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In the workroom of the system changers

The brochure "Das hat System" explains how social enterprises can promote systemic change.

by Odin Mühlenbein, Partner Ashoka Germany, September 9, 2021

*Uses content from the brochure "*[*Das hat System*](https://www.ashoka-deutschland.org/das-hat-system/)*" by Odin Mühlenbein and Martina Zelt*

What does it actually mean to be successful as a social enterprise? With profit-oriented companies, the matter is clear: the more growth and profit, the better. We also encounter this logic in the field of social entrepreneurship. Foundations want social enterprises to reach more people with their services; social investors expect a return; and politicians want to know how many new jobs the sector will create. These points of view have their justification. After all, we want all people with mental illnesses to be well cared for and all children with problems to receive appropriate support at school.

At the same time, we should ask ourselves: aren't we focusing too much on symptoms? Why do mental health crises have to escalate before you can get help? Why do so many children have problems in school? Why is the recidivism rate for violent crime so high? The answer is in our social systems. The health care system is focused on treatment rather than prevention; the school system is not designed to provide individualized support for students; and the prison system further radicalizes many inmates. Social enterprises can help change these systems. This is precisely where their greatest value to society lies. A [study by Ashoka and McKinsey](https://www.mckinsey.de/news/presse/2019-03-14-ashoka-wenn-aus-klein-systemisch-wird) shows that even small changes in social systems generate hundreds of millions of euros per year in added value. These systemic changes thus often have more impact than even the most successful social enterprises, which help many people very directly.

What exactly do such systemic changes look like? And how do social enterprises advance these goals? Changing systems needs certain [skills](https://www.tbd.community/de/a/ashoka-system-entrepreneurship) and tools. It's a mindset thing, but it's also a craft. With the brochure "[This Has System](https://www.ashoka-deutschland.org/das-hat-system/)", we offer a glimpse into the workroom of systemic changemakers. Here are 3 of the 16 examples:

With **Ipso, Inge Missmahl** supports people in mental crisis situations. Inge does not simply want to reach many people with Ipso. She wants to introduce a tiered model in the health care system for mental illness. She is focusing on "Value-Based Counseling". Effectiveness studies show that it can be used to stabilize even difficult situations with 3-5 sessions. Low-threshold initial interventions without a diagnosis are to become part of standard care. As a first milestone, an app for Value-Based Counseling is to receive approval as a digital health application from the Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices. The app has already been developed and certified as a medical device. The application process is underway. The next step is to sign contracts with the first health insurance companies before the tiered model can eventually be expanded to other interventions. Inge's tool is the power of precedent. Once the tiered model for Value-Based Counseling is in place, other approaches can be established in a similar way. As a decision maker:in at a health insurance company, you can help by supporting the model early with your health insurance company. We can all help by encouraging people around us to take mental health problems seriously and get help.

With Violence **Prevention Network** (VPN), **Judy Korn** helps violent extremist criminals shed their ideologies and change their behavior. She wants to ensure that ideologically motivated criminals are legally entitled to deradicalisation programmes. An impact study shows that the recidivism rate drops significantly. Judy's tool is cooperation with ministries. In 2016, the German government included deradicalisation programmes in its counter-extremism strategy. VPN is mentioned in it. Government funding is in place until 2024, but after that it still has to be anchored in the budgets of the federal states. It's a similar story with quality standards. These have been in place at federal level since 2020 and now still need to be adopted by the Länder. VPN has coordinated the work on behalf of the BMFSFJ. A concept for the uniform evaluation is currently being developed (among others by VPN). As an employee in an interior ministry, you can help by driving these processes forward.

With **Serlo**, **Simon Köhl** wants to ensure that learning materials are available online under free licenses for all subjects and grade levels. This would make it easier for students to learn on their own and save teachers a lot of time. The [serlo.org site](http://serlo.org/) already covers a wide range of teaching content. The 1.5 million monthly users also show that there is a broad demand for the materials. In order to firmly anchor the idea of free learning materials in the education system, Simon is trying to introduce a new rule and financial incentives through the education ministries: 10% of the learning materials actually used in schools should be under free licenses. Simon hopes that other organisations will then also create free materials on a large scale. The quota could then be gradually increased. Serlo's tool is collaboration with other organisations. The organisation is part of the "Free Education" initiative, which politically campaigns for free learning materials. As a school board member, you can help by linking parts of the budget for learning materials to the use of free licenses. We can all help by encouraging young people to learn in a self-determined way.

The examples show: Systemic change is not something abstract that just happens by chance. One can clearly name the systemic levers. You can work on the milestones. And this work can be specifically promoted.

The workroom of the system changers has room not only for social entrepreneurs. As an employee in a ministry of the interior or at a health insurance company, as a teacher or simply as a person - everyone can join in! For social enterprises to be systemically successful, [foundations](https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/embracing-complexity) should also rethink their funding practices and the [government](https://www.ashoka.org/en-gb/new-allies) should improve the framework conditions. In international studies we have shown how this can be done. Other countries are already further ahead than we are. It's time to catch up.

There's definitely room in the craft room.

*This article was written by Odin Mühlenbein from* [*Ashoka Germany*](https://ashoka-deutschland.org/)*. Ashoka is the world's largest network of social entrepreneurs. Questions or comments? Send the author an* *email**.*