

# Workshop Concept

## "System Self-Diagnosis: Building Internal Viability with VSM"

### Duration:

1 full day (8 hours incl. breaks)

### Participants:

- Representatives of operational units
- Ideally 6–12 people: include various functions of the organization, most importantly the ones with direct contact with the markets and customers (e.g. sales, service, support).

### Workshop Objective:

To diagnose the internal viability of the team/organization using the **Viable System Model**, in preparation for external collaboration. This includes mapping all VSM systems (S1–S5), environment interactions, communication channels, and feedback loops.

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### Workshop Materials:

- VSM Canvas (individual and wall-sized)
  - Sticky notes (color-coded for S1–S5 and Meta-Systems)
  - Markers, pens
  - Tape or digital collaboration boards (e.g., Miro or MURAL)
  - Pre-distributed reading: short intro to VSM & workshop goals
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### Agenda

#### 09:00 – 10:00 | Welcome & Framing

- Introduction to the purpose of the self-assessment
  - Overview of the VSM model
  - Subsidiarity principle and Ashby's Law (Requisite Variety)
  - Workshop flow explanation
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## 10:00 – 10:45 | Step 1 – Understand the Environment

**Guiding Question:** *Who are our key stakeholders (customers, suppliers, regulators)? What trends, constraints, and dynamics define our environment?*

- Map out the **external environment**
- Gain understanding of customers, competition, and other stakeholders
- Think about current markets and future trends
- Identify recurrent interactions, uncertainties, and tensions
- Highlight where variety is high and may need attenuation/amplification

**Output:** Environment map surrounding the system

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## 10:45 – 11:00 | Break

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## 11:00 – 12:00 | Step 2 – Map System 1 (Primary Operations)

**Guiding Questions:**

- *What are our core operational units (S1s)?*
- *How autonomous are they?*
- *Do they generate value independently?*
- *Do they know their customers?*
- Identify each S1
- Describe deliverables and accountabilities
- Surface key interdependencies

**Output:** S1 landscape and initial autonomy-assessment

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## 12:00 – 13:00 | Lunch Break

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## 13:00 – 13:45 | Step 3 – Explore System 2 (Coordination)

**Guiding Questions:**

- *How do we avoid conflict and redundancy between S1s?*
- *What rituals, roles, or tools help us harmonize?*
- Map coordinating mechanisms
- Identify signs of oscillations and control issues
- Test ideas for improving (self)coordination

**Output:** Coordinative mechanisms + proposals for anti-oscillation improvements

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## 13:45 – 14:30 | Step 4 – Explore System 3 & 3\*

### S3 – Operational Management

- *How are resources allocated and managed?*
- *What's our "resource bargain"?*
- *Are we leveraging synergies across operational units?*
- *Are we following the subsidiarity principle?*

### S3\* – Audit

- *How do we know how well we're doing?*
- *What's our learning cycle (Retrospectives, PDCA, Gemba Walks)?*
- Identify audits, KPIs, escalation paths (esp. for algedonic signals)

**Output:** S3/S3\* map including audit flow and PDCA rhythms

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## 14:30 – 15:00 | Break

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## 15:00 – 15:45 | Step 5 – Explore System 4 (Strategic Foresight)

### Guiding Questions:

- *How do we prepare for the future?*
- *Where does innovation come from?*
- *Who connects us to the external world of change?*
- Map strategy and innovation processes
- Assess environmental scanning mechanisms

**Output:** Current state of strategic foresight and unmet needs

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## 15:45 – 16:30 | Step 6 – Explore System 5 (Policy, Identity, Norms)

### Guiding Questions:

- *What defines our identity?*
- *What values and policies guide us?*
- *How do we resolve tensions between short-term and long-term needs?*
- Reflect on normative backbone
- Clarify meta-decisions and S5–S3 interactions

**Output:** Shared understanding of systemic identity and long-term alignment

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## **16:30 – 17:30 | Wrap-Up & Debrief**

- Present VSM map as a team
- Identify areas of strength, gaps, and tension
- Set the stage for collaboration workshop (next step in VSM Collaboration Canvas)

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## **Deliverables**

- VSM Canvas of the internal team/system
- List of internal strengths & weaknesses per system
- Initial reflection on what the team may need from future collaborators
- Key indicators for variety mismatches (e.g., overloaded systems)