SDX:
# Systemic Design eXchange

Engaging

Complexity for

Systems Change

WHAT?

An Edmonton based Community of Practice looking to convene individuals interested in collectively learning about Systemic Design as a methodology for addressing complex real world issues.

W
H
Y
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SDX3

June 24, 2016 – Action Lab – Edmonton, Alberta
#SDXCoP | #CoLabAB | #actionlabyeg

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

About SDX

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of diverse people who come together to learn, share practices, and co-create knowledge around shared areas of interest. Informal CoPs pop up in organizations around the water cooler, but when purposefully stewarded, CoPs can become powerful, positive forces that help people navigate complex challenges together.

SDX – Systemic Design Exchange – is a collaboration between the Government of Alberta and community-based practitioners. An emerging CoP, SDX will help connect people interested in using systems thinking, design thinking, ethnography, prototyping, and social labs to tackle real-world challenges. With a bias towards learning by doing, SDX aims to be an intersection where multiple sectors can come together, learn together, and act together.

SDX co-conveners – the CoLab and the Action Lab – have committed to an initial run of four gatherings, beginning in December 2015.

"Systemic design helps groups to: visualize complexity from multiple perspectives, create shared frames of reference, surface core assumptions, and find opportunities in complexity by reframing the mess. This enables diverse groups to co-create tangible improvements to the situation. By undertaking this on the front-end of a project, systemic design generates robust options for decision makers."
– CoLab, Systemic Design Fact Sheet, 2014

Action Lab is a social enterprise of Skills Society, one of the largest disability service organizations in Edmonton, Alberta. It is designed for hosting inspiring events, group collaboration, strategy sessions, and social innovation. The Action Lab experience promotes creative problem solving, offers tools to help tap into collective wisdom, and helps people prototype solutions to challenges they are working on.

Revenue from the Action Lab supports the employment of people with disabilities, innovative social change initiatives of Skills Society, and subsidizes lab use by community groups.

CoLab is a team, a way of working, and a space. It was founded in 2014 as a cross-ministry hub for systemic design and strategic foresight within the Government of Alberta. It supports work on many of the government's most complex strategy and policy challenges, providing a new way to have strategic conversations, include citizens in problem framing, and co-design actionable strategies. It runs internal communities of practice on systemic design and foresight, and builds capacity in these areas through training intensives and workshops.

In 2015, CoLab organized and hosted the international Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium, bringing the event to North America for the first time.

SDX3

CO-LLABORATING

DOMAIN
What we care about

PRACTICE
What and how we do things together

COMMUNITY
Who cares about it

CO-LEARNING   CO-NNECTING

The third gathering of the SDX community offered an opportunity for practitioners from across Edmonton to gather, network, and co-learn about two specific methods that can be used during the sense-making (or framing) stages of a systemic design process.

SDX3 was intentional about creating the space for networking. The first 30 minutes of the event invited individuals to grab a coffee, a pastry courtesy of District Café & Bakery, and to engage others in general conversation. Additionally, the facilitation team asked participants to place their name on a white board and draw arrows to others whom they have pre-existing relationships with as means for creating a shared sense of how connected the SDX3 community currently was.

The session officially opened with a welcome from Ben Weinlick of the Skills Society Action Lab, and Brent Wellsch of the Government of Alberta CoLab. Ben officially welcomed participants to the Action Lab space and provided a quick re-cap of what occurred at SDX2. Brent provided an overview of the agenda for SDX3, noting that this event will introduce practitioners to two different sense-making tools that will be applied to 5 different 'How Might We' questions that were surfaced through the challenge mapping exercise completed at SDX2.

| Agenda	
9:30 a.m.	Coffee & Networking
10:00 a.m.	Welcome & Recap of SDX2
10:15 a.m.	Introduction and Practical Application of the Iceberg Method
11:00 a.m.	Introduction and Practical Application of Seeds, Weeds, and Stones
11:45 a.m.	Method Reflection
12:00 p.m.	SDX3 Close

Brent also shared ways that the convening team are looking to enhance the SDX experience. Particular avenues for improvement include the creation of an SDX website; opening the possibility for SDX "hi-jacks" whereby a complex issue is presented to the SDX community by a member of the community whom also agrees to facilitate attendees through a process; and the invitation for members of the community to meet with members of the convening team outside of formal SDX events to discuss and learn more about Systemic Design.

The two sense-making methods that were introduced to SDX3 attendees were the iceberg model (i.e., Causal Layered Analysis) and Seeds, Weeds, and Stones. Prior to SDX3 the convening team asked Annand Ollivierre of Volunteer Alberta and Jess McMullin of the Centre for Citizen Experience to lead each of these exercises.
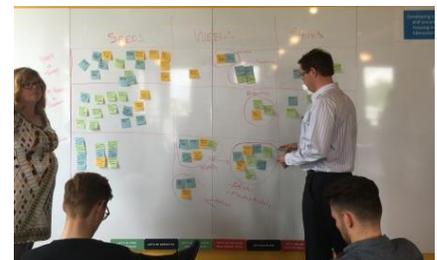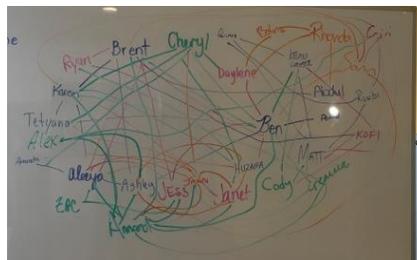
Iceberg Exercise

The iceberg exercise is a method that enables a group to drill down beneath the surface of a specific issue to appreciate the underlying structures and mental models that perpetuate an observed system. The method seeks to enable a group to become aware of leverage points for fundamentally transforming the system's dynamics.
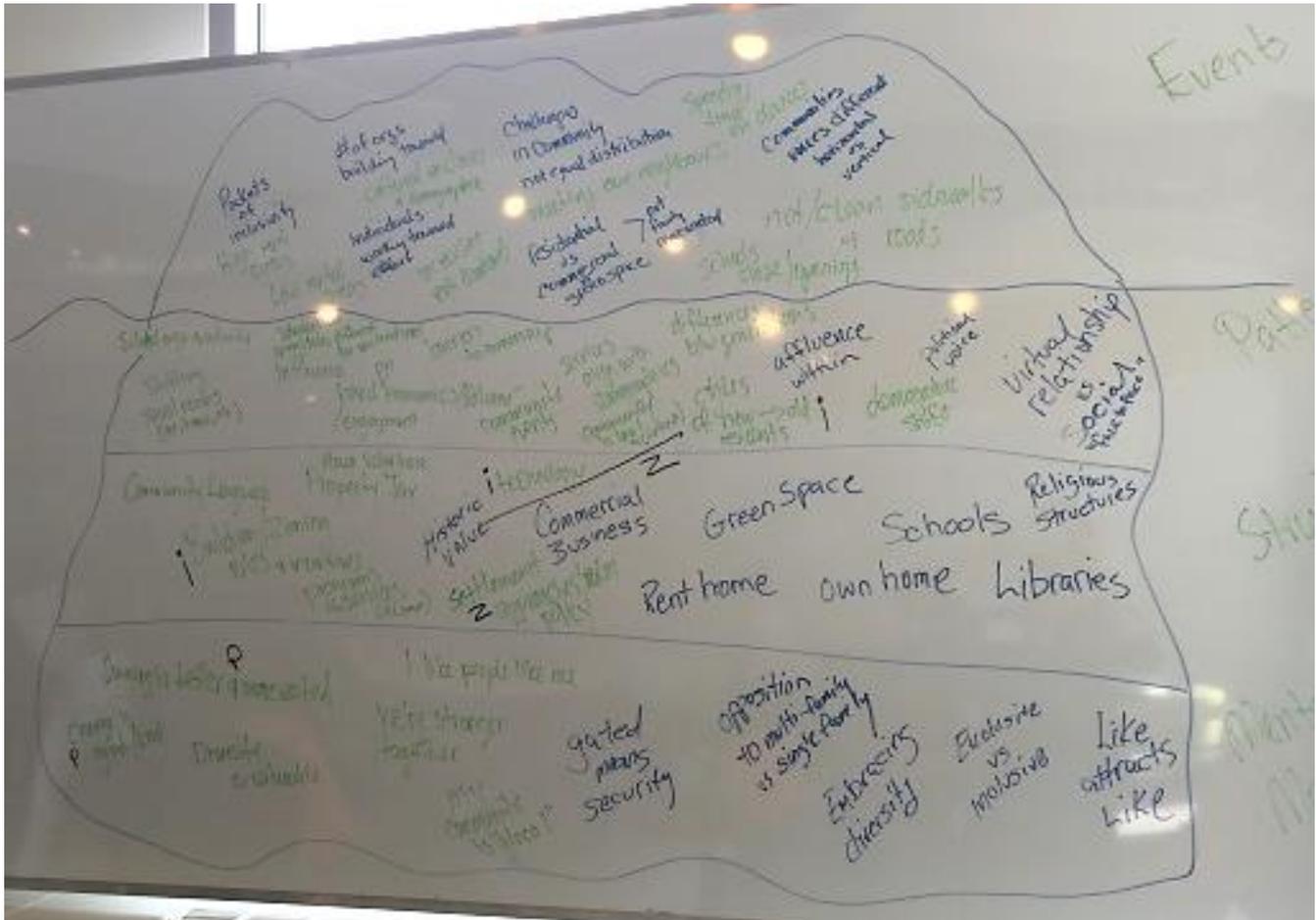
The following steps serve as general guidelines when facilitating a group through this method:

1. Brainstorm events (what has happened?)
   a. Draw an iceberg and list these in the part of the iceberg that is above the surface of the water.
2. Identify patterns (what continues to happen?)
   a. Write these underneath the events, just below the water.
3. Recognize structures (what maintains the pattern?).
   a. These should be listed beneath the patterns.
4. Surface mental models (what assumptions and beliefs created the structures?)
   a. List these at the very bottom of the iceberg.
5. Where are the leverage points for system improvement?
   a. Circle factors that we have influence to change and that could have a significant positive impact. Factors could be at any level, although deeper down usually represents higher leverage.

Key considerations when facilitating include:

1. Groups will not always stick to the category you are brainstorming on, so if you think a suggestion fits better under a different category, move it there.
2. To also show influences, consider drawing arrows that connect events to the underlying patterns, structures and mental models
3. If the group is being overly negative, ask them what are some good features of the current system? Who benefits from the current system?
4. Keep asking why to get the group to drill deeper.

Seeds, Weeds, and Stones

This method, courtesy of Marc Rettig & Hannah du Plessis, can be used at the front-end of a systemic design inquiry to help with system-sensing and framing out the problem space. This method's purpose is to surface shared values and create a common narrative for a group's perspective within a system. Specifically, this method helps groups with different narratives surface these as part of the sense-making exploration.


SEEDS
Seeds are things that you would like to see more of in a given situation or system.

WEEDS
Weeds are things you'd like to see fewer of in the system.
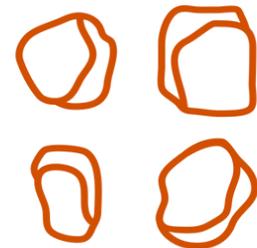
STONES
Stones are barriers that stand in the way of seeds growing.

When facilitating a group through this method, the following guidelines can be used:

1. Take 3 different colours of post-it notes; colour code the three categories. (You may use coloured markers to mark the edges of a single colour of post-it notes instead). Create three areas for brainstorming Seeds, Weeds, and Stones on the wall.
2. Work in 5 minute rounds, 2 rounds for each category.
3. Round 1, individually **brainstorm seeds** without talking. If you think of a weed or a stone, put it on the appropriate colour post-it and save it for future rounds. Distinguish between seeds (future hoped for) and seedlings (already exist) by starring the future seeds.
4. Round 2, **cluster seeds** as a group. Use 3 layers – People & Things, Org Structure & Process, and Relationships, Values, and Purpose as your sub-categories.
5. Repeat paired rounds of brainstorming & clustering for weeds and stones.
6. Discuss the implications

Insights surfaced by the community after trying this method were that it is an intuitive and simple way of extracting participants' perspectives about what is needed to succeed, barriers to this success, and what is standing in the way of moving forward. If done well, this can set the stage for further strategic conversations about leverage and how to remove stones and plant more seeds.

Group members shared that language is particularly important with this method and clear and consistent messaging of what constitutes a seed, a weed, and a stone is needed to ensure a smooth process.

Appendix A: SDX3 Participant Survey Results

Survey respondents appreciated the opportunity to practice some of the methods outlined in CoLab's systemic design field guide and to try a new method – Seeds, Weeds, and Stones.

"Learned new tools of systemic design. Learned by doing! Loved how we modelled embracing complexity and ambiguity by trying a tool together that no one in the room had tried before. Seeds, Weeds and Stones. Great learning experience!"

Respondents also commented on the utility of the networking time, appreciating the chance to learn about each other's work and meet new people with shared interests.

"As a regular attendee sometimes I find myself in similar learning. However I always gain value in practice and gain new network connections. I also recognize that with new attendees every time there is real value in gaining fresh perspectives and value for them in having seasoned attendees in the mix."

What topics would you like to explore at future SDX sessions?					
Bridging the Gap	**Creating a Platform**	**Learning**	**Ideating**	**Particular Topics**	**Tackling Specific Issues**
Policy & Delivery	Bring in outside speakers (Roger Martin, Tim Brown, Yves Behar)	Skills & craft of social innovation	Dragon's Den Format	SD as a Tool for Organizational Development	Apply models to real-life scenarios
Systemic Design & Service Design	Develop a space to publish ideas, insights, articles	How is social innovation shifting policy development?	Charrettes	Organizational learning	Have participants bring their projects to the group
Designing for 'Extreme Users'	Communicate the value of SD and Systems Thinking	When to use which tools	Prototyping	Change management, transformation	Explore sticky social issues
		How to evaluate social impact		Relation between SD and citizen deliberation, engagement	
		How to work better together		SD and community organizing, networks	
		How to understand and map systems		Storytelling	
		How to communicate the value of SD and Systems Thinking		Monitoring & Evaluation for SD	
		Big picture thinking			

Remember!
The Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium will take place at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto from October 13-15, 2016. Organizers are accepting proposals now for presentations and workshops.
http://systemic-design.net/

Multiple Choice/Scale Answer Questions

I work for:

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Another organization / Myself		9 / **75%**
2	Government of Alberta		3 / **25%**

What is your experience with the internal Systemic Design Community of Practice run by the CoLab?

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	I don't work for the Government of Alberta		7 / **58%**
2	I attend occasionally		3 / **25%**
3	I'm a regular		2 / **17%**
4	I work for the Government of Alberta, but have never attended		0 / **0%**
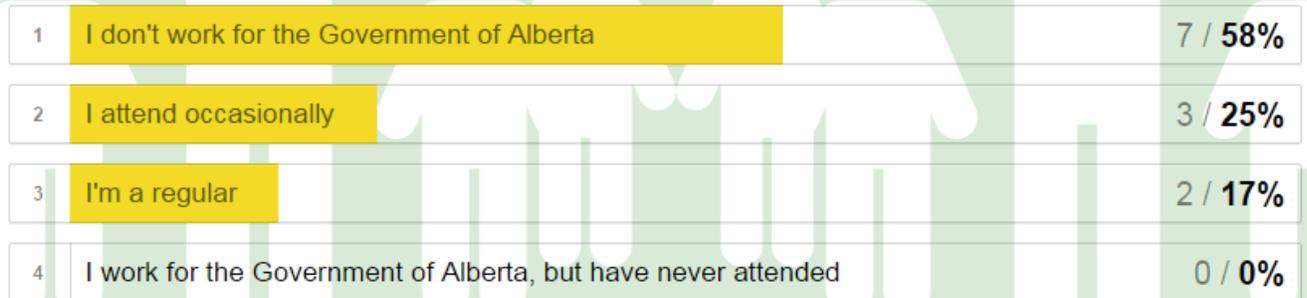
I gained new insight(s) about systemic design at SDX.

12 out of 12 people answered this question

3.92
Average rating

I made new connection(s) at SDX that could benefit my work.

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Yes		11 / **92%**
2	No		1 / **8%**
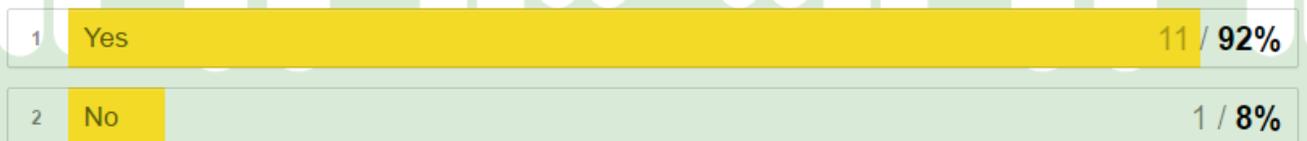
Theory:

11 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Not enough	7 /	**64%**
2	Just right	4 /	**36%**
3	Too much	0 /	**0%**
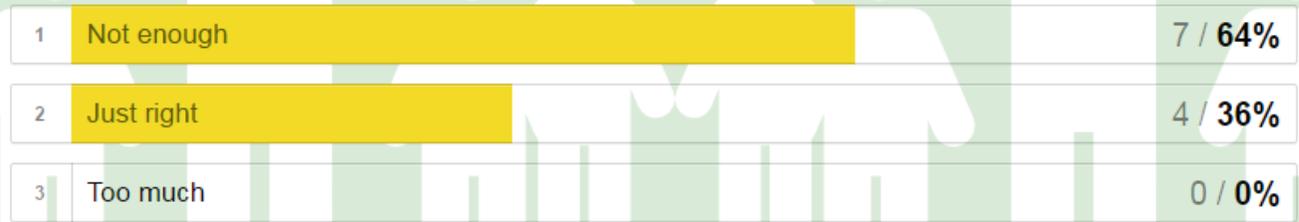
Practice:

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Just right	10 /	**83%**
2	Not enough	2 /	**17%**
3	Too much	0 /	**0%**
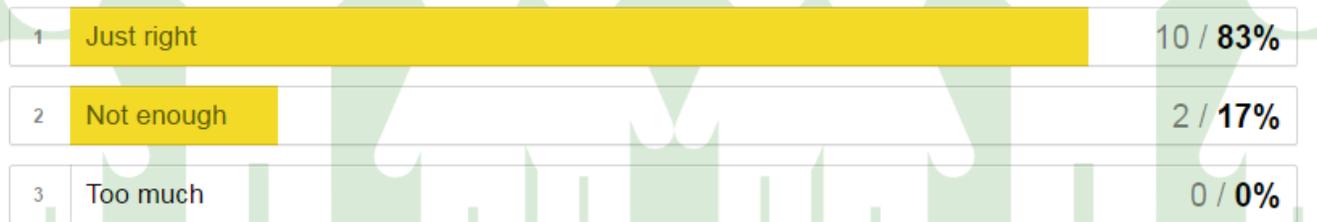
Networking:

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Just right	7 /	**58%**
2	Too much	3 /	**25%**
3	Not enough	2 /	**17%**

Listening:

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Just right	10 /	**83%**
2	Not enough	2 /	**17%**
3	Too much	0 /	**0%**

Doing:

12 out of 12 people answered this question

1	Just right		10 / **83%**
2	Not enough		2 / **17%**
3	Too much		0 / **0%**
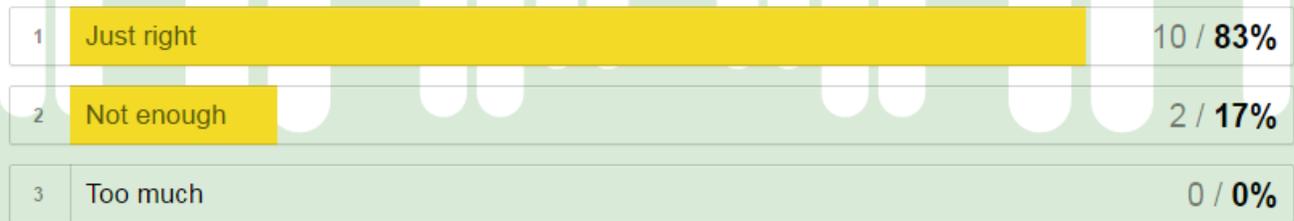
I had fun at SDX.

12 out of 12 people answered this question

4.58
Average rating

The methods we explored interest me.

12 out of 12 people answered this question

4.17
Average rating

The methods we explored have a useful application to my work.

12 out of 12 people answered this question

4.25
Average rating

Overall, how satisfied are you with your SDX experience?
More cats = more satisfaction!

12 out of 12 people answered this question

4.33
Average rating