Addressing challenges faced by systems thinking students in implementing their knowledge in their everyday organisational activities

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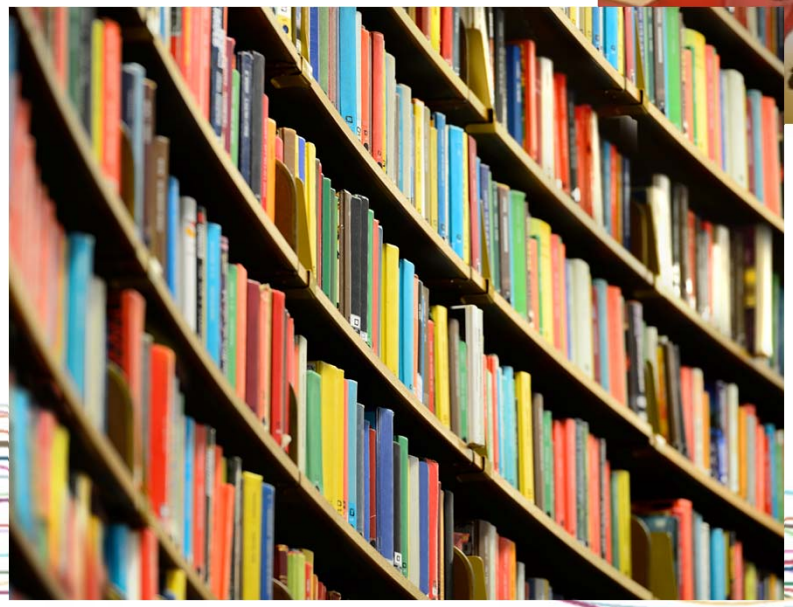
Agenda

- Introduction
- Sharing stories
- Ideating to emerge new ways forward

Reducing the Gap between learning and doing

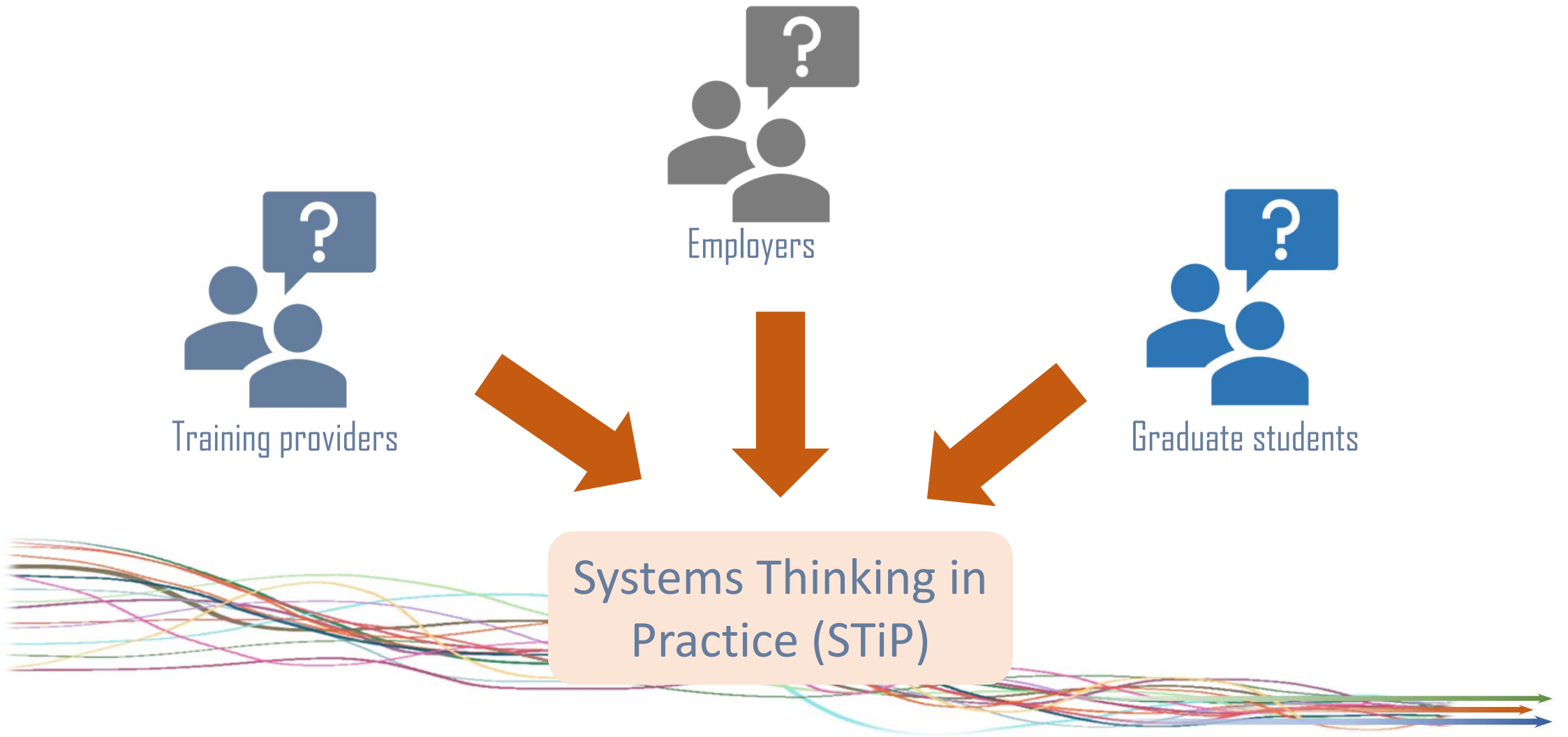
- The situation this workshop is seeking to explore and converse about is a disconnect between learning and practice.
- Specifically, between systems thinking competencies learned by potential practitioners and these practitioners implementing the competencies in their workplaces to achieve improvements in their organisation's wicked problems.

Gap between learning and doing



1 Wile E Coyote falling off a cliff – Looney Tunes Cartoon

Whose responsibility?



The Parameters of the Gap

Linear Thinkers	Systems Thinkers
Break things into component pieces	Are concerned with the whole
Are concerned with content	Are concerned with process
Try to fix symptoms	Are concerned with the underlying dynamics
Are concerned with assigning blame	Try to identify patterns
Try to control chaos to create order	Try to find patterns amid the chaos
Care only about the content of communication	Care about content but are more attentive to interactions and patterns of communication
Believe organizations are predictable and orderly	Believe organizations are unpredictable in a chaotic environment

Ollhoff, J. and Walcheski, M. (2018) Making the Jump to Systems Thinking. in Systems Thinker.

Workshop focus

How can this gap be reduced?

Day-to-day issues for STiP practitioners – 'the whole'

Systemic Thinking

Properties of a whole differ; they are said to emerge from their parts —e.g., trust cannot be understood, or exist, other than through the enactment of relational dynamics, i.e., trust emerges from relationships with specific qualities. ***The whole is different from the sum of its parts.***

Systematic Thinking

A whole can be under- stood by considering just the parts through linear cause-effect mechanisms. ***The whole is the sum of the parts***.

Some Implications for Praxis

It is helpful to surface understandings about causality amongst participants in collaborative projects —using multiple cause diagramming is one way to do this; a choice can be made to see STiP as a process of managing for emergence (systemic) or to meet predetermined goals (systematic).

Ison, R. L. (2024). Exploring the conceptual and practical affordances of duality and dualism. In: Reyes, A. and Perko, I. eds. Addressing challenges of an uncertain world: A CyberSystemic approach. Ibagué, Colombia: Ediciones Unibagué, pp. 335–364.

Day-to-day issues for STiP practitioners – 'boundaries'

Systemic Thinking

Boundaries of systems are determined by the perspectives of those who participate in formulating them. The result is a system of interest.

Systematic Thinking

Systems exist as concrete entities; there is a correspondence between the description and the described phenomenon.

Some Implications for Praxis

Awareness and choice are key concerns; awareness of the limitations of the everyday use of the word 'system' can help practice, especially surfacing boundary-judgments.

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Day-to-day issues for STiP practitioners – 'perspectives'

Systemic Thinking

Individuals hold partial perspectives of a situation framed as a whole; when combined, these provide multiple partial perspectives.

Systematic Thinking

Perspective is not important.

Some Implications for Praxis

Has implications for who participates in the STiP and how different perspectives are managed in the process of performing STiP.

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Day-to-day issues for STiP practitioners – ethics'

Systemic Thinking

Ethics are perceived as being multi-levelled as are the levels of situations understood as systems themselves. What might be good at one level might be bad at another. Responsibility replaces objectivity in 'whole-systems' ethics.

Systematic Thinking

Ethics and values are not addressed as a central theme. They are not integrated into the change process; the researcher takes an objective stance.

Some Implications for Praxis

It is not possible to reconcile 'objectivity' with ethicality and responsibility in the doing of STiP – they belong to different traditions (not to be confused with doing some things systematically within a systemic framing.

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STiP Practitioner's experience

"Adopting a systems approach takes persistence and curiosity. Being the sole systems thinker in a linear thinking organization can be a lonely place. People will not understand you. You'll feel like you're walking around with two heads… whenever you talk, people will be confused."

Ollhoff, J. and Walcheski, M. (2018) Making the Jump to Systems Thinking. in Systems Thinker.

Workshop Activities

- Introduction participants, context, issue and process. (Plenary – 10 mins)
- Sharing stories about the STiP gap between 'learning and application'. Clustering the related experiences. (Small groups and Breakout Rooms – 20 mins)
- Creating, sharing and critiquing responses to manage the issue. (Speed Stating – 40 mins)
- Collating and discussing insights from Workshop activities. (Plenary – 20 mins)

Speed Stating (Face-to-face space)

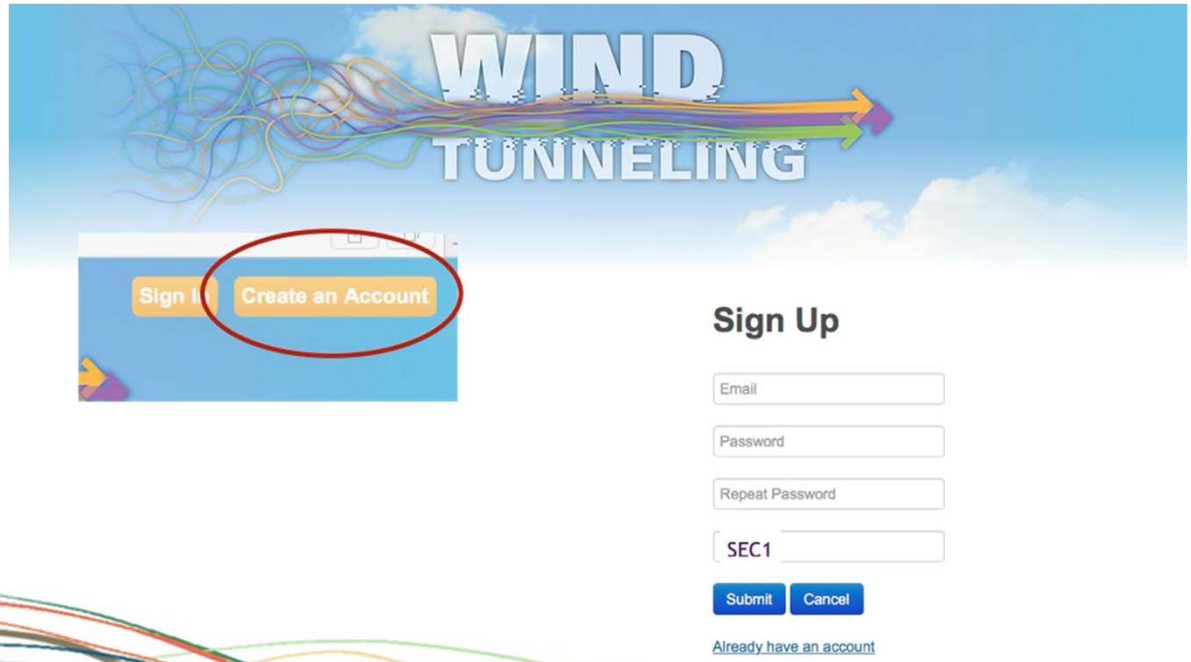
- Each participant has an A3 sheet of paper with a 5cm oval drawn in centre of sheet.
- Each participant writes in the oval a way of reducing the 'gap' on which they would like to tap the collective wisdom in the room.
- Each participant's sheet is passed around the room with everyone adding their knowledge, aim at improving the suggestion, to each sheet as it reaches them. Continue until sheet returns to originator.
- Originator studies all the collected knowledge to emerge new insights, themes and action options.

Speed Stating (Virtual space)

- Each participant signs into the WindTunneling software
- Each participant goes to Contribution page, selects 'Reducing the Gap' category, enters a short headline to highlight the focus of their suggestion, enters details of their way for of reducing the 'gap' on which they would like to tap the collective wisdom in the room.
- Go to See Outcome page and select the first listed Outcome, select Respond button and enter a thought to improve the suggestion, save and repeat for all other listed Outcomes.
- When all completed the originator of an outcome, studies responses, then returns to Contribution page and selects 'Recommendation' category and enters their amended idea.

Windtunneling instructions

Go to https://join.windtunneling.com
Project code: alara



References

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THANK YOU