

'Policy engagement in praxis'



What is the 'problem' represented to be?

Carol Bacchi

Utilising WPR to strengthen reflexive capacities in academic-policy engagement practice

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Note about the authors:

Between 2018 and 2019, two new research-policy engagement intermediary organisations were set up in the UK: the [Scottish Policy & Research Exchange](#) (SPRE), and the [Universities Policy Engagement Network](#) (UPEN). Both of these organisations work through networks to support increased capacities for (university-based) research-policy engagement, including brokering relationships.

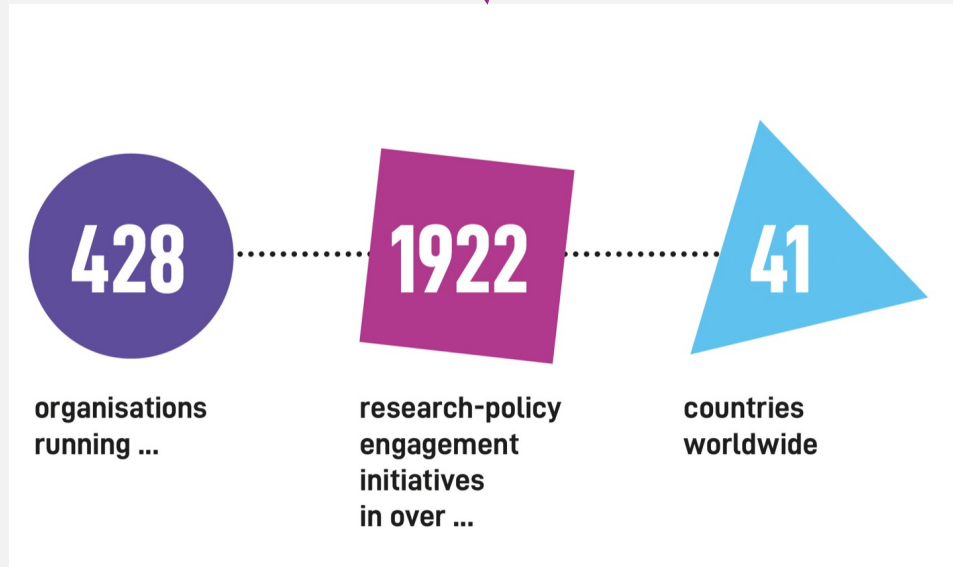
The authors of this paper all have links through being part of or engaging with SPRE and/or UPEN, and span professional identities and experiences across research, policy-engagement practice and, to a lesser extent, policy. We all have a particular interest in understanding the practical implications of research-policy engagement through the lenses of complexity, power, equity and justice, in order to shape more ethical and effective research-policy engagement systems and practices.

Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?* Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education.



A recent review of research-policy engagement initiatives

After reviewing many research-policy engagement activities



They found

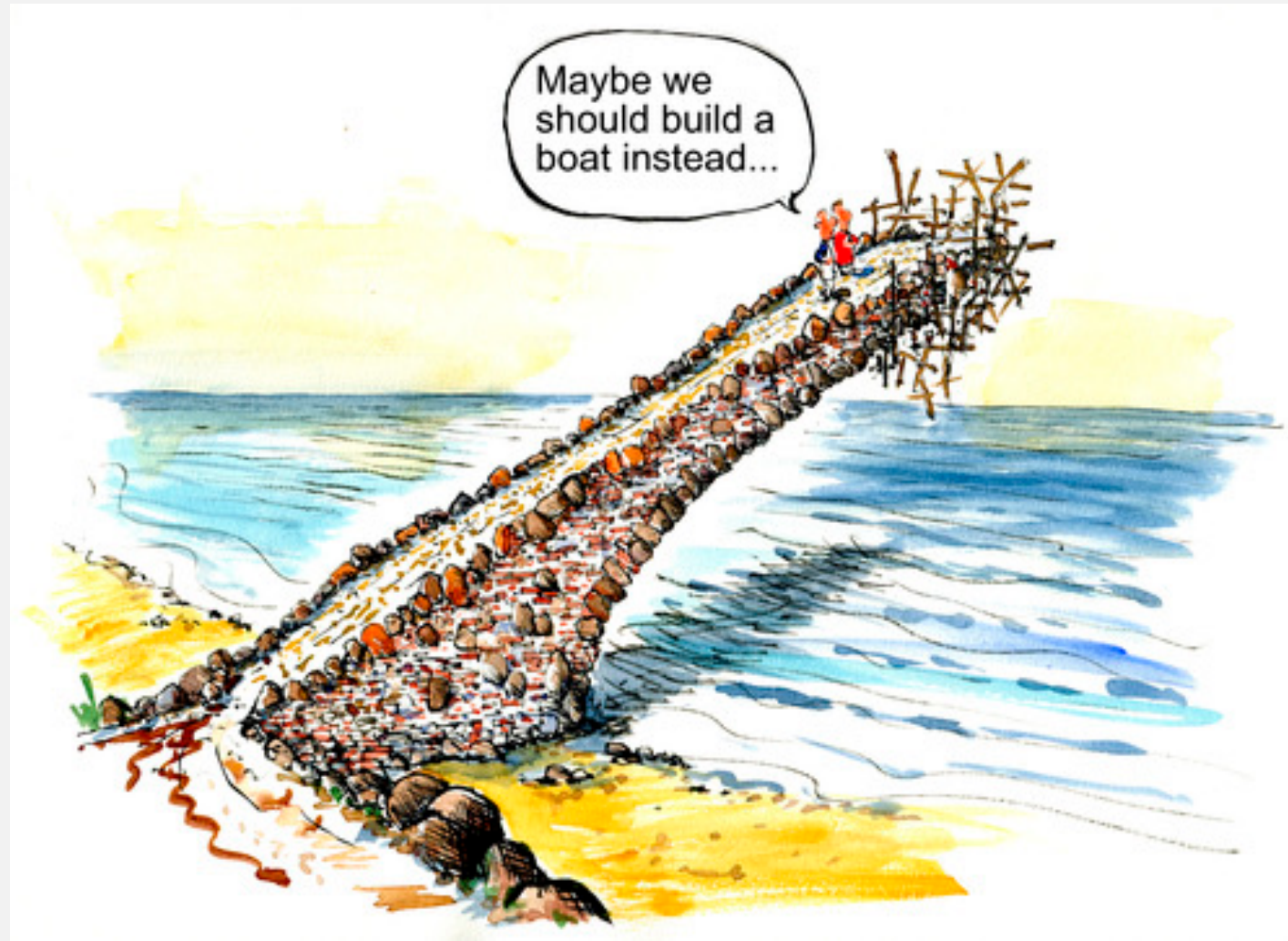
*“Overall, the picture is of a vast and increasing mass of rudderless activity, which is **busy rather than effective**...”*

*“**Harms** are likely to include wasted time and resources, reduced goodwill and interaction, and increased inequalities in terms of participation in evidence production and use.”*

Oliver, K., Hopkins, A., Boaz, A., Guillot-Wright, S. and Cairney, P. (2022) ***What works to promote research-policy engagement?***, Evidence & Policy, vol XX no XX, 1–23, DOI: 10.1332/174426421X16420918447616



What does 'rethinking' mean?



What type of problem are we addressing?

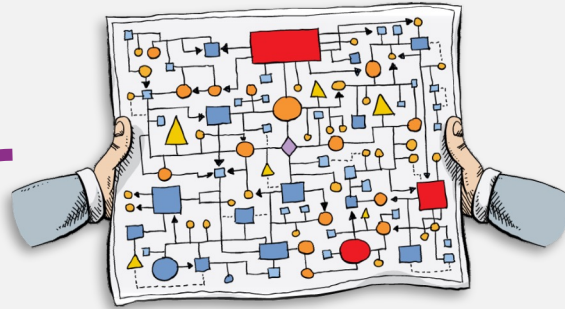


<https://www.businessillustrator.com/complexity-and-policy-making-cartoon-summary/>



Does the nature of our practice reflect the nature of the problem?

Technical

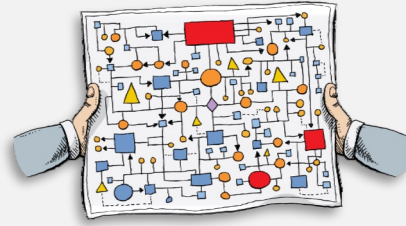


Relational



What changes are we paying attention to?





Learning [to see] relationships

Example of a 'technical' lens

- More: events, expertise, comms, people reached etc.
- Efficiency in planning & delivery
- Hierarchical leadership
- EDI is afterthought

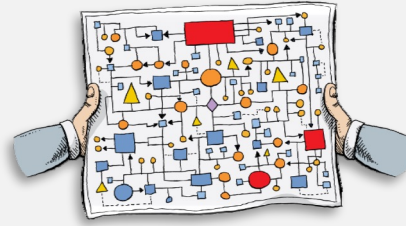
Practical

Behaviours, tools,
activities, events,
& outputs

Aim: compete for policy attention to achieve practical impacts at scale

O'Brien K, Sygna L. 2013. *Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation*. Proceedings of Transformation in a Changing Climate, 19–21, 2013

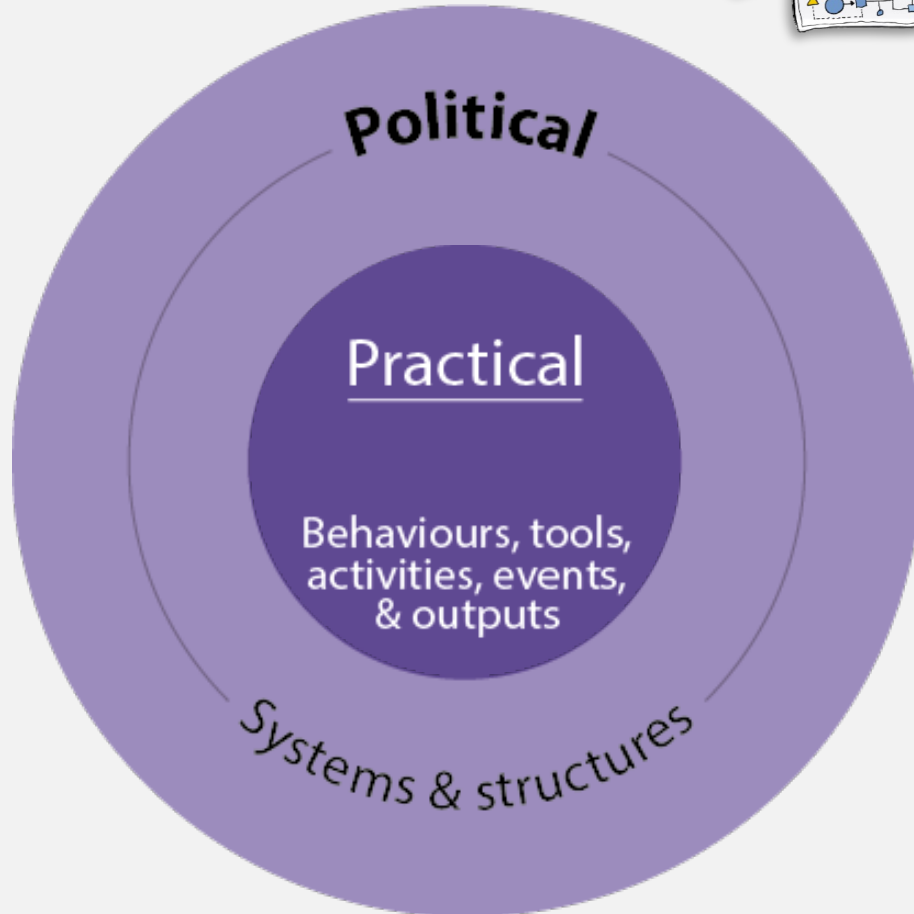




Learning [to see] relationships

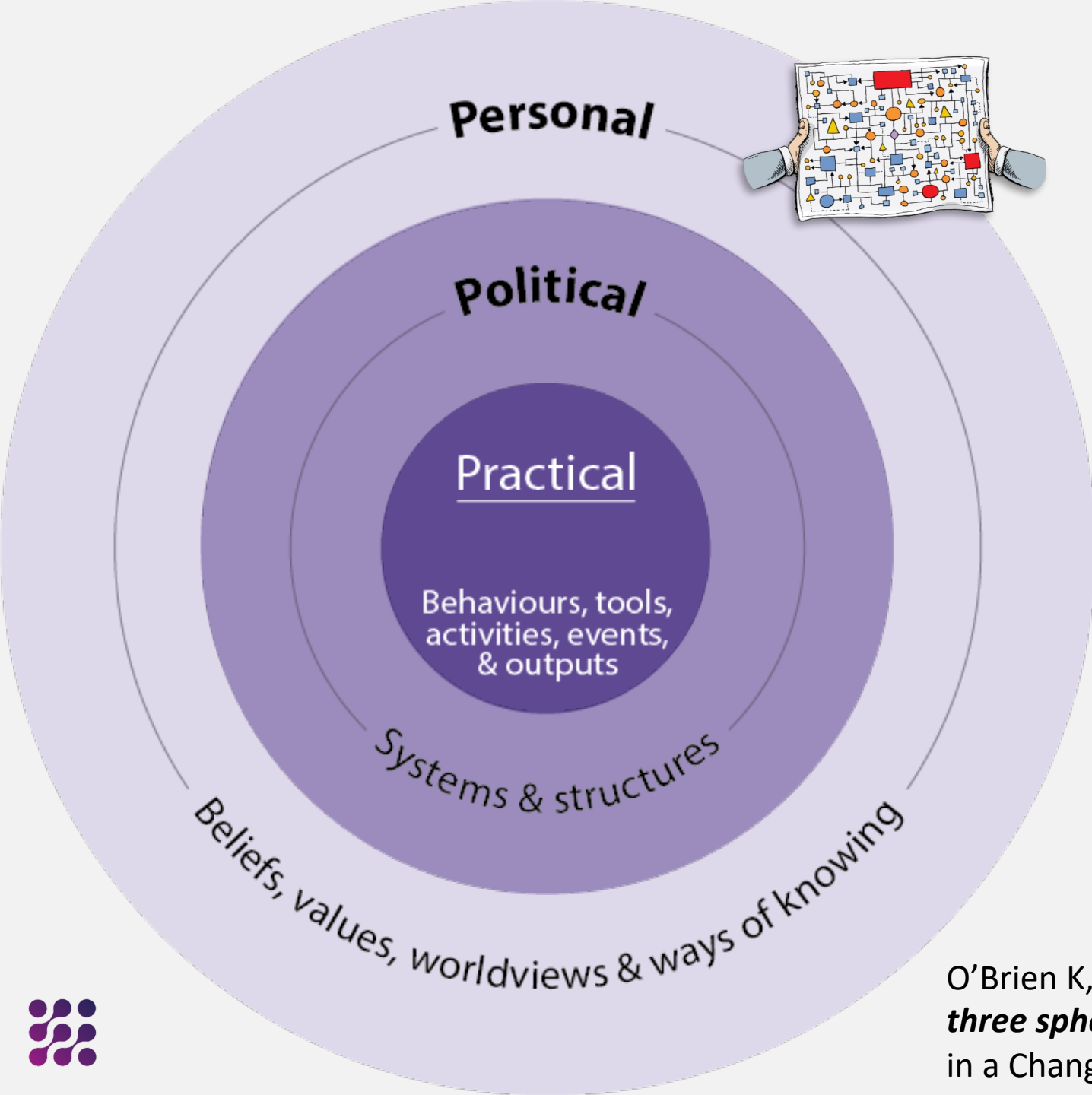
Example of a 'technical' lens

- Funding & reporting criteria
- MEL focused on what can be quantified
- ResearchFish & REF
- Career incentives
- Exclusions & barriers in networks & relationships
- Norms & capacities



O'Brien K, Sygna L. 2013. *Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation*. Proceedings of Transformation in a Changing Climate, 19–21, 2013





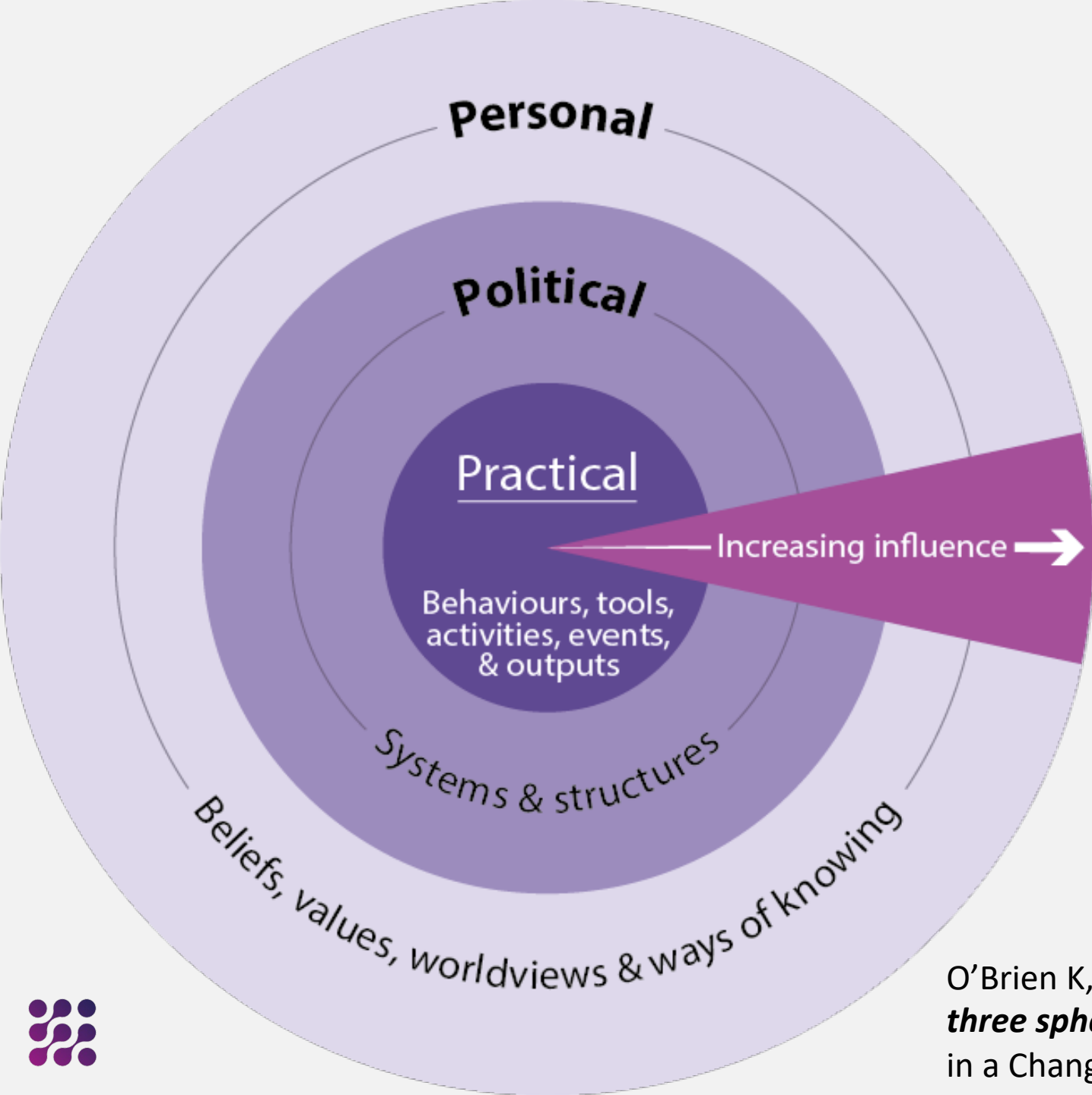
Learning [to see] relationships

Example of a 'technical' lens

- Separation of facts & values
- Impact = communication of expertise
- Change = accountability for more rational decisions
- Efficiency = effectiveness

O'Brien K, Sygna L. 2013. *Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation*. Proceedings of Transformation in a Changing Climate, 19–21, 2013



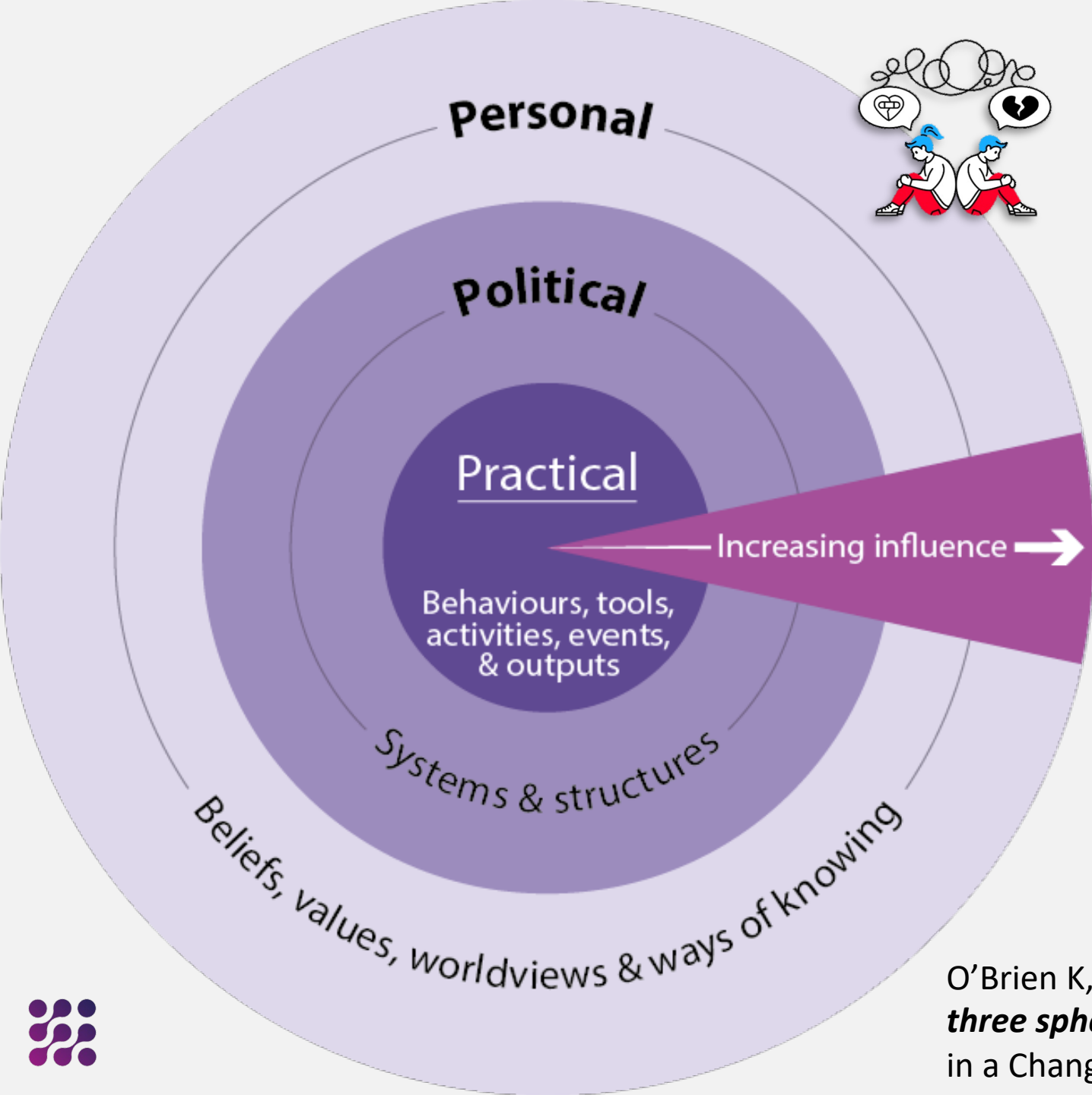


Learning [to see] relationships

- Changes in personal sphere are most influential *yet* hardest to influence
- Each sphere shapes and is shaped by the others – they operate at the same time

O'Brien K, Sygna L. 2013. ***Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation.*** Proceedings of Transformation in a Changing Climate, 19–21, 2013





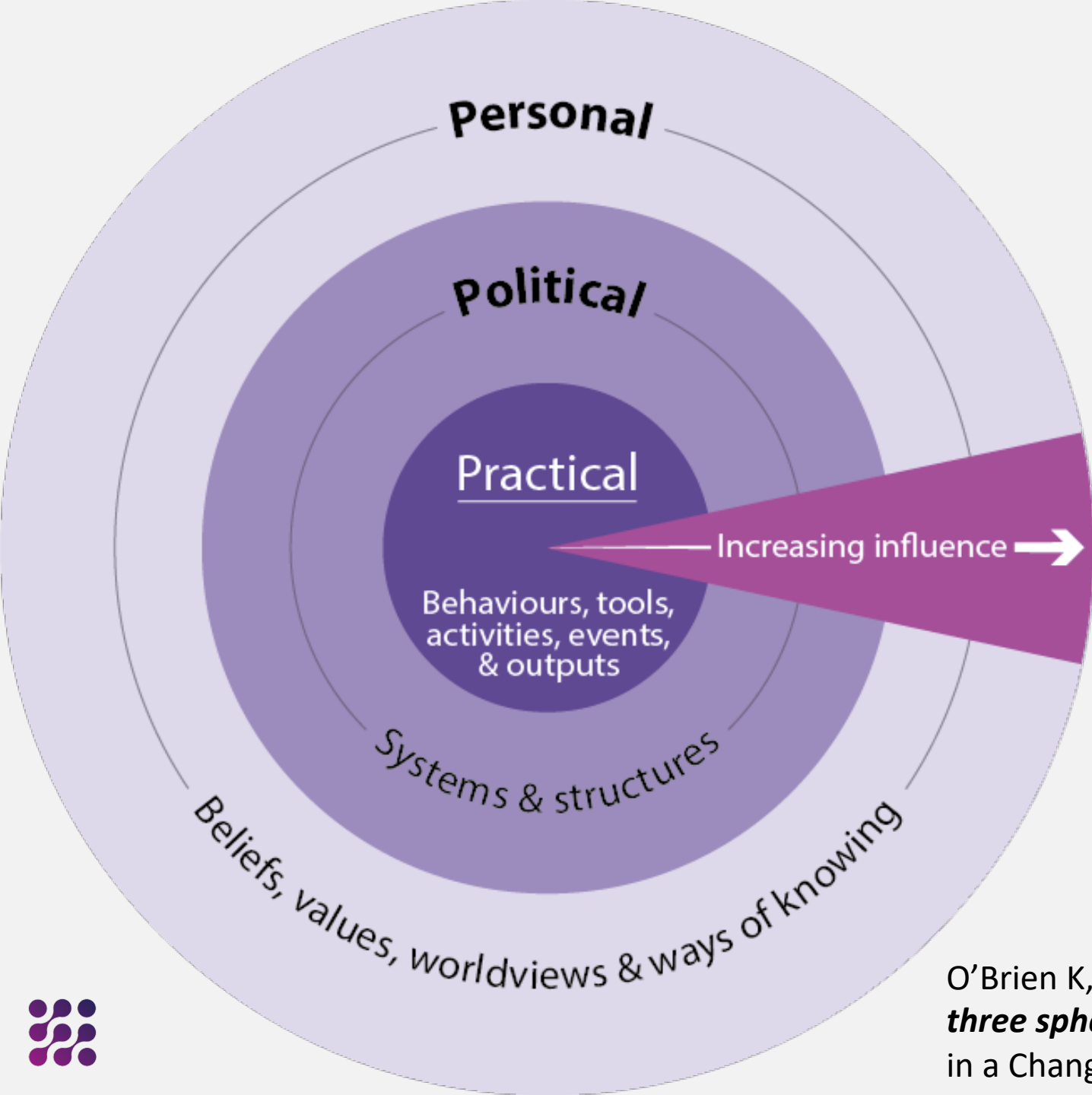
Learning [to see] relationships

Rethinking through a 'relational' lens

- Facts are infused with values
- Impact = learning relationships
- Change = accountability for relations between facts, values, ideologies, interests
- Equity & ethics = effectiveness

O'Brien K, Sygna L. 2013. *Responding to climate change: The three spheres of transformation*. Proceedings of Transformation in a Changing Climate, 19–21, 2013





Don't just do something, stand there!

How can we strengthen our *individual, collective and systemic* capacities to:

- Value the qualities of learning relationships
- Notice and name relationships
- Recognise and navigate opportunities and tensions

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