DO YOU NEED SYSTEMS THINKING?

Project Complexity Assessment

Your project involves technical solutions that need non-technical stakeholders to adopt, approve, or implement them. But traditional communications isn't working. This checklist helps you diagnose why.

Answer YES or NO to each question about your current project:

1. You have 3+ stakeholder groups with different definitions of success
(Example: Regulators prioritize compliance, communities prioritize livelihoods, investors prioritize ROI)

- Yes
- No

2. Messaging that works for one audience creates problems with another
(Example: Emphasizing innovation to investors makes regulators nervous about risk)

- Yes
- No

3. Stakeholders influence each other's decisions in ways you can't directly control
(Example: Community opposition → regulatory delays → investor pressure → project changes)

- Yes
- No
- Partially

4. Your technical information is scientifically accurate but doesn't translate into stakeholder action
(Example: Whitepapers are rigorous but executives need ROI framing, communities need livelihood framing)

- Yes
- No

5. You operate under regulatory, legal, or policy constraints that limit what you can communicate

(Example: Can't make explicit claims, need third-party validation, compliance approval required)

- Yes
- No

6. Your project operates across multiple time scales simultaneously

(Example: Need immediate adoption + medium-term behavior change + long-term policy alignment)

- Yes
- No
- Partially

7. Previous communications campaigns generated awareness but not behavior change

(Example: People understand the problem, but their actions haven't shifted)

- Yes
- No
- Partially

8. There are power imbalances between stakeholders that communications must navigate

(Example: Indigenous communities vs. government entities, small enterprises vs. incumbents, local vs. international actors)

- Yes
- No
- Partially

9. Your solution requires coordination between actors who historically haven't collaborated

(Example: Private sector + NGOs + government, or cross-border entities with different legal frameworks)

- Yes
- No

10. When you solve one communications problem, unexpected issues emerge elsewhere in the system

(Example: Successful pilot creates scaling challenges, early adopter success creates competitor resistance)

- Yes

- No

SCORING

Count your Yes (1), Partially (0.5) answers

Score 0-3

Traditional communications strategy works for your project. Focus on message clarity, channel optimization, and audience segmentation.

Score 4-6.5

Your project has systems-level complexity. Consider integrating stakeholder mapping and feedback loop analysis into your communications strategy.

Score 7-10

You need systems-informed communications. Your stakeholders form an interconnected system where traditional single-audience campaigns will fail. Success requires mapping how information flows between actors, identifying leverage points where small narrative shifts create cascading reactions, and designing aligned messages that account for how stakeholders influence each other.

If you scored 7-10, let's discuss how systems thinking applies to your specific challenge.

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Systems thinking for communications outcomes