

A high level framework for health policy analysis – V0.1

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Introduction

This is a framework for understanding high-level proposed change. The framework is pitched in terms of 'policy', but could equally well cover broader strategies, major programmes and similar instruments.

The framework is mainly relevant to health and care policy. But government has a finite set of levers, so some elements may apply whatever the policy domain.

Its aim is to give people a quick 'way in' to discussing and understanding proposals. This understanding can then be used to: think critically; help others to understand proposed changes; decide where to focus more detailed analytical attention; design complementary approaches (etc).

So the framework should be useful to leaders, policy analysts, strategists, and also students of policy.

It was produced by the Strategy Unit for internal purposes, but we think it may have more general value. So it is shared here for comment and development. The ideas in it owe obvious debts to different health policy commentators. [This blog](#) describes the development of the framework and potential applications.

The framework comprises 12 'dyads' (and two summary triads). Each sets out potential features of the proposal in question. These features are mainly drawn from political science and economics; they cover the nature / focus of the change, plus some headline mechanisms within it.

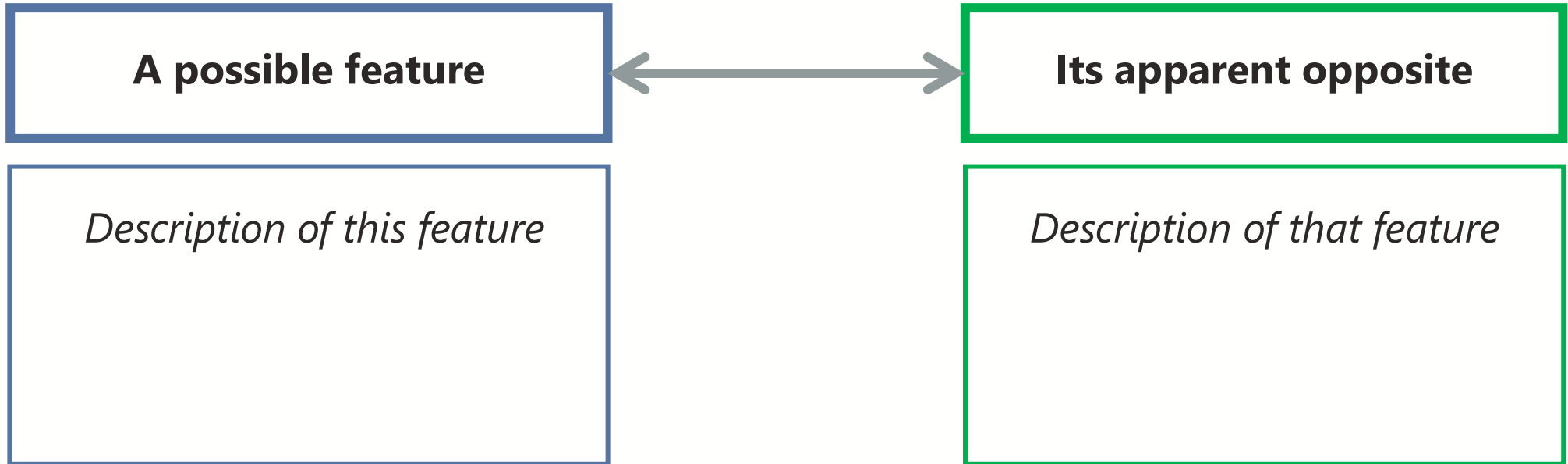
Equipped with an understanding of the proposed change, the reader can work through the dyads, asking whether / to what extent the policy *tends towards one feature of another*. At the end there are accompanying ways of summarising 'results'.

There is no sense of 'resolving one way or the other'. Policy is about balancing tensions: leaning more towards 'x' when 'x' is needed – fully expecting that its apparent opposite will eventually be required.

Every policy contains the seeds of its eventual destruction. The result therefore suggest how policies are likely to succeed and fail. This should help to guide more detailed analytical attention (e.g. Green Book type assessment, evaluation, etc).

The framework needs to be used flexibly. Its main value will be in provoking and guiding conversation, not in arriving at a precise 'result'. There are also obvious limitations: not least that the coverage of this first draft is necessarily limited. Comments are invited to improve what is presented here.

There are 12 dyads. They all look like this:



Headline questions:

- To what extent does the policy *tend towards* one feature or another? (Not '*is it this, or is it that?*' Policy typically balances, but does not resolve tensions)
- Relative to the current situation, which direction does the change take us in?
- Which features seem particularly important for this policy? What are the usual up- and down- sides of these features? So how is the policy therefore likely to work and fail – and how would analysts approach the task of assessing this in practice?

National power

Powers held by national bodies
Accountability back to national political / bureaucratic structures
Local job is to implement
Could be: set standards, targets, programming, budgets, regulation, etc
Usual arguments: standardisation ('postcode lottery'); often economies of scale / expertise



Local power

Powers held locally
Accountability back to local / national politics (?)
Local role is to define and implement what's needed
Usual arguments: tailoring, local knowledge and circumstance, pragmatism (infrequently: diseconomies of scale)

Competition

Market (more usually quasi-market) mechanisms

Competition usually on the supply side (to provide services)

Usual arguments: keep everyone sharp, competitive pressure weeds out poor provision and stimulates innovation (creative destruction)

Less usual: you could reduce performance management if this works

Collaboration

Markets can't work here because (usual market failure reasons: information asymmetries, natural monopolies, etc)

Public service ethos, rather than market incentives

Competing consumes resources in and of itself

Usually needs sharper accountability mechanisms (regulation, performance management, etc)

Democratic

Policy made / accountability for outcomes linked clearly back to 'the people', usually through political representatives

So political incentives / logic applies. Messier, more trading, less 'evidence says...' and more 'decided by...'

(Some democratic devises have technocratic elements, e.g. citizens juries / assemblies)

Technocratic

Policy made by experts – outsourced from politicians

Accountability back to the bureaucracy, arms length from day-to-day politics

Arguments usually about efficiency and expertise ('following the science...'); also longer-term thinking

Continuity of direction

No real change of destination
So usually a proposed better
means of reaching similar
desired ends

*'We can achieve what we want
more efficiently / effectively by
doing x because...'*

Technocratic tweaking, rather
than substantive changes

Break with the past

Change of direction;
renunciation of previous
policies

*'The old policies were wrong,
because of x/y/z, so we need a
new vision and destination'*

Changes of government (usual
and often overblown: has
ideology really changed?)

And / or changes of
circumstance (harder,
especially given prior /
ideological commitments)

Treat immediate problems

Seeking to remedy a problem that is with us now or coming very soon

Service configuration, treatment possibilities, R&D, technology, etc

Often tied to political cycles. Costs incurred now, so desire for speedy benefits. Political assessment of costs and benefits

Rescues visible cases (patients to treat); may trade against overall gains

Plan for the longer-term

Raising time horizons to address more structural problems / prevention

Policies to address wider, rather than proximal, determinants.

Often technocratic-type mechanisms (e.g. Bank of England independence)

Benefits not soon, costs are; harder to sell politically

Hold course in the face of demands for rescue believing that gains are greater overall

Efficiency

Maximise gains across the population as a whole

Utilitarian ethic: greatest [happiness / health / welfare / utility] for the greatest number



Equity

Maximise gains for least well-off groups

Seek this at the expense of lower gains overall

Ethic: religious; political left; can also be utilitarian (redistribution and diminishing marginal returns)

Focus on core business

Prime focus of the policy is clearly on the problem at hand – and what the organisations involved can do about it
(e.g. the NHS fixes problems that health services can fix)

Oar in other policy business

Recognition of contribution to other policy goals, explicit attempt to do something to help them too
(e.g. the NHS as an employer, an anchor institution, an emitter of carbon, etc)

Pathway

No clearly specified and detailed 'end point'

The proposal has a general direction; exact means are left open and to be discovered through 'pilots', 'pathfinders', 'vanguards', 'testbeds' (etc)

So experiment and find 'best ways' (often local) of moving in the desired direction.

Question then about use of evaluation and taking stop / scale / (further) study decisions

Destination

There is a specified end point. Maybe a single model with given features

Often comes with 'clear evidence' for a specific model and arguments against deviation from it

The idea then is to implement this model. Often supported by contracting, audit / monitoring type approaches

Single organisations

Policy designed with single organisations in mind (single types of organisation)

Accountability / performance management at the organisational level

Arguments usually about clarity of responsibility, so clearer incentives to improve / routes for doing so

Systems and networks

Policy designed with systems of organisations / services and networks of people / institutions in mind

Usually therefore place-based systems or thematic / interest networks

Complexity minded; based on understanding that outcomes result from multiple interactions and can't be controlled

Accountability harder to design in

Professionals as Knights

People providing services are motivated largely by public service ethos and feeling of duty to fellow citizens

They can be trusted to have users' interests at heart

Works off intrinsic motivations: these Knights will trade personal gain (e.g. in salaries and conditions) for public good

Professionals as Knaves

People providing services are self-interested

These Knaves don't have the service users' interests at heart, so need extrinsic incentives

Could be salaries / rewards, but more likely punishments (see targets and terror)

(Expected that they will game these too)

Target individuals

Policy designed primarily with individuals in mind

Often framed by understanding of individuals as autonomous, rational, utility maximising, responding to incentives

Arguments about individuality and autonomy

Target populations

Policy designed to address population groups (by geography, by socio-economic 'types', etc)

Framed by understanding that outcomes result from relationships between communities; between people and places

Arguments about relatedness and community assets

Users as citizens

People using the services / on the end of policy are treated as citizens of a country

Framed by political participation, rights and responsibilities; obligations to each other over time and place

Users as consumers

People as consumers of the services they 'use'

Focus on their rights and what providers should give them (charters, standards, etc)

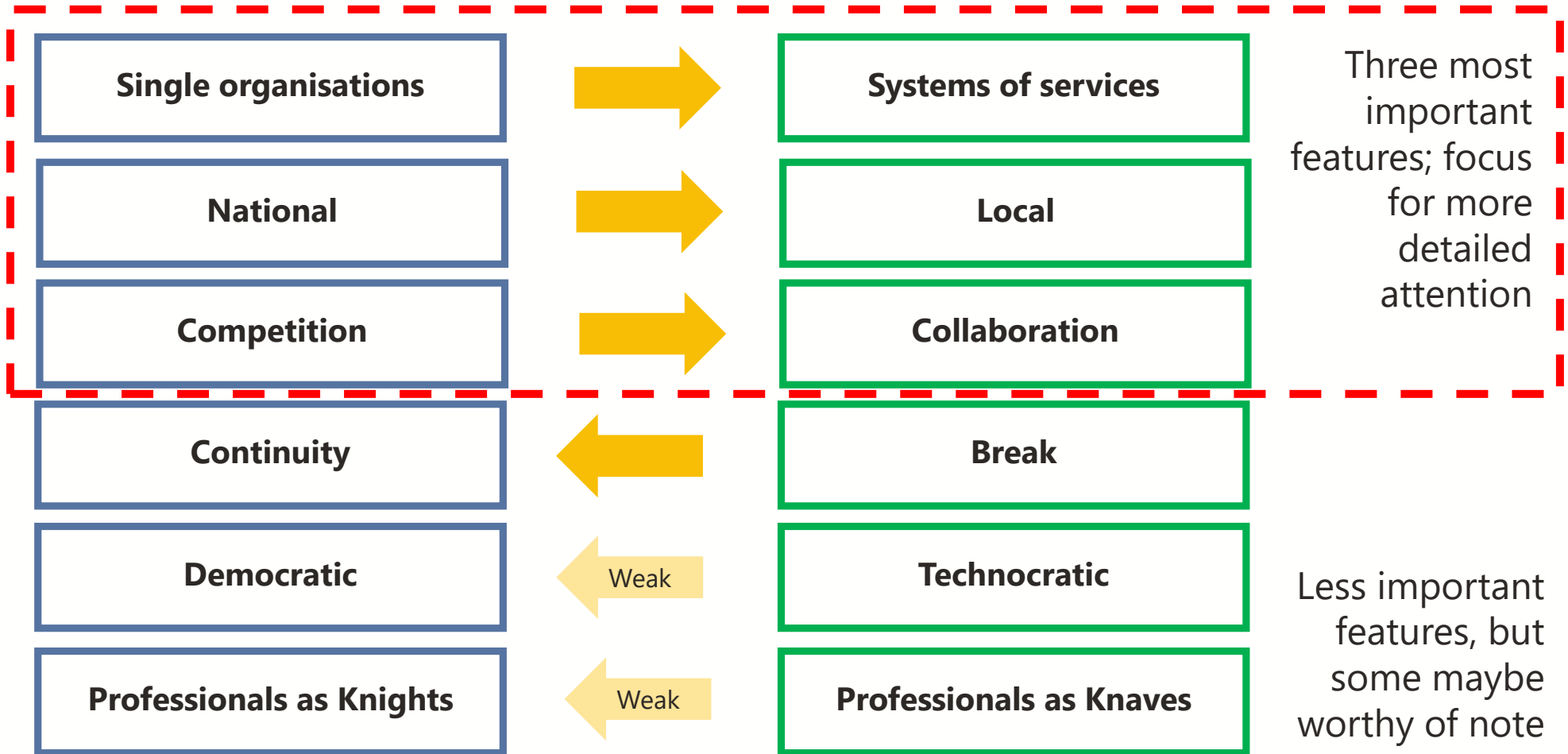
If they like the service, they use; if not, move to another provider ('choice and voice' mechanisms)

Accountability for standards (and via creative destruction of providers)

Thinking about results

The benefit of the framework is likely to be in guiding conversation, not in arriving at 'a result'. But the following slides suggest some ways of summarising the broad shape of the analysis and thinking about an overall, rather than per dyad, summary assessment.

Results summarised as a chart



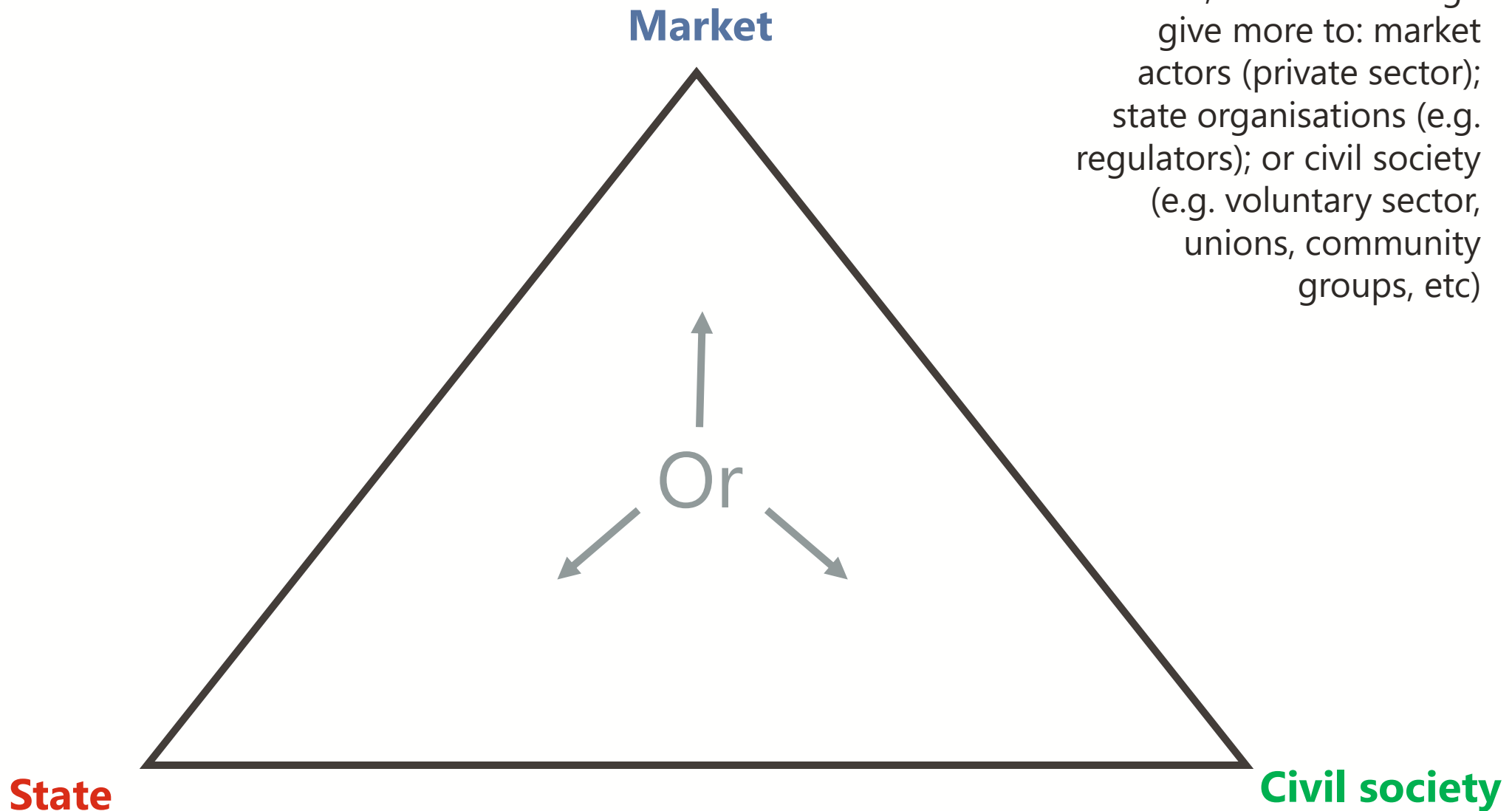
Summary triads looking at balance in power

Finally, and most broadly, here are two triads that look at shifts in the balance of power between different sectors and actors

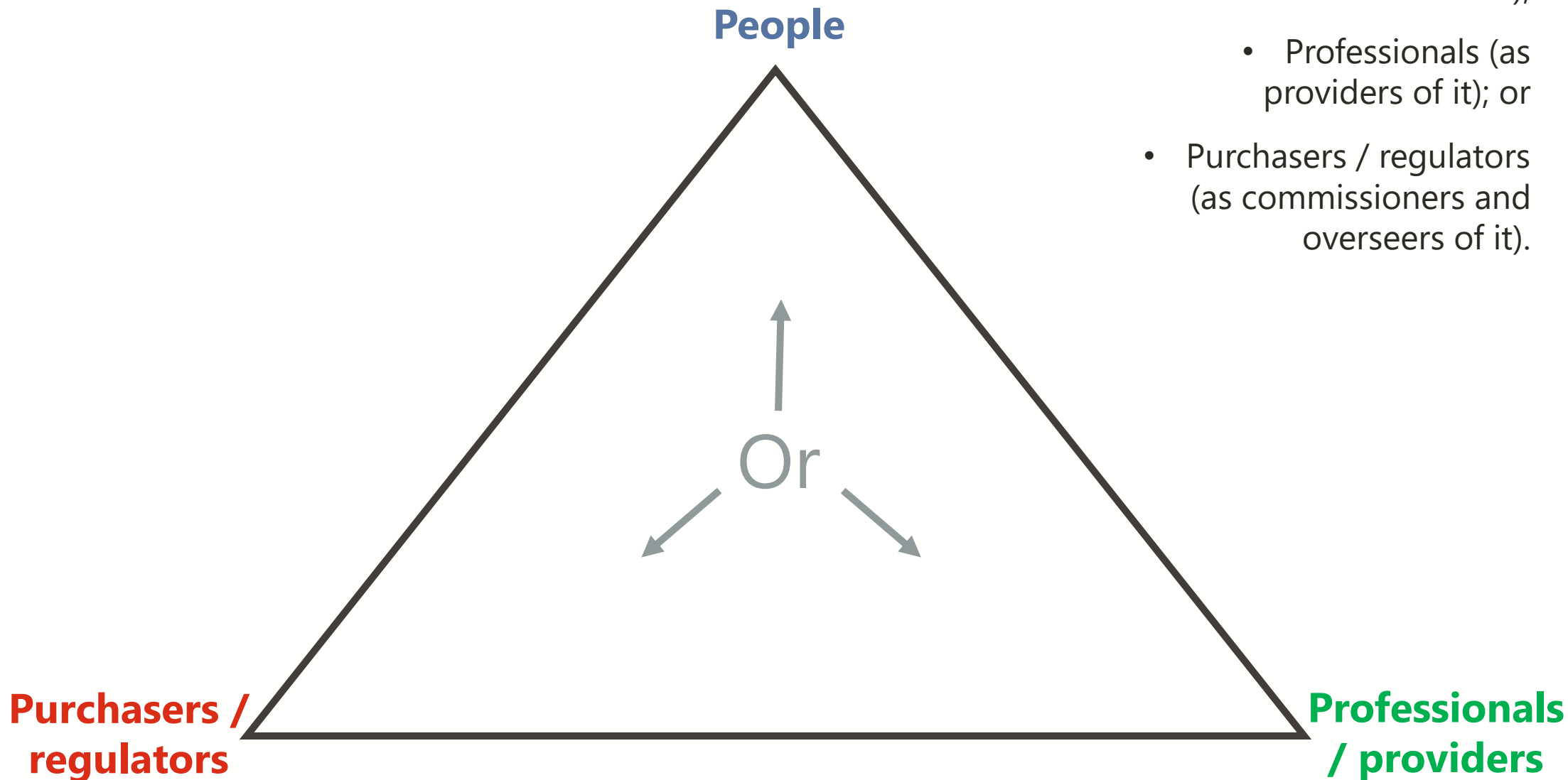
Summary triad 1: where does power shift to?

The policy will likely shift the balance of power between types of policy actor.

Here, does the change give more to: market actors (private sector); state organisations (e.g. regulators); or civil society (e.g. voluntary sector, unions, community groups, etc)



Summary triad 2: where does power shift to?



As with the previous triad, but this time does more power go towards:

- People (as users of a service);
- Professionals (as providers of it); or
- Purchasers / regulators (as commissioners and overseers of it).

**The
Strategy
Unit.**

**Please get in touch and help us
develop this version of the
framework...**



Contact

The nature of policy analysis means that this framework will never be complete or final.

This version is first draft and is presented for comment.

If you have suggestions, questions or feedback, please contact:

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