📷 *Systems Snapshot Q&A*

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In this special Systems Snapshot, we are proud to feature three incredible systems thinkers who worked together to translate the *Habits of a Systems Thinker* into German. What began as three strangers, one across the globe from the others, blossomed into a collaborative team that worked through time zones to ensure German speakers could benefit from learning and applying the Habits.

Q: How were you first introduced to systems thinking?

A: **Miriam:** My mum. She was always reminding me to put myself in someone else's shoes and to assess a situation fully before jumping to a conclusion – she had no idea what systems thinking was, but she was teaching and practicing it for sure.

Thomas: I was introduced early in my career when I became a member of the International Council on Systems Engineering. I learned that a holistic approach was crucial to develop successful technical systems.

Carlos: Similar to Thomas, as a systems engineer it's required you have a diverse knowledge of different disciplines, such as

electronics, hardware, mechanics, and so on. I was learning all of these things, but I felt like something was missing – and I realized it was a mindset – a way of thinking that viewed *everything* as a system. I did a Google search and came across the Waters Center and it's from there that I learned about systems thinking as a discipline.

Q: Which Habit of a Systems Thinker do you wish everyone practiced?

A: **Miriam:** I would say "mental models" paired with "short-term, long-term and unintended consequences."

Thomas: "Big picture" and "makes meaningful connections." These are fundamentally important Habits.

Carlos: It's hard to choose. If I had to say, I would pick, "changes perspectives to increase understanding."

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Q: Which leader (past or present) do you admire most and why?

A: **Miriam:** I'm not good at admiring. I will love the work of someone, but as I find out more about them, I learn they have lots of flaws – as we all do – we are human beings after all! But I am a fan and inspired by Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand. She's a young female politician who has been incredibly daring and resilient over the past few years and has broken so many taboos – not least having a baby and breastfeeding while in office.

Thomas: I am also not good at admiring – I don't really admire anyone, per se, but when I meet people who recognize that we live in a highly interdependent, globalized world and they adapt their actions and attempt to make decisions for the good of all, I find it inspiring and hopeful for our future.

Carlos: I would say George Soros, mainly because of his work on open societies. He is a great systems thinker. And also, from history, Marquis de Pombal, a Portuguese ruler who led the Portuguese out of despair after a devastating earthquake in 1755.

Q: What is one book you think everyone should read?

A: **Miriam:** *Reinventing Organizations*, by Frederic Laloux. I find it phenomenal. It gave me the courage to know that we can do things differently in organizations. Also, *Dignity: Its Essential Role in Resolving Conflict*, by Donna Hicks.

Thomas: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey. The book provides a framework to address important life questions, in particular "What kind of life do I want to live?"

Carlos: The book I am reading now, actually: *The Design of Everyday Things*, by Don Norman"

Q: What advice do you have for someone getting started as a systems thinker?

A: **Miriam:** Think of systems thinking like yoga – it's a practice. You must intentionally practice systems thinking at all times, and be aware that you can always make changes to move forward towards your desired state and destination.

Thomas: Being a systems thinker is a longtime process and commitment, so spend time on your personal development. Read widely and from many different perspectives – it will help to open your mind and broaden your thinking.

Carlos: Like Thomas, I would say, take time for reflection. It's important to take a step back and consider ideas and solutions other than your own.

Q: Why do you think the world needs systems thinkers?

A: **Miriam:** This is easy to answer: we need thinkers who are comfortable with complexity.
To save our mental health, our environment … our existence.

Thomas: I'd like to ask this question in a different way: "What happens to our world *without* systems thinkers?" We will not find adequate answers to the global challenges that increasingly affect our lives, such as climate crisis, species extinction, pollution, hunger, epidemics, to name a few.

Carlos: As Miriam said, the world is getting more and more complex …. and more complicated… with each passing day. We need people who can handle this complexity in a thoughtful, sustainable way.