Researching Real Life: the experience of a paradigm shift

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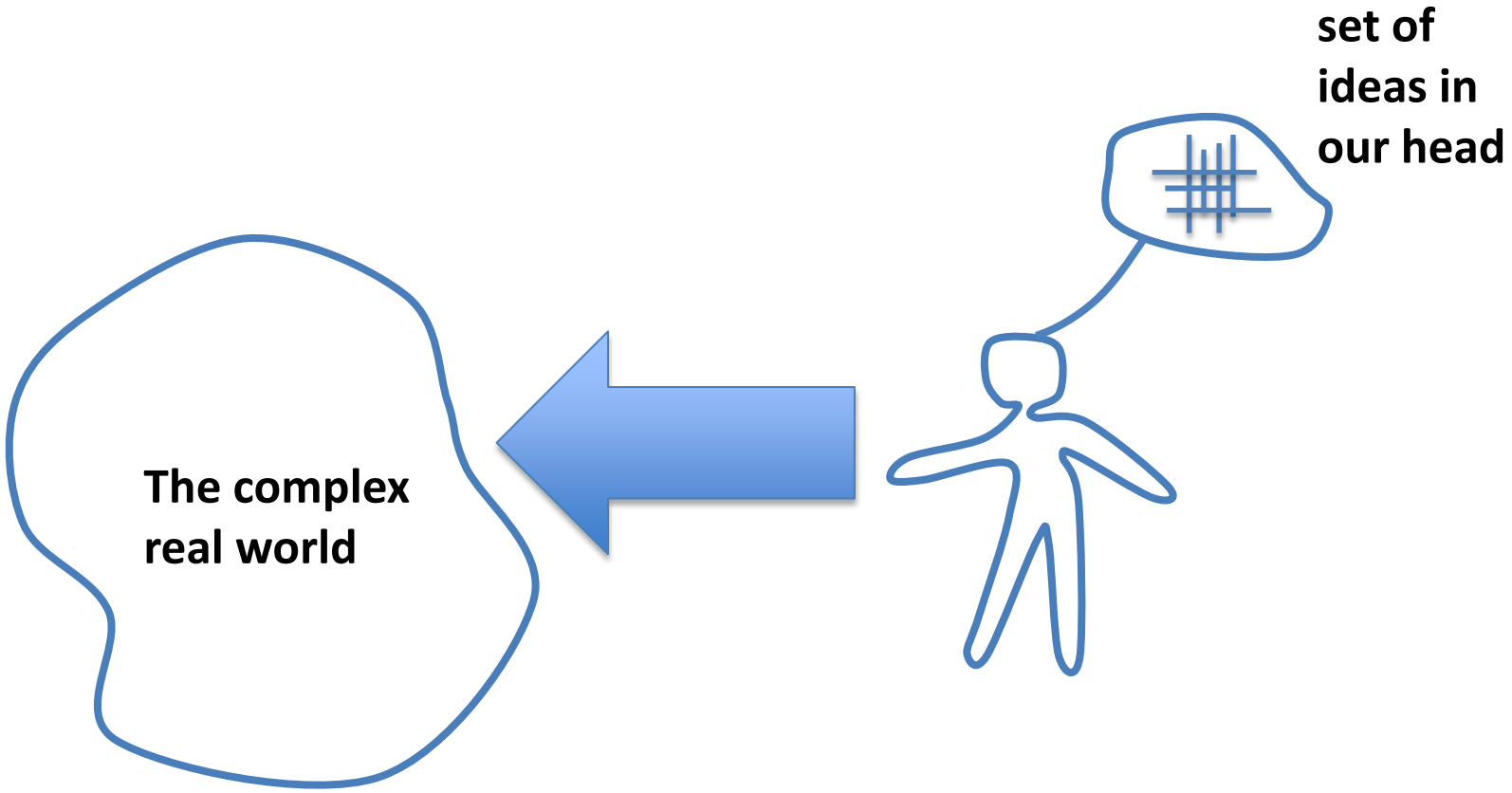

set of
ideas in
our head
The complex
real world

The Shape of the Talk

1. History
2. Action Research
3. The Research Programme
4. Learning: The Paradigm Shift
5. Conclusion

DON’T

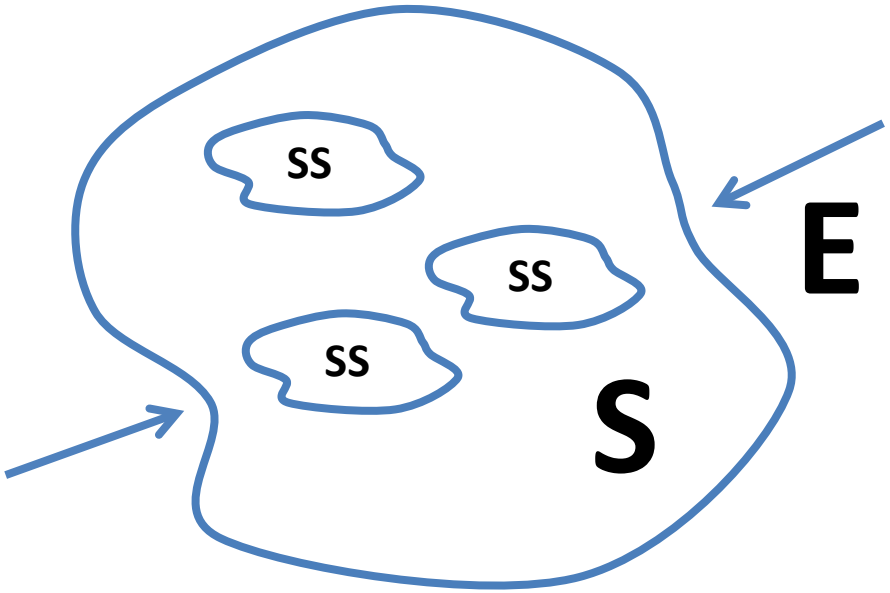
TACKLE THE HARD TASK

PIECE BY PIECE !

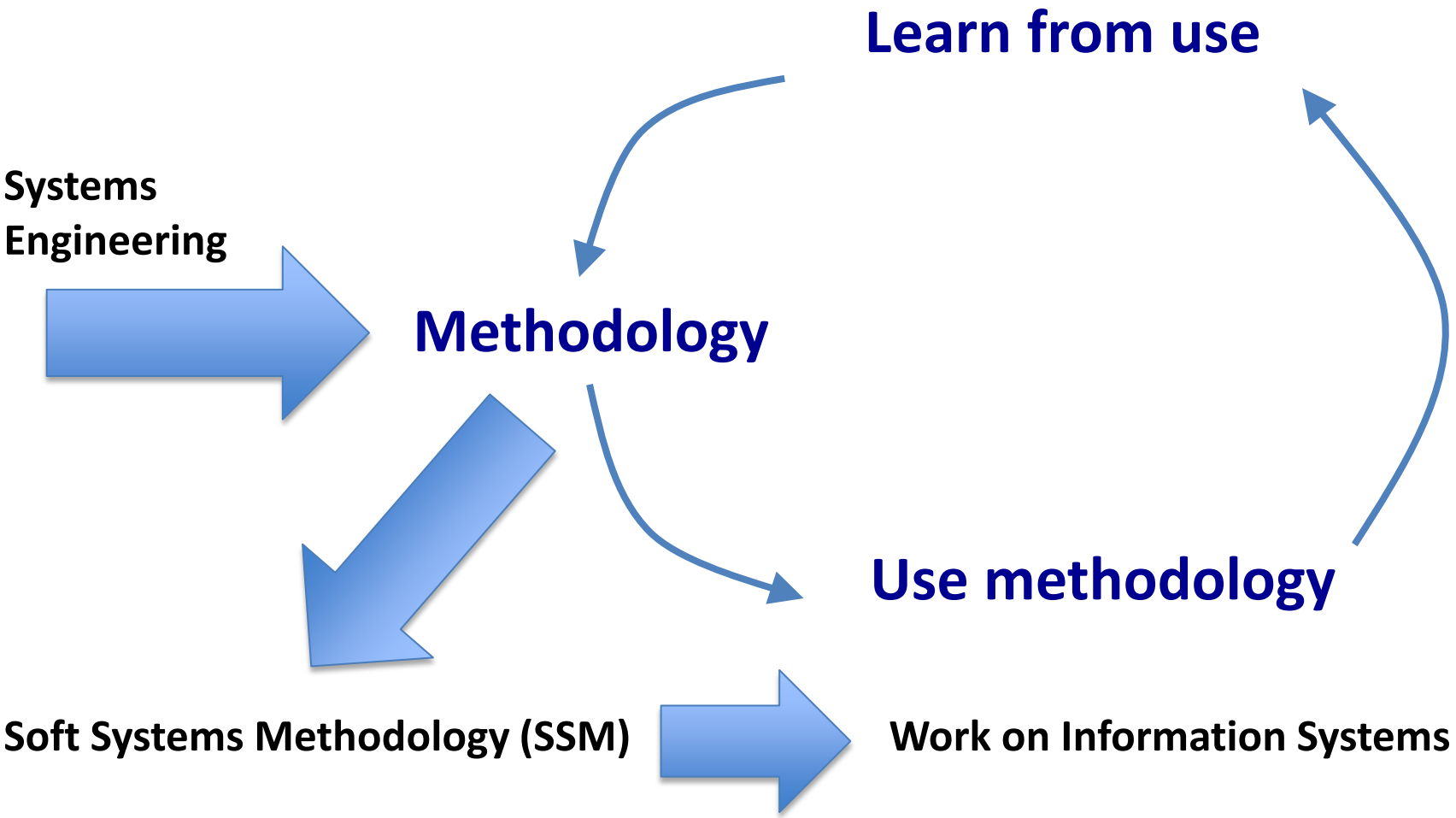
USE A SYSTEMS APPROACH !

The core systems concept:

an adaptive whole which
can survive through time



- Layered structure
- Processes of communication and control
- Emergent properties


Learn from use
Systems Engineering
Methodology
Use methodology
Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)
Work on Information Systems

Four key moments in the development of SSM

1. Model purposeful activity

2. Declare the worldview for each model

What is a prison?

1. A punishment system ?

2. A re-education system ?

3. A system to protect society ?

4. A system to train criminals ?

----- etc

Four key moments in the development of SSM

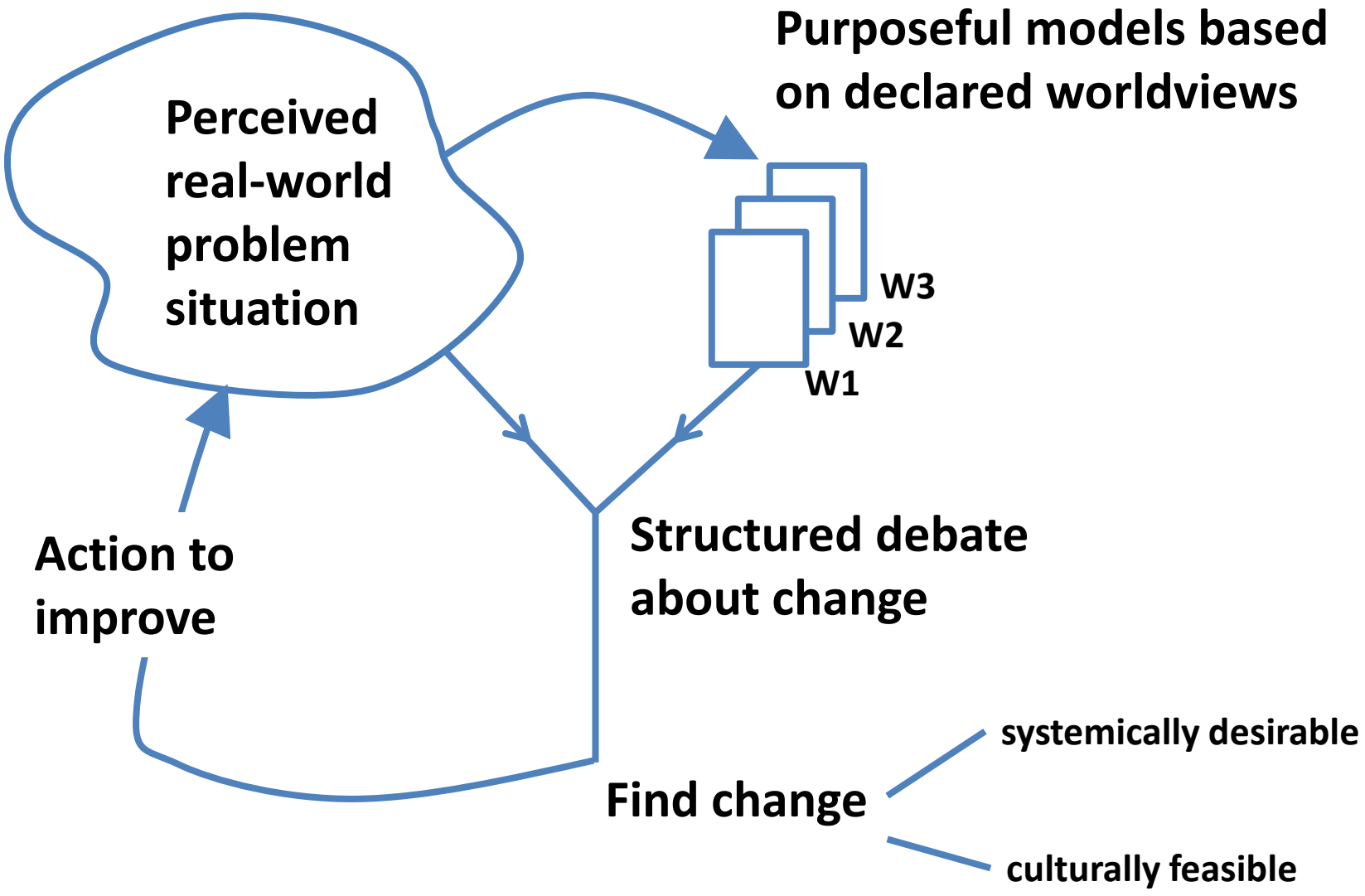
1. Model purposeful activity

2. Declare the worldview for each model

3. The process of inquiry: a learning system

4. Work on information systems

SSM's learning system



The Concorde Project

London

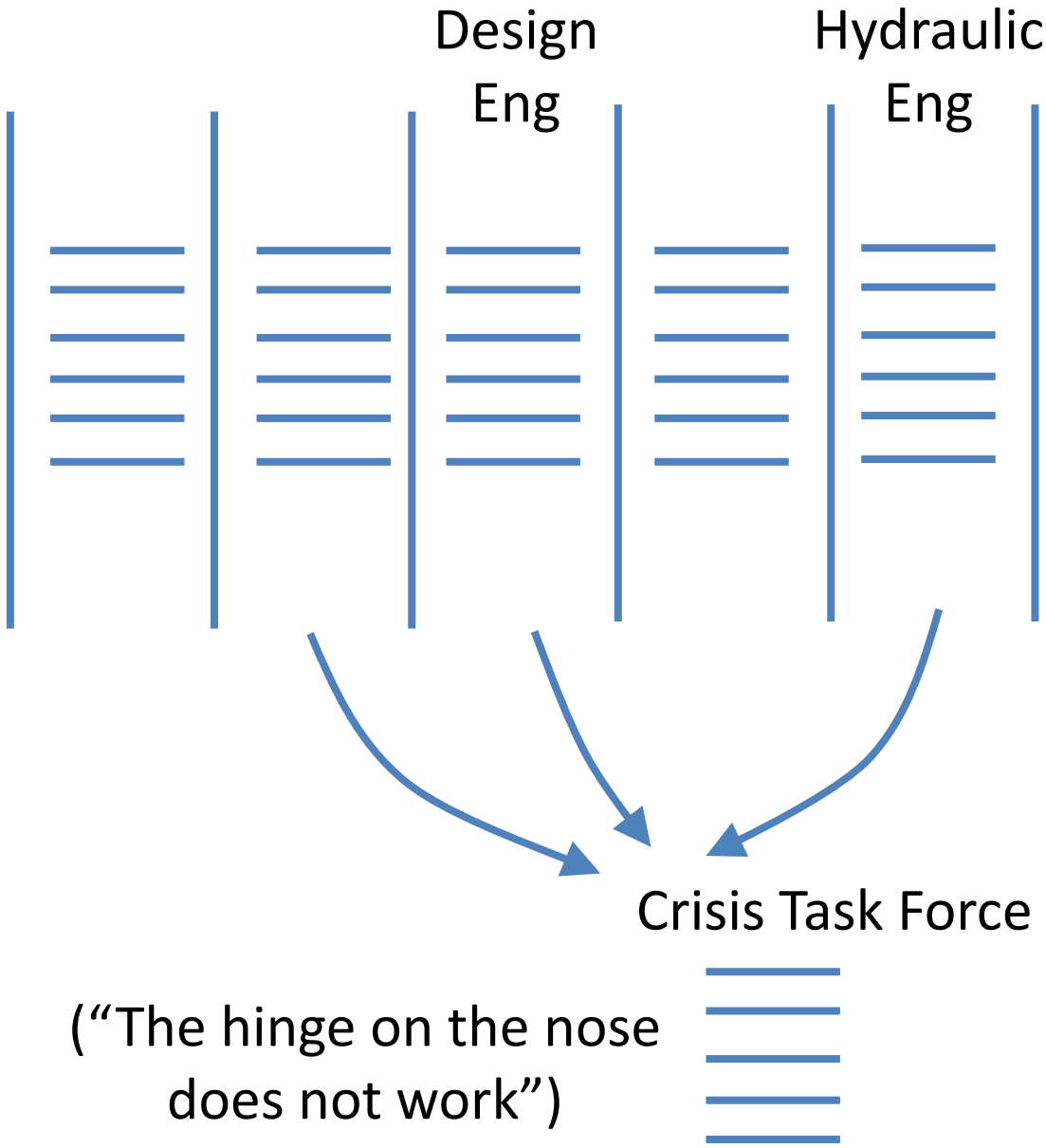
Paris

sign

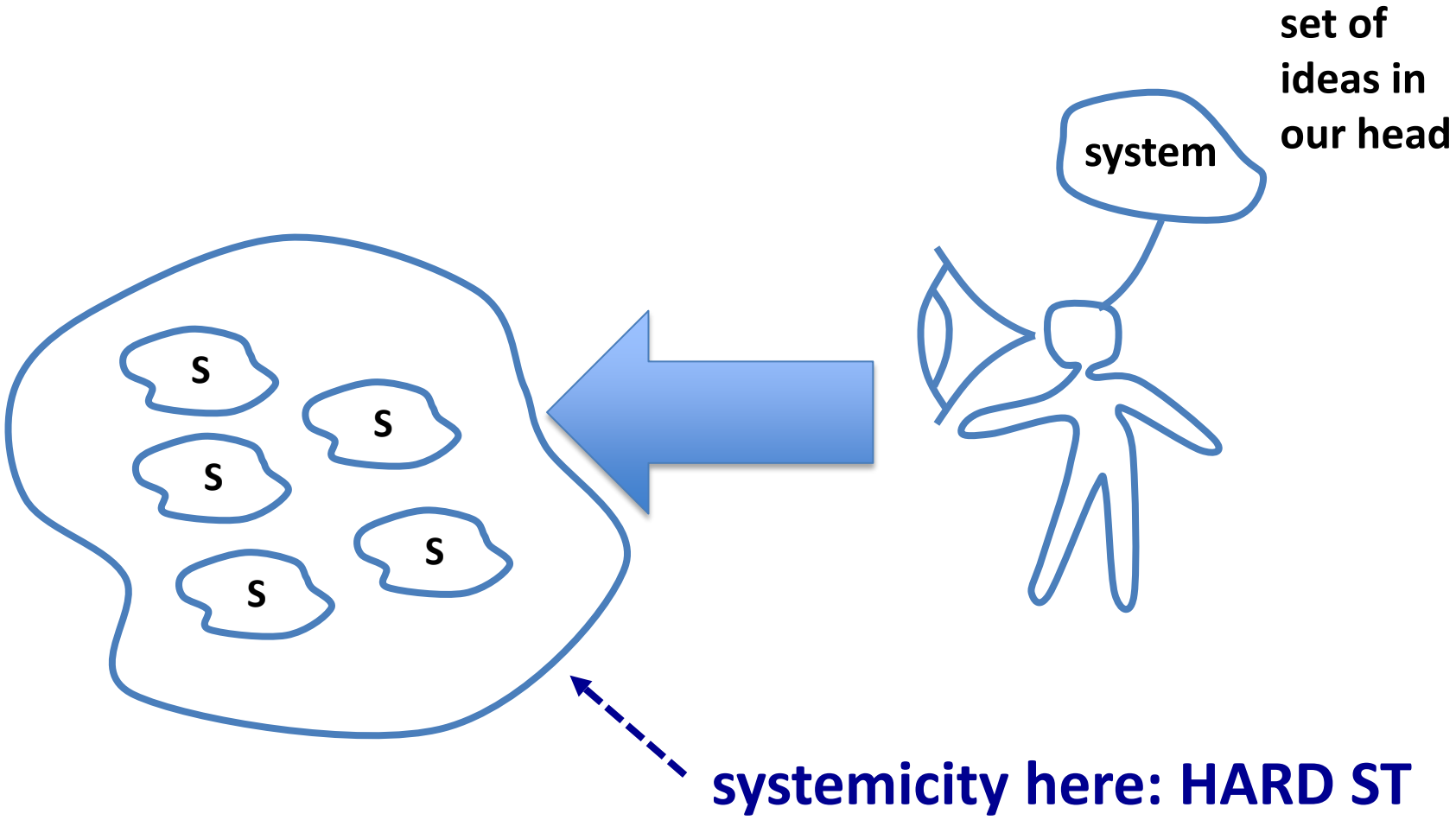
build

Concorde

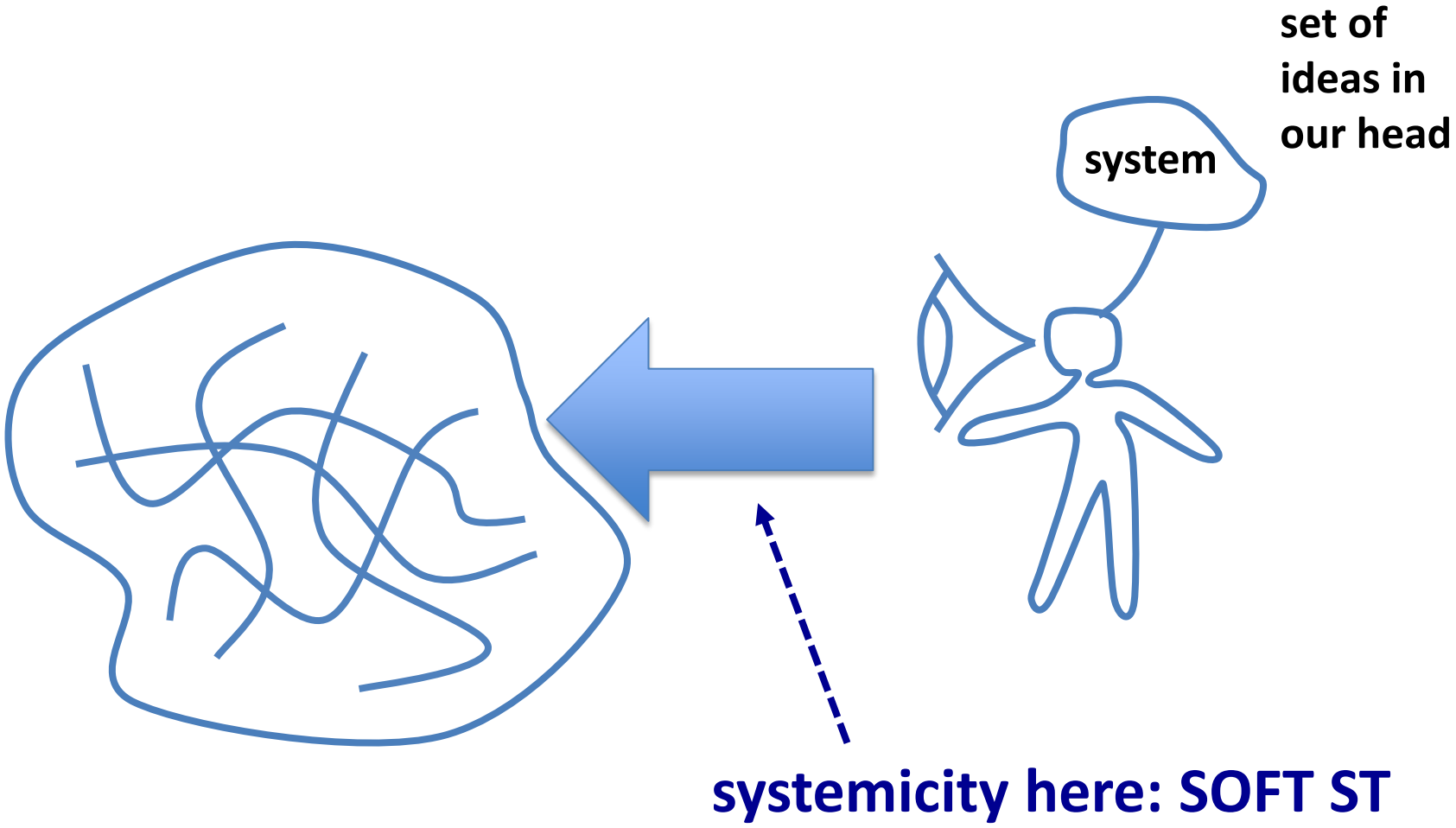
BAC (Bristol)
Aviation Sud (Toulouse)


Design
Eng
Hydraulic
Eng
Crisis Task Force
("The hinge on the nose
does not work")

Using the system idea (1)



Using the system idea (2)

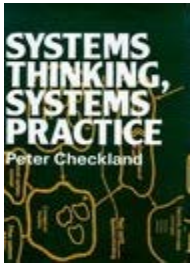


Learning: The Paradigm Shift

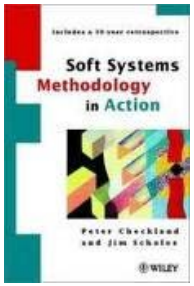
In ‘soft’ systems thinking the focus is on the **process of inquiry** into the complexity of real situations

Why is progress in understanding this so slow ?

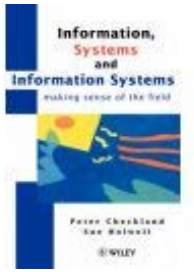
1. Shifting mental furniture is very difficult for most people
2. The new paradigm calls for engagement in real life situations: not popular with most researchers!



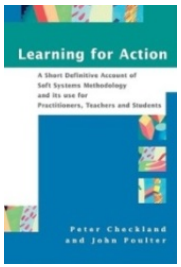
Systems Thinking, Systems Practice (1981)



Soft Systems Methodology in Action (1990 & 1999)



Information, Systems and Information Systems (1997)



Learning for Action (2006)