Participatory Systems Change: Engagement for Big Impact

IAP2 Webinar

July 10, 2018

SFU MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

Presenters

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Session goals

- Surface structural challenges in P2 work
- Explore P2 through a systems lens
- Identify characteristics of processes that are both systemic & democratic

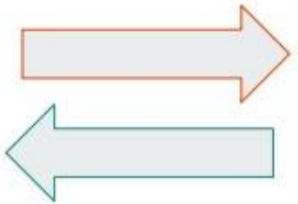
Agenda

1. Why participatory systems change?
2. What is systems thinking?
3. Characteristics of Participatory Systems Change
4. Discussion:
   - Applications to your work
   - Outstanding questions

Why link P2 and systems/design thinking?

Citizen Engagement

- Compelling story of normative legitimacy
- Can build willingness and legitimacy in decision-makers
- Can build public legitimacy, and thus resilient and sustainable policies
- Methods for mass participation



Systemic Design

- Can create deep structural change in complex systems
- Empowers participants to discover and (re)frame challenges
- Engages participants in generative co-design and co-production of the future
- Methods to engage with complexity and ambiguity

An example....

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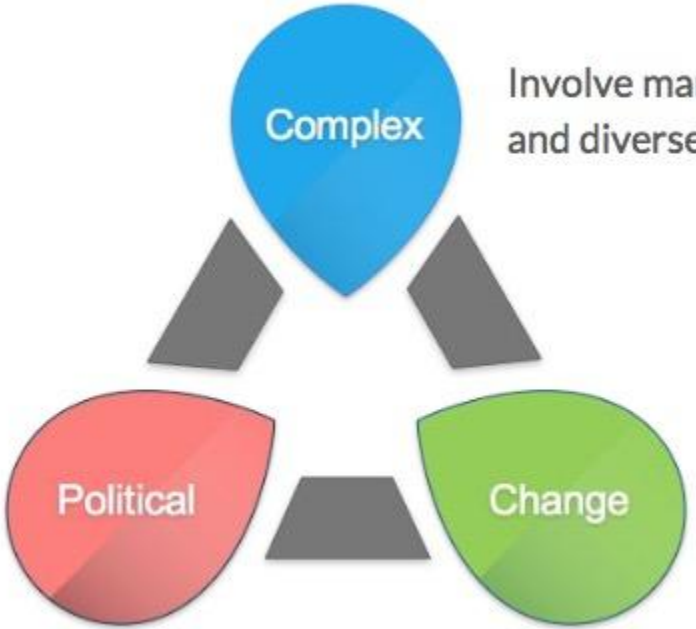
When is the systems angle most needed?



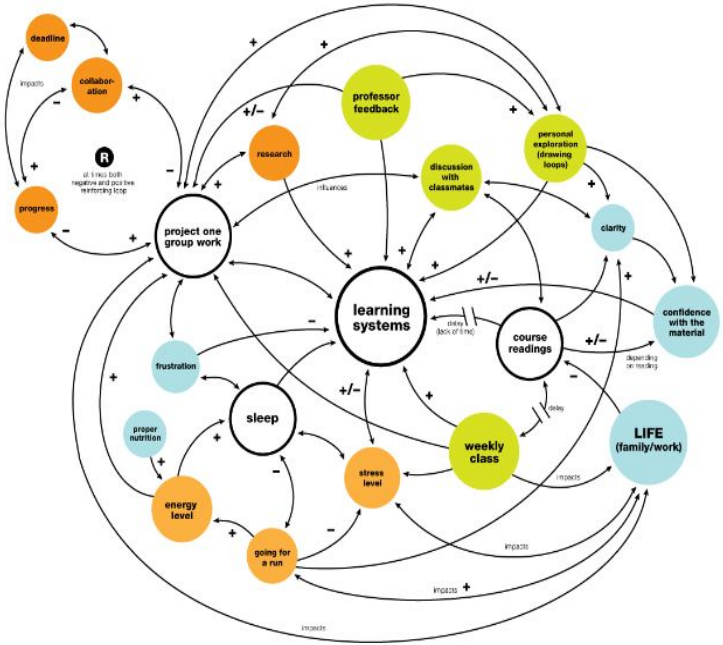
Involve many interlocking issues and diverse perspectives

Affect the future of a society or community

Requires innovative solutions and democratic will to scale & spread innovations

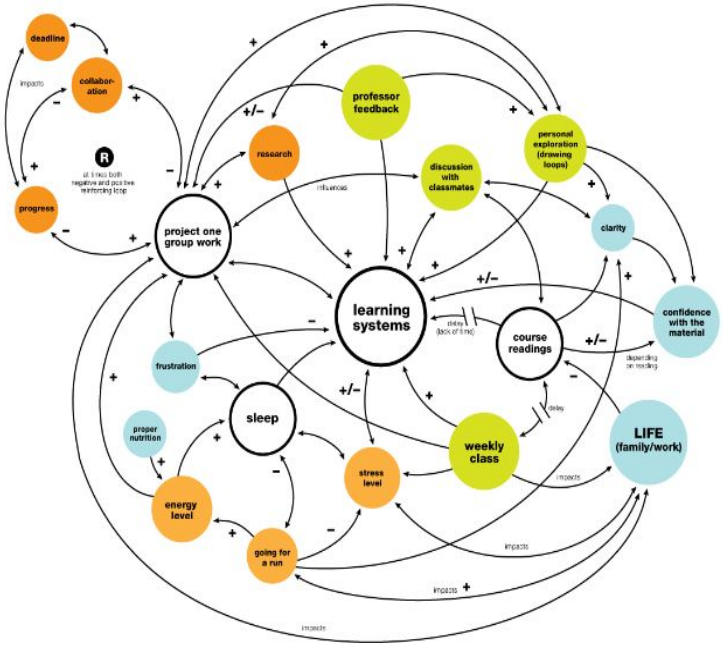
Systems Theory

- A system is “an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something” (Meadows)
- System thinking - the ability to understand those interconnections in such a way as to achieve a *desired* purpose. (Stroh)



Systems Theory Basics

- Graphic representations designed to make ideas visible, tangible, and consequential
- Enables a better negotiation of the tension between simplicity and complexity
- Places focus on interconnections and relationships between things, rather than the things themselves
- Makes the implicit (i.e. people's mental models) explicit in order to spark conversation, creativity, and continuous learning

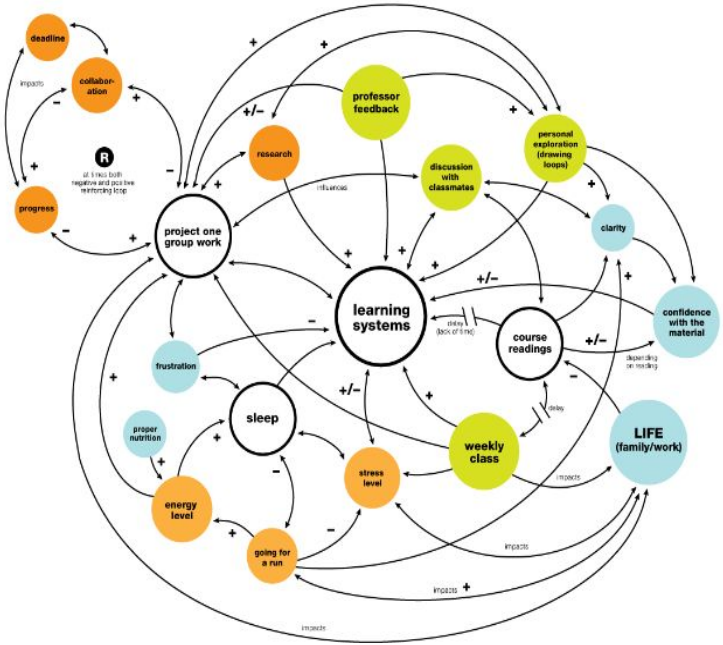


Basic Features of Systems Maps

- Systems consist of three kind of things: Elements, interconnections, and purpose

“Changing elements usually has the least effect on the system” (Meadows, 16)

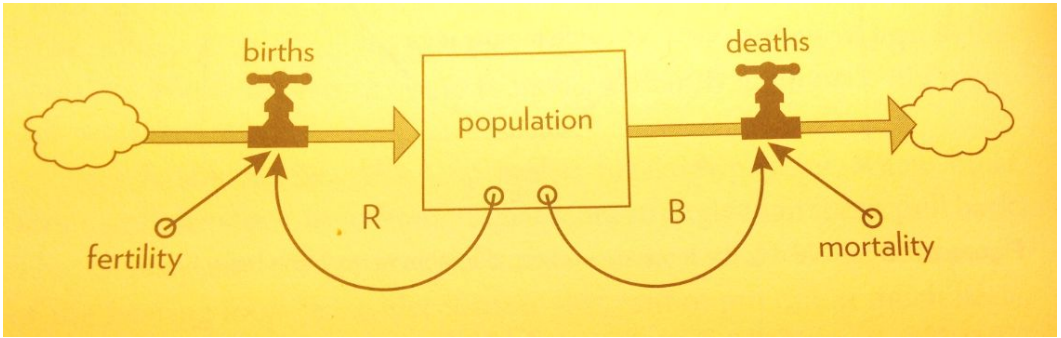
“Purposes are deduced from behavior, not from rhetoric or stated goals.” (Meadows, 14)



Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*

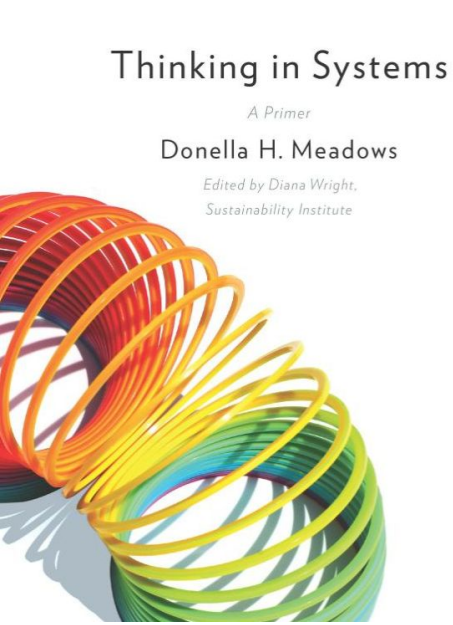
Basic Features of Systems Maps

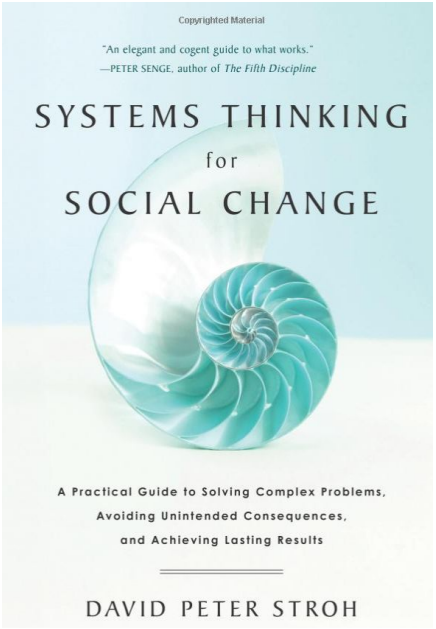
- Systems consist of three kind of things: Elements, interconnections, and purpose
- Stock, inflows and outflows
- Reinforcing (vicious or virtuous) and balancing loops
- Leverage points

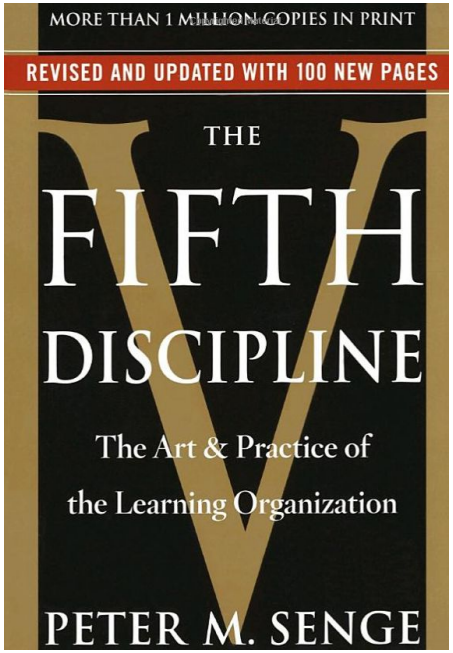


Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*

Key Systems Thinking Resources







Systems Thinking and Wicked Problem Solving™

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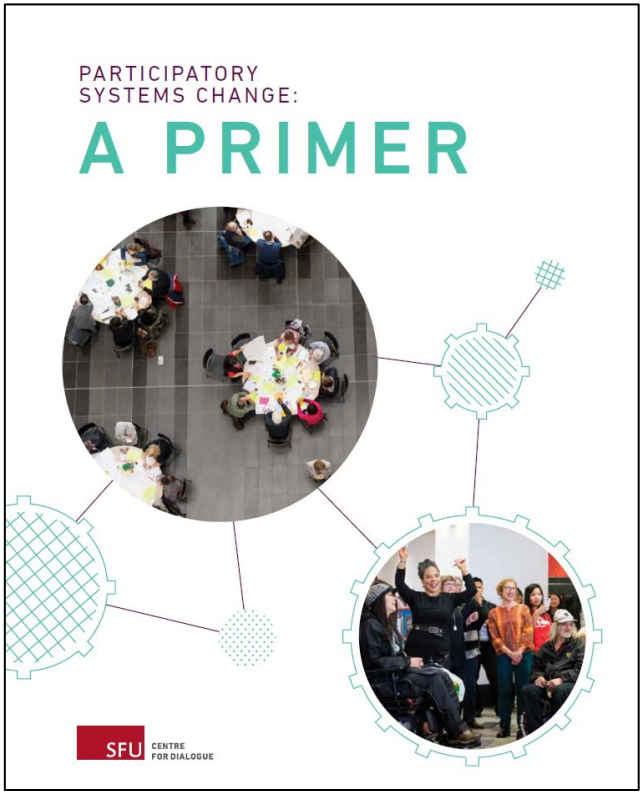
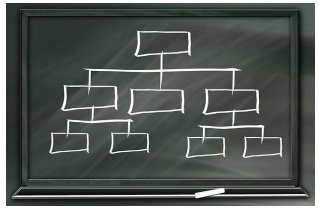
Origins of Participatory Systems Change

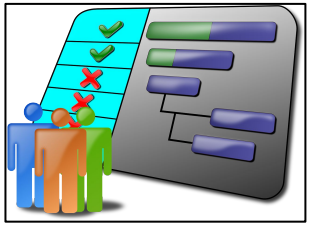
- David Kahane had initial idea to combine systems and P2 fields
- Retreat with 17 thought leaders
- Report outlines six characteristics that enable change that is both democratic and systemic: http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/watch-read-discover/participatory-systems-change.html



6 Characteristics of Participatory Sys Change...

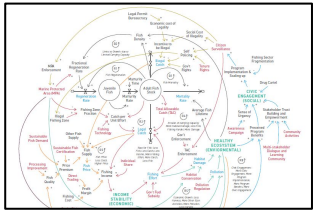
- ...uses **sponsorship & governance** models that enable participation by affected communities and enhance the ability to influence decisions/actions.
- ...recognizes that **issue framing** must enable participation across a broad range of perspectives and interests.
- ...uses **sequencing** and iterative processes to enable learning and experimentation in response to complexity.

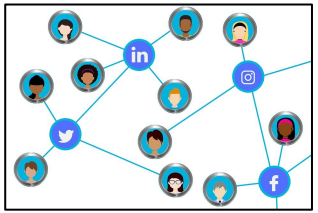




6 Characteristics of Participatory Sys Change...

- ...allows for **democratic exchanges** to work through values trade-offs and come to informed judgement.
- ...applies methods of analysis to **address complexity** and identify opportunities to affect change.
- ...leverages mass communications strategies to broaden reach of democratic exchange, reach necessary scale to sustain change, and build a **shared public narrative**.





Back to the real world

- PSC is hard! It most often remains aspirational (for us too).
- Traditional approaches are not “bad” (right tool for the right job).
- Case studies to clarify concepts:
  - Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review (not PSC)
  - Generation Energy (could turn into PSC)

Example - Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review

For each measure on the ballot, a panel of 24 randomly selected and demographically and politically diverse voters is assembled.

Over a four-day review, the panel hears directly from campaigns for and against the measure and calls upon policy experts to collect high quality information.

The panel drafts a Citizens' Statement highlighting the most important findings, including the best reasons to vote for the measure, and the best reasons to vote against it. The Statement is distributed widely so that all voters can benefit from it.

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Credit: www.healthydemocracy.org

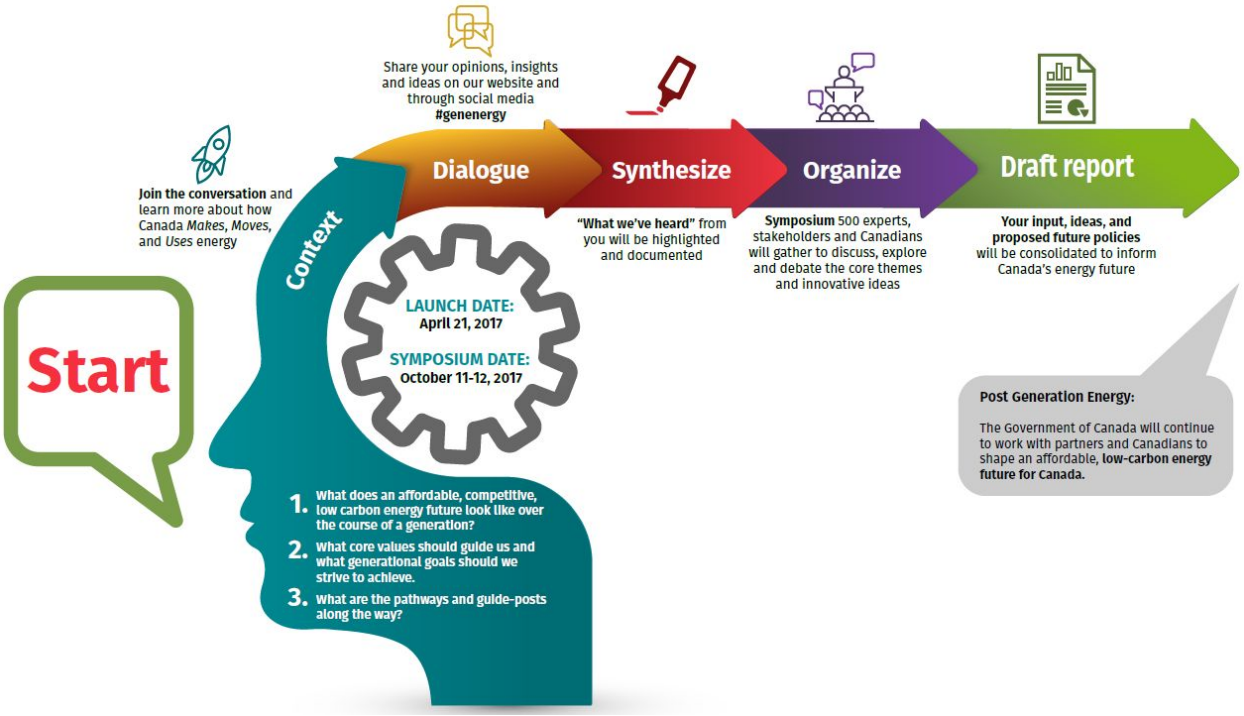
Example - Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review

The OCIR is a fantastic process to deepen democratic engagement around referenda. It is not PSC, nor is it systemic in nature. But it is useful to clarify/contrast concepts:

Sponsorship & governance for inclusion/impact ✔	Democratic exchange = informed judgement ✔
Framing enables broad participation ?	Methods of analysis address complexity X
Sequencing supports learning X	Mass comms builds "shared public narrative" ✔

Best suited for yes/no issues rather than "wicked problems"

Example - Generation Energy



> Gen Energy Council

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Example - Generation Energy

Generation Energy was recognized internationally for the scale of its engagement.

Sponsorship & governance for inclusion/impact	✔	Democratic exchange = informed judgement	✔
Framing enables broad participation	✔	Methods of analysis address complexity	TBC
Sequencing supports learning	(½)	Mass comms builds shared public narrative	TBC

It is not yet PSC, but could evolve into this in the future.

Recap - Characteristics of PSC

- **Sponsorship** & governance designed for inclusion/impact
- **Framing** enables broad participation
- **Sequencing** supports learning
- **Democratic** exchange results in informed judgement
- Methods of analysis **address complexity**
- Mass comms builds shared **public narrative**

It is not yet PSC, but could evolve to this in the future

Discussion / Q&A

Where might Participatory Systems Change be most helpful in the context of your work?

Acknowledgements

- Idea for 2016 Citizen Involvement and Systems Change Retreat and PSC field originate from Dr. David Kahane.
- Additional retreat advisors: Matt Leighninger, Alex Ryan and Shauna Sylvester.
- PSC report co-authored by Robin Prest and Sebastian Merz.
- Retreat participants*:

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**Organizations accurate at the time the retreat was held in October 2016*

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Additional resources

- Holman, P., Devane, T. & Cady, S. (eds.) (2007). *The Change Handbook, The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, Second Edition*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
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Stay in Touch

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Full Participatory Systems Change report:
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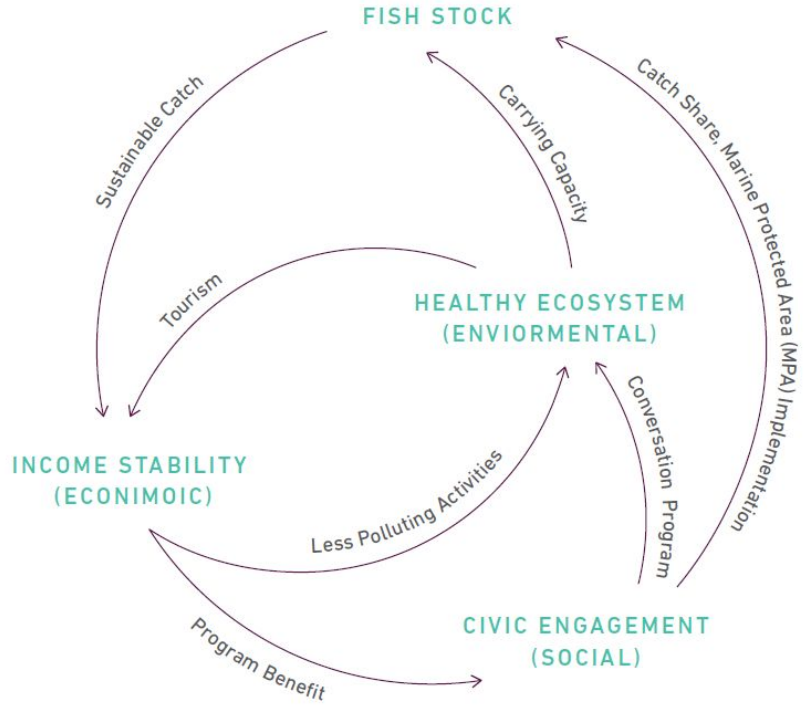
FISH STOCK
Sustainable Catch
Carrying Capacity
Catch Share, Marine Protected Area (MPA) Implementation
Tourism
HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM
(ENVIORMENTAL)
Conversation Program
INCOME STABILITY
(ECONIMOIC)
Less Polluting Activities
Program Benefit
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
(SOCIAL)