

Week 2 – Systems Thinking and Social Marketing

What is Systems Thinking?

- Systems thinking emerged from Ludwig Bertalanffy's (1949) *General Systems Theory*, and was further developed by Ross Ashby and others in the 1950s and 1960s.
- It's a way of thinking about and tackling complex problems .

Defining systems thinking

- Systems thinking can be defined as the study and gaining of understanding of how systems behave, interact and influence one another.
- Systems thinking recognises that the usual approach to analysis involving the deconstruction of problems into individual components, that we then study independently, is often ineffective for understanding complex issues.
- That type of analysis is unable to answer 'the why' questions about things. For example, you can study the pieces of a clock for eternity but never understand why a minute is as long as it is

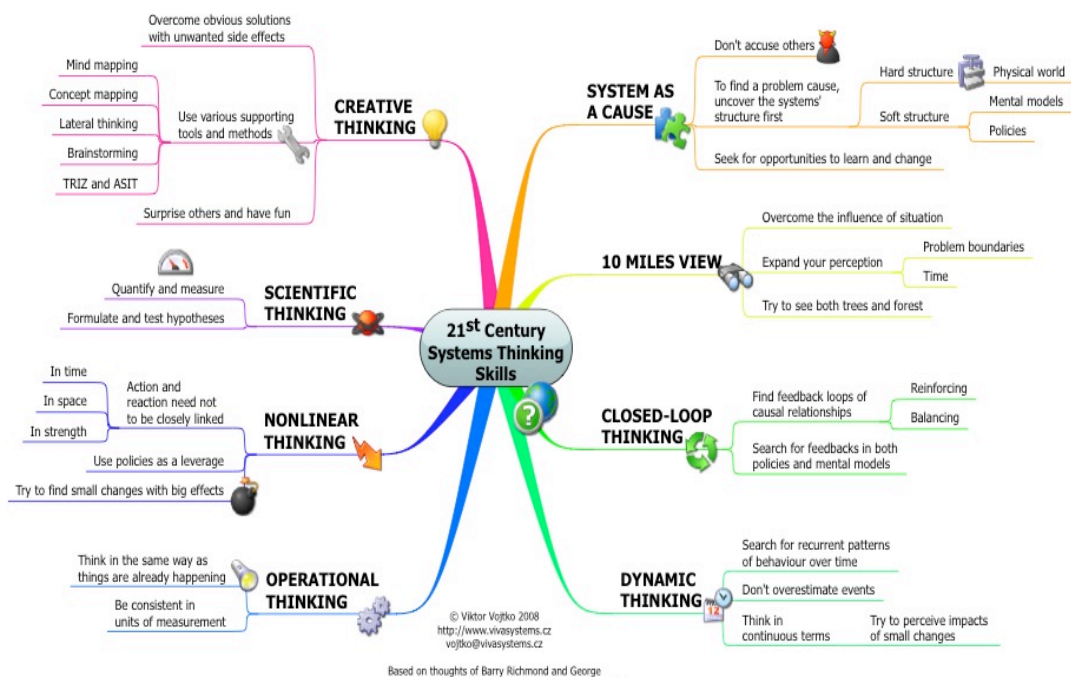
About Systems

- A system is an entity that maintains its existence through the mutual interaction of its constituent parts.
- A system also interacts with the environment it is in.
- The process of mutual interaction in a system is key, as it is through these interactions that things occur and system-level effects are felt.
- A system displays characteristics that are not created by any subset of its parts, and it exhibits discernible behaviours over time.
- Systems thinking permits us to acknowledge that systems may be relatively stable and in a state of equilibrium, but that they may also be transient, unstructured, incoherent, oscillating, chaotic or exponential
- Using systems thinking, it is possible not only to think reactively about events that have already happened, but also to think anticipatively about patterns and trends – i.e. what has been happening and what might happen.

Why is systems thinking important for social marketing?

- Social marketing is often used to what have been described as *wicked problems* (Churchman, 1967) that are difficult or almost impossible to solve due to incomplete, contradictory or changing interactions, obligations and multiple causal factors
- We need to see the big picture – currently social marketing is focused on the operational level when it also needs to focus on the strategic level.
- Macro analysis is needed – to understand the constituent parts of problems and issues, but also synthesise the whole.
- A systems approach to social marketing means applying systems thinking in all that we do, and using strategies such as individual and collective action, stakeholder engagement, interactions, the creation of links, partnerships and networks, co-created approaches to social change, and programmes operation at the micro, meso, macro, and exo level.

Doing Systems thinking



Systems as a cause thinking encourages us to not accuse others of poor decisions or actions, but to consider hard structures such as the physical environment as well as soft structures including mental models and policies as having an effect on events. This permits us to seek opportunities to all learn and change. Essentially, the behaviour of a system results from the interactions of the sub-systems within it.

Current approaches and perspectives in systems thinking in social marketing

- Proposals to introduce systems thinking in social marketing are not new Yet systems thinking in social marketing has not really taken hold and become embedded at a strategic level.
- However, one example of amore systems approach to social marketing is *Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM)* (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011).
- CBSM involves identifying barriers to desired behaviours, designing appropriate strategies using behaviour change tools, piloting strategy within the community, and evaluating a programme once it has been implemented.
- The community orientation of CBSM goes beyond individual level approaches. Through engagement, understanding and fostering interactions with community stakeholders, strategies can be more informed and reflect the multiple perspectives inherent.
- CBSM has been applied to environmental issues such as energy efficiency, use of public transport, recycling, and conservation.

For social marketing to truly embrace systems thinking this will involve:

- looking at the big picture
- mapping relevant actors
- considering multiple perspectives
- thinking critically and facilitating reflexive practice
- understanding the interactions
- acknowledging the effects of time and space
- thinking creatively
- fostering engagement, empowerment, debate and consensus building
- identifying leverage points for the development of intervention strategies

Social marketing assemblages

- One approach is the theory of *assemblage* - “*networks of hybrid, ever-shifting and heterogeneous things in which no causal factors or outcomes are invoked beyond the relationships established within and between those networks*” (Hill et al., 2014: 2).
- Recognises that systems are complex, often fluid, and not simply coherent wholes made up of the sum of their parts.
- According to assemblages theory, “*the whole is not simply a combination of interrelated parts that signify an internal connectedness*” (Gordon & Gurrieri, 2014: 268).

Actors Network Theory

- Within the assemblages paradigm, one prominent perspective to navigate the complexity of assemblages is Actor-Network Theory (ANT)
- According to ANT actors in a systems will coalesce to form impermanent and dynamic networks anchored by another actor.
- This in turn creates assemblages of a collectives – also known as an *actant*.
- Power is distributed in actor-networks, as each actant has equal agency to influence any given situation. This means that people and even objects are analysed and treated in the same manner.
- Once networks are formed they can become unstable, with changing interactions and shifting actors and coalitions occurring that cause ‘black boxes’ (Callon, 1986). These networks are persistently formed and reformed.
- ANT helps us identify that networks of actors (citizens, communities, organisations, and institutions) are not only complex and open to multiple interpretations, but also transient and constantly produced and reproduced.
- ANT tells us that we cannot simply map stakeholders, understand interactions and then develop strategy at one fixed and permanent point in time.
- ANT also enables reflexivity and critical engagement for social marketing by outlining how facts and truths are formed and then recognised through the mobilisation and equilibrium of actor-networks – it helps us understand how knowledge is constructed and how actors “define the world in their own terms” (Latour, 1999: 20).

In ANT four key moments are examined to understand how actors in a system interact:

- **Problematization** refers to how actors in a network identify and define a problem so that others recognise it as also relevant to them. This creates an ‘obligatory passage point’ where convergence occurs for all actors to be able to achieve their objectives.
- **Interessement** relates to the ways in which actors negotiate, coalesce, assume roles and form allies, which serves to stabilise identities and goals.
- **Enrolment** involves how an issue, or strategy (solution) becomes established and recognised through consensus as a fact with participation and consent proffered by actors and resistance addressed.
- **Mobilisation** refers to actors’ support for agents of the various collectives, with a strategic solution gaining credence and thereby creating a larger cohesive network that is stable enough to permit a particular solution to be enacted. By tracking how social marketing systems and collectives of actors traverse through these four moments, we can form an understanding of how events unfold.

Week 3 – Strategic social marketing

What is meant by strategic social marketing?

- Using systematic marketing principles to inform social policy selection, objective setting, planning and operational delivery that results in social good.
- Being strategic means social marketing needs to be applied

