SYSTEMS THINKING IN AN AGE OF COMPLEXITY

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The world has become increasingly networked and unpredictable. Decision-makers at all levels are required to manage the consequences of complexity every day. Simple solutions to complex issues are usually inadequate and risk exacerbating the very problems they are designed to solve. Leaders of international bodies such as the UN, OECD, UNESCO and WHO – and of major business, public sector, charitable, and professional organizations – have all declared systems thinking an essential leadership skill for managing the complexity of the economic, social and environmental issues they face.

This presentation explains the need for a systems approach and charts the development of systems thinking as it has sought to come to terms with different aspects of complexity. It shows how different systems approaches have to be used in informed combinations to manage the interconnected problems that decision-makers currently face – an approach known as 'critical systems thinking'.