Systems thinking is a breakthrough in how to understand change. A system is a collection of interactive parts that together produce a desired goal. That means a system is made up of smaller parts, and if one of those parts changes it affects the entire system. Your organization is a system, and when something changes in one department it affects the entire system. A high-functioning system has the ability to constantly exchange feedback throughout its parts so that they remain aligned. Customers—either internal or external—are the recipients of the systems process.

Think about how the system in your department works and fill in the input/output chart below for a visual representation of the system.

Use these questions to guide you:

*Suppliers*: Who are our internal suppliers?

*Input*: What services and supplies do the suppliers give us?

*Value*: What value do we add?

*Output*: What are the resulting supplies and services?

*Customers*: To whom do we give these supplies and services?
Now take it to the next level. You can do this by involving your direct reports. Post a blank input/output flip chart on a wall near your office. Encourage your team members to fill in the information for the system. After a week, facilitate a discussion about systems thinking for your group. Add another step and ask for ideas for improvement at any point along the chart. A week later invite the same people together to discuss their ideas.