When Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze Isn't Working:
Doing, Thinking and Making via Systems Changes Learning

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(Ticino, Switzerland)

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(Toronto, Canada)

International Society for the Systems Sciences
66th Annual Meeting, July 2022

Agenda

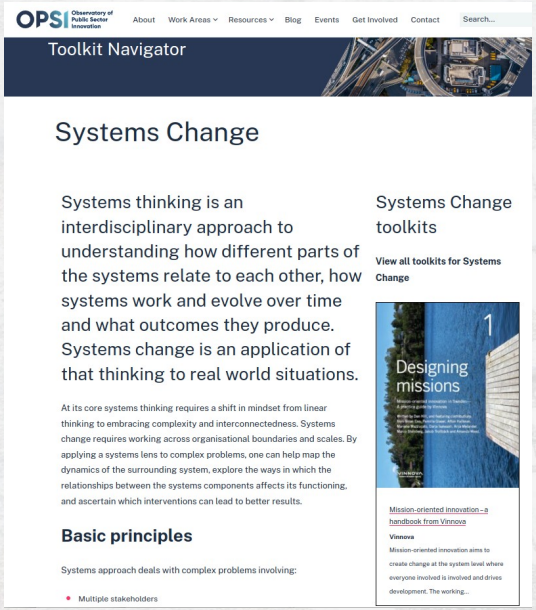
A. Rethinking Systems Changes

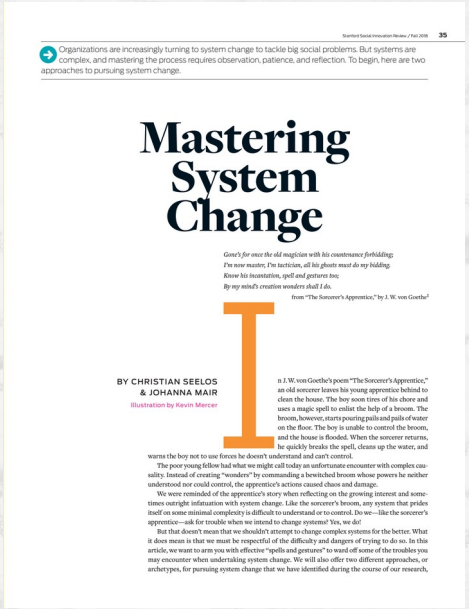
B. Rhythmic shifts, texture, propensity
(excerpts from workshop in practice)

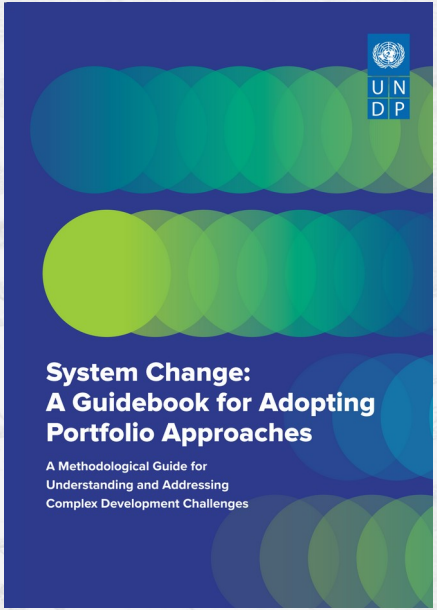
C. Hub with four axes
(excerpts from workshop in practice)

A. Rethinking System(s) Change(s) ...

Which is/are *system(s) change(s)* c.f. ***not*** *system(s) change(s)*?







OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation

"… (rare) use" by governments of systems approaches towards making public services more effective and resilient"
(Cook & Tõnurist, 2017, p. 4).

Stanford Social Innovation Review

… a way for "policymakers, foundations, NGOs, and social enterprises tackling issues like poverty, preventable disease and poor education" to "solve the root causes" of these intractable problems (Seelos & Mair, 2018, p. 35).

United Nations Development Programme

… a three phase methodology: (i) sense and frame; (ii) engage and position; and (iii) transform (Wellsch, 2022, p. 1)

Forum for the Future + McConnell Foundation

"What is systems change?"
"… asked people attending and unable to attend to offer their definitions of systems change" (Birney & Riddell, 2018, p. 5)

"Change as Three Steps" as attributed to Kurt Lewin is a "largely post-hoc reconstruction"; he never wrote "refreeze"

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Unfreezing change as three steps: Rethinking Kurt Lewin's legacy for change management

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Abstract
Kurt Lewin's 'changing as three steps' (unfreezing → changing → refreezing) is regarded by many as the classic or fundamental approach to managing change. Lewin has been criticized by scholars for over-simplifying the change process and has been defended by others against such charges. However, what has remained unquestioned is the model's foundational significance. It is sometimes traced (if it is traced at all) to the first article ever published in *Human Relations*. Based on a comparison of what Lewin wrote about changing as three steps with how this is presented in later works, we argue that he never developed such a model and it took form after his death. We investigate how and why 'changing as three steps' came to be understood as the foundation of the fledgling subfield of change management and to influence change theory and practice to this day, and how questioning this supposed foundation can encourage innovation.

Keywords
CATS, changing as three steps, change management, Kurt Lewin, management history, Michel Foucault

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[Change as Three Steps] has come to be **regarded** both as an **objective self-evident truth** and an idea with a **noble provenance** [p. 3]

unfreeze → change → refreeze

Unfreezing change as three steps | Sage Publishing | Youtube

Lewin never wrote 'refreezing' anywhere.

As far as we can ascertain, the **re-phrasing of Lewin's freezing to 'refreezing'** happened first in a 1950 conference paper by **Lewin's former student Leon Festinger** (Festinger and Coyle, 1950; reprinted in Festinger, 1980: 14).

Festinger said that: 'To Lewin, life was not static; it was changing, dynamic, fluid. Lewin's unfreezing-stabilizing-refreezing concept of change continues to be highly relevant today'.

It is worth noting that Festinger's first sentence seems to **contradict** the second, or at least to contradict later interpretations of Lewin as the developer of a model that deals in static, or at least clearly delineated, steps.

Furthermore, Festinger **misrepresents** other elements; **Lewin's 'moving' is transposed into 'stabilizing'**, which shows how open to interpretation Lewin's nascent thinking was in this 'preparadigmatic' period (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 33). [p. 5]

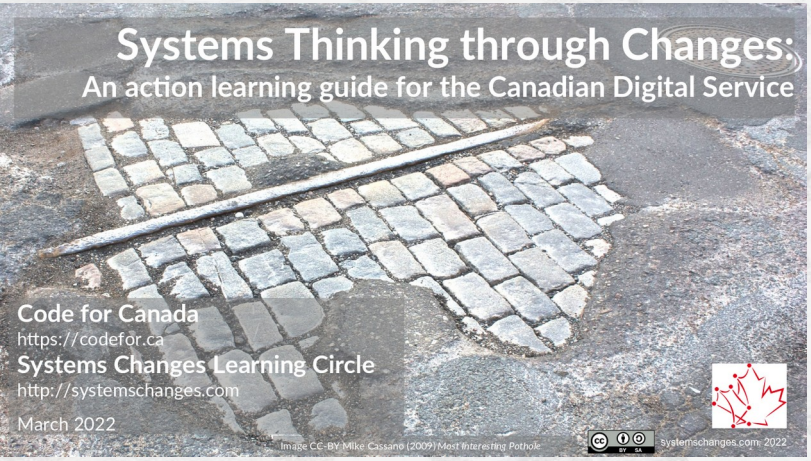
Cummings, Stephen, Todd Bridgman, and Kenneth G Brown. 2016. "Unfreezing Change as Three Steps: Rethinking Kurt Lewin's Legacy for Change Management." *Human Relations* 69 (1): 33–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715577707 .

A. Rethinking System(s) Change(s) ....

Three works in 2022 reflect the current thinking in year 4 of 10 for the Systems Changes Learning Circle

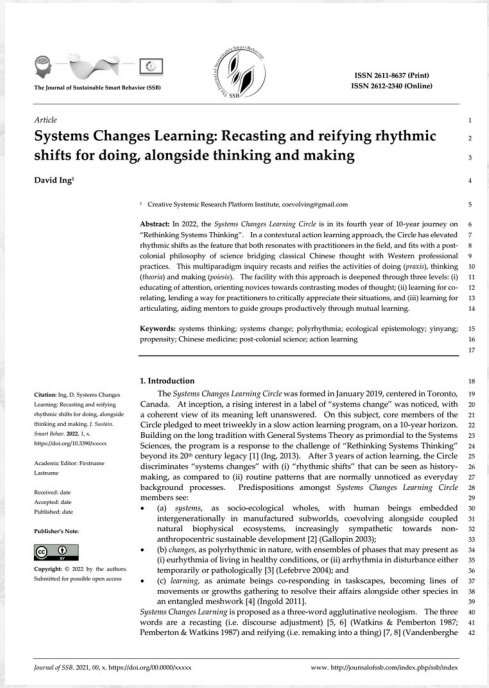
http://systemschanges.com/online/presentations

http://coevolving.com/commons/publications



http://systemschanges.com/online/presentations/20220304_cfc

http://coevolving.com/commons/20220304-systems-thinking-through-changes



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Article

Systems Changes Learning: Recasting and reifying rhythmic shifts for doing, alongside thinking and making

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Abstract: In 2022, the *Systems Changes Learning Circle* is in its fourth year of 10-year journey on "Rethinking Systems Thinking". In a contextural action learning approach, the Circle has elevated rhythmic shifts as the feature that both resonates with practitioners in the field, and fits with a post-colonial philosophy of science bridging classical Chinese thought with Western professional practices. This multiparadigm inquiry recasts and reifies the activities of doing (*praxis*), thinking (*theoria*) and making (*poiesis*). The facility with this approach is deepened through three levels: (i) educating of attention, orienting novices towards contrasting modes of thought; (ii) learning for co-relating, lending a way for practitioners to critically appreciate their situations, and (iii) learning for articulating, aiding mentors to guide groups productively through mutual learning.

Keywords: systems thinking; systems change; polyrhythmia; ecological epistemology; yinyang; propensity; Chinese medicine; post-colonial science; action learning

Citation: Ing, D. Systems Changes Learning: Recasting and reifying rhythmic shifts for doing, alongside thinking and making. *J. Sustain. Smart Behav.* **2022**, *2*, x. https://doi.org/10.3390/xxxxx

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1. Introduction

The *Systems Changes Learning Circle* was formed in January 2019, centered in Toronto, Canada. At inception, a rising interest in a label of "systems change" was noticed, with a coherent view of its meaning left unanswered. On this subject, core members of the Circle pledged to meet triweekly in a slow action learning program, on a 10-year horizon. Building on the long tradition with General Systems Theory as primordial to the Systems Sciences, the program is a response to the challenge of "Rethinking Systems Thinking" beyond its 20th century legacy [1] (Ing, 2013). After 3 years of action learning, the Circle discriminates "systems changes" with (i) "rhythmic shifts" that can be seen as history-making, as compared to (ii) routine patterns that are normally unnoticed as everyday background processes. Predispositions amongst *Systems Changes Learning Circle* members see:

- (a) *systems*, as socio-ecological wholes, with human beings embedded intergenerationally in manufactured subworlds, coevolving alongside coupled natural biophysical ecosystems, increasingly sympathetic towards non-anthropocentric sustainable development [2] (Gallopín 2003);
- (b) *changes*, as polyrhythmic in nature, with ensembles of phases that may present as (i) eurhythmia of living in healthy conditions, or (ii) arrhythmia in disturbance either temporarily or pathologically [3] (Lefebvre 2004); and
- (c) *learning*, as animate beings co-responding in taskscapes, becoming lines of movements or growths gathering to resolve their affairs alongside other species in an entangled meshwork [4] (Ingold 2011).

Systems Changes Learning is proposed as a three-word agglutinative neologism. The three words are a recasting (i.e. discourse adjustment) [5, 6] (Watkins & Pemberton 1987; Pemberton & Watkins 1987) and reifying (i.e. remaking into a thing) [7, 8] (Vandenberghe

Journal of SSB. 2021, 00, x. https://doi.org/00.0000/xxxxx

www. http://journalofssb.com/index.php/ssb/index

http://coevolving.com/commons/2022-07-recasting-and-reifying-rhythmic-shifts

http://coevolving.com/commons/2022-07-08-appreciating-systems-changes

Agenda

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B. Rhythmic shifts, texture, propensity
(excerpts from workshop in practice)

C. Hub with four axes
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Session Agenda for Canadian Digital Service

:60	:60	:80		:10	:60		:30
I. **Presentation**		II. **Workshop**			III. **Workshop**		IV. **Read-outs**
• Welcome • *Systems Thinking* as *Systems Changes Learning* • Action learning practices as a hub + 4 spokes		• Reforming as groups • Knowing from within • Contextural influences • Diagnosing rhythmic disorders	:10 :20 :20 :30		• Prognosing likelihoods • Reordering pacing • Reflecting on progress + process (pre-retrospective)	:20 :20 :20	• Show and tell (:10 per team)

D. **Post-workshop retrospective** (homework)

- Summary (1 page) of paths considered and not taken, actions to be negotiated

Favoring 3 groups of systems thinkers, we add new contributors

Early cybernetics
Gregory Bateson (1904-1980)
Norbert Wiener (1894-1964)
Warren McCulloch (1898-1969)
Margaret Mead (1901-1978)
W. Ross Ashby (1903-1972)

Soft & critical systems
C. West Churchman (1913-2004)
Russell Ackoff (1919-2009)
Peter Checkland (1930-)
Werner Ulrich (1948-)
Michael C. Jackson (1951-

Complexity theory
Ilya Prigogine (1917-2003)
Stuart Kauffman (1939-)
James Lovelock (1919-)

Ecological anthropology
J.J. Gibson (1904-1979)
Tim Ingold (1948-)

Postcolonial & Chinese philosophy of science
Keekok Lee (1938-)
François Jullien (1951-)
John Law (1946-)

General systems theory
Ludwig von Bertalanffty (1901-72)
Kenneth Boulding (1910-1993)
Geoffrey Vickers (1894-1983)
Howard Odum (1924-2002)

Learning systems
Kurt Lewin (1890-1947)
Eric Trist (1911-1993)
Chris Argyris (1923-2013)
Donald Schön (1930-1997)
Mary Catherine Bateson (1939-)

Service science
Richard Normann (1953-2003)
James C. Spohrer (1956-)
Gary S. Metcalf (1957-)

Later cybernetics
Heinz von Foerster (1911-2002)
Stafford Beer (1926-2002)
Humberto Maturana (1928-)
Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998)
Paul Watzlawick (1921-2007)

System dynamics
Jay Forrester (1918-2016)
Donella Meadow (1941-2001)
Peter Senge (1947-)

Practice theory
Hubert Dreyfus (1929-2017)
C. Fernando Flores (1943-)
Étienne Wenger (1952-)

Systemic design
Harold G. Nelson (1943-)
Birger Sevaldson (1953-)
Peter H. Jones (1957-)

Source: Ramage, Magnus, and Karen Shipp. 2020. “Introduction to the First Edition.” In *Systems Thinkers*, edited by Magnus Ramage and Karen Shipp, xiii–xx. Springer London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-7475-2, p. xvii

B. Rhythmic shifts, texture, propensity (excerpts from workshop in practice) ...

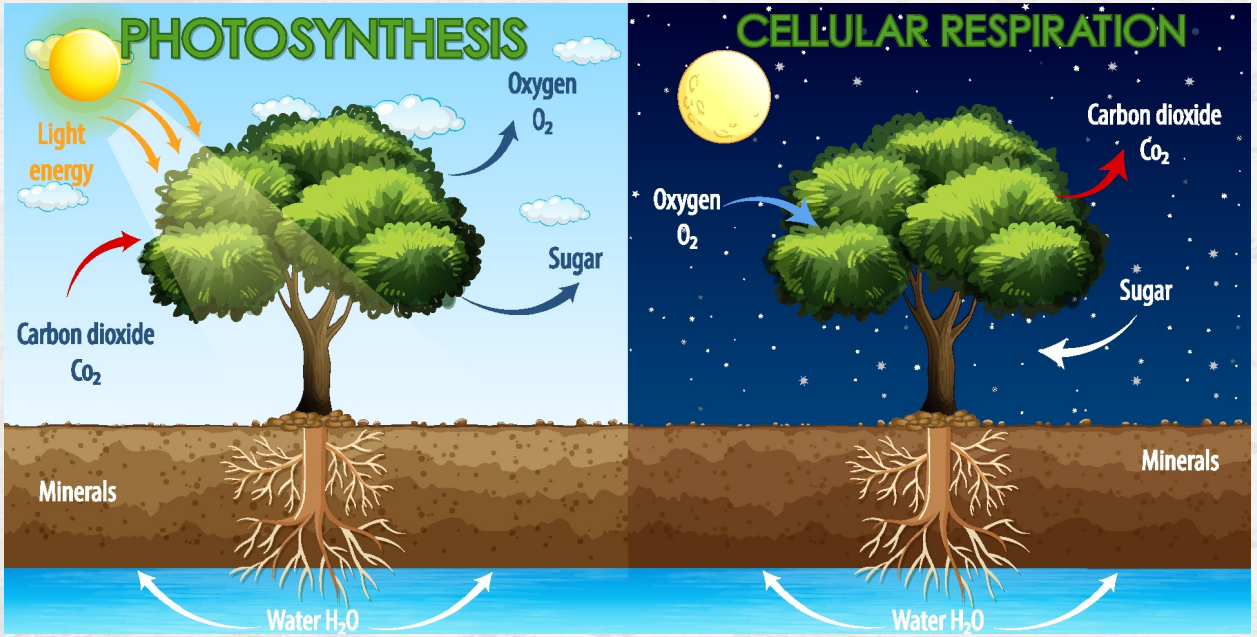
With authentic systems thinking, synthesis precedes analysis

Thinking *synthetically*

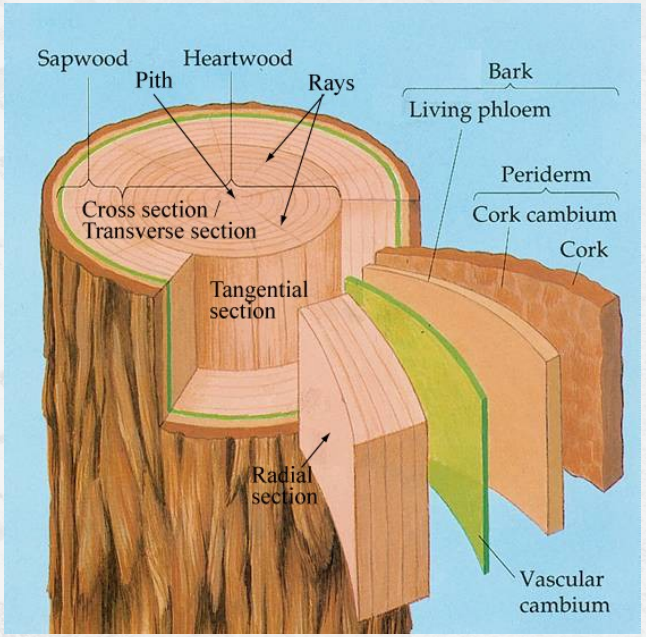
- Placing together parts into wholes

Thinking *analytically*

- Loosening from wholes into parts



"Photosynthesis, Cellular Respiration" BY brgfx (2021)



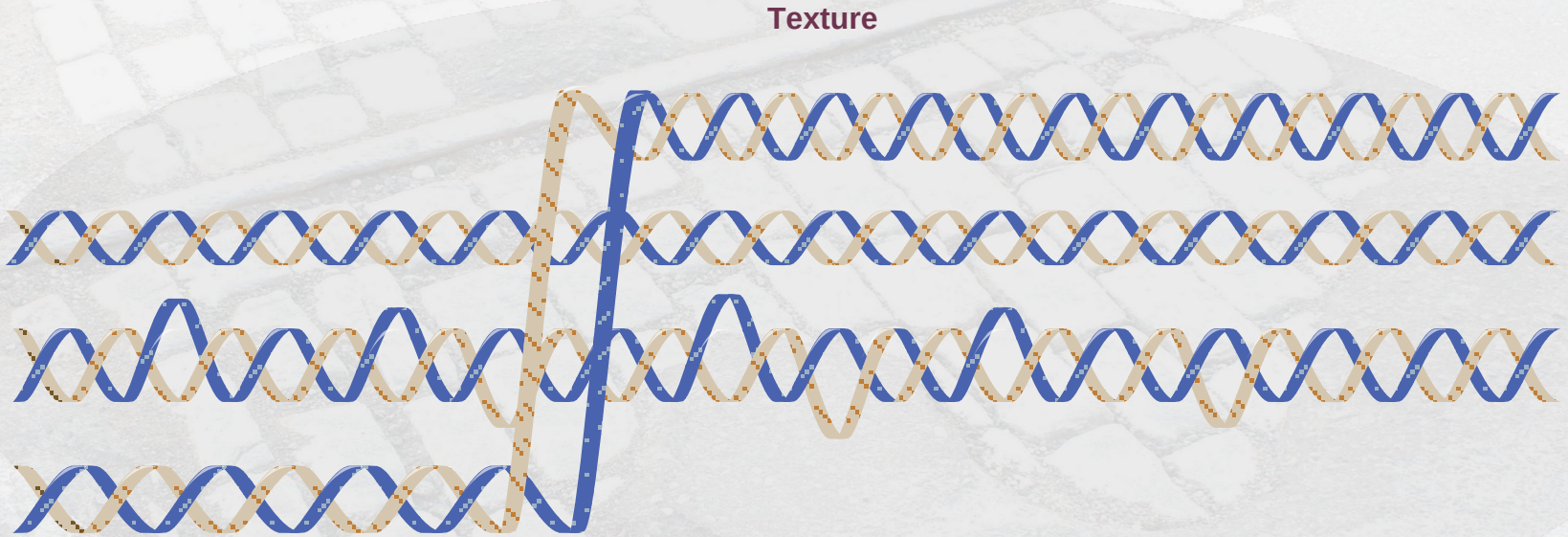
"A cut-through of a tree trunk" CC-BY-NC-SA University of Cambridge 2004

Systems Changes Learning adds ... thinking *dyadically* ... over time

- e.g. the sun *waxing* (increasing in strength) and *waning* (decreasing in strength)
- Dyadic (yinyang waxing and waning) is not dualistic (e.g. sun, no sun)

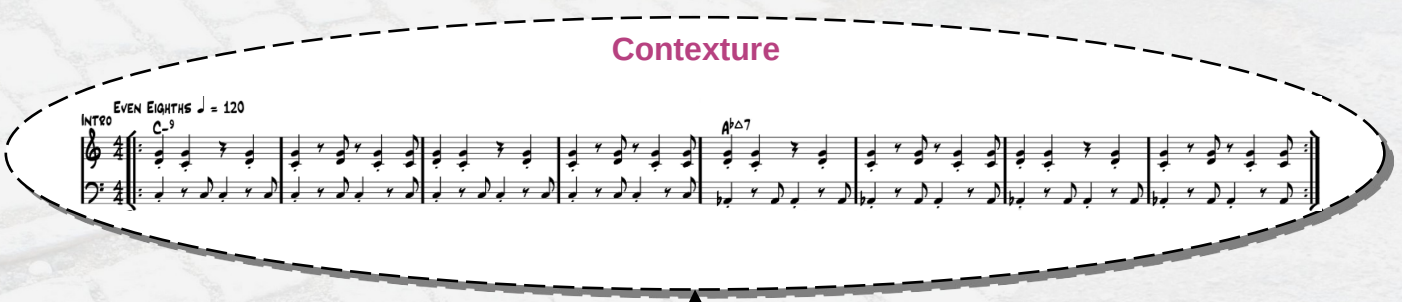
B. Rhythmic shifts, texture, propensity (excerpts from workshop in practice) ...

Our attention is drawn to rhythmic shift(s) in the texture, as the line of the system of interest crosses over co-related systems of influence



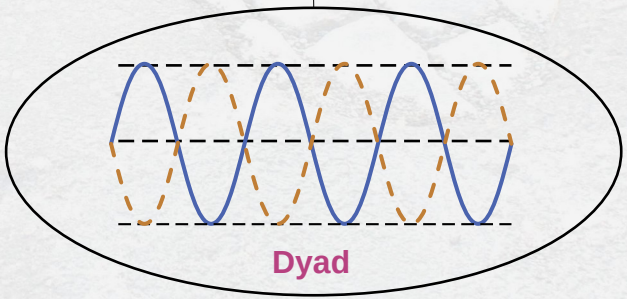
Rhythms of a living system of interest weave into a contexture of co-related systems of influence

"Joseph Shabason at The Redeemer", CC-BY David Ing 2018



consists of (has)

"Giom Perret at The Redeemer", CC-BY David Ing 2018



"David Occhipinti + Mike Murley at The Drake", CC-BY David Ing 2008

Mechanisms ⇒ causality in conditions. Living systems ⇒ propensity in conditions

Water skiing, motion via causality

- Motorboat towing

"Water Skier – Ibiza" CC-BY Mark Wordy (2018)

"Jax Beach Pier Surfers" CC-BY Ron Bixby (2012)

Surfing, motion via prospensity

- Waves in the ocean
- Surfer on the board

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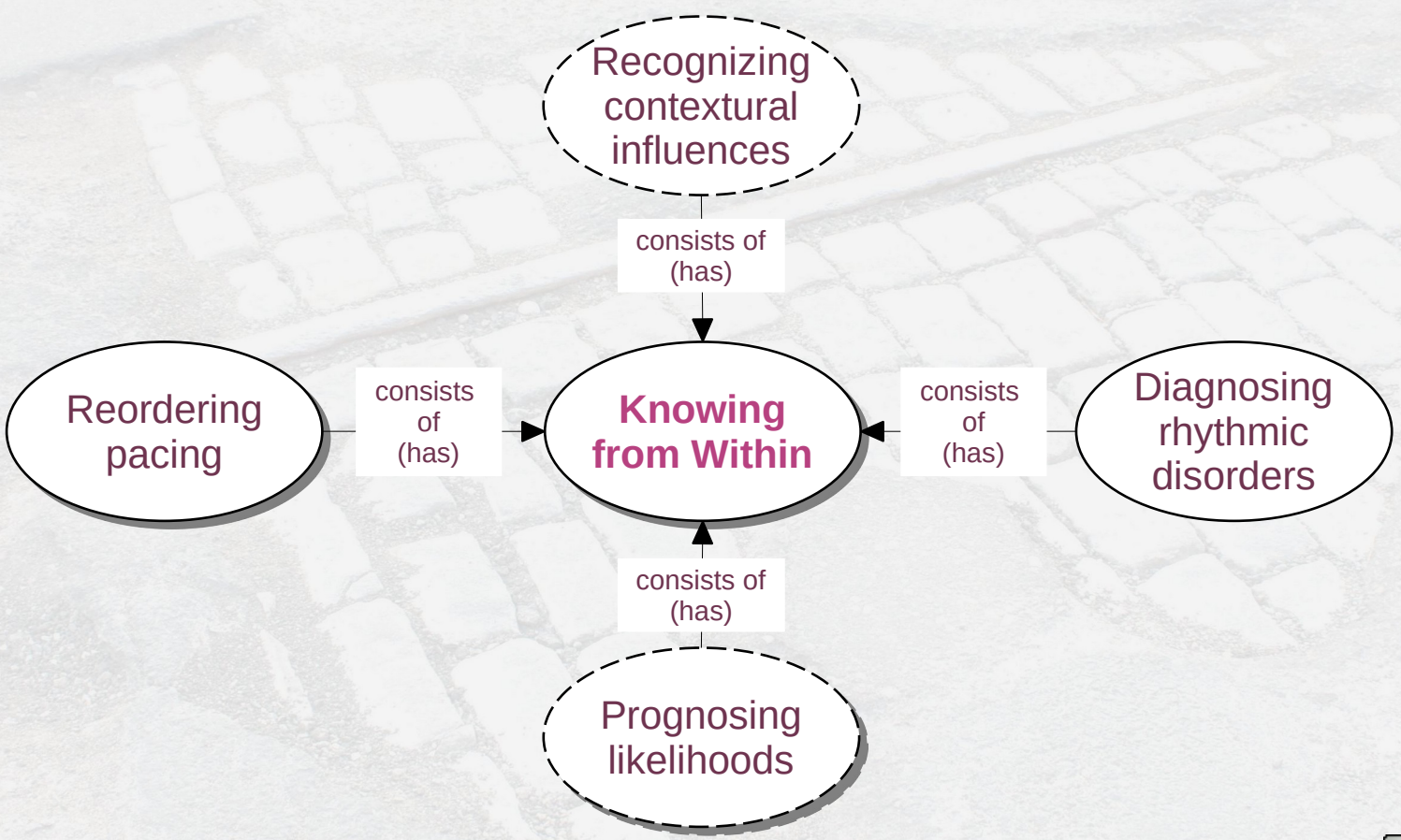
(excerpts from workshop in practice)

C. Hub with four axes (excerpts from workshop in practice) ...

Systems Changes Learning centers on a hub of *knowing from within*, appreciated through a cycle of learning along four spokes

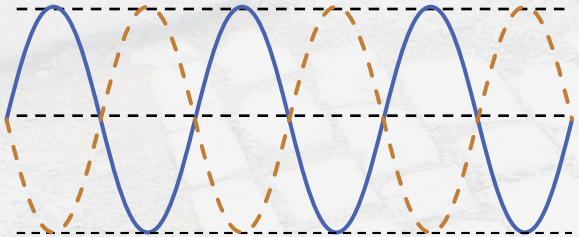


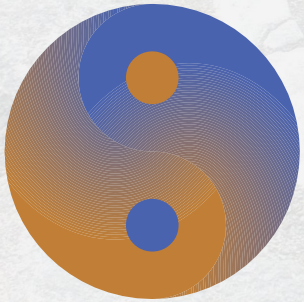
***Legend*:**
Object Process Methodology

- Essence Physical; Origin Systemic
- Essence Informational; Origin Systemic
- Essence Physical; Origin Environmental
- Essence Informational; Origin Environmental

C. Hub with four axes (excerpts from workshop in practice) ...

Knowing from within, hint (philosophy of science, Classical Chinese Medicine): Dyadic processes make up a whole with parts that co-respond





Yang	***Yin***
Illuminating	Darkening
Working	Resting
Warming	Cooling
Rising	Descending
Dissipating	Materializing
Scattering	Congealing
Generating	Growing
Expanding	Contracting

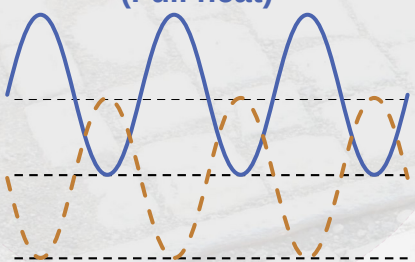
"Sunset-Sunrise" by Rick Ilovar 2021 on Dribble

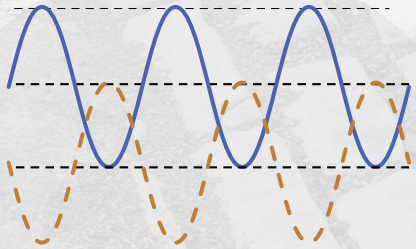
C. Hub with four axes (excerpts from workshop in practice) ...

Diagnosing rhythmic disorders hint:

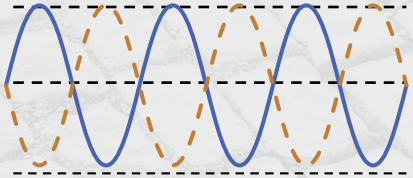
Pathologies may be diagnosed as one of four conditions

Excess yang ~
Normal yin
(Full heat)



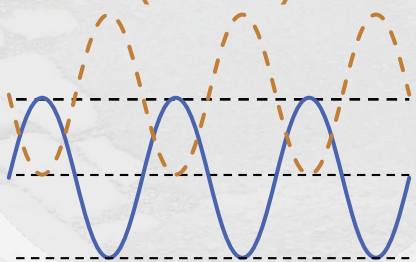


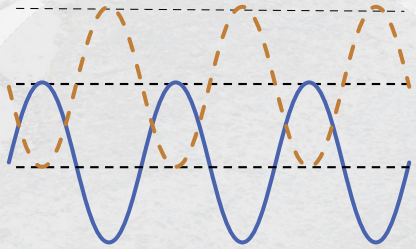
Normal yang ~
Consumed yin
(Empty heat)



Yinyang dyad
within normal range

Excess yin ~
Normal yang
(Full cold)





Normal yin ~
Consumed yang
(Empty cold)

C. Hub with four axes (excerpts from workshop in practice) ....

Recognizing contextural influences, hint:

Concurrent changes over time and space can be placed as (i) *at hand* for directly joining, and/or (ii) *remote* engaging via intermediaries

Distant	Expediting trauma emergencies 	Organizing operating room teams
Local	Summoning battlefield medics 	Scheduling neighbourhood clinics 
	Urgent	*Important*

Centered in Toronto, the Systems Changes Learning Circle originates from CSI, OCADU SFI and Systems Thinking Ontario

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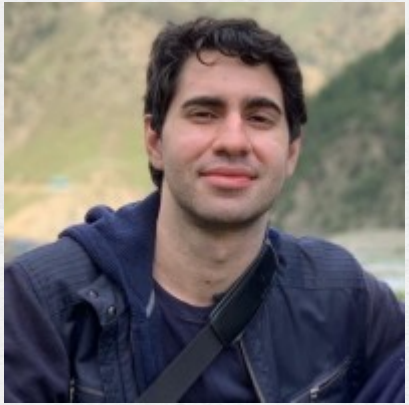

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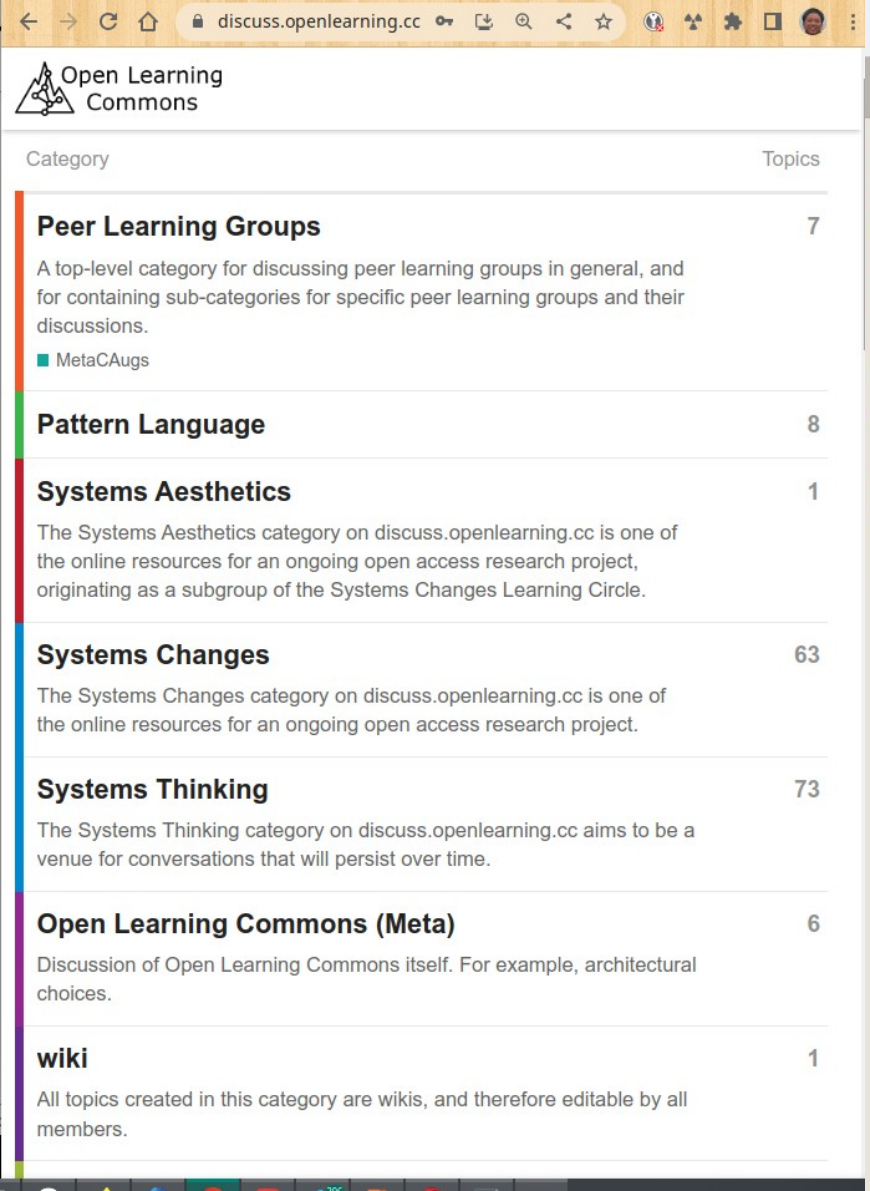
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Open Learning Commons
Category
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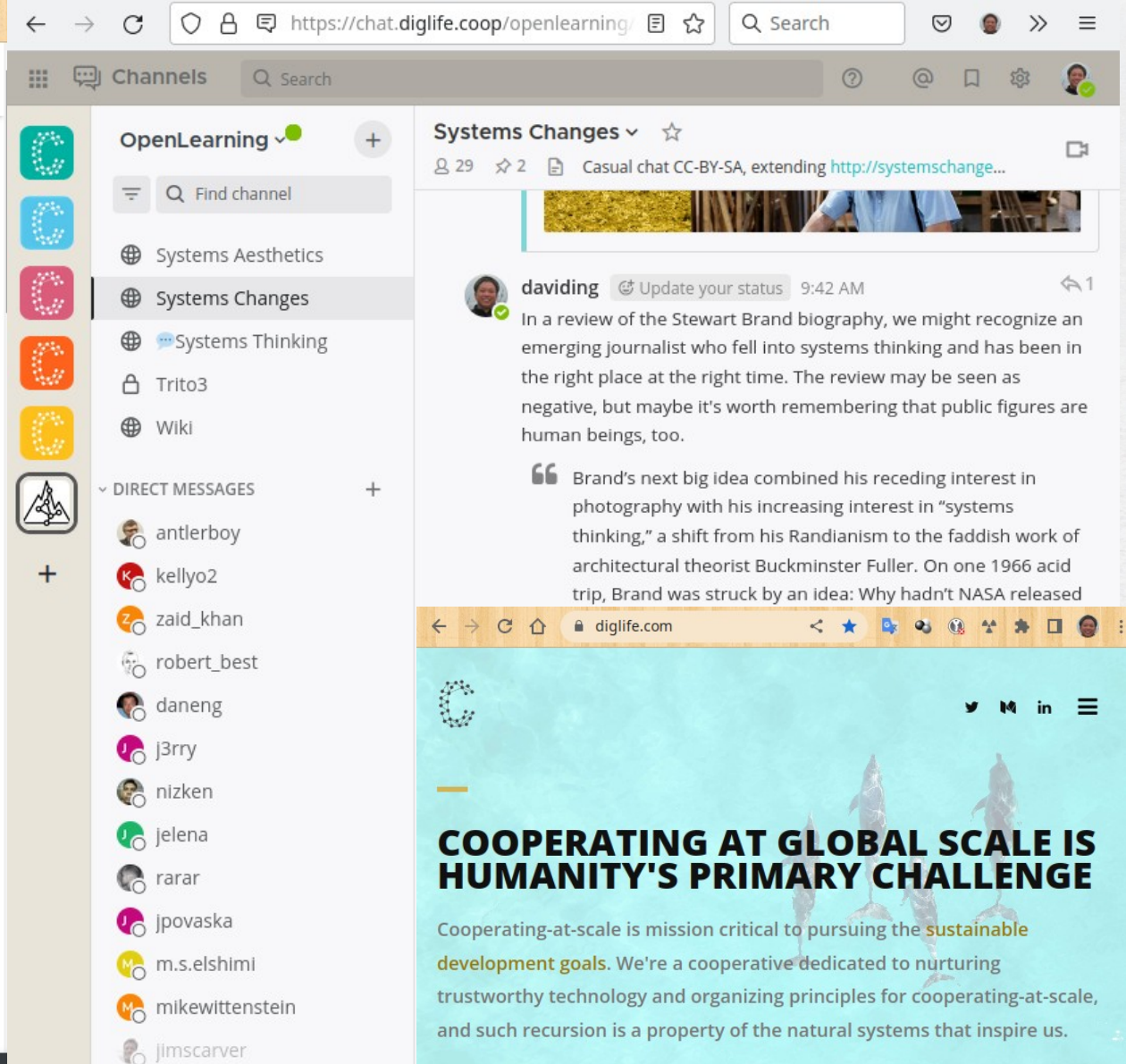
7
A top-level category for discussing peer learning groups in general, and for containing sub-categories for specific peer learning groups and their discussions.
MetaCAugs
Pattern Language
8
Systems Aesthetics
1
The Systems Aesthetics category on discuss.openlearning.cc is one of the online resources for an ongoing open access research project, originating as a subgroup of the Systems Changes Learning Circle.
Systems Changes
63
The Systems Changes category on discuss.openlearning.cc is one of the online resources for an ongoing open access research project.
Systems Thinking
73
The Systems Thinking category on discuss.openlearning.cc aims to be a venue for conversations that will persist over time.
Open Learning Commons (Meta)
6
Discussion of Open Learning Commons itself. For example, architectural choices.
wiki
1
All topics created in this category are wikis, and therefore editable by all members.


https://chat.diglife.coop/openlearning
Search
Channels
Search
OpenLearning
Find channel
Systems Aesthetics
Systems Changes
Systems Thinking
Trito3
Wiki
DIRECT MESSAGES
antlerboy
kellyo2
zaid_khan
robert_best
daneng
j3rry
nizken
jelena
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jpovaska
m.s.elshimi
mikewittenstein
jimscarver
Systems Changes
29
2
Casual chat CC-BY-SA, extending http://systemschange...
daviding
Update your status
9:42 AM
1
In a review of the Stewart Brand biography, we might recognize an emerging journalist who fell into systems thinking and has been in the right place at the right time. The review may be seen as negative, but maybe it's worth remembering that public figures are human beings, too.
Brand's next big idea combined his receding interest in photography with his increasing interest in "systems thinking," a shift from his Randianism to the faddish work of architectural theorist Buckminster Fuller. On one 1966 acid trip, Brand was struck by an idea: Why hadn't NASA released
diglife.com
COOPERATING AT GLOBAL SCALE IS HUMANITY'S PRIMARY CHALLENGE
Cooperating-at-scale is mission critical to pursuing the sustainable development goals. We're a cooperative dedicated to nurturing trustworthy technology and organizing principles for cooperating-at-scale, and such recursion is a property of the natural systems that inspire us.

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C. Hub with four axes
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Image CC-BY Mike Cassano (2009) *Most Interesting Pothole*