



Young Person's Guide to Systems Change



03 A note from the directors

05 Acknowledgements

06 **Introduction:** Why a Young Person's Guide to Systems Change?

09 Who do we think we are and why are we talking about this?

13 But what is a system anyway?

19 *We-ness*

23 The power of storytelling: Once Upon a System

26 Wrapping It All Up: Your Guide to Systems Change

28 What Next?

31 Meet the Authors

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTORS



Welcome to the Young Person's Guide to Systems Change. This guide is chock full of humour, anecdotes and useful information that will introduce you to basic concepts about systems thinking and systems change. It is not just

another toolkit for young people but a love letter from The 50 Percent to you.

Every year, the world seems like it is getting a little worse. However, since 2021, we have met thousands of young people who have committed themselves to creating a better future for us all. It's been 4 years, and we still have not changed the world, but we've gone from 5 people to 2000 people working together to make this happen. Through this guide, we aim to inspire and invite you to join us on this journey.

50 Percenters across the world are taking control of their future...

Will you?

- **Nolita Mvunelo.**



The Young Person's Guide to Systems Change is an invitation.

An invitation to believe that this world (your world and mine) can be a better place—we just need the right tools to build it.

To let go of the defeatist mindset that says this reality cannot be changed.

To believe in the words of the brilliant Gabriel García Márquez when he invited us to dream of "a new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others even how they die, where love is truly real and happiness is possible, and where the lineages condemned to a hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second chance on Earth."

This is your Young Person's Guide to Systems Change.

Welcome.

- Matías Lara.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This program was developed as part of the New Generational Contract initiative by the St. Gallen Symposium and the Club of Rome.

The Young Person's Guide to Systems Change would not have been possible without the inspiration and unwavering support of Anne Snick, whose Young Person's Guide to the Future provided us with an invaluable foundation for this work.

We are deeply grateful to our mentors, Carlos Álvarez Pereira and Mamphela Ramphele, for their guidance and encouragement. Their steadfast support for young people has empowered us to pursue bold and transformative projects.

To Michael Winter (oikos International) and Cathy-Mae Karelse (Climate Youth Resilience), thank you for generously sharing your knowledge and insights, enriching this program in countless ways.

Finally, to The 50 Percent community—your belief in a better world continues to inspire and drive us forward.

1.

Introduction: why a young person's guide to systems change?

Congratulations, dear reader! By opening this guide, you have taken your first bold step into the swirling vortex of systems change—a realm so perplexing and convoluted that even the universe's most advanced AI have been known to fake a system crash just to avoid dealing with it.

The modern world, as you might have noticed, is not exactly user-friendly. It comes pre-installed with an overwhelming array of glitches: climate crises, social injustices, political and economic disparities, and Wi-Fi passwords that never work the first time. These systems—if we may call them systems—function with all the elegance and coherence of a badly organized sock drawer.



For young people, the situation is particularly dire.

Consider for instance, all the challenges young people must solve if they want to secure a liveable future: By 9:00 a.m., they are expected to have solved climate change. By 11:00 a.m., they're asked to invent a new socio-economic model that doesn't rely on human misery. By lunchtime, they must decode contradictory advice from approximately 17 self-help podcasts.

It's little wonder, then, that so many young people today are feeling overwhelmed, disillusioned, or have started seriously considering a career as a hermit on one of Saturn's less populous moons. (Word of caution: the moons of Saturn have no sustainable oat milk supply.)

That's where this Guide comes in. The Young Person's Guide to Systems Change is here to reassure you that you are not alone in this cosmic comedy of errors. While it won't pretend to have all the answers (any Guide or person that claims to, is either lying or written by a particularly arrogant toaster), it will provide tools, perspectives, and the occasional inappropriate metaphor to help you navigate the chaos.

With this guide in hand, you'll learn to recognize the absurdities of modern systems—not to despair at them, but to laugh at their ridiculousness and roll up your sleeves to reimagine them. Whether you're tackling unsustainable energy grids, rethinking outdated educational models, or simply trying to make sense of why your local coffee shop plays jazz at 8 a.m., this guide is your companion.

Remember: systems, like socks, are easier to manage when you start by sorting out one tangled pair at a time.

And while you may not fix everything overnight,



You can take solace in knowing that you're part of a generation brave enough to try.

So, don't panic. Take a deep breath, keep your towel handy (metaphorically speaking), and dive in. After all, the world may be complicated, but systems change is nothing you can't handle—with a little courage, creativity, and maybe a second cup of coffee.

Welcome to the young person's guide to systems change.

Let's get started.



2.

Who do we think we
are and why are we
talking about this?



You might be wondering, who are these people, and what gives them the audacity to talk about systems thinking like they've cracked the code to the universe? A fair question. The truth is, we're just regular folks like you—armed with a little curiosity, a lot of caffeine, and an alarming willingness to dive headfirst into complexity. Over the past few years, we've worked with young changemakers, grassroots organizers, and some people who had no idea they were changemakers until they accidentally disrupted a system or two.

The Young Person's Guide to Systems Change is brought to you by The 50 Percent, a network of young enthusiastic humans who woke up one day, stared at the tangled mess of social systems, and thought, "Well, somebody's got to do something about this."

We are a group of optimists, pessimists, and cautiously curious individuals who

specialize in tackling the most confounding problems the world has to offer. Climate breakdown? Social inequality? Bureaucracy so convoluted it could qualify as modern art? Been there. Tried that. Lost sleep over it.

But why, you may ask, would anyone voluntarily engage in the Herculean task of untangling humanity's knottiest issues? Is it sheer idealism? Mild insanity? An elaborate attempt to avoid real jobs? The truth lies somewhere in the middle, as truths often do. We're driven by a fundamental belief: that the systems shaping our world aren't broken so much as they are in desperate need of an upgrade that includes all the voices.

Along the way, we've learned a few things about systems thinking that we'd like to pass along before the next planetary crisis hits.

Community



Community: The Beating Heart of Systems Change.

Here's the thing about systems: they're made of people. Wild concept, right? Communities are the living, breathing, slightly chaotic hearts of systems everywhere. And here's the kicker: every single person in a community has the potential to be a key player in transforming the systems around them.

That means there's no "one-size-fits-all, bake-at-350-degrees" recipe for systems change. You can't "catch 'em all" when it comes to sustainable solutions, because each system is as complex, messy, and interconnected as a group text with 17 participants.

The only way to understand a system is to listen to the people who live in it, work in it, and occasionally throw metaphorical wrenches into it. And that takes time. That's why at the core of this guide is the idea of community: groups of people from wildly different backgrounds coming together to share their stories, their struggles, and their sense of we-ness. (Yes, that's a real word now. No, we don't apologize.)

Resilience



Resilience: It's not just for "us".

Here's a plot twist you might not expect: while we (the common folk who are trying to get a decent paycheck without working 25 hours a day) are busy trying to be resilient, the systems we're trying to transform are also incredibly resilient. Case in point: the global capitalist system (Cue ominous music.).

A couple of years ago, we teamed up with organizations from Latin America to unpack this beast, and wow, did we learn a lot. Turns out, capitalism isn't just dominant—it's a shape-shifting chameleon that adapts to challenges faster than you can say "systemic injustice." Whether it's co-opting social movements, slapping eco-friendly stickers on things in the name of greenwashing, or showing up at global conferences with all the right buzzwords, capitalism has mastered the

art of looking like it's changing while staying comfortably the same.

It even turns ideologies into products, commoditizing struggles and turning legitimate demands into merchandise. You can now buy your Rebellion pre-packaged, with free shipping if you spend over \$50. Meanwhile, this relentless adaptability only strengthens its grip on social and political systems, deepening inequalities and leaving us wondering how it managed to sell us both the problem and the solution.

So, if you've ever felt like you're up against an unbeatable boss in a game where the rules keep changing, you're not alone. But here's the good news: understanding these dynamics is the first step toward rewriting the game altogether. And with community at our side and resilience in our hearts (the good kind, not the sneaky capitalist kind), we might just stand a chance.

The Anatomy of a System: Elements, Interactions, and Purpose

A system, as Donella Meadows might say if she were holding a Slinky and making dramatic hand gestures, is “a set of things—people, molecules, planets, opinions on oat milk—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own behavior over time.” In short: it’s a weird, self-perpetuating machine with three key ingredients:

Elements: These are the players on the field. In a football team, the elements are the players, the ball, the goalposts, and the fans yelling questionable advice from the stands.

Interactions: These are the relationships between the elements. The players pass the ball, defend the goal, and occasionally tackle someone just for fun. The fans, meanwhile, influence the vibe with their chants and occasional popcorn-throwing.

Purpose: This is the “why” behind the system—the reason it exists and keeps chugging along. For a football game, it’s to win.



For your digestive system, it's to keep you alive (despite your suspicious burrito choices).

For the global economy, the purpose is supposedly to create wealth and prosperity, though we often have to squint and ask, "*Wealth and prosperity for whom, exactly?*".

Now, here is where it gets interesting: a system's *stated* purpose and its *actual* purpose can be two very different things. Take political parties, for example. They're supposed to ensure everyone is represented and all voices are heard. Noble, right? But if you look at what they're actually doing, the real purpose seems to be keeping the same people in power while expertly blocking new voices from joining the conversation. (Impressive, if frustrating.) Every system is relentlessly working toward its purpose—whether that purpose makes sense or not. Understanding what a system is really aiming for is one of the first steps in figuring out how to change it.

But here's the kicker: change one part of a system, and you might not just tweak the system—you might completely transform it. Replace the fans with cats, for instance, and suddenly football looks a lot less goal-oriented and a lot more like a viral TikTok.

Dynamics of Systems.

Systems have a life of their own, much like kids left unattended in a room full of paint. They don't just sit there; they move, evolve, and occasionally throw tantrums when you least expect it. Here are some dynamics that make systems

so delightfully unpredictable:

Feedback Loops: Think of these as the system talking to itself. A positive feedback loop is like an echo chamber that amplifies everything—good or bad. A negative feedback loop, on the other hand, reduces/slows things down or stops them, like your mom telling you to calm down when you're about to jump off the roof.

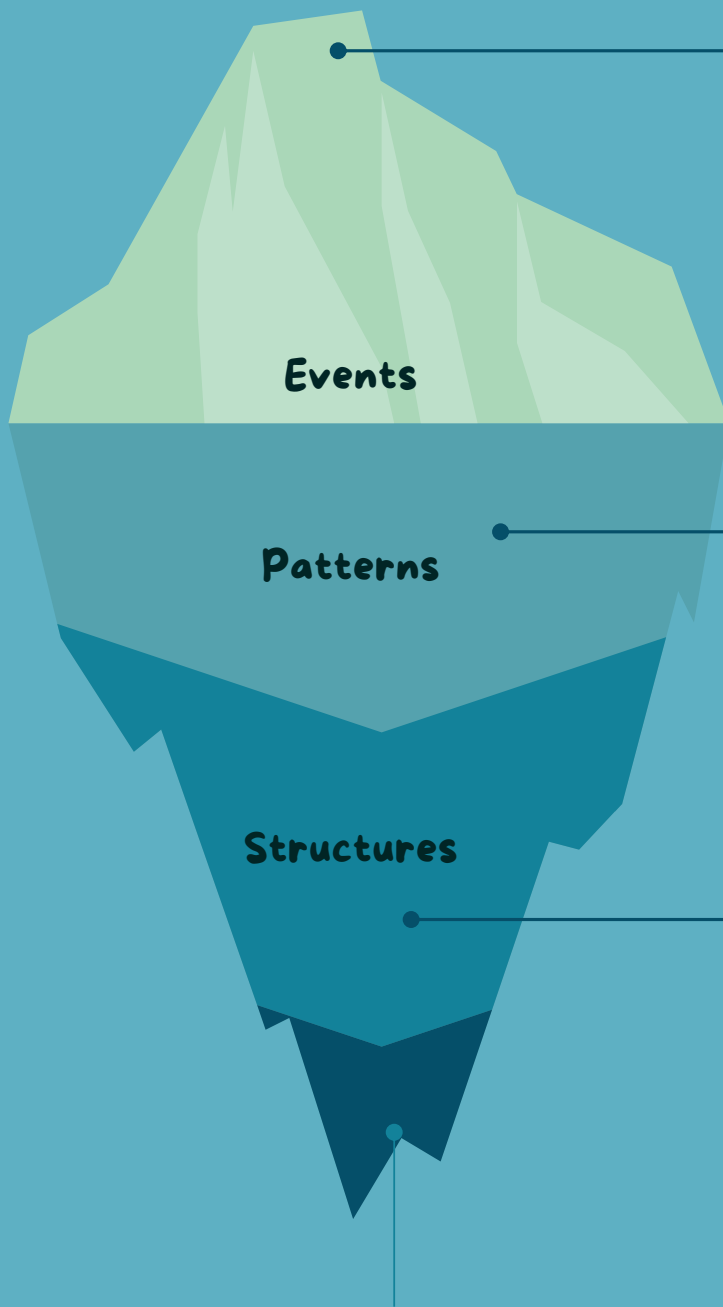
Delays: Systems often work on their own timeline, which means your brilliant fix might not take effect until it's least convenient. Like planting a tree and getting shade... decades later.

Unintended Consequences: This is the cosmic joke of systems: do one thing, and five unrelated things happen. It's why trying to solve traffic problems by widening roads often just creates bigger traffic jams. (Congratulations, you played yourself.)

Leverage Points

Ah, leverage points—the mysterious sweet spots in systems where a gentle nudge can create waves of change. If systems are like icebergs (which they often are, both in complexity and their knack for sinking unprepared captains), then leverage points are hidden deep beneath the surface. Sure, the top of the iceberg—the part everyone can see—is flashy, but the real action is below.

The iceberg: a handy visual for why your fix didn't work



4. Mental Models

But the deepest, most exciting part of the iceberg is the mental models level—the subterranean, hardwired beliefs and assumptions that shape the system's very existence. These are the “invisible scripts” running the show, like believing that “more roads will fix traffic” (they won't) or “printing everything makes it official” (spoiler: it doesn't). Changing mental models is like rewiring the iceberg's brain—it's hard, but wow, does it shake things up.

1. Events

The part you see sticking out of the water is the **events level**—the immediate “Oh no, the printer's jammed!” kind of stuff. This is where most people start poking around because it's obvious and right in front of them. The problem? Fixing **events** is like putting a Band-Aid on a volcano. Sure, it might look like you're doing something, but the lava will eventually have its way.

2. Patterns

Now, dig a little deeper, and you'll find the **patterns level**. This is where things get more interesting. **Patterns** are the recurring themes—the printer always jams on Mondays, or traffic always clogs at 5:30 p.m. Observing patterns is like realizing your bad luck isn't random; it's a weekly tradition.

3. Structures


Go deeper still, and you reach the structures level. This is where the real mechanics of the system live—the rules, relationships, and interconnections that make everything tick (or not tick). Maybe the printer jams because nobody refills the paper tray, or the traffic builds because the city planners forgot humans like to drive home at the same time. At this level, you can start making meaningful tweaks, like creating a system for refilling paper trays or staggering work hours.

So, What's This Got to Do with Leverage Points?

Leverage points work best when you dive below the surface. Sure, you can swat at events and adjust patterns, but the biggest ripples come from tweaking the structures and shifting those pesky mental models.

Let's say you want to tackle food waste. At the events level, you could host a "Save the Leftovers" awareness campaign (fun, but limited). At the patterns level, you might notice that people overbuy groceries every weekend. Move to the structures level, and you could introduce policies that make it easier to donate surplus food. But if you go all the way to the mental models level and shift people's thinking from "food is disposable" to "food is precious," you'll unlock changes that ripple across the entire system.

The Iceberg in Action: Where to Poke



Leverage points remind me that true transformation comes not from working harder at the surface, but from shifting the deeper structures of a system. Identifying where small, well-placed interventions can create ripple effects helps focus on what truly drives change."



Nonhlanhla Ngwenya
YPG fellow 2024

Think of systems as giant icebergs floating along in the vast ocean of existence. What's visible on the surface—the events—is just the tip of the iceberg, tempting you with its sparkly immediacy. But true power lies below, in the submerged, less obvious layers where meaningful change happens.

Here's your guided tour of the iceberg's levels and what poking around in each can achieve:

A Events (The Tip of the Iceberg)

This is the flashy stuff—the symptoms you see every day and are dying to fix. Events are the "why is this happening RIGHT NOW" part of the system. They're also the easiest to focus on because they're urgent and obvious.

Example: The printer jams. Panic ensues.

Your Reaction: Replace the printer, or perform a vaguely angry ritual involving paper clips and duct tape. Problem solved, right? Not really. Because guess what? Another event will pop up tomorrow.

Impact: Low. Events are like pesky weeds—you can trim them, but unless you deal with the root, they'll keep coming back.

B Patterns (Just Below the Surface)

Here's where you start noticing trends. Patterns reveal the recurring issues—the ones that make you think, Wait, haven't we seen this before? (Spoiler: yes, you have.)

Example: The printer is always out of paper by 10 a.m. every Monday.

Your Reaction: Investigate why this keeps happening. Maybe it's because everyone prints their weekly reports on Monday mornings, or maybe Laura from accounting is hoarding paper for her

“office origami” hobby. Either way, you’re starting to see that the problem isn’t random—it’s a predictable pattern.

Impact: Moderate. Spotting patterns gives you a foothold into the system, but you’re still dealing with symptoms rather than causes.



Structures (Deeper Waters)

Now we’re getting somewhere. Structures are the bones of the system—the rules, processes, and relationships that shape the patterns. At this level, you’re not just swatting at flies; you’re figuring out why the flies are there in the first place.

Example: The paper tray isn’t big enough to handle Monday’s demand, and nobody is responsible for refilling it over the weekend.

Your Reaction: Update the system! Assign someone to refill the paper tray every Friday afternoon, or better yet, install a printer that automatically restocks itself. Congratulations, you’ve just made the system a little smarter.

Impact: High. Fixing structures is like upgrading your toolbox—it makes everything downstream work better.



Mental Models (The Deepest Depths)

Ah, the hidden layer of the iceberg—the mental models. This is where the system’s beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews live. It’s also where real change begins, because when you shift the way people think about the system, you change

everything else.

Example: Why are we printing so much in the first place? Is it because we think paper documents are more official than digital ones? Or because we haven’t questioned our reliance on physical copies since 1992?

Your Reaction: Challenge the belief. What if we went paperless? Could we invest in digital tools to make printing obsolete? Suddenly, you’re not just fixing the printer—you’re redesigning the system’s purpose.

Impact: Game-changing. Shifting mental models is like rewiring the iceberg’s brain. It’s hard, yes, but it unlocks the kind of transformation that ripples across the entire system.

Why It’s Worth Diving

The deeper you go, the more lasting the change. Yes, it’s harder to poke at mental models than to yell at a jammed printer, but the results are worth it. By addressing the root causes, you’re not just putting out fires—you’re redesigning the fireplace.

Leverage points aren’t just about doing things differently; they’re about seeing differently. And remember: systems might seem daunting, but once you figure out where to poke, they’ll start dancing to your tune. (Metaphorically, of course. Icebergs are notoriously bad dancers.)

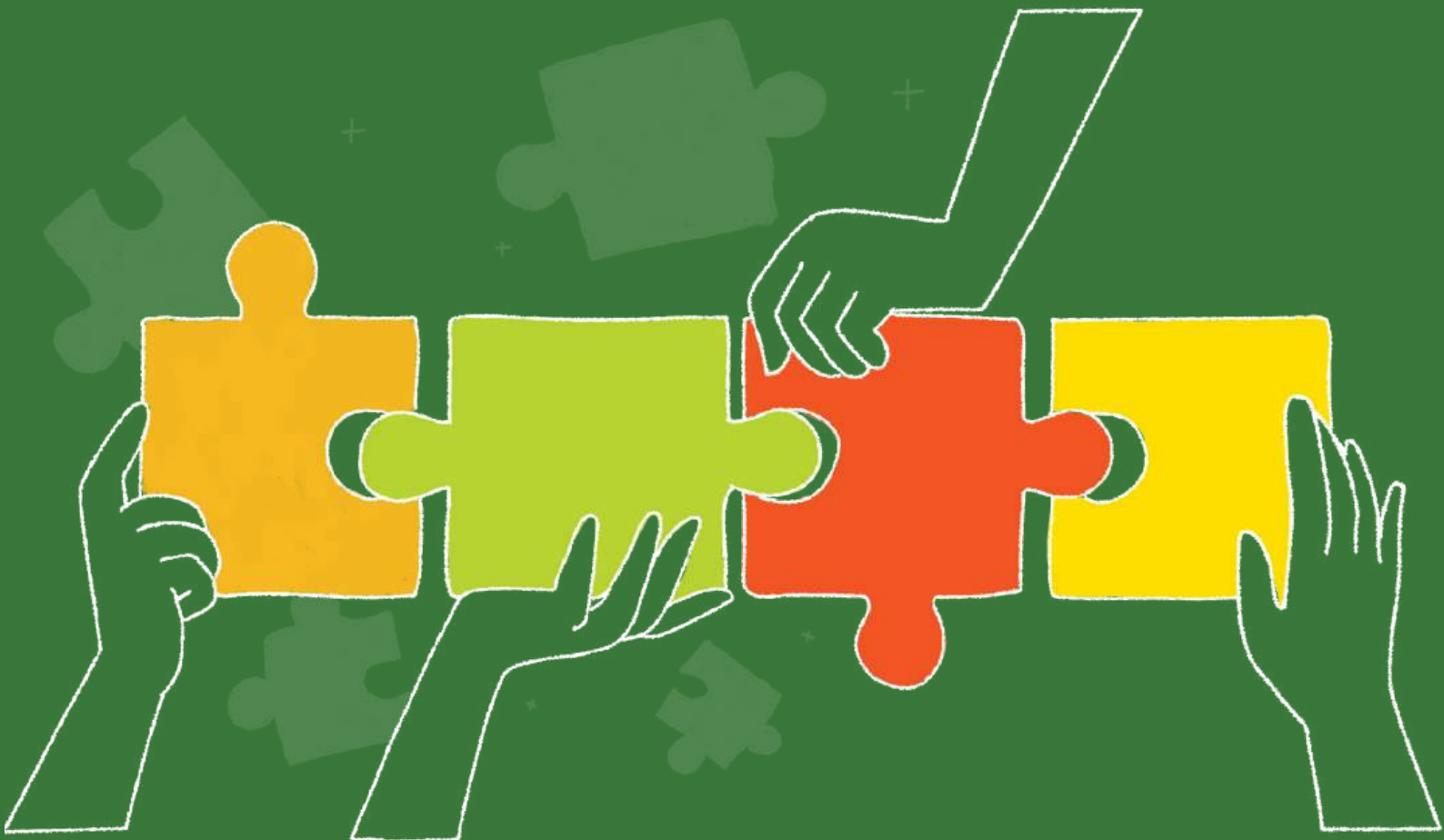
So, next time you’re faced with a system problem, ask yourself: Am I swatting at symptoms, or am I daring to dive deep? And if you’re wondering how to get there, don’t worry—the water’s fine, and we’ll bring the snorkels.

4.

We-ness

If systems are the tangled webs of our world, communities are the spiders—meticulous, slightly chaotic, and surprisingly resourceful. **And here's the wild part:** every single person in a community, whether they're the local hero or the one who always shows up late with snacks, has the potential to be a key player in transforming the systems around them.

But here's where it gets tricky: building a community isn't just about gathering people together like a mismatched LEGO set. It's about creating a space where everyone feels safe, where everyone feels they belong. That sense of "*we-ness*"—an untranslatable but perfectly useful term we're rolling with—means fostering connection without drawing lines that exclude others.



We-ness, or: How to Build Belonging Without Becoming a Club

The magic of “we-ness” is this: it’s not about forming an exclusive clique with matching jackets and a secret handshake (though, let’s admit, matching jackets would be cool). It’s about creating a space where everyone feels they have a seat at the table, even if they prefer to stand.

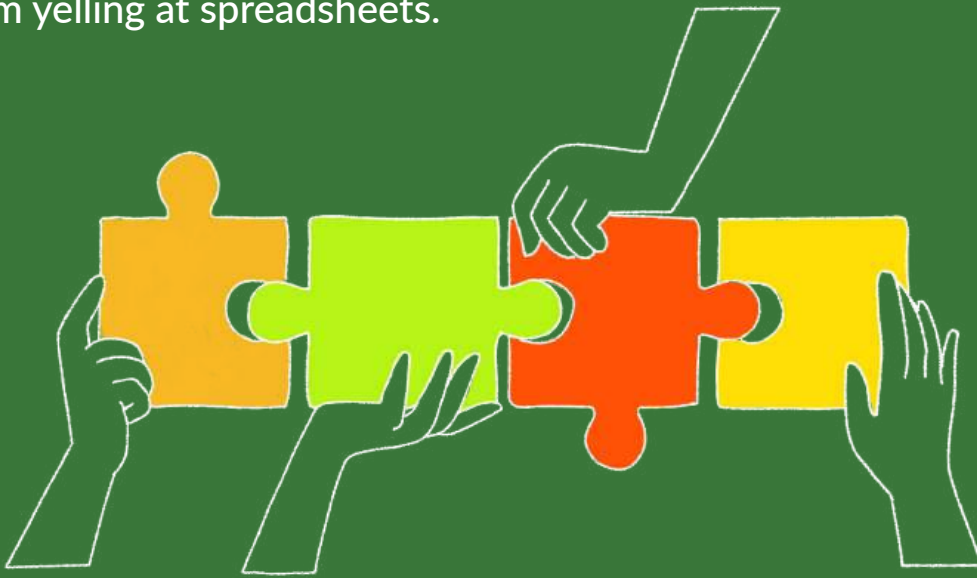
In systemic change, we-ness is the antidote to “Othering”—that insidious habit of dividing the world into “us” (the good guys, obviously) and “them” (villains, alien invaders, or that one person who insists pineapple belongs on pizza). Othering is the kryptonite of systems change because it creates walls when we need bridges.

Belonging, on the other hand, is the secret sauce. It’s about making sure no one’s left outside the metaphorical party, peering in through the window like a sad character in a holiday commercial. Belonging says, “You’re part of this, no matter who you are, where you’ve been, or how many times you’ve burned the toast.”

Why Belonging is Essential for Systemic Change

The thing about systemic change is that it’s a group project. And like any group project, it falls apart if one person tries to do all the work (we’re looking at you, overachiever) or if everyone else gets left out of the process. Meaningful change happens when communities come together, share their stories, and collectively decide, “You know what? This system is a hot mess, and we’re going to fix it.”

When people feel like they belong, they bring their full selves to the table—their ideas, their lived experiences, and, yes, sometimes their terrible jokes. It’s this collective brilliance that creates the kind of ripple effects no individual effort can achieve. Because let’s face it: no one has ever solved a global crisis by sitting alone in a room yelling at spreadsheets.



Community as the Ultimate Leverage Point

Now, here's the juicy part: community isn't just important—it's the most powerful leverage point in the entire system. Forget tweaking policies or inventing the next viral app; if you want to shake things up, you start with people.

Why? Because systems aren't made of bricks and mortar—they're made of relationships. And relationships, unlike poorly designed office printers, thrive when there's trust, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose. A strong community can tackle even the most stubborn system because they've got each other's backs—and sometimes snacks, which are also crucial.

Building a Bigger Table

At its core, systems change isn't about smashing things (tempting as that may be). It's about building something new—and making sure there's room for everyone. That means extending the table, pulling up extra chairs, and maybe rethinking the menu so it's not just spaghetti every time.

It also means actively working against exclusion. Building a community where everyone belongs takes more than good intentions; it takes listening, empathy, and the occasional awkward conversation about why the system is set up to benefit some while leaving others behind.

But here's the good news: when people come together, amazing things happen. Shared struggles become shared victories. Ideas collide and spark into something greater. And little by little, the systems that seemed so immovable start to shift.



As you may have noticed, the capitalist system is pretty resilient. Despite discontent with the current economic system being widespread, it seems hard to imagine a different reality. While revolt over its impact on the environment, our health and well-being, our work-life balance and growing inequality is something many of us feel, it still seems easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

This is because capitalism is sustained by narratives, which are currently dominating in our societies and the way we view the world. Crucially, narratives of individualism and isolation. We are taught from early on that prosperity is only for the few, that we have to grind endlessly and compete for one of the limited spots in the sun - and that we do that best focused only on our own. But if capitalism is sustained by an ideology of individualism, community is its antidote.

Because the truth is, the planet we live on is abundant, and its natural richness is enough to feed, clothe and house everyone, when used mindfully and distributed fairly. And while the 'survival of the fittest' narrative prevails now, Darwin's theory of evolution points out that it is togetherness that makes us go far: "those communities who include the greatest number of most sympathetic members would flourish best."

We know we have a lot coming our way. Building and maintaining community is how we overcome what is coming next. Because when we talk about climate resilience, when we see leaders failing to protect the most vulnerable, when we

say we want to change how our economy works - community is a pillar of all that. Examples of this include sharing meals with your neighbours, helping to fund your local soup kitchen, sharing educational resources, agreeing on early extreme weather warning systems and evacuation plans with your neighbours.

Community is also the antidote to polarisation - while current leaders would like to keep us separate, highlighting our ideological or cultural differences, when we come together, we realise that we have more in common than what keeps us apart. And that's how we build movements for change: through union and community."



Vanessa Terschluse

Head of Content & Advocacy at
The 50 Percent"

5.

The power of storytelling: Once Upon a System



Stories are powerful. They've built civilizations, toppled empires, and convinced generations that kissing frogs is a viable romantic strategy. But storytelling isn't just about bedtime tales or Hollywood blockbusters. It's also a critical tool for systems change—a way to shine a light on what's broken, imagine what could be, and rally people around the possibility of transformation.

Narratives: The Stories We Tell About the World

At the heart of storytelling lies the narrative: the grand, overarching story that shapes how we see the world. Narratives are sneaky little things—they're everywhere, often so ingrained in our culture that we don't even realize they're there. They tell us what's "normal," what's "possible," and who the heroes and villains are.

For example, there's the classic "progress is inevitable" narrative, which insists that humanity is always marching forward, one shiny gadget at a time. Then there's the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" narrative, which conveniently ignores the fact that not everyone has boots. These stories don't just reflect reality—they shape it, influencing the systems we build and the choices we make within them.

The Connection to Paradigm Shifts

Here's where things get interesting: narratives aren't just passive background noise. They're the foundations of mental models, which, as we've discussed, live deep within the iceberg of systems. And if you want to create meaningful, lasting change,

you've got to shift the narrative—reframe the story we're all living in.

Think of it like this: a paradigm is the script of a system. It's the unspoken "rules" that govern what's acceptable, what's valuable, and what's possible. By telling new stories, you're not just editing the script—you're flipping the whole production. Instead of another season of the same tired sitcom, you're pitching a blockbuster that reimagines the genre entirely.

Why Storytelling Matters for Systems Change



Stories Make the Complex Understandable

Let's face it: systems are complicated. Try explaining a feedback loop at a dinner party, and you'll have people excusing themselves to check on their imaginary oven timers. But wrap that complexity in a story—something relatable, human, and emotionally resonant—and suddenly, it clicks. Stories help people feel the system, not just think about it.



Stories Inspire Action

Facts are important, but they're not great at getting people out of their seats. Stories, on the other hand, can move mountains—or at least motivate people to sign petitions, join movements, and rethink their choices. A well-told story turns abstract issues into tangible realities, sparking empathy and urgency in a way pie charts simply can't



Stories Challenge Harmful Narratives

One of the greatest powers of storytelling is its ability to disrupt harmful narratives—the ones that divide us, spread hate, or perpetuate systems of oppression. Stories can counter disinformation, dismantle stereotypes, and create space for voices that have been silenced. They're like narrative anti-virus software, scanning the cultural operating system for bugs and bad code.

Beware the Dark Side of Narratives

Of course, not all stories are helpful. Narratives built on hate speech, disinformation, or fear can reinforce harmful systems and sow division. These are the villains of the storytelling world—the deceptive tales that twist facts, otherize communities, and make the world a darker place.

That's why it's so important to be intentional about the stories we tell and share. Before you pass along that viral tweet or catchy soundbite, ask yourself:

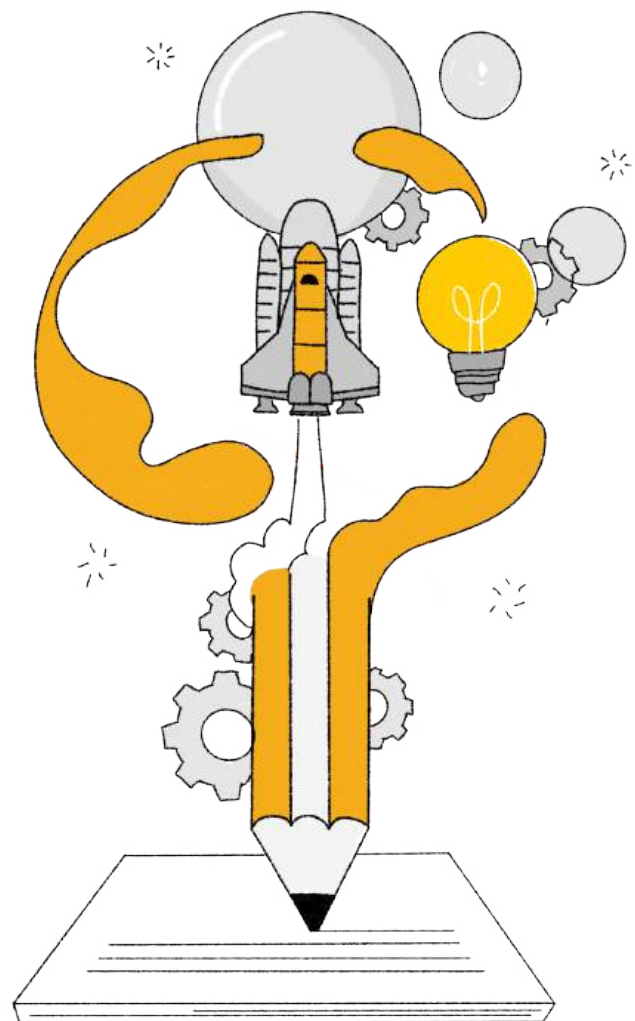
- Does this build understanding or fuel division?
- Is this story rooted in truth, or is it bending reality into a pretzel?
- Does this invite others in, or shut them out?

Bear in mind: Storytelling is a tool—and like any tool, it can be used to build or destroy.

The Stories We Need

For systems change, we need stories that are bold, inclusive, and imaginative. Stories that challenge the status quo, elevate marginalized voices, and paint a vivid picture of what a better future could look like. We need narratives that foster belonging, amplify hope, and remind us that change isn't just possible—it's inevitable, if we work together.

And most importantly, we need stories that inspire us to write new ones. Because in the end, systems are just stories we've been telling ourselves for a long time. And if we're brave enough to change the narrative, we can change the world.



6.

Wrapping it all up: your guide to systems change

Let's take a moment to reflect on
the journey so far.



A. Systems Are Everywhere (and Ridiculously Complex)

From climate change to group texts, systems are the intricate, self-perpetuating webs that shape our lives. They're made up of elements (the players), interactions (the relationships), and purposes (the "why" that keeps them ticking). And here's the fun part: tweak one piece, and you might just change the entire game.

B. Community is the Beating Heart of Change

Systems don't exist in a vacuum—they're built by people, and people are messy, beautiful, and full of potential. Community is where systemic change begins, fueled by belonging and a sense of shared purpose (or "we-ness" if you prefer, we certainly do). Forget lone heroes; real transformation is a group project.

C. Resilience is Both a Blessing and a Challenge

We, as humans, are resilient—and so are the systems we're trying to change.

The bad news? Systems like capitalism have mastered the art of adaptation, co-opting movements and commoditizing ideologies. The good news? If we understand this resilience, we can outsmart it, pushing for genuine transformation instead of cosmetic fixes.

D. Leverage Points are the Key to Unlocking Change

Not all actions are created equal. By identifying and targeting leverage points—those deep, hidden places where small tweaks create massive ripple effects—we can stop rearranging deck chairs and start steering the ship.

E. The Power of Storytelling

Stories are how we make sense of the world and inspire action. Narratives shape our mental models and paradigms, influencing everything from individual choices to systemic behaviors. The right story can challenge harmful ideologies, foster belonging, and help us imagine a brighter future.

7.

What's next?

So, where do we go from here? Armed with this guide, you have the tools to start untangling the chaotic webs of modern systems. Here are your next steps:

Build Community

Find your people—the ones who share your vision, values, and sense of humor. Listen to their stories, learn from their experiences, and work together to tackle the systems around you.

And hey, while you're at it, why not join us? At The 50 Percent, we're a community of changemakers, dreamers, and occasional overthinkers who believe that systemic transformation is possible—when we work together.

As a 50Percenter, you'll connect with others who are passionate about reimagining the world, share ideas, and help us co-create a future that's inclusive, sustainable, and just. Becoming a part of The 50 Percent isn't about having all the answers (trust us, none of us do). It's about showing up, asking questions, and daring to think differently.

So, grab your metaphorical toolkit and join the adventure. Together, we can untangle the systems that shape our lives—and maybe even have some fun along the way.

We're building something extraordinary over here (have we mentioned the importance of self-love lately?).

Why not join us and be part of this journey? Think of it as a wild dreamer's party where we're all invited to rewrite the rules together.

Now, we won't promise you a stuffy room with chairs in a circle and cookies while we talk about how tough it is to be young these days. Nope, we're so much more than that!

We're a global family, from different continents, connected by shared dreams and big questions of this world. From monthly community gatherings to dynamic discussions on the topics that unite us, we're a network of passionate individuals working to create a better future—for ourselves and for the world.

So, what do you say?

Spot the Leverage Points

Take a closer look at the systems you want to change. Where are the cracks? Where could a small nudge make a big difference? Start there, and don't be afraid to experiment.

Feeling unsure about where to begin? Don't worry—you don't have to figure it out alone. Join us for a cohort of the Young Person's Guide to Systems Change and learn how to spot those elusive leverage points and work through the process of transforming systems.

Through workshops, collaborative projects, and more than a few "aha" moments, you'll gain practical tools to analyze systems, uncover hidden dynamics, and take action where it matters most. Plus, you'll connect with a community of like-minded changemakers who are just as eager as

you are to create a more just and sustainable world.




Ready to dive in? Your journey to mastering leverage points—and making a real impact—starts here:

Tell better stories

Challenge harmful narratives and amplify those that promote empathy, inclusion, and hope. **Remember:** the right story can shift paradigms and inspire action.

If you're ready to take your storytelling skills to the next level, **why not join our Storytelling Fellowship?** This program is designed for aspiring narrators, changemakers, and anyone who wants to harness the power of stories to inspire systemic change.

Through the fellowship, you'll learn how to craft compelling narratives, dismantle harmful myths, and use storytelling as a tool to build bridges and spark action. Whether you're sharing the story of your community, tackling global issues, or simply trying to make your message stick, this fellowship will give you the tools and confidence to make your voice heard.



Because the world doesn't just need better systems—it needs better stories. Ready to tell yours? Join us in

Congratulations, intrepid traveler! You've made it to the end of the Young Person's Guide to Systems Change without throwing this book out the window, which already makes you a champion of resilience. Give yourself a

pat on the back—or a good cup of oat milk!

Now listen up: this guide isn't just something to read—**it's a call to action.** The real work begins not in these pages, but out there, in the messy, beautiful, chaotic reality of the world. Because as much as systems can drive us mad, they're also where the magic of transformation happens.

And the good news? You don't have to start by changing the entire system overnight. Small actions matter. Conversations matter. Even the tiniest step can ripple outward in ways you might never expect. The point isn't to be perfect—it's to begin. To ask questions, challenge assumptions, and start pulling at the threads of the system around you. Because starting is what makes change possible.

And remember: you're not doing this alone. Whether you're unsure where to begin, stuck in the middle, or wondering if the chaos will ever make sense, remember this: **we've got your back.** The team at The 50 Percent is here to support you every step of the way. Reach out, connect with us, and let's work together to untangle the systems that shape our world.

So, take a deep breath, grab your metaphorical toolkit, and step boldly into the fray. The world is waiting—and it needs changemakers like you more than ever. We can't wait to see what you'll do.



Nolita Mvunelo
Co Director



Matias Lara
Co Director



Vanessa Terschluse
Head of Content
& Advocacy



Kristen Miller
Program Lead
Storytelling fellowship



Ana Sofía Villa
Community
Coordinator



Japheth Orieny
Monthly Wrap's host



Ekow Adu-Mensah
YPG fellow 2024



Ephie Lumumba
YPG fellow 2024



**Nonhlanhla
Ngwenya**
YPG fellow 2024



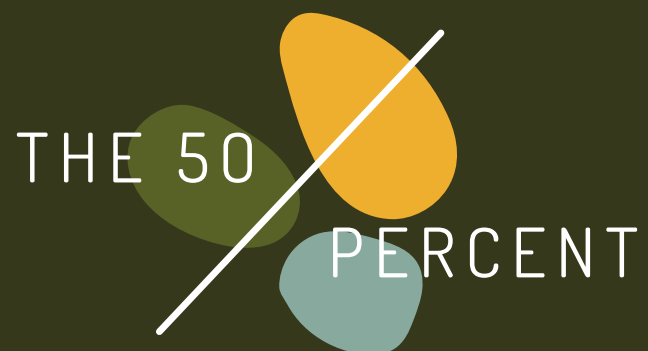
Sara Bechtler
YPG fellow 2024



Esther Murunga
YPG fellow 2024



Claudius Mbuya
YPG fellow 2024



Young Person's Guide
to Systems Change

© 2025