

Thinking and Working in Systems

GLOSSARY

5Rs Framework: The Roles, Relationships, Rules, Resources, and Results that together capture the dynamics of a system and, more importantly, help you understand a system.

Active networker: Active networkers have the most arrows pointing away from them in a system map, because they are actively pursuing relationships with numerous other actors within a system. As a result, active networkers are more likely to initiate collaboration and to distribute and promote information and ideas throughout a system.

Adapt: In the last phase in the systems strengthening cycle, you'll reengage system actors in dialogue and identify steps to adjust the interventions carried out in the Engage phase. If feedback shows that your initial intervention was a success, you may choose to scale up! On the other hand, if your original intervention didn't produce the desired results, use the Adapt phase to consider alternative interventions.

Bonding social capital: Close relationships between two or more actors. Bonding capital typically emerges among actors that work together closely, and often within a specific geographical area. Bonding capital is an important ingredient for trust and cooperation, and it facilitates the sharing of resources and ideas among a "tight-knit" community of actors.

Bridging social capital: Connections brokered by an actor within a system, usually between actors or groups of actors from different geographical locations, communities, or cliques. Bridging capital facilitates the exchange of resources, information, and support between actors that would otherwise have a hard time connecting.

Broker: Brokers have relationships with different groups of actors and have the potential to be powerful connectors and to bridge the divide between different cliques. They have what is called high "betweenness", because they sit between two or more groups and serve as a potential bridge. Although they hold the key to valuable connections, they may not be aware of the important role they play. As a result, they may not take necessary steps to make these links.

Centralised system: Centralised systems are dominated by a few key actors. In centralised systems, cliques are often disconnected “islands” of activity. They typically lack information flow and coordination, even when working in similar thematic areas.

Clique: A group of three or more actors that engage in intense interaction. Cliques are typically made up of actors that are similar and have come together because of commonalities such as geographical location, type of work, organisation type, language, ethnicity, or religion.

Collaboration areas: Collaboration areas are the types of work carried out by groups of actors within the system (i.e. advocacy, research, and organisational strengthening). Collaboration areas are also the issues about which actors go to one another for information, resources, and support, such as education, agriculture, and democracy and governance.

Decentralised system: In a decentralised system, there are low levels of concentrated interaction. Actors or cliques are only connected through a few tenuous connections. As a result, information and knowledge can be very hard to access. There is often little awareness about the various roles that actors play.

Distributed system: There is an equal distribution of engagement and exploration in a distributed system, where there is a greater number of connections among actors throughout the system. Distributed systems have greater cohesion, and more equitable flow of knowledge, information and influence.

Directionality: Directionality refers to the direction of the relationship between two actors. On a system map, the direction of the arrows between actors tell you which actor is initiating the contact with another actor for information, ideas, or resources.

Discover: During the third phase in the system strengthening cycle, you’ll work with system actors to discover the impacts of your interventions. There are several ways to this, including observing how roles and relationships have evolved overtime in the system map and by asking system actors for feedback about the interventions.

Domination: A common system roadblock, domination occurs when there is an over-dependence on certain key actors for information, ideas, and support within a system. This can stifle access to new and innovative ideas and prevent system actors from access new resources.

Engage: Engage is the second phase in the systems strengthening cycle. During the Engage phase, work with system actors to envision a future system that will be better able to achieve

desired outcomes. From there, you'll work together to identify, design, and implement a set of interventions designed to help you get closer to that better, future system.

Engagement: The level of interaction within a clique. Engagement is measured by counting how often a clique member interacts with a fellow member.

Exploration: The extent to which members are building relationships outside of the clique is exploration. Exploration is measured by counting how often a clique member interacts with another actor from outside their clique.

Feedback: Information from a person about something they have experienced – or are experiencing. Feedback helps you create a more complete and nuanced picture of the system including its limitations and strengths, providing insights into human thoughts, feelings, and perspectives playing out among actors.

Four Actions Framework: The Four Actions Framework is a tool developed by Blue Oceans Strategy. This tool can be used to identify actions that need to be taken to move from the current system to a future, better functioning system. The possible actions are: Create, Reduce, Eliminate, and Raise.

Frequency: Frequency refers to the frequency of interaction between two actors within a system map. When two individuals or organisations interact frequently, they are more likely to exchange ideas and coordinate. This usually indicates a stronger relationship. Frequency is represented by the thickness of the link between actors and is determined by asking how often actors interact. Actors that interact more frequently have thicker links, while, those who interact less frequently have much thinner lines.

In-Degree: An in-degree arrow faces towards an individual or organisation on a system map. An in-degree arrow means that another actor is coming to this individual or organisation for information or resources.

Influencer: Influencers have relationships with other prominent actors, like resource hubs and active networkers. Because of their prominent position, influencers have the potential power to shape an agenda, set or reset norms and expectations, or convince other organisations about the merits of a programme or a new idea.

Insularity: A common system roadblock, insularity results when actors only engage with others like themselves--who speak the same language, come from the same region, or share the same

opinions and beliefs. Insularity limits opportunities for collaboration. Each clique is at risk of groupthink, or when ideas are not challenged by others.

Link: A line used to represent a relationship between two actors in a system map. Links often include arrows on one or both ends to indicate the direction of the relationship between actors.

Listen: The first phase in the systems strengthening cycle, Listening is the process of understanding the current system through the perspectives of diverse actors in the system. The Listen phase includes mapping and analysing the actors in the system; collecting feedback from system actors; and dialogue with actors about the system.

Marginalized: Actors on the periphery of a system with few or no connections with other actors.

Node: A dot or square used to represent an individual actor in a system map.

Out-degree: An out-degree arrow faces away from an individual or organisation in a system map. Out-degree means that the actor is seeking information or resources from another entity.

Preferential attachment: A common system roadblock, preferential attachment is when actors, particularly local ones, pursue relationships with dominant actors, like highly influential international or local actors. Organisations may attach themselves to dominant actors in hopes of securing funding or to influence others.

Reach: The number of actors or percentage of a system that can be accessed within two degrees of separation.

Reciprocal ties: Arrows facing both directions between two actors within a system map. This means that these two actors go to one another for information, ideas, and support. Reciprocal ties generally indicate a stronger exchange than one-way in-degree or out-degree interactions.

Resource hub: Resource hubs are actors that have the most arrows pointing towards them, relative to other actors on a system map. Resource hubs are an important source of information, ideas, and resources within the system.

Roadblock: Obstacles or traps that prevent a system from functioning well.

Snowball effect: This refers to the organic growth of an online system map. You start by inviting five actors to map, those five each invite five more, and those twenty-five each invite five more. The map begins to grow exponentially and to reflect the real-life system.

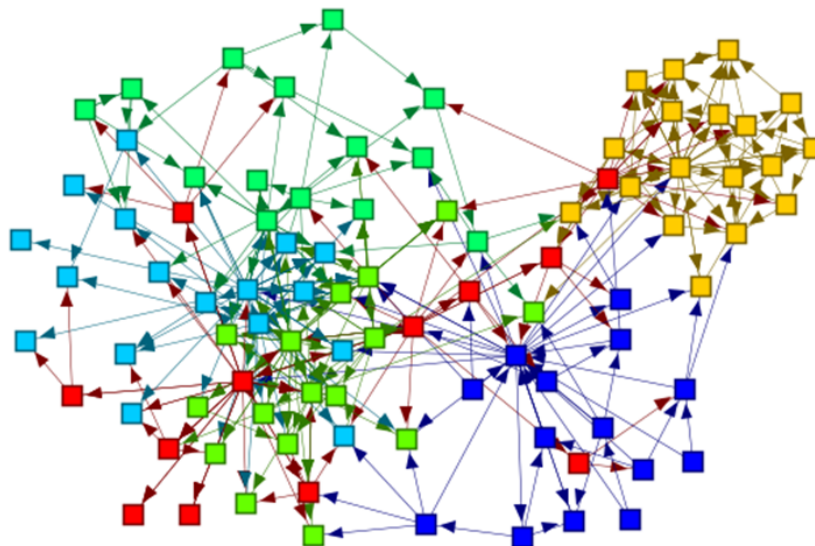
Social capital: The social networks that bind people, organisations, and systems together. At the core of social capital is trust. Without it you can't build meaningful relationships and facilitate system-wide collaboration. Social capital enables organisations to rally together around collective action and access innovative ideas, information, and resources in a system.

Sphere of influence: Organisations within three degrees of separation that can be reached through relationships with mutual connections. These are organisations that can be influenced by your work and from which you can access information, ideas, and resources.

System: A group of people, organisations or institutions, called actors, that are connected by a web of relationships and interactions.

System analysis: Systems analysis critically evaluates the various elements of a system, including the 5Rs: Roles, Relationships, Rules, Resources, and Results.

System map: A visual representation of real life human interactions taking place every day within a system. A system map can take many shapes and sizes, but it generally looks something like this:



System strengthening: To improve a group of actors' ability to achieve a goal, by improving their ability to work together. In other words, systems strengthening empowers and connects actors to create and sustain a greater impact than an individual could achieve on their own.

System strengthening cycle: Listen, Engage, Discover, and Adapt. See definitions of Listen, Engage, Discover, and Adapt for more information.

Systems thinking: An approach that helps you understand how the issues you work on are part of a larger system that include many actors and helps you uncover the numerous factors that influence your programmes that are not always immediately obvious.