# THE LSP MAGAZINE.

**ISSUE 6** | Spring 2022



# SYSTEM, SYSTEMIC, SYSTEMATIC, AND LSP

Exploring the unified whole

# THE LSP MAGAZINE.

# LSP AND **SYSTEMS MAPPING**

## Stronger together?

By **Hannah Härtwich**

I have recently started to experiment with combining Lego Serious Play and Systems Mapping. So far I have found it to be a very promising, mutually beneficial approach. For complex topics, exploration and thinking beyond a LSP session is needed, before decisions can be made and actions planned. Systems Mapping offers a way to capture all the ideas that come up during a LSP session, making it easy to continue building on these ideas, until decisions can be made. At the same time, Lego Serious Play offers a playful, accessible and psychologically safe way to gather the information needed to create a systems map.

**What exactly is a system and a systems map?**

When components interact in a way that leads to an overall behaviour that is more than the sum of the parts, they form a system. Your body, a company, the economy or a forest are all examples of complex systems made up of interacting components. Systems maps visualise these components and their interactions.

Systems maps help us to better understand why systems behave the way they do and allow us to identify what actions are needed in order to change the behaviour of a system. What causes the low efficiency of a team or homelessness or climate change, and what can we do about it?

In order to make useful systems maps that can offer answers to these questions, we need to combine the perspectives of many different stake-

holders. In complex systems, no single person holds all the information. But how can we reach the people within the system who hold the pieces of the puzzle? We can research existing records, send out surveys, organise interviews or stakeholder discussions. Or we could organise workshops using the Lego Serious Play method.

**What could combining Lego Serious Play and Systems Mapping look like in practice?**

At the moment, I see a couple of options for what this combination of the lego serious play method and systems mapping could look like, depending on how many of the steps of the systems mapping process are integrated in an LSP session.

**The general systems mapping process looks like this** (Figure 1):

We start by defining the purpose of the map we want to create: What do we want to achieve? From there we gather the relevant information, tapping into multiple sources. We then structure this information and visualise it in the form of a systems map. The resulting map is discussed and explored, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the system and its behaviour. We add any new information that comes up during these discussions to the map. When we reach a shared understanding of the system, we can determine our strategy and plan actions. As we start to take action, we are likely to find out more about the system and we can use this information to further improve our map and update it as the system evolves.

**Options how LSP and Systems Mapping could be combined** (Figure 1):

**Option 1:** Carry out the Lego session and take notes as usual. Translate the notes into a systems map after the session and organise a separate session to discuss and build on the systems map. This can be achieved by a single LSP facilitator who also has the ability to create systems maps.

**Option 2:** Create the systems map during the Lego part of the session, then transition to an open discussion of the systems map, continuing to add to the map throughout the discussion. Since here the work happens in parallel, we need an LSP facilitator and a systems mapper.

**Option 3:** Alternate between using the Lego Serious Play method and open discussions of the systems map, building on it continuously. In this case, we need an LSP facilitator and a systems mapper that work closely together. They should have a good understanding of each other's methods, so they can carefully design the session together.

Personally I find the third option the most intriguing, but also expect it to be the most challenging. Therefore I would recommend first experimenting with options 1 and 2, before attempting option 3.
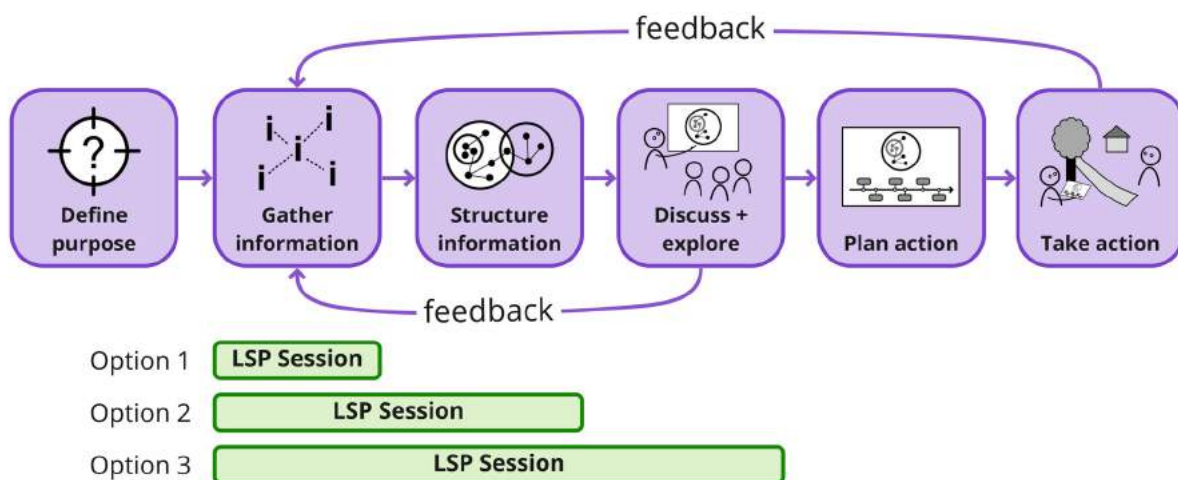


**FIGURE 1**
General systems mapping process and options to combine it with LSP

**How can we translate Lego models and their stories into systems maps?**

In LSP we connect rich stories that can contain multiple interconnected ideas to a visual representation of that story in the form of a Lego model. We need to translate these stories and models into a form that is suitable for systems maps.

**Translating stories for systems mapping**

To translate stories into a systems map, we need to identify the individual components of the story and their connections. When doing this, it helps to think about the types of information the story contains. I differentiate between 5 general types of information:
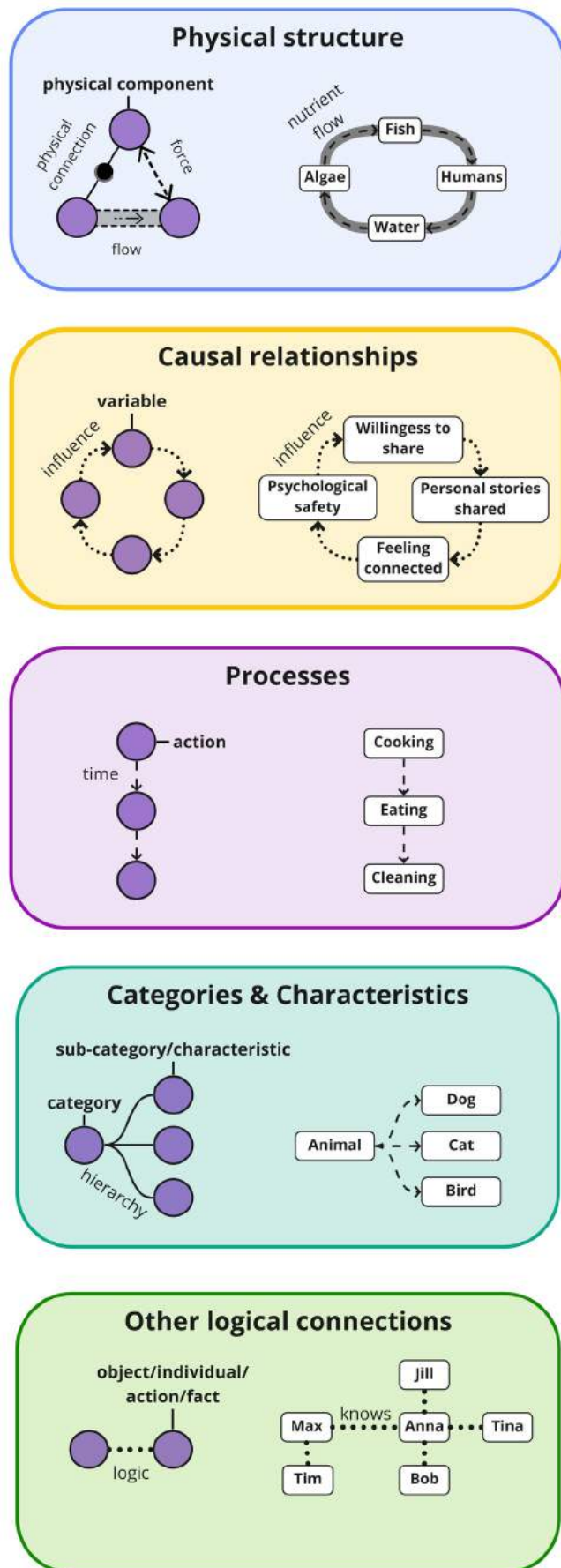


**FIGURE 2**
Information types for systems mapping

### Physical structure

Physical components are connected to each other by a force, a flow or a physical connection. For example there is a flow of nutrients from algae to the fish that eat them to humans and from humans back to the water where they are taken up by algae.

### Causal relationships

Here we are looking at variables and how they influence each other, sometimes forming loops. For example psychological safety increases the willingness to share personal stories, which increases the number of personal stories being shared, in turn increasing how connected people feel, further increasing psychological safety.

### Processes

Processes show sequences of actions or events in time.

### Categories and Characteristics

Elements of information can be sorted into a hierarchical structure of categories and subcategories or categories and associated characteristics.

For example dogs, cats and birds all belong to the category "animal". We could also think about characteristics of animals: they can move, reproduce and react to stimuli.

### Other logical connections

Any other logical connections that do not fit into the previous 4 types of information. For example people can be connected by the fact that they know each other.

These 5 types of information can be connected to each other in many ways in the same systems map.
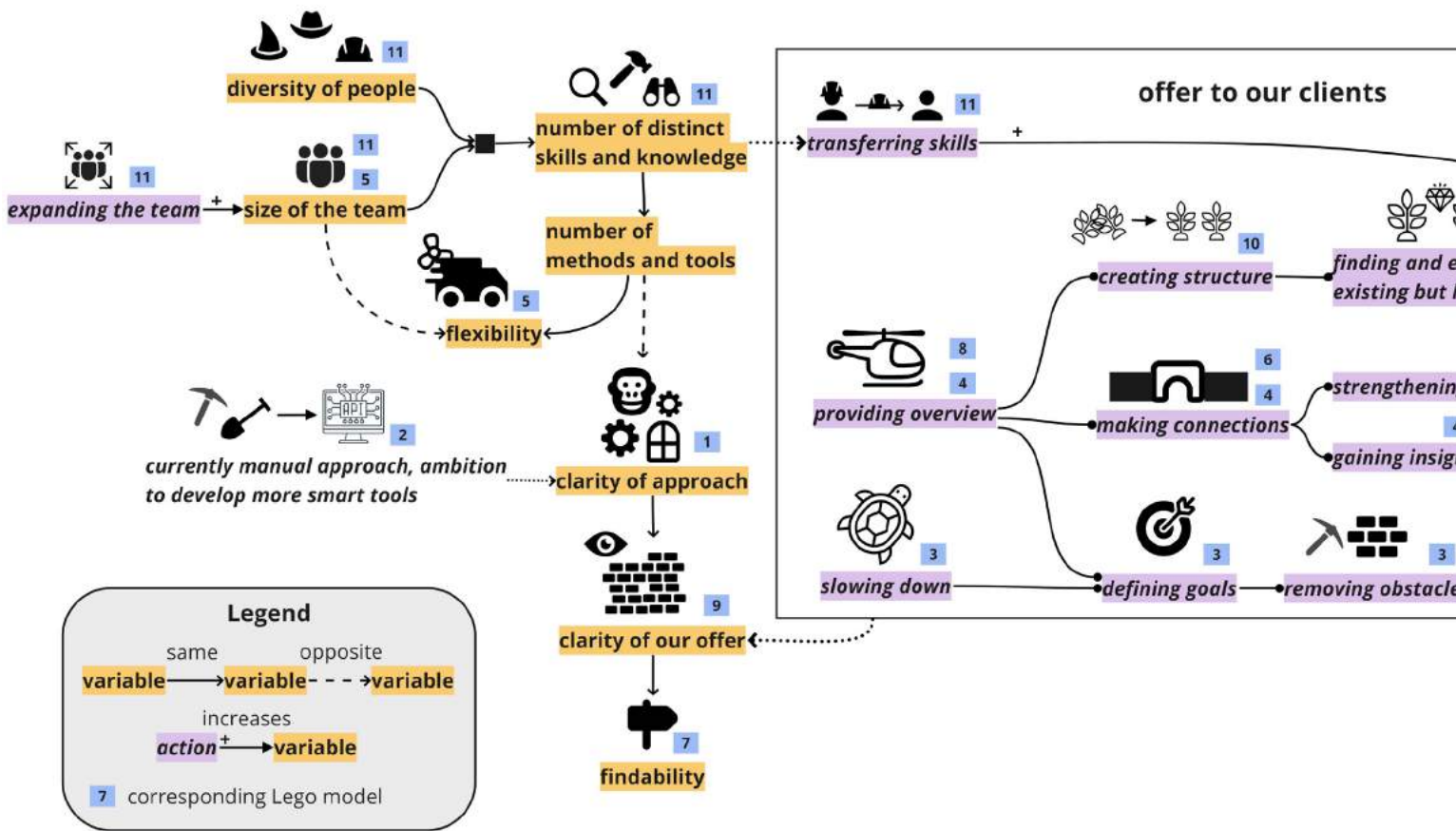
**Translating Lego models for systems mapping**

Next to identifying the components and connections of the story, the visual language used in the lego model can also be translated into a form that can be integrated in the systems map. Instead of using pictures of the lego models, I recommend to use the same visual metaphors, but translate them into icons. Icons are simplified visuals, and therefore easier to identify than a picture of a lego model at the same size.

Using icons also allows us to break the lego model down into its visual components and match them to the linguistic components identified earlier.

The original Lego models and their stories can be shared next to the systems map. By numbering the models we can refer to them in the systems map, showing the origin of each element. I created a simple example of how this could look like based on a Lego session I facilitated (Figure 3).

Beyond the systems map, using icons makes it easier to continue using the visual language established during a Lego workshop for other applications.

**Legend**

same — opposite
variable → variable - - → variable

increases
action ± → variable

7 corresponding Lego model

diversity of people 11

expanding the team + → size of the team 11 / 5

number of distinct skills and knowledge 11

number of methods and tools

flexibility 5

currently manual approach, ambition to develop more smart tools 2

clarity of approach 1

clarity of our offer 9

findability 7

offer to our clients

transferring skills 11 +

creating structure 10

finding and e... existing but l...

providing overview 8 / 4

making connections 6 / 4

strengthenin...

gaining insig...

slowing down 3

defining goals 3

removing obstacle... 3

**1.** Clients see that we can do a lot of different things, but it is unclear how all the methods combine to a coherent approach.
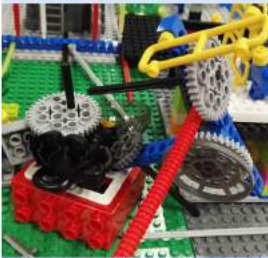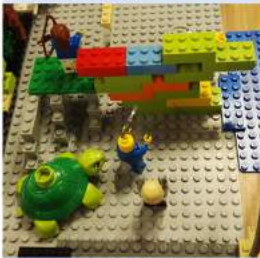
**2.** At the moment we are still diving into the garden with our manual tools to get out all the diamonds.

**3.** We help the client to slow down, define their goals and remove obstacles along the way.

**4.** We help our clients to gain overview and gain insights by making connections.

**5.** We have a small team, but we have many tools in our bus.

We build... can supp...

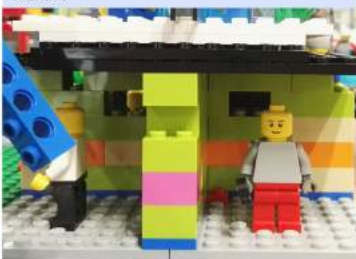**7.** Bus stop to help people find us.

**8.** We help our clients to gain overview.

**9.** Black box: it is not exactly clear to our clients what we all do, who does it and what the result will be. Holes in the wall: only some parts a visible
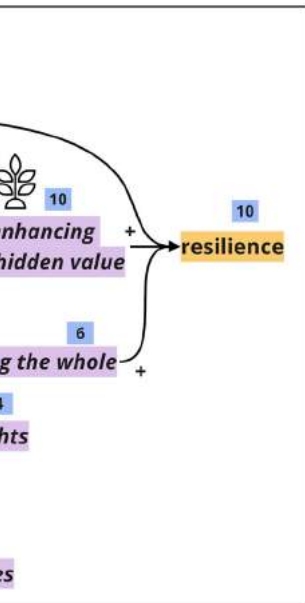
**10.** We often come into organisations and see that their "garden" is a bit of a mess. But there are a lot of knowledge and experience present. We give structure to the garden. Put things in the right place, bring processes in order. This way our clients become more resilient.

We... sm... ad... kn... th... or...

enhancing
hidden value

resilience

g the whole

hts
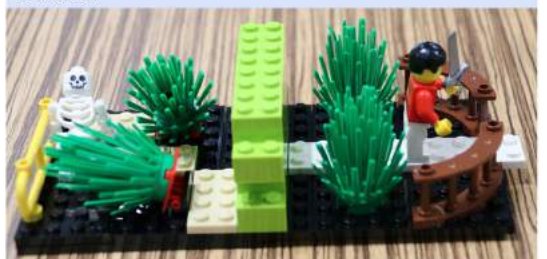
## More ways to gather stories

For complex challenges with many stakeholders, I would recommend using additional methods to gather information for a systems map. I frequently use a method called "Story mapping" developed by the company "World of Minds" to gather stories from large groups of people, based on which I create systems maps.

Story Mapping could be implemented before a Lego session, to sense what is needed by a group of people bottom up, instead of determining the focus of a Lego session based on a discussion with people on the management level.

Or the results of a Lego session could be used to determine who the relevant stakeholders are, whose stories and perspectives we need to create a richer picture of our system. These stories can then be collected through Story Mapping.

Story Mapping, LSP sessions and other methods to collect stories like interviews, could also be used in parallel, in order to make sharing stories around a certain topic accessible to as many people as possible. The stories from all these different sources can then be combined in a systems map, combining many different perspectives.

Let's explore these possibilities together! If any of these ideas struck a chord with you, don't hesitate to contact me.



bridges between elements that
ort each other.

6

e are currently working with a
all team. We plan to expand,
d people with diverse
owledge and skills. We transfer
ese skills to people within the
ganisations we support.

11

**FIGURE 3**
Example translating Lego models and
their stories into a systems map

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