

I would like to introduce you to a very simple framework that we have been using to understand systems in a dynamic and holistic, non-binary intersectional way in our work on Systems Transformation.

This is the visual that depicts the framework. It's based on the integral framework, which basically says that any system requires investigation of at least four domains, a minimum of four domains, in order to develop a holistic understanding.

So let me walk you through these four domains. As you can see the two squares or quadrants that you see in the upper half, are about the individuals who are part of the system. The two quadrants which are at the bottom represent the collective aspects of the system.

Let's start with the top left quadrant. This quadrant represents the inner world of the individuals who constitute the system. It's what they think and feel inside themselves, and it's something they hold inside themselves. And this inner world includes their values, their beliefs, their ethical and moral framework, their image of themselves, the way they see the world, their perspectives on issues, and on change. So, that's the inner person.

Now, as you can see here, these two quadrants on the left are internal, invisible, tacit while on the right we have the external visible explicit expression of what is internal and invisible.

So let's look at the top right quadrant. The top right quadrant is the external expression of the individuals inner world. This is what others see. So while the individual's values, beliefs, ethics and so on are known only to them, they are revealed through their bodies, their behavior, their actions. The way they perform - the way they act out their being - the expressions of their sexuality for instance, or their expressions of their preferences and biases, is a window into their inner world . This is the connection between the "invisible inside" and the "visible outside" of individuals who make up part of the system.

Now let's come down to the collective side, and let's look at the bottom left quadrant. This quadrant represents the collective expression of the inner worlds of the individuals who constitute the system. This is the "shared normal" - the shared set of norms, constructed collectively by people in the system, and implicitly believed in, followed and supported. So things like morality - what is right and what is wrong ; judgements - what is valuable, what is not or what is useful, what is not; biases - this kind of people are not good, or people from that place are not quite the same as us; narratives about what the system is doing, what the system wants to achieve, the history of the system. What is outside the boundary of the system and what is inside, what part of history, what part of reality is valid. Is there a collective agreement to erase something, to not talk about it, to silence it, to pretend that it doesn't exist. All this constitutes the shared normal, or the culture, the culture of the system or the institution.

Now if you look at the bottom right quadrant, that is the external expression of the culture. It's the external expression of the "shared normal" within the system, and this expression is in the form of the structure of the system. So the hierarchies, the power sharing, the lines of power, policies, processes, rules, laws, protocols, the regulated ways of doing things that are laid down by the system - these are the external expression of the shared normal. These structures allow this "normal" to sustain itself and allow this "normal" to replicate itself.

As you can see all of these elements of the system, all of these four elements are in dynamic interaction with each other, as we've indicated with these two-sided arrows. It is because these elements interact continuously with each other that they constitute a system, they don't have any existence apart from each other - they exist because of each other and that's how they influence each other also.

Once the structure is created, it provides the boundaries of the system - it is the framework within which people act, show themselves to others through their behaviour and the ways they perform their roles and duties.

So once the structure is created, individual behaviour is regulated, and the inner world may also be influenced and impacted. The culture too influences the inner world, which in turn influences the external behaviour and so on.

This slide gives a slightly different view of what is happening within the system. It shows the kind of big processes happening within each domain. In the domain of the inner world, the mind space of the individual - the thinking and the feeling is happening in this space. The external, visible, explicit space of practice and action is the space of the body - individual bodies are doing and showing. In the culture quadrant, what is happening is that people are conforming to that normative framework that is set by the culture. At the same time, people are also being socialised into matching that culture, adapting themselves and reconciling their individual values with the collective shared normative values. They are also socialising others to come into the culture and to blend into it. In the domain of the rules and the laws, the structural domain, what is happening is that the unwritten invisible norms of the culture are being regulated and validated through rules and laws.

So this is how these processes are interacting with each other within the system. This system could be anything - you could apply this framework to an organisation, you could apply this framework to a social system like class, or caste or heterosexuality or patriarchy. You could apply it to a community, to a group on the ground, or a movement. Whichever however you decide to frame the boundaries of the system, whichever part of the geography you want to look at within a system - you could apply this framework to understand all of the different things that are happening from these four essential viewpoints.

Looked at another way - some of us might prefer to enter our analysis of the system through our own inner worlds. We might prefer to go in with our perception of how things work, our understanding of how systems ought to be. Even though our entry point is from one quadrant, the exploration will inevitably take us into other quadrants. Similarly you can enter the analysis through the culture quadrant through trying to understand what the shared normal is. But that inquiry will inevitably lead you into the other quadrants.

This is why, in our experience of developing and using this framework, we found it to be something that covers the entirety of the system. It's a holistic framework. It's not binary - it's not only about women and men. It's about every individual, regardless of their gender identity, regardless of any of their other identity markers. It can be applied to see how power is playing out in each of these domains, and to understand how individuals are thinking, feeling, being, doing; how the culture is socialising and making people conform; and how the governance structure of the institution or organisation is regulating and validating the activities inside the system.

So this framework is useful because it can be a guide to understanding systems transformation in more complex and holistic ways, as we've tried to show in this slide. Essentially what we're saying is - all of the goals that we talk about - we want to transform patriarchal systems, gendered systems into systems where everybody has equal rights, equal freedoms. Everybody is respected and given dignity. Everybody is recognised and valued. Everyone has access to justice and access to resources. Everyone is safe and secure, can be assured of safety and security. Everyone can be included and is included and can participate. There is no discrimination and no violence on the basis of identity, or regional location or cultural preference or whatever else.

So that's the kind of system based on equality and freedom that we're talking about. For this transformation to come about, changes have to happen in each of these quadrants that are in a dynamic relationship to one another. When change happens in one quadrant, it inevitably impacts the other quadrants.

When we're talking about transformation, we're not really thinking about this long slow process that might take centuries to change in the normal course. We're talking about transformation for the people we work with, whose lives are being daily threatened and destroyed by these inequalities. So when we're talking about transformation, we're talking about conscious, directed, purposive action to make change happen within one or more of these domains, in a powerful way that influences the whole system and therefore moves the whole system and shifts the whole system in the direction of transformation.

This is just a quick explanation of how we use this framework. It is a work in progress - we are using it, refining it, developing it continuously. This is the latest iteration. We are hoping everybody who's been part of this discussion will take it back, play with it, apply it to their own contexts and see if it works for them, see how they would like to tweak it or change it. We hope you will continue to be in conversation with us and share your experience of using it.