SOCIETY OF DESIGN THINKING PROFESSIONALS NEWSLETTER

Society of Design Thinking Professionals Newsletter

FOUNDER'S SPEAK

"Elevate problem-solving through the fusion of design thinking and systems thinking. This dynamic synergy unveils a holistic canvas, fostering innovation by integrating diverse perspectives into transformative solutions."

I often come across questions like, "What sets systems thinking apart from Design Thinking?" and, "Which one is more effective?" To address these inquiries, I've put together this brief note—it's not exhaustive, but consider it a sneak peek into the subject.

Systems Thinking is essentially about grasping how elements in a context connect and create emerging patterns.

It takes insights from different fields like natural sciences, social sciences, and complexity studies. Michael C. Jackson's four commitments, laid out in "Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity" (2019), guide Systems Thinking.

It involves recognizing challenges' complexity, critically evaluating methods, welcoming diverse approaches, and prioritizing practical improvements over academic pursuits.

These commitments shape the practice of Systems Thinking:

- **Complexity Acknowledgment**: Recognizing that challenges in the world resist universal truths and the fundamental problems they pose are epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic.

- **Critical Awareness**: Employing various systems approaches flexibly with a learning attitude. Systems Thinking engages in a 'second-order' critique of systems approaches, scrutinizing assumptions about social reality and effective intervention strategies.

- **Pluralism**: Building on critical awareness, Systems Thinking recognizes that different systems approaches are partial. Consequently, to address the multi-dimensional complexity of the world, it embraces methodological pluralism.

- **Improvement**: Unlike a purely academic method, Systems Thinking is rooted in real-world practice, aiming to meet the needs of users and stakeholders by bringing about tangible improvements.

Understanding the complexities of Systems Thinking and its commitments provides a comprehensive framework for tackling complex challenges.

Happy Reading...

Dr. Jimmy Jain
Founder
Society of Design Thinking Professionals

Editor's Speak

In the past decade, Design Thinking has demonstrated success across businesses, non-profits, and government agencies by transforming creative problem-solving into structured innovation. However, a challenge arises post-prototyping, as traditional processes take over, hindering effective change management. Here, systems thinking proves vital, addressing the continuity gap by comprehensively understanding and organizing value flow across an organization's chain.

Take the example of IKEA through a lens of systems thinking. The product development and showroom experience are not just focused on people; the entire organizational system is carefully designed.

After experiencing the showroom, customers proceed to a warehouse where they independently source and procure items, rather than relying on IKEA employees. Customers even have the choice to get their purchases delivered.

Currently, IKEA is delving into digital transformation initiatives to digitize its value proposition. While Design Thinking is at the core of this experience, it's systems thinking that enables the implementation of the value proposition. It connects the front-end experience with back-end operations and orchestrates the value exchange between stakeholders, creating a more efficient organization.

Feel free to write to me at **afreen@sdtp.co.uk**, in case of feedback, input, or if you want us to cover any specific topic.

Afreen Fatima
Content & Community Manager
Society of Design Thinking Professionals

Simplifying the Complexities with Design Thinking

A system, in its fundamentals, is a complex network of interconnected elements where changes in one part have a ripple effect on the entire system. Let's bring this to life with a real-time example: imagine a bustling city as a system.
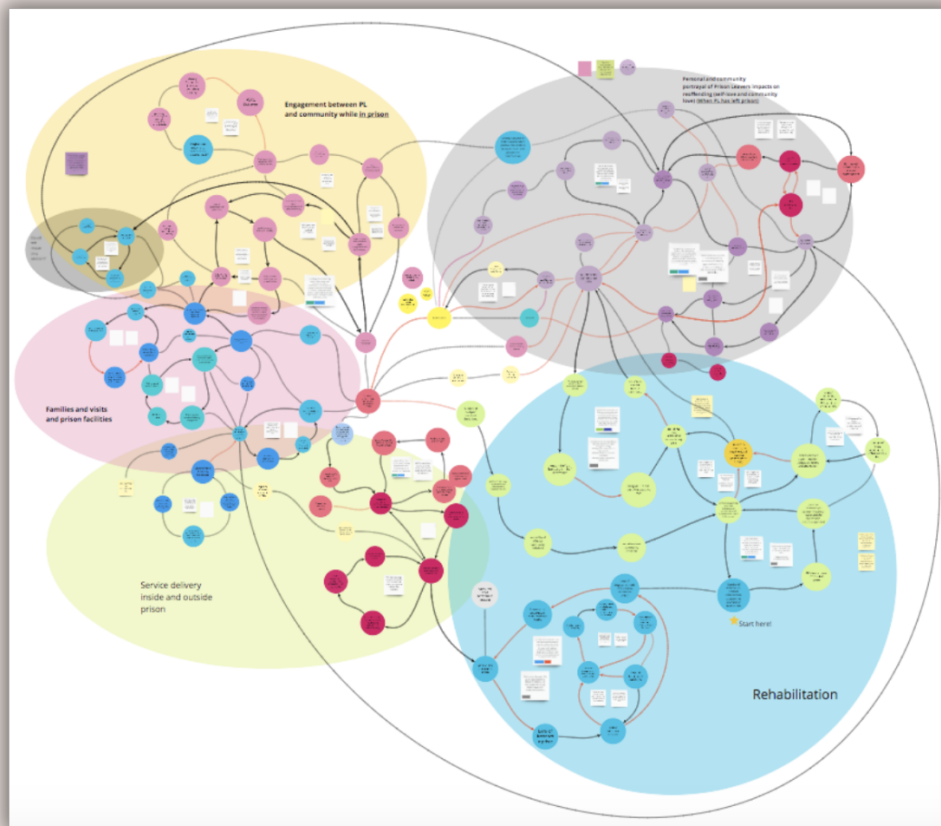
The traffic, public services, environmental factors, and societal elements are all interconnected. When we tweak one aspect, like optimizing traffic flow, it inevitably influences other parts of the system—perhaps leading to changes in air quality, public satisfaction, or even economic patterns.
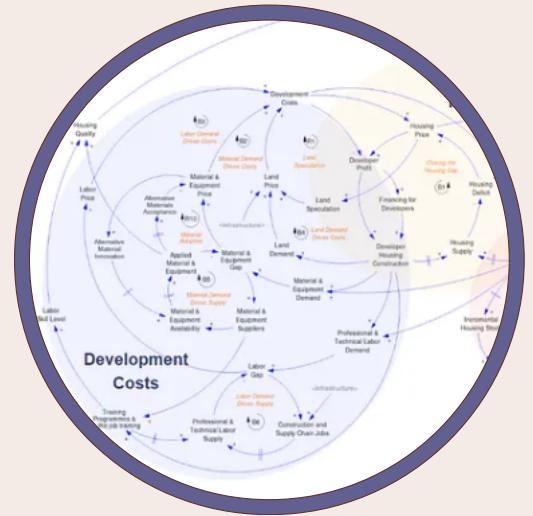
Key Tools for Systems Thinking

Systems Mapping

This visual tool helps organizations identify and map the interconnected elements within a system. It offers a holistic view, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how different components interact.


Feedback Analysis

Organizations can leverage feedback loops to understand how changes in one part of the system lead to adjustments in other areas. This tool aids in predicting and managing system dynamics.

Causal Loop Diagrams

By illustrating the cause-and-effect relationships within a system, it provides a clear visual representation, aiding in the identification of reinforcing or balancing loops.
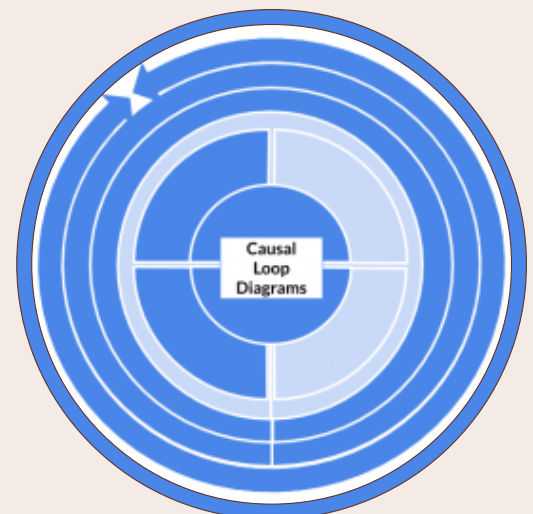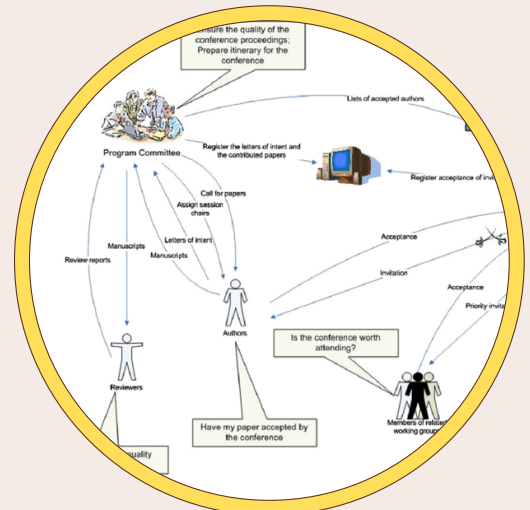
# Key Tools for Systems Thinking
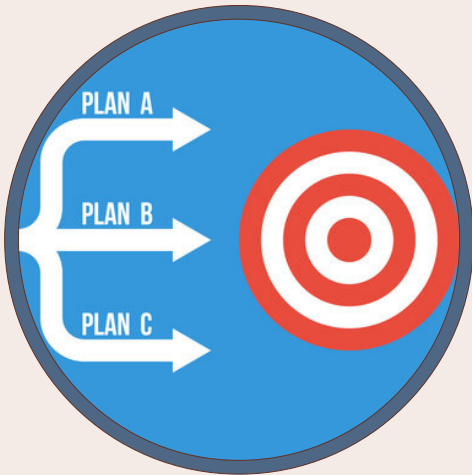
Scenario Planning

Considering various future scenarios helps organizations anticipate potential changes and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Rich Pictures

This tool involves creating visual representations that capture the diverse aspects of a system, fostering a shared understanding among team members.

Systems and Design Thinking Together: A Holistic Approach
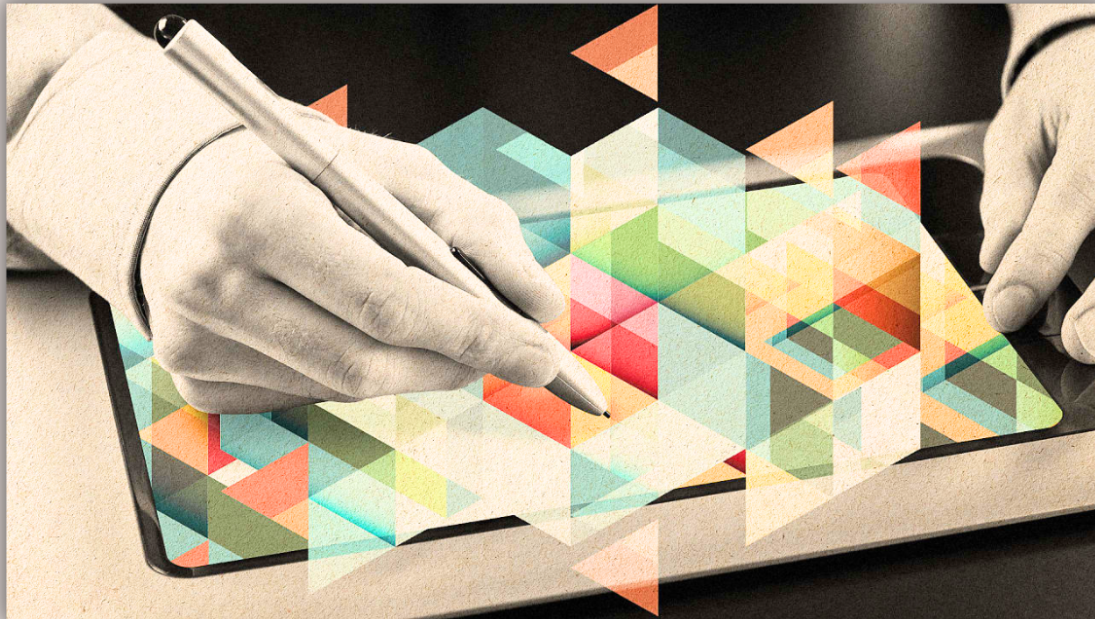
Design Thinking, at its core, is a user-focused design approach that transforms how products, services, processes, and organizations are developed. It revolves around understanding customers' specific needs, utilizing quick prototyping, and nurturing a culture of innovative idea generation. This method shifts decision-making away from relying solely on historical data or risky instincts, encouraging dependence on tangible evidence.

A pivotal aspect of Design Thinking lies in its fusion of what is desirable from a human perspective with technologically feasible and economically viable elements.

This convergence (Systems and Design Thinking) is strategically categorized into three dimensions:

Desirability (People):
In this dimension, the focus is on what resonates with individuals—what makes sense for them and aligns with their needs and aspirations.

Feasibility (Technology):
Moving to the technological dimension, the consideration revolves around what is technically achievable within the foreseeable future. This ensures that creative ideas are not just dreams but tangible possibilities.

Viability (Business):
Lastly, the business dimension delves into what is likely to become an integral part of a sustainable business model. This dimension is crucial for translating creative concepts into economically viable and enduring solutions.

SDTP
Society Of Design Thinking Professionals

Systems Thinking, which highlights interconnectedness, perfectly complements Design Thinking—a user-focused approach. Think of it like a symphony, where both methods blend seamlessly for a harmonious result.

- **Mindset Shift:** Systems thinking facilitates a shift from a linear to a circular mindset. Recognizing that everything is interconnected, lays the groundwork for holistic problem-solving.

- **Understanding User Needs:** While Design Thinking concentrates on understanding customer needs, Systems Thinking broadens this perspective to comprehend the entire system influencing the customer. It's a marriage of empathy and systemic awareness.

- **Clarity through Systems Mapping:** As demonstrated in the real-world example of traffic violations in Chennai, Systems Mapping offers clarity by revealing the interconnected elements contributing to a specific issue. This broader view is immensely helpful for researchers in constructing theories and analyzing qualitative data.

> *Design Thinking isn't just about products; it's about understanding people, embracing empathy, and transforming relationships. It's a transformative journey, shaping leaders and communities, and becoming a way of life."*

Nagaraj is a Global Learning and Development Leader at SoftwareOne, leading L&D services of Software and Cloud Services across all geographies. He brings 30+ years of rich experiences from a business perspective as a technologist, and practice leader and a learning perspective as a facilitator, coach, and Learning and development professional. As an external consultant, he has worked across industries in developing strategy practices for organizations and aligning leadership capabilities and practices to deliver strategic needs. He is a strong proponent of Design thinking, Systems thinking, and complexity thinking approaches to address the challenges we face today and in the future.

Join us in this thought-provoking session with Nagaraja as we delve into the exploration of Design Thinking from a fresh perspective. Be prepared for a discussion that offers a deeper understanding of the synergies between Design Thinking and being a better human being.

Can we use the concepts of design thinking to become better leaders, and how did it help you?

Yes, because leadership is fundamentally a community skill. A leader's existence is intertwined with the community they lead. Design thinking, focused on understanding people's needs and perspectives, plays a crucial role in intentionally becoming a leader for the community.

In design thinking, empathy is a key concept. Becoming immersive in others' lives, observing neutrally, and shedding the constant lens of one's role opens up possibilities. This approach, although challenging, is transformative for leadership development.

Can understanding design thinking and innovation make us better human beings?

Absolutely. Innovation isn't limited to the professional realm; it extends to personal relationships. By embracing the true nature of innovation, which includes emotional gestures and understanding others' perspectives, design thinking significantly impacts personal relationships.

What are the emerging trends in Design Thinking?

One notable trend is the integration of systems thinking into Design Thinking. Combining these approaches eliminates limitations imposed by practitioners and allows for more eco-friendly and sustainable innovations.

Will Design Thinking stay or be a fad?

Design Thinking will undoubtedly stay. While its form may evolve and incorporate elements from systems thinking and other methodologies, its core values of a user-centered and prototype-driven approach will persist.

Will Design Thinking become a mandatory practice for everyone over time?

Yes and no! While it may become a mandatory process in terms of widespread practice, Design Thinking shouldn't be approached as a mandatory compliance process. It needs to be a ritualized, day-to-day practice, essentially becoming a way of life.

Would you have any recommendations for SDTP so that we stay ahead of the curve?

To foster a widespread embrace of Design Thinking as an integral part of life from an early age, it is essential to extend our outreach initiatives to schools and colleges. This involves tailoring educational programs to different age groups, creating engaging game-based tools, and productizing key aspects of Design Thinking. This strategic approach aims to enhance accessibility and scalability, ensuring that the principles of Design Thinking become ingrained in the educational journey of students.

Perspectives on the Complexity of Design Thinking and Systems Thinking

Design thinking is evolving from its initial phase, where professionals exclusively held the design process. The First Generation Design methods rely heavily on the idea that professionals hold knowledge that is critical to the design and inaccessible to the user. In the Second Generation, designers embrace collaboration and external perspectives, as evident in methodologies like IDEO's Deep Dive. Ethnographic studies and interaction within the larger system enrich the design process, aligning it with elements of systems thinking, and enhancing the value of generated solutions.

"To accomplish its goals, system design cannot be a top-down operation nor can it be expertly driven. It must actively involve the stakeholders of the design in shaping a shared vision that represents their ideas, aspirations, values, and ideals."
—Kenneth C. Bausch

"The system, to a large extent, causes its behavior! An outside event may unleash that behavior, but the same outside event applied to a different system is likely to produce a different result."
— Donella H. Meadows

"For every complex problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong."
— H. L. Mencken

"Yet we act as if simple cause and effect is at work. We push to find the one simple reason things have gone wrong. We look for the one action, or the one person, that created this mess. As soon as we find someone to blame, we act as if we've solved the problem."
— Margaret J. Wheatley

A Two-Way Street

Systems thinking, with its focus on understanding the present, can sometimes be entrenched in the current state. Typically applied in fields dealing with risk management, conflict resolution, and sustainability, it tends to address issues incrementally. However, when intertwined with design thinking, a powerful hybrid discipline emerges. This fusion propels conflict resolution through innovation, not just negotiation, and transforms safety and sustainability radically. The result is the creation of novel, win-win solutions, making this combination a marriage tailored for innovation.