

STRATEGIC PATTERN DIAGNOSTIC

A 20-Minute Assessment of Systemic Complexity

What This Diagnostic Reveals

This assessment helps leadership teams understand whether they're facing genuinely systemic challenges requiring systems thinking capability or technical problems that traditional approaches can solve effectively.

Three dimensions assessed:

- **Pattern Recognition** – which systemic patterns your organisation is experiencing
- **Readiness** – whether you recognise complexity and show willingness for new approaches
- **Urgency** – how critical it is to address these patterns now

How to Use This Diagnostic

Individual completion: 5 minutes

Group exercise: 20 minutes (5 minutes individual + 15 minutes discussion)

For group use:

1. Each person completes independently (5 minutes)
2. Share and discuss scores together (15 minutes)
3. Reveal where you see patterns differently
4. Use interpretation guide to determine next steps

For individual use: Complete all sections, then use the interpretation guide (page 6) to understand your results and recommended next steps.

PART A — PATTERN RECOGNITION

PATTERN RECOGNITION (0—12 points)

For each pattern below, mark the checkbox that best describes your organisation.

Pattern 1: The Recurring Problem

'We've addressed the same strategic issue multiple times, but it keeps resurfacing in new forms. Our "solutions" seem to create new versions of the original problem.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
 - ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
 - ☐ Definitely us (2 points)
-

Pattern 2: The Unintended Consequence

'When we fix one problem, we often create new problems elsewhere. Our interventions generate unexpected effects in other parts of the organisation.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
 - ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
 - ☐ Definitely us (2 points)
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Pattern 3: The Strategy–Execution Gap

'Our strategic plans feel disconnected from operational reality. By the time we implement, market conditions have shifted and our strategy feels outdated.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
 - ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
 - ☐ Definitely us (2 points)
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Pattern 4: The Change Fatigue

'Multiple change initiatives have created cynicism. People resist new transformation programmes because previous ones failed to deliver lasting improvement.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
- ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
- ☐ Definitely us (2 points)

Pattern 5: The Fragmented Optimisation

'Different departments optimise their own performance without understanding system-wide impact. Decisions made in isolation create conflicts elsewhere.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
 - ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
 - ☐ Definitely us (2 points)
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Pattern 6: The Trust Deficit

'Trust has eroded – in leadership, between teams, or across the organisation. Defensive behaviour prevents honest conversation about real challenges.'

- ☐ Not us (0 points)
 - ☐ Somewhat us (1 point)
 - ☐ Definitely us (2 points)
-

PART A TOTAL: _____ / 12

PART B — READINESS ASSESSMENT**READINESS ASSESSMENT (8—40 points)**

Rate each statement: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Recognition of Interconnection

'Our leadership team recognises we're facing interconnected challenges that can't be solved in isolation.'

Strongly Disagree **1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5** Strongly Agree

2. Willingness to Examine Thinking

'We're willing to invest time examining how we think about problems, not just solving them faster.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

3. Psychological Safety

'Our culture allows people to surface difficult truths without fear of negative consequences.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

4. Openness to New Approaches

'We're open to trying approaches that feel unfamiliar if evidence suggests they address our challenges.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

5. Long-Term Thinking

'We recognise that quick fixes often create larger problems downstream.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

6. Productive Disagreement

'Our team can have productive conversations about differing perspectives without becoming defensive.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

7. Time Commitment

'We're prepared to commit time for deep work, not just quick workshops.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

8. Sustained Practice

'We understand that developing new capabilities requires sustained practice, not one-off events.'

Strongly Disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 Strongly Agree

PART B TOTAL: _____ / 40

PART C — URGENCY ASSESSMENT

Select the **ONE** statement that best describes your situation:

☐ **Critical (3 months)**

We're making strategic mistakes or experiencing competitive disadvantage due to inability to think systemically. We need capability now.

☐ **Important (6 months)**

We recognise systemic patterns affecting performance. Should plan structured development over next 6–12 months.

☐ **Review (12 months)**

Lower priority currently but patterns are present. Will monitor whether urgency increases.

☐ **Interesting**

Intellectually curious about methodology but no immediate organisational need. Will reassess quarterly or annually.

SCORING & INTERPRETATION

YOUR RESULTS

PART A: PATTERN RECOGNITION (0—12)

Score: _____ / 12

9–12: High Complexity

Multiple systemic patterns present. Your challenges are interconnected rather than isolated.

What this means: The recurring problems, strategy-execution gaps, or fragmented thinking you're experiencing won't resolve through better execution alone. Traditional problem-solving likely creates unintended consequences elsewhere in your system. You need capability to understand underlying system dynamics, not just implement solutions faster.

5–8: Moderate Complexity

Some systemic patterns present. Worth exploring if issues resurface despite good execution.

What this means: Some challenges may be interconnected whilst others are more straightforward. The key question: do problems keep resurfacing despite good execution? If the same issues return in different forms, you're likely dealing with systemic patterns that traditional approaches won't resolve. Systems thinking may be valuable – especially if patterns intensify over time.

0–4: Low Complexity

Challenges appear isolated rather than interconnected. Traditional approaches should work.

What this means: The issues you're facing likely don't require systems thinking capability right now. Standard problem-solving, project management, or

analytical approaches should work effectively. However, if problems persist despite good execution, or if the same issues resurface repeatedly, reassess – what looks technical may actually be systemic.

PART B: READINESS (8–40)

Score: _____ / 40

33–40: High Readiness

Psychological safety and leadership commitment present. Positioned for capability development.

What this means: You have the foundation needed for systems thinking to take root. This combination is rare and valuable – your team can examine assumptions, surface difficult truths, and engage in genuine inquiry without defensiveness. You're positioned to develop capability, not just attend workshops. The challenge now is translating readiness into sustained practice.

21–32: Moderate Readiness

Some elements present with gaps. Need internal discussion before proceeding.

What this means: You may have leadership commitment without psychological safety, or willingness to try new approaches without time for deep work. Before investing in systems thinking capability development, explore what's creating hesitation. Use this diagnostic as a conversation starter with your leadership team about what genuine readiness requires. Building foundation may be more valuable than jumping into methodology.

8–20: Low Readiness

May not recognise interconnections or lack cultural safety. Build foundation first.

What this means: Your organisation may not yet recognise the interconnected nature of challenges, or cultural barriers prevent the honest inquiry systems thinking requires. This isn't failure – it's useful clarity about where to focus. Build psychological safety first. Help leadership see systemic patterns rather than isolated problems. Create conditions where examining assumptions feels safe, not threatening. Revisit this assessment in 6–12 months after building foundation.

PART C: URGENCY

Your Selection: _____

Critical (3 months)

Cost of not addressing patterns is increasing. Act now to avoid strategic mistakes.

What this means: You're likely making decisions without understanding system-wide consequences, solving problems that create bigger problems elsewhere, or missing strategic opportunities because you can't see interconnections. Delaying capability development compounds the problem – patterns typically intensify when unaddressed. The investment in systems thinking capability pays back quickly when you avoid even one major strategic mistake.

Important (6 months)

Affecting performance but not crisis. Time to plan thoughtfully.

What this means: Systemic patterns are visible but haven't created crisis yet. You have time to build the case internally, secure leadership commitment, and design capability development as sustained practice rather than episodic intervention. Don't wait until patterns become critical – that forces reactive responses rather than thoughtful development. Use this window to establish foundation properly.

Review (12 months)

Not urgent now. Monitor if patterns intensify.

What this means: Systems thinking capability development isn't urgent right now. Focus on executing well with current approaches. However, pay attention to whether the same problems resurface despite good execution, whether unintended consequences multiply, or whether complexity increases over time. If patterns intensify, reassess – what feels manageable today may require systemic capability tomorrow. Early recognition creates advantage.

Interesting

No immediate need. Reassess when situation changes.

What this means: You're intellectually curious about systems thinking but don't face immediate organisational need. That's perfectly valid. Bookmark this

assessment and the Executive Brief. If your situation changes – new strategic challenges emerge, conventional approaches stop working, or complexity increases – return to evaluate whether systems thinking capability has become relevant. Sometimes understanding the methodology before needing it creates advantage when challenges arise.

YOUR NEXT STEPS

Your scores reveal whether systems thinking capability would serve your organisation – and how urgently you need it.

What to do now:

1. Share these results with your leadership team

Run this diagnostic together (20 minutes) and discuss where you see patterns differently. Individual scores reveal personal perspective – group discussion reveals systemic reality.

2. Download the Executive Brief (20-minute read)

Understand what systems thinking capability delivers and whether your organisation needs it.

Download at: seriousoutcomes.com/executive-brief

3. Assess fit for your context

- **High scores across all areas?** Start with a leadership team workshop to explore patterns together and build shared understanding.
- **Mixed scores?** Use results to spark conversation about what you're experiencing and whether traditional approaches are serving you.
- **Lower scores?** Monitor whether patterns intensify. Systemic challenges often become more visible over time.

4. Ready to explore next steps?

Email sean@serious.global with your scores and context. We'll help you think about appropriate next steps for your organisation.

TEAM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Use this 80-minute structure to explore results together:

Setup (5 minutes)

- Everyone completes diagnostic individually beforehand
 - Create psychologically safe space for honest conversation
 - Clarify purpose: understanding our challenges, not defending positions
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Round 1: Share Scores (15 minutes)

- Each person shares their three scores (Pattern Recognition, Readiness, Urgency)
- No discussion yet – just listen to differences
- Notice where perspectives diverge most

Guiding questions:

- Where do we see patterns differently?
 - What does divergence reveal about our perspectives?
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Round 2: Explore Complexity (20 minutes)

- Discuss Part A patterns marked 2 points (definitely us)
- For each pattern: What specific examples demonstrate this?
- Look for interconnections between patterns

Guiding questions:

- Are these isolated challenges or interconnected dynamics?
 - What happens when we address one pattern? Do others worsen?
 - Which patterns feel most consequential?
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Round 3: Examine Readiness (20 minutes)

- Discuss Part B statements with divergent scores
- Explore why some see readiness where others don't

- Identify specific barriers to genuine inquiry and deep work

Guiding questions:

- Can we have difficult conversations without defensiveness?
 - Are we willing to examine how our thinking creates our challenges?
 - What would need to shift to create genuine readiness?
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Round 4: Determine Urgency & Next Steps (20 minutes)

- Given our complexity and readiness, what's appropriate timing?
- What path forward makes sense for our specific situation?
- Who needs to be involved in next conversations?

Guiding questions:

- What's the cost of not addressing systemic patterns?
 - What's required to build capability (not just awareness)?
 - What's our next concrete action?
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UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS THINKING

WHAT IS SYSTEMS THINKING?

Systems thinking is the discipline of seeing wholes rather than parts, understanding how elements interconnect and influence each other over time, and recognising that system behaviour emerges from relationships between elements – not from the elements themselves.

It means shifting perspective from:

- Focusing on things → focusing on interrelationships
- Seeing static snapshots → recognising patterns of change
- Blaming individuals → understanding how system structure generates behaviour

Why it matters:

Most organisational challenges are systemic – they arise from how parts of your organisation interact, not from any single part being broken. Traditional

reductionist thinking (breaking problems into parts, solving each separately) creates unintended consequences because it ignores interconnections.

THE SYSTEMS SYNERGY METHODOLOGY

Three powerful methodologies integrate to make systems thinking practical and accessible:

LEGO® Serious Play® – Makes invisible systems visible and tangible through three-dimensional model building. Everyone builds, everyone's perspective matters equally, psychological safety emerges through physical objectification of ideas.

The Fifth Discipline – Provides the strategic framework (Peter Senge's five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning) that transforms experiential discovery into transferable knowledge.

Dialogue – Creates reflective depth (David Bohm's practice of collective inquiry) that transforms understanding into behavioural change through suspension of assumptions and genuine thinking together.

Together, they develop four irreplaceable human intelligences:

- Individual meaning-making (purpose, creativity, judgement)
 - Relational trust (empathy, vulnerability, authentic connection)
 - Collective wisdom (group intelligence exceeding individual capability)
 - Systems intelligence (seeing wholes, understanding interconnection)
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WHEN SYSTEMS THINKING IS APPROPRIATE

Use this approach when:

- Facing genuinely systemic challenges where multiple interconnected forces create complexity
- Strategic thinking has become superficial, producing documents rather than capability
- Investing heavily in AI/technology but neglecting fundamental questions about what you're creating
- Conventional approaches have been tried repeatedly and failed

- Leadership team is ready for genuine inquiry and deep work

Use other approaches when:

- Challenge is technical (well-defined, clear cause-effect) rather than complex
 - Need decisions quickly and options are clear
 - Work is primarily technical rather than adaptive
 - Stakeholder alignment is the primary need (not understanding development)
 - Organisational culture is highly resistant or time pressures are extreme
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RESOURCES & CONTACT

DOWNLOAD ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Executive Brief: Why. What. How.

20-minute overview for senior leaders and decision-makers. Explains the strategic case for systems thinking capability, what the Systems Synergy delivers, and how to begin.

Download at: seriousoutcomes.com/executive-brief

The Systems Synergy (Complete Book)

Full treatment of the theory, practice, and evidence. Ten years of practitioner wisdom across diverse contexts showing what works, what doesn't, and what distinguishes transformative work from merely competent facilitation.

Available at: seriousoutcomes.com/systems-synergy

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RESULTS?

If you'd like to discuss your diagnostic results and what they mean for your organisation:

Email: sean@serious.global

Website: seriousoutcomes.com

Response time: Within 2 business days

We're particularly interested in hearing from organisations scoring high on complexity and readiness with critical or important urgency timelines.

A NOTE ON HONEST ASSESSMENT

This diagnostic is most valuable when answered honestly, not aspirationally.

If you found yourself tempted to mark higher scores because you want your team to be ready rather than because you genuinely are, that's valuable information.

Readiness can be developed. Psychological safety can be built. Willingness to examine assumptions can be cultivated. But pretending readiness exists when it doesn't leads to failed initiatives and wasted resources.

If your scores suggest lower readiness, that's not failure – it's useful clarity about where to focus first.

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