

SYSTEMS THINKING

in the Philippines

A Facilitator's Guide

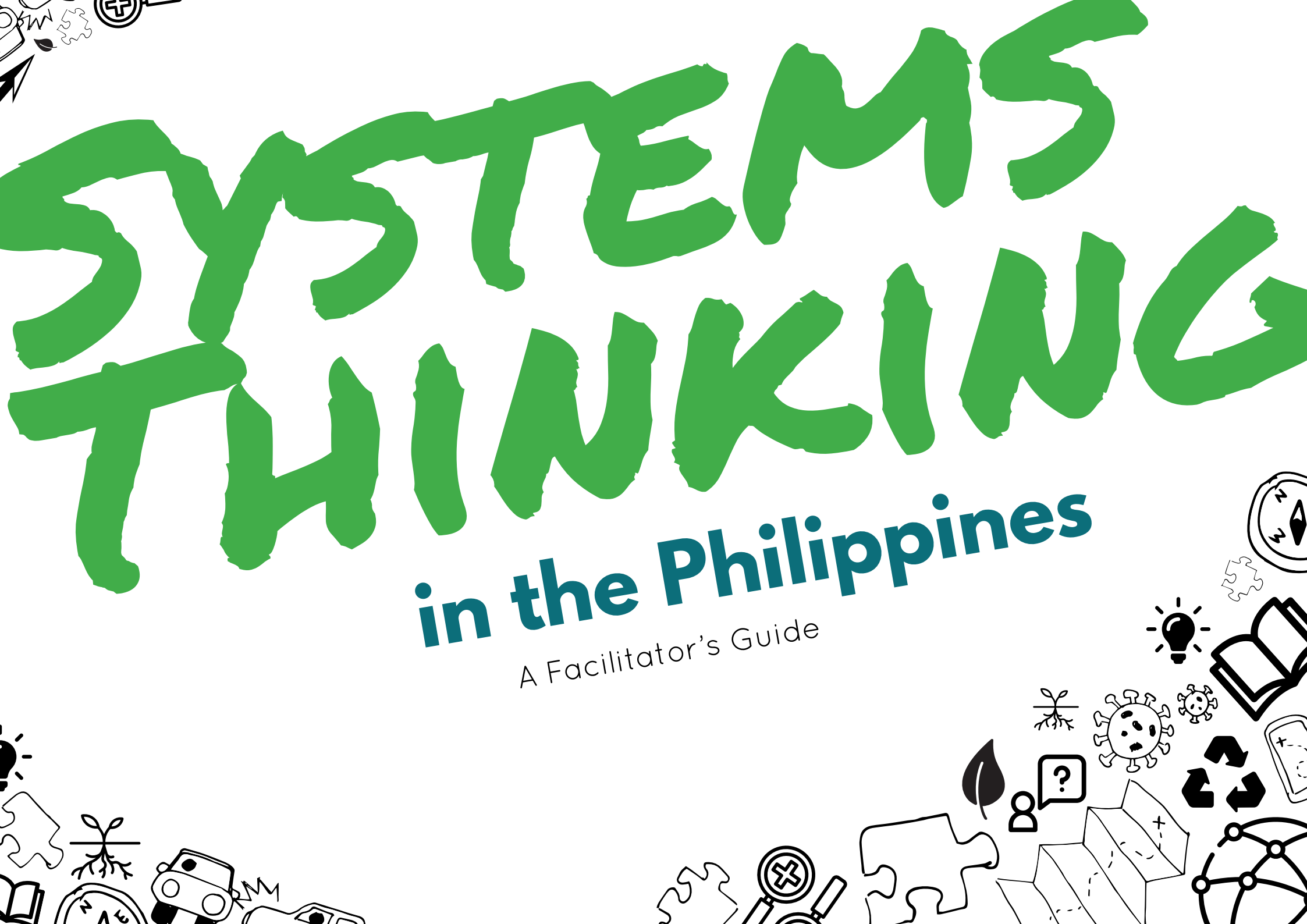


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EVERYTHING IS
CONNECTED TO
EVERYTHING
ELSE



Introduction

Whether we realize it or not, we have all experienced first-hand how **our world is interconnected through systems that are around us and inside us**. Visible and invisible connections that weave us together across distance and time.

We can see these systems in ourselves – how our own mind and body are interconnected and how our actions can affect the lives of others in our community. Why can our mental wellbeing influence our physical health?

How can an individual act of kindness, like contributing to a scholarship, have such positive ripple effects across the life of a student and his or her family?

We can see these systems in nature. Our beautiful forests have taught us how every little plant and animal has a role to play in the ecosystem. Remove just one and we see how it affects the balance of the whole.

We can see this in even the most common activities of our daily life. *How can a drought that happened hundreds of miles away affect the price of vegetables in your neighborhood palengke or market?*

These are all the results of systems that surround us and connect us. Things, people, and communities whose behavior and beliefs are so interconnected that, when one part of it moves, the rest can feel it.

Is there a problem in your community that does not seem to go away?

Is there a problem you've grown up with where you've been told that "there's nothing you can do about it?"

Systems thinking helps us to recognize and understand this world of systems that we live in. More importantly, it helps us if we want to try to shift these systems and solve problems. There are systemic problems or problems that are deeply embedded in the systems that we live in.

We believe that systems thinking is a mindset that allows us to look beyond the problem on the surface, and see the hidden forces that are actually keeping it in place.

The mindset of systems thinking allows us to look at an old problem in new ways, and it is in seeing things differently that we may find new solutions to try. The goal of systems thinking is to create lasting change, because you are working collaboratively on the deeper causes of the problems rather than just the symptoms.

We can apply systems thinking when we face problems in our community, but we can also put our systems thinking hat on when we encounter challenges in smaller groups.

Problem-solving takes time and the collaborative effort of many people. But if you are up to the challenge of finding new solutions and creating change that lasts, whether it's in your community or your very own homes, this guide is here to help you start.

**WELCOME
TO THE
COMMUNITY
OF SYSTEMS
THINKERS.**

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

We created this beginner's guide for communities, networks, and organizations who want to introduce systems thinking to their members or teammates for the first time.

We put together resources that we think will be helpful for young leaders who are starting their changemaker journeys and local groups who are already running social change initiatives.

We designed this as a **facilitator's guide** because we want to equip you with an overview of this expansive topic so that you can explore and use the resources that you feel will be most relevant for your local context. **We want to collaborate with you so that you can adapt and localize this material because you know what works best for your teams and communities.** Changing systems and solving deep-seated problems takes time and needs to be nurtured within a community of support. No one can change a system alone.

A few important points before we start:

How we created this guide: We compiled the content for this facilitator's guide by reviewing the extensive range of materials already out there on systems thinking and sharing with you some of the resources that may be helpful for the Philippine context. We also collaborated with and interviewed local systemic leaders in the Philippines.

We would like to acknowledge the limits of our methodology. This guide is not meant to be an academic research piece as **we are not academics or systems experts, just community-builders who have seen first-hand the benefits of systems thinking.** Over the years, we've seen how there is a lack of locally relevant systems thinking materials so we hope that this guide can help jumpstart the creation of more resources that can be easily understood and used by Filipino communities.

This guide is meant to be a **basic introduction** for those who are exploring systems thinking for the first time and want to apply it towards solving social problems. **Because this is a beginner's guide, there is so much more about systems thinking that is beyond what this guide will cover. But we share links at the end to resources for those who want to explore the topic further - which we strongly encourage you to do.** Systems thinking is part of a wider practice called Systems Change (for more on this, see our section "[What's Next: How to Keep Learning](#)" at the end of this guide).

Let's collaborate! We hope that we can collaborate with you so that this resource can continue to evolve and grow. If you use this guide or any of its pieces with your communities, we would love to hear your feedback and any suggestions on how to make it better. If you have come across materials that you think would be good to include in the guide, please do share. You can reach out to us at tim@firetree.org.

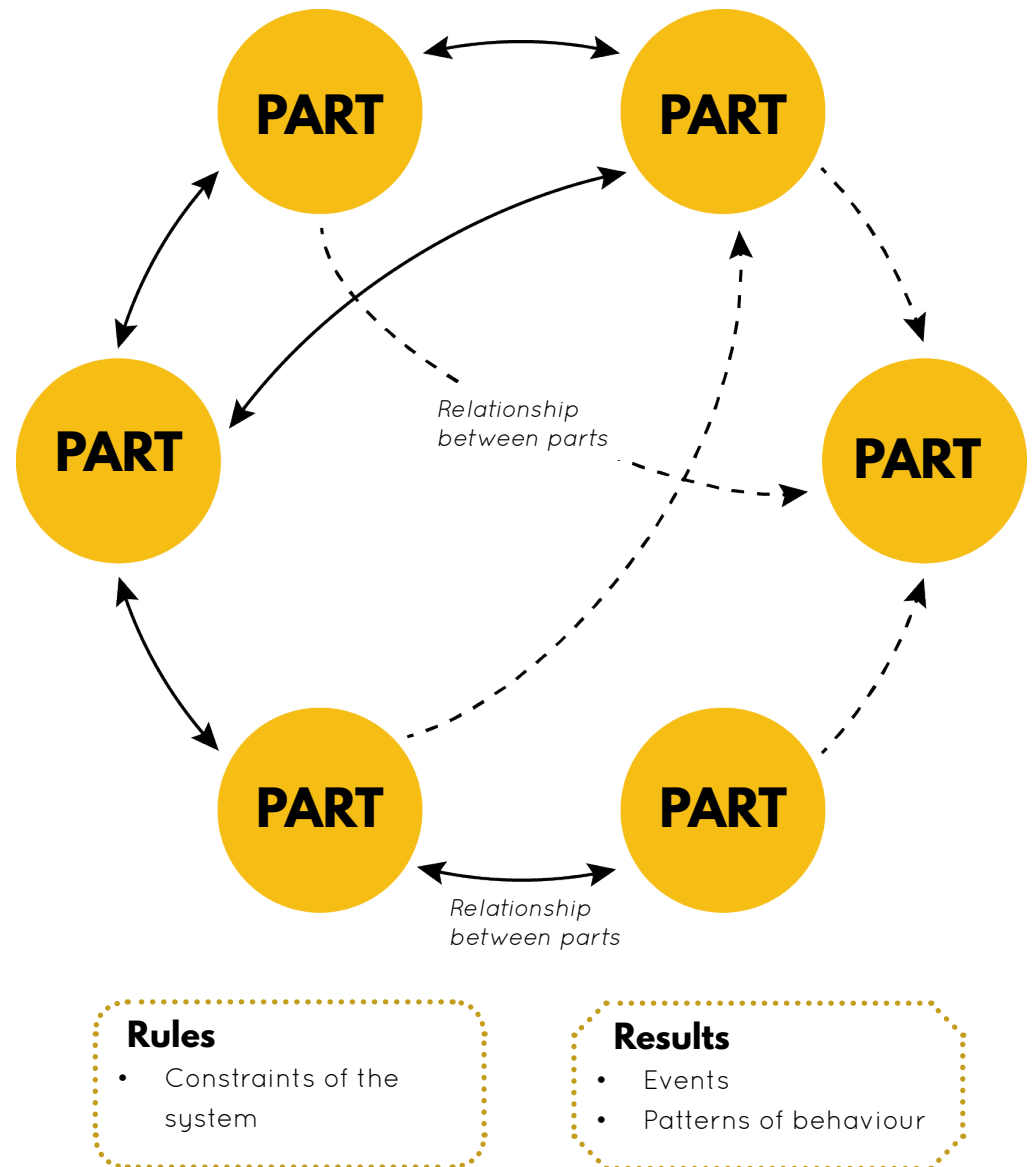
WHAT IS A SYSTEM?

A system is “an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something. ...a system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections and a function or purpose.”

(Thinking in Systems, Donella Meadows)

As we go on a journey to explore systems thinking, it is helpful to start by understanding what we mean by the word “system.”

- > A system has a set of different parts (sometimes called **elements**)
- > These parts interact with each other (**relationships**) according to certain rules.
- > These interactions lead to events or **results**.



WHAT IS A SYSTEM? continued

When used in the context of social change, many people in the Philippines assume that “system” is referring to either the government system, systems of political governance, or socio-economic systems. Yes, these are examples of systems but systems thinking can also be applied to different systems, both big and small.

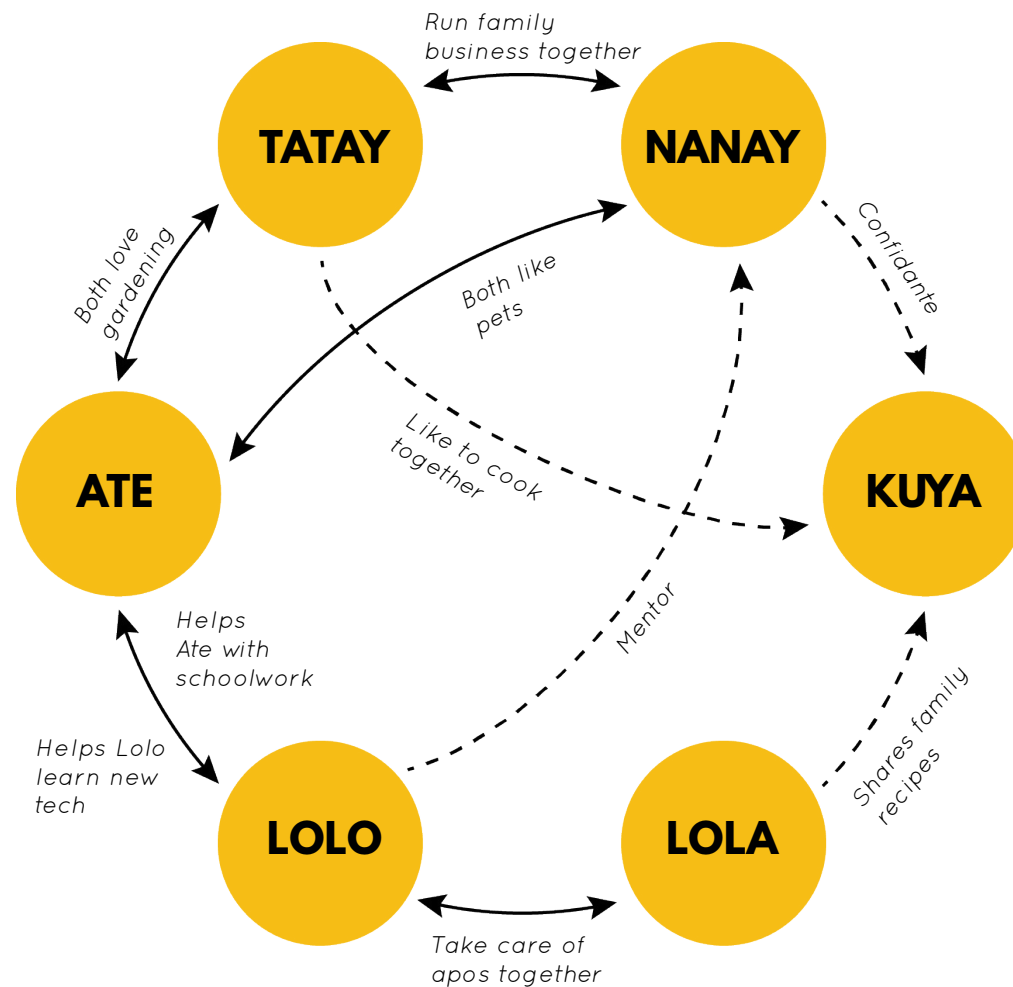
For example, you could see your **family as a system**:

- > Who are considered to be the members of your family? (**elements**)
- > What are the different roles that each member plays and what is the relationship like between the family members? (**relationships**)
- > What **rules** are followed in your family?
- > What resulting patterns of behavior can you see? (**results**)

The same can be applied to your **organization or company**. What are the different teams and departments and how do they interact and affect each other? What are the rules and social norms within your organization? What are the trends and patterns in terms of your organization’s performance or outputs?

Finally, **you could also define a system that you are working within**. For example, if you are running a youth empowerment program, you could think about who are the different groups, organizations, and government agencies that have an influence on the lives of the young people you are working with. How do young people interact with them and what patterns and behaviors do you see? What resources can be found within this system?

Example of a Family System



Rules

- Always treat each other with love and respect.
- Everyone should help with household chores.

Results

- Parents spend a lot of time working.
- Family members like to spend time together at home

A few things to remember about systems:

- ✓ **Systems can be large (like a national system) or small (like a family),** depending on how you choose to define them.
- ✓ **Systems are constantly changing.** When you map out a system, you are only getting a snapshot of what it looks like at that moment.
- ✓ Systems are usually complex because you cannot always predict how your actions will affect the other parts of the system. This is what is usually called **“unintended consequences.”**

- ✓ **Systems usually have multiple layers and there can be systems within systems.** For example, the human body is a system with a series of other systems within it like the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, etc.
- ✓ Don't forget that **YOU are part of these systems.** What role/s do you play in it and what perspectives and assumptions do you bring with you?
- ✓ In general, **systems can be difficult to change.** It will take time and needs to be done collaboratively.

* FACILITATOR'S TIP!

There are a few games and activities that you can use to help your teammates understand the concept of a system:

- [The Triangle Game](#)
- *You can reflect on the human body and how it is made up of many other systems within it.*

*After doing these activities, you can ask your members to give different examples of systems that they are a part of or systems that they feel need to change. **Challenge them to think about systems of different sizes and contexts. Try to think about systems that affect them personally.***

SYSTEMS THINKER'S SPOTLIGHT

Jo Anne Coruna

Founder, Ecology of Changemaking

Jo Anne is a visual artist, writer, and permaculture practitioner based in Bacolod. Permaculture is a philosophy and approach of designing systems so that we (humans) can live in harmony with nature's ecosystems.

Practicing permaculture and growing her family's backyard forest garden in Bacolod made systems thinking real and tangible for Jo Anne. This led her to create the [Ecology of Changemaking](#), a program that integrates nature into the design of social initiatives and projects.



Why do you think systems thinking would be helpful for us and our communities?

Jo Anne: We are all expected to learn how to read and write at a young age. That is well and good, but **imagine if you are able to read words, a whole novel, but you are unable to make sense of how everything you read goes together.** Then being able to read becomes pointless, right?

I see Systems Thinking as our ability to make sense of how everything and everyone goes together in whatever story -- or system -- we find ourselves embedded in. **Systems Thinking enables us to see our interconnectedness** -- how our actions affect others and vice versa.

Beyond people, systems thinking also lets us consider our environment, the tangible and intangible structures we have built, the other non-human living beings that share this planet with us, their intrinsic value, how we affect them, and how crucial their existence is to ours.

What are some of the systems thinking insights you've gained from practicing permaculture?

Jo Anne: Practicing self-regulation can be just as powerful and effective as actively doing something. I think we are always encouraged to do something or to "just do it" but **it's good to remember that we are not the only players in this game.** We are not the dominant actors in this system. **We coexist along with everything and everyone else,** and sometimes, holding back, letting things play out, and closely observing before we intervene (after considering if we must even intervene) is for the best... **self-regulation can provide the space for more thoughtful interactions, for empathy, the possibility of others being more engaged,** and other positive occurrences that otherwise may not happen if we just went ahead and did whatever we wanted.

WHY DO WE NEED SYSTEMS THINKING?

Types of Problems We Face



Simple

Can be addressed by commonly known solutions that are relatively easy to implement



Complicated

Usually requires the involvement of experts to find a solution.



Complex

Context of the problem is always changing

Now we know that we are living in a world full of systems -- inside us and around us -- where everything and everyone is interconnected. **Some systems work well while other systems cause problems that can lead to suffering or inequality.** How can we live and thrive in this kind of world? Systems thinking provides a helpful way of understanding our world, especially if we want to shift some of these systems to make them better.

Systems thinking can help us solve complex problems

Every day, as we live and work within systems like our organizations, our families, and our communities, we come across many problems that we have to solve. Some of these problems can be simple, while others are more difficult or complex. On the next page, you will see a table* that shows a helpful way of looking at problems and how each type may need a different approach for us to be able to solve them.

* Adapted from a framework of Brenda Zimmerman. You can find [a short video here](#) referencing her classification of problems.

TYPE OF PROBLEM

DESCRIPTION

EXAMPLES

Simple

Simple problems are easy to understand and have just a few factors involved which are mostly within your control.

Solving simple problems is like following a recipe. Most of us already know what to do and if we just implement these steps, the problem will be solved.

- Can be addressed by commonly known solutions that are relatively easy to implement



How to use less plastic at home?



Collecting book donations for a reading program



Watering your plants

Complicated

Complicated problems can be harder to solve than simple problems because there are more issues to think about and you will need “experts” or people in your community who have a specific set of skills to be able to solve them.

- Usually requires the involvement of experts to find a solution.
- You can easily define what the problem is and what are the many parts affecting the problem.
- You can apply best practices based on what has worked before.



Setting up a recycling system in your city



Teaching a child how to read and write



A farmer producing crops for harvest

Complex / Systemic

Complex problems are much harder to solve because they are unpredictable and they are deeply entangled with other problems around them. They are harder to define so you are not even sure where one problem ends and another begins.

- Has very many parts that are interacting with each other continuously; you cannot solve them separately

- Context of the problem is always changing
- Very hard to predict what will happen because the “cause-and-effect” relationships are not clear. Solving one part of the problem can cause unintended consequences in another.
- What has worked before may not work this time
- Experts can be helpful but their involvement doesn’t guarantee success



Addressing climate change issues in your city



Improving the quality of learning for public school students



Strengthening nutrition and food security in your town

WHAT IS BENEATH THE SURFACE?

We believe systems thinking is most helpful in addressing complex problems. Most of the social problems that affect us today can be seen as complex or systemic problems because they involve human behavior and beliefs that are constantly changing and have underlying factors that are difficult to see. We have to look beyond the easily visible events and actions and explore deeper to understand why these things are happening.

Instead of reacting to a situation based only on what we can see, systems thinking tells us to dig deeper. The model below (based on a local adaptation of the popular Iceberg Model) demonstrates this through the image of the Taal volcano.

Most Filipinos grew up being told that the Taal volcano in Batangas is the smallest volcano in the world because of the small iconic crater that we can see on tourist postcards and photos. But the destructive power of Taal is hidden beneath the surface. What people do not realize is that Taal is actually a large and complex volcano system with multiple vents and craters connected underground. Its eruption in early 2020 showed us exactly how powerful this hidden system can be.

The Taal model below shows the levels of thinking that we should consider when dealing with systemic problems. We can have much more impact if our initiatives can shift the deeper layers of the model.

1 Events

This is usually individual events or actions that we can easily see and they can seem relatively simple to address.

2 Patterns

If we look beyond individual events, we can start to see patterns of behavior or similar events that have happened over time.

3 Structures

Once we see the patterns, we can start to think about what “systemic structures” (these could be things like policies, rituals/practices, physical factors, or organizations) that are causing these patterns to occur.

4 Mental Models

Finally, we must figure out what are people’s beliefs or assumptions that are keeping these systemic structures in place. Why are these structures being created?

THE TAAL MODEL

This Taal Model is inspired by the Activating Rural Changemakers' (ARC) local adaptation of the popular Iceberg Model of systems thinking

YOU CAN HAVE INCREASING
IMPACT AS YOU ADDRESS THE
DEEPER LAYERS

Events

- What just happened?

Patterns

- What has been happening over time?

Structures

- What forces are contributing to these patterns?
- What is causing these patterns?

Mental Models

- How does our thinking allow these situations to persist?
- What beliefs and assumptions keep the problem in place?

SYSTEMS THINKER'S SPOTLIGHT

iVolunteer

iVolunteer was founded by a group of friends in 2009 who wanted to promote volunteerism in the Philippines. What started as a volunteer-matching website has now evolved into a dynamic community and movement of volunteers who are engaging NGOs and corporations to promote volunteerism for nation-building.



<p>Events <i>What just happened?</i></p>	<p>After a major disaster (Typhoon Ondoy), there were many Pinoy who wanted to volunteer but the NGOs that they were familiar with could not accommodate them anymore. Meanwhile, the less popular NGOs were struggling to get volunteers.</p>	<p>At the surface, this seemed like a simple problem to solve. They just needed to match interested volunteers with the NGOs who needed their help. So they compiled volunteer opportunities and created an online volunteer matching platform.</p>
<p>Patterns <i>What has been happening over time?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs could not retain their volunteers and the volunteers' impact was very limited. • Volunteers were not showing up to their projects. 	<p>However, over time they started to see patterns of behavior among both the NGOs and the volunteers. The team realized that there was more to this problem and that a volunteer-matching website alone would not solve it.</p>
<p>Structures <i>What forces are contributing to these patterns?</i> <i>What is causing these patterns?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGO's lack of proper volunteer orientation and management systems • Lack of active reminder system for volunteers • Lack of feedback mechanisms 	<p>They looked deeper into the practices of NGOs and volunteers to understand what were the structures that were causing these patterns of behavior.</p> <p>By setting up stronger feedback mechanisms for both the volunteers and the NGO hosts, they were able to suggest how each side could improve their experiences.</p>
<p>Mental Models <i>How does our thinking allow these patterns to persist?</i> <i>What beliefs and assumptions keep the problem in place?</i></p>	<p>Lack of trust between NGOs and volunteers</p> <p>NGOs: "Volunteers are unreliable, I can't assign them major responsibilities."</p> <p>"They are only with us short-term, there is no point for us to spend time training them."</p> <p>Volunteers: "I'm only going to be assigned menial tasks. I'm not valued."</p> <p>"I'm still learning and exploring what it means to be a volunteer."</p>	<p>By uncovering the assumptions and attitudes that the NGOs and volunteers had, the iVolunteer team was able to create programs that would help shift their beliefs and build trust between the two groups.</p> <p>Through their partnership training programs for NGOs, they are able to show the long-term value of volunteers as ambassadors and advocates rather than just a set of free hands.</p> <p>They were also able to tailor their activities once they learned how volunteers had different levels of commitment and knowledge about volunteering.</p>

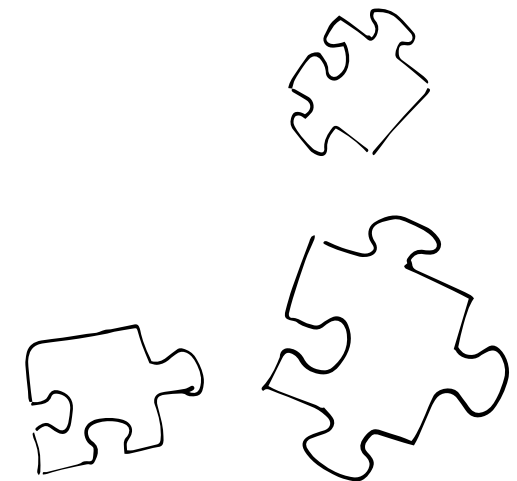
* FACILITATORS TIPS!

> While there are no magic formulas and solutions, we believe systems thinking can be most helpful for addressing complex problems, precisely because it helps us to better understand and deal with complexity.

Using 'simple' or 'complicated' approaches (as defined in the earlier table) to address complex or systemic problems can produce unintended consequences that can sometimes make situations worse. This [short video](#) gives a historical example of this.

> When discussing examples of complex or systemic problems, **it is good to show how this one problem or issue is connected to many other issues** and how it needs to be addressed from many different perspectives.

On the next two pages, you'll see two examples that you can use of systemic problems and their interconnected nature.



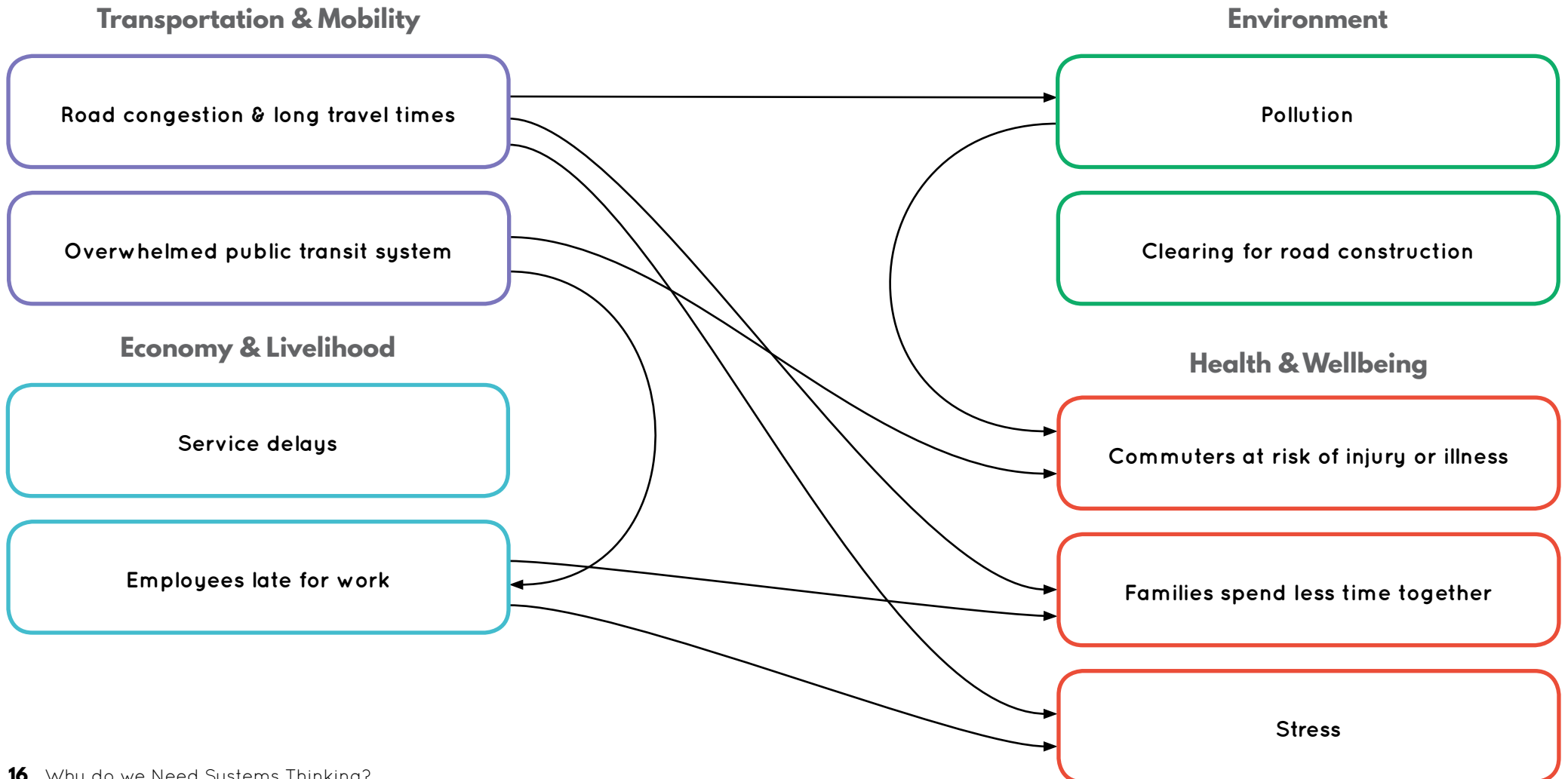
SYSTEMS THINKING IN PRACTICE:

Traffic



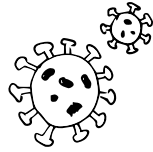
In urban cities like Manila or Cebu, the problem of traffic can be seen as an issue that affects not only transportation and mobility but also health (commuter's safety and families' quality of life), livelihood (effects on employees and businesses), and the environment (pollution). You would

need a holistic approach to solve this problem and look at it from many different perspectives beyond infrastructure and public transportation. Which other groups and expertise do you think would be good to bring in to help solve this problem?



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SYSTEMS THINKING IN PRACTICE: COVID Pandemic



Is the COVID pandemic just a health issue?

The diagram below shows just some of the many aspects of community life that the pandemic has affected.

Health

People getting sick or dying from COVID

Hospitals overwhelmed with COVID cases

Mental wellbeing suffers

Food Security

Farmers & vendors unable to sell goods

Families unable to access or afford food

Education

Schools close

Students & teachers forced to adjust to at-home learning

Economy & Livelihood

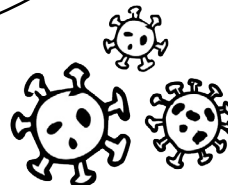
Business closures due to lockdowns

Unemployment

Employees getting sick

Extra cost of complying with safety measures (eg. testing)

Employees struggling with 'Work from Home'



SYSTEMS THINKING HELPS US CREATE LONGER LASTING POSITIVE CHANGE

What happens when we create solutions without thinking about the systems that we are connected to? We could end up creating **“band-aid solutions”** whose impact is only on the surface and lasts for a short time. We could also miss the opportunity to collaborate with others so that the positive impacts of our projects can connect and amplify each other.

If we look around, we can see many examples of this:

- > *One-time donation drives that are able to provide for a community’s urgent needs. But their impact might end once the groups leave the community or their funding runs out.*
- > *Successful awareness campaigns that can change the way the public feels about an issue. But the campaign on its own is not necessarily able to transform those feelings into concrete changes within the system.*
- > *Advocacy efforts that lead to policy change. But the new laws are not being implemented effectively on the ground.*

Each of these efforts are extremely valuable and play an important role in the system but where do they fall short? How can we connect their positive effects so that they support each other and grow even more?

When you are trying to change a system, you are trying to make sure that the change is long-lasting, it is supported and protected by many stakeholders, and is really shifting how people think and act.

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT DOES A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH AIM FOR?

Long-term Positive Change

Long-lasting change that outlives you and your organization and fundamentally reorganises how the current system is behaving

Reinforcement

Positive social impact that is supported and reinforced by structures in the system (such as institutions, policies, social norms)

Inner Transformation

Positive social change that runs deep and is internalized by the people and communities involved

Inclusion

Positive change that benefits all, not just a few

In many ways, this is an idealistic scenario. **Since we know that systems constantly change and complex problems will evolve, our systems changing work is often never truly finished.** But it is important to have a clear guiding star for our journey that can help us make the right decisions about how we work and who we should work with.

* FACILITATOR'S TIP!

When we reflect on the end goal of systems thinking, many times the vision we come up with can be overwhelming and seem impossible to achieve. That is why it is helpful to frame this as an ongoing journey that we can - and must - take in collaboration with others.

* USEFUL TOOL!

[Ashoka's 4 Levels of Impact](#) is a framework that can help your team reflect on the type of work and social impact you want to achieve.

SYSTEMS THINKER'S SPOTLIGHT

Fatima Garcia-Lorenzo

Co-Founder, Kythe Foundation

If you are a child suffering from cancer or chronic illness, it can almost feel like you are growing up inside the hospital because of the continuous need for medical treatment and support. The pain and challenges are even more if your family is poor.

Fatima Garcia-Lorenzo co-founded [Kythe Foundation](#) to help improve the quality of life of these children and their families. Kythe introduced the concept of **Child Life services** in Philippine hospitals - these are specialists and programs that help the child and their family **understand and cope with the stress of sickness and hospitalization**. Imagine what a difference it makes for a child and her family to have someone always there to educate and guide them through the medical procedures and provide emotional support when needed.

Understanding the system. As psychologists, the founders of Kythe were initially focused on play therapy and psychosocial support for children. But taking a look at the bigger picture and the systems affecting the kids and their families, they knew that psychosocial support was not enough. If they wanted to help these children get well, they would also need to help the families through financial support so that they can access crucial medicines and treatments.



Photo Credit: Istorya ng Pag-Asa

Kythe was eventually able to set-up Child Life (CL) programs in several key hospitals around the country. These programs offer a much-needed combination of psychosocial, medical, and financial support, helping over 11,000 children and their families.

SYSTEMS THINKER'S SPOTLIGHT

Fatima Garcia-Lorenzo *continued*

Long-term Positive Change

How can our impact live beyond our organization?

After many years of running Child Life programs inside hospitals, Kythe realized that if they truly wanted to scale up their impact and help more families they needed to change their approach.

Instead of Kythe setting up and running individual Child Life programs for hospitals, they focused on shifting the healthcare system so that all hospitals could be empowered to set up and run Child Life programs for themselves.

Reinforcement

What structures or institutions are needed to support this change?

To empower hospitals to set up their own Child Life programs, Fatima and the Kythe team needed to get the support of key opinion leaders from pediatric oncology, palliative and hospice care medical societies and the Department of Health (DOH) so there would be a mandate and guidance from the DOH about establishing CL programs.

As part of this, Kythe conducted evidence-based research that would show how psychosocial support for children in hospitals actually increases the effectiveness of the medical treatment that they receive.

Inner Transformation

Are we shifting what people think, feel, and believe?

According to Fatima, shifting the system is more than just changing public policy. An “inner transformation” must happen so that the change we are working on is internalized by society.

To do this, Kythe focuses on creating events as “shared experiences” so that doctors, volunteers, partners, and government officials are able to really see and feel the difference that their CL programs are making in the lives of patients, their families and even the doctors themselves.

Inclusion

Are we working to improve the lives of all, not just a few?

If you are committed to equity and creating a world where everyone can thrive, your journey as a systems thinker never really ends. As you implement your projects, you start to see how your work is connected to other issues and communities. You start to see new problems to solve and questions to explore.

This was the case for Fatima as she scaled the impact of Kythe, she saw how she could support other patient communities in the Philippines. Kythe became a founding member of the Philippine Alliance of Patient Organizations (PAPO) where they push for universal healthcare for all patients, access for cheaper medicine, and the institutionalization of psychosocial care in the healthcare system.

THE MIND OF A SYSTEMS THINKER

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”
(Albert Einstein)

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.”

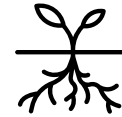
Systemic problems still exist not because people have let them be. Through the years, many well-meaning people from communities across the world have constantly tried to solve them. You may be trying to address a systemic problem yourself, seeing how it weighs your community down or prevents it from growing.

Systems thinking does not necessarily provide you with easy solutions, but it allows you to look at the same problems in a different and more complete way. It helps you to ask the right questions.

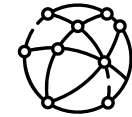
When you develop a systems thinking mindset, you will be able to see not just the problem on the surface, but also how it is connected to the values and behavior of the people involved, as well as the systems in your society that allow this problem to thrive. Once you see the web of interconnections keeping the problem alive, hopefully you'll be able to see new and different avenues that you, and others, can approach.

Here are some tips on how to have the mind of a systems thinker:

- > Look beyond what is obvious and always ask “why” to find out the root causes



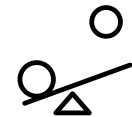
- > Try to see the bigger picture and recognize interconnections



- > Zoom in & zoom out: try using different perspectives



- > Find “leverage points” where small actions can cause big changes



- > Collaborate with humility & empathy



- > Keep learning & be open to new ideas



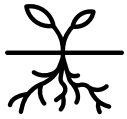
- > Work for the good of all: always strive for inclusion and equity



- > Be prepared for uncertainty and failure



Look beyond what is obvious and always ask “why” to find out the root causes



When we see people suffering in our communities, our instinct is to immediately run and help in their time of need - give food to the hungry, donate clothes to the victims of typhoons, deliver school materials to children in remote villages.

All of these are important acts that may even save people’s lives at that moment. But for lasting impact that outlasts us and our organizations, it’s important and helpful to also pause to ask ourselves why this is happening in the first place.

Why are some families so poor that they cannot afford to eat?
Why are some communities so unprepared for typhoons that they are left with nothing?
Why can’t all children go to school?

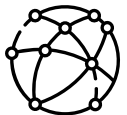
Only in eliminating the root cause can we truly make lasting change in the community.

Otherwise, the moment aid stops, the suffering will continue.

Take Note: We believe that giving immediate assistance and addressing the root causes are not competing efforts but should be complementary ones.

We find this works best if those giving immediate assistance understand what the root causes are, and how their efforts can also contribute towards long-term change. While those addressing the root causes must not forget the immediate suffering and needs of the community they serve. Otherwise their long-term initiatives will also be futile and disconnected from the community itself.

Try to see the bigger picture and recognize interconnections



When you are tracing the root causes of a certain systemic problem, it is also important to take a step back. Allow yourself to look at the environment that surrounds the problem. Who are the people, groups, and communities that are connected to or affected by it?

Apart from asking how they are all connected to the problem, also ask how they are connected to each other. When one of them moves, what happens to the rest?

Lastly, go deeper and ask what cultures, policies, practices, and beliefs do those people have. How are these mindsets helping to perpetuate the problem?

Zoom in & zoom out: try using different perspectives



Systems thinkers need to be able to shift comfortably between different perspectives or ways of thinking, even as they execute their plans.

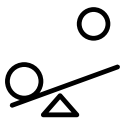
As we help address the community's urgent needs, we must also keep an eye on the long-term goal of lasting change.

As we study how the problems and systems directly affect the community, we must also look at the people in its immediate environment to see how their behavior alters the system or cements the problem.

As we think of concrete and external policies we want to change, projects we want to undertake, we also have to consider the changes that need to happen within - the shift in people's mindset and beliefs, that can ultimately change their actions.

Like the cameras in our phones, we must learn how to both zoom in and zoom out of the problem. There is always something different to see in both.

Find "leverage points" where small actions can cause big changes



As you build a better understanding of the system and the role that different partners play in it, try to find the places in the system where even just a small shift or a relatively small amount of effort could lead to big positive changes for the community. These areas are called "leverage points".

We all have limited time and resources so identifying leverage points helps ensure that we use our resources in the most strategic way. Once you find these points in the system, figure out which of the leverage points you and your group are best equipped to lead.

Collaborate with humility & empathy



Now that we have a better sense of how wide the scale of the problem is and just how many people and groups are connected to it (whether intentionally or not), it should bring us to one logical, and humble realization: We cannot solve this on our own.

This is not a cause for despair, but actually an important epiphany. It is crucial for a systems thinker to embrace the mindset of collaboration.

Link up with people who have different strengths from yours, or have better access to the people in the system that are beyond your reach. Do not just invite people who think like you - collaborate even with people who don't. This is a good opportunity to hear other perspectives and learn from them.

In the spirit of collaboration, you must learn to listen to the perspectives of others with empathy, and hold your own perspectives up for scrutiny with humility. Together, you and your new partners can come together and form a shared vision about what change you want to achieve. Factor in your respective strengths, weaknesses, similarities, and differences, and you are bound to come up with fresh approaches.

Keep learning & be open to new ideas



Systemic problems still exist because the traditional solutions tried before have not worked. In opening your mind to their root causes, the interconnections between all the people and groups involved in them, and in collaborating with people who may be outside your usual circle, new ideas will surely come up - new solutions will now be within your reach.

However, you must keep in mind that this will all be a big learning process. There is no guarantee that the ideas you and your new collaborators come up with will actually work, especially since the very problem you are dealing with evolves and changes constantly. Keep trying new things, keep learning from each other and from the impact of your previous attempts.

Do not lose sight of the goal: to find lasting change and create a brighter future for the people in your community.

Work for the good of all:
always strive for inclusion
and equity



When we are implementing a project that is focused on one specific group or issue area in the community, we can sometimes forget to consider how our actions affect other groups. Always ask and see: who are being excluded or are being left behind? Are there other voices in the community that need to be heard?

We must try to build systems that work for the good of all.

**Be prepared for uncertainty
and failure**



Things won't always be smooth sailing when we are trying something new and dealing with the uncertainties of complex systems. We will make mistakes. This is part of our learning journey as a systems thinker. No amount of research and planning will allow us to predict and know everything in advance.

That being said, we also know that mistakes can be very costly when dealing with the lives and wellbeing of our community members. This is why, as systems thinkers, we must design our projects in such a way that we can safely test our new ideas and assumptions, then quickly adapt our approaches when we need to.

***AS YOU READ THROUGH THESE HABITS OR ATTITUDES OF A SYSTEMS THINKER, YOU MIGHT THINK: "THESE IDEAS ARE NOT NEW. MY TEAM ALREADY DOES SOME OF THESE THINGS."**

You are probably right. Even though systems thinking as a topic is relatively new, there have always been leaders and groups who are trying to work towards long-term positive change for their communities. It is through their experiences that we have learned how important the practices like collaboration, innovative thinking, and mapping the bigger picture are. You don't have to be a "systems expert" to know this. Without even knowing the terms systems thinking or systems change, many of the local leaders we interviewed have been practicing these principles intuitively over the years. The main value we see in introducing you to the systems thinking community is that you can learn from many others around the world who are committed to solving long-standing community problems. It is also our hope that you will be able to contribute your own insights and learnings into this growing community of practice.

SYSTEMS THINKING IN PRACTICE

The COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful example of how we are all connected in systems. What we once thought of as “just a health issue” soon disrupted our economies, our food security, our education, and our mental wellbeing. What we once thought of as a problem that was isolated in a few countries, ended up right at our doorstep. Even communities with low numbers of COVID cases felt the strong effect of the pandemic as industries like agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism were greatly affected.

Now more than ever, we must apply systems thinking to navigate this new and changing reality. **Let’s take a look at how a systems thinker like you could explore ways of helping your community during the pandemic.**

Mindset

How can I help my community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Look beyond what is obvious and always ask “why” to find out the root causes

- Why are people in my barangay getting sick?
- Why are some people not following the safety protocols? Why is it not possible for some people to stay home?
- Are there any policies, beliefs, or practices that are putting people more at risk?

Try to **see the bigger picture** and recognize interconnections

- Is COVID just a health issue? What other parts of our community life are being affected?
- What are the initiatives that already exist? How does their work affect each other? Where are the gaps?

Zoom in & zoom out: try using different perspectives

- **Short-term/Long-term:** What are my community’s problems right now? What problems will we see 2 years from now because of the pandemic?
- **Micro/Macro:** What is the experience in the family and barangay level? What are the challenges in the city and provincial level?

Find “leverage points” where small actions can cause big changes

- What small actions can lead to big improvements in the lives & safety of our community members? Can I lead any of those actions?

Collaborate with humility & empathy

- Who can I collaborate with and how can I support the work of others?

Keep learning & be open to new ideas

- Are there any new approaches out there that we should try? Who else can we learn from?

Work for the good of all: always strive for inclusion and equity

- Who are being left out or being left behind by relief efforts and policies?

Be prepared for uncertainty and failure

- What will we do if this pandemic lasts longer than expected? What if the virus keeps mutating?

SYSTEMS THINKER'S SPOTLIGHT

Ryan Gersava

Virtualahan & Activating Rural Changemakers

Ryan is the founder of [Virtualahan](#), a group that is building more inclusive systems by using technology to break down employment barriers for Persons with Disabilities and other excluded communities. Their model combines well-being sessions and community-building with digital job skills training. Ryan is also the co-founder of [Activating Rural Changemakers](#).



Why do you think systems thinking would be helpful for Filipino communities?

Ryan: Systems thinking is helpful for Filipino communities to have a deeper understanding of the issues that directly affect them and not fall into the trap of only focusing on a single story. This way, they can truly be part of the solution by understanding their role in the system and how to work effectively with others to change their conditions that will lead to systems change.

As a changemaker, when did you realize that you had to think and act in a systemic way?

Ryan: I realized that I had to think and act in a systemic way after seeing that the existing “short-cut” solutions are not delivering the long-term impact that my community needs. It’s when I was forced to confront the uneasy narratives that cause the problem and acknowledge that I must do what is necessary and not just what is convenient.

Any advice for changemakers when it comes to dealing with uncertainty and failure?

Ryan: Embrace uncertainty and failure; it is the building blocks of your success. In the process, build a strong support system so you can unburden yourself with all the emotional challenges that you have to process.

TOOLS FOR SYSTEMS THINKERS

Now that we understand how a systems thinker sees the world, the usual next questions are: “Ok, how do I get started? What should I do?”

Systems thinking does not offer a one-size-fits-all kind of process. Neither is it a magic solution where if you implement all the steps, you are guaranteed to solve any problem. This is because it is an approach built on the complex reality that the background of the problem you are trying to solve, the communities it affects, and even your own situation as the problem solver will always be different. **You will have to design your process based on your context and be ready to adapt as things change.**

This is why we find that it is more important, particularly when you’re starting out, to spend time as a team understanding and internalizing the mindset of a systems thinker. **If you understand how a systems changer thinks, then it will be easier for you to decide on which of the many systems tools and frameworks out there are relevant for your own situation.**

Although there is no single, correct way of implementing a systems change process, there are a few general phases or steps that most systems thinkers use.

> Understand the System

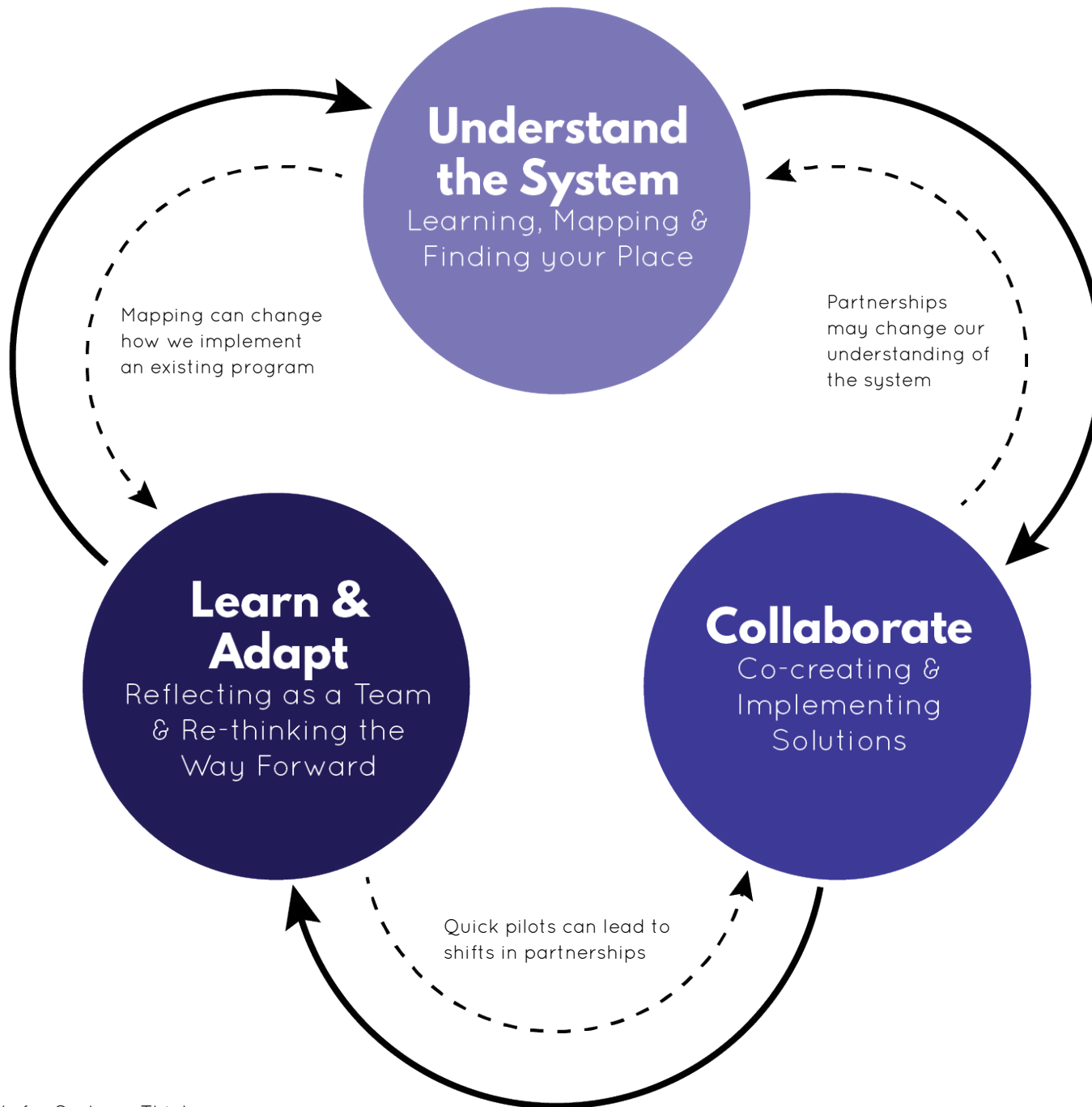
Learning, Mapping, & Finding Your Place in the System

> Collaborate

Co-Creating & Implementing Solutions

> Learn & Adapt

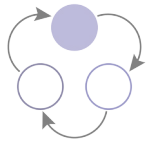
Reflecting as a Team & Rethinking the Way Forward



*** TAKE NOTE!**

This is not a linear process meant to be applied one step at a time across the duration of a project. Instead it is a continuous cycle that your team may repeat multiple times as you are implementing a project. You may even jump from one mode to another depending on your situation. For example, collaborating with a new partner could give you new insights that will change the way you would map the system. Or mapping the system could lead your org to shift or adjust the implementation of an existing project. Rather than conducting monitoring and evaluation only at the end of a project, we should be able to continuously learn and adapt our efforts to the changing system.

UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM



Learning, Mapping, & Finding Your Place in the System

The first key phase of a systems thinking process is about building a holistic understanding of the system that we are working in. This usually involves the following:

Identifying the system

that we want to focus on and deciding on the scope and scale that we want to work with. For example, are we trying to solve a problem at the barangay level or are we focusing on a city or national issue? This can also be called “setting the boundaries of a system.”

Developing a vision

of our end goal or the positive long-term change that we are trying to achieve. This is your guiding star for the work that you do.

Mapping the system

and identifying the different elements (these could be people, stakeholders, institutions, etc), the relationships between these elements, and the patterns of behavior and events that are the results of these relationships.

There are many different methods that you can use to map out a system depending on the kind of insights you need. Later on in this section, we share with you some of these mapping methods.

Finding your place in the system

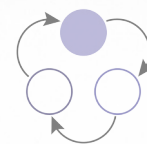
and knowing your ‘leverage points’. As you create a map of your system, you will start to see the different problem points and areas of need. You won’t be able to solve all of them on your own. But if your team reflects on your strengths, weaknesses, and experiences, you can try to find the specific parts of the system **where even a small amount of your effort could result in a much bigger impact.** These are sometimes called “leverage points.” This is how you can reflect on what is the best role that your team can play in the system -- where and how can you have the most impact given your existing capacity and resources.

* DON'T FORGET!

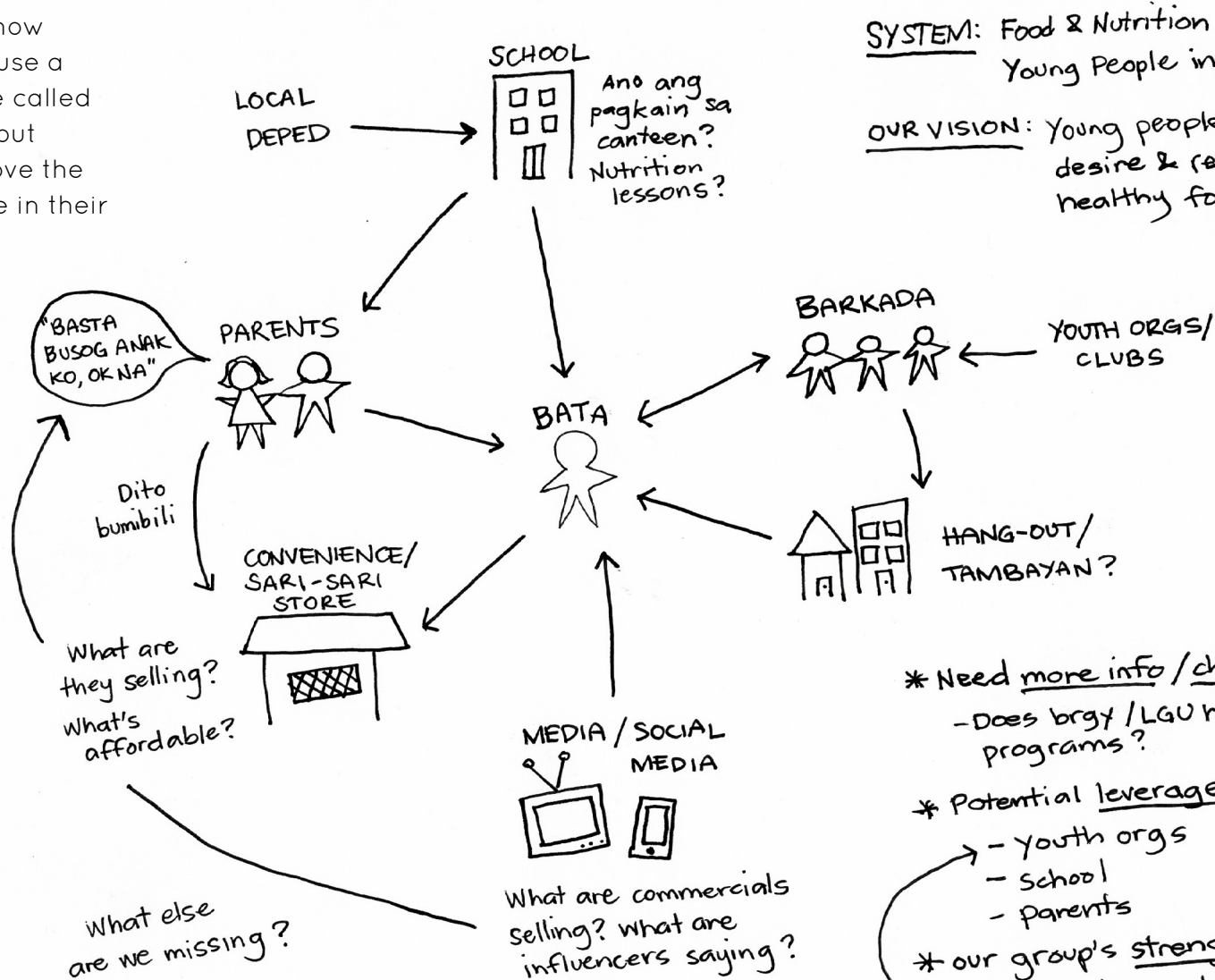
Don't forget to **check your assumptions and biases** which may affect how you understand a system. This is why it is important to bring together people with diverse points of view when you are mapping and to **make sure that the different voices and perspectives of a community are represented.**

RICH PICTURE DRAWING

Understand the System



This is an example of how a youth group could use a simple mapping exercise called Rich Pictures to think about how they can help improve the nutrition of young people in their community.



SYSTEM: Food & Nutrition for Young People in our Barangay

OUR VISION: Young people have the knowledge, desire & resources to eat healthy food

* Need more info / check assumptions:
- Does brgy / LGU have youth or nutrition programs?

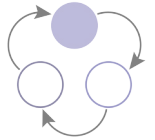
* Potential leverage points:

- Youth orgs
- School
- Parents

* our group's strengths/resources:
- access to popular youth orgs
- local social media following

SOME MAPPING TOOLS + EXERCISES

Understand the System



Rich Pictures

Rich pictures is one of the simplest ways of mapping a system where you draw the different players in your system and try to visually represent their world views and the relationships among these different players.

Taal Model

Adapted by ARC from the Iceberg Model

The Taal Model uses the metaphor of a volcano to show how we must look beyond an event or action and dig deeper to understand the patterns of behavior, structures, and mental models that drive these actions and can hold a problem in place.

Theory of Change

Theory of Change is a method that helps teams clearly outline how they intend to achieve the impact that they envision and identify the assumptions that they are making in each step.

5 Whys

To Find Root Causes

The 5 Why's Exercise is a simple yet effective way for us to get a sense of the root causes of a problem. We ask ourselves why a problem is occurring, check our assumptions about our answer, and then ask "why" four more times to go beneath the surface of an issue.

Empathy Mapping

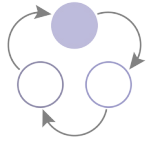
Empathy mapping is a simple tool from Human-Centered Design that helps a team develop a deeper understanding of the people who their project serves or affects. Empathy maps reflect on what a certain group of people "say, do, think, and feel."

5R Mapping

Adapted by Ashoka

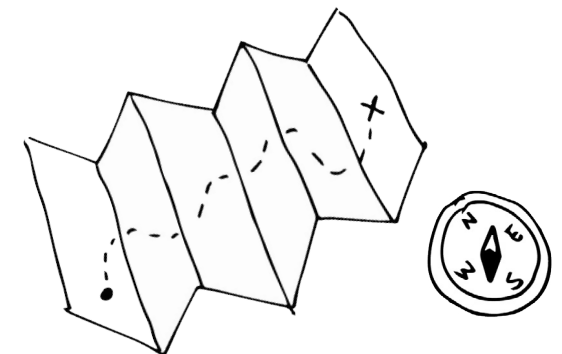
Ashoka's 5R model is adapted from a USAID framework and helps us map out a system by identifying its Roles, Relationships, Rules, Resources, and Results. It also provides a structured way of thinking about where your group should intervene in a system.

* FACILITATORS TIPS!



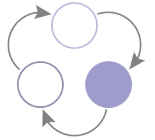
It's not all about you. One of the most common mistakes that teams make is to map the system in order to justify the existence of their project or organization. They will usually start by putting their project or team in the middle and then map out all the different groups and elements that they interact with. Encourage your team members to start by mapping what the system looks like without them in it. We are mapping to see where the gaps are and what are the most effective roles we could fill based on our own resources and skills.

Systems are alive and constantly **changing**. We always need to remind ourselves that the maps we create are only snapshots of the system at a certain time and based on our experience and perspective. Things will change and we will need to revisit and rethink our maps. Don't get too hung up on creating the perfect map because these maps are only supposed to help us discover insights and visualize the bigger picture. They are not the goal itself.



COLLABORATE

Co-Creating & Implementing Solutions



As you go through the process of mapping and understanding the system that you want to change, we hope that you will realize two things:

1 Every piece of the puzzle matters

We all have a role to play in this system and each of us can make a difference.

2 We need to collaborate with others

The problems are complex and we cannot shift the system on our own.

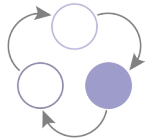
When dealing with a complex situation, we usually try to break things down into different parts and analyze these parts individually.

But we have learned in systems thinking that a system has to be seen as a whole and we need to focus on the relationships and patterns happening between the different parts if we want to influence a system.

This emphasis on connections is part of the reason why collaboration is such a key part of working within systems. Systemic problems are so complex and can be overwhelming. There are limits to our own resources, energy, funds, and time. **So a truly effective systems strategy needs to be collaborative.**

COLLABORATE

Co-Creating & Implementing Solutions



***** In the previous stage, you were able to build a better understanding of the system and identify leverage points or small shifts in the system that your organization is best equipped to lead which could result in big positive changes for the community. Now comes the time to **design and implement your solutions** or project in collaboration with other partners or stakeholders in the system. This will usually include:

Building relationships and nurturing human connections.

Organizations and movements are driven by people. Collaboration in real life boils down to our ability to nurture human connections. We have to be able to listen, practice empathy, and build trust. Collaboration requires humility and an openness to learning from others, especially when we have to work with people or groups whose perspectives or beliefs may be different from our own.

Identifying shared goals.

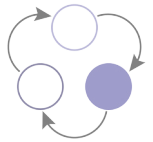
Most teams and organizations will say that they collaborate. But there is a crucial difference between trying to find partners who will help push forward your organization's own agenda versus working together to create and implement a community's shared vision. This is the challenge that many coalitions and collective action groups face.

Designing and implementing an adaptive plan.

Together with your trusted partners, you will design and implement your initiatives based on the strategic areas you identified during the mapping. One important point to remember is that the plans we create must be adaptive. This means that we know and expect that things in the system will change as we implement our plans. So we need to be prepared to shift our approaches if needed. It is impossible to predict all the potential scenarios during your planning and proposal-writing. This is why methods like Human-Centered Design or Design-Thinking are very helpful.

SOME GUIDE QUESTIONS

Collaborate



> Am I engaging people who have diverse perspectives about the system or am I only working with people who think like me and agree with my ideas?

> Based on the map of what the community needs, what am I able to do and which are the pieces that are beyond my capacity? And who are the groups in the system who can do this better than us?

> Am I partnering to scale up my operations or am I partnering to scale up my impact?

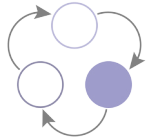
> How does my work contribute towards the goals of other teams and organizations?

> What happens after my organization and I are gone?

There is a key difference. Many times, organizations fundraise and build partnerships so that they can increase the reach of their own operations (for example, how can our team build and run more learning centers in different barangays?)

But sometimes we can have much more impact if we let go and share the idea with others (Instead of us fundraising so that our team can run more learning centers around the country, what if we open-source our learnings so that we can train and empower other community orgs on how to establish their own learning centers?)

HELPFUL TOOLS + METHODS FOR COLLABORATION



Collaborate

Bridging Leadership is a collaborative approach that focuses on the internal reflection and transformation of leaders into trust-builders. This approach helps leaders learn how to build trust and collective action among diverse groups of people. Its three phases include: 1) building a leader's ownership and responsibility over a problem; 2) developing co-ownership with other stakeholders; and 3) co-creating solutions.

The Collective Impact method is an example of a more structured process for collaboration and is helpful for tackling a systemic problem that is focused on a specific geographic area and where there are already strong local organizations who are championing collaboration.

The Collective Impact process is built on five conditions:

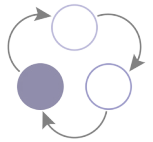
- A common agenda;
- Shared measurement systems;
- Mutually reinforcing activities;
- Continuous communication; and
- A dedicated backbone support organization

Other useful tools that you can explore for collaborative learning and trust-building are:

- > **Design Thinking**
a process that can help you co-design and try out new ideas with your partners. [Limitless Labs](#) has created a local design-thinking workshop and toolkit called [POSIBLE](#) for Pinoy communities.
- > **Open Space Sessions**
a unique way of structuring gatherings or meetings so that participants are able to create and manage their own agenda while still contributing to a common strategic theme.
- > **Recipes for Wellbeing**
a community focused on the wellbeing of changemakers; their website collects and shares helpful activities for building trust and connection

LEARN + ADAPT

Reflecting as a Team & Rethinking the Way Forward



As you collaborate and implement your initiatives, you will soon see that not everything will go according to your plans and you will have to rethink your initial proposals. This is the nature of living systems, things are constantly changing.

How many times have you been involved with a project where a partner you are working with suddenly changed their mind or an unexpected problem hits the community?

Imagine yourself as a traveler going on a long journey. You may start off with a map to guide you but if there are unexpected obstacles in your path or if you discover that the paths themselves have changed, you will need to find other ways to reach your destination. It no longer makes sense to blindly follow an out-of-date map.

Working within these dynamic and ever-changing human systems and communities means that we can no longer just design and implement a plan, we must be prepared to adapt our plans to the shifting perspectives and goals of the people involved. This is where adaptive models like the [Cynefin Framework's](#) "Probing-Sensing-Responding" approach and [Design Thinking's](#) "Empathize > Define > Ideate > Prototype > Test" cycle can be helpful.



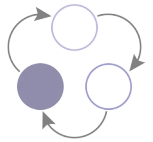
In Practice

If we go back to our example of the pandemic as a systemic problem, we can see how important it is for organizations and communities to be able to learn and adapt quickly.

In the beginning, there was so much that we didn't understand yet about the virus and how it spread. But we still had to act and respond within our communities. We didn't even know how long the pandemic would last. Even a year after the crisis started, groups had to continuously adjust their initiatives as the virus mutated. What worked before may not work again.

BUILDING A SYSTEMS THINKING TEAM




Learn & Adapt



In theory, the idea of learning from our challenges and mistakes then adjusting our approach may seem like common sense. But in practice, it can be very difficult to do. It is natural for us to want our initial plans to work out. Teams may be afraid to re-think and adjust their projects within the project cycle because funders might not allow it or view it as a failure of the organization.

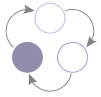
This is why it is not enough to have just one systems thinker leading the team. We need to be able to build whole teams and organizations whose culture is deeply aligned with systems thinking. This is because so much of systems work may seem counterintuitive to how organizations usually operate.

We will not be able to effectively work towards a systemic goal if we do not consciously build a systemic organization.

-  **A systemic organization incentivizes its members to try new approaches and focuses on learning from failure rather than penalizing it.**
-  **Members are comfortable looking at a situation holistically and tackling multiple problems together rather than breaking it down into individual programs and separate teams.**
-  **Systemic organizations are able to see beyond their own organization's programs and contribute towards a shared goal with other organizations.**

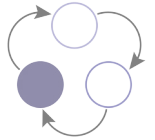
TIPS ON HOW TO SHIFT YOUR TEAM'S CULTURE

Learn & Adapt



Many teams face a challenge of shifting their internal cultures to be more aligned with systems thinking. Some local organizations that we interviewed shared a few tips for how they shifted their team cultures:

- > **Think about shifting not just the culture of your team (staff members) but also that of your volunteers and partners.**
- > Help team members see the bigger picture and “map” it by **encouraging them to participate in ecosystem events** that are outside their usual “functions” and by interacting with new systemic partners.
- > **Lead activities that can help team members reflect** on their strengths (and the value that this can bring to the system) as well as their weak points (and where collaboration in the system is crucial).
- > Although you may have identified a longer term systemic goal, be sure to **celebrate the team’s small wins** and show how it contributes to the bigger vision.
- > **Let team members lead and co-design your initiatives.** Encourage continuous learning and comfort with ambiguity by supporting team members when they learn from their failures.
- > **Show how direct service provision and systems change can and must go hand-in-hand.**



**A SYSTEMS
VIEW THAT IS
ANCHORED ON
THE GROUND**

When working and thinking about systems, we can sometimes forget that we are trying to influence larger systems so that we can improve the lives of the people we serve and live with.

We are not dealing with abstract concepts but with individual human lives, dreams, and struggles.

For this reason, many systemic organizations have chosen to make sure that part of their operations continue to be involved in serving the direct and immediate needs of their community so that their longer-term systemic work is built on empathy and an authentic and humble understanding of their communities' experiences.

WHAT'S NEXT?

How to Keep Learning

We hope that this glance into the systems thinker's mindset and process has inspired you to learn more and explore how this could help your teams and your communities.

As you search online for materials on systems thinking and systems change, you'll see that there is such a wide range of materials out there. We think it is helpful for you to know that the term "systems change" can be used to refer to several different things:

Systems Change as a

Mindset

a way of seeing the world;
also referred to as
"systemic thinking" or
"systems thinking"

Systems Change as a

Process

a way of working;
can refer to different
methodologies, frameworks, or tools
for social change

Systems Change as an

End Goal

*a vision of what
we are working towards;*
can refer to the goal or
what things should look
like once a system
has been changed

ONLINE RESOURCES

Helpful Starting Points

Guides & Toolkits

- Youth Year PH's [Systems Thinking Resources](#)
- Omidyar Group's [Systems Practice Workbook](#)
- MobLab's Guide for [Systems Thinking for Campaigning and Organizing](#)
- Ashoka's [Systems Change Crash Course](#)
- NPC's [Systems change: A guide to what it is and how to do it](#)
- [Thinking Tools Studio \(Waters Center for Systems Thinking\)](#)
- [Systems-Led Leadership](#)
- FSG's [Systems Thinking Toolkit](#)
- The Systems Thinker's [Introduction to Systems Thinking](#)
- Smart CSOs [Systems Thinking Workbook](#)

Articles

- [The Systemic Starfish \(Firetree Philanthropy\)](#)
- [Dancing with Systems \(Donella Meadows\)](#)
- [6 Concepts of Systems Thinking \(Disruptive Design\)](#)
- [System Change - Big or Small? \(SSIR - Odin Muhlenbein\)](#)

Organizations to Check Out

- [Activating Rural Changemakers](#)
- [Ecology of Changemaking](#)
- [Ashoka Philippines](#)

Courses

- [Systems Innovation](#)
- [Systems Practice \(Acumen\)](#)
- [Systems Thinking for Change \(Coursera\)](#)

Videos

- [Intro to Systems Thinking PH](#)
- [Why Use a Systems Practice \(Omidyar Group\)](#)
- [Systems Practice Mindsets \(Omidyar Group\)](#)
- [Levels of Impact \(Ashoka\)](#)
- [A Systems Story \(Systems Thinking\)](#)

A FINAL MESSAGE FOR THE FACILITATOR

We hope that you have found this guide to be a helpful tool as you explore systems thinking with your team and community.

Let's Collab!

We look forward to hearing from you and collaborating with you to improve these resources for Filipino changemakers. We designed this guide as a general overview of systems thinking and we would love to see how you could take the relevant content and tailor it with the language, messaging, and tone that is most helpful for your communities. Please reach out to us at tjm@firetree.org. We would love to hear from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide and we wish you all the best as you embark on your systems thinking journey!

As a final note, we wanted to share with you some **insights we have learned from other local systems thinking facilitators**:

- > Learning about systems thinking needs to be done within the larger context of your team's changemaking or social change initiatives. Be sure to think about how to make these insights and ideas more personal and relevant to your audience.
- > Storytelling is a very effective way to help team members understand the systems thinking mindset. Try to use stories coming from your own community that relate to the systems thinking principles and invite your team members to share their own experiences.
- > Some facilitators have shared that it has been helpful for them to first personally introduce their systems thinking experience to their team members and then invite an external speaker or practitioner who can reinforce these ideas but from a different perspective (e.g. giving global examples or examples from other fields).
- > The best way to learn systems thinking is by practicing it. Make sure to incorporate many activities and hands-on exercises as you explore the systems thinking principles. Try to create a supportive community of practice so that your team or community members continuously learn and share insights.

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