Busting Silos: Taking a Systems Approach to Program Implementation



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Today's Agenda

- Build a definition of systems thinking
- Discuss the types of silos that exist at our institutions
- Share examples of how those silos impact program implementation
- Develop organizational analysis maps or organizational scanning strategies
- Determine how to use systems thinking in a program implementation or change initiative

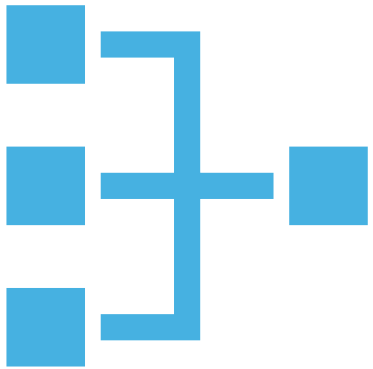
What is systems thinking?

- What do you think of when you think of a system?
  - Drop some ideas in chat



Biology: A system is a group of organs or biological components working together to perform complex functions essential to life.

Engineering: A system is a collection of components organized to achieve a specific goal or function, often involving inputs, processes, and outputs.



Psychology: A system is a dynamic network of mental processes or social interactions influencing behavior and cognition.

History: A system is a structure of social, economic, or political organization that evolves over time.

Sociology: A system is a patterned network of relationships, norms, institutions, and roles that organize social life.

Systems Definition

Key ideas:

- Interconnected parts
- Boundaries
- Inputs and outputs
- Rules or structures that guide behavior
- Emergent behavior

Organization Development: A system is a dynamic network of people, structures, processes, and cultures that interact to produce organizational outcomes. In OD, organizations are viewed as **open systems** — constantly influenced by and influencing their environment.

What is Systems Thinking?

- What are you paying attention to when you are “systems thinking”?
- Drop your ideas in chat

Systems thinking is a way of seeing and understanding how the parts of an organization — people, processes, structures, and policies — are **interconnected** and how those connections influence outcomes over time.

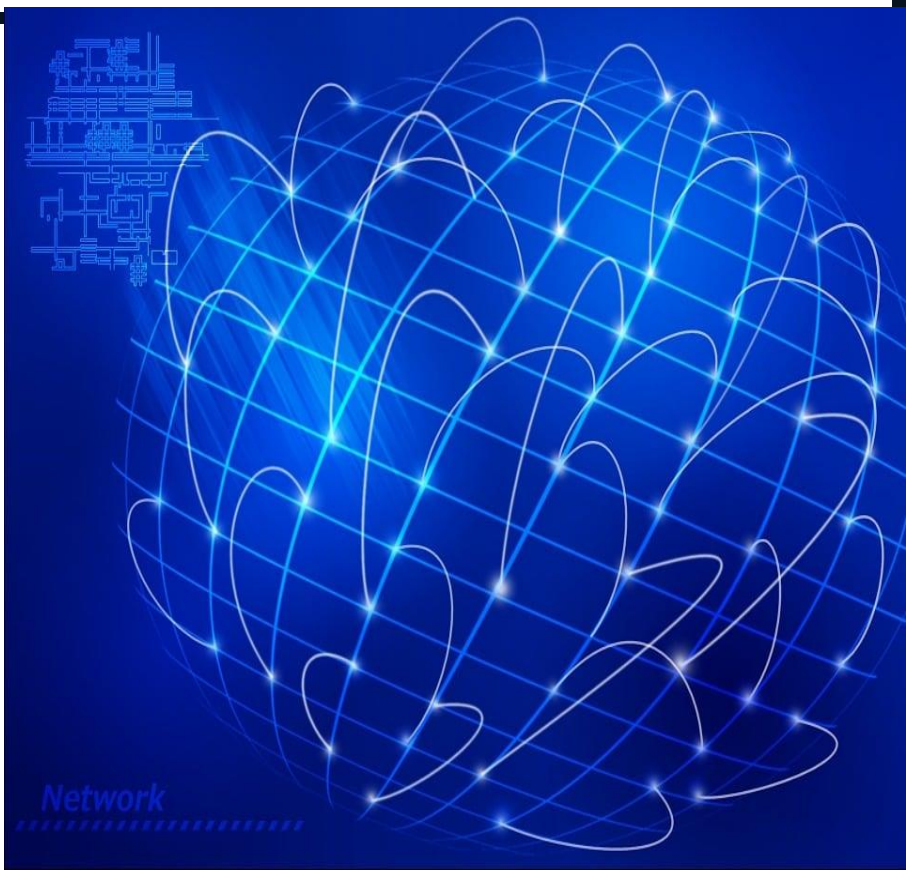
- See beyond silos to understand the whole
- Identify reinforcing, conflicting or overlapping processes
- Map relationships, redundancies, and gaps that affect implementation
- Explore ripple effects of change
- Shift from fixing symptoms to addressing underlying system patterns

Higher Education as a System



- Complex Adaptive Systems
- Loosely Coupled Systems
- Multiple Organizational Cultures
- Distinct customs and procedures
  - Prestige economy and highly educated members
  - Desire for high independence
  - Governance and tradition
  - Competition
  - Role Ambiguity
- What are some other characteristics of HE systems?

Higher Ed: Complex Adaptive Systems View



- A living system of people, processes and ideas that constantly adapt, evolve and respond to change
- Key Characteristics
  - Non-linear
  - Emergent
  - Self-organizing
  - Adaptive
  - Decentralized
- Implications:
  - Change spreads through networks, not directives
  - Experimentation and feedback drive progress
  - Create conditions not control of outcomes
  - Local context matters

David Snowden, Jill Jameson, Paul Trowler, Margaret Wheatly

Higher Education: Loosely Coupled Systems



- Parts of the organization are **connected but operate independently** — they influence each other, but not tightly or predictably.
- Key Characteristics
  - Autonomy
  - Weak but real connections
  - Change doesn’t ripple automatically
  - Buffers and flexibility
- Implications
  - Parts function semi-independently
  - Centralized plans may not lead to consistent implementation
  - Use sensemaking, dialog, local ownership

Karl Weick

Higher Education: Multiple Cultures

- Higher education isn't one culture — it's a mix of **coexisting, sometimes competing subcultures** shaped by roles, disciplines, values, and traditions.
  - Academic
  - Collegial
  - Managerial
  - Developmental
  - Advocay/Equity
  - Innovation/Entreprenurial
- Implications
  - Navigate and align with multiple cultures
  - Tensions between cultures
  - Build coalitions and frame change in meaningful ways

William H. Bergquist and Kenneth Pawlak- Engaging Six Cultures of the Academy

The Challenge(s) of Silos

- Resistance
- High workload
- Competing initiatives
- Unexamined processes
- Misalignment between initiative goals and implementation
- Lack of awareness (students, faculty, staff)
- Limited resources
- Duplicative efforts
- Lack of cohesive experience for students
- Collapse of initiative

What are the challenges you are concerned about? Drop a few in the chat.

Redesign the General Education Program

Guided Pathways Initiative

Developmental and AELP Co-requisite Initiative

OER Initiatives

Experiential Learning in the Major

Community Engaged Teaching Initiative

Course Enrollment Maximization

Processes- Feedback Loops
1. Curriculum Process
2. Program Review
3. Transfer- Receiving
4. Course Descriptions/Catalog
5. Financial Aid
6. Course Scheduling

Groups and People
1. Curriculum
2. Student Affairs
3. Registrar
4. Deans and Associate Vice Presidents
5. Chairs with Majors program

Timeline:
18 Months start to finish (ended up being 2 years)

Processes- Feedback Loops:
1. GE Course Application
    1. Redesign
    2. Review
2. Compliance and Removal
3. Assessment- course and program level

Changes
1. Reduce # of Gen Ed courses
2. Incorporate Integrative Learning and metacognitive skills into all GE courses
3. Group courses thematically- Thematic Pathways
4. Update competencies and areas of proficiency
5. Update and enhance signature assignments
6. Intentionally raise awareness about the philosophy, value and structure of Gen Ed.

Groups and People
1. Students
2. Advisors
3. GE Program Committee
4. GE Departments and faculty
5. SVPAA's Office
6. Center for Teaching and Learning
7. Assessment Office
8. Degree Programs
9. Transfer and Articulation

Challenges

- **Multiple requests** for course redesign for different goals
- **Lack of cohesion-** Constant, separate data collection and recommendations for different purposes
- Constant **emergent innovations and initiatives** with no centralized way to track
- **Curriculum process** is lengthy, involved, and overwhelmed by the volume
- Transfer articulation to and from constantly being updated
- **Advising students** on requirements, goals, and expectations inconsistent and constantly changing
- **Course inconsistency and course drift-** Deans, chairs in different areas prioritizing different initiatives and efforts
- Initiatives **competing for priority** and some feel **top-down**
- Disengagement and resistance among faculty

Systems Analysis and Mapping



- **Formed a committee**:
  - Assessment, General Education, Curriculum, Student Affairs, faculty representatives, governance rep
  - Anchored by Assessment Office
- **Conducted Inventories**
  - initiatives and processes impacting courses in Gen Ed program
  - data collection requests and recommendation processes
  - inventory of all communications
  - People, committees, groups
- **Mapping Exercises**
  - Visual map of processes and initiatives
  - Timeline of processes in an academic year

Systems Approach

- Alignment
  - **Program Review** as the umbrella
  - **Defined programs-** degree programs, gen ed program, departments w/out degrees- can propose “programs” for review
  - **5-year cycle**, annual activities with **alternating focus for reflection and recommendations** (i.e. degree attainment, course enrollment)
  - **Create space for emergent projects** and innovations
  - **Created aligned data collection and data dashboard-** organized and maintained by assessment office
  - **Consolidated data collection**

Scenario Activity

- **Scenario 1**
  - GGG Community and Technical College is revising its General Education program in include integrative learning and major connection in all GE courses.
- **Scenario 2**
  - Georgian Gorge State University is implement a degree requirement for all students to complete 2 High Impact Practices before Gradutation.
- **Scenario 3**
  - Riverstone College is adding a career capstone and eportfolio requirement to all majors

Scenario Activity

Break into groups of 3-5 people to discuss your assigned scenario. Consider the following questions:

1. What “systems” are directly impacted and accounted for in this scenario?
2. What “systems’ are invisible in this scenario?
3. What feedback loops and enablers are necessary in this scenario? What are some invisible or missing feedback loops and enablers in this scenario?
4. Are there any ways this initiative and implementation might reinforce silos?
5. What recommendations might you give to this group to help improve this implementation?

Plan to share out your top insights

Systems Analysis Activity

In pairs, take a few minutes to discuss your own project:

Using the Systems Analysis Worksheet

1. Identify your project, the people involved, the direct systems involved. **Part 1 and 2**
2. Identify the immediate impact of these changes on the system? **Part 3**
3. Identify the indirect systems that might be involved and the indirect impact of your program changes to the system- **Part 3**
4. Discuss your project with your partner. Together identify some of the silos and ideas for breaking down those silos.

Strategies for Breaking Down Silos

- Consolidate or align processes
- Create Systems Visual Maps
- Add people with specific roles into the process
- Eliminate redundancies
- Solve pain points
- Provide clear anchors and decision makers
- ???

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Questions/Ideas