky but European intellectuals and academics in general (Kearney, 2003). However, with the decline of communism internationally in light of its appalling results represented by death of millions in Soviet Union, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Tibet, among other areas (Rummel, 1994; Dallin, 2000; Karlsson & Schoenhals, 2008), it was difficult for philosophers and thinkers to continue affiliating themselves with the ideology.

In any event, for intellectuals and academics such as Sartre, Foucault and Derrida, for example, relinquishing Marxism would mean a drastic shift of focus. Working without reference to a notion of collectivity that had been an institutional basis to their philosophical thought was never an option (Kearney, 2003). The alternative was to expand the traditional economic-based Marxist axioms to a culture-based version of them and extrapolate the power struggle beyond the economic realm into a cultural one. The new paradigm, which has become known as postmodernism, has been widely popular among intellectuals and academics ever since the 1960s and 1970s (Hicks, 2019). The result is that now the power struggle is represented in the relations between the ‘culturally oppressed’ and the ‘culturally oppressor’ instead of merely ‘proletariat’ and ‘bourgeoisie’, which enables novel possibilities to classify nearly any group in one of those categories (Bauman, 1992).

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, although still grounded in Marx’s ideas (Engeström, 1987), seems to have been developed in a postmodern academic environment, which could potentially explain its popularity (Engeström, 2009) among scholars avid for analytical tools to investigate the relations between ‘culturally oppressed’ and ‘culturally oppressors’. In Engeström’s model of analysis of activity systems, ‘Division of Labour’ is the element within which power relations can perhaps be most notably observed. The division of labour occurs both horizontally – according to task, role or professional expertise – and vertically – between actors in a hierarchical fashion. It is in the latter that power relations are mostly at play.

Marx's ideas on power are also influential for the notion of learning through expansive cycles, as power relations have the capacity to hamper the development of expansive learning cycles. As explained in the previous section, contradictions should be reflected upon and discussed by the different actors, subjects of an activity system. The discussion leads to cycles of expansive learning that enable new activity structures (tools, rules, objects, etc.) to be created through the resolution of the contradictions existent in the current form of activity (Engeström, 1987). Expansive learning connects the current activity in which contradictions exist to the historically new form of the activity that is collectively generated through the resolution of those contradictions (Vygotsky, 1987; Engeström & Sannino, 2010). In a scenario where there is no dialectics between actors because of relations of power, there is no opportunity for expansive learning.

In summary, if expansive learning is to be used to resolve contradictions, more powerful actors need to engender a protected arena where multi-voicedness galvanizes syncretic dialogue. The creation of an institutionally protected social space in which asymmetric power relations does not prevent criticism would represent a step forward (Courpasson and Clegg, 2012). The emancipation of powerless actors is paramount for unfolding their capacity to act. In this study, the Change Laboratory Model (see section 5.4.1 below) – an intervention tool underpinned by CHAT – is suggested as a means to empower actors to achieve such scenario.

#### *2.1.4 Criticism to activity theory and potential alternatives*

So far I have been making a case for the use of activity theory as the germane social theory to address interagency collaboration, but surmising that the theory is flawless would be naïve. Activity theory has been subject to some criticism as, for example, the vagueness of the concept 'object', the unclear role of the 'arrows' in the activity system

model (Bakhurst, 2009; Blunden, 2009), and the fact that the theory does not account for subjectivity but rather focuses on the object (Allen et al., 2011; 2013). These are valid points that need to be taken into account.

As mentioned earlier, activity theory has its origins in the Soviet Union and was introduced in the West in the 1970s (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009). Whilst the Russian founders saw activity as a category enabling philosophical questions about the possibility of the mind, activity theory in the West has become an empirical method for modelling activity systems (Kaptelinin, 2005). In light of the fundamental difference between the two activity-theoretical traditions (the Russian and the Western), the criticism is that the Western strand is more a method for analysing activity systems than a theory in itself. In such case, Engeström's triangular model could be easily relegated, as it does not say much about the relation between its components (Bakhurst, 2009). As Bakhurst (2009) questions, what do the arrows in the activity system triangular model represent? The items at the nodes of the triangle do not exist in themselves, but they are a result of the dialectical relationships they bear to each other. Therefore, whatever relationship the arrows are trying to symbolize play an important role on the dynamics of the activity under study and the constitution of actor represented by the triangle.

Much of the reasoning and semantics of activity theoretical concepts – not the triangular model – have been originally developed by the theory's founders in Soviet Union and bequeathed to Western scholars. Consequently, the meaning of some of these theoretical concepts was lost in translation when laid out in different languages, e.g. English. In this vein, 'contradiction' has become a conspicuously vague notion and 'object' has acquired an elusive connotation. Bakhurst (2009) explains that the Russian language has two words for the word 'object', namely '*ob"ekt*' (a physical item) and '*predment*' (a conceptualised object), which renders the term 'object of activity' in English ambiguous. Thus, 'object' in English could mean something the subject is trying to achieve



by conducting an activity or the thing the subject is working on. In any theoretical endeavour, concepts are essential to endow a theory with sense. Therefore, when semantics are impervious due to linguistic barriers, there is a risk that the entire theory becomes jeopardized.

Finally, a major shortcoming of Activity Theory is its lack of subjectivity in the analysis of activity systems (Roth, 2007; Sannino, 2011). That is a criticism I particularly agree with and have championed in appended paper V.

Aware of the limitations of Activity Theory, I also considered alternative theories in this study. Two that deserved close attention were the Craftmanship Theory (Bardach, 1998) and the Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

The Craftmanship Theory (Bardach, 1998) preaches value creation through interagency collaboration, but the capacity to collaborate is a dependent variable according to the theory. The theory focuses on work and workers as the main asset of an organisation and enabling force of collaboration. To that end, Bardach introduces the idea of ‘interagency collaborative capacity’ (ICC) as the main concern of the Craftmanship Theory, which can be understood as people’s capacity to engage in collaborative activities rather than regular ones. To pursue a common goal, people need convergent efforts and ICC, which is dependent on the alignment of factors such as available human and social materials, smart practices, critical skills and abilities, etc.

The Resource Dependence Theory is concerned with the way organisational behaviour is affected by the external resources utilised by the organisation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The theory’s central idea is that resources are crucial to organisational success. Therefore, access and control over them are key. However, resources are usually controlled by actors other than the organisation that actually needs them. Thus, liaison strategies must be carried out in order to ensure open access to external resources (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

Whilst both theories are insightful with regards to collaboration between organisations and challenges faced by front-line workers separately, they do not provide the same toolkit to the analysis of interagency collaboration at the street-level as Activity Theory does. The Resource Dependence Theory focuses mostly on interagency collaboration at the macro level and the Craftsmanship Theory theorises the purposiveness of managerial action (Bardach, 1998). The choice of activity theory in this study is justified by the theory's emphasis on activity as lenses through which one should analyse human and organisational behaviours. Besides, activity theory introduces the notion that individuals are social beings and the very possibility of our minds depends on our membership in a community (Bakhurst, 1991; 1995), which is a riveting idea when trying to make sense of the role of front-line workers (individuals) in a context of interagency collaboration (a form of community).

Despite shortcomings, in the end CHAT was still fathomed as a germane theoretical alternative to underpin a study that grapples with the challenges that lurk in street-level interagency collaboration. Nevertheless, as a means to mitigate the potential limitations aforementioned and broaden the purview of the analytical lenses wielded to make sense of the behaviour of front-line professionals, CHAT was amalgamated with the notion of innovation in this study. In the next section, the concept of innovation in the public sector is introduced and further discussed.

## ***2.2 Innovation in the public sector***

### ***2.2.1 Defining innovation***

In a broader sense, innovation is a concept employed to explain the development and implementation of something new (de Jong & Vermeulen, 2003). It is the combination of existing ideas and resources in a novel way (Schumpeter, 1934).

There is a stream of literature that discusses innovation as a generic three-phased process. First the generation of an idea, then its development and finally its implementation (Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 1982); more or less as a defined planned project (Van de Ven et al., 2008). However, this research espouses the understanding that innovation might also organically emerge from practice. This notion finds grounding in organisational settings where often the development of new ideas is intertwined with mundane processes of the company (Sundbo, 1997; Toivonen & Tuominen, 2009).

There is a great deal of research done on ad hoc innovation (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997), tinkering (Styhre, 2009) and bricolage (Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011) that support the notion of innovation arising from practice. Common among these approaches is the understanding that new ideas might result from workers' creative thinking to meet the customers' needs (ad hoc innovation), that innovation can represent a leeway to adjust a protocol to unexpected events (tinkering) or that innovation can also be a planned move initiated at the street-level to address a problem (bricolage) (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011).

This research accepts not only the concept that innovation can emerge from practice but also that it can be an incremental process corollary of cumulative learning processes where new ideas build upon the ones that already exist (Van de Ven et al., 2008; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011). This allows for a concept of innovation that is intertwined with practice to include also improvement consequent of regular learning activities (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Sundbo, 1997; Van de Ven et al., 2008; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011).

In the next section, I discuss how innovation processes are depicted in the literature and focus on the dichotomy 'top-down management-

initiated innovation processes’ versus ‘bottom-up practice-based innovation processes’.

### *2.2.2 Service innovation processes: Top-down versus bottom-up perspectives*

Traditionally, public sector innovation has been ignited through top-down processes driven by political decisions (Walker, 2006) that called for standard policies being equally implemented by front-line professionals across diverse contexts despite local circumstances (Lipsky, 2010).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, innovation processes aimed at improving public sector efficiency mostly followed the New Public Management (NPM) agenda<sup>3</sup>. Strategies to innovate public service focused on the division of large public bureaucracies to create less hierarchical organisations, on increased competition by introducing private-sector service providers in the realm of public services, and on incentivisation through performance-based policies that remunerated good performance (Hood, 1991; Ferlie et al., 1996; Dunleavy et al., 2006).

The performance-based approach to public policy making and public management claimed to increase accountability of governments and to facilitate the assessment of the performance of the public sector through a few characteristics, among others: a clear articulation of the problem addressed by the policy and how the government should intervene; a clear identification of the policy expected outcomes; the development of an independent assessment plan for the implementation, enforcement

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<sup>3</sup> The New Public Management (NPM) is a management model widely adopted in public service organizations in the UK and USA, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The term encompasses a series of reforms and restructures as part of an effort to make the public service more "businesslike" and to improve its efficiency by using private sector management models (Hood, 1991). The concept is further explored in article III, which can be found in part II of this thesis.

and outcomes of the policy; and the development of an evaluation plan for identification of success/failure factors to inform future policy-making (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008; Fryer, Antony, & Ogden, 2009; Kuhlman, 2010; van Dooren, Bouckaert, & Halligan, 2010). Performance-based policing was an important strategy supporting the NPM agenda, but ended up having its use decreased as the New Public Management wave retreated.

Although less frequent since the 2000s, the NPM agenda has become again mainstream in policymaking with the 2010 UK election of a Coalition government that shared an enthusiasm for mixed economy of public service provision (Albertson, et al., 2018). Policymakers began again to prioritize top-down performance-based commissioning in different areas of government, including welfare-to-work programmes, public health budgets and criminal justice system (Bochel & Powell, 2016). An example of the approach is the national model for Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services that links funding to the ability the service has to achieve the outcomes specified in the policy (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014).

However, the idea of having a one-size-fits-all model to be applied to local settings has already been contested elsewhere (Rittel & Webber, 1973), as the effectiveness of any solution is dependent on the environment and actors involved. Particularly in the case of performance-based policies, there is an inherent clash with the notion of innovation. Even though innovation requires experimentation, performance-based policies prioritize the reward of success. Risk-averse front-line workers wish to focus on fail-proof initiatives that have been tested in the past rather than experimenting new service designs, which ultimately deters innovation (National Audit Office, 2015; McGahey & Willis, 2017).

A different path observed currently is a bottom-up practice-based approach to innovation where employees and their workplace make up

an arena for learning and innovation, which contrasts with the notion of top-down pre-planned performance-based innovation processes (Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010). Central to the bottom-up practice-based approach is the understanding that innovation processes are embedded within work practice and the employees' reflective experiences, which connects innovation with learning experiences taking place within the street-level practice. Thus, innovation is seen as a result of learning processes whereby employees renew working methods, routines, products and services (Ellström, 2010).

In a bottom-up practice-based approach, communities of practice serve as a site for employees to innovate through work (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Wenger, 2000). A community of practice is a group of professionals who share similar interests and cultural practices, for example, police officers in custody, mental health practitioners in a hospital and Liaison and Diversion workers in a specific L&D site. In an environment where everyone shares similar work practice, collective learning is more easily achieved, resulting in the production of new knowledge. Another characteristic of a community of practice is that it serves as an arena for the development, maintenance and reproduction of the very knowledge that is produced within it (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

The current increased need for public services to meet citizens' demands (Hartley, 2005) reveals a trend of having front-line workers more responsible for promoting innovation in public sector organisations (Arundel & Huber, 2013). As top-down policies often do not meet the needs encountered at the street-level, deviations from their rules promote transformation initiated at the front-line. Once transformation spreads and develops into a routinized way of performing the work, it becomes the new work practice. Thus, practice-based innovation can be perceived as a cyclical process of learning, whereby deviation from previous work routines initiate a learning process that develops into new work practice (Ellström, 2010).

In contrast with the top-down management-initiated approach to innovation where front-line workers merely implement new policy at the street-level, the bottom-up practice-based approach gives employees the power to initiate innovation processes. However, both approaches require communication and coordination between all those involved in the process. On the one hand, if managers feel that practice-based solutions are threatening the order of the system, they will not support them (Høyrup, 2010). On the other hand, an attempt to innovate coming from management might also fail if front-line workers do not recognise it as relevant at the street-level (Lipsky, 2010).

Summing up, effective innovation processes require both strategic directions for innovation that are initiated top-down along with the presence of ideas emerging throughout the organization in a bottom-up fashion (Fuglsang & Sundbo, 2005; Sundbo & Fuglsang, 2002). That is where adopting cultural-historical activity theory becomes advantageous, as it provides a set of instruments to study transformations and social processes of innovation and make sense of them through cycles of expansive learning.

### ***2.3 Research questions through the theoretical framework***

The over-arching aim of this research is to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion.

In order to investigate the role of L&D services as a conduit of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems upon the introduction of the new national model, the aim of this study has been operationalized through two research questions, as follows:

### *2.3.1 Research question I*

Research question I investigates how members of the L&D services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model

The matter of policy implementation at the street-level is widely discussed in the literature (Lipsky, 2010; Rice, 2013; Hill & Huppe, 2014; Goldman & Foldy, 2015). As explained by Hill and Huppe (2014), there are several top-down policies initiated by central levels of government attempting to establish collaboration between public sector organisations. Government expect that these directives will be naturally disseminated at the street-level, but there seems to be a gap between policies instructions and circumstances found at the street-level impeding their actual implementation in practice (Hill & Huppe, 2014).

Although there is a great deal of research done on street-level bureaucracy discussing the variables and outcomes of the discretionary behaviour of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010), the perspective of front-line workers is – to my knowledge – underexplored, especially the influence other actors have on the decision-making process carried out by front-line professionals (Rice, 2013). In the context of offender rehabilitation, the studies that do acknowledge interagency collaboration are to a great extent focused on the managerial point of view (Fenge, et al., 2014; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017; Kane, Evans, & Shokraneh, 2018).

In order to develop a contextualised understanding of street-level interagency collaboration in offender rehabilitation in England and Wales, I used Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to explore the day-to-day challenges (contradictions) encountered by Liaison and Diversion (L&D) front-line professionals striving to work in tandem with professionals in neighbouring services in a backdrop of heterogeneous local circumstances. Moreover, research question I



explores possible tensions arising both within and between the L&D, the criminal justice and the welfare activity systems as a consequence of the introduction of a new national model aimed at standardise practice across all L&D sites.

### *2.3.2 Research question II*

Collaboration across organisational boundaries has been promoted as a means to decrease reoffending rates (Fenge, et al., 2014; Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009). However, organisational objects more often than not diverge. In this scenario, constructing integrated care pathways to divert vulnerable offenders from criminal justice system is seen as a challenge.

In CHAT, the tensions generated by the disagreement between service providers create opportunities for organisational and interorganisational learning achieved through expansive cycles. The learning leads to innovation of existing work routines as well as the creation of new sorts of tools that ultimately take the object and forms of collaboration into consideration (De Dreu, 1997).

In research question II, I inspect the main contradictions found by L&D front-line workers when trying collaborate with neighbouring services to improve health and social care outcomes. Thus, research question II should be seen in tandem with research question I inasmuch as it explores potential contradictions existent, by and large, at the street-level and not only those derived from the top-down implementation of the L&D national model. The goal with this research question is to explore all potential contradictions between the activity systems comprising my unity of analysis (Engeström, 2001), namely the Liaison and Diversion, criminal justice and welfare services activity systems. By doing so, the aim is to identify possible points of tensions that, once resolved, can promote innovation in the offender rehabilitation context.

### **3 Methodological choices**

In this chapter, I present the research's paradigm, methodological choices, data collection procedures, code development processes, and the data analysis approach.

A case study approach to data collection (Yin, 2009) was adopted. Observations, document analysis and interviews were employed as data collection methods. Information was captured through audio recording and continuous note-taking. A template analysis (King, 2012) was employed to analyse the transcripts of the interviews, while the data collected through observation and note-taking enabled a more detailed and context-driven interpretation of the events discussed in the interviews.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, the research paradigm is presented. Then, I outline considerations behind my decisions regarding methodology as well as the final design of data collection and analysis. Finally, I discuss the quality of the study by addressing its trustworthiness and address ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 *The research paradigm***

Ontologically, Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) conceives the nature of reality through concepts of 'artefact mediation' and 'object-orientated activity' to demonstrate how human beings are both shaped by and shape the world respectively (Engeström, 1987). This concept has its philosophical roots on the writings of Marx and the idea of 'praxis' whereby the mind was shaped socially but was also capable of reshaping the world from which it was generated (Jensen, 1999). Thus, cultural activities are necessarily intertwined with psychological phenomena (Vygotsky, 1987). The separation of individual and social should never happen (Daniels, 2001), and human behaviour needs to be contextualized within broader social and cultural contexts (Cole, 1996). That is the

fundamental difference between CHAT and other approaches in social sciences. The researcher has to consider people's abilities to interpret, represent and modify their experiences (Tomasello, 1999) and accept that we are social beings with no individual existence *in abstractum*.

Epistemologically, CHAT defends that learning is a social-cultural process that happens in the real world through collective activities conducted around a shared object; therefore, promoting studies that are qualitative rather than quantitative in their nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a social-cultural practice, learning requires contextualizing the psychological processes of individual within the broader social and cultural settings in which they take place. In doing so, the research yields accounting for the whole context in development (Engeström, 1999). Consequently, CHAT provides concepts (as mentioned earlier, artefact mediation and object-orientated activity) with which to study behaviour in context. These concepts are especially useful when carrying out cross-organisational comparison because they allow for a full picture instead of a compartmentalized one.

In the midst of this, it might seem contradictory to adopt CHAT (a systems-level theory) in a study emphasizing the perspective of front-line professionals (individuals), but it is not. To understand the individual processes undergone by front-line professionals, one must take into account the dialectical relationship between them and other elements in their activity such as the rules, division of labour and cultural tools. Thus, using CHAT allows the contextualization of the perspective of front-line professionals within the broader social and cultural contexts they are embedded in, which is in line with the ontological and epistemological stances adopted by CHAT.

In the next sections, I demonstrate the methodological realization of CHAT's ontology and epistemology in the research's methods and design.

### **3.2 The research methodology**

The research paradigm determines a study's methodology. In turn, the methodology of a study defines the selection of phenomena of interest, the research design and case selection, the data collection methods as well as the strategies of analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

This research has a goal to make sense of a complex phenomenon of social change (Fletcher, 2016). To that end, a qualitative approach to research was adopted because it is in line with CHAT's ontology and epistemology. A case study approach was the design choice for the study, as it allows for in-depth study of a specific case (Harrison & Easton, 2004), namely the front-line interagency collaboration of criminal justice and welfare services through the perspective of professionals from one organisation is specific, i.e. Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services.

In CHAT studies, a qualitative approach to research tends to be the most appropriate choice (Fletcher, 2016) because investigating a social phenomenon in its milieu is the best way to capture it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Human nature and experiences cannot be quantified, manipulated, measured or have their variables controlled. There is a need for flexibility which allows for the research to be moulded by the findings arising from fieldwork (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The choice for a case study approach is also in line with CHAT's ontological and epistemological stances. Several CHAT scholars refer to case studies as an approach that fits well with the methodological aims of exploring social phenomena in real-life settings (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The benefit of adopting the case study methodology is that allows for the investigation of "one or a small number of social entities or situations about which data are collected by using multiple sources of data and developing a holistic description through an iterative research process" (Easton, 2010, p. 119).

As explained by Yin (2009), single-case studies are appropriate in five instances, as follows: 1) when there is a ‘critical case’, meaning a case presenting a set of circumstances that are critical to the study’s theoretical underpinning; 2) when there is an ‘extreme case’, i.e. a case especially attractive because deviates from theoretical norms or everyday occurrences; 3) when there is a ‘representative case’, that is a case that captures the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation; 4) when there is a ‘revelatory case’, meaning a case that reveals a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science inquiry; and 5) when there is a ‘longitudinal case’, i.e. studying the same single case at two or more different point in time. This research adopts a representative single-case study design, as capturing the circumstances and conditions of the interactions between front-line workers from L&D and other services in criminal justice and welfare systems provide lessons about interagency collaboration and policy implementation that are relevant social aspects in activity theoretical studies.

### *3.2.1 Rationale for a single case-study*

Achieving breadth and depth in a single case-study is not linked to the amount of respondents or to a large sample size but it regards focus. It is generally believed that single-case studies produce findings that emphasise on specific details within a unique context (Easton 2010). In this vein, depth would refer to the density of the contextual information (Meier & Pugh, 1986). However, single-case studies can also yield a breadth when we analyse broad and fundamental themes through the perspective of an individual entity, e.g. the analysis of interagency collaboration (a broader phenomenon) through the perspective of a particular entity (L&D).

The value of having symbolic cases that represent life phenomena and explore insights from individuals’ perspective has been acknowledged by several scholars who have decided to design their investigations as a single case-study (Platt, 1988; Abramson, 1992; Miller, 2000). It is with

this inclination that the findings emerging from this single case-study need to be faced in order to be deemed valuable. The breadth and depth of the insights presented here might forego immediate empirical generalisation as they retain the intricate texture of the context in focus, but their transferability is grounded in the representativeness of the L&D site chosen as focus of the case study, as member of the ‘wave one’ sites that were originally chosen to roll out the new L&D national model due to their excellence in service provision and representativeness (for more on the trustworthiness of this research, please check section 3.5).

### **3.3 *The research design and methods***

#### **3.3.1 *Case selection***

##### **3.3.1.1 *Sampling criteria***

In the first moment, I conducted a purposeful sampling to narrow down cases for this representative single-case study. The criteria I used were (a) L&D services that were part of the ‘wave one’ sites rolling out the new L&D national model and (b) L&D services with well-established local support mechanisms in connection with other services in criminal justice and welfare systems. ‘Wave one’ sites were originally selected by the government to roll out the national model due to their excellence in service provision and representativeness (Disley, et al., 2016); therefore, being a reliable indicator of a single-case study that was representative of the L&D services needed to be selected.

Once a site was chosen, I focused on selecting appropriate participants for the study. Participants were divided into two groups: L&D front-line staff and front-line workers from other services in criminal justice and welfare systems. To be considered a front-line worker, they had to fall within the following criteria (a) being a worker who interacts directly

with the public he/she serves, and (b) providing technical support to service-users and not having obligations limited to administrative tasks.

Another consequence of having selected a site for carrying out the study was the definition of sampling criteria for documents to be analysed. Documents of relevance were those that provided insights into the contextual and historical background of the implementation of the new model for L&D and how it has impacted the relationship between the L&D site and neighbouring agencies in criminal justice and welfare systems. The documents were both requested to participants of the study as well as selected by me contingent to my understanding of what was contextually and historically relevant. Any bias as to my selection methods were addressed and mitigated according to section 3.5 below.

### **3.3.1.2 Description of the site, participants and documents selected**

The chosen L&D site is located in South West England and was selected because it belongs the ‘wave one’ and has been able to successfully roll out the L&D national model over the past 5 years, although already existed before that. Its team consists of 4 administration staff, 8 Support, Time and Recovery workers, 8 mental health practitioners, 2 team leaders, and 1 service manager. Due to the small size of the staff, the team leaders and the service manager also function as mental health practitioners when necessary, which transforms them into front-line workers for the effects of this study. The organization covers a county of 1000 square miles, which encompasses urban and rural areas serviced by 15 police stations and has a static population of around 780,000 with a significant influx of tourists throughout the year summing up to approximately 3.2 million staying visitors and an additional 25.1 million day visitors (The South West Research Company Ltd, 2016). In 2017, the service assessed 2,365 adults and numbers increase yearly (Dorset Health Care, 2013, 2014; Williams et al., 2019).

From the selected L&D site, the participant-criteria narrowed the number of front-line workers to 19. All of them agreed to participate in the study. From the other services in criminal justice and welfare systems, 9 professionals agreed to participate in the research project, being 2 from criminal justice system and 7 from welfare services. In total, this thesis discusses the perspective of 27 participants spread across various services in both criminal justice and welfare systems.

Out of the 28 participants, 11 were male and 17 female. Age range from 25 to 56 years. All of them were British, although a few had an immigrant background. The vast majority had a university degree in health-related field, although five of them were at the secondary education level. Their work experience varied greatly. Their years of work experience ranged from 1 year to 32 years (although not necessarily working at the same organisation).

As to selected documents (Appendix 4), the list included internal documents as well as policy documents such as official white papers, audits and evaluations, all describing the process of implementation of the new model for L&D (n=27) in the selected site. Moreover, I collected statistical reports of the screening and assessments taking place in custody and court upon the national model (n=12).

### ***3.3.2 Data collection methods***

Data collection methods included document analysis, semi-structured interviews. Observations were also conducted, but there was no formal scheduled being followed (see section 3.3.2.3 below for more information). In this sense, although providing interesting insights into practice at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems, observations served more as one means to ensure embeddedness in the context as well as credibility check.



### *Methodological choices*

Data collection took place between 2017 and 2019. Table 2 below summarises these methodologies.

Table 2 – Data collection procedure summary

Methodology	Sources	Procedure
<b>Document analysis</b>	Materials available at the investigated L&D site, which provided an overview of the transition period the service went through between being a locally managed organisation to being a ‘wave-one’ site following the new L&D model. As it can be seen in Appendix 4, the dataset included internal documents describing the process of implementation of the L&D national model (n=27) and statistical reports on the number of clients being screened and assessed in custody and court upon the rollout (n=12)	Read all the materials and documented any descriptive statistics related to the impact the new L&D model had on the performance/work routine of the investigated site
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	Front-line workers at both the Criminal justice (n=2), welfare services (n=7) and the L&D (n=19).	Tape recorded and transcribed semi-structured interviews
<b>Observations</b>	Observed participants’ interactions with other services and the tools available to facilitate communication within and between agencies.	Took notes and used the notes to contextualize data obtained through document analysis and interview.

In this study, descriptive clarity of the data collection methods was achieved with the provision of a clear and complete description of the site and participants (section 3.3.1.2). My role as researcher and the relationship with the participants was addressed in section 3.3.2.2. Finally, identification of assumptions and biases of the researcher takes place at section 3.5.

#### **3.3.2.1 Document analysis**

Documents are invaluable to provide insight into the investigation of a social phenomenon. This study used documents mainly with an exploratory purpose, a way of understanding the history and context that the case was to be set in (Bowen, 2009).

Sampling criteria and a list of the selected documents can be found in section 3.3.1 above as well as Appendix 4. I searched the documents for ‘meaningful and relevant passages of text’<sup>4</sup> (Bowen, 2009), made notes when suitable and added these to Nvivo. These notes eventually helped me to make sense of the themes arising from interviews and supported the coding of certain connections with interview and observation data material.

The table below brings an overview of the elements of the document study: the amount of research material, time of collection and the role of this document study in the analytical process. A complete chronological list of the documents comprising this study can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3 – Overview of document analysis

External and internal document analysis		
Dataset	Issuing date	Purpose
39 documents	2008 – 2019	Development of contextual background

### 3.3.2.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants of this research project, who received letters of invitation, an information sheet about the project as well as a consent form beforehand (Appendix 2). Responses were prompted through an interactive process between the interviewer and the interviewees. Before each interview, I tailored my interview guide (sampled in Appendix 3) to the specific characteristics of the upcoming interviewee. Therefore, the interview guide changed slightly as insight broadened, making it possible to build upon the information acquired as the interviews went on. Despite minor

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Meaningful and relevant passages of text’ were those providing insights into the contextual and historical background of the implementation of the new model for L&D and how it has impacted integrated care in offender rehabilitation.

alterations, all interviews were conducted based on a framework informed by CHAT. Above all, the informants were intentionally left with ample room to elaborate or bring up new insights (Smith & Elger, 2014). The interviews were conducted by me at the participants' workplace, in English, and were 45 minutes long on average.

In order to obtain invaluable information from the participants, they needed to feel comfortable enough to talk with me about the challenges they were facing in their daily work routine. Because workers at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems can be reluctant to speak with a researcher or having a stranger in their work setting, it was useful to reach out to informants and have a preliminary meeting more casually. Having an informal conversation about their responsibilities and expectations concerning their jobs, a talk without guidelines or formal questions to be answered, fostered a certain degree of rapport between the participant and me that could, later on, be benefited from in further meetings promoting opportunities for observation and interviews.

After each interview, I wrote memos with my contemplations on what was discussed. Out of 30 interviews, 26 were tape-recorded and personally transcribed by me. Three interviewees agreed to talk with me but asked not to have the conversation recorded. Nevertheless, they allowed me to take notes and use the information shared in the research. In the following table is an overview of the interview data.

As this study was concerned with the perspective of front-line professional working at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems, the accounts of managers as well as service-users was purposefully left out (see inclusion criteria in section 3.3.1.1 above). However, these can be found in studies that were conducted collaboratively with mine in the same context; therefore, their point of view was not overlooked (Hean, Johnsen, & Kloetzer, 2020).

Table 4 – Overview of interview data

Interviews overview					
Informant service	Informants	Interviews	Time of collection	Minutes recorded	Pages transcribed
L&D	19	21	11.2017 – 11.2018	801	121
Criminal Justice	2	2	02.2018 – 02.2019	83	16
Welfare Services	7	7	05.2018 – 11.2018	141	33
Total	28	30	11.2017 – 02.2019	1025	170

### **3.3.2.3 Observations**

In this thesis, the observation study was primarily used to gain a contextual insight into the workdays and interactions among the frontline workers in different services, as well as into normative structures in the case office. The approach chosen for the observation exercise was an unstructured type. As explained by, Gilham (2008), the goal with unstructured observation is to record behaviour holistically without the use of pre-determined guidelines, as opposed to what it would happen in a structured observation approach. Nevertheless, as the author emphasises, “no research, however open-ended, lacks structure” (2008, p. 39). Thus, despite the unstructured approach, during this research three were the main points addressed whilst observing/interacting with participants, as follows: the relationships professionals would establish while performing their job, the perception of front-line workers from other agencies would have of L&D, and the drivers and barriers practitioners would encounter in their daily work routine. One of the benefits of having some delimitation in the observation phase was the ability to focus the interaction with informants on those points that were

relevant, which was convenient given time constraint imposed by the participants' busy schedule.

### **3.3.3 Data analysis**

The transcribed interviews were subjected to a template analysis, which is a way of thematically analysing qualitative data that involves the development of a coding 'template' summarising themes identified by the researcher as important in a data set and organises them in a meaningful and useful manner (King, 2012).

Thematic data analysis was adapted from King's template analysis method (2012). Initially, the transcription of the interviews was carried out and added to the documents gathered as well as notes taken during the data collection phase. I transcribed the interviews as close as possible to the date when they took place, as it was easier to make sense of the data being produced through the transcripts. Due to the analytical approach adopted, the content rather than the structure of the participants' responses for analysis was the focus of my interest. In this sense, long pauses, interruptions and nonverbal communication were not explicitly noted in the transcribed text. Transcriptions were double-checked by listening back to the audio recording and reading the transcripts simultaneously. The process also allowed me to add any notes taken during or immediately after the interviews to the transcriptions.

Open coding was performed in part of the dataset (3 randomly selected interview transcripts). With the help of the CAQDAS package QSR NVivo version 12, I underlined interesting segments of text and labelled them with a description. Through abstraction, codes turned into categories, and these were elevated to themes (and sub-themes when

suitable) according to their degree of generalizability. A preliminary analytical framework was developed.

The *a priori* template was shared and discussed with PhD supervisors. The goal of this procedure was to ensure the quality and reflexivity of the data analysis as well as to discuss the relevance of the developed coding. Together we performed an exercise of co-coding, which has led to the same passages of the text being highlighted as meaningful in most cases although the interpretation of the extracts varied in certain instances. In such situations, the transcript was revisited, and a new coding was carried out. The process of refining, applying, and refining the analytical framework was repeated until no new codes appeared and a final template could be formed, which later on was applied to the entire dataset yielding inductive codes, categories, sub-themes and themes.

The final step in the analytical approach comprised subjecting the inductive framework to meta-themes deductively developed based on cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). The purpose of this last level was to classify the data according to theoretical tenets that transcend the limits of this study. Furthermore, since CHAT provided the theoretical grounds in which interpretation of the data took place, indexing the dataset according to the principles of the theory seemed to make sense.

The final framework consisted of two main templates, one for the L&D and another for the 'Other services'. The L&D template was formed by 1 meta-theme, 1 theme, 3 sub-themes, 4 categories, and 3 sub-categories. The Other Services template had 1 meta-theme, 1 theme, 3 sub-themes, 4 categories, and 6 sub-categories. The entire framework, with exemplary codes and quotes, can be found in Appendix 5.

### **3.3.3.1 Template analysis: Advantages and limitations**

The strongest advantage of the template analysis approach is its flexibility and simplicity. It is a rather straightforward method with few specified procedures, which allows for changes to be made according to

the needs of a particular study. These changes pertain not only research topics but also epistemological and methodological positions. Furthermore, the possibility of developing an *a priori* template – a particular feature of the method – can be useful in situations where the researcher wants to ensure focus on key areas relevant to the study early on, allowing for the capture of relevant theoretical concepts and/or perspectives that have informed the very design of the study (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015).

Although flexibility and simplicity were listed as strengths of the approach, they can also be perceived as limitations. As opposed to other thematic analysis methods that are pervaded with elaborated procedures and stages (e.g. moving from descriptive themes to interpretive one and finally overarching themes), the template analysis approach does not provide the researcher with such clear guidelines. In this scenario, novice researchers might end up jumping relevant steps in the analytical process and rushing into the final stages in interpretation of the data. Another potential pitfall would be the erroneous emphasis on the development of an *a priori* template as an end product when in fact it is a means to an end. *A priori* templates are optional and should be used to help the researcher to make sense of the data in early stages of the analysis. They are not the end result (Brooks et al., 2015).

In this study, the flexibility offered by the approach was beneficial. Open coding at the outset of the analytical process allowed me to explore various aspects of data in depth. At the same time, having in mind the goal of producing a template kept me on track and forced me to adopt a well-structured approach to data handling. To mitigate the harmful effects of my inexperience, I benefited from the expertise of my supervisors to ensure that all the necessary steps were taken during the analysis. As explained in the previous section, using the template analysis facilitated the collaboration between me and my supervisors in the elaboration of codes and definition of meaning and structures. In the end, the analytical choices made were guided by the theoretical

framework laid out in chapter 2 as well as the research questions of this study, which was only possible due to the flexibility offered by the template analysis method.

### **3.4 Research design in the appended papers**

The aim of this research project was to respond the over-arching question “*How is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion?*” The aim was operationalized through two research questions, as follows:

- I. How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfares systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?
  
- II. What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?

An overview of the research design and methods of all papers is given in table 5 below, followed by a more detailed description of each appended paper.

Table 5 – Overview of research design

Title	RQ	Theory	Methods
<i>Tracing the Historical Development of a Service Model for Interagency Collaboration: Contradictions as Barriers and Potential Drivers for Change</i>	I	Cultural-historical activity theory	Document analysis (n=39) + Semi-structured interviews (n=30) of the participants from both the L&D, criminal justice and welfare services + observations  Template analysis



*Methodological choices*

<b><i>Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care</i></b>	I	Cultural-historical activity theory	Semi-structured interviews conducted with front-line workers from L&D (n=10), criminal justice (n=1) and welfare services (n=1) + unstructured observations Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
<b><i>Performance-Based Policy in Offender Rehabilitation: Limitation or Innovation for Liaison and Diversion Organisations and Their Front-Line Workers?</i></b>	I&II	Performance-based policing, innovation in the public sector and street-level bureaucracy	Document analysis (n=39) + Semi-structured interviews (n=21) of the entire L&D front-line staff (n=19) + observations Template analysis
<b><i>Where is the Primary Contradiction? Reflections on the Intricacies of Research Predicated on Activity Theory</i></b>	II	Activity Theory	A conceptual article reviewing a prevalent concept (namely, primary contradiction) in Activity Theory
<b><i>Personality Traits as mediating artefacts within the subject: Considerations on How to Move Activity Theory Forward</i></b>	II	Activity Theory & Five-factor theory	Conceptual paper aimed at interpreting Activity Theory in a different light

### ***3.4.1 Paper I (book chapter) – Tracing the Historical Development of a Service Model for Interagency Collaboration: Contradictions as Barriers and Potential Drivers for Change***

The book chapter is an empirical analysis of the historical development of Liaison & Diversion services as a conduit to interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems. It makes use of CHAT as analytical tool to respond research question I (namely, how members of the L&D services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfares systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?). In this sense, the new national model for L&D serves as an allegory to the standard practice of top-down implementation of public policies. The paper dovetails nicely with the over-arching aim of the study, namely to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and

neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion. It does so by wielding Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to trace a chronological line of the scenario (a) before the rollout of the L&D national model, (b) during the rollout of the L&D national model and (c) after the rollout of the L&D national model.

Studies based on the third generation of Activity Theory grapple with complex social phenomena by taking into account the perspective of the several actors involved in the phenomenon (Fletcher, 2016). To that end, a qualitative single case study approach was the design choice for the paper because it allowed for an in-depth study of a specific case (Harrison & Easton, 2004), namely the front-line interagency collaboration of criminal justice and welfare services through the perspective of professionals from one organisation in specific, i.e. L&D.

As it is the case of investigation of social phenomena, the human nature and experiences cannot be quantified, manipulated, measured or have their variables controlled. Therefore, data are best captured in their milieu (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). That was the motivation for the methods of data collection adopted, namely semi-structured interviews, document analysis and unstructured observations. The dataset included the entire L&D front-line staff as well as front-line workers from neighbouring services in both criminal justice and welfare systems, as specified in section 3.3.2. A template analysis (King, 2012) of the collected data was adopted in collaboration with the co-author. I was responsible for the initial open coding of 3 randomly selected interview transcripts and the development of a preliminary analytical framework. This *a priori* template was shared and discussed with the co-author and refinement was carried out as necessary. A final template was formed and applied to the entire dataset yielding inductive codes, categories, sub-themes and themes (Appendix 5).

The book chapter draws upon the accounts (n=30) of the participants (n=28), which were of paramount relevance to respond the research question I in addition to the attainment of the aim of this research as mentioned earlier. To explore the impact of the new national model for L&D services and its reverberation on interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems (over-arching aim of the study), the analysis of historical documents (n=39) ranging from 2008 to 2019 in contrast with the current scenario as described by informants was of particular relevance.

### *3.4.2 Paper II – Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care*

The methodological choices carried out in this paper had in mind the objective to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion (over-arching research aim) and to establish how L&D front-line workers see their role in the current scenario (research question I).

This article is an empirical paper on early diversion of vulnerable offenders into appropriate care as a means to reduce recidivism. It introduces the work done by L&D and the theoretical discussion around the benefits of early diversion of offenders into care (Andrews & Bonta, 2016). The article was originally a submission to an international

conference in 2018, and it was later on published<sup>5</sup>; therefore, it reflects the developments of this research at that stage.

Data collection happened through semi-structured interviews, field notes and unstructured observations. The data reflected in the article were gathered between November/2017 and May/2018 and comprised interviews conducted with front-line workers from L&D (n=10), criminal justice (n=1) and welfare services (n=1). These interviews followed a common schedule underpinned by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and aimed at exploring the relationship between front-line professionals in both L&D and neighbouring services in criminal justice and welfare systems.

Given the ongoing character of data collection at the stage in which this paper was produced, its design – in comparison to the other papers – is perhaps predicated more on my observations of the informants in their natural milieu than document analysis and interviews, although the last two also comprise the dataset utilised in this paper. The observation in this study was unstructured and primarily used to gain a contextual insight into the workdays and interactions among the front-line workers in different services, as well as into normative structures in the case office (Gilham, 2008). There was no use of pre-determined guidelines, but during fieldwork three were the main points addressed whilst observing/interacting with participants, as follows: the relationships professionals would establish while performing their job, the perception of front-line workers from other agencies would have of L&D, and the drivers and barriers practitioners would encounter in their daily work routine.

An inductive stepwise thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke , 2006) of the available data was conducted in an attempt to find potential

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<sup>5</sup> Although the paper was not published in a journal of sufficient standing according to NSD's (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) standards, I decided to include it in the thesis to give an idea of the full scope of the research project and of its reporting.

contradictions between L&D and neighbouring services with major focus on the situation after the implementation of a national model for L&D services.

The benefit of drawing upon observations was the ability to create an unfiltered picture of the current scenario of collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems as well as the role L&D front-line workers play in this context. The observations, in tandem with interviews and document analysis, informed both the over-arching aim and the research question I of this study and yielded a paper that narrows down into a topic that was more broadly addressed in paper I. Here, the emphasis is primarily on the current role played by L&D, i.e. to liaise with agencies across criminal justice and welfare systems to enable the timely diversion of vulnerable offenders, whereas in paper I the focus was on the historical development of the service.

### *3.4.3 Paper III – Performance-Based Policy in Offender Rehabilitation: Limitation or Innovation for Liaison and Diversion Organisations and Their Front-Line Workers?*

This is an empirical paper on performance-based policing in offender rehabilitation, serves to explore the limitations imposed by a top-down approach that has been using competitive elements in the process of allocating public funds through policies and how these limitations can foster innovation.

This paper in particular draws upon a stream of literature on performance-based policy implementation at the street-level (Lipsky, 2010) and coping mechanism developed by front-line workers as a form of bottom-up innovation (Fuglsang, 2010; Hill & Huppe, 2014; Lippke

& Wegener, 2014) as a means to explain the situation of the current scenario in offender rehabilitation in England and Wales. In doing so, it is able to address both the research question I, as it shines a light on the impact of the new policy on collaboration between front-line professionals, but also helps to identify the contradictions that have arisen from the tension between the new model and the circumstances found at the street-level, which ends up informing the discussion taking place in the research question II.

Data collection and analysis methods resemble those described for the book chapter, i.e. the use of semi-structured interviews, document analysis and unstructured observations to gather data and their analysis through an approach of template analysis (King, 2012). However, here the dataset included only L&D professionals because we wanted to emphasise on the impact of the new policy on the L&D services instead of going too broad on the analysis of the challenges each organisation had with their own policies. We deemed the research design adopted in this paper commensurate because, in light of the research aim, having the accounts of the L&D front-line workers particularly explored was crucial. Besides, the possibility to contrast those with historical documents collected during the fieldwork and the observations carried out while interacting with informants yielded a holistic view of the impact of the new policy on the L&D services. The choice of a template analysis approach to handle the data was appropriate because it enabled focus on key areas relevant to the paper (specifically, policy implementation at the street-level) while also granting a degree of flexibility to implement changes made according to the needs of the ongoing fieldwork (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015).

This paper is in line with the previous two because it focuses down only on part of the general practice of L&D services currently (focus of paper II), namely the challenges faced by front-line workers while trying to operationalise collaboration upon the introduction of a performance-based policy (the new national model for L&D services).

### *3.4.4 Paper IV – Where is the Primary Contradiction? Reflections on the Intricacies of Research Predicated on Activity Theory*

Whilst the previous papers were empirical, this article is conceptual. The goal of the article is to address potential inconsistencies between Activity Theory and Marx's understandings of what constitutes the concept of primary contradiction (a concept directly addressed by research question II – *What are the main contradiction encountered by L&D front-line professionals?*). Despite the notorious importance of such discussion at a philosophical level, I also draw upon my experience of conducting a field research predicated on Activity Theory to demonstrate the bearing of such discussion empirically.

As a conceptual paper, the methodology proposed by Whetten (1989), Van de Ven (1989) and Cropanzano (2009) was followed, i.e. a conceptual paper should alternatively address at least one of the following seven questions: (a) What is new? (b) So what? (c) Why so? (d) Well done? (e) Done well? (f) Why now? and (g) Who cares? In addition to informing the research question II, the research design adopted in this paper also dovetails nicely with the over-arching aim of this study as it investigates how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion (What is new? – according with the methodology aforementioned).

### ***3.4.5 Paper V – Personality Traits as mediating artefacts within the subject: Considerations on How to Move Activity Theory Forward***

This is also a conceptual article. Thus, the empirical data produced by this research project is not directly explored here either, but it serves as a backdrop in which theoretical issues are discussed and recommendations for the future are presented.

Being conceptual, this paper also follows the methodology described in the previous section, but with a different purpose. The goal herein is to, beyond summarising recent research on ways to advance Activity Theory, integrate it with the literature on biologically-based psychological personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and contribute to the knowledge by offering a framework that conflates both.

Although the research design adopted in this paper might not be exclusively linked to one of the research questions, it is in line with ideas tackled in both of them as well as it links with the over-arching aim of this research as it discusses the limitations of the chosen theoretical underpinning and suggests alternative possibilities for its development.

### ***3.5 My role as researcher: Handling personal bias and ensuring the trustworthiness of the study***

A well-known feature of qualitative studies is that they accommodate the researcher's personal perspective, which makes it hard to separate the final product from the scholar herself/himself. Therefore, it is relevant for the researcher to be transparent and reflexive about the processes through which data have been gathered, analysed and presented (Polit & Beck, 2014). From the outset, having a well-defined research paradigm



(in this study, check section 3.1) clarified the purpose and intention of the study. It also helped to hold me accountable, which in the end led to a more trustworthy study.

Bias – understood as an influence capable of distorting the result of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014), is a term originally belonging the paradigm of quantitative research. In this vein, the recognition of personal bias in qualitative studies is somewhat under dispute, as it does not fit the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative inquiry (Thorne, Stephens, & Truant, 2016). Pacific though is the understanding that concepts such as rigour and trustworthiness are more pertinent to the reflexive, subjective nature of qualitative researcher (Galdas, 2017).

Every research project tries to investigate predetermined questions in a way that is reliable, valid and ethical. The methodological choices taken to achieve such goal are of utmost relevance with regards to establishing the trustworthiness (i.e. credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability) of the study (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Below, I clarify the provisions made to ensure the trustworthiness of this research.

*Credibility* refers to whether findings are congruent with the reality being scrutinized (Shenton, 2004). Among others, I made the following provisions to ensure that the phenomenon under study was accurately recorded:

- Research methods were well established before data collection started, as explained in this chapter. For example, I had clear sampling criteria for both informants and documents comprising the dataset, interviews followed a specific schedule (Appendix 3), and data analysis followed the procedures explained in the literature on Template Analysis.
- I developed familiarity with the culture of participating organisations by embedding myself in the context studied through unstructured observations (see section 3.3.2.3) and preliminary casual meetings with informants. These

conversations did not follow a formal schedule and helped to promote rapport between the participant and me.

- Whenever possible, I adopted more than one method of data collection (methodological triangulation), more than one source of data (data triangulation), and more than one type of theory to interpret the investigated phenomenon (theory triangulation) (Van Maanen, 1983; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
- To ensure participants' honesty when contributing data, I gave informants opportunities to refuse to participate in the research. They were also given a chance to withdraw from the study at any point. In addition, participants' honesty was spurred by letting them know that data would be anonymised (Appendix 2).
- Frequent debriefing sessions with the PhD supervisors served as an arena to address my vision of the research as well as for them to discuss alternative approaches and draw attention to potential flaws in my design (Shenton, 2004).
- Throughout the PhD, the research has been subjected to peer scrutiny in seminars at the university, international conferences and presentations as well as through submission to scientific peer-reviewed journals.

Credibility and *dependability* are closely related, and by demonstrating the former the researcher is ensuring the latter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As to dependability specifically, my research design was reported in detail in both this thesis and other publications (see part II of this thesis), which enables future researchers to repeat the work done by me even though it might not guarantee same results (Shenton, 2004).

*Transferability* is a controversial topic in qualitative research. While some argue that it is not possible (Erlandson et al., 1993), others suggest that transferability should not be dismissed entirely in qualitative studies (Stake, 1994; Denscombe, 1998). Despite the discussion, I strived to produce sufficient contextual information about fieldwork site, about the phenomenon being studied, and about the background factors impinging on the study. All that to allow comparison to be made.

Additionally, to enable transferability, I use this thesis to provide information on the following issues (Shenton, 2004):

- The number of participant organisations and their location.
- Any limitation of the study or conflict of interests.
- Selection criteria and information on the participants.
- Data collection methods, period over which they happened, and the length of the data collection sessions.

Finally, *confirmability* refers to the objectivity of the data. However, ensuring the objectivity of a study is difficult, as the researcher's biases are inevitable especially in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). To reduce the effect of my bias and ensure that the findings of the study were resulting from experiences and ideas of the informants, both methodological, data and theory triangulations were carried out. Besides, personal beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted are acknowledged and explained in this thesis.

### **3.6 Ethics**

In this research project, the first challenge faced was to ensure voluntary participation. The manager of the L&D service studied is an experienced and well-connected professional in the investigated setting and acted as a gatekeeper in this research project. In this sense, I could benefit from the manager's assistance in arranging interviews with the L&D front-line staff as well as appoint informants in other services. However, professionals working at the interface between criminal justice and welfare services are very busy, and one could not take for granted their capacity to dispose of their valuable time to participate in a research project. My concern, especially about the L&D front-line staff, was that the manager's involvement in the research would not leave many options for employees to abstain from it. Nevertheless, the challenge was

diminished by clarifying to potential participants that their participation was voluntary.

Interviewees were contacted by email and specific points were clarified from the outset, such as the goals of the research, the reasons why that specific participant had been chosen, information about the voluntary nature of participation and the possibility to withdraw participation any time in the process, and confidentiality matters. Moreover, a consent form was handed over to the participant at the interview, and each interviewee was asked to sign it. Both documents can be seen in Appendix 2. Overall, the participants seemed comfortable with their participation, although some of them asked not to have the conversation audiotaped, which was respected.

Another consideration in the research project was to guarantee the anonymity of the participants in the publication of the findings. Due to limited staff in the chosen L&D site, internal anonymity of some of the most central research participants was challenging to keep from the other professionals in the organisation. However, external anonymity could be ensured by not mentioning specific characteristics of the selected L&D site, since this is a national service with several sites spread around England and Wales. Concerning other organisations in criminal justice system and welfare service, anonymity was achievable by not mentioning the specific agency the interviewee worked.

For the most, front-line informants seemed open and candid during the interviews, providing even enthusiastic accounts of their experiences. To ensure anonymity, interview quotes were not related to demographic information of gender or age. All informants were identified by their role in the organisation and the gender used was either 'female' or 'male' in the publications, although both genders were well represented. Any specific dialects and jargon that could potentially identify an informant were masked in the transcripts.

*Methodological choices*

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Ethical clearance was obtained from both the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (case number 51047) and the Bournemouth University Ethics Committee (Ethics ID 16612).

## **4 Research results**

This thesis comprises a book chapter and four articles exploring front-line interagency collaboration between criminal justice, welfare services and Liaison and Diversion (L&D). Combined, they attempted to attain the over-arching aim of this research, which is to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion.

In order to investigate the role of L&D services as a conduit of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems upon the introduction of the new national model, the aim of this study has been operationalized through two research questions, as follows:

- I. How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?
  
- II. What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?

In this chapter, I present the papers comprising part II of this thesis (sections 4.1 to 4.5) and later argument for the relevance on each one of them to the attainment of the research's aim and response of the research questions (section 4.6.2). Table 6 below presents an overview of the results discussed in the appended papers. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the link between the research questions and the papers' contribution. In doing so, I demonstrate the overall contribution of the research.

*Research contribution, implications and further research*

Table 6 – Overview of the appended papers

Title	Contribution	RQ	Findings	Authorship
<i>Tracing the Historical Development of a Service Model for Interagency Collaboration: Contradictions as Barriers and Potential Drivers for Change</i>	To use CHAT to map the contextual background and identify potential contradictions within and between both the L&D, criminal justice and the welfare services activity systems that serve as potential triggers for future development	I	<p>Three activity systems were identified to represent the historical development of L&amp;D services over time. They depicted the scenario (a) before the rollout of the L&amp;D national model, (b) during the rollout of the L&amp;D national model, (c) after the rollout of the L&amp;D national model.</p> <p>The L&amp;D national model did not promote the expected change in the dynamics between services, mostly because it did not provide agencies with appropriate conditions to implement the rules of the policy</p>	Co-authored with Prof. Sarah Hean, University of Stavanger. I did the main part of the writing and contributed to all parts of the paper
<i>Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care</i>	To discuss the drivers and barriers to prearrest/pre-sentence models of rehabilitation of offenders through the perspective of the work done by L&D	I	<p>Services do not have their roles clearly specified, which causes miscommunication between professionals working in different agencies.</p> <p>There is a mismatch between local circumstances and the rules of the national model, which hinders the implementation of the model by front-line workers.</p>	Sole author
<i>Performance-Based Policy in Offender Rehabilitation : Limitation or Innovation for Liaison and Diversion Organisations and Their Front-Line Workers?</i>	To investigate the impact of top-down performance-based policing in public services, with emphasis on the offender rehabilitation context	I&II	<p>There is a conflict between standardised top-down policies and the circumstances found at the street-level.</p> <p>In the context of rehabilitation of offenders workers often abide by values and ethical standards of their profession, which leads to employee-based innovation at the street-level since professionals develop coping strategies to equate policy and reality</p>	Co-authored with Ass. Prof. Ann-Karin Holmen, University of Stavanger. I did the main part of the writing and contributed to all parts of the paper
<i>Where is the Primary Contradiction ? Reflections on the Intricacies of Research Predicated on</i>	To discuss the inconsistencies between Activity Theory and Marx's understandings of what constitutes the concept of primary contradiction and to demonstrate the	II	As a conceptual article, the findings drawn from empirical data were not discussed herein, although there are referrals to the previous papers and the evidence they produce	Sole author

<b>Activity Theory</b>	bearing of such discussion for empirical research			
<b>Personality Traits as mediating artefacts within the subject: Considerations on How to Move Activity Theory Forward</b>	To discuss one of the Activity Theory's shortcoming (i.e. lack of individuality in its analysis) and to suggest ways to address the situation by acknowledging the influence biologically-based psychological personality traits have on the subject of an activity	II	As a conceptual article, the findings drawn from empirical data were not discussed herein	Sole author

#### **4.1 Paper I (book chapter)**

Rocha, P., & Hean, S. (2020). Tracing the Historical Development of a Service Model for Interagency Collaboration: Contradictions as Barriers and Potential Drivers for Change. In S. Hean, B. Johnsen, & L. Kloetzer, *Collaboration, innovation and organisational learning in Penal Systems*. Routledge. In peer review.

The book chapter on collaboration and innovation in the public sector makes use of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to trace the historical development of a service model for interagency collaboration, namely L&D. The chapter also identifies potential contradictions within and between the L&D, criminal justice and the welfare activity systems that, once resolved, have the potential to promote innovation.

The chapter is positioned within a stream of literature on activity theoretical analysis of complex work environments (Engeström, 1987; Kaptelinin, Kuutti, & Bannon, 1995; Warmington, et al., 2004) and analyses the drivers and barriers of top-down versus bottom-up approach to innovation in the public sector.

The results of this chapter include the perspectives of professionals from several organisations in criminal justice and welfare services. A template



analysis (King, 2012) was done on the perspectives of a sample including interviews (n=30) with L&D (n=19), criminal justice (n=2) and welfare service (n=7), document analysis (n=39) and observations. Based on the results, the chapter identifies 3 activity systems that help explain the development of activities aimed at the promotion of integrated care. The 3 activity systems are discussed in chronological order and include a representation of the studied setting (a) before the rollout of the L&D national model, (b) during the rollout of the L&D national model, and (c) after the rollout of the L&D national model. The chapter suggests that the new model did not promote the expected change in the dynamics between services and uses the CHAT to articulate the reasons why as well as possible ways forward.

## **4.2 Paper II**

Rocha, P. (2019). *Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care*. *International Journal of Social Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 2(6), 831-837.

The paper examines early diversion of vulnerable offenders into appropriate care as a means to reduce recidivism. It does so by introducing the work done by L&D and the theoretical discussion around the benefits of prearrest/pre-sentence models of intervention.

The article is positioned within a stream of literature on how to meet criminogenic needs to reduce recidivism (Hare, 2002; Skeem & Peterson, 2012; Andrews & Bonta, 2016). The way criminogenic needs relate to risk factors is that they are both tied together; therefore, in trying to identify the reasons leading up to an offence, criminologists analyse the necessities of the offender and determine the individual's unmet needs that led to criminal behaviour. Thus, criminogenic needs are the characteristics directly connected to the probability of a person to re-

offend (Andrews & Bonta, 2016). More specifically, the article focuses on the ability agencies have to collaborate to meet the criminogenic needs care of those entering criminal justice system as well as their capacity to implement rehabilitation strategies that address clusters of correlated needs through integrated care.

The perspective of front-line professionals (n=12) operating at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems was collected through interviews and an inductive thematic method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted to make sense of the gathered information. The results provided evidence that organisations use independent IT systems, which has been impairing their ability to coordinate care. As a consequence, there is a misalignment between agencies that end up not having a full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each other. Despite described as the default means of information gathering and sharing, computer systems are not interconnected and interagency communication is hindered, although data protection rules have also been mentioned as one cause for the difficulty of sharing information on clients.

Using CHAT to explore the relationship between L&D and other services in criminal justice and welfare services, the article suggests that front-line professionals have been struggling to share knowledge due to a misalignment between the tools used by each organisation. In CHAT, knowledge sharing is the basis for collaboration between activity systems and the co-creation of a shared object. However, the tensions created by the misaligned tools create opportunities for expansive learning, which calls for the innovation of existing working routines as well as the creation of new sorts of tools that ultimately can take interagency collaboration into consideration.

One of the contributions of the article is that not only it confirms existing knowledge of the benefits of early diversion of vulnerable offenders into appropriate care as means to reduce recidivism, but also it situates

specifically the work done by L&D in this context. Although only reflecting the developments of this research at that stage in which was written (mid-2018), this paper provides an overview of collaboration models that focus on prearrest/pre-sentence diversion of vulnerable individuals in England and Wales and contextualizes L&D in this context.

### **4.3 Paper III**

Rocha, P., & Holmen, A. (2020). *Performance-Based Policy in Offender Rehabilitation: Limitation or Innovation for Liaison and Diversion Organisations and Their Front-Line Workers?* *Probation Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550520926578>.

The paper, on performance-based policing and implementation at the street-level, serves to explore the limitations imposed by a top-down approach that has been using competitive elements in the process of allocating public funds through policies. The paper is positioned within a stream of literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) and bottom-up employee-driven forms of innovation in the public sector (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014).

Paper III builds upon the findings presented in appended paper II (namely, the challenges of promoting integrated care on a fragmented system) and expands to explore the impact of the national model for L&D services on practice at the street-level. However, here there is a more in-depth exploration of the finding that L&D sites have been struggling with the implementation of the national model due to its standardised rules that do not take into account the local peculiarities of each region. The results provide evidence that L&D front-line workers make a difference between “core-work tasks and housekeeping chores” (Lipsky, 2010, p. 30) and prioritize the former in detriment of the latter. The prioritization has been described by informants as a coping strategy

to equate policy and reality since front-line workers tend to operate under bureaucratic constraints and with limited resources.

The paper contributes by investigating performance-based policing and implementation at the street-level in the context of offender rehabilitation through the lens of a new service, namely L&D. In doing so, it confirms the existing knowledge that offenders workers often abide by values and ethical standards of their profession (Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016), which might go against the idea of standardisation introduced by performance-based policies. In addition, the paper innovates by suggesting that the ethical approach of professionals in this context, which not always is in line with top-down introduced rules, can be interpreted as a form of bottom-up employee-based innovation in the public sector (Fuglsang, 2010).

#### **4.4 Paper IV**

Rocha, P., (2020). *Where is the Primary Contradiction? Reflections on the Intricacies of Research Predicated on Activity Theory*. Outlines: Critical Practice Studies (Accepted – Publication September 2020)

This conceptual paper reflects on the idea that there is an omnipresent primary contradiction lurking at the bottom of every activity in capitalism. In doing so, it articulates the relationship between Marxism and Activity Theory. Whilst Marx's ideas suggest that a trademark of capitalist social formations is the way surplus is pumped out from living labour, Activity Theory posits that the dual nature of commodities (i.e. their use and exchange-value) is the fundamental contradiction existent among all activities. The article argues that such distinction bears a direct impact on empirical research predicated on Activity Theory and goes on to consider the practical and theoretical implications of the Activity Theory's departure from Marx's ideas. The point is illustrated with hindsight reflection on the challenges I faced while conducting an

activity theoretical field research attempting to identify contradictions in the activity system of L&D.

#### **4.5 Paper V**

Rocha, P., (n.d.). *Personality traits as mediating artifacts within the subject: Considerations on how to move activity theory forward*. Theory & Psychology (In peer review)

In the literature, there have been discussions on how to move Activity Theory forward. This conceptual paper is my attempt to contribute to the advancement of the theory.

As a name of reference for activity theorists, Engeström has suggested that the future for activity theory is to look for resilient alternatives to capitalism (Engeström, 2009). In the paper, I investigate whether that is the case and conclude that, by and large, there is a proclivity to an anti-capitalist discourse among academics currently, which leads to the risk of having political ideologies informing activity theoretical research.

The article suggests a scientific-based alternative path to advance activity theory, which includes subjectivity in the scope of a theory that is otherwise mostly concerned with societal activity.

#### **4.6 Final considerations**

##### **4.6.1 *The study's idiosyncrasies and potential impact on the results***

General limitations of the study are addressed and commented upon in section 5.5 below. However, regarding specifically the research results and taking into account the knowledge acquired whilst undertaking the study, the empirical findings presented in the aforementioned papers should be considered in light of some circumstances.

The first situation concerns the sample. This was a study focused on interagency collaboration at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems. Therefore, it was important to have a sample representative of both sectors. I successfully engaged 28 participants, but only 2 of those represented the criminal justice system. My limited access to respondents working in organisations in the criminal justice system was not due to apathy from my part, but rather their unwillingness to participate in this research project. Criminal justice professionals, especially probation officers, seem to be uncertain about the results their organisations have been yielding (Deering & Feilzer, 2015), which in my perception led to their disinclination to talk with me. Alternatively, respondents from other organisations (other than probation, police and court) or at different levels (e.g. management level, politicians) could have been approached to participate, but this study was inherently designed to investigate interactions between front-line workers, which made those alternative possibilities unfeasible. In this vein, future research on interagency collaboration at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems could emphasise on the perspective of front-line criminal justice professionals, especially those working for Probation.

The second situation is rather an idiosyncratic characteristic of this study than a drawback in itself. While embedding myself in the context studied, assistance received from locals helped me to better understand their culture and obtain access to participants. Nevertheless, miscommunication and misinterpretation can occur when fieldwork is conducted in a foreign cultural setting (Crang & Cook, 2007), and these can easily undermine the validity of the study itself if important pieces of information are misunderstood and misrepresented in the final text. Although I am proficient in English, language and culture can be formidable obstacles to understanding both meaning and the intention of informants, and I am still foreign to the cultural codes that are used by locals to signal intended meaning. Hence, there were certain cultural

challenges that had to be overcome in the research process. For example, while pursuing access to Probation services, a probation officer working directly with the rehabilitation of vulnerable offenders seemed positive about participating in my research project. Although I perceived this seeming expression of interest as genuine, later, when the person in question became unavailable for further contact and follow-up, I realized that this was not indeed the case, and this potential informant was just being politely dismissive. This example drives the point that understanding a language is not the same as being able to read cultural symbols and signals.

#### *4.6.2 Relationship between the papers*

In light of the over-arching aim of this research (i.e. how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion) and the researching questions informing it (How members of the L&D perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model? and What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?), the thesis main contribution is perhaps the suggestion of new solutions to old problems through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

The connection between the papers is not only empirical but also theoretical. Empirical because while this research project has addressed various aspects of the collaboration between agencies in both criminal justice and welfare systems, the focus on the perspective of front-line workers has remained constant. Theoretical because, as shown in table 6 at the beginning of this chapter, the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2 was equally wielded to address the research questions posed in this study, which was also reflected in the concordant methodological choices throughout.

The use of CHAT to make sense of interagency collaboration happening at the street-level between organisations in both criminal justice and welfare systems is innovative inasmuch as there are few studies using the theory in the context of offender rehabilitation (Hean, Willumsen, & Ødegård, 2015; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017). Moreover, the focus on the role of the L&D front-line workers as conduit for collaboration between agencies provides a fresh take on a topic that otherwise has been explored with emphasis on practice at the organisational level (Fenge, et al., 2014; Kane, Evans, & Shokrane, 2018).

In general lines, the relationship between the papers can be explained as follows:

Paper I (the book chapter) provides an overview of the historical development of L&D services comparing the situation before, during and after the introduction of the new national model for the service. Paper II builds on the timeline produced by paper I and narrows down on the general practice of L&D services currently. Finally, paper III dovetails nicely with the previous papers inasmuch as it concentrates only on part of the general practice of L&D services currently, namely the contradictions encountered by front-line workers striving to realise collaboration upon the introduction of a performance-based policy (the new national model for L&D services). Papers IV and V are conceptual. In this vein, their relation with the other three papers is predicated on their contribution to the advancement of the theory underpinning the empirical work reflected in papers I to III. However, these papers symbolize only first step of a study with the potential to effectively impact practice.

CHAT provides practitioners and researchers equally with tools and strategies to influence, in tandem, the current practice (see section 5.4.1 below for recommendations for the future). Nevertheless, it is also important to emphasise that the outcomes of this study can stand autonomously as a step toward change. The use of Activity Theory's



analytical tools in papers I (book chapter) and II – the activity systems – helped to develop the understanding of the current scenario of collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in comparison to the situation prior to the introduction of the new model for L&D services, which dovetails nicely with the over-arching aim of this study. Making sense of the dynamics existent among key actors in various sectors of public service is crucial before any attempt to influence practice. To that end, papers I and II gathered and analysed pivotal data to inform future CHAT-oriented interventions in the field.

Furthermore, the slightly different framework adopted in paper III, i.e. less focus on CHAT and more emphasis on an analysis of the impact of top-down standardized instructions on practice at the street-level and how professionals go about implementing policy, highlighted the role of L&D front-line workers not only as collaboration facilitators but also as street-level policy makers (the focus of the research question I), which enriches the contribution of this research and aligns it with yet another strand of literature besides Activity Theory, namely studies on street-level bureaucracy (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Lipsky, 2010; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014; Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016).

Papers IV and V build upon the knowledge developed through analysis of empirical data in papers I to III and attempt to contribute theoretically to the advancement of Activity Theory. As it would be naïve to take CHAT for its face value, a critical analysis of its advantages and shortcomings was conducted in this study (see section 2.1.4 for more information). Paper IV expands on the concept of ‘contradictions’ – a key tenet of Activity Theory – and delves deep into its Marxist origins in comparison to the current understanding put forward by authors such as Engeström (1987; 2001). Understanding the notion of ‘contradictions’ is a key prerequisite to the investigation proposed by research question II. Furthermore, paper V addresses other array of limitations of CHAT (Roth, 2007; Bakhurst, 2009; Allen et al., 2011; 2013), namely its

potential disregard for the relevance biological factors affecting social activity. This is a discussion aimed at moving the theory forward and acknowledging yet another possible shortfall of the chosen theoretical underpinning in this study.

Guided by the research questions and the study's over-arching aim, three were the main empirical findings discussed in the appended papers as well as in this thesis: (1) fragmentation of communication tools not promoting information sharing within and between agencies, (2) difficulties of policy implementation (the national model for L&D) at the street-level and the consequent adaptation of the model to local circumstances, and (3) front-line workers having to rely on interpersonal relationships to circumvent systemic limitations and promote collaboration between agencies. These findings not only confirm the knowledge produced by the existent literature (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Lipsky, 2010; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014; Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016), but also offer an up to date read on the situation in the criminal justice and welfare systems settings, demonstrating that these challenges are still to be overcome.

In this vein, the knowledge produced herein meets the desire to find innovative ways to transform their interagency working practices, as service leaders have reiterated the need for change in organisational practices to address lack of shared understanding on key concepts of confidentiality and referral (Bradley, 2009). They also felt they had failed to gain the perspectives of the front line professionals, how these practices impacted on offenders' experiences of interagency working, and ways to probe the underlying reasons behind these challenges (Fenge, et al., 2014; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017; Kane, Evans, & Shokraneh, 2018). In the end, CHAT is adopted as an overarching theoretical framework bringing both the thesis and papers together, it fosters a novel way to make sense of the current scenario, and provides tools to transform practice – as specified in section 2.1.4 below.

## **5 Research contribution, implications and further research**

This chapter summarizes and concludes the research contribution. The over-arching aim of this study was to investigate how is interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services perceived by L&D front-line workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion. To that end, the focus was on the perspective of front-line workers, more specifically those professionals providing support to offenders who have not been arrested yet. A specific organisation called Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) was selected to be the entry door into the setting, as the main goal of the service is to bring other organisations together to support vulnerable offenders entering criminal justice system.

The aforesaid aim was operationalised through two research questions:

- I. How members of the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfares systems in light of the standardized guidelines introduced by the new national model?
  
- II. What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?

In this chapter, I address the research questions by elaborating on themes addressed in the appended papers in order to respond individually each of the queries posed in light of the ver-arching aim of the study. Based on this discussion, I subsequently discuss the overall practical and theoretical implications of the study and present my recommendations as to how to take the research further. Finally, I acknowledge potential limitations of this study and present my final thoughts on the research.

### **5.1 *Interagency collaboration through the perspective of L&D front-line workers upon the introduction of a new national model for the service***

The over-arching aim of this research was to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model for Liaison & Diversion. To that end, the new national model for L&D services was used to narrow down the scope of the study by providing a limited timeframe. The research aim was informed by two research questions (further discussed in the next sections), which were addressed in the appended papers comprising part II of this thesis. Hereinafter, I explicit how they contribute to the attainment of this research's aim and critically appraise the papers in light of relevant literature.

The appended paper I (book chapter) uses Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to trace the historical development of the L&D services. The focus is on the role of front-line workers serving as conduit for collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems. The paper not only dovetails nicely with the literature on activity theoretical analysis of complex work environments (Engeström, 1987; Kaptelinin, Kuutti, & Bannon, 1995; Warmington, et al., 2004), but also contributes to the literature on different approaches to innovation in the public sector (Ellström, 2010; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014). Although the relevance of front-line workers in street-level policy implementation is well recognized (Elkjaer, 2001; Lipsky, 2010; Volberda, Van Den Bosch & Mihalache, 2014), this paper framing of innovation as societal activity emphasises the importance of dialectics amid all interested actors. Thus, street-level bureaucrats must be given as much credit as every agent at the various strata in public services and innovation must happen through dialogue. In sum, the paper uses the challenges (i.e. upon the implementation of a national model) faced by

the L&D as an allegory to the diffused need for communication between front-line workers, manager and policy-makers. As pointed out by the analysis of the findings, there is a ‘Contradiction between communication tools and object of liaison’ (see this specific sub-theme in Appendix 5) that renders communication inadequate currently. Therefore, the suggestion of a CHAT-based intervention as a means to correct this shortfall and promote interagency collaboration.

Paper II finds itself within a stream of literature on how to reduce recidivism by meeting the offenders’ criminogenic needs (Hare, 2002; Skeem & Peterson, 2012; Andrews & Bonta, 2016). The claim is that once the risk factors leading up to an offence are identified service providers can positively impact the service users by catering to their specific needs (Bradley, 2009), which ultimately reduces re-offending (Andrews, Bonta & Wormith, 2006). The paper contributes by exploring the L&D practice at the street-level while attempting to collaborate with other organisations to meet the criminogenic needs of service users. It sheds a light on the role of L&D front-line workers as a conduit of collaboration, it explains that the introduction of a new national model did not have the expected impact on L&D services due to the policy’s relative inadequacy, and emphasises that rehabilitation strategies that address clusters of correlated needs can only be achieved if agencies across different sectors can work in tandem. In this sense, the paper addresses the existent ‘Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison and diversion’ (see this specific sub-theme in Appendix 5), confirms existing knowledge of the benefits of early diversion of vulnerable offenders into appropriate care as means to reduce recidivism incarcerations (Clayfield, et al., 2005; Herrington, et al., 2009; Earl, et al., 2015; Winters, Magalhaes & Kinsella, 2015), and situates specifically the work done by L&D in the literature on prearrest/pre-sentence models of collaboration (Disley et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2018).

Paper III tackles performance-based policing and policy implementation at the street-level. It is positioned within a stream of literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) and bottom-up employee-driven forms of innovation in the public sector (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014). Herein, the focus is on the difficulties front-line workers have to harmonise top-down policies and street-level contingencies. Even though that is not a struggle exclusively found by L&D, the organisation's front-line staff deals with it in a peculiar fashion, i.e. by prioritising 'core-work tasks' in detriment of 'housekeeping chores', which is interpreted in the paper as an organic employee-driven attempt to innovate in a scenario where professionals operate under dire bureaucratic constraints and with limited resources (Fuglsang, 2010). The paper draws upon the sub-theme 'Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison and diversion' (see Appendix 5) that emerged from the analysis of the findings and uses the case of L&D as an allegory to discuss a situation of broader purview. Furthermore, another contribution of this output is to confirm the existing knowledge that workers in the studied setting often abide by values and ethical standards of their profession (Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016), which clashes with the idea of standardisation introduced by top-down policies.

Papers IV and V aim at a theoretical contribution to Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987), despite their grounding in the empirical knowledge produced by the previous three outputs. Whenever a theoretical framework is adopted, it is paramount to probe the literature for adequate criticism in order to avoid a biased study developed within an eco-chamber. That is the goal of these two outputs. They reflect on the intricacies of a study predicated on Activity Theory and present alternatives on how to move the theory forward. The manuscripts raise key issues regarding Activity Theory in its present incarnation in the works by Engeström (1987; 2001). Engeströmian Activity Theory has been influential across several fields of study and research directions; it

has helped the dissemination of ideas by activity theory pioneers – Vygotsky (1987) and Leontyev (1981) and others; it has made an important original contribution to research into various aspects of human development and learning. However, Engeströmian Activity Theory has not been closely scrutinized with a probing and critical lens from within the theory own standpoint and position – i.e. with an eye on delineating internal contradictions and gaps within this theory (which inevitably characterise any theory) so that its continuous movement and development are made possible (Roth, 2007; Bakhurst, 2009; Blunden, 2009; Jones, 2009; 2011). Papers IV and V aim to fulfil the goal of exactly such a critique and scrutiny.

An overview of the main contributions (empirical and theoretical) of each paper is provided by table 7 below. More specifically, however, the appended papers contributed to the literature on street-level interagency collaboration and policy implementation by exploring the challenges faced by front-line workers in the offender rehabilitation through the lenses of Activity Theory. The selected theoretical underpinning provided this study the opportunity to explore activity theoretical alternatives of intervention and development of the current L&D setup. There is a shortfall in the body of work produced by this study, which is the fact that the perspective of criminal justice front-line workers is under-represented. In section 5.4.1 below, I suggest the deployment of activity-theoretical studies with stronger focus on the point of view of criminal justice front-line professionals as a potential avenue to explore.

In short, the appended papers contribute to the attainment of the overarching aim of the study in the following manner:

I start in paper I by tracing an overview of the historical development of L&D services comparing the situation before, during and after the introduction of the new national model for the service. The paper's scope is pointedly broad and serves the purpose to situate the reader within the discussions guiding this study. Paper II narrows the focus down and

addresses only the general front-line practice of L&D services currently. The focus of paper III is even narrower and concentrates just on part of the general practice of L&D services currently, namely the contradictions encountered by front-line workers striving to realise collaboration upon the introduction of a performance-based policy (the new national model for L&D services). In parallel, papers IV and V are aimed at advancing the theory underpinning the empirical work reflected in papers I to III.

A lot was covered by the body of work produced in this research, as demonstrated in this thesis. Nevertheless, there is still scope for further exploration of the themes addressed herein. The perspective of criminal justice front-line workers seems to be under-represented and the service-users' standpoint is only indirectly represented in the study. These are two caveats the reader must be mindful of, even though the over-arching aim of this research project has been attained.

In the sections to come, the research questions will be responded individually by further elaboration on this study's contributions in light of previous research. By no means there is a division between each research question and its corresponding findings, as it may appear in the table below. On the converse, the findings together confirm and build on each other, just as the papers do. The individual discussion of the questions guiding this study is just to provide the reader with an overview of this research's contribution.

Table 7 – An overview of the main findings and theoretical contributions in light of the research questions

	How members of the L&D services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration in light of the standardised guidelines introduced by the new national model?	What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?
<b>Main findings (# indicating number of the appended paper)</b>	#2: Services do not have their roles clearly specified, which causes miscommunication between professionals working in different agencies.	#1 & #3: There is a mismatch between local circumstances and the rules of the national model. Internally, L&D services struggle to comply with the nationally standardised rules that do not take into account the local



*Research contribution, implications and further research*

	<p>#3: In the context of rehabilitation of offenders workers often abide by values and ethical standards of their profession, which leads to front-line workers developing coping strategies to equate policy and reality in order to enable interagency collaboration</p> <p>#1: The L&amp;D national model did not promote the expected change in the dynamics between services, mostly because it did not provide agencies with appropriate tools to implement the rules of the policy</p>	<p>peculiarities of each region. Externally, L&amp;D aptness to collaborate is constrained to work practice based on the instructions of the model.</p> <p># 1: IT systems were found to be an emblematic example of contradiction between the policy's expectation and the reality of the available tools. Different operational conditions (i.e. incompatible IT system) within and between agencies have been impairing knowledge sharing between L&amp;D and other agencies in criminal justice and welfare. Thereby, L&amp;D front-line staff has been resorting to interpersonal relationships to circumvent systemic limitations and promote collaboration</p>
<p><b>Theoretical contributions</b></p>	<p>In order to meet complex criminogenic needs, services at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems need to collaborate.</p> <p>In a scenario of fragmented services and limited resources, front-line workers have taken the lead to remedy the situation through interpersonal relationships as a means to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration at an individual level.</p>	<p>Top-down performance-based policing has become again mainstream in England and Wales with the election of a government that shares an enthusiasm for mixed economy of public service provision. The approach has been adopted in different areas of government, including welfare-to-work.</p> <p>Tools are a reflection of other people's attempts to solve similar problems at an earlier time by creating/modifying available instruments to make them more efficient. They carry with them a particular culture that reflects the historical fragments from that development and can end up being a limitation to the accomplishment of certain goals if they are not adapted to the programmes, public health budgets and criminal justice. However, the idea of having a one-size-fits-all model to be applied to local settings is contested, as the effectiveness of any solution is dependent on the environment and actors involved.</p>

## **5.2 How members of the L&D services perceive their role as facilitators of interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems in light of the standardised guidelines introduced by the new national model?**

In England and Wales, the idea of criminal justice and welfare systems working in tandem to address the needs of vulnerable people entering the criminal justice system is not up for grabs amid decision-makers (Ministry of Justice UK, 2013). The notion is, by and large, manifested through policy-makers' proclivity to introduce strategies aimed at promoting collaboration between agencies. The government expects that these directives will be spread out at the street-level of public service organisations, but there seems to be a gap between the policies instructions and their actual implementation in practice (Hill & Huppe, 2014), which is usually justified by the fact that front-line workers operate under bureaucratic constraints and with limited resources (Lipsky, 2010).

The research question I investigates the impact of a new policy on interagency collaboration operationalised by L&D front-line workers. To that end, the implementation of the national model for L&D services is studied through the perspective of the front-line staff of an L&D site. The viewpoint of front-line professionals from neighbouring organisations in criminal justice and welfare services is also taken into account as a means to broaden the purview of the analysis carried out herein. The results provide evidence that the implementation of the national model for L&D was contingent on local circumstances and front-line workers' discretion, an idea emerged from the analysis of the findings and coded under the sub-theme 'Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison and diversion' (see Appendix 5).

In this thesis, I suggest that deviance from policy intent at the street-level can be construed as a form of innovation instead of implementation failure (Hupe & Hill, 2016), which is a concept further explored in the appended paper III. This is a notion that builds upon the traditional understanding of front-line workers as lower-level policy-makers (Lipsky, 2010).

Dealing with specific top-down implementation instructions in their overloaded work situation, I could observe that the L&D front-line staff used their discretionary judgment based on professional values and ethics, to decide whether specific instructions of the national model for L&D were feasible. There was a prioritisation of tasks engrossed in their goal of supporting vulnerable people (the ‘core-work tasks’, see appended paper III) while ancillary tasks (‘housekeeping chores’, same paper) tended to be kept at bay. The prioritisation was carried out by professionals themselves and overtly reported in the interviews I had with them (e.g., an L&D front-line worker mentioned that “there are national guidelines from NHS England, but then we just add bits to make them specific to our service” – see Appendix 5). In certain ways, it was bewildering to notice how the enforcement of an entire system was contingent on the ethics of the individuals, which comes to validate my decision of focusing this study on front-line workers.

In appended paper III, I suggest interpreting these coping strategies as value-driven work practices aimed at handling managerial instructions that contradict the objective of their work, which is a form of incremental transformation that begins as an adjustment of the policy to the workers’ reality and develops into autonomous practices and routines (Fuglsang, 2010).

### 5.2.1 The impact of the new model on street-level interagency collaboration through the lenses of Activity Theory

The idea of everyday employee-based innovation at the front-line emerging from casuistic problem-solving can also be perceived as an incremental type of innovation that draws upon the resolution of present contradictions, which is in line with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1999; Ellström, 2010).

In activity theoretical terms, there is a contradiction within the L&D activity system. This contradiction has been manifested as a tension between the national model for L&D (Rule) and the service's goal to liaise with other agencies to divert vulnerable people into care (Object), as graphically represented in figure 5 below. Solving the current contradictions within the system will lead to the development of a new evolved L&D activity system in which the national model is appropriately incorporated by front-line professionals.

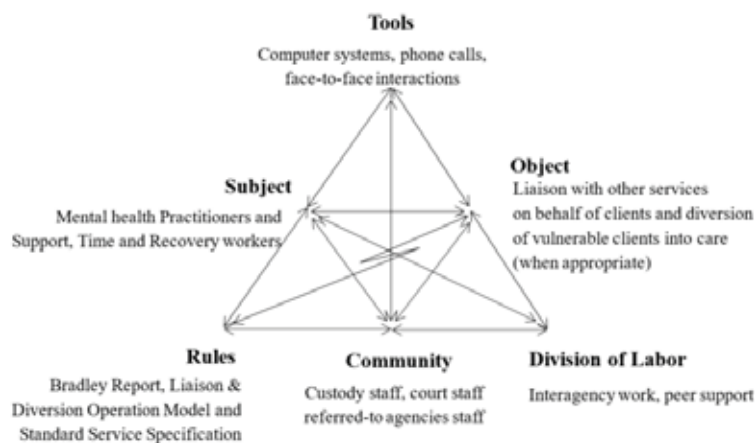


Figure 5 - L&D activity system with a contradiction between rules and object. Adapted from Engeström (1987)

In the current setup, there is a state of need in the L&D activity system. In other words, there is a contradiction within the L&D activity system and also between the L&D and the neighbouring services systems, which is a finding categorized under the meta-theme ‘Contradictions’ of my analysis that explores all the issues found the current L&D setup (see Appendix 5).

In the need state there is a questioning happening within a constituent component of the L&D activity system, namely the professionals (Subject). This form of questioning/tension has been defined as a primary contradiction (Engeström, 1987), which has the ability to kick off an expansive learning cycle to transform the current L&D activity system. In the appended paper IV, I address in depth the notion of primary contradiction and the empirical challenges emerging from the identification of this theoretical concept. However, by and large, expansive learning cycles refer to the processes whereby an activity system resolves its internal contradictions by constructing and implementing a new way to function (Engeström, 1987), and they are generally kicked off by grappling with an identified primary contradiction.

Although there is a dispute as to what constitutes a primary contradiction (see appended paper IV), in my empirical research predicated on CHAT I adopted Engeström’s understanding that a primary contradiction derives from antithetical relations between exchange-value and use-value in capitalist socioeconomic formations (Engeström, 1987). The L&D front-line workers have a use-value (a fundamental existence) that is currently opposing their exchange value (their perception as commodities in a marketplace). In practical terms, L&D professionals work to support vulnerable clients (core-work tasks) but are required to demonstrate positive outcomes in order for the service to continue being funded (housekeeping chores). This contradiction between their core-work tasks (their use-value) and their housekeeping chores (their exchange value) makes professionals question their own role in L&D the

activity system. Are they working to support clients or to gather data that demonstrate positive outcomes and guarantee remuneration?

This need state (the existence of a primary contradiction) leads to a second phase where the primary contradiction transcends the limits of the constituent component and becomes a tension between elements of the system (a secondary contradiction). In the L&D activity system, this second stage is represented by the tension between professionals (Subject) and the national model (Rule).

The goal in this second stage is to analyse the reasons for the discrepancy between the instructions of the national model and the circumstances found at the street-level, which enables the modelling of a solution. To that end, the findings of this study (see the previous chapter) provide data on the front-line workers' perspective as to why implementation at the street-level is troublesome. Based on the data, those involved in the development and implementation of the model (L&D front-line workers, middle-level managers and policy-makers) could collaborate to have a breakthrough where they model new solutions for the activity. In this case, new solutions could include, for example, the modelling of new instruments/strategies (Tools) that enable the implementation of the national model or a different 'Division of labour' that allows front-line workers to focus only on core-work tasks.

In any event, the new solution modelled has to be examined and tested to ensure effectiveness. It is only after the necessary adjustments are made that a new model emerges. Then, this new model has to be implemented in the old (current) L&D activity system.

It is natural that during the implementation contradictions occur between the old and the new models. These are called by Engeström tertiary contradictions (1987). An example of those could be L&D front-line workers resisting the use of novel instruments/strategies or being dissatisfied with the new proposed division of labour.

These tertiary contradictions lead to a stage of reflection on the impact the expansive learning cycle has had on the L&D activity system. Moreover, there is a need for considering the impact the cycle might have had on neighbouring organisations as well. Potential contradictions between the new L&D activity system and the activity systems of other organisations in criminal justice and welfare services are called quaternary contradictions (Engeström, 1987). It is by meditating on the impact of the cycle on neighbouring activity systems that these quaternary contradictions can be tackled and the entire expansive learning cycle stabilized. Then, the result would be the consolidation of a new practice. The whole cycle is graphically represented by figure 6 below.

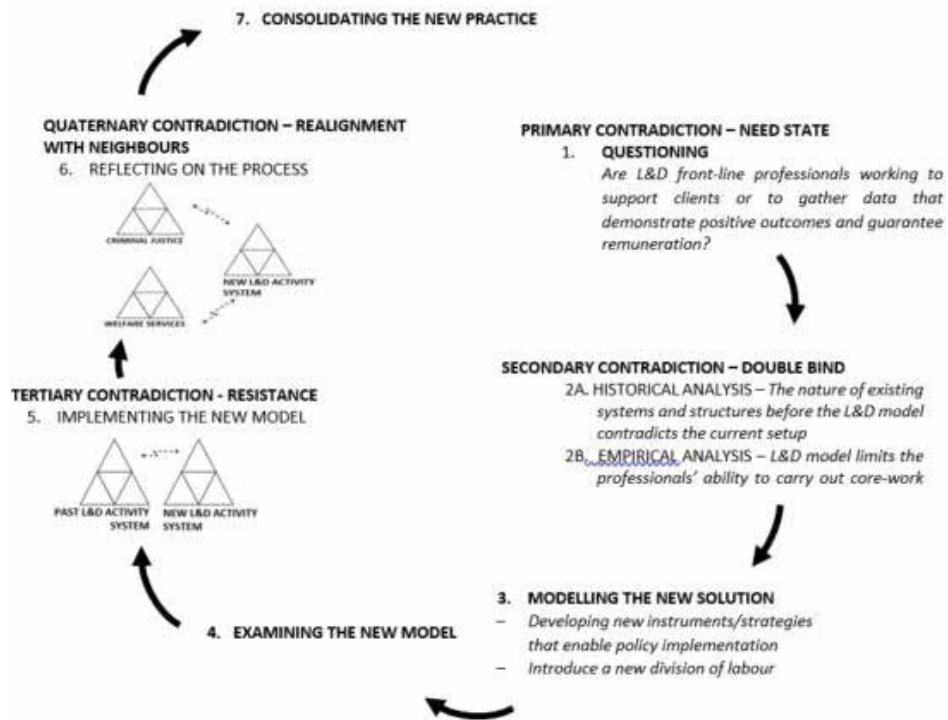


Figure 6 – L&D potential expansive learning cycle. Adapted from Engeström, 2001

Expansive learning cycles are developed through discussions between all of those involved in the affected activity systems. In this vein, my representation of a potential L&D expansive learning cycle is not to be taken as a formula to be bestowed upon the organisation. Instead, it should be construed as an intellectual exercise to demonstrate the rationale behind a CHAT-oriented intervention. Currently, however, front-line professionals in different L&D sites carry out an *ad hoc* implementation of the national model, as emerged under the sub-theme ‘Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison and diversion’ (see Appendix 5). The localised decision-making is constrained by the contingencies of each region and practice among L&D site is still disparate. The volatility of the current scenario – which the national model did not manage to extinguish – is the testimony to the benefit of innovation models that regard all the interested actors and are not imposed top-down. That is an issue addressed in more details in the section ‘Recommendations’ below, where I demonstrate how the data emerging from this study could be used to trigger transformation in both L&D and neighbouring services activity systems.

### **5.3 What are the main contradictions encountered by L&D front-line workers?**

This question investigates the challenges front-line professionals encounter in their day-to-day work while collaborating to improve health and social care outcomes for their clients. The results of the study provided evidence of three main contradictions hindering integrated care at the street-level, namely (1) tensions between standard top-down policies and local circumstances found at the street-level, (2) stretched workers due to high caseloads, and (3) restrictions on information sharing due to confidentiality concerns and fragmentation of communication tools. See analysis in Appendix 5.



### *5.3.1 Top-down policies versus street-level circumstances: An obstacle to interagency collaboration*

In the previous section, I addressed the secondary contradiction within the L&D activity system, namely L&D front-line workers striving to fit the instructions of the national model into their local circumstances in order for collaboration to happen in accordance with the new policy. I suggested that the current L&D activity system could be transformed through expansive learning cycles and that the tension between workers and policy could be resolved to give rise to an evolved L&D activity system. In such a scenario, quaternary contradictions would most likely occur, as the new L&D activity system would provoke tensions with the activity systems of other agencies in criminal justice and welfare services.

However, an L&D activity system that includes a national model is already a novelty when compared to an L&D activity system where the service was locally organized. Thus, it is possible to affirm that there is a quaternary contradiction between the current L&D activity system (including a national model) and activity systems of other agencies in criminal justice and welfare services, namely the lack of clarity as to L&D's role and power since the national model. This finding was coded as a category called 'Misunderstanding as to organisations' powers and roles', which served as grounding for the mentioned quaternary contradiction (see Appendix 5).

This is an idea explored in depth in the appended papers II and II, but basically the data demonstrated that professionals from other organisations in criminal justice and welfare systems see the need for a defined care plan co-designed by the agencies operating in the context. They understand that such coordination could be facilitated by L&D bringing services together. However, according to informants' accounts, the national model seems to have instilled a conflict (a primary

contradiction) into L&D professionals' mind who currently struggle between the liaison with other services to support clients (core-work task) and the gathering of data that demonstrate positive outcomes and guarantee remuneration of the service (housekeeping chore).

As they have to prioritize between core-work tasks and housekeeping chores, the L&D front-line workers seem stretched, and that leads to a contradiction between L&D's and other agencies' activity systems. In the midst of this, policy implementation at the street-level has been subpar. There is a need to adapt the national model to local circumstances, which means not always following the policy as categorized under the sub-theme 'Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison and diversion' (see Appendix 5). This has been hindering other services making sense of L&D's role and ultimately impairing interagency collaboration. These are findings discussed in the appended papers I to III.

An alternative view would be that, considering the steps of an expansive learning cycle described above, the current quaternary contradiction between the L&D, criminal justice and welfare services activity systems exist because the national model (a new modelled solution – step 3) was not adequately examined (step 4) and/or did not suffer enough resistance within the L&D activity system (step 5). In this scenario, it would be necessary to investigate why L&D sites rolling out the national model did not resist the model. It is possible to speculate that the lack of internal resistance would be because the L&D sites did not have the political strength to go against the ideas of the main sponsor of the service, namely the national government. However, this is a conjecture that is not necessarily supported by the findings of this study.

### ***5.3.2 The impact of high caseloads on policy implementation and interagency collaboration***

The high caseload was a particular challenge mentioned by almost every participant in the study. The only reason why the finding is not clearly coded in the template provided in Appendix 5 is that this is not a context-specific situation.

When there is a constant backlog of cases to be dealt with, investing time in collaborating with professionals from other agencies becomes a luxury workers might not afford (Hornby & Atkins, 2000). On top of that, the investigated agencies are running IT systems that are not interconnected and each organisation has its own independent database system (a difficulty categorized under the sub-theme ‘Contradictions between communication tools and the object of liaison’ in Appendix 5 and further explored in section 5.3.3 below). The result is a scenario in which information sharing is difficult, collaboration limited and integrated care hard to realize, reported the participants.

Another consequence of high caseloads is the impact on policy implementation (Fuglsang, 2010). At the street-level, front-line workers operate under bureaucratic constraints, with limited resources and the expectation of high productivity (Lipsky 2010). In such conditions, front-line workers feel the need to deviate from top-down policies that do not necessarily match theirs or the clients’ needs (Thunman, 2013). The deviation, which is, by and large, motivated by resource constraints, tends to make implementation subpar (Lippke & Wegener, 2014). The findings align with the literature especially in cases where front-line workers were stretched and had to prioritise between performing core-work tasks and integrally implementing the L&D national model (meaning, also performing housekeeping chores). As addressed in the previous section, this finding was coded as the sub-theme ‘Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of liaison

and diversion' (see Appendix 5), and reflected the proclivity of workers to prioritise 'core tasks' in detriment of 'housekeeping chores'.

The finding addressed herein serves to ratify the understanding that collaboration between public sector organisations requires alignment between politicians, management and employees (Hean, Willumsen, Ødegård, & Bjørkly, 2015), which could be facilitated by CHAT principles and tools as demonstrated in this thesis (Engeström, 2001). Processes initiated top-down without consideration for the circumstances existent at the street-level will ultimately not be carried out as planned. They tend to overwhelm front-line workers and provoke a feeling of inauthenticity within the staff (Thunman, 2013). In this sense, seminal to the idea of interagency collaboration in public sector organisations is the understanding and cooperation between top-down and bottom-up processes (Høystrup, 2010).

In summary, prearrest/pre-sentence strategies of rehabilitation require L&D, the police, court and organisations in the welfare services working in tandem to timely divert vulnerable individuals into appropriate care. However, the findings demonstrated that the services use IT systems to communicate and exchange information, but multiple non-connected IT systems across services have caused misalignments and impaired collaboration (sub-theme 'Contradictions between communication tools and the object of liaison' in Appendix 5).

### *5.3.3 Fragmented communication tools hampering information sharing*

In the context of offender rehabilitation, co-designed care plans are crucial (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Strype, Gundhus, Egge, & Ødegård, 2014). However, in such a complex environment, determining what elements are influencing on successful collaborative initiatives can be challenging.

Interagency collaboration, which takes place at various levels of the involved organisations, is contingent on specific factors enabling successful interactions, for example, teamwork, tools supporting the work, the development of non-hierarchical relationships and knowledge sharing (Warburton et al., 2008). However, more often than not, barriers to collaboration impair organisations to work in tandem.

As mentioned in the previous section, during this study I was able to identify a few barriers impeding interagency collaboration: stretched workers due to high caseloads, restrictions on information sharing due to confidentiality concerns and high rates of staff turnover. Above all, the results provided evidence that the currently available tools of communication are not supporting collaboration within and between organisations (sub-theme ‘Contradictions between communication tools and the object of liaison’ in Appendix 5). This is a key finding that dovetails nicely with research question II.

Professionals working at the interface between criminal justice and welfare services who participated in this study reported the use of information technology (IT) systems as the default communication tool within and between organisations. The benefits of having properly maintained clinical information systems supporting collaboration are undeniable (Woltmann, et al., 2012), but the findings of this study point to a fragmentation between the diverse IT systems adopted in the studied context.

In the offender rehabilitation setting, investment in modernisation programs over the years has been made on an individualised basis, and IT solutions have grown in a piecemeal fashion, with limited links between them (Keen, 2010). Keen explains that these systems were developed independently for logistic reasons, relating to the scale and complexity of implementation of a unified healthcare system across the country. Consequently, discrete sectoral systems have been developed for GPs, outpatient clinics, and other services so that they would not have

to wait for national initiatives (2010). In this sense, the current fragmentation can be understood as a historical impediment to collaboration and requires adaptation to current needs.

In a scenario where technological limitations are prone to hamper co-designed care plans predicated on shared information versus, front-line workers have been looking for alternatives ways to collaborate and exchange data. My analysis found that the use of phone calls has been indicated as a means professionals have found to interact with each other in a less rigid way and consequently obtain information on clients (see category 'Limitations of communication tools and alternative solutions' in Appendix 5). However, it has been mentioned by participants that divergent workhours and availability tend to hinder communication through telephone. As noted by Fredheim et al. (2011), simply making a phone call to a staff member in another service can be challenging even though phone calls are the glue of interagency collaboration.

The results of this study provide evidence that front-line workers have been striving to realise interagency collaboration through interpersonal relationships (see category 'Limitations of communication tools and alternative solutions' in Appendix 5). To name a few of the observed patterns, the L&D front-line staff, for example, makes an intentional effort to expand their relationship with professionals from agencies beyond work-related matters and establish an informal way of communicating, which has allowed them to discuss openly (yet effectively) about formal, professional issues. Another example would be co-location since professionals discussing face-to-face how to treat patients and co-create intervention strategies would contribute to building a sense of unity among themselves, even though they belong to different organisations. A third strategy deployed by the L&D front-line staff would be performing small favours to professionals from other organisations from time to time, which puts the L&D staff in a position of having their needs met by other services trying to reciprocate the received favours.

However, it seems to be easier to achieve collaboration at the strategic level than it is at the street-level, mostly because of the increased amount of variables that have to align in order for collaboration to take place among front-line workers (Lipsky, 2010). In this sense, when considering collaboration, it is crucial to find solutions to enable information flow among those involved in the care of service users (Statham, 2011). The use of IT systems supporting client management is part of the answer, but not in the current setup where each organisation runs a different computer program, and there is no communication between them (see category ‘Limitations of communication tools and alternative solutions’ in Appendix 5). For new solutions to come up it is pivotal, therefore, to include the perspective of those who are directly involved in the service delivery, namely front-line workers. Bottom-up solutions will address the problem found at the front-line and ultimately yield effective alternatives to interagency collaboration (Ellström, 2010).

#### **5.4 *Practical and theoretical implications***

Current rehabilitative strategies such as care pathways and care plans are top-down attempts to standardise collaboration at the street-level (Hill & Huppe, 2014). Top-down processes of innovation entice reactive actions from front-line workers, while a practice-based approach to innovation would pay tribute to these professionals’ ethics and allow them to be more proactive (Lipsky, 2010). In a way, the message across the appended papers is that the involvement of front-line professionals in the development of innovative solutions to the rehabilitation of vulnerable people is crucial (Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016).

This overall message was unpicked in paper I (that highlighted the how the mere introduction of a new top-down policy is not a guarantee of change at the street-level), paper II (that emphasised the role of L&D front-line workers in timely identifying and diverting vulnerable

offenders to appropriate care in order to avoid recidivism), and paper III (that addressed the role played by L&D front-line workers in adapting the national model for the service before putting it to practice).

A conclusion emerging from the mentioned three papers was that the involvement of front-line professionals entailed collaboration both within and between agencies in criminal justice and welfare systems (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017). Collaboration within agencies can enable communication between management and operational levels and leads to the co-design of new solutions (Strype, Gundhus, Egge, & Ødegård, 2014), and collaboration between agencies can bring organisations together and enabled knowledge sharing (Warmington, et al., 2004). However, the finding of the study demonstrated empirical issues to be overcome before collaboration is attained.

The empirical findings – (1) fragmentation of communication tools hampering information sharing within and between agencies; (2) policy implementation is difficult at the street-level and leads to a certain degree of adaptation of top-down instruction to street-level contingencies; and (3) front-line workers relying on interpersonal relationships to circumvent systemic limitations and promote collaboration between agencies – confirm the knowledge produced by the existent literature (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Styhre, 2009; Lipsky, 2010; Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2011; Lippke & Wegener, 2014; Robinson, Burke, & Millings, 2016) in addition to offering an up to date read on the situation in the criminal justice and welfare systems settings, demonstrating that these challenges are still to be overcome. In this sense, the original contribution of this study is what to do about these issues.

The appended papers suggest Activity Theory and its tools as a means to enable collaboration and address the communication challenges existent in the current setup. The suggestion is due to the theory's emphasis on dialectics and the flattening of power relations (Engeström, 1987), which



empowers actors at the street-level to take part in the process of innovation and provide them with the necessary tools to do so (Engeström, 2001).

In section 5.4.1 below, the specifics of how Activity Theory can help to tackle issues of fragmentation between IT systems and policy implementation in addition to foster bottom-up transformation in the work practice of agencies in both criminal justice and welfare systems is further explored. Nevertheless, believing Activity Theory is flawless would also be naïve. Therefore, another original contribution of this study – this time a theoretical one – is to present alternatives to the advancement of the theory.

As Pinker pointed out (1994), the study of human nature in Western culture in the twentieth century was impregnated with what the author called the ‘Standard Social Science Model’, which posits that human behaviour is largely determined by culture-bound social learning. This is an understanding that dovetails nicely with the theoretical advancement promoted by this study, which I discuss hereinafter.

There is no doubt human behaviour is largely influenced by external factors, but activity theorists seem to have overestimated the extent to which exogenous elements are influential (Bakhurst, 2009; Jones, 2009; 2011). They seem to have overlooked cross-cultural similarities that indicate the existence of factors of higher-order (most likely evolutionary-based biological tendencies) that transcend cultural cultural-historical contexts (Costa & McCrae, 1992b), or perhaps just relied too much on Vygotsky’s work developed all the way back in the nineteenth century.

The goal to use of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) in the context of offender rehabilitation is to validate it in a new context. It is crucial for the theory to be responsive and relevant for new emerging phenomena, which can only be achieved through new concepts development and their trial in new settings. It was due to the use of

CHAT in a new context that this study was able to identify its potential shortfalls, which were addressed majorly in appended papers IV and V.

As a theory concerned with societal activities (Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2010), CHAT inherently struggles with limited exploration of subjectivity, which has already been acknowledged in the literature but not yet fully explored (Roth, 2007; Bakhurst, 2009; Blunden, 2009; Jones, 2009; 2011). To that end, this study is an original contribution to the literature on CHAT inasmuch as its reflections on the shortcomings of the theory address the internal contradictions and gaps within CHAT and suggests alternatives to address subjectivity in activity theoretical studies (see appended papers IV and V).

As discussed in section 2.1.1 above, the challenge with the fourth generation of Activity Theory has been to establish a clear definition of the issues it is addressing, although prominent authors have been pointing to the need to include a subjectivity element in the activity theoretical analysis of activity systems (Roth, 2007; Sannino, 2011; Allen et al., 2011; 2013). I agree with them that the traditional triangular representation of activity overlooks the issue of subjectivity, but I recognise that such characteristic is in line with the theory's philosophical grounding. Activity Theory is fundamentally a Marxist theory that – in line with Marx's ideology – puts emphasis on collective identity in detriment of individual identity. Besides a few scholars (see e.g. Roth, 2007; Bakhurst, 2009; Allen et al., 2013), criticism to Activity Theory's focus on societal matters at the expense of individuality is rather reticent, perhaps due to the postmodern ideology reigning within social sciences currently (Hicks, 2019) which also favours collective identity in detriment of individual identity.

Accounting for the subjects' motivation to collaborate rather than just focusing on cultural, historical and contextual circumstances impeding or promoting collaboration between organisations is crucial, as motivation is a predominant factor in influencing individuals' behaviour

towards their objectives. As I further explored in appended paper V, a holistic understanding of the subject's motivation in an activity has to necessarily run through the acknowledgement of biologically-based psychological tendencies determining his/her behaviour. In doing so, this research contributes to CHAT by suggesting the addition of the subjectivity element that has been missing in the triangular model of activity (Roth, 2007; Bakhurst, 2009; Allen et al., 2013) and improving the use of the theory in the analysis of activity systems.

#### **5.4.1 Recommendations**

In the public sector, innovation is traditionally initiated by central levels of the government in a top-down manner as, for example, the L&D national model. This approach presupposes standard instructions being equally applied across diverse contexts (Lipsky, 2010). However, the idea of having a one-size-fits-all model to be applied to local settings has already been contested elsewhere (Rittel & Webber, 1973), as the effectiveness of any solution is dependent on the environment and actors involved.

Although the findings of this research pertain immediately to the case of L&D services, they seem to represent a sub-specie of a broader genre already addressed in the literature, namely the need for collaboration between interested actors in the pursue for innovation in the public sector (Ellström, 2001; Fuglsang, 2010; Høyrup, 2010; Lipsky, 2010; Hill & Huppe, 2014). The procedures carried out by the several L&D sites across England are the reflection of their local contexts and are deeply embedded in their work routines. Therefore, any attempt to innovate needs first to take into account the cultural and historical circumstances of each L&D site, and only then break away from previous practices. One-size-fits-all models will most likely fail because they do not consider the local settings and the actors involved (Rittel & Webber,

1973), as supported by the findings of this research in the case of the L&D services.

The L&D national model's endeavour to standardise practice nationwide fails because each site has different needs and conditions, according to the evidence produced by this study. The implications of such findings illustrate an imminent need for collaboration and innovation to be addressed as a bottom-up matter. Thus, it is salutary that decision-makers in public policy support employee-driven innovation processes and create an appropriate environment where open dialogue between actors at different strata is feasible. To that end, further research could support the attainment of such scenario by exploring alternatives that do not rely on top-down initiatives but instead emphasise the resourcefulness of front-line professionals initiating solutions. On that note, I suggest the change laboratory model (CLM) as a suitable strategy to tackle the challenge of innovatively promoting integrated care in a fragmented setting (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003; Tolviainen, 2007).

As a tool for promoting innovation and learning within and between organisations, the CLM draws upon activity-theoretical concepts, which renders it a natural follow up to a CHAT-oriented study like this one. The CLM has been successfully applied in other interagency workplaces (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003; Tolviainen, 2007; Virkkunen, Vilela, Querol, & Lopes, 2014), and emphasises on the benefits of solutions co-devised by all those involved in the implementation process, meaning politicians, managers, front-line workers, and service users.

In its basic setup, the CLM provides participants with three sets of wallboards to represent their work activity. The horizontal dimensions of the wallboards depict different levels of abstraction and generalisation, whereas the vertical dimensions represent the change in time (past, present and future). In the mirror wallboard, participants find registers of their daily work practices, for example, videotaped episodes of work, interviews, stories. In the model/vision wallboard, activity-

theoretical concepts are used to analyse the data from the mirror wallboard. Finally, in the ideas/tools wallboard, participants find the resources created during the sessions, i.e. intermediate cognitive tools such as schedules, schemes and charts (Engeström et al., 1996). Figure 7 below illustrates the CLM basic setting.

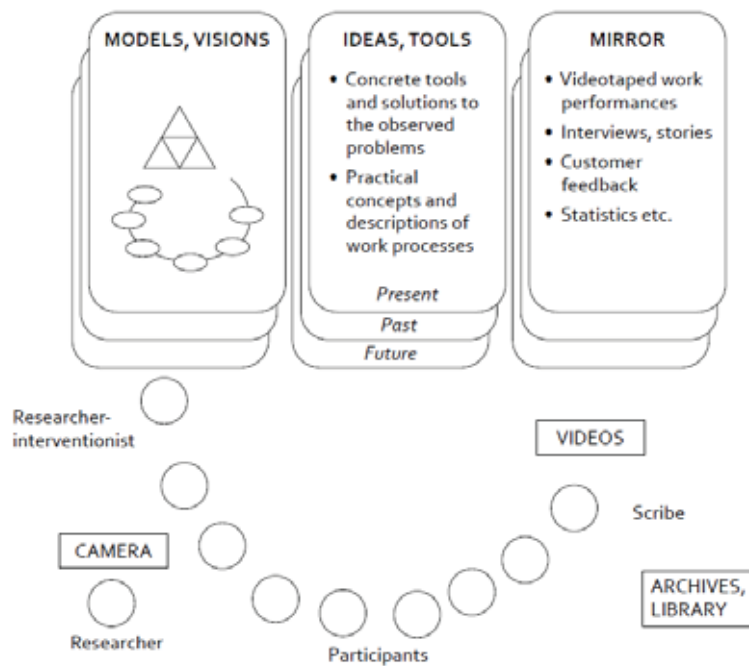


Figure 7 – Basic setup for CLM (adapted from Engeström et al., 1996, p. 11)

The CLM starts with participants analysing current contradictions in an activity. The goal is to find the roots of the problem, which is usually achieved by modelling previous iterations of the activity. Following up, the current activity is also modelled, and any existent contradiction is included. Then, participants envision the future model and develop a plan to achieve it. The entire process takes several sessions and lasts from three to six months (Engeström & Escalante, 1996). As a result, new solutions are created by expanding objects, developing new tools, rules or communities or even by redesigning division of labour (Engeström,

Kerosuo, & Kajamaa, 2007). Thus, CLM can be understood as a means to innovate and here is how it could be done in the case of L&D.

The findings produced by this research would inform the mirror wallboard. The historical documents gathered throughout this study form a commensurate dataset to inform the mirror wallboard in its past dimension and the accounts produced by interviewees would dovetail nicely with the mirror wallboard in its present dimension. The future dimension of the mirror wallboard could comprise, for example, my analysis of the collected data, which is basically a discussion of the current shortfalls and conjectures of potential ways forward.

In the model/vision wallboard would go an activity-theoretical analysis – activity systems – of intra and inter agency collaboration in its current format, which would be facilitated by me and carried out by the CLM participants (front-line workers in the L&D and neighbouring criminal justice and welfare services, middle and top-level managers, and policy-makers). An idea of how these activity systems could look like in terms of their vertical dimensions (past, present and future) is found in appended paper I (book chapter), which traces the historical development of L&D services through the lenses of CHAT.

Finally, in the ideas/tools wallboard, the results of the CLM sessions would be found. These would be intermediate tools to be put in practice. Their goal is to kick off the development of learning cycles that tackle existent contradictions and transform the current practice and, in the case of L&D, have the objective to foster more adequate policy-making and collaboration with other services.

The CLM is a highly iterative CHAT-strategy. Therefore, most of its stages are to be realized in tandem with participants and not pre-arranged by the researcher. My role in a future CLM intervention would be to facilitate the participants' sense making of their current work activity and development of solutions to address contradictions existent in the current setup. The tensions pointed out by the findings produced of this study

are a crucial initial step in learning circles of transformation; therefore, the relevance of the contribution yielded herein.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that asymmetric power relations inhibit the creation of a multi-voiced environment where dialogue between powerless and powerful actors exists (Courpasson and Clegg, 2012). Thus, the existence of an open dialogue between all of those involved in the rehabilitation of offenders is a prerequisite to the deployment of an intervention such as CLM (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003; Tolviainen, 2007). Expansive learning cycles are not developed in a scenario where there is no possibility of discussions, and without expansive cycles there is no learning (neither at individual nor at collective levels) (Engeström, 1987). In my view, a potential limitation of CLM is to surmise the existence of equalitarian power relations amid the involved actors. To that end, here is another contribution of my current study.

In the happenstance of an L&D Change Laboratory, the current study has already served as a preliminary step in which power relations between potential participants have been assessed. In this sense, this study produces knowledge on whether there is scope for a potential CLM in the case of L&D (in terms of dialogue and willingness for open discussion among participants) before the disposition of one.

More broadly, CLM would bring together the findings and discussion laid out in this thesis and would be the natural next step to a CHAT-oriented study such as this one for the following reasons:

- In the legacy interagency interactions, there is a proclivity to a latent understanding of collaboration (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017). Conversely, the CLM focuses on how information is shared across disciplinary boundaries (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003; Tolviainen, 2007). Thus, the issue of fragmented communication tools (IT systems

especially) would serve as a contradiction kicking off a learning cycle to transform the current cycle. Speculatively, I could suggest the systematisation of interpersonal relationships between front-line workers (as it happens casuistically in the current setup) as a means to circumvent fragmented communication tools and enable collaboration. In other words, professionals seem to have already developed an efficient way to communicate and collaborate (i.e. through the establishment of one-to-one relationships), so why not letting front-line workers come up with ideas on how to build a system around that feature?

- CLM acknowledges that innovation takes place at the interface between disciplines and that working across boundaries is crucial (Engeström, 2007). It prioritises the perspective of front-line professionals in addition to the leaders with regards to problems identification and problem solving (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003), which engenders solutions coordinated at the street-level that meet existent needs and do not have to be adapted by front-line workers (Fuglsang, 2010). The horizontal dimensions (wallboards) and vertical dimension (time) of CLM are designed to unpick what the problem actually is from the mouth of the practitioners in their particular work place environment (Tolviainen, 2007). In other words, CLM enables the development of bottom-up solutions custom made to the specific needs encountered at the street-level.

Current collaborative tools such as care pathways and care plans endeavour to standardise practice as oppose to provide customised solutions such as CLM. This model of intra and interagency collaboration allows professionals to work in tandem to resolve issues they have identified as problematic rather than impose top-down standardised solutions to what management perceive to be challenging, something already shown to be ineffective (Rittel & Webber, 1973) .



Thus, it seems logical that a CLM intervention would be the following step to address the findings of this study.

## **5.5 Limitations of the study**

The thesis presents explanations for the limited interagency collaboration at the street-level between agencies in criminal justice and welfare systems. However, in such a complex setting, there are many other possible explanations for the same challenges, but these go beyond the CHAT framework I decided to utilise. For example, the research focuses only on the contradictions happening at the street-level even though they are most likely the reflection of contingencies existent at macro and meso levels as well (Disley et al. 2016).

In addition, because of the need to narrow down the focus of the study, the perspective of service-users was left out. It is undeniable that interaction between front-line workers and service-users have an impact on the issues addressed in this thesis, but the study's design purposefully focused on the perspective of professional at the street-level. That is not to say that the 'voice' of service-users is silenced in this study. The rich description that front-line workers gave about their practice and their relationship with service-users represents well the perspective of service-users. In addition, this study was conducted collaboratively with many others in the same context, which ensures that the perspective of both management and service-users is duly represented elsewhere (cf. Hean, Johnsen, & Kloetzer, 2020).

A third potential limitation, which has been already addressed earlier, is representativeness of criminal justice professionals. The study focused on interagency collaboration between organisations across criminal justice and welfare systems, but out of 28 participants only 2 represented the criminal justice system. Speculatively, it is possible that criminal

justice workers were not satisfied with the relationship they had with Liaison & Diversion services (L&D) and they were not comfortable talking with me, as I was being introduced to them through L&D. The implications of this to the findings of the study might be that if more criminal justice participants had also been part of the research, other collaboration-impeding issues could have been drawn out of the data, which would be another interesting link to follow. To that end, there is scope for further activity theoretical studies to be carried out in which the perspective of criminal justice front-line professionals is at the core. Such investigation would dovetail nicely with the work done in this research project and would be also a way to move the current study forward, besides the suggestion in section 5.4.1 above.

Finally, another possible limitation of the study is that the initial focus on street-level interagency collaboration between criminal justice and welfare systems had to be supplemented with issues of policy implementation (namely, the national model for L&D services) that the informants consistently brought up while talking about the interactions between services. This indicated that participants closely related certain policy implementation matters with their ability to collaborate with professionals in other organisations. This insight was relevant for the analysis of the impact of the new rule on the L&D activity system. However, because I had only access to L&D services after the implementation of the national model, information about L&D prior the new policy was limited to participants' accounts and historical documents gathered during fieldwork. This could represent a weakness, but both participants and documents offered a rich description of how the service was locally managed before the national policy.

## **5.6 Final comments**

The over-arching aim of this research was to investigate how interagency collaboration between L&D and neighbouring services is perceived by street-level L&D workers after the introduction of a new national model

for Liaison & Diversion. By addressing this matter, I wanted to improve understanding of the drivers and barriers to interagency collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems with emphasis on the perspective of front-line workers. The study explored the role of the L&D front-line staff as a conduit to interagency collaboration across sectors. The role of L&D and its impact on interagency collaboration was analysed in a backdrop of new policy implementation (namely, the national model for L&D services). The study was largely oriented by Activity Theory and adopted a qualitative case study approach. The research questions derived from a need for empirical studies on the aptitude of front-line workers to realise interagency collaboration at the street-level. The results of the research provided evidence that communication tools are not promoting information sharing within and between agencies, which impairs collaboration. IT systems are fragmented, organisations do not have access to each other's knowledge of patients, and front-line workers have to rely on interpersonal relationships to circumvent systemic limitations and function together. Moreover, the national model for L&D has been incorporated by different sites around the country in light of their own local circumstances, which means that the policy fails in its primary objective standardising practice across the country (see Appendix 5).

The study paints an up to date picture of the perspective of L&D front-line workers on collaboration between agencies in criminal justice and welfare systems in England and Wales. It confirms previous research stating that currently interagency collaboration is of subpar quality (Hean, Warr, & Staddon, 2009; Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017), but also contributes by identifying existing challenges in the current setup and suggesting alternative solutions to the ones that have been currently applied (Kerosuo & Engeström, 2003; Tolviainen, 2007). The result is the depiction of a scenario in which innovation strategies would prioritise bottom-up initiated forms of interagency collaboration as a means to provide customized solutions that take into account the

peculiarities of the environment and actors involved. How would interagency collaboration look like in such circumstances? While this and other studies suggest that bottom-up solutions are a means to bring organisations together (Hean, Ødegård, & Willumsen, 2017), more work is necessary to establish the benefits engendered by the implementation of such a solution.

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**Tracing the historical development of a service model for  
interagency collaboration: contradictions as barriers and  
potential drivers for change**

Paulo Rocha and Sarah Hean

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## Meeting Criminogenic Needs to Reduce Recidivism: The Diversion of Vulnerable Offenders from the Criminal Justice System into Care

Paulo Rocha

**Abstract**—Once in touch with the Criminal Justice System, offenders with mental disorder tend to return to custody more often than nondisordered individuals, which suggests they have not been receiving appropriate treatment in prison. In this scenario, diverting individuals into care as early as possible in their trajectory seems to be the appropriate approach to rehabilitate mentally unwell offenders and alleviate overcrowded prisons. This paper builds on an ethnographic research investigating the challenges encountered by practitioners working to divert offenders into care while attempting to establish cross-boundary interactions with professionals in the Criminal Justice System and Mental Health Services in the UK. Drawing upon the findings of the study, this paper suggests the development of adequate tools to enable liaison between agencies which ultimately results in successful interventions.

**Keywords**—Criminogenic needs, interagency collaboration, liaison and diversion, recidivism.

### I. INTRODUCTION

HIGH rates of mental health problems observed among inmates is a worldwide problem, and in the UK the situation is not different [1]. It has been suggested that offenders with mental disorder are more likely to reoffend, as vulnerable offenders tend not to receive adequate rehabilitation treatment in prison [2]. In this sense, effective interventions devised to decrease recidivism and protect the population should rely upon precise identification of offenders' risks and needs and their early diversion from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) into treatment.

In England, the Offender Assessment System (OASys) is the tool currently used to determine the risks and needs of adult offenders in contact with the CJS. The model works with the premise that certain risk factors are likely to predict for criminal behavior and consequently the likelihood of recidivism [3]. Therefore, by addressing these offending-related factors (such as offending history, literacy and employability, relationships, substance abuse, emotional balance, accommodation, and lifestyle), authorities are able to devise risk management interventions that ensure public protection.

Although mental illness is not identified as one of the major criminogenic factors promoting criminal behavior in OASys, studies have demonstrated that serious mental problems either

can directly or indirectly cause criminal behavior [4]. Furthermore, as mental illness is overrepresented in the prison population, it is reasonable to make the conceptual leap to connecting mental health problems and criminal activity in a causal way. As a result, it seems to be natural for agencies to design rehabilitation programs that take into consideration offenders' mental health, as their ability to re-socialize is deemed to be directly related to the treatment they receive. To this end, it is sensible to have professionals within CJS aware of mental health conditions, treatments and services they can refer offenders to if the need arises. Likewise, mental health workers need to be supportive of their patients in case they find themselves involved with the CJS [5]. However, this cross-boundary collaboration has proven to be difficult to put in practice. In this context, the government in England has been working on a series of initiatives to improve access to services, being Liaison and Diversion schemes (L&D) one of them. L&D is a service targeted at connecting Criminal Justice and Welfare Services and diverting vulnerable offenders away from CJS by referring them to health and other services as early as possible in their trajectory through the criminal justice [6].

This paper focuses mainly on the work done by L&D front-line workers who liaise with organizations in the MHS and the CJS to meet the criminogenic needs of vulnerable offenders.

### II. MEETING CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS

In trying to identify the reasons leading up to an offence, criminologists analyze the necessities of the offender. In other words, they attempt to determine the individual's unmet needs that led to a criminal behavior. Hence, criminogenic needs are the characteristics directly connected to the probability of a person to re-offend. These traits can be divided into two categories: Those that can be influenced by other factors (called dynamic), and those that cannot be changed (called static) [3].

Static factors cannot be addressed by any type of program aiming to prevent future offences. Examples of static factors include family criminality, criminal history, etc. In general, these are core aspects of a person's life that personally promoted the criminal activity. Conversely, dynamic factors, such as the lack of respect for authority, anti-social behavior, substance use, employment status, and so forth, are traits that can be addressed by therapy or any other type of targeted programming with the goal of influencing the individual into a more law-abiding posture. They are seen as directly correlated

with re-offending, being the type of criminogenic needs addressed by interventionist programs [3].

The way criminogenic needs relate to risk factors is that they are both tied together. In this sense, if someone, for example, is incapable of filling up a job application because of lack of literacy, this might result in the person resorting to criminal activity in order to make money. In this example, education is the need to be met and its absence is leading to the appearance of a risk factor. Hence, once this person is provided with education, the present risk factor diminishes and so does the probability of recidivism. Normally, to understand the risk factor of an individual, the CJS assesses both static and dynamic characteristics, but to affect – and lower – the re-offending risk, interventions are directed towards the latter.

Effective rehabilitative interventions are the ones that take into consideration the dynamic risk factors of an offender, especially those strongly correlated with criminal conduct. Thus, offence promoting needs such as antisocial personality, an established criminal history, antisocial cognition, substance abuse, lack of empathy, lack of problem solving skills, lack of self-control, and antisocial associates, should be the main target of rehabilitation interventions [3]. However, it is worth noting that the majority of offenders are more likely to re-offend because they present multiple risk and criminogenic needs [7]. Unemployment, for example, in itself is not deemed a strong risk factor. However, when an unemployed individual lacks self-control (which in most of the cases also implicates in substance abuse) and lacks problem-solving skills, then for this person offending might appear to be the solution rather than looking for a job. Therefore, successful programs are the ones that address clusters of correlated needs and provide multifaceted solutions.

Although mental illness is not expressly listed among the factors above, a study conducted on the assessment of predictors of criminal behavior demonstrated that mentally ill offenders have obtained considerably higher total scores on the tests than those without any mental condition [8]. The results have been confirmed by another research involving 600 probationers with and without mental illness [9], which has demonstrated that “the predictive validity of mental disorders most likely reflects antisocial cognition, antisocial personality patterns, and substance abuse” [10]. The empirically supported conclusion is that offenders with mental illness present more general risk factors for recidivism than healthy offenders, therefore requiring more suitable rehabilitation strategies. However, the care pathway of mentally unwell people in contact with the English CJS has been complicated. Organizations are usually inconsistent in their assessment of vulnerabilities, which makes individuals to fall between the services of different agencies. Consequently, those with multiple and complex needs tend to go unnoticed through CJS, which is disastrous for them and inefficient for the system that is already overcrowded [6], [11].

Aware of the problem, the government commissioned an independent study to determine the extent to which vulnerable individuals in contact with the CJS could, when suitable, be diverted to care and the eventual barriers to such diversion.

The Bradley Report identified, among other problems, an emphasis on diversion often too late in system, lack of joined-up services, and need for training for both health and criminal justice sectors [12]. Put simply, the lack of shared protocols and timeframes, insufficient information sharing, and uncertainty on lines of responsibility were identified as barriers to interagency work [13]. The need for focus on micro level relationships was also emphasized, meaning that if professionals in both MHS and CJS are able to effectively establish interpersonal relationships, then interprofessional collaboration takes place and ultimately interagency cooperation is promoted [13].

In the end, the issues identified in the Bradley Report were addressed by the national government by putting emphasis on collaborative practice between MHS and CJS as means to improve offender mental health and overcome the obstacles imposed by organizations with different agendas, and that L&D schemes are the tool to operationalize it [12].

### III. THE DIVERSION AGENDA

The management of the needs of vulnerable offenders has been on the political agenda for the last two decades. As early as 1992, the Reed Report suggested that diversion schemes were helpful in providing a multi-agency focus that made effective disposal easier [14]. Nevertheless, the progress to realize the aims of the Reed Report were slow, and the need for a central strategy to put the service in practice across the country was identified [6]. By December 2007, the announcement of the Lord Bradley Review confirmed the still existent interest in creating a national model of L&D as well as the lack of efficient measures on the matter by that point [15]. Although the review had a broader scope of examining the extent to which vulnerable offenders could be diverted to care and what were the barriers to such diversion [12], Lord Bradley highlighted the importance of L&D schemes in accomplishing the goal.

The Bradley Report defines diversion as a process whereby mentally disordered offenders are directed away from CJS to health and care services. It also highlights that it can happen both before arrest, after proceedings have been initiated, during prosecution, or even when the case is already in court [12]. Accordingly, precise screening and assessment of the mental health condition of offenders are key to successful interventions and consequent signposting to health and social care as suitable. However, despite the efforts of the national government to rollout L&D around the country and equally implement standards of service, the local management of the schemes varies from region to region and research of the efficiency of the teams has revealed inconsistency in provision, with a part of the country still not covered by the service [11].

It has been noticed that L&D schemes at the police custodies and courts have the potential of successfully diverting vulnerable individuals into hospital [16] and other services in education and social care [17], not to mention the cost-effectiveness of not having mentally unwell individuals contributing to the overcrowding in the CJS [18]. However,

much of the L&D work has not been properly recorded, which leads to a paucity of knowledge on what has been done by the existent L&D services across the country and consequent difficulties in moving the state of the art forward [19].

This paper builds upon an ethnographic research grounded in a 'cross-boundary' approach inspired by Engeström's work [20], [21], which has been conducted to a sample of 13 professionals involved with the rollout of the L&D services in a county in the South of England. The focus of the study is on documenting the progress of the scheme from its outset until now as well as pinpointing the challenges practitioners encounter in their daily activities. Participants consisted of mental health practitioners, support time recovery workers, team leaders, a service manager, and a data analyst. Their participation in the research was voluntary.

IV. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study focuses on collaboration between CJS and MHS by analyzing the professionals participating in the management of vulnerable offenders as activity systems working on a partially shared object [20].

In order to understand activities, their contradiction and possible ways of resolving them, the history in which they are embedded must be taken into consideration. Learning and problems are defined by local and historical forms of activity as well as the existent cultural means of resolving the problems. In this sense, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides the necessary tools to understand human behavior situated in its historical and systemic contexts. In other words, the model allows the study of complex learning environments from the standpoint of a chosen subject. It is a model to investigate how the subject and its collaborative community carry out an activity with the participation of mediating artifacts, rules and division of labor.

A complex learning environment is a situation in which several individuals participate in shared activities in a single or multi-organizational setup. The benefit for adopting activity system analysis of a situation is that it allows the researcher to look into the core of intricate datasets through a graphic model and build on that to draw systematic implications of a single human activity [22].

An activity system is studied through a triangular model, as seen in Fig. 1. In this graphic representation, the subject is the individual involved in the activity. Tools are resources supporting the subject in the activity, being artifacts, instruments, or even social others. Rules are regulations influencing the way the activity takes place. The community represents the social group the subject is part of while performing the activity. The division of labor addresses the issue of how tasks are distributed among members of a group. The outcome is the end result of the activity [20]. However, tensions within the system can exist and they usually arise from the nature of each individual component in the activity and the contextual systemic contradictions. Tensions influence the interactions between components in an activity system and ultimately affect the subject's ability to attain the object [22]. In the L&D activity system analysis, tensions within the

system arise from the significantly limited access to information L&D practitioners have on their patients due to non-integrated computer systems between the scheme and the other organizations in MHS and CJS, which ultimately affect the L&D staff's ability to divert vulnerable offenders into care.

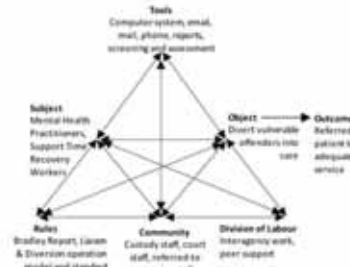


Fig. 1 The triangular model of an L&D activity system (adapted from [20])

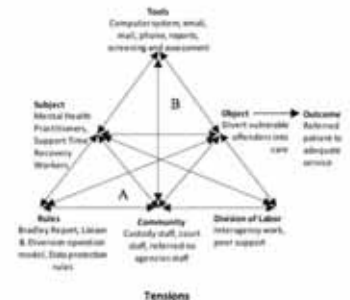


Fig. 2 Tensions affecting practitioners activity of diverting vulnerable offenders from CJS into care

Fig 2 represents how external factors in the contextual situation that create systemic contradictions can generate tensions in individual activities and affect their nature. The tensions in the represented activity were provoked by the systemic contradictions related to data protection rules and non-integrated computer systems, both limiting access of the L&D staff to information on their clients and ultimately

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impairing their ability to divert them from CJS into care.

Tension A between rules and the object represents how the mental health practitioners and the support time recovery workers in L&D team struggle with data protection laws that limit their access to information on their clients. Tension B between tools and object emphasizes the fact that non-integrated computer systems affect the capacity of professionals to provide appropriate treatment to service users as information sharing is only achieved in a case-to-case basis. However, the high level of specification and interdependence of human activities these days requires the study of activity systems as a network rather than unity of analysis. By investigating only one activity, the researcher may risk having a partial understanding of the object being produced, overlooking accessory activities that are equally important [21].

The next sections consider the findings from semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observations that took place over a period of 4 months between 2017 and 2018. The goal was to explore the participants' perspectives of the issues involved in interagency work and the rehabilitation of vulnerable offenders.

#### V. INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured interviews followed a common schedule and set of prompts, but participants were allowed to address topics they deemed relevant to the research. Whenever possible, a preliminary meeting between the researcher and the informant took place with the objective to build rapport and confidence between parts.

Participants were informed beforehand on data collection, confidentiality and anonymity in reporting. In addition, written informed consent to record and report was collected upon interview ending.

Recordings were put through thematic analysis, with key concepts being identified from the data and added to a framework based on CHAT for transmitting the essence of what the data highlighted [20].

Traditionally, the result of an ethnographic study is a thick description which is then analyzed through analytic notes on data and the establishment of themes and codes. Although concepts from existing literature are commonly adopted at the analysis, normally there is a challenge in fitting specific aspects of the study into standardized categories while the researcher attempts to create new knowledge.

Having adopted CHAT as theoretical framework from the outset of the research has meant that the design in this study has existed throughout, and has informed the content emerged from the fieldwork [23]. Furthermore, the model has helped to structure the data analysis without limiting it due its openness to meanings and interpretations.

#### VI. FINDINGS

##### A. Informatics Systems as Tools to Enable Offender-centered Care Collaboration

Technological advances have transformed the concept of

offender care, where organizations have the tools and resources to impact on the management of the individuals in touch with the CJS. Ideally, a care coordination plan would reach across all various organizations' informatics systems, with timely access to information and efficient communication. However, practitioners who participated in the research generally experienced the available systems as disempowering, as they were seen to be fragmented and limiting of the professionals' ability to deliver.

[Integrated computer systems] would be really useful.

Because rather than calling social services, then waiting a week for them to call me back, then they call me let's say now when I am talking to you so I cannot answer the phone, so I then called them back and they do not answer... If I can just look on their system, it will be a lot quicker. (AM, L&D outreach worker, female)

Technology is expected to expedite processes as well as facilitate knowledge sharing, but with organizations using non-integrated computer systems efficiency decreases and the work of practitioners become more time-consuming. On the benefits of integration, a participant has said:

Different areas have different systems... There is no national system. What we would do, because the crisis team works 24 hours a day, so we tend to ring them [to have information on patients from other regions]. I was 40 minutes on the phone the other day just to get some information and I still did not speak to somebody. It is not great. It does not happen a lot, most of our clients live here in the county. However, it is quite restrictive, and it is not very good for a client who is travelling from another county either.

Even within the same service, the fragmentation of the informatics systems can be noticed, which is definitely a barrier to good practice.

[The police's system] is not national. It is the similar sort of thing... It is strange because the National Health Services is national, the police force is national, but every county seems to do their own thing. The management of counties I never really understood properly. (MK, Custody police officer, male)

In addition to limitations in the systems operational manner, professionals are subject to data protection rules that restrict the sharing of information on the individual between organizations for whom that person is a common case. In this sense, when an offender is referred to L&D by other agencies, any necessary disclosure of information on the individual is bound by data protection regulations that can be quite restrictive. On having unlimited access to patients' information, one participant has commented:

From a practitioner point of view, it would make things a lot easier. It would be brilliant. If I put myself as a patient though, I am not sure that I would want all of my information to be universally shared. Our system was attacked recently. They at least could only get a certain amount of information. If everything is in one system, the possibility for being hacked is huge. On the one hand, it would be great if I could have access to everything, but

then actually what right do I have to access all of this information? (KN, Support, Time and Recovery worker placed in court, female)

#### B. Interagency Staff Relations

There is a concern that other agencies do not have a full understanding of the roles and responsibilities of L&D practitioners. Overall, the other organizations are willing to collaborate with the L&D team, but participants emphasized the need to educate other professionals on what it can be expected from the service.

Every organization I have come across is very positive and respectful about the work we do. The only issue I can think of is when... I think there is still quite a bit of confusion as to what we actually do. I think lot of services do not really understand our work. They think that we can do more than we can. They think that we have more access to information than we do. People think that we have access to all the police systems, but we do not. (LL, Mental Health Practitioner placed in custody, female)

Understanding what L&D can provide is key to enable collaboration between the scheme and other agencies. However, this awareness can only be achieved if professionals develop a comprehensive grasp of relevant legislation, policy and agency requirements. Moreover, participants have highlighted the importance of relationships established on a personal level in order to spread understanding on the scheme's responsibilities and limitations. Once professionals are familiarized with one another, organizational barriers tend to fall down and a certain degree of camaraderie overcomes the standard skepticism existent between agencies. Thus, being physically located in the custody as well as in the court has helped L&D practitioners to integrate with professionals in the CJS. Moreover, the background of the practitioners in the L&D team – most of them with work experience within health and care services – helps them to understand the culture of organizations existing across the MHS.

You do need to know who people are... Because we are nurses and we are in a police station, which is not our environment, and we had to come in here and build working relationships in their environment. It is not a hospital ward, we had to get into their custody, work with them, and sort of join their team. So, it is very important to build up that working relationship. (EE, Mental health practitioner placed in custody, male)

As emphasized by another participant:

If you start trying to do things over the phone all the time, people will not pick up. They will not make referrals because they are busy. People will be missed. It is just another obstacle in somebody's way. (EE, Mental health practitioner placed in custody, male)

#### C. Funding

The costs associated with collaboration revolve around coordination, communication and implementation. With agencies in CJS and MHS usually being overcommitted and

underfunded, the potential for new collaborative relations to be formed is low. In the case of the L&D, participants relate the challenges of having to cope with high workload with a limited staff.

So if I have got an assessment on one side of the county and an assessment on the other side of the county is needed, I just physically cannot get there. It would be nice just to call on someone and say: Could you go see them? But, it does not stop us from doing our work. We just make the appointment for another day. (AF, Mental health practitioner placed in custody, female)

This raises the importance of having creative and proactive practitioners overcoming the challenges imposed by the obstacles they encounter. Bureaucratic top-down rules restricting agency at the front-line level, limitations imposed by informatics systems that do not fully meet the needs of their users, and understaffing due to insufficient funding resulting in work overload are only a few of the problems faced daily by participants of this research. Innovation in the public sector cannot only rely on the resourcefulness of practitioners, but it also has to be supported by the system.

#### VII. DISCUSSION

From its outset in the early 1990s, L&D has focused on liaising with CJS and MHS while diverting vulnerable individuals out of criminal justice and referring them to health and other services [6]. However, until the 2009 Bradley Report and the consequent L&D trial launched by the national government in 2014, L&D decisions were taken locally and as such results would vary according to local innovation and funding.

The issues emerging from the observations and interviews in this research confirm the relevance of interagency collaboration in supporting the rehabilitation of vulnerable offenders. The views expressed by the participants are in line with earlier work that emphasized the importance of having both the management level (macro), the project level (meso) and the operational level (micro) working together toward implementing innovative cross-boundary tools [24].

During the interviews, participants stressed the challenges of constructing a shared object with professionals in other organizations since each agency tend to have diverse objectives, tasks and agendas. The problems are only aggravated by agencies adopting separate computer systems, which hinders knowledge sharing among themselves.

In activity theoretical terms, constructing a shared object from diverse perspectives can be challenging, but can also be beneficial. The tensions generated by the disagreement between service providers create opportunities for expansive learning, which calls for the innovation of existing working routines as well as the creation of new sorts of tools that ultimately take the object and forms of collaboration into consideration [25]. In other words, everyday routines are the consolidation of past experiences in a particular setup [26], and these accumulated tensions have the power to trigger a learning process in the current activity system that leads to a new type of activity around a new, expanded object [20].



However, interagency knowledge creation call for boundary crossing in the form of negotiated knot-working [27], which does not seem to be happening currently [28].

Knot-working is a form of collaboration that encourages innovation and usually takes place in a complex learning environment, which can only be achieved with adequate tools supporting the interactions between agents [27]. Tools, such as computer systems, shape how individuals interact with reality, their surroundings and others. In a context where informatics systems are not integrated, professionals struggle to achieve their goals and deliver their best performance.

Tools are a reflection of other people's attempts to solve similar problems at an earlier time by creating/modifying available instruments to make them more efficient. In this sense, tools carry with them a particular culture that reflects the historical fragments from that development, and can end up being a limitation to the accomplishment of certain goals if they are not adapted to the current context in which they are applied [29]. Notwithstanding, participants have expressed a positive attitude towards their experience of interagency collaboration and the willingness of professionals across organizations to work together towards an adequate treatment to vulnerable offenders.

The importance of interpersonal contact in the current scenario must be highlighted, as it has been only through relationships on a personal level that knowledge sharing has been promoted. In the end, overcoming fragmented informatics systems while trying to implement the diversion and liaison agenda seems to be the challenge of practitioners these days.

#### VIII. LIMITATIONS

This paper is built upon a small-scale study that focuses on the results of only one county in the South of England. There is possibility to test the transferability of these observations to the population of practitioners in MHS and CJS across the country.

#### IX. CONCLUSION

L&D schemes have been around in England for nearly 30 years, yet it was only from 2014 that the implementation of the service lost its regional character to embrace a national model. Thus, bringing about the rollout of a uniform model across the country is a complex and long-term process that requires fine-tuning over time, and one of the reasons for this is the nature of the existing systems and structures prior to the new model that need to be taken into consideration.

This paper suggests that even though professionals are willing to understand the philosophy of other organizations, they still have to become more familiarized with the roles and responsibilities of the L&D schemes, which ultimately will enable them to work more effectively together. In this scenario, informatics systems could play an important role of integrating agencies and enabling knowledge sharing but the current setup is fragmented and bureaucratic.

In conclusion, the challenge seems to be how government

and agencies can support the development of more adequate tools that enable liaison between agencies towards diverting vulnerable offenders from the criminal justice into care.

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## Appended Paper II – Meeting criminogenic needs to reduce recidivism

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# Performance-based policy in offender rehabilitation: Limitation or innovation for front-line workers in Liaison and Diversion services?

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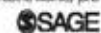


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## Abstract

In recent years, the English government has been using competitive elements in the process of allocating public funds through policy. Front-line workers struggle with the limitations imposed by such a model. A qualitative case study was conducted to investigate the impact of a new performance-based policy on front-line workers of a public service called Liaison and Diversion. The findings demonstrated that professionals have been adapting the policy to local circumstances found at the street level. We argued that adaptation is a form of employee-based innovation that optimises the use of scarce resources and customises services to the clients.

## Keywords

performance-based policymaking, Liaison and Diversion, front-line workers, limitations, innovation, offender rehabilitation, England and Wales

## Introduction

A large number of vulnerable individuals, that is, people with mental health, learning disability, substance misuse, and other psychosocial vulnerabilities (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014), enter the criminal justice system

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every day. The antisocial behaviour that leads them towards wrongdoing is understood to be related to their vulnerabilities, which could be by and large grappled with in the community (Andrews and Bonta, 2016). Strategies devised to assist these have to address clusters of correlated needs and provide multifaceted solutions (Andrews and Bonta, 2016) in a timely manner (Armstrong, 2012; Ministry of Justice UK, 2013; Sinha, 2010) so to ensure desistance from further criminal behaviour (Fazel and Danesh, 2002; Fazel and Wolf, 2015; World Health Organization, 2005). To that end, the involvement of welfare services in the rehabilitation process is crucial to increase the individuals' chances of remaining crime-free (Hean et al., 2009; Strype et al., 2014).

In the context of offender rehabilitation in England and Wales, a public service called Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) is one means to promote collaborative interactions between organisations in criminal justice and welfare services. The service provides prearrest support for vulnerable people as they come to the attention of the criminal justice system. L&D also collaborates with the police, youth offending teams, and court staff to provide critical information to decision makers in the justice system regarding charging and sentencing. In addition, L&D functions as a point of referral and follow-up for service users, so that they can access and are supported to attend community treatment and rehabilitation appointments (NHS England, 2018).

L&D is a form of diversion that has been locally organised and funded over the past three decades (Reed, 1992). However, in 2014, a performance-based national model for L&D services pre-empted local policies with the goal to standardise practice across sites nationwide (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). It attempted to do so by specifying outcomes to be equally achieved and dovetailing funding for the services to their performance (Glas et al., 2018).

Although studies have investigated the impact of the national model on L&D services (Disley et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2018), they have focused on service-level outcomes (e.g. arrest rates, diversion rates, and referrals to other services), and little attention was paid at the perspective of professionals at the front line. As explained by Lipsky (2010), front-line workers traditionally operate under bureaucratic constraints and with limited resources. Under these conditions, they tend to struggle with equating top-down instructions and the needs existent at the street level (Hill and Huppe, 2014). Thus, addressing the perspective of front-line workers is also crucial to verify the impact of the national model for L&D services on practice.

The aim of our study was to add to the literature on policy implementation and innovation in the public sector by introducing the standpoint of front-line professionals on the national performance-based model for L&D services. To that end, we posed the question 'How has the introduction of a performance-based national model for Liaison & Diversion services impacted front-line practice?', and through the perspective of front-line workers of an L&D site in England, this article attempts (1) to investigate how the model has been implemented at the street level and (2) to examine the strategies deployed by L&D front-line workers to implement the national model.

The article is structured as follows: First, we introduce the theoretical framework adopted in the study of policy implementation and innovation in the context of offender rehabilitation. Further, we present the design and results from our qualitative case study exploring contradictions emerging from the implementation of the performance-based national model for L&D. The discussion raises the question of how to characterise the adaption of the model to the local context. The final section suggests a way to take our research forward.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### *Performance-based commissioning in public services*

The main principle of performance-based policy is to use remuneration as a motivator for organisations to achieve desired goals. As Herbst (2007: 90) explained,

The rationale of performance funding is that funds should flow to institutions where performance is manifest: ‘performing’ institutions should receive more income than lesser performing institutions, which would provide performers with a competitive edge and would stimulate less performing institutions to perform. The output should be rewarded, not input.

In other words, the main argument for these models has been that through completion and financial compensation, public services can have their quality improved (Milstein and Schreyögg, 2016).

Performance-based funding arrangements were popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s when innovation processes aimed at improving public sector efficiency mostly followed the New Public Management (NPM) agenda. The NPM is a management model widely adopted in public service organisations in the United Kingdom and United States, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The term encompasses a series of reforms and restructures as part of an effort to make the public service more ‘businesslike’ and to improve its efficiency using private sector management models (Hood, 1991). However, with the 2010 UK election of a Coalition government that shared enthusiasm for mixed economy of public service provision (Albertson et al., 2018), performance-based funding arrangements have become mainstream in policymaking again. Top-down performance-based commissioning was again prioritised in different areas of government, including welfare-to-work programmes, public health budgets, and the criminal justice system (Bochel and Powell, 2016). As a consequence, there are several top-down performance-based policies initiated by central levels of government waiting to be implemented by front-line workers, but there seems to be a mismatch between these policies and the conditions existent at the street level (Hill and Huppe, 2014).

The idea of introducing new solutions in the public sector through top-down policy is contested in the literature (Fuglsang, 2010; Lippke and Wegener, 2014), especially in cases where policies introduce a performance-based approach to stimulate implementation. Critics suggest that there is an inherent clash between performance-based commissioning and the notion of innovation

(Blais et al., 1993), as it creates risk-averse workers who focus on fail-proof initiatives rather than experimenting new service designs (McGahey and Willis, 2017; National Audit Office, 2015). In the context of offender rehabilitation, the criticism is taken a step further, as the mere idea that financial motivation can be used to galvanise performance is rather simplistic. It assumes a one-dimensional causal connection between intervention and result and shows total disregard for the complex social context of offenders (Burke, 2010).

Thus, by responding the research question 'How has the introduction of a performance-based national model for Liaison & Diversion services impacted front-line practice?', this article addresses the implementation of the national model for L&D services (an example of a policy that links funding to the ability of the service to achieve pre-established outcomes) by front-line workers and uncovers potential mismatches between the policy and coping strategies at the street level.

#### *Implementation of performance-based policy at the street level*

The terms front-line worker, street-level worker, employees, and staff are interchangeably used in this article. They refer to Lipsky's (2010) canonical conceptualisation of street-level bureaucrats in the public service sector, that is, those professionals who interact directly with the public they serve.

According to Lipsky, front-line workers are constantly developing coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges of policy implementation in a backdrop of inadequate resources, few controls, indeterminate objectives, and discouraging circumstances (Lipsky, 2010). The current increased need for public services to meet citizens' demands reveals a proclivity of front-line workers behaving more autonomously rather than blindly following top-down instructions (Hartley, 2005). This approach epitomises the notion of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) and is responsible for promoting innovation in public sector organisations (Arundel and Huber, 2013). As top-down policies often do not meet the needs encountered at the street level, deviations from their rules promote transformation initiated at the front line. Once transformation spreads and develops into a routinised way of performing the work, it becomes the new work practice. Thus, practice-based innovation can be perceived as a cyclical process of learning, whereby deviation from previous work routines initiates a learning process that develops into new work practice (Ellström, 2010).

In this article, we suggest that front-line workers' drudgery to square top-down policies and street-level conditions is a form of innovation in the public sector rather than implementation failure. In this sense, innovation can incrementally emerge from practice as a consequence of a process where new ideas build upon the ones that already exist (Fuglsang and Sørensen, 2011; Van de Ven et al., 2008). This concept is widely supported in the literature on innovation in the public sector (Fuglsang and Sørensen, 2011; Gallouj and Weinstein, 1997; Sundbo, 1997; Van de Ven et al., 2008) and allows for a concept of innovation that is intertwined with practice to include also improvement consequent of regular learning activities.

Later in this article we will draw upon this theoretical framework to discuss how front-line workers have been coping with the introduction of a performance-based national model attempting to standardise practice among L&D sites, but first we will describe the research context and methods of our study.

## Research context and methods

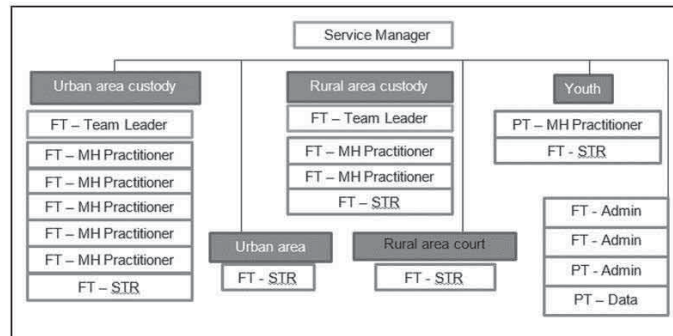
### Case selection

The performance-based national model for L&D services was originally rolled out in a few trial sites in each of the National Health Service's (NHS) regions, namely North, Midlands, East, London, South East, and South West of England (Disley et al., 2016). These sites became known as 'wave one' sites. They were chosen because they ran well-established L&D services before the new policy. Building upon the experiences of 'wave one' sites, the model has been also introduced in other regions across England. The implementation has been happening in new 'waves'. Currently, there are also 'wave two' and 'wave three' L&D sites (NHS England, 2019).

The goal of the case study reflected in this article was to investigate the overall impact of the national model on front-line practice. Therefore, selecting a representative L&D site was crucial. Initially, we conducted a purposeful sampling to narrow down cases for the representative single-case study. The criteria used were (a) L&D services that were part of the 'wave one' sites rolling out the new L&D national model and (b) L&D services with well-established local support mechanisms in connection with other services in criminal justice and welfare systems. 'Wave one' sites were originally selected by the government to roll out the national model due to their excellence in service provision (Disley et al., 2016) and served as base for the 'wave two' and 'wave three' implementation processes, thereby being a reliable indicator of a single-case study that was representative of the L&D services.

The selected L&D site belongs to the 'wave one'. The service has a team that comprises administration professionals, Support, Time and Recovery workers, mental health practitioners, team leaders, and a service manager. Mental health practitioners are health professionals placed in police custody and in court to assist with the screening and assessment of vulnerable individuals entering the criminal justice system. Support, Time and Recovery workers are professionals responsible for following up the initial contact between the mental health practitioner and the client with practical support and referral to appropriate care.

The staff are small and stretched, the team leaders and the service manager have to multitask also functioning as mental health practitioners when necessary, which transforms them into front-line workers for the effects of this study. Service is provided to all ages and is available from 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Sunday. The selected L&D service is responsible for an area of 1000 square miles, which encompasses urban and rural areas serviced by 15 police stations, and has a static population of around 780,000. In 2017, a total of 2365 adults were assessed, and the number has been increasing yearly ever since. Figure 1 shows an illustration of



**Figure 1.** Work division and responsibilities management (adapted from Williams et al., 2019).

how the scheme’s core workforce and coverage operate, where FT stands for full time and PT for part time.

*Data collection*

Data collection followed a representative qualitative case study approach with the goal ‘to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation’ (Yin, 2014: 48). The data collection occurred between 2017 and 2018 and consisted of three main stages.

*First*, we collected documents providing insights of contextual and historical factors which happened during the transition period in which the selected L&D service went from a locally managed and funded organisation to a site applying the new performance-based national model for L&D. The data set included internal documents describing the process of implementation of the new model (n = 27) and statistical reports of the screening and assessments taking place in custody and court upon the national model (n = 12).

*Second*, the entire front-line staff of the selected L&D service (n = 19) was interviewed. To ensure willingness, before each interview informants received a letter of invitation containing an information sheet about the project as well as a consent form to be signed. During the interviews, participants were given opportunities to refuse to participate in the research. They were also given a chance to withdraw from the study at any point. In total, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview schedule was inspired by cultural–historical activity theory principles (Engeström, 1987) and aimed at exploring contradictions between the model’s instructions and their implementation in practice.

*Third*, we gathered observational data from visits with L&D staff placed in custody/court and participation in team meetings (n = 4) to ensure embeddedness in the context and build trust with participants.



The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the funders nor the participants, who had no involvement in the study design; data collection, analysis, and interpretation; the writing of the report and the decision to submit the article for publication.

### *Data analysis*

A template analysis method was adopted, which is a method of a thematic analysis of qualitative data that implicates the development of a coding 'template' summarising and organising relevant themes inductively identified in the data set (King, 2012).

First, the interviews were transcribed with attention for consistency in transcription across the entire data set. The initial analysis was limited to three transcripts because the goal was to develop an a priori framework based on a representative part of the data set without delving too deep into it (King, 2012). Besides, open-coding the entire data set would not fit the idea of having a framework applied to the data. With the help of the CAQDAS package QSR NVivo version 12, relevant segments of text were highlighted and described to identify the topics commented in each excerpt. Codes were detailed in their description of the extract to record the meaning of the selected excerpt, and the labelling could range from a few words to entire sentences. Through abstraction, codes were grouped into categories, and these were elevated to sub-themes (when suitable) and themes. The a priori template included themes considered relevant in the light of the research questions the study aims to respond.

In the end, a final template consisted of one meta-theme, one theme, three sub-themes, four categories, and three subcategories, which was then applied to the entire data set and served as the basis for the interpretation of the data and writing up of the findings. This article draws upon findings of contradictions between the national model's instructions and working conditions at the street level. In the following sections, we present and discuss the findings of how L&D front-line workers have been coping with the instructions of the model.

### **Case-study findings**

#### *The performance-based model for L&D services and standardisation of practice*

The national model for L&D is a policy enacted by the central levels of government with the goal to standardise performance across the country. Homogeneous practice is galvanised by linking funding to positive outcomes. An outcome is positive if it meets the standards stipulated by the policy and also in comparison with other L&D sites, which reinforces the need for standardisation of the service nationwide (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). Nevertheless, interviewees bluntly informed that the national model is being subjected to local idiosyncrasies.

There are national guidelines from NHS England, but then we just add bits to make them specific to our service. (Mental health practitioner while working at the L&D headquarters)

As of the national model, all the L&D sites have the responsibility to equally assist criminal justice professionals to identify vulnerable people entering the criminal justice. Logistically, such responsibility involves the placement of L&D professionals in court and police stations to carry out the screening, assessment, and signposting of vulnerable offenders to adequate health and social care as necessary. However, once again the findings demonstrated a discrepancy between the instructions of the model and the reality, which was confirmed by an interviewee who reported that each L&D site has been running their business in a slightly different fashion.

Our scheme offers support work to clients up to 4 weeks. I think it is a guideline from NHS England and you would think that L&D schemes would follow the same rules and have the same setup, but actually they do not. They work completely differently [...] I do not have the stats, but let's say we do 50 referrals per month whereas another area does not do any. It might be simply the case that they do not have support workers. So, there is not much uniformity in the service. (Mental health practitioner while working at a police custody suite)

Administratively, the national model requires that L&D sites collect data on their cases so that their performance is compared against national outcome measures established in the national model. The information gathered is to be shared among commissioners and L&D sites around the country to ensure standardisation of the service (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014, paragraphs 4 and 9.5).

Interviewees described that the service was already performing at its full capacity before the national model and that the new tasks introduced by the policy only added to the front-line workload. As a consequence, they mentioned difficulties in, for example, going on vacation or on sick leave. Operating with a small staff, participants reported the need to multitask or even prioritise tasks (e.g. screening, assessment, and support of vulnerable clients in detriment of administrative tasks) and cases (e.g. support of clients having a mental health episode or about to be released from custody to detriment of stable clients) they deem more relevant.

We have to register the outcomes of our work on our database. It is beyond my capacity to explain to you how these statistics are handled, but I know we have to prove ourselves in order to continue to receive the funding from NHS. [...] If I have seen someone in the morning, for example, by the time I am done with the bits and pieces, it is about two and a half hours' worth of work. So, when we are busy, we have to prioritise. (Mental health practitioner while working at a police custody suite)

This quote encapsulates the effort that front-line workers have to put into complying with the procedures established by the model. Interviewees revealed a concern that the lack of time and resources to comply with the requests for data from NHS England might affect future funding of the service. They also admitted being

frustrated with the fact that they have to prioritise cases instead of addressing everyone entering criminal justice, which they understand as going against their sense of values and work ethics.

Our claim, further explored later on in this article, is that the adverse conditions described above motivate adaptation of the national model to local circumstances found at the street level.

### *Policy implementation: Front-line adaptation and coping strategies*

The goal of the government with the national model was to lay out instructions to be consistently followed by local L&D schemes across the country so that the service could be equally provided nationwide and results could be compared between schemes (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). However, the text of the national model demonstrates that the document mixes both mandatory rules and suggestive guideline, for example:

The service *must be* [emphasis added] accessible at the earliest stage once an individual is suspected of having committed a criminal offence. (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014: 5)

Coverage *should be* [emphasis added] a 24/7 service consisting of a mix of operating times and out-of-hours arrangements, including links to existing services and provision. (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014: 5)

The work of the liaison and diversion scheme and the relationships it develops *should be* [emphasis added] underpinned by formally agreed service level agreements, joint policies and protocols. (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014: 5)

The liaison and diversion service *will need to be* [emphasis added] integrated and take cognisance of a range of inter-related projects and programmes and developing initiatives. (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014: 6)

Words such as 'shall', 'will', 'require', and 'must' imply mandatory rules. Conversely, words such as 'consider', 'should', and 'may' denote a certain degree of suggestiveness (Bunnell and Jepson, 2011). In this sense, the national model for L&D provides the professionals with a certain degree of discretion, which transforms those implementing the model into adjunct policymakers (Lipsky, 2010) as they can interpret and apply the national guidelines, as they seem fit. At the L&D site focus of our study, we could observe front-line staff benefiting from the suggestiveness of certain instructions of the model and discretionarily interpreting the policy to encompass diverse behaviours, actions, and practices according to the local needs. The approach was confirmed by an interviewee who said:

There is a national model of liaison and diversion that sets out the age group that we have to work with and the things that are supposed to be included in our model, and it is commissioned by NHS England, but again every area that piloted the model has done things slightly differently. (Mental health practitioner while working at a police custody suite)

However, the interviews showed that often adaptations are made in response to limitations encountered by the professionals. An example of customisation of the national model is L&D workers performing Street Triage functions. Police officers who encounter a person having an episode of mental ill health might seek the assistance of mental health professionals who will function as a first-line response through dedicated phone line, conducting a rapid needs assessment and directing the individual to the most appropriate source of help. In the region where this study was conducted, Street Triage and L&D services are provided by the same team although funded by different organisations.

The national model expressly excludes such responsibilities from the L&D programme (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014, paragraph 8.3), but front-line workers adapted the instruction to the local conditions they encounter.

The Street Triage is not a function of the Liaison and Diversion service. Here in this county, both services are provided by the same team, but they have different funding. So, if we are functioning here as Liaison and Diversion during the day and the Police find someone in the streets and ask us to check if the person is on our systems, we could say no to that. However, if we are not having a busy day and they need our support, we can bend the rules. (Mental health practitioner while working at a police custody suite)

In another instance, the model highlights the importance of making L&D accessible 'as and when people need' (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014, paragraph 5.1). However, professionals at the front line have not been able to follow the instruction entirely due to lack of resources.

Practitioners have to prioritise. So, we are coming into the police, and we have five people to see. From start to finish, each assessment is going to take probably a couple of hours if not more, in order for us to do everything we need to do. There is much paperwork involved. So, I think practitioners are constantly under pressure to get to see loads of clients, but we cannot. Then we worry about the ones that we did not see. (Mental health practitioner while working at a police custody suite)

The quote shows the dilemmas of daily praxis of front-line workers. Because of the unmanageable workload front-line workers have to handle, prioritisation of the most complex clients is necessary. In that way, the service is not accessible to everyone entering the criminal justice system. The quote exemplifies the considerable demand from clients and the massive amount of paperwork to be done for each person who is seen by L&D, which hinders accessibility of the service to everyone being arrested.

In the end, the findings show that adaptation of the national model to local conditions is part of the front-line workers' daily routine, although most of the time such adjustments are a consequence of limitations imposed by scarce resources.

## **Discussion**

### *Front-line adaptation of the L&D national model to local circumstances: Limitation or innovation?*

Ever since the roll-out of the national model for L&D (NHS England, 2014), there has been an expectation that all L&D sites equally accomplish the outcomes specified in the policy (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014, paragraph 4). To ensure standardisation of practice, NHS has linked funding of the services to their ability to perform according to the policy. Success has been measured based on the number of assessments carried out monthly.

The results of our study demonstrated that front-line workers have been grappling with lack of time and resources to comply with all the instructions of the national model. Having assessment rates being used as a gauge implies that professionals must register the outcomes of their work on the database to ensure future funding of the service. However, that is a time-consuming task and doing the paperwork of one client means detracting attention from others, which also affects future funding of the service. In the middle of a predicament, L&D front-line workers see themselves forced to choose between performing core-work task (e.g. the support of vulnerable people in contact with the criminal justice) or housekeeping chores (e.g. tasks related with new procedures in information technology, new ways of recording and monitoring activity, and filling up forms). The findings showed that they have been prioritising the former in detriment of the latter despite the impact such decision might bear on future funding of the service.

The explanation is that front-line workers in the context of rehabilitation of offenders often abide by values and ethical standards of their profession (Robinson et al., 2016), which might go against the idea of standardisation introduced by performance-based policies. The prioritisation of certain instructions of the national model (core-work tasks) at the expense of others (housekeeping chores) was the approach adopted by our interviewees to implement the policy in the light of their work values and ethical standards. In the midst of this, however, standardisation of practice among L&D services – one of the main goals of the model – has not happened as expected and the current service-provider has to consistently bid against other suppliers in new tendering processes brought up by NHS (NHS England, 2018).

Based on the findings of our study, we argue that the adaptation of the performance-based national model for L&D services does not have to be perceived as negative necessarily. We understand the deviance from policy intent at the street level as a form of innovation instead of implementation failure (Hupe and Hill, 2016). This is an idea that builds upon the traditional understanding of front-line workers as lower level policymakers (Lipsky, 2010). By the same token, the prioritisation of core-work tasks in detriment of housekeeping chores can be perceived as a tentative means to operationalise the policy in a way that adds value and is beneficial to service users, which is a strategy predicated on the notions of bricolage (Fuglsang, 2010) and everyday innovation (Lippke and Wegener, 2014).

As mentioned in the above paragraph, the adaptation is a tentative to equate policy and practice. Therefore, we are not arguing that it is the optimal approach to implement the national model. Ideally, the policy would be implemented in its full potential through communication and coordination between L&D front-line workers and policymakers. However, the findings of our study confirmed the knowledge that top-down attempts to innovate in the public sector are prone to fail if front-line workers do not recognise them as relevant at the street level (Lipsky, 2010; Rittel and Webber, 1973). Similarly, policymakers are not amenable to practice-based solutions if they feel that they are threatening the order of the system (Høyrup, 2010). Effective innovation processes require both strategic directions for innovation that are initiated top-down along with the presence of ideas emerging throughout the organisation in a bottom-up fashion (Fuglsang and Sundbo, 2005; Sundbo and Fuglsang, 2002). This is what is missing in the case of the national model for L&D services.

However, street-level bureaucracy needs to be taken to task for its purview as a heuristic device. The proclivity to square policy and street-level conditions might seem providential, but its reification by front-line professionals might lead to deleterious effects. Discretion must go in tandem with accountability, and professionals ought to bear the consequences in circumstances where they abuse their discretionary power. In the case of the L&D service discussed in this article, professionals are conceivably not being wary enough to grapple with the repercussions of their adaptations beyond proximal contingencies, even though they are being pressed by a cluster of intractable conditions that increasingly limit their capacity to perform.

Thinking strategically, the discretionary decision of prioritising 'core-work tasks' over 'housekeeping chores' taken by front-line professionals might lead to a not so benign outcome in the long run. The result could be that, in the future, the service might have funding discontinued due to the partial disobedience of the front-line professionals to the national model despite the workers' efforts. It is a scenario in which street-level professionals benefit from discretion to override the proposed standardisation of the service and they do so predicated on the understanding that innovation is contingent on an evolutionary epistemology whereby only the most suitable norms should endure. In other words, a norm of the national model should not persist if it does not meet the needs of practice and service user. Although riveting, such understanding might harm the subsistence of the service.

As mentioned earlier, the way the national model is being implemented currently is subpar. Coordination amid the various strata of power is paramount to overcome hardship and avoid a zero-sum game in which either management or front-line achieve their political goals. The findings from the study, however, contribute to interpret the adaptation of top-down instructions as a type of employee-based innovation, as it adds value at both the street level and the system level of the organisation by optimising the use of scarce resources through tailoring the service to the recipients instead of blindly following standardised top-down instructions.

### **Final remarks**

L&D services have been present for nearly three decades (Reed, 1992), but since 2014, they were turned into a national service (NHS England Liaison and Diversion Programme, 2014). With the introduction of a national model for L&D service, the goal was to establish outcomes to be equally achieved across L&D sites and link funding to their ability to perform according to the policy's standards. The findings of our study revealed, however, that front-line workers have been struggling with lack of time and resources to comply with all the instructions of the national model. Consequently, the policy has been adapted to context-specific circumstances found at the street level.

This article problematised the utilisation of performance-based policies in the context of offender rehabilitation by exploring the challenges faced by front-line workers of an L&D scheme in England implementing instructions of the national model for L&D. We interpreted the adaptation of the policy as a form of employee-based innovation and suggested communication and coordination between L&D front-line workers and policymakers as the solution for the national model to achieve its full potential.

Thus, the question requiring further research becomes how to make sure that the national model for L&D services is implemented and meets the needs existent at the street level? Currently, the government expects the directives of the national model to be naturally spread out, but there seems to be a gap between the policy instructions and the needs of service users and front-line workers (Hill and Huppe, 2014). We understand that new ideas in the public sector should emerge through interaction and not top-down with the use of remuneration as a stimulator (Fuglsang, 2010). In this sense, we suggest that front-line workers should recognise the relevance of the national model, but they also should receive the necessary support for the introduction of bottom-up employee-based solutions (Ellström, 2010; Engström, 1999), as only they are aware of the needs of service users and street-level bureaucrats.

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## OUTLINES - CRITICAL PRACTICE STUDIES

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### Where is the primary contradiction? Reflections on the intricacies of research predicated on activity theory

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#### Abstract

*This article reflects on the idea that there is an omnipresent primary contradiction lurking at the bottom of every activity in capitalism. In doing so, it articulates the relationship between Marxism and Activity Theory. Whilst Marx's ideas suggest that a trademark of capitalist social formations is the way surplus is pumped out from living labour, Activity Theory posits that the dual nature of commodities (i.e. their use and exchange-value) is the fundamental contradiction existent among all activities. The article argues that such distinction bears a direct impact on empirical research predicated on Activity Theory and goes on to consider the practical and theoretical implications of the Activity Theory's departure from Marx's ideas. The point is illustrated with an example of the challenges faced by the author while conducting an activity theoretical field research attempting to identify the primary contradiction in the activity system of a public organisation in the UK.*

*Keywords:* Activity Theory, Marx, contradictions, labour-power

#### Introduction

One of the pillars upon which Activity Theory stands is the notion of contradiction as a driving force of transformation and development in activity systems (Engeström, 2001). Engeström draws upon (Il'enkov, 1977; 1982) to describe the central role of contradictions, as follows:

The primary contradiction of activities within capitalism is that between the use and exchange value of commodities. This primary contradiction pervades all elements of our activity systems. (Engeström, 2001, p.137)

As a fundamentally Marxist-based theory, Activity Theory has incorporated Marx's categories such as 'contradictions', 'commodities', 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' into its foundation. Engeström specifically developed the notion of contradictions and

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categorized them into four levels: primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary (Engeström, 1987). As it is beyond the scope of this article, a detailed examination of each level of contradiction is not provided herein. However, it can be vastly found in the literature (see e.g. Engeström, 1987 and Foot, 2014).

In this article, I focus on Engeström's interpretation of what constitutes a primary contradiction in capitalist socio-economic formations, namely the "inner conflict between exchange value and use value within each corner of the triangle of activity" (1987, p. 102). The reason for the emphasis on the primeval contradiction is that, while the others are contextual, the primary contradiction pervades all activity systems in capitalism. This is a notion not only present in Activity Theory, but also widespread in the work of Marx. However, while Activity Theory posits that the dual nature of commodities (i.e. their use and exchange-value) is the fundamental contradiction existent among all activities (Engeström, 2001), Marxism suggests that the primordial contradiction in capitalist social formations is the way surplus is pumped out from living labour (Marx, 1909). Besides the clear theoretical relevance, the distinction also bears impact on empirical research, as the precise understanding of what constitutes a primary contradiction has the capacity to determine the development of an entire research project.

The shortcomings of the Engeströmian Activity Theory have been widely discussed in the literature. Avis (2009) emphasizes the current limitations of the theory, as it neglects "the wider social context in which activity systems are located as well as by its failure to address issues of power and social antagonism" (p. 151). The author does not seem to be alone in this regard, as it is possible to observe other scholars jumping on the same bandwagon and championing similar criticism (Daniels, 2004; Barker, 2007; Roth 2007; 2008; Bakhurst, 2009; Jones, 2009; 2011; Martin and Peim, 2009). Bakhurst (2009), for example, highlights that the current developments of the theory are not aligned with key ideas of its founders, which makes us wonder whether new interpretations would bring us closer to what was originally intended and if being closer to the founders' intentions is the way to move the theory forward.

Bearing Bakhurst's ideas in mind and noting the "importance of recovering and evaluating the larger influence of the writings of Karl Marx on current and future research directions" (Sawchuck, Duarte and Elhammoumi, 2006, p. 2), this article expands on the existing critique and adds to the mentioned literature inasmuch as it proposes a new conceptualization of primary contradictions and commodification predicated on Marx's work. To investigate the notion of primary contradiction as manifested through the dual nature of commodity, I return to the work of Marx and explore his ideas on 'activity', 'labour-power' and 'the ascent from the abstract to the concrete' method. I pair an otherwise theory-laden article with reflections on my personal experience with fieldwork research predicated on Activity Theory. In doing so, I conclude by meditating on what could have been done differently in my empirical quest for the primary contradiction.

### Articulating Marxism and Activity Theory

Activity was a central concept in Marx's seminal book *Capital* (Marx, 1976),<sup>1</sup> and the author strived to clarify that 'activity' was not to be confused with daily commodified tasks people are engaged. For Marx, activity (or work, or labour process for that matter) is the eternal natural condition of human existence and its elements remain the same in all social forms of development (Marx, 1909). These elements, according to the author, are "purposeful activity, that is work itself, the object on which that work is performed, and the instruments of that work" (Marx, 1976, p. 284).

It is possible to notice that Marx was not describing any particular form of historical activity like a job, for example (Newman & Holzman, 1993). The elements described above are independent of historical and social conditioning and they remain constant throughout all potential forms and stages in the development of the processes of production. They are typical of human labour (or human activity) as an evolution beyond purely animal production process and are not constrained to capitalism (Marx, 1909). What is typical to the capitalist production process, however, is the fusion of the labour process and the valorisation process (Marx, 1976).

The capitalist production process is "the unity of labour process and process of valorisation" (Marx, 1976, p. 304), but it does not mean that both processes are the same thing. They are antithetical activities aimed at the production of commodities, which are things useful to sustain life that also have a market price attached to them. Therefore, it would be wrong to attribute to tasks conditioned by capitalist production relations (e.g. the capitalist production process) the character of activity in its abstract form. To do so would be a "very convenient method by which to demonstrate the eternal validity of the capitalist mode of production and to regard *Capital* as an immutable natural element in human production as such" (Marx, 1976, p. 998).

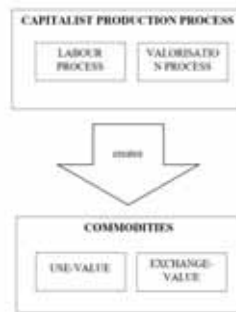


Figure 1: The capitalist production process and its creation

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noticing that, throughout volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx used terms such as "labour", "productive life", "work", "process of labour" and "labour process" as synonyms of activity (Marx, 1976, p. 86, p. 998).

In light of the above, it appears as if Activity Theory was mistakenly created out of the determinations that Marx specifically tailored to activity in the sense of labour process. This inaccuracy can be observed, for example, in Leont'ev's distinction between collective activity and individual action (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999), or in Davydov's generalization of Marx's concept of activity in the sense of labour process to include all sorts of social activity

Thus one can regard activity as an initial category that determines the specific character of people's social being. The social laws can reveal themselves only in activity and through it" (1999, p. 41).

Activity Theory overlooks Marx's understanding that human activity is independent of every specific social development (Marx, 1976) and grounds the entire theory in characteristics of activity within a capitalist social formation. In other words, Activity Theory confuses the sub-species activity (i.e. a commodified task, a job) with the genre activity (i.e. the eternal natural condition of human existence that transcends the constraints of any social form). Thus, it is not activity that determines the specific character of individuals, as suggested by Davydov. In capitalist societies, it is the capitalist labour process (i.e. the unity of labour process and valorisation process) that determines the specific character of people's social being. This confusion is the reason why the elements of activity in Marx's sense (as described at the beginning of this section) cannot be used to model "activities" within capitalist social formations or any other formation for that matter, as attempted in Ilyenkov's characterization of 'activity' in Activity Theory as "object-oriented, collective, and culturally mediated" (1982, p.96).

The same confusion is also found in the work of Engeström, who understands that the dual nature of commodities is what constitutes the primary contradiction of activities in capitalism (Engeström, 1990) when in fact the dual nature of commodities (their use-value and exchange-value) is not even an exclusivity of capitalism (Jones, 2009). In the capitalist production process, two are the most emblematic features: (1) "the labourer himself acts in the role of a seller of commodities" so that "wage labour is the typical character of labour" (Marx, 1909, p. 1025); and (2) "the production of surplus-value as the direct aim and determining incentive of production" (Marx, 1909, p. 1026). In this sense, commodities are actually a prerequisite for capitalism, being "products of capital itself" (Ilyenkov, 1982).

By grounding its logic in activities within capitalism instead of the Marx's concept of activity, Activity Theory errs as the bourgeois political economists did: it fails to comprehend the labour process as an independent thing and at a same time as an aspect of capitalist production" (Marx, 1976, p. 1000). Furthermore, Activity Theory fails also when it considers the dual nature of commodities to be the principal contradiction within the capitalist production process (Engeström, 1987). This second error particularly has a direct impact on the successful deployment of activity theoretical studies, as researchers demonstrate a proclivity to struggle with the identification of the primary contradiction (the dual nature of commodities) that should be lurking at the bottom of each and every activity system. This is an idea further explored later on in this article.

### Labour-power and Activity Theory

According to Engeström, as stated at the beginning of this article, the tension between the use and exchange value of commodities is the primary contradiction that pervades all elements of our activity systems in activities within capitalism (Engeström, 2001). Bypassing the potential inaccuracy of the statement, if we are to look for the primary contradiction of an activity, Leont'ev provides us with the *modus operandi*.

The primary contradiction can be found by focusing on any of the elements of the doctor's work activity. For example, instruments of this work include a tremendous variety of medicaments and drugs. But they are not just useful for healing—they are above all commodities with prices, manufactured for a market, advertised and sold for profit. (Leontyev, 1981, p. 255)

Leont'ev's acumen made the tension between use-value and exchange-value seem clear-cut, but this is not the case by any stretch of the imagination. Contradictions play the central role of setting change in motion, but do not, in themselves, guarantee a better alternative (Engeström, 1987). It is the ethical critique of capitalism, not merely a technical critique of labour within capitalism that ensures evolution (Bhaskar, 1993) and here is where Activity Theory departs from Marx's critical theory of labour. In its current form, Activity Theory does not seem to provide a sound ethical critique to capitalism inasmuch as it is grounded in characteristics of activity within a capitalist social formation. As explained in the previous section, Activity Theory confuses the sub-species activity (i.e. a commodified task, a job) with the genre activity (i.e. the eternal natural condition of human existence that transcends the constraints of any social form), which can be observed in Engeström's proclivity to lay his analysis/criticism on contextualised technical practices rather than on contradictions embedded in social class relations (Engeström, 1990; 2001).

In order for us to equate activity theoretical studies with Marx's critical theory of labour we need to bestow on the analysis of activity systems a quality of transcendence, which is necessary for them to become the representation of aspects pervading all capitalist social relations. The study of activity systems as the representation of production sites where concrete commodities such as, for example, machines or interagency services are being produced is an epistemological error to be avoided. Elements such as 'rules', 'community' and 'division of labour' cannot be construed as archetypes of concrete social relations binding actors to each other. As the activity in totality, its elements also need to convey a sense of transcendence in order for activity systems to be seen as sites where 'social substance' is constantly being transformed to mould the fabric of the social universe. It is only under such conditions that contradictions will be pervasive (Warmington, 2008).

Unpicking Leont'ev's example quoted above, we see that the treatment provided by the doctor is his 'product/service', the objectification of his labour within capitalism; therefore, it has an exchange-value in the market. The treatment, however, is useful for healing and will be purchased as a use-value by patients with a momentary need of the healing. The money exchanged for the service will enable the doctor, in turn, to purchase the products/services of others' concrete labour. Put simply, the treatment commodity has been sold by the doctor as a means to enable him to acquire the objectified labour of other producers, for example, a car, clothes or food. Thus, commodities can have both use-value and exchange-value depending on the activity in which they are being analysed.

Even though the example serves well the purpose of demonstrating the differences between use-value and exchange value, it is limited in its ability to support an ethical critique of capitalism. The dual nature of commodities does not provide sufficient grounds in which

the capitalist production process can be criticised for its strategies to intensify work and maximise value at the expense of workers. There is another aspect that seems to be relegated in Leont'ev's example as well as in Engeström interventions: labour-power.

[Labour power] is the merely abstract form, the mere possibility of value-positing activity, which exists only as a capacity, as a resource in the bodiliness of the worker. But when it is made into a real activity through contact with capital—it cannot do this by itself, since it is without object—then it becomes a really value-positing, productive activity. (Marx, 1976/1858).

From the above definition, it can be construed that labour-power is a potential until the moment in which workers direct their various capabilities to reify labour. In fact, Rikowski posits that, just as actual labour has use and exchange-value, so does labour-power (Rikowski, 1999; 2002a; 2002b). The use value being represented by one's aptitude to labour and the exchange-value being symbolised by socially average labour time (Marx, 1909). In this sense, even though it seems like employers are purchasing labour, they are in fact paying for the employee's aptitude to labour, i.e. labour-power (Warmington, 2008).

Rikowski (2002b) divides labour-power into three expressions. First, 'concrete labour-power', i.e. the skills and attributes embodied in an individual but not yet manifested. Second, the 'subjective labour-power', represented by the labourer's will to materialise his/her potential at a particular moment to a particular end. Finally, 'collective labour-power', which is of special interest to Engeström and those adopting his version of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987)

The collective aspect of labour-power reflects the fact that in capitalist society labour-powers are coordinated (through co-operation and division of labour) ... Such co-operation forms a significant collective force within the labour process, a force that capital and its representatives seek to control and channel into the value form of labour (Rikowski, 2002b, p.15).

Activity Theory's interest in the collective expression of labour-power derives from the fact that, as opposed to general commodities, labour-power is inherently expansive, given its unlimited potential to create value (Allman et al., 2000; Neary & Rikowski, 2000; Rikowski, 2002a/b). This characteristic is what Engeström calls "expansive transformation" (1987; 2001; 2007b); even though in practice such potential is affected by conflicts (contradictions) between antithetical drives. In Engeström's model of analysis of activity systems, the tension between labour-power and capital is addressed within the element 'division of labour' (the division of labour occurs horizontally according to task, role or professional expertise and vertically between the representative of capital and staff. It is in the latter that the contradiction between labour-power and capital occurs). However, there seems to be a reticence in Engeström's interventions to address wider social antagonism and instead there is a focus on contextualised technical practices (Engeström, 1990; 2001). This is where Activity Theory falls short of the appropriate incorporation of Marx's critical theory of labour and this is where there is scope for an improvement of the theory's methodological framework. Currently, workplace activities are as much about social production as they are about the production of commodities (Warmington, 2005). Thus, it is crucial that empirical research takes into account broader notions of social antagonism and break away from the limited analysis of contextualised technical practices. To that end, an adequate use of Marx's 'ascent from the abstract to the concrete' method could be opportune.



### Activity Theory and the ‘ascent method’

Up to this point in this article, I have addressed Activity Theory’s misinterpretation of Marx’s concept of ‘activity’ and the consequences of such inaccuracy. The notion that the primary contradiction pervading all elements of our systems in activities within capitalism derives from the dual nature of commodities is misleading. The peculiar trait of capitalist mode of production is rather “the production of surplus-value as the direct aim and determining incentive of production” (Marx, 1909, p. 1026). In this section, I will address Activity Theory’s need for incorporation of Marx’s ‘ascent from the abstract to the concrete’ method (henceforth, referred as the ‘ascent method’) in order for empirical research to focus more on broader notions of social antagonism instead of getting lost in the intricacies of contextualised technical practices.

The ramifications of Marx’s work are incommensurable. Although he is mostly recognised as a political economist, it is as methodologist that he is a figure of relevance to Activity Theory. In his introduction to *Grundrisse*, under the heading ‘the method of political economy’, Marx introduced a methodological principle that has become known as the ‘ascent method’. The method was an approach developed to make sense of historically specific social formations like, for example, the capitalist mode of production. In Marx’s view, the analysis of a social formation could not be predicated on general concepts and notions indistinctively enforced across dissimilar formations throughout history. Instead the analysis should begin from the unique economic phenomenon that differentiated a particular capitalist social formation from others. From that initial unity of analysis (the germ-cell), the theoretician would be able to systematically uncover the logic of development of the entire economic structure of capitalist society (Marx, 1976/1858). The terminology adopted by Marx was that so the totality of the economic structure of society in all its details was the ‘concrete’, whereas the simple economic fact isolated from any extraneous features was the ‘abstract’ (Jones, 2009).

Engeström (1990) referred to the ‘ascent method’ as the reason why Marx was able to, in his analysis of capitalist production, identify commodity as germ-cell from which the analysis progressively ascended to the concrete, i.e. entire economic structure of capitalist society. In fact, Engeström drew similarities between the ‘ascent method’ and the dialectical method of thinking adopted by Activity Theory, calling for the identification of a germ-cell (i.e. an activity system as unity of analysis) also in activity theoretical studies, which he exemplified with the application of the ‘ascent method’ to make sense of educational practice through the analysis of a case study on adult education taking a course in instructional theory (Engeström, 1990).

The utilisation of Marx’s political-economic methods in the analysis of human beings has been on Activity Theory’s agenda from the outset, as Vygotsky himself once stated that the field of psychology needed its own Capital – referring to the seminal work by Marx (Sève, 2018). Over the years, the initial concern Activity Theory had with the dialectical process of human development transmuted into an interest in the dialectics of activity at a collective level (Engeström, 1987; 1999), which can be observed in Engeström’s introduction of elements such as ‘community’, ‘rules’ and ‘division of labour’ in the analysis of activity systems. Nevertheless, dialectical logic has always been a key idea behind Activity Theory, and it seems only natural that activity theorists would adopt the ‘ascent method’ outside the political-economic arena (see e.g. Engeström, 1990 and Miettinen, 2000).

Expanding the ‘ascent method’ beyond the political-economic field is a riveting idea, but it is crucial to observe the structure of the method and ensure that it is not disfigured after adaptations. In recent instances of adaptation of the ‘ascent method’, it seems like activity theorists have handpicked the most convenient features of the method at the expense of others. In other words, it is difficult to see how the study of the psychological development of a deaf-blind child (Miettinen 2000), the development of particular approaches to schools subjects (Davydov, 1990) or the analysis of adult education taking a course in instructional theory (Engeström, 1990) would lead us to the final goal of attaining an understanding of the entire economic structure of capitalist society, which they did not.

As it is today, Activity Theory’s analysis starts with the identification of a ‘unit of analysis’ (i.e. an activity system); the activity system is broken down into elements (subject, tools, object, artefacts, rules, division of labour); contradictions are identified both within each element, between elements and between activity systems; finally, contradictions are dialectically worked out and an opportunity for transformation occurs. Such an approach, as suggested by Engeström in diverse occasions (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Engeström, 2001), is devised to attend social current needs for a method flexible enough to analyse complex interactions. However, given the extent to which activity theorists have been relativizing the ‘ascent method’, it has become unclear whether there is still a connection with Marx’s original ideas, as we can see in the comparison provided by table 1 below.

**Table 1: A comparison between the starting and ending points in each tradition**

	<b>Activity Theory</b>	<b>Marxism</b>
<b>Concrete</b>	A map of the whole social system enabled by a network of interacting activity systems	The totality of the economic structure of society
<b>Abstract</b>	Activity systems	Commodity

The point to be made here is that Activity Theory has been bypassing commodity as the germ-cell and has been focusing on concrete developmental contradictions of local activities in society as unity of analysis, i.e. it bestows the status of ‘the abstract’ on each activity system separately. The question then becomes why can we not take each activity system as a germ-cell and then try to figure out how all activity systems work together? Why did Marx not simply start the ‘ascent method’ with an inventory of different types of work as ‘the abstract’ instead of only the commodity?

It is worth noticing that Marx’s method did not reduce all activities into one germ-cell, but found the common ground among all activities run in capitalist societies: the commodity. Thus, it is the analyst’s responsibility to find out how extraction of surplus value is occurring in the analysed living labour activity. For example, while political activity does not produce surplus value, we can all appreciate how governments act in response to financial crises. The point is that the production of surplus values occurs in both governments, schools and

factories equally. A teacher produces as much surplus value as a car dealer or a coal-miner (Marx, 1909). If an analyst is not able to notice the common thread running through all types of work (i.e. that they all are producers of surplus value), then it is either a shortcoming of the analyst or he/she needs to identify a better placement for the analysed worker in a capitalist social formation grounded in productive work.

The theoretician has not merely a right but even an obligation to consider the commodity form in abstraction within the capitalist system, he has no logical right to consider just as abstractly any other form of economic connection in the same capitalist organism. (Il'enkov, 1982, p. 104).

In this sense, Activity Theory does not seem to be ascending from the abstract to the concrete, but remaining in the sphere of the abstract and, therefore, far from a scientific concept (Il'enkov, 1982). To solve that, Engeström has argued that

Activity systems are characterized by inner contradictions. The primary inner contradictions reflect the basic contradiction characteristic to the socio-economic formation as a whole. In capitalism, the basic contradiction is the dual nature of commodities, the tension between the use value and the exchange value. In different activity systems, this fundamental tension appears in different forms, as the primary contradiction of that particular activity. This primary contradiction resides in each component of the activity system. (1990, p. 84)

Engeström's solution is unsatisfactory on many levels. First, the characterisation of the dual nature of commodities as the primary contradiction in capitalism seems like an inappropriate generalisation. While capitalism is predicated on commodity making, the production of commodities is not exclusive to capitalist societies. In other words, the dual nature of commodities can also be observed in other social formations besides capitalism. What is typical of capitalist production is the existence of wage labour, which transforms the labourers also into sellers of commodities inasmuch as they sell their service. So, "the relationship between wage labour and capital determines the entire character of the mode of production" (Marx, 1909, p. 1025). Another peculiar trait of capitalism is the "production of surplus-value as the direct aim and determining incentive of production" (Marx, 1909, p. 1026). The conclusion is that the dual nature of commodity is not the primary contradiction of capitalist societies (as it can be observed in other social formations), instead it is the tension between wage labour (i.e. the agents who produce surplus value) and capital (i.e. those who exploit surplus value of the agents) that characterises capitalism (Jones, 2011).

Engeström's misinterpretation of Marx's view on what constitutes the primary contradiction in capitalist societies sets researchers, such as me, for failure, as from the outset we go to the field equipped with a misconception of what our 'abstract' and our 'concrete' are. The result tends to be studies that mechanically apply Activity Theory's triangular representation of activity systems due to scholars who have not yet grasped the epistemology behind the model (Sannino, 2011).

### **Where is the primary contradiction? Example from the field**

The discussion foregoing this section is not mere academic hair-splitting exercise. The proper understanding of Marx's 'ascent method' has practical consequences, as field researchers will be better equipped in their quest for the primary contradiction that pervades all activities within capitalism and, therefore, will be able to better draw the total – the

economic structure of a society – from its parts – the commodity isolated from any extraneous features.

To carry out an activity theoretical Marxist analysis of an activity, first a reconceptualization of the object of the activity is necessary. There is a need to break away from contextualised technical objects to the consideration of the meta-object of social production of labour-power (Warmington, 2008). As brilliantly explored by Barker (2007), Engeströmian Activity Theory lacks a holistic view of what constitutes the primary contradiction. To align with its Marxist origins, Activity Theory should incorporate the notion of opposition of objects among the participants of activity systems instead of the current surmise of an inherent consensus among them.

To that end, the element 'division of labour' acquires an explicit dual nature. Vertical division of labour (division between capital and staff) is construed as a tool and extracted from the element 'division of labour', which now comprises only the horizontal instance of division (that according to task, role or professional expertise).



Figure 2: The remodelling of Engeström's model with an explicit split of the element 'Division of Labour' and the focus on a meta-object, i.e. the social production of labour-power

Figure 2 above is aligned with Warmington's suggestion that

Institutions and organisations in which research interventions are conducted must not simply be analysed as settings in which tools are developed; they must be understood as (institutional) tools in themselves, created and developed to work on objects. Because organisations are configurations of labour-power, they must be examined as tools, as cultural artefacts, in ways that call attention not only to contradictions within and between the nodes of momentary object-orientated activity but also to the contradictions generated by labour-power within capitalism. (Warmington, 2008, p. 14)

Incidentally, such reconfiguration also means that some areas of public services (e.g. the rehabilitation of offenders co-organised by agencies in both criminal justice and welfare systems) do not characterise as a typical representation of the workings of capitalist production, despite their inevitable dependence on supply of commodities and wage-labour. This was the challenge I faced in my fieldwork research of an English public organisation called Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion (L&D) between 2017 and 2020.

The goal of the single case-study (Yin, 2009) commented upon herein was to investigate the overall impact of a new policy (a new national model for L&D services) on front-line practice in L&D services (for more details, see Rocha and Holmen, 2020). The selected

L&D site was a representative single-case study because of its many years of experience providing L&D services, its well-established network of partners across agencies in both criminal justice and welfare systems, and its pioneering in the introduction of the new policy, which enabled the impact of the policy on practice to be already felt; therefore, being a reliable indicator of a single-case study that was representative of the L&D services.

The selected L&D site comprised four administration staff, sixteen front-line workers, two team leaders and a service manager. The staff was small and stretched, the team leaders and the service manager have to multitask also functioning as front-line workers. Service was provided to all ages and is available from 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Sunday. The selected L&D service is responsible for an area of 1000 square miles and a population of around 780,000. In 2017, 2,365 adults were assessed, and the number has been increasing yearly ever since (Williams et al., 2019).

In exploring L&D worker activity through the lens of Activity Theory, critical areas of tension were uncovered. Tensions (contradictions) are important as they might act as triggers for future service development and learning. The structure and activity theory methodology of the study are discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Rocha and Hean 2020; Rocha and Holmen, 2020). The research focused on the perspective of front-line workers on what are the main contradictions they face in their daily work of supporting individuals entering the criminal justice system, especially upon the implementation of the new national model for L&D services. Accounts were collected from professional located at both L&D and neighbouring organisations at the interface between criminal justice and welfare systems. Interviews (n=30), historical documents on the development of the service at the site (n=39) and observations comprised the dataset that, in the end, was subjected to template analysis (King, 2012). The findings were that professionals struggled with the policy that did not meet the needs existent at the street-level. Consequently, the quality of information sharing within and between agencies was subpar. The study also produced evidence that the available communication tools were fragmented and impaired communication both within and between agencies. Alternatively, professionals had to rely on interpersonal collaboration as a means to circumvent systemic limitations.

The research project was widely predicated on Activity Theory and adopted Engeström's taxonomy of contradictions to label the tensions observed within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987). While secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions could be inferred from the data collected, the issue of identifying the primary contradiction in the unity of analysis still persisted. To tackle that, a fundamental tension within the element 'Subject' of the L&D activity system was tentatively construed by me as primary, based on Engeström's understanding of what constitutes the primary contradiction.

The service provided by L&D front-line professionals is their product, the objectification of their labour within capitalism; therefore, it has an exchange-value in the market. The service, which demonstrates its proximal usefulness in the rehabilitation of those entering the criminal justice system, also presents an ancillary value to the State because it helps decreasing reoffending rates, relieving a stretched prison system and alleviating the public purse. For that reason, it is purchased as use-value by the public government (through salary payment, i.e. wage labour). The money exchanged for the service enables L&D professionals, in turn, to purchase products/services of others' concrete labour. Thus, L&D professionals' service seen as a commodity comprise both use and exchange-value and the

tension between the two manifestations of value was construed by me as a primary contradiction.

In light of Marx's work, the identification the dual nature of commodity (L&D professionals' service) as a primary contradiction seems erroneous, although aligned with Engeström's standpoint. The dual nature of the commodity in itself does not provide sufficient grounds in which an ethical critique of the capitalist production process can stand. My focus was narrowed down into the intricacies of the L&D activity system and my analysis did not account for wider notions of social antagonism because Engeström's conceptualization of primary contradiction does not explore the political implications of the analysis of the commodity form (Avis, 2009). As pointed out by Livingstone (2006, p. 147), "without sustained attention to the central contradictory relationships serving to reproduce capitalist societies and generating the potential for their transformation, the basic objectives of Marxist inquiry are missed".

Furthermore, as explained by Avis (2009), the Engeström's conceptualization of primary contradiction is non-transferable to Developmental Work Research (DWR). The locus of the DWR process is a series of workshops or 'change labs' (Engeström, 2007a) and the goal of my study was solely to generate data about L&D from the perspective of participants in the system to inform future 'change labs' (Nuttall, 2013). Thus, if one fathoms DWR as a set of practices to empower participants of an activity system to explore their own practice, then it is crucial that the method can support the move from a relational ontology to a transformative active stance that results in the transmutation of participation into contribution, as championed by Setsenko (2017). However, the use of Engeströmian Activity Theory to articulate the relations and dynamics of collaboration across criminal justice and welfare systems does not seem to bring commensurate awareness to the existent contradictions in the system and potentially falls short in its goal to thrust transformation.

In essence, my approach to analyse the contradictions encountered during fieldwork did not differ from the one proposed by Engeström. My conclusion was that criminal justice and welfare services, by and large, did not provide cases of capitalist production to the extent that they were manifestations of consumption of goods and services rather than of production of surplus value. Furthermore, the cooperative atmosphere I observed among professionals (despite vertical and horizontal divisions of labour) did not characterise, at least *stricto sensu*, the primary contradiction of capitalism. For that reason, it was difficult to characterise L&D as either an allegory of capitalist economic processes or an example of activity in general (given its social specificity).

In retrospect, however, I fathom the shortfalls of my conclusion and surmise a different outcome had Engeström's ideas not guided my analysis. In this vein, I use this paper in a cathartic fashion to reflect on the intricacies of my past choices and re-calibrate my stance for the future. It is certain that criminal justice and welfare systems operate within the constraints of overall capitalist economic and political relations and, therefore, can only be fully understood if we consider their place in these relations, an analytical possibility not provided by the third generation of Activity Theory. Their position in the system turns them into target for appropriation by private Capital (see e.g. Monbiot 2001; Deering & Feilzer, 2015) and forces us to analyse them in light of deep and powerful motive forces of capitalist production. In sum, a primary contradiction can potentially be identified within any of the elements of the L&D activity system, as the service is also a manifestation of the capitalist

production process. To do so, however, Engeström's approach must be surpassed in benefit of an analysis that is more in line with the theory's Marxist origins (Bakhurst, 2009).

### Final thoughts

The goal of this article is to meditate on the intricacy of fieldwork research predicated on Activity Theory. More precisely, it is a reflection on the challenge of empirical identification of the primary contradiction that pervades all activities within capitalism when Engeström's understanding underpins the analysis (Engeström, 2001). The conclusion hereby reached, however, is that part of the difficulty derives from a misconception of what an activity theorist is looking for while in the field. To that end, the suggestion presented here is a return to the origins of Activity Theory (i.e. Marx's work) in order to develop a deeper understanding of what activity means and how it manifests within capitalism (Bakhurst, 2009).

In hindsight, I am able now to appreciate the reason why my attempt to identify the primary contradiction within the L&D activity system did not pan out as planned: I was wrongfully focusing on the dual nature of commodities (Engeström's understanding of what constitutes a primary contradiction) when in fact I should be concerned with broader notions of social antagonism derived from the capitalist mode of production (Avis, 2009; Barker 2007). Had I done so, perhaps the outcome would have been different.

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on the dual nature of commodities (i.e. their use and exchange-value) as the primordial contradiction existent among all activities is erroneous. The bipartite nature of commodities is not even a feature exclusively observed in capitalist social formations, let alone being its main contradiction. Jones suggested that, when looking for the "evil" that contaminates all activities in capitalism, one must concentrate on the "pumping out of surplus value from living labour" (2009, p. 54), and I must agree with him.

In his work, Marx strived to make a distinction between labour process and capitalist labour process, being the latter a subspecies of the former (Marx 1909; 1976). This distinction is crucial, as it frees creative and dynamic potential from capitalist strategies. In this vein, Marx wanted to demonstrate how human potential (see above the idea of potential manifested through labour-power) could also be perceived within capitalism but tends not to be because of its subordination to oppressive capitalist production processes.

Engeström's model of Activity Theory is predicated on the resolution of the contradictions of a specific activity system or cluster instead of pushing the analysis towards a political mobilization that transcends the constraints of a particular set of activities (Sawchuck, 2006). It does not accommodate class struggle in the scope of its analysis and it does not account for social antagonism among the participants of an activity. In doing so, it deviates from its Marxist origins and ends up being no more than a management technique rather than a theory (Hayes, 2003).

In the end, as opposed to what has been suggested elsewhere (see Engeström & Mettinen, 1999), I ratify the understanding that Marx was "interested in problems of economy only insofar as they revealed the complex hierarchy of the structure that he wants to see positively transcended" (Mészáros, 1970, pp. 126-7). Therefore, Activity Theory – especially as proposed by Engeström – has still things to learn from its inspirational source.

### Disclosure Statement

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*Appended Paper IV – Where is the primary contradiction?*

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<Where is the primary contradiction?> • 17

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## Personality traits as mediating artifacts within the subject:

### Considerations on how to move activity theory forward

In the literature, there have been discussions on how to move activity theory forward. As a name of reference for activity theorists, Engeström has suggested that the future for activity theory is to look for resilient alternatives to capitalism. Is that the case? The purpose of this article is to discuss the proclivity to an anti-capitalist discourse among academics currently and the risk of allowing for political ideologies to inform activity theoretical research. Herein, a scientific-based alternative path to advance activity theory is suggested, which includes subjectivity in the scope of a theory mostly concerned with societal activity.

Keywords: activity theory; marxism; personality traits

### Introduction

In an interview in 2016, Engeström suggested that the way forward for activity theory is to find “resilient alternatives to capitalism especially understood as the neoliberal global regime” (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016, p. 93). While it is accepted that activity theory requires advancement given its current limitations (Engeström, 2009), the statement clarifies exactly what the luminary scholar has in mind when he thinks about the development of the theory.

At the current stage, activity theory’s general application in scientific research has become the sum of mechanical applications of its triangular representation of activity systems by scholars who have not yet grasped the epistemology behind the model (Sannino, 2011). There are claims that the current developments are not aligned with key ideas of the founders of the theory (Bakhurst, 2009), which makes us wonder whether new interpretations would bring us closer to what was originally intended and if being closer to the founders’ intentions is the way to move the theory forward.

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The purpose of this article is to contribute to the development and expansion of activity theory. To that end, first I articulate the political scenario we are in, the reasons that brought us here and activity theory's positioning within it. Then, I proceed to address the psychological and philosophical aspects of the theory and their relationship with the current political scenario. Further, I discuss what it has been understood as one of the weaknesses of the theory, namely its lack of subjectivity (Roth, 2007). Finally, I conclude by suggesting that activity theorists could incorporate the examination of personality traits in their analysis, which would be a means to address the mentioned shortcoming. I ground my suggestion in research demonstrating a proclivity to certain behaviors in given circumstances linked to determined biologically innate traits operating within the individual even before any external influence.

#### **Moving activity theory forward: Alternatives to capitalism**

The aforementioned interview given by Engeström in 2016 was aimed at discussing the current applications of activity theory and explore potential future directions to advance the theory. The theory has become increasingly popular in academic research (Engeström, 2009) and it is only natural that discussing its future is in vogue. In this sense, when Engeström himself suggests that the way forward for the theory is to find an alternative to capitalism, it makes us think: What is precisely the problem with the current system for activity theory and how will the suggestion resonate within academia? To answer that, we first need to grasp what capitalism is so that we can foresee how activity theory can provide us with sustainable viable alternatives to it.

Capitalism is an economic system as well as a form of property ownership. It is predicated on generalized commodity production, commodity being a good/service produced for exchange. In capitalism, private owners have control over the productive wealth, life is organized according to impersonal market forces (mostly the force of

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demand and supply), and material self-interest provides the main motivations for enterprise. Because maximization of profit moves people to hard work, commodities are produced with the fundamental purpose of being commercialized (Heywood, 2017). In this sense, in capitalism, everything (goods) and everyone (services) has an exchange-value and a use-value, and they differ from one another.

Marx understood that there was an intrinsic tension between use-value and exchange-value. The former would represent something/someone's endogenous value expressed through their very fundamental existence and the latter would represent something/someone's value as an article of trade in the marketplace. Activity theory is grounded in the notion that transformation is contingent on the resolution of contradictions, i.e. the resolution of contradictions existent within or between activity systems leads to the betterment of the entire activity. Besides cultural-historical-specific contradictions that vary from activity system to activity system, there is an intrinsic tension between use-value and exchange-value primary to every activity system running in a capitalist system. In other words, although potentially context-specific secondary, tertiary and quaternary contradictions may occur and be resolved, there is still the issue of the primary contradiction between use-value and exchange-value that can only be resolved once we are freed from capitalism (Engeström, 1987). Every activity system, even the ones that are hypothetically running in harmony, are fundamentally contaminated by capitalism's primary contradiction. In this scenario, it makes sense that Engeström suggests finding alternatives to capitalism as the way forward for the theory.

Marx's ideology posited a fundamental power conflict between the bourgeoisie – oppressors who controlled the means of mass production of commodities – and the proletariat – an oppressed class without use-value because they were treated as a commodity, and suggested communism as the solution to flatten the power-based

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existent hierarchy (Marx, 1848/2014; 1867/2018). Activity theory is fundamentally predicated on Marxism, which was of strong influence on the work of Vygotsky. Having read Marx from his youth in the revolutionary climate of Russia in 1917, Vygotsky had his view of psychology shaped by *Das Kapital* (seminal work by Marx) and even stated that psychology needed its own *Das Kapital* (Sève, 2018). In hindsight, it is easy to understand why Activity theory is grounded in Marxism, as follows.

A young Vygotsky, living in Russia pre-communism, had just become acquainted with Marx's ideology. With the imminence of the 1917 revolution, there was an aura of change in the country and the hope that a new Marx-based regime could be the solution to the problem of oppression of the powerful against the powerless. As we know today, a person around Vygotsky's age at that time is going through a stage of intellectual development known as 'the formal operation stage', according to Piagetian developmental theory. A person in this stage incorporates the world through his/her own grand schemes and theories and develops a "messianic zeal to save humanity, to reform the world, and to change the establishment" (Kalyan-Masih, 1973, p. 44). In other words, Vygotsky read Marx's work and became influenced by it. As he felt compelled to contribute to the change of society and decided to do so by developing a new theory, it was only natural that he would resort to Marx's lessons in his endeavor. However, Vygotsky's early demise did not allow him to see how communism played out in Russia and worldwide.

As explained above, traditionally Marxism reinforces the idea that the economic landscape is a battle between the powerless (proletariat) and the powerful (bourgeois) and that the economic system would continue to keep people downtrodden unless there was a radical economic transformation predicated on equity (Marx, 1848/2014). Throughout the twentieth century, the communist movement adopted Marxism as its

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foremost ideology and it became the dominant philosophy of many countries in both Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and South America. In 1917, communism took over Russia once the Bolsheviks (epitomized in the figure of Lenin) seized power through the October Revolution. From there, communism widespread across European socialist parties, which was only strengthened with Stalin's rise to power upon Lenin's demise. Between 1940 and 1979 communist philosophies were not only adopted by Eastern European countries such as Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia but also by other nations across the globe, for example, China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea.

The breadth and erudition of Marxist philosophy were irresistible to European intellectuals, especially in France in the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies. Marxism had strong influence in schools, universities and political discourse (Kearney, 2003) but, by the end of the nineteen seventies, with the accelerating decline of communism internationally in light of its appalling results represented by death of millions in Soviet Union, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Tibet, among other areas (Rummel, 1994; Dallin, 2000; Karlsson & Schoenhals, 2008), it was difficult for intellectuals to continue affiliating themselves with the ideology. However, for intellectuals such as Sartre, Foucault and Derrida abandoning Marxism would mean working without reference to a notion of collectivity that had been an institutional basis to their thought (Kearney, 2003). The solution was to migrate from traditional, economic-based Marxist principles to a culture-based version of it. Hence, the extrapolation of power relations from the economic realm into the cultural one. The power struggle was now between the 'culturally oppressed' against 'culturally oppressor' instead of merely 'proletariat' against 'bourgeoisie'. This opened up a myriad of opportunities to identify nearly any group in one of those categories and fostered postmodernism (Bauman, 1992).



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Postmodernism relativized the Marxist economic power struggle and expanded it into the cultural arena. This emphasis on relativism has been widely accepted in academia and it has become increasingly dominant ever since. As Bloom (1987) stated, academic knowledge “has now fallen largely into the hands of a group of professors who are influenced by the post-Sartrean generation of Parisian Heideggerians, in particular Derrida, Foucault and Barthes”. Relativism has promoted the denial of the possibility of objective truth in the name of philosophy and has “permeated the media, public education, race and gender diversity, national security, and corporate culture” (Bloom, 1987, p. 226). Even if today’s academics might not have read Derrida or Foucault themselves, they have been educated in an academic environment permeated by ideas hostile to objectivity and where the “race-class-gender has become a brain-numbing intellectual mantra” (McGowan, 2001, p. 232).

Now that we have established what activity theorists might find problematic in capitalism, it is time to discuss how academics might receive this idea. Engeström (2009) himself has wondered what the reason might be for the growth of research based on activity theory. Although my suggestion differs from his standpoint, I understand that, above any other factor, postmodern academia is the perfect scenario for activity theory to flourish. It is difficult to assume that the appropriate use of activity theory is the reason for its popularisation, as it has been suggested already that poor understanding of the epistemology behind the theory has led to mechanical applications of its triangular model in recent years (Kaptelinin, 2005; Roth, 2009; Sannino, 2011). Therefore, I understand that the way forward for activity theory is through the acknowledgment of its current shortcomings in the first place.

However, even assuming that the theory’s limitations have been addressed, is the quest for alternatives to capitalism the way to go? As I see Engeström’s support to

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Sannino's suggestion that acquaintance with the work of Marxist authors such as Vygotsky, Ilyenkov, Davydov and Lucien Sève is crucial to develop an understand of the theory (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016), I am led believe that renewed emphasis on Marxism and its focus on group identity (a facet of Marxism also well represented in postmodernism) might be recommended as the antidote to capitalism. For that matter, I risk saying that the idea will most likely be happily accepted in the postmodern academic environment where these concepts are already widespread.

#### **Activity theory and subjectivity**

Identity is still a puzzle to be solved despite the centuries of research and considerations done on the topic (Mikhailov, 1980). Descartes once said "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes, 1637/1973, p. 93), which directly links one's identity to their intellect. Although activity theory recognizes the relevance of thinking, it does not link identity to it (Vygotsky, 1986). In activity theory, thinking represents a reflection of societal activity on the plane of consciousness rather than the result of internal individual reflection (Roth, 2007). Such difference leads to a unique conceptualization of thinking and includes the entire setting and material actions within it (Leont'ev, 1971). In other words, activity theory considers individual and society as one (Vygotsky, 1989), which transforms human identity into the sum of societal relations impossible to be conceived as an abstractum inherent in the individual.

The construct of identity as an ensemble of societal relations is encompassed by Engeström's interpretation of activity theory (i.e Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, henceforth CHAT) and is translated into his triangular representation as an analytical tool to activity systems (Engeström, 1987). In my view, what CHAT seems to lack – an activity theory as a whole for that matter – is the acknowledgment of individuality.

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The Russian founders were not concerned with theorizing activity in itself, as much as using the notion of activity to explain our place in the world, the nature of consciousness and personality. In other words, activity was conceived as a means and not as an end in itself (Bakhurst, 2009). In this vein, activity was supposed to be registered as more than an empirical observation but rather as a means to convey the very nature and possibility of thought itself, which made Ilyenkov's position rather bold. Ilyenkov's philosophical stance was that reality is an object of thought, therefore a creation of the human intellect (the subject) (Ilyenkov, 1997).

In activity theory, thinking is perceived as a societal activity rather than the result of the internal process of the individual. Ergo, activity is both the ontological notion enabling the very existence of an intellectually constructed world and also the concept that enables our mental powers to emerge (Ilyenkov, 1997). What makes Ilyenkov's position even more ambitious is to think that, as a realist, he really meant to say that we actually do not have access to reality in itself but only through human activity, which fundamentally means that thought is responsible for reality as it is (Bakhurst, 2009). So, if we accept that thought is contingent on mediation (as claimed by activity theorists), then we have to conceive that the mediational medium in an activity is ultimately revealing reality to us and not merely promoting our encounter with it.

These are deep notions and, once acquainted with activity theory's philosophical origins, it becomes clear that there is a separation between how the theory was originally conceived and what it has become in the current Western civilization. Whilst originally activity was conceived as an allegory used to explain the nature and possibility of mind (Leont'ev, 1977), currently CHAT is limited to a system put in place to facilitate practice and organizational change (Kaptelinin, 2005). Therefore, the claim

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here is that activity theory can turn into a rather simplistic approach when applied as a method to collect and interpret data of a particular phenomenon, perhaps not even worth being called theory (Bakhurst, 2009). The reason being its lack of consideration for the individuality of the participants of an activity.

As an analytical tool, CHAT is nothing more than a model. A generic schema able to fit in any activity carried out in modern society, which can be the very reason for the attenuation of its utility. A universal model capable of making sense of all sorts of activity has its predictive power lowered due to indefiniteness. In addition, most of the recent research drawing on CHAT emphasizes on its structural aspects and demonstrates a proclivity to relegate agency (originally represented by the notion of identity) to a second category. Adopters of CHAT will claim that individuality is acknowledged by the theory in the form of individual agency, which can be divided into three levels: activity, actions and operations (Sannino, 2011). So, let me address the idea.

The three levels of agency are in a hierarchically dialectical relation and constitute the minimal unity of analysis in activity theoretical studies. Activity is societal and represents cultural-historical forms of realization of collective motives. Participation in an activity defines the nature of who a person is (Engeström, 1987). In this sense, identity is contingent on a person's involvement in a societal activity, i.e. there is no sense of individuality outside a collective enterprise.

Whilst activities are motive/object-oriented, actions are goal-oriented. In their dialectical relation between activity and action, activities are realized through goal-oriented actions (Roth & Lee, 2006). In this vein, every action is both singular – as a concrete realization of an individual event – and plural – as a transcendently

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intelligible event that can be realized by other individuals in the same circumstances (Hegel, 1806/1977).

In this hierarchical relation, it is through operations that activity and action are ultimately concretized. Motive-oriented activities and goal-oriented actions are abstractions that need to be concretized through concrete operations. In other words, societal activities are made sense of through their relation with goal-oriented actions, which in turn are grounded in the material body of the person through operations (Leont'ev, 1978). Hence, in CHAT individuality is manifested as the last event in a hierarchic-dialectical relation between activity, action and operation. To that end, the materiality of an individual (flesh and bones) not only incorporates consciousness but also enables the anchoring of abstract constructs such as activities and actions. It is also the materiality and durability of the material body that enables transcendental identification beyond and independent of a particular activity (Franck, 1981). The continuity of the body makes for the continuity of the identity despite the changes within and between activity systems as well as their development over time.

[FIGURE 1]

Despite the claim that CHAT expands the analysis of activity systems both up and outward – by having multiple activity systems and shared objects as unity of analysis – and down and inward – by addressing matters of personal sense, identity and commitment –, Engeström (2009, p.8) admits that “there is a risk that activity theory is split into the study of activity systems, organizations and history on the one hand and subjects, actions and situations on the other hand”. In other words, CHAT’s acknowledgment of individuality through individual agency (Sannino, 2011) might not be appropriate and the claim that a shortcoming of CHAT is the exclusion of subjectivity from the analysis of activity systems based on the triangular model is not

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far-fetched. As emphasized by Roth (2009), “without articulating and theorizing needs, emotions, and feelings, we are hard-pressed to arrive at more than a reductionist image of activity generally” (p. 70). The question becomes then how to include subjectivity in the scope of a theory concerned with societal activity?

While the acknowledgment of the materiality of an individual as a means to include individuality in activity-theoretical studies can be deemed as an interesting attempt to address the theory’s limitation, I still see the opportunity for CHAT to recognize the impact of personality traits existent at an intrinsic level of the individual.

#### **Moving activity theory forward: Personality traits and external influences**

The notion of personality traits can be traced back to Aristotle’s times (384-322 BC), who saw dispositions such as vanity, modesty and cowardice as crucial determinants of moral and immoral behavior. The idea was followed by his student Theophrastus (371-287 BC), who wrote a book describing 30 different personality traits (Rusten, 1993). Therefore, the understanding that individual traits of the character might be isolated and studied separately is not new.

More recently, the scientific study of traits has focused on developing two aspects of common-knowledge discourse on personality. First, it has provided scientific grounding to the tendency in natural language to use trait descriptors of individuals. Second, it has validated the folk psychology that there are generalities of personality in such a way that enable the categorization of individuals with similar dispositions (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2009). In the midst of this, the major concern of scientific studies on psychological traits has been to distinguish internal properties of the individuals from overt behaviors and to explore the causal link between them with the goal to develop an appropriate theory of personality traits (Carment, Miles, &

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Cervin, 1965; Edman, Schalling, & Levander, 1983; Mehl, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2006; Rhodes & Smith, 2006).

Although to this point there has not been a generally accepted scientific theory of traits (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2009), the prominence of the Five-factor model indicates a relative consensus among researchers about the existence of five psychological tendencies observed across individuals (De Raad, 2000). By expanding on common language and folk psychology the model associates words broadly used in society to describe personality traits to five broad dimensions commonly observed in individuals. These dimensions are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Each individual can rank high or low in each of these dimensions, which ultimately informs traits of their personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992a).

The validity of the Five-factor model is based on evidence summarised among longitudinal and cross-sectional studies demonstrating the existence of five robust factors that emerge from different personality systems. These factors are hereditary and can be observed in different age, sex, race and language groups (McCrae & Costa, 1997; McCrae, et al., 1999; McCrae, et al., 2000; McCrae, 2004). In fact, research on the heritability of personality traits, limited parental influence, structural invariance across cultures and species, and temporal stability has demonstrated that “personality traits are more expressions of human biology than products of life experience” (McCrae et al., 2000, p. 177). They are endogenous biologically-based psychological tendencies that follow intrinsic paths of development with little to no influence of external environmental factors; therefore, assessable through cross-cultural standard personality inventories. However, personality traits give rise to characteristics adaptations, which in turn respond to socio-cultural external factors (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2009).

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[FIGURE 2]

The notion of biologically-based psychological tendencies is the central idea of the Five-factor model that, as seen in Figure 2 above, differentiates between five fundamental biological tendencies and several derived social constructs that are contextualized in time and place. Whilst in the first category there are abstract potentials and dispositions, in the second there are skills, habits, beliefs, roles and relationships (McAdams & Pals, 2006). To the extent that the model is correct, the socio-cultural-historical circumstances will have relatively little impact on the long-term development of personality traits, but they can have an influence on characteristic adaptations (Harkness & Lilienfeld, 1997). In other words, external factors do not change personality traits but influence their manifestation in different ways. In this vein, activity theory seems to be lacking the analysis of the intrinsic and enduring biologically-based psychological tendencies and just focusing on societal factors.

In my understanding, activity theory's fundamental limitation as a psychological theory is to base its tenets on Marx's philosophical stance that completely overlooks individuality. The whole idea that human identity is the sum of societal relations is impossible to be conceived as an abstractum is predicated on Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach that states: "But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of social relations" (Marx, 1845). It is understandable that Vygotsky, given the social circumstances in which he developed activity theory, would adopt and reinforce Marx's ideas, but doing so today is denying all the knowledge produced by scientific research over the past century.

To move forward, activity theory must embrace evidence produced by scientific research that a person's individuality is not only formed by extrinsic characteristics susceptible to external influence but it also includes personality traits that are



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biologically ingrained within us and not the result of social relations. The literature on the existence of biologically-based psychological tendencies endogenous to human beings is overwhelmingly accepted by Western psychology scholars (Goldberg, 1992; DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007; Hirsh, DeYoung, & Peterson, 2009), and yet it is not addressed in our Western version of activity theory (Engeström, 1987). While “reconstructing the history of human activity”, Engeström sees the subordination of biological factors to cultural ones as a qualitative leap in the development of activity theory (Engeström, 1985, p. 13). By now this understanding should have been revised.

As Pinker pointed out (1994), the study of human nature in Western culture in the twentieth century was impregnated with what the author called the ‘Standard Social Science Model’, which posits that human behavior is largely determined by culture-bound social learning. There is no doubt human behavior is largely influenced by external factors, but activity theorists seem to have overestimated the extent to which exogenous elements are influential. They seem to have overlooked cross-cultural similarities that indicate the existence of factors of higher-order (most likely evolutionary-based biological tendencies) governing personality traits across diverse cultural-historical contexts (Costa & McCrae, 1992b), or perhaps just relied too much on Vygotsky’s work developed in the nineteenth century.

The importance of understanding personality traits as biologically-based psychological tendencies is due to their ability to foretell certain patterns in human behavior. To that end, the Five-factor model has successfully provided the framework for several studies showing the validity of personality traits as predictors of consequential outcomes in cases such as individual well-being, the quality of relationships, and beneficial or detrimental community involvement (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). Thus, although there are other models to make sense of personality

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traits (Eysenck, 1991; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Mischel, 2004), the Five-factor model has wide support in the literature.

This is not to say that personality traits are the only reason for an individual to behave in a certain way. It has been established already that it is the interaction between personality traits and external situations that shape the outcome of an event. In other words, traits are most reliably expressed in situations that are suited to their expression than not, for example, it would be unlikely for a person to be extroverted while in a funeral, but much more probable at a party (Wright & Mischel, 1987). To put it simply, “personality develops from both biological and cognitive-social influences” (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2009, p. 47).

While cognitive-social influences are indisputable in both streams of literature, activity still lacks the recognition of biological factors. Having an awareness of how an individual can potentially behave in an activity even before the activity starts would be revolutionary for activity theory. To that end, activity theorists must admit the existence of individuality (moving from group identity to individual identity) and that consciousness is not contingent on an activity (personality traits exist and precede activities). To put it in a familiar way for activity theorists, personality traits are artifacts mediating relationships within the subject’s psyche even before the activity has started.

[FIGURE 3]

### Conclusion

In this article, I provide an overview of the psychological, philosophical and historical reasons behind the development of activity theory. I do it so in order to make a point for the need for an update of the theory. To that end, I conceptualize an activity theory that considers the personality traits of the individual and acknowledges its influential power. As a theory predicated on the idea that all activity between subject and object is

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mediated (Engeström, 1987), ignoring the influence of personality traits on people's responses signifies disregarding the internal mediation that occurs within each individual even before any external manifestation takes place. Put simply, biologically-based psychological tendencies mediate the inputs we receive and the outputs we provide, and it is only at this point that activity theory – in its current state of development – picks up. In sum, that is how I see activity theory currently and this article is my suggestion as to how to move it forward.

To the contrary, Engeström's vision for the future of activity theory seems to be more focused on the ideological side of it, as he returns to the notion that capitalism is an obstacle to be overcome. A call for an insurgency against capitalism has been done before (Marx, 1848/2014), and the consequences of that are well-known. At this point, a turn back into a Marxist model might lead to a new wave of communist tyrannies around the world, which I fail to see as a step forward given the appalling results we could observe when the ideology managed to be widespread previously. In this sense, is the way forward for activity theory really to find alternatives to capitalism?

Any real attempt of advancement should focus on demystifying the idea that we are divided into classes and that there is a power clash between oppressors and oppressed, and this is what I tried to achieve herein. We are individuals and should be analyzed as such. Any potential power struggle is more appropriately explained at an individual level where particular circumstances are taken into consideration.

The whole idea that there is a primary contradiction between exchange-value and use-value as the inescapable consequence of our capitalist existence holds uncanny resemblance with the Christian notion that we are all contaminated by a primeval and unavoidable sin due to our condition as humans. In the Christian tradition, freedom from the original sin took the appearance of a messiah willing to sacrifice himself on

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3 our behalf in order to redeem us. Given Marxism's status of quasi-religion (Ling, 1980),  
4 should we wait for an analogous solution in our alleged fight against capitalism?  
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6 Criticizing Marxism or any ideology in the same lineage is a risky business.  
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8 However, and I risk repeating myself here, in moving forward activity theory would  
9 actually benefit more from espousing a scientific understanding that people should be  
10 considered individually than continuing in its proclivity to endorse any given political  
11 ideology that depicts the individual as a mere mouthpiece of a class.  
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Appended Paper V – Personality traits as mediating artefacts within the subject

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For Peer Review

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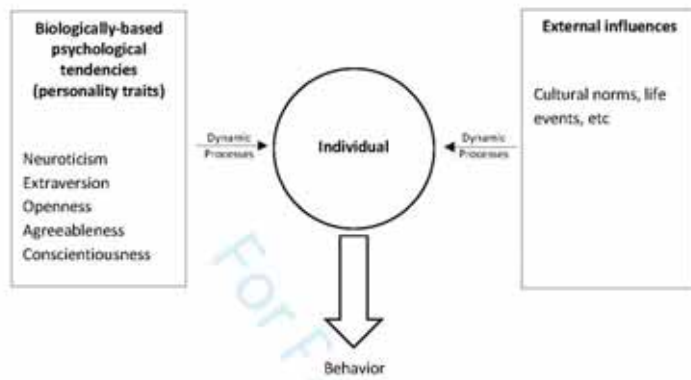
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Figure 1 Individual agency expressed through activity, action and operation. Adapted from Roth, 2007

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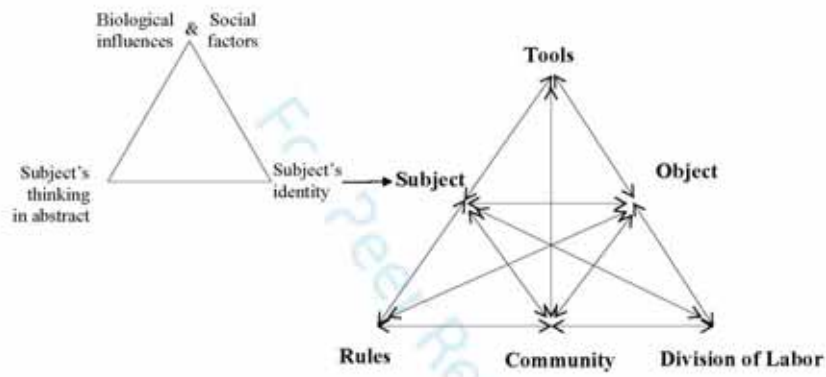
Figure 2 A model of the personality system according to five-factor theory. Adapted from McCrae et al., 2000

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*Appended Paper V – Personality traits as mediating artefacts within the subject*

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Figure 3 Activity theory triangle model and individuality formation through mediation within the 'Subject' dimension

For Peer Review

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1 – Ethical clearance*

#### **APPROVAL FOR COLAB PROJECT CONDUCTED IN UK FROM BOURNEMOUTH UNVIERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE**

From: Research Ethics  
Sent: 16 June 2017 09:55  
To: Carol Bond  
Subject: Your ethics checklist [16612] has been approved.

[Bournemouth University logo]

Dear Carol Bond,

Your checklist (COLAB) has now been reviewed and APPROVED in line with BU's Research Ethics Code of Practice<<https://intranet.sp.bournemouth.ac.uk/documentsrep/8B-research-ethics-code-of-practice.pdf>>.

You can now save and/or print off a hard copy of the checklist at <https://ethics.bournemouth.ac.uk>.

This approval relates to the ethical context of the work. Specific aspects of the implementation of the research project remain your professional responsibility.

It is your responsibility to ensure that where the scope of the research project changes, such changes are evaluated to ensure that the ethical approval you have been granted remains appropriate. You must re-submit for ethical approval if changes to the research project mean that your current ethical approval is no longer valid.



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Students - if the scope of your research changes, please discuss with your Tutors/Supervisors before submitting a new checklist.

Many thanks

For UG/PGT enquiries - please contact your Supervisor in the first instance

For general enquiries - please email [researchethics@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@bournemouth.ac.uk?subject=Online%20Ethics%20Checklist%20Query) <<mailto:researchethics@bournemouth.ac.uk?subject=Online%20Ethics%20Checklist%20Query>>

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## **APPROVAL FOR COLAB PROJECT CONDUCTED IN NORWAY FROM NSD COMMITTEE**

### **Personvernombudet for forskning**



#### **Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar**

Prosjektur: 51047

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research projects is (1) to explore current interagency practices between mental health and prison services from the perspective of front line professionals, and (2) to explore the mentally ill offender's experiences of this interagency practice.

#### **COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS**

The research project is an international collaboration. University of Stavanger is the coordinator of the research project, and the responsible institution for all personal information which will be collected in Norway.

The Data Protection Official for Research presupposes that the responsibility for processing of personal data has been clarified between the participating institutions. We recommend that the division of responsibilities is formalized in a contract that includes structure of liabilities, who initiated the project, use of data and ownership.

#### **SAMPLE**

The sample consists of (1) offenders in low security Norwegian correctional services with previous contact with specialist mental health services, and (2) prison officers, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists working in or in contact with Norwegian correctional services.

#### **RECRUITMENT**

Both front line professionals and offenders with previous contact with mental health services will be recruited through circulating posters and pamphlets in Norwegian prisons. Health staff in the prison will act as gate keepers in the recruitment of the offenders, so that only participants will be recruited who are judged by prison health staff to be stable in terms of their mental health condition. The researcher will not know the identity of the offenders before those who are interested in participating in the project has given their consent to participate or to establish contact with the researcher. We advise that persons who want to participate, if possible, contact the researcher directly, so that the staff does not know which offenders who participate.

The Data Protection Official recommends that the involvement of prison staff in the recruitment of offenders is reduced to a minimum in order to secure voluntary participation.

Prison inmates are regarded as a vulnerable group in research. Please read the guidelines for research on prisoners by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees:

<https://www.etikkom.no/en/library/topics/research-on-particular-groups/prisoners/>

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

Data with personal information will be collected through personal interviews with offenders, personal and/or

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group interviews with professionals, and through observation of meetings among professionals. Interviews will be audio recorded and the meetings might be video recorded.

### SENSITIVE INFORMATION

There will be registered sensitive information relating to criminal offences and health.

### DUTY OF CONFIDENTIALITY

The Data Protection Official presupposes that no information about identifiable prisoners or other information subject to duty of confidentiality is disclosed by front line professionals during interviews or in meeting where a researcher is present. We advise that you remind the sample of their duty of confidentiality in advance of the interviews and meetings, to make sure they do not talk about prisoners in a way that identifies individual persons.

### INFORMED CONSENT

The sample will receive written and oral information about the project, and give their consent to participate. The letters of information received 07.03.2017 are well formulated.

However, we recommend to remove the following sentence, so that the participant cannot be let do believe that the data material will be anonymous: "Any personal information is removed from the digital recoding and transcript of the interview."

### DATA SECURITY

The Data Protection Official presupposes that all researchers follows internal routines of University of Stavanger regarding data security.

If data containing personal information is to be sent by e-mail, the data must be adequately encrypted. In general, the Data Protection Official does not recommend sending personal information by e-mail, as such data should be stored within the control of the responsible institution (UiS).

### STORAGE OF AND ACCESS TO DATA

Data will be stored in the data systems of the home institution of the respective researcher who collects the data, and will be accessed only by the research team engaged in the specific research study. A repository may be set up on the UiS secure server for the purpose of storing data collected in the project by participating researcher. UiS will coordinate access to the data. Only researchers participating in the project will get access to the data, and data may only be used for the purposes of the project.

The estimated end date of the project is 28.02.2021. Collected data will be stored for 10 years after this date for follow-up studies/further research. The data will be stored in the data systems of the respective home institutions and/or in the repository at UiS. Please note that the use of the data for follow-up studies or new projects is subject to notification to the Data Protection Official.

After the storage period, the data shall be made anonymous. Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognised. This is done by:

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- deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers)
- deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such as name of prison, age and gender)
- deleting digital audio and video files

University of Stavanger is responsible for the processing of personal information throughout the project period and also during storage period, and must ensure that data is adequately secured.

### CHANGES

If data is to be collected or handled in a way that deviates from the project as described here, i.e. if researchers are going to observe prisoners, this must be notified to the Data Protection Official in a change request form. We also ask you to notify as a change if researchers will use deviating interview guides.

If participating researchers will collect data for substudies which differ from the main study, these projects may be notified as separate projects with reference to the project number of the main project.

The change request form is found here:

[http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/en/notification\\_duty/change\\_request\\_form.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/en/notification_duty/change_request_form.html)

*Appendices*

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From: Research Ethics  
Sent: 09 October 2017 15:55  
To: Jonathan Parker  
Subject: RE: Application for ethical clearance (Ethics ID 16612) New Proposal (COLAB)

Dear Jonathan

Please accept my delay in responding to you in relation to the new project submitted by Paulo Rocha under the COLAB Agreement.

This has now been approved via Chairs Action on the basis that the project fall within the remit of Aims 1 & 2 and the PI Sheet and PAF are accepted with no changes.

As this activity does not require a separate checklist, please keep the email on file as confirmation of approval. Should any of the project details change, please contact me.

Kind regards  
Sarah

Sarah Bell  
Research Governance Adviser  
Research, Knowledge Exchange Office

To keep up to date on Research Ethics @ BU – visit the research ethics website<<http://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/researcher-toolbox/research-ethics/>>

## Appendix 2 – Letter of invitation and consent, sample



### INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BETWEEN CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE UK

#### Information Sheet for Participants

##### Summary

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

My name is Paulo Rocha and I am a PhD researcher based at the University of Stavanger, Norway. I am carrying out a piece of research on the collaboration between Mental Health (MHS) and Criminal Justice (CJS) services as means to provide appropriate treatment to vulnerable people in contact with CJS in Dorset, UK. My interest is mostly in the perspective of front-line workers in MHS and CJS on the current interactions between services, particularly the impact the diversion agenda has had on the relation between professionals from both sides. Therefore, I would like to know about your experience of working for providing an adequate treatment to vulnerable people in contact with Criminal Justice and providing them access to services.

The interview will last for about 30 to 45 minutes, and will use the attached schedule to ignite the conversation. I will make these sessions as comfortable as possible and you are under no obligation to answer any of my questions and can stop the session at any time.

##### About the study

My research is taking place in Bournemouth until May 2018 and forms part of a larger EU project called COLAB scheduled to finish 2021. This is an initiative that involves a large team of international researchers and practitioners from the UK, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Finland, and is funded by the EU Horizon2020 Marie Curie Skłodowska RISE Action (2017-2021). The University of Stavanger in Norway is the coordinator of the overall research project. [The Bournemouth University is the UK arm of the COLAB consortium, and has granted ethical clearance for all data collection that takes place in the UK \(Ethics ID 16612\).](#)

The aim of my specific research is to explore the dynamics of collaboration between front-line professionals in MHS and CJS, especially after the rollout of the national Liaison and Diversion model that

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introduced a trial of the L&D scheme in Dorset.

To this end, I am primarily seeking participants for interview with the following profile:

- Professionals working in the Liaison and Diversion team in the Dorset area;
- Front-line health professionals (meaning those in direct contact with patients) specializing mental health treatment, for example, GP, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, nurses, managers, admin, etc.;
- Front-line professionals working within the Criminal Justice System. For example, police, judges, prison officers, etc.;

### **Why I have been chosen**

You have been invited to participate in the study because of your first-hand experience of dealing with people with mental health issues either as a Mental Health worker or as a professional working within the Criminal Justice system. I would like to ask about your relation with other agencies and whether/how the CJLDS have impacted on the dynamics of such interactions.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw during the interview at any time and without giving a reason and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the interview has finished you can still withdraw your data up to the point where the data have been analysed and have become anonymous, so your identity cannot be determined.

### **What would taking part involve?**

You will be invited to take part in an interview. Before the interview begins, you will be given the opportunity to clarify anything that is unclear. My preference will be to conduct the interview in private at your place of work, but if this is not possible, other arrangements can be discussed.

With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded (audio). If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not have to. You are free to change your mind about being interviewed at any time.

### **How will my information be kept?**

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications without your specific consent.

The project is scheduled to finish in February 2021. All personal data relating to this study will be held for 5 years from the date of publication of research. All recordings or transcripts of the interview will be held securely in a password protected folder on a secure servers at the University of Stavanger and Bournemouth University.

Except where they have been anonymized, we will restrict access to your personal data to members of the research team who have a legitimate reason to access it for the purpose or purposes for which it is held by us.

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The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from these data.

### **Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**

The interview will be audio recorded and the recordings made during the interviews will be transcribed and analysed (a copy of your transcript can be made available on request). Personal information will be removed from the digital recording and the transcript of the interview. The transcription of the recordings will be used for illustration in reports or publication of the study findings. After transcription the audio material will be destroyed.

### **Contact for further information**

If you have questions about the study, please contact:

*Dr Sarah Hean and Paulo Rocha*

COLAB Coordinator and PhD Researcher

University of Stavanger

shean@bournemouth.ac.uk or sarah.c.hean@uis.no; paulo.t.bastosrocha@uis.no

In case of complaints please contact Prof Vanora Hundley, Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice, Faculty of Health & Social Sciences, [Bournemouth University by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk).

*The Bournemouth University is the UK arm of the COLAB consortium, and has granted ethical clearance for all data collection*



## Appendices



### Participant Agreement Form

**Full title of project:** Reducing reoffending through improved collaborative practice between mental health and criminal justice service systems: A UK case study

**Name, position and contact details of researcher:** Paulo Rocha, PhD Researcher at the University of Stavanger, Norway. [paulo.t.bastosrocha@uis.no](mailto:paulo.t.bastosrocha@uis.no).

I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary.	
I understand that I am free to withdraw up to the point where the data are processed and become anonymous, so my identity cannot be determined	
During the interview I am free to decline to answer any particular question or to withdraw completely without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the outputs that result from the research.	
I understand taking part in the research will include being recorded (audio) but that these recordings will be deleted once transcribed.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*This form should be signed and dated by all parties after the participant receives a copy of the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated participant agreement form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.*

**Appendix 3 – Interview guide**

Activity Theory Nodes	Interview Questions
<p><b>Subject</b></p>	<p>What is your current position? Please describe the tasks in your current job role. In your job role, are you in touch with vulnerable offenders? If yes, what is your interaction with them? When a vulnerable offender comes to you for help, what happens? Do you have to interact with other organizations in order to perform your job role?</p>
<p><b>Tools</b></p>	<p>Do you use specific tools or instruments to perform your job role?</p> <p>If yes: What kinds of tools/instruments? How do they support your work? Have you had specific training on the tools/instruments you use at work? Who carried it out? Who designed the tools/instruments you use at work? Do other organizations have access to the tools/instruments you use at work? Do you have access to tools/instruments used by partner organizations?</p>

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	<p>Has your employer asked for feedback on the tools/instruments you use at work?</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>What is the goal of your job role, i.e. what is expected from you at your work?</p> <p>How does collaboration with other practitioners play out for you? Do you work together on same tasks or you share different tasks?</p>
<b>Rules and Regulations</b>	<p>Is there any official guidelines or directives guiding the way you collaborate with practitioners from other agencies? Are these always useful?</p> <p>As to vulnerable offenders, how was your work routine before the existence of the national model of L&amp;D?</p>
<b>Community</b>	<p>Is there any kind of interagency meetings? If yes, do you participate?</p> <p>Have you participated in any joint training event with members from other organizations? If yes, what kind?</p> <p>Do you think the communication with practitioners from other organizations is satisfactory? Can you explain why?</p>

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<p><b>Division of Labour</b></p>	<p>What do you understand for collaboration? What other organizations do you work together? What other organizations could you say are engaged in the offender's treatment pathway? How does the division of tasks look like when you work together with practitioners from other organizations?</p>
<p><b>Desired Outcomes</b></p>	<p>Is there any sort of quality control of your performance? Are you concerned about user feedback (or lack of it)? How do you perceive the quality of the service provided by your organization? Is there any sort of control of the direct impact of your organization's intervention on reoffending rates?</p>
<p><b>Contradictions &amp; Alignments</b></p>	<p>Can you think of any obstacle that might hinder the collaboration between agencies working to manage offenders within criminal justice system? Can you think of any mechanism that might encourage the collaboration between agencies working to manage offenders within criminal justice system?</p>

#### **Appendix 4 – Document overview**

##### L&D national model implementation documents

1. The Police and Mental Health. A report on the use of section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. Comparison between Dorset and national findings, and recommendations for local development – December/2008
2. Lord Bradley Review (2009)
3. Letter from the National Liaison and Diversion Development Network inviting the Dorset L&D to take part in their network and evaluation study – June/2011
4. Liaison and Diversion Services: Current Practices and Future Directions. A report by (OHRN) Offender Health Research Network – November/2011
5. Definition of the consortia responsible for NLDDN and its functions – April/2012
6. Invitation of Dorset Primary Care Trust to join the NLDDN (Check Memorandum of Understanding) – April/2012
7. National Liaison and Diversion Development Network (NLDDN) – Newsletter September/2012
8. Agreement between Dorset Police and Dorset Healthcare NHS University Foundation Trust (DHC) – September/2012
9. Commencement of the Custody L&D service in Dorset. A report on the service’s goals, background and method of data collection (stats for Q3 2012: October to December) – October/2012
10. Report on the L&D service in Dorset referring Q3 and Q4 2012/2013 (October to December/2012 and January to March/2013)
11. Business Case: Dorset L&D Application to National Model – November/2012
12. NLDDN Newsletter – November & December/2012
13. NLDDN Newsletter – February/2013
14. Briefing on EFQM - March/2013
15. NLDDN Newsletter – May/2013
16. Independent Commission on Mental Health Policing

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17. Report on the L&D service in Dorset referring Q1 2013/2014 (January to March/2013)
18. Questionnaire for partner organisations
19. Newsletter on L&D by the HM Government Liaison and Diversion Programme (new model for the NLDDN newsletter) – September/2013
20. Liaison and Diversion Service Specification – December/2013
21. Liaison & Diversion Operating Model 2013/2014
22. Implementation of a locally commissioned mental health street triage pilot by DHUFT Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Service – June/2014
23. Terms of Reference for the Criminal Justice, Liaison & Diversion Service (2015)
24. Evaluation of the Offender Liaison & Diversion Trial Schemes conducted by RAND Europe (Disley et al., 2016)
25. Outcome Evaluation of Liaison and Diversion Services – Progress Report 1 (2017)
26. Health and Justice Characteristics of Dorset’s Liaison & Diversion Population (2019)
27. Data Inventory Report of the Health and Justice Characteristics of Dorset’s Liaison & Diversion Population (2019)

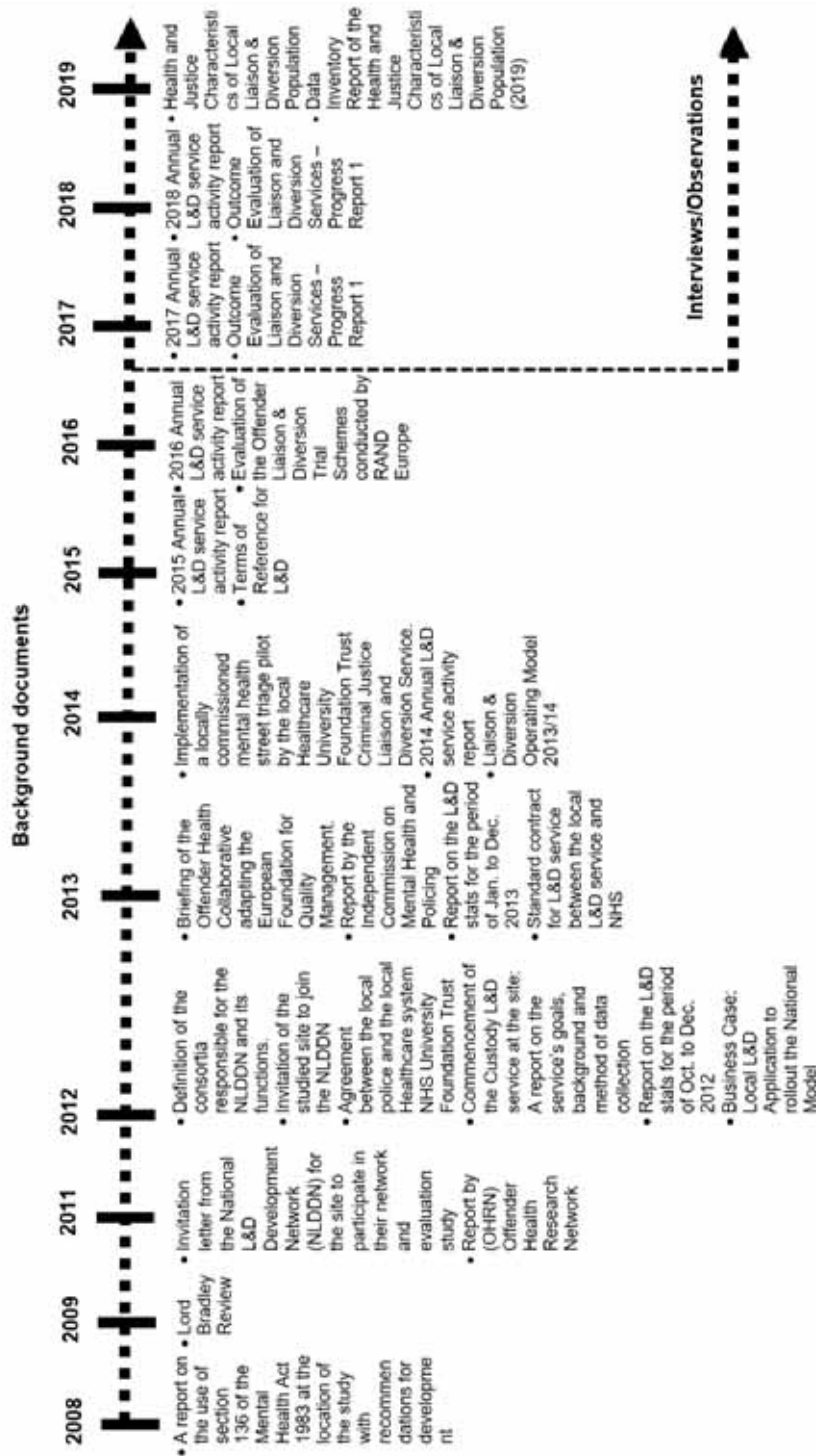
Statistical reports of the L&D activity in custody and court upon the national model

1. 2012-13 Q4 Custody Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report – DRAFT
2. 2012-13 Q4 Custody Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report
3. 2013-14 Q1 Custody Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report – DRAFT
4. 2013-14 Q1 Custody Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report – FINAL
5. Custody Liaison and Diversion Service Report Q1 2013-14
6. Questionnaire for other professional bodies Aug 13

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7. 2013-14 Q2 (Full Year) Criminal Justice Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report v1
8. 2013-14 Q2 (Full Year) Criminal Justice Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report v1
9. 2015 Annual Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report
10. 2016 Annual Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report
11. 2017 Annual Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report
12. 2018 Annual Liaison & Diversion Service Activity Report





**Appendix 5 – Coding**

**Liaison and Diversion – Contradictions**

Meta-theme	Theme	Sub-theme	Category	Sub-category	Exemplary code
Contradictions	Contradictions within the L&D activity system and between L&D and other surrounding systems	Contradictions between communication tools and object of liaison	Limitations of communication tools & Alternative solutions	Multiple non-connected IT systems across organisations	Different organizations have different IT systems that are not interconnected
				Limitations of phone communication	Mismatching schedules makes communication between agencies difficult
				L&D staff strives to establish relationships with professionals from other services	Whenever possible L&D strives to strengthen the relationship with other organizations by offering help with their work
		Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of	Policy implementation according to local conditions	-	Establishing relationships between organisations takes time and requires consistency

*Appendices*

		liaison and diversion	Clients' rights limiting information sharing	-	Confidentiality hinders information sharing
		Contradictions between L&D and its neighbouring activity systems	Limitations resulting from conflicting agendas	-	Needs identified but no service available to support the client

**Other services – Contradictions**

Meta-theme	Theme	Sub-theme	Category	Sub-category	Exemplary code
Contradictions	Contradictions within and between criminal justice and welfare activity systems	Contradictions between limited communication tools and the object of integrated care	Limitations of communication tools & Alternative solutions	Multiple non-connected IT systems across organisations	Police do not have and do not want access to Health Care's IT system because they are not able to understand the information therein
				Geographic constraints to information sharing	Services have access to information only within the limits of their own county
				Alternatives to collaboration between professionals in criminal justice and welfare services	Assertive Outreach Teams do not share the same IT clinical system, but there is an informal network whereby professionals have meeting and share good practice.

*Appendices*

					With L&D in custody, the police do not spend time assessing vulnerabilities and get a more precise assessment done by experts
					Communication with other services happen in a casual way
		Contradictions between policy implementation and the object of integrated care	Policy implementation according to local conditions	Inexistence or non-application of a national model	No national standards as to collaboration between criminal justice and welfare services. There is a lot of discretion at the street level
			Clients' rights limiting information sharing	Confidentiality hinders information sharing	Professionals are less comfortable sharing info on clients when they are going against legislation
		Contradictions within the object of integrated care	Limitations resulting from conflicting agendas	Misunderstanding as to organisations' powers and roles	When dealing with vulnerable people, welfare organizations assume the police have lots of powers and the police assume the same about welfare services