

Transcript | How to Use Systems Thinking to Break Siloes

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Welcome to this panel event on how to use systems thinking to break silos.

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My name is Derek Alton, and I am the Community Engagement Lead here at Apolitical.

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Uh, it'd be great to hear from you all. Uh, so do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organizations you work for.

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So, today, we're gonna be covering a highly useful skill and mindset called systems thinking.

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This is an approach that has many positives, from helping you to be more predictive and strategic in your work, to being a catalyst to break down silos between teams and departments. And we know that silos can cause us great frustration in the world of civil service.

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We're also going to introduce you to one of the newest and most innovative techniques that is being paired with systems thinking in some contexts. The portfolio approach.

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So, more on that a bit later. But, for those of you who'll be joining us for the first time, welcome!

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Apolitical is the largest community for government used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 170 countries. Our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants around the world, like yourselves.

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So where's everybody joining us from? Oh, wow, we've got people from all over the place.

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From Istanbul, from Canada, I'm from Canada, so woot to the Canadians on the call.

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Um, Shetland Islands, wow! Okay, there's... Cape Town? We got a whole diversity of people, this is incredible. Welcome, everyone.

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So we're glad that many of you are able to join us live today, because this event marks the release of our brand new Systems Thinking course. This online course has been co-designed and developed by a political in partnership with the UNDP Strategic Innovation Unit. In recognition of the fact that modern challenges in public policy call for innovative approaches.

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This course will demonstrate how systems thinking and the portfolio approach can transform policymaking.

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The course is fully online and self-paced, so you can pick it up and pause it to fit around your busy schedule.

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And, importantly, it's completely free! If you'd like to take the course, you can navigate to the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen, where you'll find a link to the course page.

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Or, check the chat, where I believe Joel is putting. Uh, up the link right now.

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Awesome. Thank you, Joel. Alright, so I'm gonna get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation.

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Okay, so.... Before we introduce our speakers, we're going to run a few quick polls to get a sense of where you're coming from to today's conversation.

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Alright, I'm gonna take a look at the first poll. Where do you most often feel the impact of silos in your work?

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When designing or delivering cross-cutting policies. When accessing or sharing data and insights.

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When communicating with leaders or external partners. I don't experience this regularly.

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Or something else, and if it's something else, just put it in the chat.

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Okay, so the question again is, where do you most often feel the impact of silos in your work?

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Is that when you design or deliver cross-cutting policies, I would also put programs into that category.

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Uh, when accessing or sharing data and insights? When communicating with leadership or external partners, or it's something that you don't really experience.

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And if something else, just put it in the chat.

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All right, and the results are in. Uh, and surprise, surprise, almost 50%, 43% of people say when designing or delivering cross-cutting.

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Policies. Uh, followed by when accessing and sharing data insights, and then when communicating with leadership.

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But it sounds only 2% said they don't experience it at all. So silos do seem to be a common thing. I can... I used to work for the Government of Canada for many years, and silos were definitely a big part of my reality there.

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Alright, next poll question. How well do you understand systems thinking?

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I use it regularly in my work. I have a good understanding, but don't use it much.

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I've heard about it, but don't really understand it. Or this is my first proper introduction to it.

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Once again, just to give us an idea of where everybody's coming from to today's conversation, how well do you understand systems thinking?

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It's something you use regularly at work. Something you have a good understanding, but don't use it that much.

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It's something you've heard of, but don't really understand, or this is your first proper introduction to it.

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Oh, wow, we got people... Jody here started her master's in systems thinking. You and I should talk, Jody. I also did a....

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Graduate diploma in systems thinking. All right, so, uh....

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For most people, 37%, this is something that they don't really understand. This is great, you've come to the right place to get a deeper understanding.

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Of systems thinking. Uh, so welcome. Thank you so much for filling out the polls.

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All right, and finally, we actually have one more poll, my apologies. Have you encountered the portfolio approach?

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Specifically, the portfolio approach. Yes, I use this in my practice.

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Yes, I've come across the idea, but I do not apply it yet.

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Uh, no, this is a concept that is new to me, or not sure, I might know it by another name.

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So once again, have you encountered the portfolio approach? Yes, I use it in my practice.

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Yes, I've come across the idea, but have not applied it yet.

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No, this is a concept that's new to me. Or, not sure. I might know it by another name.

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Let's see how it results were. Uh, so 50%, bang on, said that this is a new concept for them. With another 20% saying not sure, might have heard of it by another name.

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So there's lots of people to learn. You, again, are in the right place. We're going to be talking about this as well today. So, uh, welcome everybody, uh, and let's dig in.

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So thank you so much for taking part of the polls. Now it's time to introduce our speakers. We're fortunate to have four, four brilliant guests today joining us.

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So thank you so much. First, we have, uh, Roberto Poggio, who's the National Secretary for the Brazilian Ministry of Management and Innovation in.

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The public service, specifically in Brazil. Second, Dr. Katindi Sivi is a futures researcher and policy analyst based in Kenya, as well as the principal trainer at Africa Foresight Lab.

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And then we have Dr. Kate Phillip. Kate is the program lead for the Presidential Employment Stimulus in South Africa.

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Which is an incredible project, we're going to learn about shortly. And last, and absolutely not least, we are pleased to be joined by Millie Begovic.

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Head of the UN Development Program's Strategic Innovation Unit. Now, you can read the full biops by visiting the resource tab at the bottom of your screen, and head to the speakers section.

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But before we begin our panel discussion, I'm going to give the stage back to Mili Begovic for the next 5 or 10 minutes, and she's going to do some scene setting for us and get us thinking about why the subject of today's event is so important.

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Some milli, over to you.

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Super. Derek, thank you so much. It's a privilege to be invited to speak apolitical tends to put together some really good geek-out parties with great speakers like we have today, so I really appreciate.

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Uh, having a chance to geek out with all of you guys today. So, I'm gonna take my five-ish, seven-ish minutes, uh, from the perspective of....

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Abilities, and where do we at UB? As innovation part of UNDP, uh, kind of, uh, committed.

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Um, over the last 5-6 years, we've been working with about 100 countries and a lot more cities.

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On, uh, helping public sector build the type of capabilities that they need. But when we started this work around systems and portfolios, we didn't quite know where to hang it into, where to kind of dovetail it.

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And we've seen two... three different frames. Um, streams of work are going on in capacities.

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In the capacity work. One was around, kind of, basics and foundations, uh, the capacity of public sector to collect taxes, to provide safety and security.

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Uh, to provide good services that are inclusive and that are far-reaching, and the legitimacy of the state and its contract with the citizens comes.

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From its ability to do those, uh, kind of bricks and mortar, the basics of it.

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Um, the other stream that we kind of saw was investing in public sector's role as anticipating and responding to changes.

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Um, and a lot of this work is really around setting up digitization agencies, setting up innovation agencies, um, this kind of an idea that you set up a team that's on the periphery as to escape some of the political interference.

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And be able to do some of the more experimental work off the radar, and in that way, be able to keep.

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Staying ahead of the curve. Now, neither one of these. Are obviously wrong, but....

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At the time that we were coming into it, we were kind of inspired by the work of a number of people, and this is where we hung a lot of this work, right? So, Jeff Mulgan in Institutional Innovation Stream, Christian Basin, previously of the Danish Design Center, Julio Fujotto, currently at the... with the UAE government, Kate Phillips' work as well, that you will hear about today, Mariana Mazzucato and Reiner Cattell, Marco Steinberg.

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So all of these folks, together with Dr. Wenwen An. Um, whose concept of direct improvisation for us really most captures.

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The types... the type of evolved frame around capabilities that really got into, where a lot of our work on systems and portfolios really fits in.

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Which is this concept of direct improvisation. And what it does, at least for us, is it kind of marries the two, marries the bricks and mortar, and marries the periphery and says.

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There are some capabilities that are really not just bricks, you know, brick and mortar, and not really don't belong in the periphery, but should be a part of the DNA of a state that can continually renew itself and renew its contract with citizens.

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Um, and this concept of. Improvisation kind of looks at toggling between.

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One, being able to set a direction. Um, and then put in some strategic ambiguity as to inspire, uh, many different partners and actors in the society and in the state to experiment their way towards.

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Uh, towards that direction, so.... The point is, can you be an ambidextrous state.

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Are you able to tell capabilities to do these different, on one side.

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Putting the conditions for transformative change, which is all about coalescing the politics.

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Sort of coalescing all the assets into society, and at the same time creating enough space for.

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For experimentation. So the course, uh, that we have designed together with APolitico really kind of looks at, if you take this principle of direct improvisation, if you take the principle that these types of capabilities are necessary part of the DNA of the institutions that are operating today.

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Uh, in the context where we're dealing with issues that don't really fit in any particular sector, that are kind of transversal, that sit in between.

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What we know today as sectors in the... you know, take heat right now, right? I'm sitting in Montenegro, where yesterday was 48 Celsius, right? Heat is anything from affecting your mental health and well-being, to a national security issue.

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Right? So, who... where does heed belong to? Alright? So, the course that we built, uh, first of all, is a really... it's foundations. It's a teaser. It's almost like CliffsNotes.

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As to what are the building blocks of this course. Uh, but it kind of centers on a couple of dynamic capabilities.

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That we've heard from partners across many different governments and cities are the ones that are looking for and that they find are relevant for them as the public sector to navigate the uncertainty and to navigate pursuing some of the big societal missions that they have. The course itself.

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Addresses the first two, not necessarily the third, around governing data and digital platforms.

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But where it really focuses on is, one, the capability to anticipate, adapt, and learn.

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Would we keep hearing and seeing in the field is that in many respects, when the state is pursuing a big transformative goal that cuts across.

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It ends up speaking at odds with each other from across different departments. So, for example.

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Um, you know, public funding for gender equality is being invested into the jobs.

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That economic diversification strategy has called jobs of the past, that we should be divesting from.

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Right? There's a department that wants to promote work from home, whereas in energy infrastructure outside capital is nowhere near good enough, or dependable enough, that supports that type of work.

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Right? So, how do you marry KPIs that are incredibly sector-specific to be able to address issues that require kind of joint work?

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How do you do sense-making on real time on issues? That don't have a definitive problem definition in a frame. Take AI, for example. If you're sitting in any one government right now, making a decision about what is the implication for AI for your labor market, for capacities for public sector, for resource management, it's very difficult.

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To do that, unless there is investment in capability to. Continually sense-make and be able to evolve.

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The decisions as you go along. So this is a little bit about anticipating, adapting, and learning. The second one that the course really kind of builds on, uh, brings systems and portfolios to.

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Um, is this effort to democratize agency? To democracy... we obviously come at it from the perspective of innovation, so democratizing agency and power, meaning moving the relationship citizen-state from beneficiaries or citizens as beneficiaries, or co-creators to co-deciders.

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Because we've seen time and time again, this is seen quicker on the city level than a national level, but still building in.

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Enough and frequent avenues to move that relationship to co-decider changes the political economy.

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Um, of issues. Changes the stake, changes the mobilization, changes the number and quality of relationships that take a stake in a particular issue. Um, so again, for us, this course has been a kind of a cherry on a cake, a synthesis.

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Of the work that we have done across 100 different countries, where we've seen this work, and where the intent was.

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Building capabilities of the public sector to harness. The assets of the society towards a mission that's either, you know, moving to a circular and just transition.

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Building livable cities. You know, pursuing digital transformation, which is not about tech and infrastructure, but really about changing the rules of the game. And the course itself, again, provides the foundation.

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And it should be a teaser that if you like what you see.

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Um, the real value here is putting it into action and doing it for real, and doing it for real in the field. And if this is where you want to go.

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Please do reach out, because we are still... we continue to be in a steep learning curve. For us at UNDP, we developed a new instrument.

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Called Portfolio Policy. To date, we've only really had a project.

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Project policy, and now you can say, well, you can hack anything. Sure you can, but project is an instrument is very premised on stability and predictability, and what we heard from the field is.

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We need a different instrument that one is going to indicate.

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Then this is about something very different. It's not about designing a better policy, it's really about the collective will to change the way that we operate and collaborate across.

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Um, uh, but also the way to fund transitions differently, and the way to collaborate differently. So this is something that exists, and we've also noticed the big movement across organizations like OECD. Mariana Masugato's IIPP, to move into a systems and portfolio approach. Portfolio is a vehicle.

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For mission-oriented government, which we think is fantastic. So, I will stop here, Derek. I'm hoping I have kept... I have a lot more to say, but I'm trying to keep.

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To time, and also to... I think there are a lot more interesting stories coming through with Kate Katindi and Roberto.

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Derek, over to you.

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Thanks so much, Millie. Um, yeah, I mean, really excited to dig into. I am super excited about the course. I'm gonna be taking the course, so I encourage everybody here as well to check it out. Um, and I know the course also gives some of the basics as well, which I know people are asking for on, you know, sort of what is systems thinking. Also, I can keep the conversation going, uh, because we have a community.

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For systems thinking that is a great place to ask all of these questions I'm seeing in the chat, for example.

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Uh, speaking of which, um, just letting you know now that we are going to have a Q&A section later in the panel discussion, so now it's just a reminder to, you know, capture your questions, put them into the Q&A, which we have at the bottom here, the little Q&A button on the bottom of the Zoom. That is where we're asking people to submit their questions, and that'll be great, because then I can incorporate it into the conversation.

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Alright, so, speaking of panel, let's dig into it. Uh, Roberto, I have you first.

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So, Roberto, what is the nature of the challenges that your government is dealing with right now?

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Thank you, Derek, and good afternoon to everyone. It's a pleasure to meet.

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Join this... this panel. This talk could not be more timely and more aligned with the experience we are having in Brazil.

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Uh, the idea of breaking down silos through system think has.

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Been central to how we've approached the transformation of the state.

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And we are working with. Masocato and IPP.

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With this, um.... Huge, uh, program of, uh, transformation.

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Of the States and Brazil now. Um, whether we are talking about public administration, digital transformation, or citizen-centered service.

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The challenges we face today require more than, uh, easily. Efforts, of course. We need integrating things, cross-sector coordination.

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As a clear sense of.... Share propose, and it involves three interconnected dimensions in our opinion of the individual, the digital.

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And, uh, public organizations. And they must move and sync.

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Um, the most important example of this integrated approach. Is for us public procurement.

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Traditionally, seen as a technical or bureaucratic function. Procurement in Brazil has now been recognized.

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And, uh, recognizes, sorry, and activate as a.... Strategic policy tool for development.

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We have this approach now. This shift reflects a broader understanding that the state is not only a regulator.

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And the service provider, but also, a key promoter of inclusive and sustainable growth.

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In this context, considering the nature of Brazil as a federation.

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This adds for us complexity and opportunity. Because we have.

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To coordinate federal, state, and municipal levels. And for her, it's mandatory, because I have to do.

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That because our.... Constitutional, constitution, uh, say-so.

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And, um, that, uh, for us, um.... System think has become the guidance principle in our work.

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We needed to understand how policies connected, how actors interacted, how interventions reinforced.

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Or sometime contradict each other. Um, and the thing is reflects in major federal initiatives.

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As, um, drove, uh, growth acceleration program back in Portuguese. The new industry, Brazil is strategy.

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And the ecological transfer plan. That's from the different ministries. We are working together.

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Put in the.... Uh, public procurement.

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Um, in the center of discussion, the role of publicity procurement.

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How to... to put all this problem together. Um, and uh... but this, uh, initiatives are not.

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Treats sustainability, sustainability, sorry, as a side agenda. They embed it at the core, and recognize that procurement.

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King be powerful ever to accelerate results. Across multiple goals.

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Um, but, um, when this program. Were first designed. The idea of using procurement as a driver of development was still somewhat conceptual.

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We decided to take this challenge. And, um, turn this into practice.

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Through a deep listening process. And it's sponsored by Minister Staduec, we launched a broad consultation.

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To build the national public procurement strategy. And this included.

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Regional workshops, engagement with specialists. Multiple, uh, multiple rounds of dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

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All over the country. We also, um, activate and regular convening the committee, um.

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A committee, uh, which one is the Interministerial Committee of Sustainable.

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Public procurement, sorry. Which, uh, has served as an important governance mechanism.

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To ensure alignment and collaboration across ministries. We have, uh.... Five, uh, ministers in this committee, too.

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Discuss about the role of. Public procurement in Brazil.

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But of course, and we also need to change the paradigm.

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Of in public procurement, of chosen. Always the lowest. Uh, price in public procurement.

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Instead, we have to prioritize best value for society. Including environmental, social, and economic impacts. That's our new drive today.

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Uh, by law. By the newer of public procurement.

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But of course, we have to develop a new. Capabilities? Capabilities?

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And our teams needs to learn how to analyze the product lifecycle, how to integrate social and environment criteria, how to balance efficiency with long-term value creation.

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That's so hard, because it's a huge.... Mind change for our teams.

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And, um.... We began, uh, treating public procurement as.

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Public policy in its own right, not.... Only a procedure?

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To, uh.... Get some service or goods, but....

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In fact, uh....

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Tools to promote innovation, to promote inclusion, and local development, local economies.

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And we have a key initiative for this called Contratamize Brazil in Portuguese. It is a platform to contract serves and goods.

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For public administration. And, uh, with strong emphasis on.

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Social sustainability and territorial development. Now, we have to... to get public procurement, to get goods.

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Strong public procurement. Under, uh, lowest price, so usually.

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Oh, um.... Brazilian municipalities, um....

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Get all this goods from Sao Paulo, from the same region. Instead.

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Use public procurement. To improve the development of.

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Their own territorial, so we are changing that in Brazil now.

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With, uh, this... this idea, this problem. Um, what....

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They... the.... The main idea is bring them the micro and small entrepreneurs.

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Into procurement ecosystem. That were very hard to then access.

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And the, um.... Working to democratize, democratize, sorry, opportunity, and make.

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Public spend work, uh, for the people. That's the.... The idea. And we are working with, um....

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Other programs, like National School Feeding. Uh, working with, uh, family farming, agro, uh, ecology.

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Uh, that sought to enhance the whole of procurement. In those programs, and of course.

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Uh... looking for one regional economic strengthening. That's... that's the point. And the old....

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Yes.

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Roberto, you're... so I'm gonna jump in here, you speak, because I want to make sure we give a chance to everybody to speak here, but you're speaking my language with procurement, so anyone who knows me knows how much.

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Uh, I think procurement is one of the great opportunities for government to really make an impact on society, so I'm super excited to.

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Nice. Cool.

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To hear more about it, and I know there's been... actually, Anna had a really good question for you. Anna, if you could put it in the Q&A, if you haven't already, there's a good question on procurement for you, Roberto, in the chat that will hopefully bring into the conversation. I know that some people have been asking for, like, you know, what is just systems thinking? Like, what is it?

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More space at the most basic level. I mean, the way... I'll give a quick answer, and then I'm gonna hand it over to Dr. Kitindi, uh, to jump in and build upon this, but for me, the most basic level.

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Okay?

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Uh, systems thinking is this idea that whatever you're working on sits within a larger context, and that that context will have more... might have more impact on what you're trying to do than what's right in front of you.

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And so systems thinking this idea of opening her up and looking around to that broader context. And that context could be, uh, within your department, it could be within your government, but as Roberto has pointed out, and, you know, Canada is another great example where we have a federal system, it could be different levels of government. It could be different industries, it could

even be different countries. And then the other piece I'll add that I like about systems thinking is also thinking about it like an ecosystem.

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And that brings in this idea that there's flows of resources, that could be money, it could be skill, it could be expertise, it could be ideas.

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Systems thinking for me is just learning to sit back and look at these bigger pictures, and think about how it's impacting you.

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Because the thing that might block your work might be, you know, in a completely different part of the system from you. Or the thing that might unlock your work might also be in a completely different side. So anyways, I'll use that as a foundation.

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Kitindi, I'll send it over to you. Um, how do you begin to bring this idea of systems thinking into government, particularly in high... very hierarchical and politically complex spaces?

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All right, so maybe I'll start from where you stopped, and thank you very much for the....

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Introduction, but also for inviting me for this meeting. It is a pleasure to be here. So, first of all, how I started is really by simply defining what.

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Uh, systems thinking is because you have to get buy-in before you introduce, um, that concept, because as you would notice, it's very counterculture to how.

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Government's work. So my first place, usually, in a workshop is, draw for me how you make a cup of coffee or a cup of tea.

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And usually people will do a very linear process of, I take a cab, I fetch the water, I... depending on where you are from, so you, of course, begin to see.

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Cultural emergencies coming out, etc. And when you pose the question, is it a simple problem or a complex problem?

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Everyone, obviously, will be like, it is simple. But if you think about it in context, it is fairly complex in the sense that.

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There are very many moving parts that had to happen for you to have that cup of coffee, feel that cup of tea.

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So, if the coffee manufacturer didn't get it to you on the shop on time, and you had the money to buy it, that's a whole system. You have farmers, you have....

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You know, a whole system going on there. Think about the water system.

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Think about the energy system. Think about the labor system. For us, in Africa, who consume so much milk, think about the milk system.

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All those things have to come together for you to actually have that cup of coffee. And somehow, they have to work together in terms of time.

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Delivery, you know, all those things for you to get that cup of coffee.

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And therefore, that interconnectedness is so important. The fact that all those parts have to come together for you to make the hole, which is the cup of coffee.

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The fact that, um.... Despite the fact that it's a linear process, there's another circular process happening.

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Behind the scenes for that to come to your table. There's obviously a lot of collaboration that has to work.

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So the road system has to work, ETC, you know, the banking system, etc. So, and that whole synthesis, that whole relationship has to come to fruition for you to work. And when you start there from a place where.

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People can understand just from a simple cup of coffee, they begin to identify with what you're talking about when you're... when you're, um, talking about, um.

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Systems thinking. And the reason for that is because you need buy-in.

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And that buy-in is so critical, because government works in very hierarchical and very, uh.

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You know, top-down ways. The other thing is basically how you frame.

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How you frame the issue. And how you frame the issue is so important. And basically, you're beginning to ask people to really move out of their comfort zone.

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To begin to explore. How do I....

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C's being the central part of decision-making, and go across board to work with other people.

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And basically try and figure out how to co-create solutions. And so that framing is so important, because then, obviously, the question becomes the how.

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People immediately begin to hear. That you're telling them, you're making their portfolios, their importance, their hierarchies.

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Very, very redundant, and none is very threatening. So the moment you start speaking about systems thinking, you're already beginning to threaten people's psyche.

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So you need to address and make sure that you're bringing in psychological safety.

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Into the whole discussion about systems thinking. And then, obviously, you need then to start seeing... asking people, where do you see areas of importance? And I'll stop speaking so much in, you know, become very practical.

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Um, so, in Africa, maybe the biggest challenge you begin to see right now is the youth.

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Youth bulge question. And the youth unemployment question. So, um, if you look at the youth and employment question, and one of the things about reframing is to ask different ministries.

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Youth cuts across different things. It cuts across health, education, agriculture.

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All those things. So you... by actually asking everyone of them.

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To give you a view of how they view this question of youthhood, for example.

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Therein lies a very interesting co-creating opportunity. Because you're beginning to bring people to the point of saying, your definition is not more important than mine. Because this one person actually needs all these definitions and all those outlook for their issues to be resolved.

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By doing that, you're beginning to draw them in to this conversation. You're beginning to then reframe the issue, the problem.

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So that it's not just a labor problem, education, trade, etc, but it is a holistic problem.

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And then you begin to map in the system around what does it mean for a young person who simply just wants the government to be able to.

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Help them figure out where they'll get job opportunities. And therefore, here lies in the whole question about systems. What is the contribution to education? What is the contribution to health? What is the contribution to everything else? So that this person can get.

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And once you begin to frame that, people begin to see this issue that is so huge, and people are....

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Perhaps duplicating issues, we can actually all hold on to our parts of the elephant, and if we are understanding that we are creating the elephant, we can all piece it together to actually become the elephant.

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And so, um, just to give you an example of a project that we did, um.

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In Kenya in 2007, we went through a post-election crisis. Interestingly, because I was working in a think tank, we had actually done a scenarios exercise that 7 years before that time had begun to say that.

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Kenya had all the ingredients that could make us go into a civil war.

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But obviously, we were the most stable country, perhaps, in the region.

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And across board, nobody could ever believe that we actually had that capacity until it happened.

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But for me, the point is this. When we began crafting the Vision 2030.

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The instructions and the TORs from the president was. Let us create an economic vision for Kenya, because the people who fought, or.

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Where the kills were most is where young people, idle young people unemployed, were actually the ones used to actually orchestrate the conflict.

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Long story short, we came in with this deep research that we had done and said, look.

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Having done a scenarios exercise, it will be counterproductive for you to actually do an economic vision by itself.

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The reason being, if you don't have political systems that actually.

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Support that economic, sort of, like, the basis for that economic growth.

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You go back to the very same problems because you create more inequality.

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If you don't have a social fabric that actually trusts the government and is able to coexist effectively.

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When you actually go back to the very same problem you're trying to resolve.

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So by doing that deep research, by showing the connections, by anchoring it in different other systems.

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You're saying your best bet of the vision is to have all these things, the political issues, the economic, the social.

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And the values coming together then to say, what is the vision for Kenya?

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And that was an interesting project, of course. How do you do that?

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You need a lot of political goodwill, and for us, particularly for this project.

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The success is we had a leadership that was willing to actually.

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Veer off from the original TOR and say, okay, let's include the political and the social pillar.

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But also, let's then co-create this vision with civil society, so that we can then be able to have a vision that then can be directed from government for it to be implemented across the ministries. So that's an example of.

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How you can use systems thinking to try and make entry points. And what I'm saying is that it can be at different levels. It can be at the.

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Presidential level, it can also be at a ministry level, where different departments can actually come together and say.

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This is our mandate. This is how we are going to actually co-create a solution on this, and this is what each of us will contribute.

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Of course, it is easier said than done, but if we make it a culture and a practice, I think we would try and get far.

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Thank you.

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Amazing, thanks so much, Katindi, and so many different good nuggets there, uh, to bring to the forefront.

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Kate, I want to keep going on this idea of concrete examples, and also building off of Katindi's.

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Mentioning of youth, which is the area that you work on with the government of South Africa, but also wondering if you could pull in some of what Millie was talking about with this whole idea of the portfolio approach.

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So can you introduce what the Presidential Employment Stimulus is, and how you're applying a portfolio approach to deliver in response to this?

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With pleasure. And before I do that, just to say, that was one of the most compelling, uh.

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Explanations of systems approaches that I've heard, so that was... that was beautiful.

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Um, so the Presidential Employment Stimulus, um, arose in the context of COVID. It was part of the crisis response to the economic impacts of the pandemic.

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And it fits very well within a framework of never let a good crisis go to waste.

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Because there was a degree of what I can only call policy panic.

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We already had a crisis of unemployment, we already had over 30% unemployment.

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Um, and we were losing jobs at a rapid rate. Um, 55% youth unemployment.

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Um, and so there was an urgent need to create publicly funded jobs.

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To deal with the fact that markets and the private sector simply couldn't do it, and were shedding jobs even further.

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Um, and so there was an urgency about it, and so the Presidential Employment Stimulus.

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Created half a million, uh, publicly funded jobs in its first year. It has, at this point, created over 2.2 million.

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Um, it mobilized over 15 departments in government, and I'd never heard of a portfolio approach at the time.

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It's only in retrospect. Then I've realized that that is what we did. We created a portfolio of programs, um, mobilizing 15 departments, doing very different things.

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Um, our biggest program, part of the issue was how do you go to scale quickly?

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And so there, part of the issue was, where is their institutional capacity? Where are their distributed networks that we can build on?

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And their schools were the most obvious example. Within 6 weeks of the program being announced, we had placed 315,000 young people.

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In over 20,000 schools in every corner of the country, because every community has a school.

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Every school has a management system, and every school could absorb 10 to....

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10 to 15 young people at very short notice. So that was an example of going rapidly to scale, but in a way that impacted the whole of the society.

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And had real impacts, um, on the learning environment in a really strong... creating really strong social value.

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How did it work? Um.... Why did it work well? Uh, it, of course, helped to be doing it from the president's office, but.

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Also critical was a central funding mechanism. Where what we said is we invited departments, we put some proposals on the table, so the school's program was rapidly put on the table.

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But then we invited all departments in government at a national level to put proposals on the table, and they came forward with alacrity.

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I mean, when do you have the opportunity to get additional budget?

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And this was such an opportunity. Um, and so departments came forward, and I think what was important, and for the portfolio concept, was.

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Um, we had a set of basic criteria. We needed to create jobs or livelihoods, or forms of economic inclusion, including for self-employed people.

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Um, there needed to be minimum standards, they need to create real social value.

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So those were the kinds of criteria against which the proposals were, um....

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You know, were approved or not approved. Many were rejected. Um, many were tiny project-scale initiatives. It was amazing how difficult the public sector found to think at scale.

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That was what we really had to push. And, you know, we didn't have time for project-level approaches.

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Um, in terms of, of, of a whole-of-society approach, we started with... within government, but then.

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We also included a program called the Social Employment Fund. Um, which specifically called on organizations in civil society to come forward. It was recognized that.

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We use the slogan, there's no shortage of work to be done to make South Africa a better place.

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Um, we recognize that many organizations in communities across the country are doing fantastic work.

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Combating gender-based violence, food security, catchment management, care, you name it.

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And the idea was, how do we help them do more of that good work and create jobs in the process?

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Another mechanism was for the creative sector. We recognized that creatives who were very badly affected by the pandemic.

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And so we created a special stimulus for the creative sector, which invited creatives to propose new creative work.

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Um, that would employ themselves and ideally employ others as well. And so we had an absolute outpouring. I mean, that program was oversubscribed.

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We could support, uh, I can't remember the numbers, but it was, like, 10 times oversubscribed in terms of the budget that we have. We just had an absolute.

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And I think outpouring of ideas and excitement. Um, and I think the point here is, you know, calls for proposals are not a new instrument, but you can use them in different ways as a form of innovation in relation to procurement.

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And the key lesson for us here was don't over-design. Allow the ideas to bubble from below, and bubble up into the process. Set criteria, be clear on your purpose, be clear what you want to achieve, but don't predetermine what that's gonna look like.

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We were amazed and inspired by the responses from across the whole of society.

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Sorry, I was just writing down my questions. Speaking of which, reminder, everybody, to write down your questions, uh, and put it into the Q&A. Uh, so I'm actually going to use this as a chance to jump into Q&A. Um, I know, like, I've... I have....

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Lots of questions I want to ask each of you, but I also want to make sure there's time for other people, uh, to ask your questions, so use the Q&A at the bottom. I know I see Igor's already got a question here, um, so please, uh, add your questions to the Q&A as well.

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And while you're doing that, I want to draw your attention to the fantastic systems thinking community. This is a space where you can connect with your peers, with the speakers here, ask questions, share resources, and really, we're in together. This is meant to be the starting point in the communities where this can continue.

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Uh, so please join the community. There's over 6,000 people from governments all over the world who are part of that community. I'm there, if that's not an incentive, I don't know what is, but you should come hang out with me and everybody else in the systems thinking community.

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Um, alright. Q&a. Uh, I actually have a question, Millie, and I want to bring it back to you. We've just heard, like.

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These amazing stories of systems thinking in action. Uh, but if you're just starting out on this journey, it can all feel a bit overwhelming. What advice would you have, like, where do you start? Hey, new to systems thinking, work in the government, I wanted to apply it, but I don't even know where to start. What advice would you give?

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Well, so what we found is that one can get lost pretty quickly if you start reading and checking out what others are... getting in and doing the work. Just like, uh....

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Just, like, from Roberto spoke, just like Kate, you know, Kate's story is really extraordinary to me. Covid strikes.

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You know, hundreds of thousands of people, young kids, you know, at home without a job.

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She's got something up her sleeve, go and do it. And what we've learned from her work, really, is that.

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What was previously treated is, for example, youth issues, not really a youth issue, it's a social cohesion issue in one community. It's resource management in another community, so the advice here is.

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If you're interested to dig into this type of work, what we hear from colleagues from public sector and cities and governments is.

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Bring to life in your own country, in your own department, uh, because chances are there are another few people sitting in other departments who are having the same type of headache as you do.

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Amazing. Uh, Roberto, I want to go to you next, um, and I'm going to try to... Igor's got this big meta question here that I'm gonna try to synthesize into something, so.

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Bear with me as I attempt to simplify a bit, but really this idea that, you know.

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In systems, it can be big and complex. How do you ensure, um....

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A way of approaching things that doesn't leave people behind. Like, how do we move forward collectively, instead of just being certain parts of the system that take advantage of the situation?

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Okay, um.... For us here, we are trying to... to bring.

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Um.... To dialogue with a representative of all... all over the country. We have a....

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The most important for us is how to get the diversity... diversity we have in Brazil.

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And, uh, we are trying to put this in the huge dialogue.

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Since the... our, uh, four. Four years plan, budget, and we're trying to do this with... direct with the people.

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All over the country, and we're trying that, um.... With, uh, nationalist strategy for public procurement and the national strategy for the....

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Just the government, with a lot of dialogue all over the country, all over the country, because we have to get.

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Our diversity.

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I actually want to build upon this, and Kate, I'm going to throw this to you next, because I have a special question holding off for Katindi after this.

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So much that we talk about when it comes to systems thinking is awareness and dialogue. Are there any....

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Tips and tricks on how to do that. Um, I mean, we live in this, like, hierarchical.

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System of government, and yet, you know, all the recommendations are, like, Roberto's just saying, you gotta go and talk to people, you have to go out and help make those connections.

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Are there ways that help doing that in a particularly hierarchical system like government?

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I think one of the most important things is not just to talk.

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Within government. To broaden the room, because that very... you know, people in the wider society don't think in the same silos.

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And having to respond to that means that government officials also can't just rely on the existing silos.

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Um, so the fir- yeah, the first comment would be, you know, open the door, broaden the room, um, bring in other voices. Um, yeah, I'll leave it there.

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Well, and I think one of the things I like about that as well is that there's certain things that we can do as public servants, there's certain things we can't do. But, there could be other people within the system who can do stuff that we can't do.

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Uh, I'm just thinking, like, you were just talking about dialogue. I mean, I know with consultation of the Government of Canada, it's a process. You can't just go out and consult.

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There's a whole process behind it. That being said, some of the community organizations that we've worked with in the past are much more agile and can get into play... and have more trust in a lot of spaces that we don't. And so, that's the idea of, you know, partnerships, I think it's a core part of, uh, making this happen.

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Uh, Kendi, I mentioned I had a question specifically for you, and this is from Anna. You mentioned psychological safety when it comes to systems change, and helping people to shift their way of doing things.

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Do you have any more insights into how you do this, and help manage people's emotional and psychological responses to change?

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My simple question.

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All right, thank you very much for that. Yeah, thank you for that question. I think, um, first and foremost, people usually....

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Tend to stay away from things they don't understand. And my rule of thumb is really simplify it and make sure that everybody can identify with it from a very simple point of view, because that becomes a point of reference for them.

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And almost like your safety blanket, if you may. When you think that it's getting too complex, you can come back and say, okay.

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I remember the cup of tea, I remember that it's about the coffee farmer, it's about the road, it's about the water.

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So that really helps to really endear people to... and it's... I feel like it's half the battle won in the sense that.

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Then people can begin to say, okay, if that can work that way, what does it... how can I translate? So it also helps.

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Translate information from very big mega concepts to, okay. I can see that interconnections are important, I can see that.

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There has to be relationships with TC. So I think the other way is basically.

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Also, just getting information. And I think when you... when you have basic skills on... on... on a conversation, you don't feel....

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Intimidated by it. So, just getting to understand what is it about systems thinking that is out there. Of course, get the simplified versions, because I have come across the most complex definitions of systems thinking, and it is very difficult.

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For anyone. So, just getting, um, yourself to get skilled on that is important.

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I really, really like this whole idea. I do a lot of research, of course, and my background is research and policy analysis.

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And one of the things is, even just starting from a point of view of beginning to see the connections.

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From deep researches, and I really like what Dr. Kate says about bringing different people in the room.

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And actually, when you think about government culture, it's about... we are like-minded, we are very turn-of-vision in terms of we think we work in echo chambers.

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But when you bring people that think very different from us, and challenge the way we think, and we are open to that, it really opens up the room for us to think about.

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Other ways in which the systems work as well. And then, um, my sense is that.

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Um, as you do this, lean on, for example, cases, case studies that have also worked as well.

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And particularly cases that are in line with what you want to do.

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Because that also helps give viewpoints on what you could do, like a sneak preview of what success will look like, and that helps a lot. So, as you deal with that, as you make the process easy, it helps you then to navigate it a little easier.

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And then it becomes a less challenging process, and it gives you the safety and the confidence you need.

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Thanks so much, Katindi. Uh, Millie, I want to come back to you with this next question.

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Thank you.

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Um.... I mentioned earlier, governments are very hierarchical, and part of that is also in the evaluation and monitoring processes that we have put in place that we are accountable to.

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So, how do you, um, I guess, MacGyver, or, like, you know, work with that... work within that structured system that is very hierarchical, is very, sort of.

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Not conducive to systems thinking. And within that context, particularly thinking around the whole idea of monitoring, planning, evaluation, like, that process, which is, you know, very....

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Lanier, how do you work within that? What are success stories that you've seen that people can draw inspiration from?

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Yeah, I think this also connects a little bit to your previous question about how to start. I mean, there is something that we have done.

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With colleagues from different cities and governments, called sense-making, meaning meeting colleagues where they are. Um, so if... if, for example, we work with Zambia recently on the circular and just transition.

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And what we do when there is that type of an issue, one of the things that we say, okay, so if this is where you want to go, what do you already have that speaks to this?

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This mission, and we call it, sort of, portfolio sense-making. And at least two types of insights come out. One.

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What are the connections between initiatives and policies? That are... that currently exist, but are not connected. So very quickly, what emerged.

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Is that an election... a set of election projects and set of energy projects need to come together as to extend energy access into areas that don't have good energy, and therefore the populace, the citizens, are not as informed and are not able to wield their vote and agency and elections as well.

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Whereas if previously we didn't have this frame, it would be really difficult to bridge that connection. Then, obviously, when you find that there is a connection between two completely seemingly disparate.

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Set of initiatives, one around election, one around energy. Then the question becomes.

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How do we make this work? Right? How do we put money that's currently sitting in two different budgets?

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Teams that currently report the different set of, you know, supervisors, and have very different set of mandates to actually come together, not coordinate.

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Not share information, but actually make joint decisions about how to address some of those issues. We see that also, especially in Asia, around issues that have to do with, for example, health and environment, right?

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Where the joint objective is how do you reduce number of hospital visits related to, you know, air pollution, respiratory diseases. If these two teams come together, at the point in time now, with sector-based public finances being allocated to sector-based KPIs, there's very little interest to do that.

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I think this is, as a starting point, we found this type of sense-making a really useful entry point.

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That surfaces pain issues. That people see, but don't necessarily might have a shared....

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Understanding as to. Just how many there are, and how can we move forward.

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The barrier there is then a structural change, right? We've seen, for example, Danish government has played with the idea of setting up a mission.

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Ministry that actually integrates agriculture, environment, and climate, because they have found that, you know, working by committee hasn't really made the dial, uh, the dial move.

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So I think that's one. Now, if you bring these things together, then as you pointed out, how do we understand change?

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As you're toggling a long-term. Uh, you know, transformation with kind of a shorter-term.

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A shorter-term actions. One of the concepts that we have found very useful is one of momentum.

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Um, and sort of looking at where do we hear, where do we see signals of change, or lack of signals of change, where we might want to, you know, throw the rock into the lake to create the puddles. Now.

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Being able to assess momentum gives you an opportunity, gives you insights to have a number of different things that you can do.

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Right? But this is where, to Roberto's point, the way we move money.

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With procurement and hiring, it's very, you know, that tension.... Irrespective of the quality and the frequency with which you can get insights.

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From the ground, that grinds at your ability to move money in the public sector as quickly as you can, and this is where, to Kate's point.

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Um, the influence question comes in, right? If your portfolio, so to speak, has a number of partners outside the state that buy into the same vision....

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They can, uh, they can move. But I think the M&E is the one part that we have found the most exciting.

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In terms of this whole systems work. Because the premium is being able to compete on the quality and frequency of intelligence that you're able to surface.

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At the surface out that Kate and I were in South Africa a couple of months ago, and one of the stories that we heard.

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Was in Zimbabwe, there was a number of... there was a growing number of people getting bit by snakes.

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And they couldn't figure out why. Seasonally, it made no sense. This particular area, it made no sense. But at the point in time where you had a Minister of Energy, a Minister of Health in the same room, they actually figured out that these particular areas were areas where the energy access was very intermittent. Women were going out to collect firewood and getting built by snakes.

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So, what was essentially looked at as a health issue. Was actually gender relationships, infrastructure, and energy issue.

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So, the capabilities, one, being able to see. And then being able to bring different partners in to... that's M&E.

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In systems, being able to get those really quickly and to respond to them.

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So I'm gonna jump in, because that's an amazing story. I... we, uh, are basically at time. Uh, I could keep having these conversations with you for several hours, um.

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Good news! We have a systems thinking community where we can keep this conversation going, and I actually have homework for everybody, because one of the questions that we've got was asking about, you know, what are you reading? What are the resources, the articles, the books that are inspiring you?

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So, my homework for everybody here, as well as all of you, uh, is to go onto the Systems Thinking Community. I'll make a post inviting people to share their resources.

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And then just throw your resources in there, and we can build a bit of a summer or winter, depending on what hemisphere you're in, reading list.

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Um, so, first off, thanks everybody for participating, our amazing speakers here, uh, Millie, Roberto, Kate, and Katindi, for taking time and speaking with all of us. To all of you.

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A big thank you. We are going to launch a quick poll here, uh, to just get your feel on how you enjoyed today's session. Scale of 1 to 10. So please fill out this poll. And while you're doing that, did I mention the systems thinking community?

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In case I didn't, you should join it. It is a great place to keep those conversations going, get resources. So many questions we didn't get to.

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Um, so please go to systems thinking community and keep the conversation going there.

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Um, and finally, reminder that if you found today engaging, and you're hungry to learn more about how systems thinking and portfolio approaches works, because we just scratched the surface on this, uh....

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You can help us demolish... we've got this new tackling complex challenges with portfolio approach that you can see, uh, in this new course, so definitely check out this new course. Once again, this is a brand new online, self-paced.

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Free course, developed in partnership with AP Political and the UNDP Strategic Innovation Unit.

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Um, designed to help you up your systems thinking skills. So you can find the link in the resources, as well as in the chat. Um, okay, well, we're basically at time.

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So, uh, hopefully you found it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you once again to everyone who made SAY happen, and thank you for taking the time out of your super busy day, uh, to be with us. Keep an eye out for emails, I know people are asking about resources, they'll be coming in an email to your inbox soon, including the presentations. And a recording. So, other than that, we hope to see you at a new apolitical event soon.

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And other than that.