A Fight for Truth
A research and systemic analysis of wrongful convictions in Canada

Systemic Design- Social Systems  SFIN 6008
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Research Challenge

Our Gigamap, entitled A Fight for Truth, aspires to inform the general public about the issue of Wrongful Convictions. Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

This bold statement, found in section seven of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, is, in its purest form, a promise made by Canada to its people. Although such a promise governs the most basic of all human expectations - the right to a free life - it is not without its controversy and complexities. The aforementioned excerpt covers, in broad strokes, the exception that would deem it acceptable for an individual to lose his or her freedom - except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

But what happens when fundamental justice fails? In 2012 alone 2,470 wrongful convictions were reported in Canada (Mclellan, 2013). When creating our gigamap, we kept the following question as our guide: How might we understand the Canadian legal system in order to identify intervention points that may mitigate the occurrence of wrongful conviction.

Scope and Boundaries

The Canadian judicial system is complex and has many complexities, to build this map we have decided to focus on the Canadian Criminal Justice. According to Meadows (2008) all systems are connected, our world is a continuum. To correctly draw the perimeter, we focused on the question we were attempting to answer.

Because we planned on spotting possible intervention points that would minimize the occurrence of wrongful convictions, we focused our system on three phases that wrongfully convicted individuals’ experiences. These sections are identified in our map as: Law Enforcement, Court Process, and Ministry of Justice.

Visual Mapping
Visual Mapping

1. A flowchart visually representing the complexity of the Criminal Justice System is the central piece of the map.
2. We have used 3 different kinds of roads to show the variation in speed of each phase. Time, affluence and complexity of the crime have been factored in.
3. The three main phases of the system have been clearly marked with loops and information related to each section has been laid out in close proximity for ease of reading.
4. Stakeholders that have influence on each phase of the map appear at the top. A variation in scale shows their relative influence on the process.
5. Intervention points have been clearly marked and a legend has been provided at the start of the map for ease of reading.
6. We have used a visual metaphor to represent the current adversarial system.
   a. Prosecution and defence getting ready for a bout.
   b. Media putting the spotlight on the contest.
   c. Government controls prosecution and defence using strings. This shows how much control they have in the system. It is, in fact, a self-serving system with the prosecution significantly more likely to be successful.

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**STAKEHOLDERS**

- Police Officer
- Forensic Expert
- Crown Counsel
- Media Person
- Judge
- Jury
- Prosecutor
- Defense
- Advocacy Group
- Convict
- Minister of Justice
- Wrongfully convicted
Additional information helps in getting a better picture of the process.

**TIMELINE SHOWING THE PROMINENT CASES AND LANDMARKS IN THE CANADIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM 1960 - 2015**

Use of chains to show how long someone spent behind bars (famous cases)
The illustration style has been finalized after a lot of discussion. We have considered factors such as representation of races and communities, connotations attached to certain imagery, depth and detail of information. It is for this reason that we have chosen black and white imagery with limited detail.

**Systemic Intervention**

After understanding the wrongful conviction judicial system, and building on the insights gathered through our research phase, we found unfavourable systemic behaviours and archetypes that reveal the complexity of the issues in this system. A complexity worth noting is related to the legal aid defense, which is free of charge for individuals who cannot afford a lawyer.

One of the issues with legal aid defense lawyers is that they lack the resources to adequately help and process all the cases that come their way. The amount of cases these lawyers receive require hundreds of hours of work and examination, which is not currently possible because of the number of cases. This component of the judicial system is in need of funding to enhance its capacity. Another issue with legal aid defense related to their lack of resources is their underdog mindset. This mindset may unconsciously influence defense lawyers to look for the fastest route to resolve a case instead of seeking the truth and finding the underlying arguments to help a client.

Judicial systems have a success of the successful archetype that relates to defense lawyers. As it is commonly known, private lawyers usually have more resources, in terms of time and people addressing a case, to examine a case and build a solid argument for a client. The playing field is not levelled because legal aid public defense lawyers do not have the same resources. What this means is that a person can have a better defense based on his or her affluence. There have been a number of famous cases in North America that can confirm this issue. People with affluence have a higher chance of being free of charge in a trial.

Another convoluted issue worth discussing is the dynamic interaction between police investigation and public opinion shaped by media. As it is commonly known, mass
media is always on the look for interesting stories that will drive traffic and readership. The number of wrongful conviction cases covered by Canadian media has gradually been increasing over the last decades. Additionally, pop culture has always been keen on using detective and crime narratives to fill up movie theatres and increase TV ratings. The resulting effect that media has on public perception, police enforcement and the dynamic between those two components is worth noting.

Given the degree of gravity of criminal breaches, especially in the case of rape and murder, the police investigation side organically takes a leadership and heroic role in the unfolding of the investigation. This mindset has been instilled over decades through the depiction of hero investigators and policemen in popular culture, but more importantly it is fuelled by news media following how a case unfolds. The more attention media gives to a criminal case, the more spotlight police investigators get, which influences their frame of investigation and their partiality towards specific results. In some cases the investigation side will try to confirm a perpetrator with the available evidence and information available. However, in some cases it may not be possible to confidently confirm a perpetrator based on existing evidence. This is an issue that can surface in some cases, and that investigators should acknowledge to avoid building cases based on self-confirming evidence that does not exclude other potential versions of a crime. The pressure of media and public opinion as well as the heroic mindset can lead investigators to build cases that may hold strong based on partial evidence presented, but does not exclude the possibility of leads that could point to another perpetrator.

When analysing the judicial system through a systemic approach, we noticed that the Criminal Case Review group's operation resembles the system's archetype Shifting the Burden. The solution proposed by the CCR, to investigate the cases of wrongful convictions, does nothing to solve the underlying problem that wrongful convictions occur on the first place, it is only a symptomatic solution. The ministry of justice, due to their workload, won't have the bandwidth necessary to focus on fixing what causes wrongful convictions on the first place. To solve this issue, it is necessary to look beyond short-term reliefs and to focus on long-term system restructuring (Meadows, 2008).

Stakeholder Analysis

A large and complex system often has an extensive list of stakeholders. It was our priority to enquire about their needs and look for patterns. A stakeholder analysis gave us an understanding of their needs and priorities, but also shined light on a suspicious imbalance.

Maintaining the scope of Canadian Criminal Justice System—with a special emphasis on rape and murder charges, we analyzed police enforcement, crown counsel, the Criminal Case Review group, the Ministry of Justice, and briefly touched on society and media. We broke the stakeholders down into three main phases; investigation, pre-conviction, and post-conviction. When organizing them based on whether they were accountable (A), responsible (R), consulted (C), or informed (I) in each of the three phases, we noticed a

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Responsibility assignment matrix of the stakeholders
significant imbalance in power. Stakeholders on the prosecution side were significantly more involved and powerful than stakeholders involved with the defence. A direct impact can be seen from stakeholders supporting the prosecution side. This led us to look further into the injustices of the system, specifically un-level playing field and its impacts. We wanted to emphasize the power and resource imbalance in our map and suggest ways of making the system fairer for the defendants.

Proposed Systemic Design

Our research led us to identify three main intervention areas:

Police Investigation
This is an important section to minimize wrongful convictions because, if performed correctly, it can impact the entire system (MacFarlane, n.d.).

We have detected that this section acts as the first sieve to reduce the amount of wrongfully accused of entering the system. Unpacking this section, we listed the main faults that lead to miscarriages of justice at this stage: The first is tunnel vision, which happens when police investigators get so focused on one single suspect that they ignore other potential suspects. This can be addressed by the implementation of processes that reduce tunnel vision such as cyclical programs that teach police investigators how to avoid tunnel vision and acknowledge the threat of preconceived biases.

There is also an interesting factor called “Noble Cause Corruption”. In 1992, Sir John Woodcock, Chief Inspector of Constabulary, first coined the phrase. It is describe a situation where the police officers violate legal ethical standards in pursuit of what they believe to be the benefit of society (Kleinig, 2002). This can be mitigated with proper training and processes.

A third cause is when eyewitness testimonials and evidence are also tampered in a case. Evidence with the potential to prove an individual's innocence can also be tampered with. Garrett (2013) explains how it is not only necessary to guarantee that all evidence-handling processes are followed, but also to punish those who do not follow the processes. As DNA technology and forensic science are constantly improving, it is also important to guarantee that the investigation team has access to the right equipment to test the evidence collected. Finally, some investigations are rushed, due to pressure of the investigator’s office, society, and media. According to MacFarlane (n.d), this rush can influence investigators, pushing them to disregarding all facts contradicting the guilt of their suspect, and thus increasing the chances of occurrence of wrongful convictions.

Crown Counsel
The second intervention point is the The Crown Counsel process.

The Crown is in charge of reviewing the reports received from the police and deciding whether the charges should be accepted. They play a pivotal role because they can act as an additional safety net to prevent cases of wrongful conviction, we identified the following procedures that can be implemented to alleviate the issue of wrongful conviction: implementing a checks and balances system, exercising contrarian thinking, stimulating questions, and encouraging second opinions.

The Crown Counsel’s department can implement several checks and balances to
minimize tunnel vision and the confirmation bias sometimes practiced by law enforcement (Kennedy, 2004). Also, the Crown Counsel should have an internal team that acts like a contrarian, a devil's advocate, to the charges presented by the police department. To exercise contrarian thinking, and to have the freedom to make unpopular decisions, are pointed out as solutions to minimize the occurrence of wrongful convictions, according the 2011 report released by the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Wrongful Convictions. It is vital that the internal environment in the Crown Counsel department also encourages questioning, no matter the case and the stakeholders involved. The same must be said to second opinions, especially on serious cases, where colleagues inside the Crown Counsel have the opportunity to point out mistakes in the investigation.

**CCR Group**
The third intervention area is the Criminal Conviction Review group, which operates within the Ministry of Justice. They are responsible for reviewing and investigating each wrongful conviction application and making final recommendations to the Ministry.

This process is much more complex than it may appear because, not only is the application process very lengthy, it also requires the accused to produce new evidence to prove their innocence. Currently, the CCR is not independent of the Ministry of Justice. For the group to properly do its work, it must have the means to carry out investigations independently of the executive (Roberts & Weathered, 2008).

Roach (2009) suggest that to perform its duty, not only does the CCR need to be independent, it also need to have proper funding, staffing, and access to witnesses and evidence. Professor Alan Young, Co-Founder and Director of Osgoode's Innocence Project, boldly claimed during our interview “We need to go British!”. This was in reference to the British CCRC, the Criminal Case Review Commission. The CCRC is an independent body that is responsible for investigating suspected miscarriages of justice, and operates independently. They have access to funding, staff, evidence, witnesses, and are free to pursue investigations of their choice. We believe that Canada needs to incorporate these elements in the CCR.

**Stakeholder Engagement**
For all the proposed interventions to take place, it is vital that the right people are engaged. We will share our findings with advocacy groups, such as AIDWYC & The Innocence Project to share with their audiences. It is also important to enlist the support of the general public. We plan on reaching them through social media and harnessing the power of digital platforms,
such as Google Search, Advocacy Group Websites, and targeted virtual channels. We will also encourage the public to participate through petition websites, such as change.org. These websites allow the public to voice their concerns for specific matters and are powerful change mechanisms. We believe that our findings will touch a nerve with the general public and they will want to demonstrate their support in fixing the issue of wrongful convictions.

We also had two plans that would require proper funding and specific resources. We envision the distribution of pamphlets, throughout Toronto, that would inform pedestrians of our findings and possibly the collection of signatures. Also, we contemplate designing an app that would contain an overview of legal processes to anyone who is interested in learning more about the topic. It also has the potential to connect students or retired lawyers with those in need of their services. We imagine that individuals that have been charged, and their families and loved ones, will benefit greatly from this information.

Finally, we are excited to see our work go live on the web, and witness the impact it can have on society at large by raising awareness and gaining support from the general public. The amount of traffic and traction this initiative may generate is in itself a meaningful and positive response.

Systemic Impacts
The judicial system has a far-reaching impact in a number of systems within our society. The intervention areas we recommend further looking into may impact other social systems. Although we are not able to identify the range of impact, our group believes the proposed interventions could also affect the following systems:

Educational system
One of this project's objectives was to depict a complex system in a straightforward and easy to understand manner. Like one of our group member's mentioned, there is hidden power in complexity when presented to masses lacking adequate knowledge. Therefore, we believe it is important to make information considered inaccessible accessible to more people by portraying complex systems so that people less education could understand it.

After sharing our synthesis map with our class, feedback from a couple peers helped us realize the potential impact of our work outside the judicial system. We thought our synthesis of wrongful conviction in Canada and its underpinning judicial processes could be useful for individuals who may be facing trials, and do not have a good grasp of the processes and intricacies involved. Further conversation led us to realize that this could be used to teach high school law in a much more effective and engaging way than is currently delivered. There are many systems, in which all Canadian citizens and residents are part of. Many of these systems are very complex and hard to understand. This in itself is an interesting initiative worth looking into. Developing a database of social system processes in Canada that can help residents navigate through them faster and with more confidence. As it was mentioned in our presentation, we plan to iterate on the visual communication and design of our synthesis map one more time to release our work online and see its ongoing impact. If an educational institution addressed us to use our information, we would be more than happy to help out.

Law enforcement
Canadian law enforcement is strongly linked to the judicial system, and to a certain degree, it is an influx point into this system. In fact, an intervention area in need of systemic change is related to police investigation and how it influences initial stages of a criminal trial process. The biggest
impact would be on the culture and mindset of police investigators and how they go about an investigation. As it has been learned over SFI program, culture is a very strong change lever that can make systemic changes successful. We believe that there needs to be a shift in the culture of police investigation in order to have more just, equitable, and adequate investigation processes that are not tendentious towards easy-fixes or pre-conceived biases.

**Correctional system**
We believe that our suggested systemic interventions can have impacts in the correctional system, which is closely tied to the judicial system. The relationship between both systems is straightforward. The more people convicted of a crime, the more people go to jail. We hope that our suggestions can help reduce the occurrence of wrongful conviction, and in turn reduce the amount of people who are put in jail by mistake. This would ultimately have a bottom line effect on the overall costs of running a correctional facility because of the decrease in wrongfully convicted prisoners. Our synthesis map highlights the average cost of keeping an inmate in a Canadian correctional facility. A small reduction in miscarriage of justice can have a significant impact that translates in cost savings and less tax money wrongfully spent.

**Foreign judicial systems**
The Canadian judicial system, along with the UK and US are three regions pioneering on the issue of wrongful conviction. In most countries around the world, this issue is not acknowledged or tackled, which speaks greatly of Canada’s judicial system and its efforts to have a just and equitable system. This also means that other countries can use our actions as lessons to learn from and good practices to emulate. Therefore, the structure and approach Canada takes may have implications and impacts in other judicial systems.

**Key Challenges and Influences**

Based on our research we have identified the main challenges that might affect our proposed interventions. We will briefly explore them below:

**Culture & Status Quo** - This social group has a strong group culture that was solidified throughout the years. The stakeholders of this system are used to doing things a certain way and might resist change.

**Funding** - Many of the changes we proposed would require extra funding, especially in the police investigation and the CCR sections.

**Media & Public Opinion** - Media can be a great ally on correcting wrongful convictions, because it can influence the public opinion, which can consequently influence the governing bodies.

**Time** - Time plays a major role on this proposal. All changes would require a significant amount of time to take place. For those who are innocent and are waiting behind bars, time may be the heaviest price to pay.

Besides the factors addressed, there is a foundational matter concerning the Canadian Legal System, and that is Adversarial mindset. There are two main systems of adjudication: the adversarial and the inquisitorial. The map created by our group highlights the main differences of the systems using the table below:

Roach (2010) addresses how one form of minimizing wrongful convictions would be to incorporate aspects of the inquisitorial adjudication in the Canadian legal system. Professor Roach cases that to prevent wrongful convictions, the parts leading to the trial, as depicted in our map by the ‘Law Enforcement’ section, and the court process, would greatly benefit from incorporating elements of the inquisitorial investigation and court process.
In the beginning of this section we discussed the challenges that are inherent to the Canadian Legal System, when addressing wrongful convictions. After delving into the issue, we believe that to truly reduce the occurrence of miscarriages of justice it is necessary not only to apply corrections on specific points -- it is necessary to rethink the entire system, and to design it in a way that the truth is the final outcome.

Proposed Planning and Delivery Horizon

1. Make a video explaining the problem using the map and upload it YouTube. (1 month)
2. Participate in design or law conferences and present findings of our reports. We can also participate in legal hack-a-thons to develop our idea about making a platform to connect pro bono lawyers to people who need them. (1-3 months)
3. Reach out to advocacy groups or law firms who might fund us to make a website with the outcomes of our project. This may be an iterative process. Based on our target audience they might ask us to make some changes to the map. An interactive map might be an interesting way for readers to – literally– navigate the system. (2-6 months)
References


