People's Association

nacli

Systems Leadership In Action

A PA Leader's Guide to Stewarding Organisational Learning & Change

PREFACE

This playbook has been curated by the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI) to enhance organisational learning and reinforce the practice of Systems Leadership within the People's Association (PA). It serves as a practical guide, anchored on Peter Senge's five disciplines of the learning organisation and the three types of mastery of Systems Leadership.

This book is dedicated to all those who embrace the growth mindset and are passionate about continuous learning and incorporating Systems Leadership into their everyday lives.

May it act as a compass for your leadership journey!

This playbook is for internal / educational use within PA only and should not be reproduced or distributed outside the organisation.

People's Association

nacli

Contents



Foreword by CED Jimmy Toh 6

Navigating this Playbook 8

OVERVIEW: CONCEPT OF THE LEARNING ORGANISATION & ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING 11

Defining a Learning Organisation 13

Three Legged Stool 13

Five Disciplines of a Learning Organisation 14

Defining Organisational Learning 15

Seven Organisational Learning Disabilities 16

Organisational Learning and Change 18

Value of the Learning Organisation to the PA 21

PA's Theory of Success 22

PART 1: PA'S JOURNEY TOWARDS SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP 25

1.1 Defining Systems Leadership 27

1.2 Benefits of Systems Leadership to PA 29

1.3 Navigating Complexity through Systems Thinking 30

Systems Complexity 32

Implications for PA 34

PART 2: TYPES OF MASTERY IN SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP **37**

Systems Leadership Framework **39**

2.1 Creation Mastery **41**

Creative Tension Model 43

The Hierarchy of Choices Framework 48

2.2 Collaboration Mastery **55**

Mental Models 57

Ladder of Inference 59

Left-Hand Column Tool 62

The Choice Map 66

Quality of Conversations 69

Generative Conversations through Team Learning 74

Check-In and Check-Out Process 79

The Four-Player Model 83

The Effectiveness Model 87

World Cafe and the Knowledge Travelling Process 89

A Core Theory of Success 91

2.3 Complexity Mastery **99**

Single and Double-Loop Learning 101

The Levels of Perspective Framework 105

Basic Causal Loop Diagrams 112

Systems Archetypes 114

Vision Deployment Matrix 119

Navigating Systems Change **122**

Identifying High Leverage for Fundamental Solutions 122

Dealing with Unintended Consequences 122

PART 3: SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP IN ACTION **127**

3.1 Five Roles of a Systems Leader **129**

Understanding the Five Roles of a Systems Leader 130

3.2 Habits of a System Thinker **132**

3.3 Next Steps: From Learning to Action **133**

Guiding Framework for PA's Organisational Learning Journey 136

FOREWORD BY CED JIMMY TOH



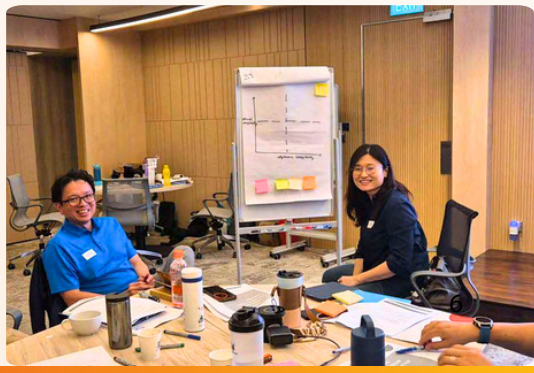
Dear Colleagues,

As we navigate through an increasingly dynamic operating landscape shaped by changing demographics, rapid digitalisation, and evolving community needs, the People's Association (PA) must be adept in navigating complexities to remain effective in our mission to spark and nurture community participation for a caring and united Singapore, fostering greater collaboration.

The **refresh of our vision and mission** in 2024 marked an important milestone in PA's transformation journey with our Community 2030 implementation plan setting out key pivots to position the PA for the future. But the success of our transformation efforts would depend on how purposefully we put in place **an organisational learning and development strategy** that will help us institutionalise learning in the PA; leveraging opportunities to tap on collective wisdom and strengths of our leadership teams as we work more collaboratively as One PA to achieve our desired future reality for the next bound.

The practice of a **Learning Organisation** with **Systems Leadership** as its cornerstone would enable PA to be more adaptive, and innovative in navigating the fast-changing operating environment. It would help us **look beyond the scope** of the individual division's work and **sense make how various parts of the PA** are **intrinsically inter-connected**, as we work together to create meaningful outcomes and impact within our organisational ecosystem. This capability would in turn facilitate more **systemic and sustainable solutioning** across divisions or C2030 workstreams; breaking down silos and fostering greater collaboration.













This playbook represents our commitment to building PA's organisational learning capabilities as we continuously expand our capacity to create the results we truly envision.

It contains practical tools and frameworks that will help you and your teams adopt core capabilities of a Learning Organisation, which aligns with three types of mastery in Systems Leadership: **Creation, Collaboration, and Complexity Mastery**. With this shared understanding, we can then build a critical mass of systems leaders and a common language across PA about Systems Leadership and the learning organisation.

I strongly urge you to approach this playbook with curiosity and openness. Take time to reflect on the concepts, experiment with the tools, and most importantly, apply these insights in your daily leadership practice. Remember, Systems Leadership is not about having all the answers but about **asking better questions** and **fostering collective learning and actions**.

In your leadership learning journey, do make conscious effort to pause and reflect regularly to **strengthen the rigour in our thinking and actions**. Consider how you could **'spiral up' the PA's reinforcing 'engine of growth'** as you lead your team i.e. by enhancing the quality of our relationships, the quality of our thinking will improve, leading to better quality of actions and higher quality of results, which in turn will further strengthen the quality of relationships.

Together, let us embrace this journey towards building a **stronger organisational learning culture** in PA. Your growth as systems leaders will be the key in shaping PA's future; fostering deeper connections and creating lasting change as we pursue our work in building social capital towards realising our vision of a caring and united community.

Jimmy Toh
Chief Executive Director
People's Association

Navigating this Playbook



PURPOSE

This playbook is designed to reinforce learning and support our PA leaders in their journey as they practise and apply Systems Leadership principles, tools and frameworks in their daily work and lives.

It serves as a practical guide to help our PA leaders:

01 Navigate complex organisational challenges systemically using high leverage interventions

02 Foster collaborative problem-solving and co-creation across work units

03 Drive sustainable change within teams and whole of PA

04 Guide PA's journey of building an organisational learning culture

PRACTICE

The playbook is structured into three main parts, moving from understanding the 'why', to learning the 'what' and navigating the 'how':

- **Overview | Concept of the Learning Organisation and Organisational Learning**
  Understand the overarching concept of the learning organisation and organisational learning
- **Part 1 (Why?) | PA's Journey Towards Systems Leadership**
  Uncover what Systems Leadership entails and its value to PA leaders
- **Part 2 (What?) | Types of Mastery in Systems Leadership**
  Based on the three core capabilities of a Learning Organisation, unpack the three types of mastery in Systems Leadership (Creation, Collaboration and Complexity Mastery) anchored on organisational learning tools and frameworks
- **Part 3 (How?) | Systems Leadership in Action**
  Use Systems Leadership tools in your role as a PA leader

Throughout this playbook, you will find several recurring elements designed to enhance your learning journey:

Notable Quotes	*Look out for inspiring quotes from thought leaders that provide deeper insights and reinforce key concepts*
Food for Thought	*At the end of each section, you will find reflective questions to help you connect the concepts to your own contexts and experiences*
Guiding Questions	*These reflective questions will support you in applying the tools and frameworks in your real work settings*

Draw upon the tools and frameworks in your team discussions and planning to help your team see connections, patterns, underlying structure and operating mental models in complex work situations.

Transfer and amplify your learning by sharing widely with other PA colleagues to expand collective wisdom, create a common language and strengthen our organisational learning culture as a Whole-of-PA.

Remember:

This playbook serves to support your **Systems Leadership journey**, offering **principles and practices** that you can adapt based on different contexts.

Rather than being prescriptive, it serves as a useful guide as you **explore, experiment, and discover** what works best in your leadership practice and learning process which is unique for every individual.

Happy learning!



Overview

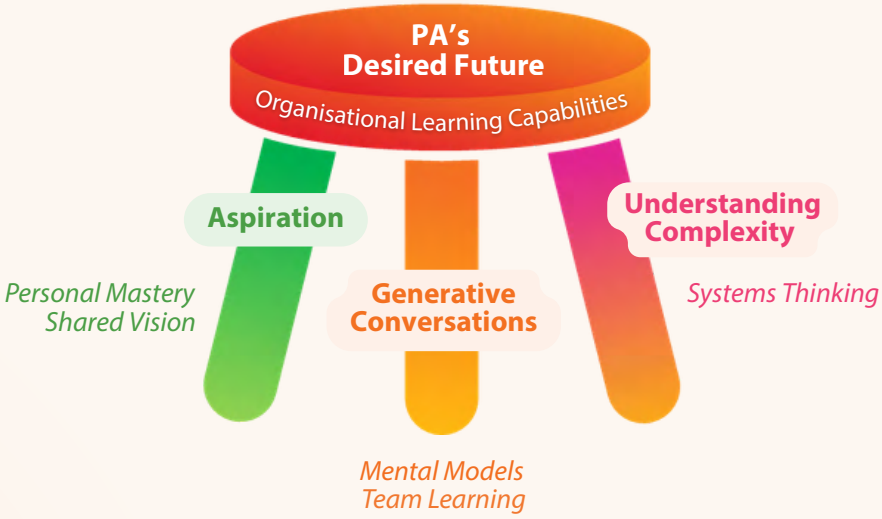
Concept of the Learning Organisation & Organisational Learning

Defining a Learning Organisation

A Learning Organisation is one where people **continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire**, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and **where people are continually learning how to learn together** (Senge, 1990).

THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

In a Learning Organisation, there are **three core capabilities**, namely **Aspiration**, **Generative Conversations** and **Understanding Complexity**, that support the development of our capacity to create the future that we desire. This can be illustrated with the three-legged stool.



01 Aspiration

Focuses on the **creative**, as opposed to the reactive orientation i.e. developing a clear **sense of purpose and vision** both at the individual and broader organisational levels (disciplines of **Personal Mastery** and **Shared Vision**).

02 Generative Conversations

Expanding our capacity to be more **reflective in our thinking** and to become more generative when we think and talk with others (disciplines of **Mental Models** and **Team Learning**) so that the quality of our collective thinking and learning as a team is enhanced.

03 Understanding Complexity

Internalising perspectives and skills, which allows us to better understand and manage systemic interconnections that produce complex organisational dynamics (discipline of **Systems Thinking**).

The three-legged stool conveys two important points:

- First, the stool must have all three legs to be **stable enough to support our capacity to create the future we desire**.
- Second, we need to **develop these capabilities more or less in tandem**.

Else, the stool will be shaky and cannot support anything we do for very long. Even if we experience momentary success, it will be short-lived if we do not balance the development of the three core capabilities.

Scan this QR code to access
Daniel Kim's Introduction to Systems Thinking.

The article explores fundamental concepts and practical applications that can enhance your understanding of Systems Thinking.



FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANISATION

In his 1990 book, "The Fifth Discipline", Peter Senge focused on the five disciplines that represent approaches, theories and methods for developing the three core learning capabilities of fostering aspiration, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity.

The five disciplines of a "Learning Organisation"* are summarised as follows:

Personal Mastery

- The ability to articulate, clarify and build the capacity to create the result one desires.
- Adopts a creative orientation to life, focusing on deepening personal vision, while having objective sight of one's current reality.

Shared Vision

- The ability of the team to articulate and create the results they desire.
- A clear, compelling picture of what they aim to achieve.
- Involves the collaborative process of unearthing the shared future and fostering commitment for a sense of purpose.

Mental Models

- The capacity to reflect and clarify assumptions and beliefs.
- Mental models are deeply ingrained worldview and attitudes that influence how we understand the world.
- Surfacing our mental models enable better decision-making.

Team Learning

- The ability of the team to learn how to learn and work in synergy so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Team learning transforms conversational and collective thinking skills so that groups can develop intelligence greater than the sum of individual members' talents.

Systems Thinking

- The ability of the team to see beyond simplistic cause and effect relationships to understand inter-relationships between different variables in the system.
- This helps organisations avoid 'quick fixes' that may cause more problems in the long run.

*Strategies for Influence: Peter Senge - Learning Organisations - Strategies for Influence, assessed on 29 June 2025; Taylor Mogan, 2024

Defining Organisational Learning

IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Organisational learning is the **intentional** use of **learning processes** at the individual, group and system level to **continuously transform the organisation** in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to its stakeholders (Dixon, 1994).

According to practitioners, organisational learning is crucial more so in today's context due to increasing complexity, rapid technological change, global competition, demands of the knowledge economy and need for continuous adaptation.

The following are some compelling reasons cited by organisational learning practitioners as to why organisational learning is so important:

> *Through learning, we **re-create ourselves**. Through learning we become able to do **something we never were able to do**. Through learning, we **reperceive the world** and our relationship to it. Through learning, we extend our capacity to create, to be **part of the generative process of life**."*

Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline (1990)

Peter Senge
Author of the book - The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation

- Creates sustainable **competitive advantage**
- Enables organisations to adapt to **change**
- Develops collective capacity for **innovation**
- Builds shared **vision and purpose**
- Enhances **Systems Thinking** capabilities

Nancy Dixon
Author of the book - Common Knowledge: How Companies Thrive by Sharing What They Know

- Facilitates collective meaning-making
- Enhances **knowledge transfer**
- Builds organisational **memory**
- Improves **stakeholder satisfaction**
- Enables continuous **transformation**



Chris Argyris
Author of the book - On Organisational Learning

- Enables **detection** and correction of **errors**
- Develops **double loop learning** capabilities
- Reduces defensive routines
- Improves **decision-making** processes
- Creates **actionable knowledge**

Seven Organisational Learning Disabilities

In Peter Senge's book, "The Fifth Discipline", he introduces **seven learning disabilities** that largely go undetected in organisations.

According to Senge, only by identifying these detrimental habits or mindsets, which create learning disabilities, can an organisation take the necessary steps to cure them and become a learning organisation.

" I Am My Position"



People often define themselves by their daily tasks rather than their role in the larger organisation. This narrow focus creates tunnel vision, where individuals overlook how their work affects the broader system. When everyone focuses solely on their own position, it becomes difficult to identify root causes of problems or take collective responsibility.

Try this instead

Encourage cross-functional teams and build a shared vision so staff connect their contributions to the bigger picture and break down silos.

"The Enemy is Out There"

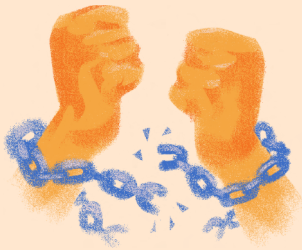


This syndrome arises from a narrow "I am my position" mentality, where problems are seen as externally caused. When things go wrong, blame is placed on others, and those around us are viewed as "enemies." This fosters defensiveness and prevents people from recognising their own role in the system.

Try this instead

Build reflective practices that strengthen an internal locus of control. By examining how our own actions contribute to outcomes, we can move from blame to shared responsibility.

"The Illusion of Taking Charge"



What passes for proactiveness is often reactiveness in disguise — fighting external "enemies" without addressing underlying causes. True proactiveness requires recognising how our own actions create or worsen problems and resisting the urge for quick fixes.

Try this instead

Develop Systems Thinking by peeling back layers to uncover hidden root causes. This allows organisations to craft effective, lasting solutions rather than reacting to symptoms.

"The Fixation on Events"



We are conditioned to see life as a series of short-term events. This event-driven mindset leads to reactive behaviour and prevents generative learning. At best, we predict and respond to events, but we fail to build capacity for long-term creation and innovation.

Try this instead

Adopt a longer time horizon and shift away from linear cause-and-effect thinking. By focusing on patterns and structures over time, organisations can open up new possibilities and foster true generative learning.

"The Parable of the Boiled Frog"



Like the frog that adapts to slowly rising heat until it boils, people often fail to recognise gradual shifts that pose greater risks than sudden threats. Subtle changes accumulate unnoticed, leaving organisations vulnerable before they realise it.

Try this instead

Slow down, pay attention, and create space for honest reflection. Regular check-ins and candid conversations help detect early warning signs, confront uncomfortable truths, and take timely action.

"The Myth of the Management Team"

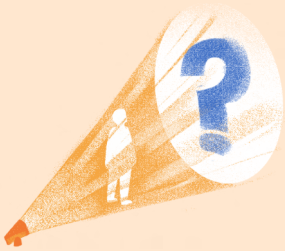


Many teams appear cohesive but in reality avoid conflict, suppress disagreement, and resist difficult conversations. This creates "skilled incompetence," where teams look like they are collaborating but are actually preventing real learning.

Try this instead

Promote open dialogue and establish group norms that encourage inquiry, respectful dissent, and constructive debate. Healthy conflict fosters shared understanding and genuine team learning.

"The Delusion of Learning from Experience"



While we learn best from trial and error, we rarely experience the long-term consequences of many of our most important decisions. System-wide effects may take months or years to surface, making it difficult to connect actions with outcomes.

Try this instead

Be deliberate in creating feedback loops and conducting rigorous After-Action-Reviews (AARs). These practices help track decisions over time, reveal unintended consequences, and build organisational memory for better choices in the future.

> *"It is no accident that most organisations learn poorly. The way they are designed and managed, the way people's jobs are defined, and, most importantly, the way we have all been **taught to think and interact** (not only in organisations but more broadly) create fundamental learning disabilities. These disabilities operate despite the best efforts of bright, committed people…for they **pervade all organisations** to some degree."*
>
> **Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline (1990)**

Organisational Learning and Change

If there is one single thing a Learning Organisation does well, it is **helping people embrace change**.

People in Learning Organisations react more quickly when their environment changes because they know how to **anticipate changes that are going to occur** (which is different than trying to predict the future), and how to **create the kinds of changes they desire to have**.

The relationship between organisational learning and organisational change represents a **vital symbiotic connection** that drives organisational success in a dynamic environment.



While **learning** creates the foundation for sustainable transformation, **change initiatives** generate new opportunities for learning and knowledge creation. This interconnected relationship shapes organisational culture, builds change readiness, and enhances adaptive capabilities.

PARABLES OF LEARNING AND CHANGE

Who Moved My Cheese?
by Spencer Johnson

The story offers a compelling metaphor on organisational change and learning. Through four characters, two mice, Sniff and Scurry, and two little people, Hem and Haw, the tale illustrates different responses to change and the importance of adaptability in navigating uncertainty.

Scan to watch animated video

Outlearning the Wolves
by David Hutchens

Outlearning the Wolves presents a powerful metaphor for how Learning Organisations can thrive by challenging limiting assumptions and embracing continuous learning.

Scan to watch animated video

Here are key lessons drawn from the stories on the importance of organisational change and learning in building a Learning Organisation:

Anticipating Change

- This represents the importance of environmental scanning and early warning systems in organisations
- Shows how successful organisations stay alert to shifts in the operating environment

Learning and Adaptation

- Importance of unlearning old behaviours
- Learning/collective wisdom enables successful navigation of change

Systems Leadership Insights

- Importance of questioning assumptions
- Readiness to move into unknown/uncertain territory
- Seeing interconnections and seeking high leverage solutions

The stories illustrate the need for leaders and organisations to embrace change and foster continuous learning to stay resilient in the fast-evolving operating landscape.



“

***Change** and **learning** may not be synonymous, but they are **inextricably linked.**”*

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook.

Value of the Learning Organisation to PA

At its heart, a **Learning Organisation** is about creating an environment where everyone **continuously grows, adapts, and innovates**.

It is about building our **collective capacity to shape the future we envision for PA**, rather than simply responding to change.

As we progress towards becoming a Learning Organisation, as a Whole-of-PA, we must commit to:



- **Fostering innovation and adaptability** in our approaches
- Understanding **how our various initiatives/programmes influence and impact each other**
- Creating solutions that **leverage our collective strengths**
- Building **stronger connections across teams and divisions**

To achieve this vision, we must embrace a **holistic perspective**. As a leadership team, we need to understand how different aspects of our work interconnect, seeing how actions in one area influence others and how various community needs interrelate.

For PA, having a **systems view** of the diverse work that we do would enable us to identify **high leverage interventions** that can bring about **sustainable change** in the community.

By practising the disciplines of the Learning Organisation, we are not just adapting to change, we are **positioning PA at the forefront to proactively shape the future of community engagement in Singapore**.

PA's Theory of Success

As PA embarks on its transformation journey, our theory of success will propel us forward as an organisation.

Using Daniel Kim's Core Theory of Success (The Systems Thinker, 1999) as our guiding framework, we have mapped PA's picture of success as follows:

Improvement in the quality of results in PA may be observed through the following outcomes as examples:

- Realisation of C2030 goals
- Improved organisational alignment
- Stronger cross-functional collaboration
- Increased organisational adaptability and innovation



Improvement in the quality of actions in PA may be observed through the following behaviours as examples:

- Ability to identify high leverage interventions in PA's work
- Ability to identify synergistic approaches
- Ability to align actions to PA's new mission and vision
- Ability to apply and weave in Learning Organisation tools and double-loop learning in day-to-day work



Improvement in the <u>quality of relationships</u> in PA may be observed through the following behaviours as examples:

- Higher level of trust and openness within and across teams
- Demonstration of care towards each other
- Use of common language (Learning Organisation and Systems Leadership) in day to day conversations
- Desire to collaborate

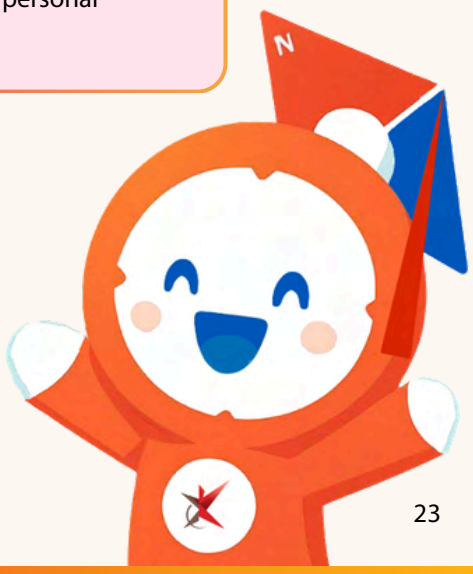
Quality of *Thinking*

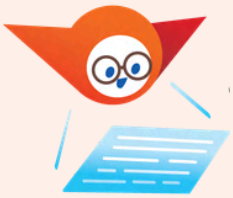
Improvement in the <u>quality of thinking</u> in PA may be observed through the following behaviours as examples:

- Ability to question assumptions
- Ability to uncover mental models through generative conversations
- Ability to engage in personal reflective practices

These four qualities form a reinforcing engine of growth, where improvements in one area naturally strengthen the others, creating an upward spiral of continuous improvement.

Learn more about the **Core Theory of Success** on page 91.





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

01

PA's Journey towards Systems Leadership

1.1 Defining Systems Leadership

UNPACKING SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP



Systems Leadership is a **leadership approach** anchored on the **discipline of Systems Thinking** defined as a set of **leadership skills and capacities** that individuals or organisations can use to catalyse, enable and support **systems-level organisational change** (Study by Harvard Kennedy School on Systems Leadership for Sustainable Development, 2019).

It represents a fundamental shift in how we lead and create change, focusing on enabling collective wisdom and fostering systemic thinking.

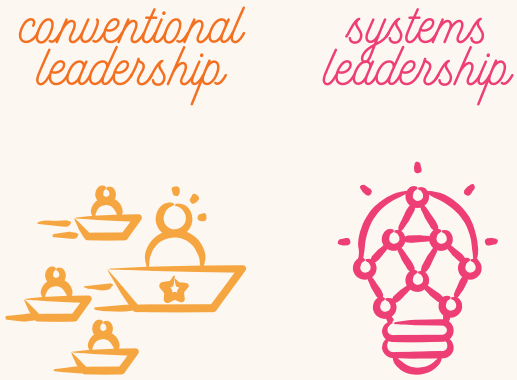


Today's landscape has evolved **beyond VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous)** into what is increasingly described as a **BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible)** and **PLUTO (Polarised, Liquid, Unilateral**, **Tense and Omni-relational)** world. While traditional leadership approaches had served organisations well in stable, predictable environments, our new reality demands leaders who can not only navigate complexity but also build organisational resilience, embrace emergent patterns, and find clarity amidst confusion (Ghate et al, 2013; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

At its core, Systems Leadership emphasises **understanding and managing complex organisational systems**, rather than focusing solely on our individual parts. It enables us to recognise and leverage interconnections within the organisation, think more holistically and tap on collective leadership wisdom when tackling complex and systemic issues (Senge, Hamilton & Kania, 2015).

Effective systems leaders demonstrate distinct qualities that set them apart from traditional leaders. These characteristics manifest through their approach to both challenges and opportunities, shaping how they interact with stakeholders and navigate complexity.

Systems leaders create collective leadership, united by a common challenge and shared vision. Deep systemic awareness forms the foundation of Systems Leadership. Systems leaders demonstrate 3 core abilities:



- Ability to see and understand the **larger system**/value chain and how **different parts of the system interact** and influence each other
- Ability to leverage **reflection** and **generative conversations**
- Ability to shift the collective focus **from short-term** problem-solving to **co-creating value for the future**

Differences between Conventional and Systems Leadership

	Conventional Leadership	Systems Leadership
Principal Agent	Individual	Collective
Scope	Individual > Organisation	Nested systems
Purpose	Organisational purpose	Sustainable transformation (impact)
Function	Empowering individuals and increasing team performance	Facilitating systems transformation
Intervention	Problem-solving	Co-creating regenerative futures
Context	Complicated	Complex

1.2 Benefits of Systems Leadership to PA

In today's dynamic environment, the PA faces unprecedented challenges that require a more holistic perspective. Our community landscape is transforming rapidly, driven by shifting resident engagement patterns, evolving demographics, accelerating digitalisation, and the pressing need to reimagine our community spaces.

This is why the PA embarked on the C2030 transformation journey. Yet, for us to realise our C2030 aspirations, it would require more than just new strategies; it demands a new way of thinking and working together with the community.

While our traditional approaches had served us well in the past, the complexity of current challenges requires us to see beyond individual solutions to understand the interconnected nature of our PA's work. Systems Leadership allows us to embrace a more collaborative, holistic approach to addressing community challenges and creating sustainable community impact.





1.3 Navigating Complexity through Systems Thinking

WHAT IS A SYSTEM?

A system is a **group of interacting, interrelated or interdependent components** that form a **complex and unified whole** (Virginia Anderson and Lauren Johnson, Systems Thinking basics).

Systems have several **essential characteristics** (Daniel Kim, 1999, Introduction to Systems Thinking):

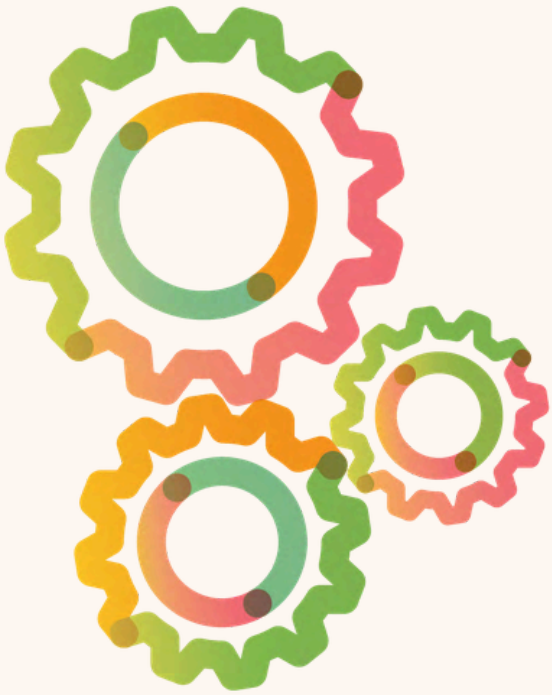
01 Systems have purpose

02 All parts must be present (functioning and contributing) for a system to carry out its purpose effectively

03 The order in which the parts are arranged (differentiated roles) affects the performance of the system

04 Systems attempt to maintain stability (in pursuit of its purpose) through feedback

05 Systems are capable of creating – being more than the sum of their parts



THE PARABLE OF THE ELEPHANT AND THE BLIND MEN

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today."

They had no idea what an elephant is.

They decided, "Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway."

All of them went where the elephant was. Every one of them touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the first man who touched his leg.

"Oh, no! It is like a rope," said the second man who touched the tail.

"Oh, no! It is like a thick branch of a tree," said the third man who touched the trunk of the elephant.

"It is like a big hand fan" said the fourth man who touched the ear of the elephant.

"It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man who touched the belly of the elephant.

"It is like a solid pipe," said the sixth man who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue about the elephant and every one of them insisted that he was right. It looked like they were getting agitated. A wise man was passing by and he saw this.

He stopped and asked them, "What is the matter?"

They said, "We cannot agree to what the elephant is like."

Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like.

The wise man calmly explained to them, "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features as what you all said."

"Oh!" everyone said. There was no more fight. They felt happy that they were all right.

Key Takeaways

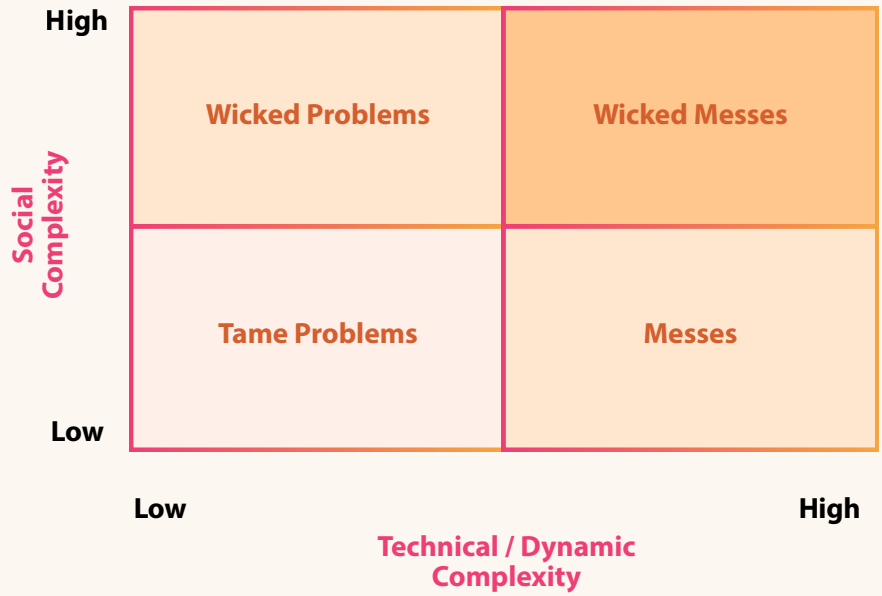
- Recognising our limited perspective opens us to discovering **broader patterns** that connect separate experiences.
- **Complex challenges** cannot be grasped from any single position. Understanding emerges from examining **interconnections**.



1.3.1 Systems Complexity

Complexity equals the **number of elements** and the **relationships** between them. In organisations, complexity may manifest in **three distinct** but interrelated forms: **dynamic, technical** and **social complexity**.

Understanding these variations helps leaders develop more effective approaches to four classes of problems as depicted in the diagram below.



Social Complexity

The nature of interactions and relationships among diverse stakeholders with different agenda and worldviews.

Dynamic Complexity

Emerges when cause and effect are separated by time and space. In PA's community work, this often appears in how today's engagement initiatives might only show their full impact years later. The non-linear nature of these relationships makes it challenging to predict outcomes accurately or establish direct causal links between actions and results.

Technical Complexity

Arises from the integration of multiple systems and technologies. For example, as PA embraces digital transformation and modern community engagement platforms, we encounter increasing technical interdependencies. These require specialised knowledge and careful consideration of how different systems interact and affect each other.

Source: Adapted from "Ackoff's Best: His Classic Writings on Management" (Ackoff, 1999)

Understanding the nature of each quadrant of complexity empowers us to better shape our response to our organisational problems:

Wicked Problems (Low Technical / High Social Complexity)

- Multiple stakeholders with different perspectives, values and beliefs
- Requires relationship building and consensus among different groups of decision makers

Example: Inspiring residents to move from being passive consumers to active contributors in their communities

Wicked Messes (High Technical / High Social Complexity)

- Both technically challenging and socially complex
- No clear solution path

Example: Building social cohesion in a rapidly changing community landscape; Addressing inter-generational gaps in the community

Tame Problems (Low Technical / Low Social Complexity)

- Clear cause-and-effect relationships
- Standard operating procedures work well
- Can typically be solved in isolation

Example: Ensuring timely submission of staff performance reviews or annual declarations

Messes (High Technical / Low Social Complexity)

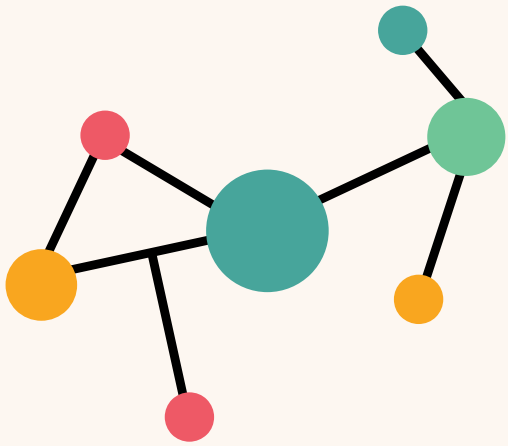
- Requires expertise and analysis
- Can be solved through careful planning and recognising significant couplings between isolated problem symptoms

Example: Strengthening compliance with procurement processes by improving systems and workflows

> *Scope of challenges we face today is global and its magnitude goes **beyond individual agency** – these challenges are often **wicked problems**, requiring us to unleash, develop and facilitate a process of **collective intelligence** in order to address them.*
>
> **Josep M. Coll, 2022**

1.3.2 Implications for PA

To move beyond conventional problem-solving, we must change how we view challenges. Rather than addressing each issue in isolation (for instance, treating resident engagement, volunteer motivation, or programme design as separate problems), we need to look at how these elements are connected and influence one another.



This perspective is particularly valuable when addressing complex community challenges that cannot be solved through simple, linear solutions.

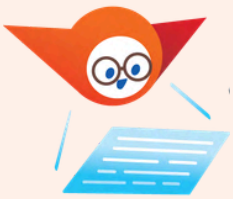
This integrated approach enables us to better understand the intricate web of relationships between our community initiatives, stakeholder interactions, and organisational processes.

When we launch a new programme or initiative, we should consider not just its immediate impact, but also how it might affect the broader community ecosystem, existing programmes, and long-term relationships. This deeper understanding helps us design solutions that are more holistic and enduring in terms of community impact.

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS



02

Types of Mastery in Systems Leadership

Systems Leadership Framework

Mastery is more than just getting results. It is about understanding the **principles** behind how those results are created, so that we can **repeat them and improve over time**.

In Systems Leadership, **three types of mastery** form the foundation for effective change: ***Creation Mastery, Collaboration Mastery and Complexity Mastery***. When they work together, leaders can navigate uncertainty with confidence, unlock collective potential, and bring about sustainable change.



Creation Mastery

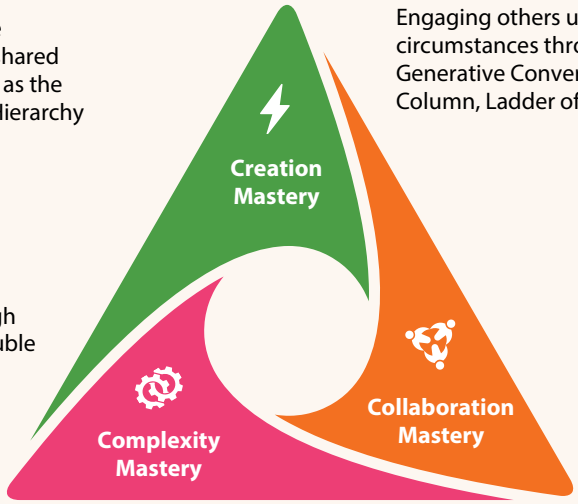
Embracing the generative orientation to create the shared future through tools such as the Creative Tension Model, Hierarchy of Choices etc.

Collaboration Mastery

Engaging others under complex circumstances through the use of Generative Conversations, Left-Hand Column, Ladder of Inference etc.

Complexity Mastery

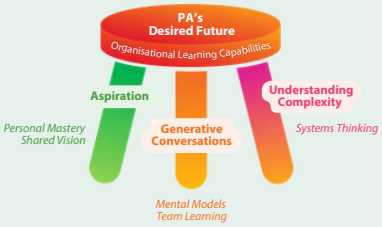
Enhancing the mindset to handle complexity through tools such as Single & Double Loop Learning, Levels of Perspectives, Systems Mapping etc.



Source: Adapted from SIM Academy (2023)

Recap

These three **types of mastery** in Systems Leadership (Creation, Collaboration and Complexity Mastery) are well aligned with the **core capabilities** of a Learning Organisation in the three-legged stool framework, discussed on page 13 (Aspiration, Generative Conversations & Understanding Complexity).



Source: Peter Senge et al., The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (1990)

WHEN TO USE EACH MASTERY?

As a leader, you will move through the three types of mastery.

Creation Mastery helps you shape ideas and visions, so you know where you are headed. **Collaboration Mastery** helps you bring people onboard, so the vision is shared and supported. **Complexity Mastery** helps you see the bigger picture, so decisions are holistic and stay grounded in reality.

Creation Mastery

Envisioning and aligning toward a shared future

QUESTION

"Can we clarify our vision and align on what we want to create together?"

USE THESE FRAMEWORKS WHEN

Setting direction, facing uncertainty about purpose, or needing to inspire commitment to a common goal

Collaboration Mastery

Building trust and co-creating with others

QUESTION

"Can we strengthen relationships and improve the quality of our conversations to move forward together?"

USE THESE FRAMEWORKS WHEN

Engaging diverse stakeholders, facing conflicts or misunderstandings, or needing to unlock collective wisdom

Complexity Mastery

Making sense of and working with complex systems

QUESTION

"Do we need to step back, see the bigger picture, understand patterns in the system?"

USE THESE FRAMEWORKS WHEN

Tackling systemic challenges, seeing recurring problems, or needing to connect immediate issues with long-term dynamics

2.1 Creation Mastery

UNDERSTANDING CREATION MASTERY

Creation

Creation mastery is the ability to envision and manifest desired futures instead of simply solving current problems. It involves understanding and managing the tension between our vision and current reality, while making choices that align with our fundamental purpose.



This goes beyond **simple goal setting** to encompassing deep understanding of change dynamics and implementation requirements. Leaders with strong creation mastery can articulate **compelling visions** while maintaining awareness of current reality, effectively managing the creative tension between the two and maintaining the resilience to navigate challenges along the way.

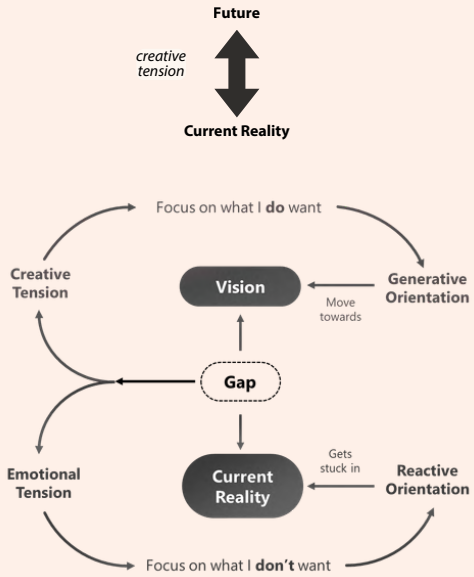
In developing Creation Mastery, we will explore **two key models**. The **Creative Tension Model** shows how the gap between vision and reality can generate the energy for change, while the **Hierarchy of Choices** provides a disciplined way to translate that vision into aligned decisions and actions. Together, these models enable leaders to transform vision into meaningful outcomes.



AT A GLANCE: CREATION MASTERY FRAMEWORKS

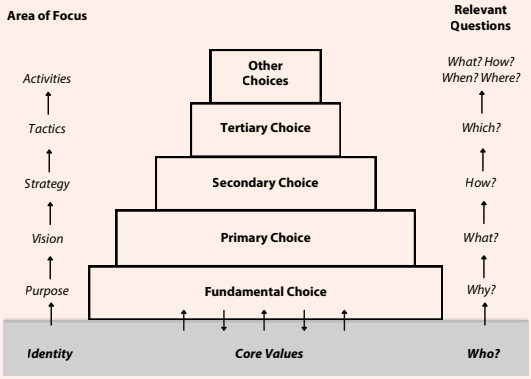
Creation mastery is anchored on **two key frameworks** (*Creative Tension Model* and *Hierarchy of Choices Framework*) that help us **gain clarity of our vision**, assess our current reality and unpack the choices we need to exercise to transform our desired future into a vision that has the power to tap into people's energy and commitment.

Creative Tension Model



Source: Adapted from Fritz (1989), The Path of Leader Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life.

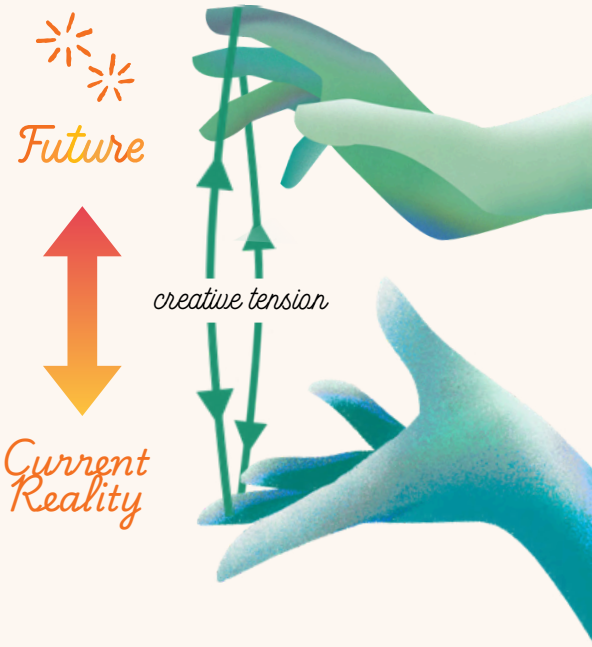
Hierarchy of Choices Framework



2.1.1 Creative Tension Model

The **Creative Tension Model (CTM)** is a fundamental framework that helps us understand the relationship between vision and current reality. The principle of CTM is the central principle of personal mastery.

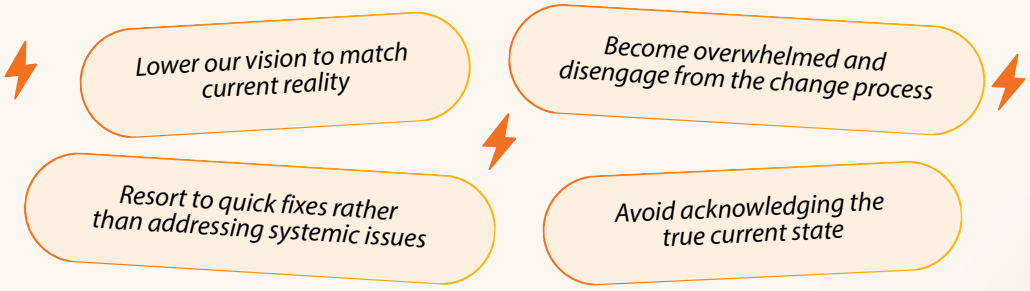
When you hold a **vision** that **differs from your current reality**, a gap exists. This gap between vision and current reality can be a source of creative energy. If there were no gap, there would be no need for any action to move toward the vision. We call this gap **creative tension**. In other words, creative tension is the **gap between what you want (vision)** and **what you have (current reality)**.



Think of it like a rubber band stretched between two points:

- Where you are now (Current Reality)
- Where you want to be (Vision)

Structural tension can give rise to emotions such as anxiety, frustration, resistance, hopelessness, or worry. We refer to these emotions as emotional tension, which tends to be unproductive and demotivating rather than helpful. **Emotional tension** often creates barriers to progress and can cause us to become stuck or overwhelmed rather than moving forward effectively.



If we fail to distinguish **emotional tension** from **creative tension**, we predispose ourselves to lowering our vision. The key to **managing emotional tension** is to recognise it as **distinct from creative tension** and develop strategies to work with it constructively.

This might involve building psychological safety in teams, developing emotional resilience, breaking down large changes into manageable steps, acknowledging and processing difficult emotions rather than suppressing them.

LEVERAGING PERSONAL MASTERY AND SHARED VISION IN CREATIVE TENSION PROCESS

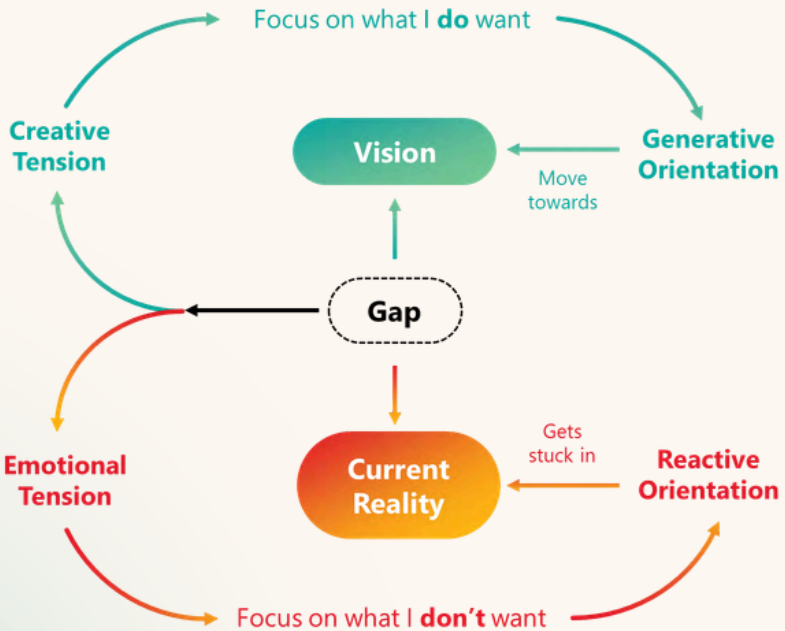
The relationship between **personal mastery** and **shared vision** within the creative tension model is **dynamic and interdependent**.

Personal mastery contribute to and shape the shared vision. **Personal mastery** provides the individual foundation for holding creative tension which influences the collective ability to sustain shared vision. **Shared vision** provides context and meaning for personal mastery efforts. Strong alignment between **personal mastery** and **shared vision** builds confidence for tackling shared challenges.

This relationship creates a powerful framework for organisational learning and transformation, where personal and collective asipirations mutually reinforce each other through the creative tension process.

> ***Shared vision*** *and* ***personal mastery*** *are* ***closely connected*** *pursuits. In considering their aspirations for the organisation, people naturally reflect on their own desires, current realities, and sense of purpose.*

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1990). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook.



Source: Adapted from Fritz, R. (1989). The Path of Leader Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life.



Guiding Questions
for Applying Creative Tension Model

Where are we now, and what evidence supports this assessment?

This question aims to establish a clear, honest view of current reality by:
- *Encouraging data-driven evaluation*
- *Identifying specific gaps in performance*
- *Surfacing both strengths and weaknesses*
- *Challenging assumptions and biases*

What is our compelling vision, and why does it matter?

Areas to consider:
- *The team's/organisation's core purpose*
- *Specific, measurable outcomes*
- *The impact on stakeholders*
- *The alignment with organisational values*

How can we harness the creative energy of the team?

Areas to consider:
- *Leadership approaches to change*
- *Support systems for teams*
- *Communication strategies*
- *Capacity/capability building needs*

What specific actions will move us from current reality towards our vision?

Areas to consider:
- *Priority areas for intervention*
- *Resource requirements*
- *Timeline and milestones*
- *Accountability mechanisms*



There is a fundamental difference between ***creating*** *and* ***problem solving.*** *In problem-solving we seek to make something we do not like go away. In creating, we seek to make* ***what we truly care about exist.***

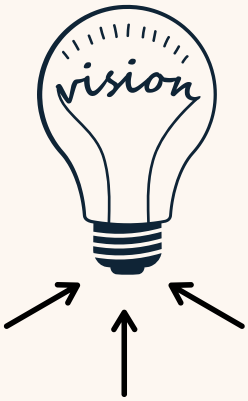
SIM Academy

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



2.1.2 The Hierarchy of Choices Framework

The **Hierarchy of Choices (HOC) framework** provides a structured approach that helps leaders **make decisions** in complex environment, aligning purpose with action.

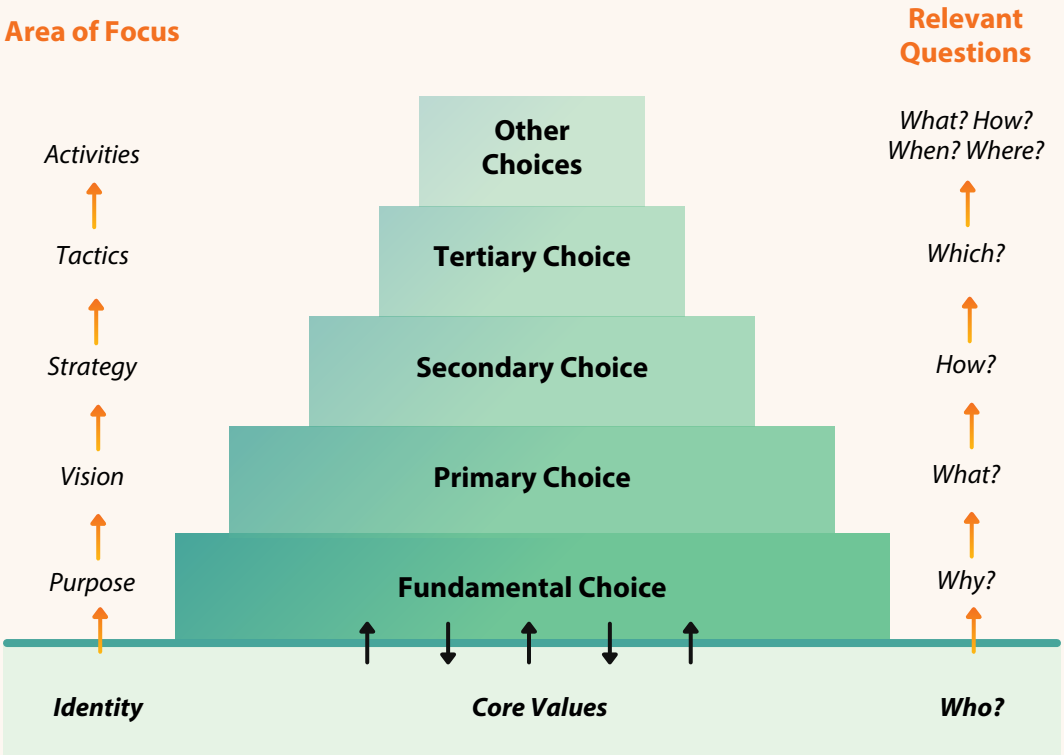


This approach to decision-making ensures **consistency across different levels of choice**. Each level builds upon the previous one, creating a coherent path from fundamental purpose to specific actions.

Vision is fundamentally **shaped by the choices** we make. When we fail to exercise our power of choice, we remain trapped in a cycle of **desire without action**, never moving towards our aspirations.

Robert Fritz explores this concept in **The Path of Least Resistance**, where he outlines three distinct levels of choice: **Fundamental, Primary, and Secondary**.

He emphasises that making choices at higher levels becomes challenging if we have not first made the necessary choices at more foundational levels.



Source: Adapted from Kim, D. H. (2002). Foresight as the Central Ethics of Leadership.

Purpose forms the foundation of all other choices.

For example, in the PA's context, our fundamental purpose centres on fostering social cohesion and strengthening community bonds. This core purpose guides all subsequent decisions and actions, providing a clear reference point for evaluating options and resolving conflicts.



Vision flows from purpose but focuses on specific desired outcomes.

For example, a vision might involve creating vibrant community spaces that foster meaningful interactions across different demographic groups. This vision must be specific enough to guide action while remaining flexible enough to accommodate changing circumstances.

When team members deeply understood and internalised the organisation's fundamental values and purpose, while also having a vivid mental picture of their desired outcomes, these foundational choices serve as a constant compass, guiding their decisions and actions every step of the way.

Scan to download the Hierarchy of Choices Template

Example of Nested Hierarchy of Choices (HOC) | PA HOC Framework

A nested hierarchy of choices is a model where a major decision is broken down into smaller, dependent decisions, creating a chain of choices from a high-level goal down to specific actions.

Strategy

1. Purposeful and effective engagement
2. A broader PA movement centered on a strong grassroots core
3. A center of excellence in community engagement and development enabled by a first-class support infrastructure

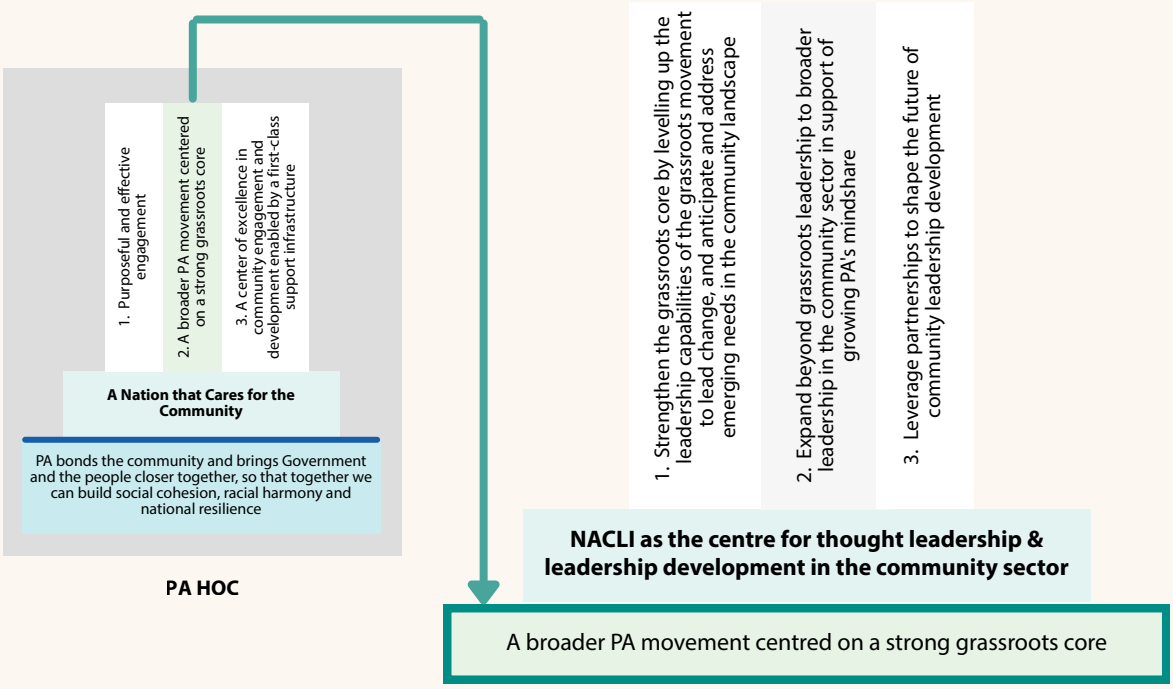
Vision

A Nation that Cares for the Community

Purpose

PA bonds the community and brings Government and the people closer together, so that together we can build social cohesion, racial harmony and national resilience

Example of Nested Hierarchy of Choices (HOC) | NACLI HOC Framework





Guiding Questions
for Developing Hierarchy of Choices

Purpose Level (Why): Why does our organisation exist? What values guide us? What lasting impact do we aim to create in society?

These questions help define our organisation's core purpose that transcends profit and market conditions.

Vision Level (What): What specific, ambitious future state and outcomes do we want to achieve in the next 3-5 years that aligns with our purpose? Describe how this mental picture of our desired future reality look and feel like?

This helps create a clear, compelling picture of where the organisation is heading and what success looks like.

Strategy Level (How): What are the critical few choices we must make about where our focus should be? What are our broad strategies in establishing our success metrics, allocating our resources etc. to achieve our vision?

This shapes your broad approach and key priorities for achieving competitive advantage.

Tactical Level (Which): What specific approaches and methods should we employ in each key area of focus to execute our strategy effectively? What are our implementation plans, resource deployment, timeline planning, assignment of responsibility etc.?

This determines the concrete plans and initiatives needed to implement the strategy.

Activity Level (What, when, where, which): What day-to-day operations and specific tasks must be performed, by whom, and in what sequence to support our tactical plans?

This establishes the detailed work plans and processes that drive day-to-day execution.

Each question ensures alignment between higher-level aspirations and ground-level implementation, creating a coherent chain of choices throughout the organisation.

Source: Kim, D. H. (1993). Foresight as the Central Ethics of Leadership.

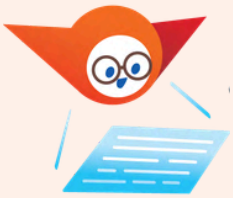


Food for Thought Questions
to Develop Creation Mastery

- **How effectively am I balancing between maintaining current structures and creating space for new possibilities to emerge?**
- **In what ways am I fostering an environment that encourages creative thinking and innovation across the system?**
- **How am I helping others to move from problem-focused thinking to possibility-oriented approaches?**
- **To what extent am I enabling others to participate in co-creating the team's/organisation's future?**
- **How am I nurturing and sustaining creative energy while managing resistance to change?**

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

2.2 Collaboration Mastery

Collaboration Mastery represents the ability to create conditions where diverse stakeholders with **different perspectives and skills** can work together and collaborate effectively toward common goals.

Collaboration

This capability focuses on the skills of building and sustaining **strong relationships**, facilitating effective communications through **generative conversations**, and fostering a shared vision among stakeholders, all of which become particularly crucial when addressing complex organisational challenges that **no single entity can solve alone**.

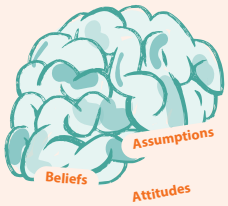


The following tools provide practical pathways to cultivate Collaboration Mastery. Each framework offers a lens to observe, reflect, and intervene in the patterns that shape how we think, speak, and work together. From uncovering mental models to transforming the **quality of conversations**, these approaches invite leaders to move beyond reactive habits and towards generative dialogues to create the conditions for collective wisdom to emerge.

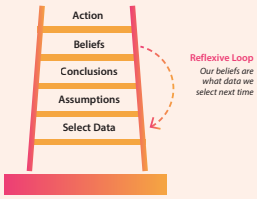


AT A GLANCE: COLLABORATION MASTERY FRAMEWORKS

Mental Models



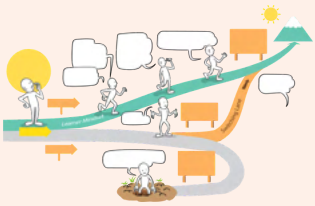
Ladder of Inference



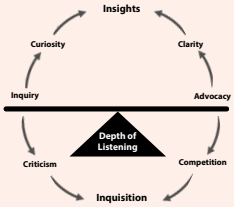
Left-Hand Column Tool



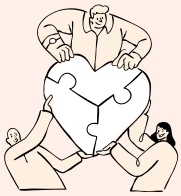
The Choice Map



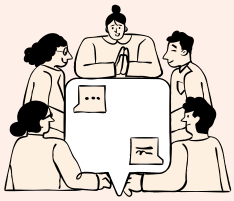
Quality of Conversations



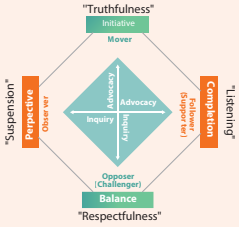
Generative Conversations through Team Learning



Check-In Check-Out



Four-Player Model



The Effectiveness Model

Quality x Acceptance = Effectiveness (Q x A = E)

World Cafe and Knowledge Sharing Process

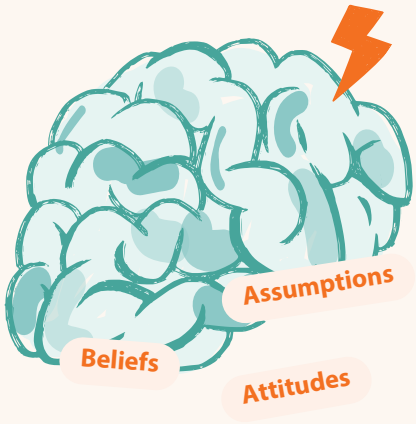


Core Theory of Success



2.2.1 Mental Models

Mental models are deeply ingrained **assumptions, beliefs and generalisations** or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and respond to situations in life.



Our mental models **shape everything we do** from problem definition to solution selection. The way we see the world affects our experiences of the world.

When the way we see the world changes, we can then **change our actions** and get very different results (SIM Academy, 2023).

Very often, we are **not consciously aware** of our mental models or the effects they have on our behaviour. As leaders, we must develop the ability to **recognise and work with different mental models** to foster effective collaboration, create shared understanding and leverage collective wisdom.

The optical illusions below are good illustrations of how everyone sees things differently because of the differences in our mental models.







Scan to watch the video on
Shadows of the Neanderthal: The Cavemen's Dilemma

The story explores the concept of mental models and their influence on perception and action. It tells the story of cave dwellers who, through ingrained beliefs and fear, refuse to leave their cave, convinced that the outside world is dangerous.



SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF MENTAL MODELS

01 Everyone has mental models.

02 Mental models determine how and what we see.

03 Mental models guide how we think and act.

04 Mental models lead us to treat our inferences as facts.

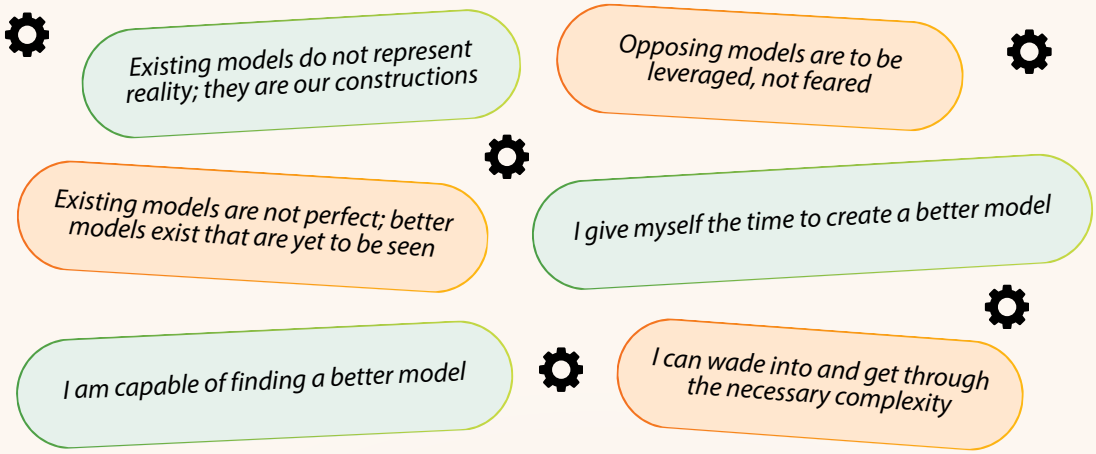
05 Mental models are always incomplete.

06 Mental models influence the results we get, thereby reinforcing themselves.

07 Mental models often outlived their usefulness.

SIX ELEMENTS TO REFRAME MENTAL MODELS

Beyond the 7 Principles listed in the Shadow of the Neanderthals, Roger Matin in his book "*The Opposable Mind*" provided **six elements** to help us **reframe our views** about mental models:

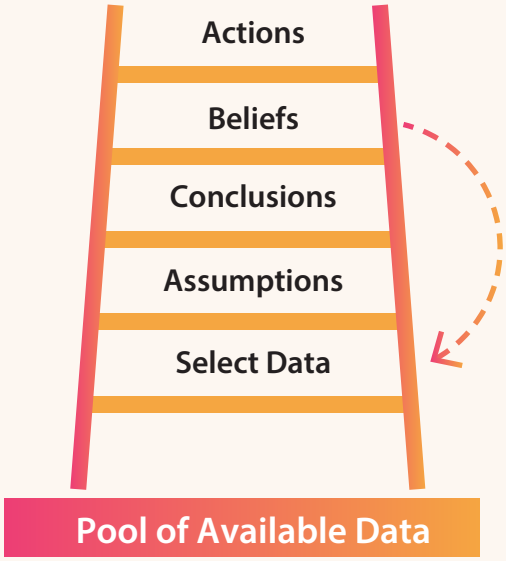


2.2.2 Ladder of Inference

We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt those beliefs because they are based on conclusions, which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experiences (Senge, 1990, The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook).

The Ladder of Inference

The Ladder of Inference (LOI) is a helpful tool for understanding how our mental models are formed; allowing us to examine our thinking and how we arrive at our beliefs and take actions based on these beliefs.



Reflexive Loop

Our beliefs affect what data we select next time

Originally developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, this framework shows how we rapidly progress from **observable facts** to **conclusions** and **actions**, often without conscious awareness.

We form mental models by climbing up the Ladder of Inference:

01 **We select "data" from the pool of observable data**



02 **We add meaning to the data we've selected**



03 **We make assumptions based on the meaning we added**



04 **We draw conclusions from the assumptions we made**



05 **We adopt beliefs**



The **reflexive loop** further reinforces our mental models. Based on the conclusions and beliefs, we take **action**. The results we get from our actions influence what data we select in the future, thereby **reinforcing our original mental model**.

This is an especially relevant tool in our work in the PA. Be it when we interact with residents, manage community feedback, work with partners and stakeholders, or design engagement programmes, we are constantly under the influence of our mental models and climbing the LOI.

Oftentimes, we think of our long-standing assumptions as facts and our ability to achieve the results we truly desire is eroded by our feelings that: our beliefs are the truth, the truth is obvious, the data we select are the real data and our beliefs are based on real data.

The guiding questions on the next page will help us:

- Recognise the difference between direct observation and interpretation
- Identify potential gaps in reasoning
- Challenge assumptions constructively
- Consider alternative perspectives
- Understand how beliefs influence actions

Scan to download the Ladder of Inference template



Guiding Questions
to Address Ladder of Inference (LOI) in Conversations

Observable Data

What are the specific facts or data points we can observe in this situation?

What exactly did we see or hear, without any interpretation?

What concrete evidence or examples did we draw the observable data from?

Select Data

What information did we pay attention to, and what might we have overlooked?

On what basis did we choose which aspects of the situation to focus on?

What other data points might be relevant that we haven't considered?

Add Meanings

What assumptions are we making about what the data meant?

How might someone from a different personal or professional background interpret these same facts?

What cultural or personal filters might be influencing our interpretation?

Make Assumptions

What beliefs or past experiences are informing our current assumptions?

How might our assumptions be limiting our understanding of the situation?

What alternative explanations could there be?

Draw Conclusions

How did we arrive at this particular conclusion?

What other conclusions might be possible given the same information?

What evidence would challenge or make us reconsider our current conclusions?

Take Actions

How are our conclusion(s) influencing our chosen action(s)?

What other actions might be available if we revisited our assumptions?

How might our actions reinforce or challenge our beliefs?

2.2.3 Left-Hand Column Tool

In our day-to-day work and personal lives, we constantly carry on two dialogues - one **public** and one **private**.

The **public dialogue** is the one we share with others – including all that we express verbally and non-verbally.

The **private dialogue**, however, is filtered – we say only what we assume others will hear, what will not upset anyone, what will get us what we want, and so on. If we keep our private conversations to ourselves, we hinder learning and decision-making. But if we say what we are thinking or feeling, we may make things worse by upsetting people, by putting ourselves in a vulnerable position, and so on.



The **Left-Hand Column (LHC)** is a tool originally developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon in their 1974 book Theory in Practice, and popularised by Peter Senge in his 1990 bestseller, The Fifth Discipline. This tool helps **surface the unspoken thoughts** and feelings that influence our conversations and relationships.

The LHC tool works by creating two columns: the **right column** captures the actual conversation (what was said), while the **left column** records our unspoken thoughts, feelings, and assumptions (what we had in our mind but not said).

Right Column (Actual Conversation)

The words you actually speak aloud and the observable dialogue that takes place.

Left Column (Unspoken Thoughts)

Internal dialogue, assumptions, judgements, and feelings that you keep to yourself during the conversation.



Source: Adapted from The Left-Hand Column (Private Conversation), Pegasus Communications.

What we actually say might be diplomatic and measured, while our unspoken thoughts (LHC) might reveal real concerns, assumptions, or defensive reactions that influence our judgement.

This tool is particularly powerful in helping us become aware of tacit assumptions which govern our day-to-day conversations.

Example | Feedback on Engagement Framework

Follow the conversation below between a supervisor and his staff on a project.

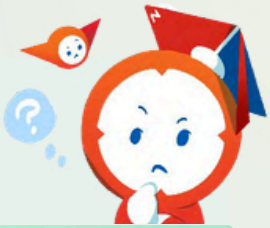
	Right Column (Actual Conversation)	Left Column (Unspoken Thoughts)
The new engagement framework looks promising, but implementation might take longer than expected.		
	What's your assessment of the timeline?	*He's being diplomatic. Something's holding him back. Need to create space for honest concerns without putting him on the spot.*
Perhaps 6-8 months, considering ground capacities due to the upcoming national events.		
	Walk me through your main considerations	*He's worried about having multiple events happening at the same time. Similar to the ABC constituency situation last year.* *Must understand if this is a capability issue or stakeholder management challenge.*



Supervisor



Staff



Guiding Questions
for Left-Hand Column

Here are some guiding questions to help members surface their "left-hand column" - those unspoken thoughts, assumptions, and feelings that influence but remain hidden during conversations/meetings.

These questions, drawn from Chris Argyris and Donald Schön's work on organisational learning, help reveal the gap between what we think and feel versus what we actually communicate, enabling more authentic and effective dialogue.

Opening/Check-in Questions
Before we dive into the agenda, what concerns or reservations do you have about today's discussion that you think we should acknowledge upfront?

During Discussion
I'm sensing some hesitation in the room. What are we not saying that might be important to put on the table?

When Sensing Underlying Tension
It feels like there might be some unspoken concerns here. What assumptions are we each making that we haven't tested with the group?

To Encourage Authentic Input
If you could speak completely freely without worrying about how it sounds, what would you want this group to know about this issue?

When Decisions Feel Rushed
Before we move forward, what doubts or questions do you have that you haven't voiced yet?

To Surface Different Perspectives
What story are you telling yourself about why this proposal might succeed or fail that you haven't shared?

For Quiet Members
Ashley, you've been thoughtful during this discussion. What's going through your mind that might be helpful for us to hear?

Before Major Decisions
Let's pause. What are each of us thinking privately about this decision that we should discuss openly before proceeding?

Creating Psychological Safety
As a conversation host, model vulnerability by occasionally sharing your left-hand column thoughts: "I'll be honest - I'm worried that we're avoiding the real issue here, which might be..."

Tip: The key is to create an environment where surfacing unspoken thoughts is valued rather than penalised.

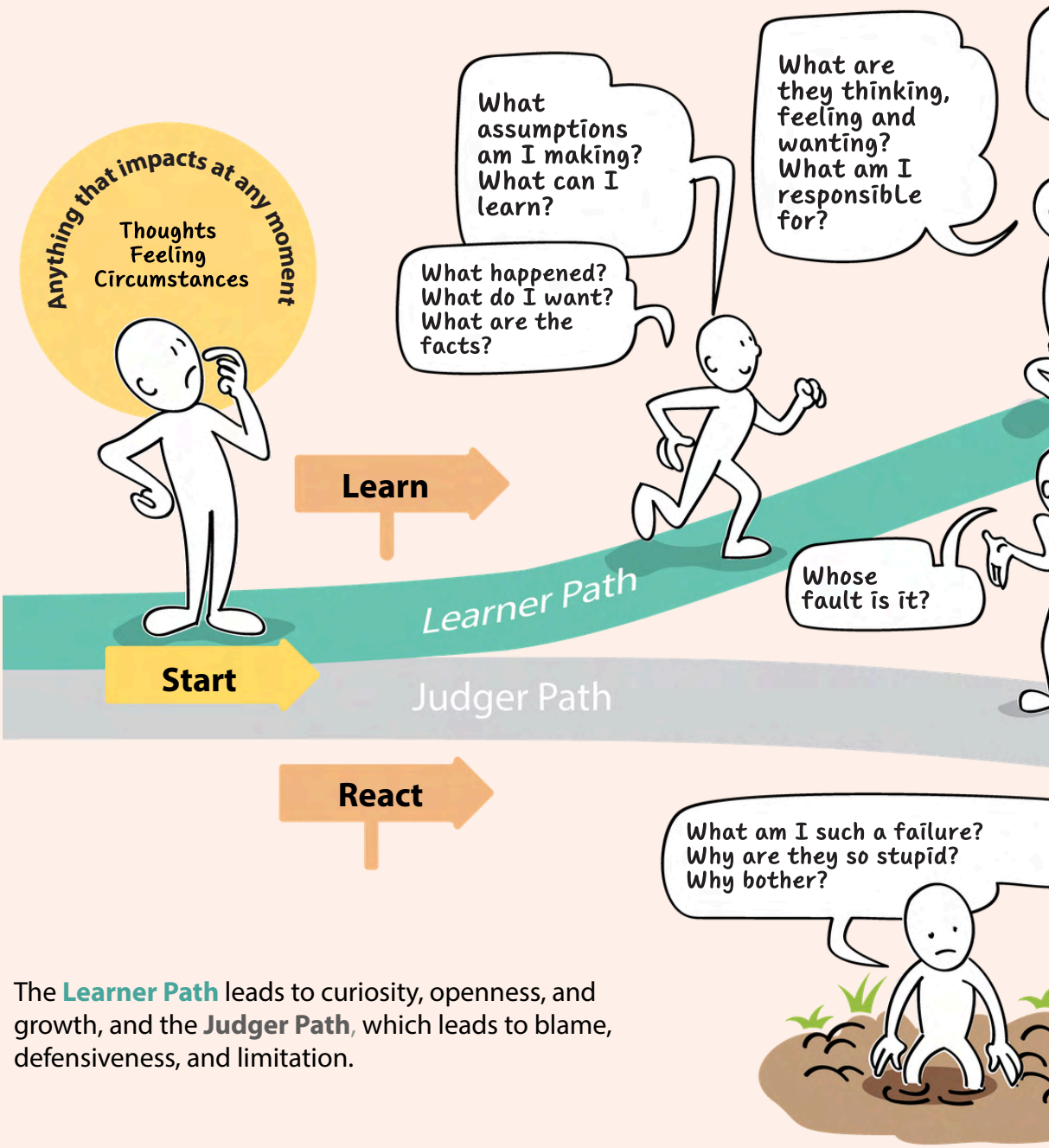


*To effectively communicate, we must realise that **we are all different** in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a **guide to our communication with others**.*

Tony Robbins

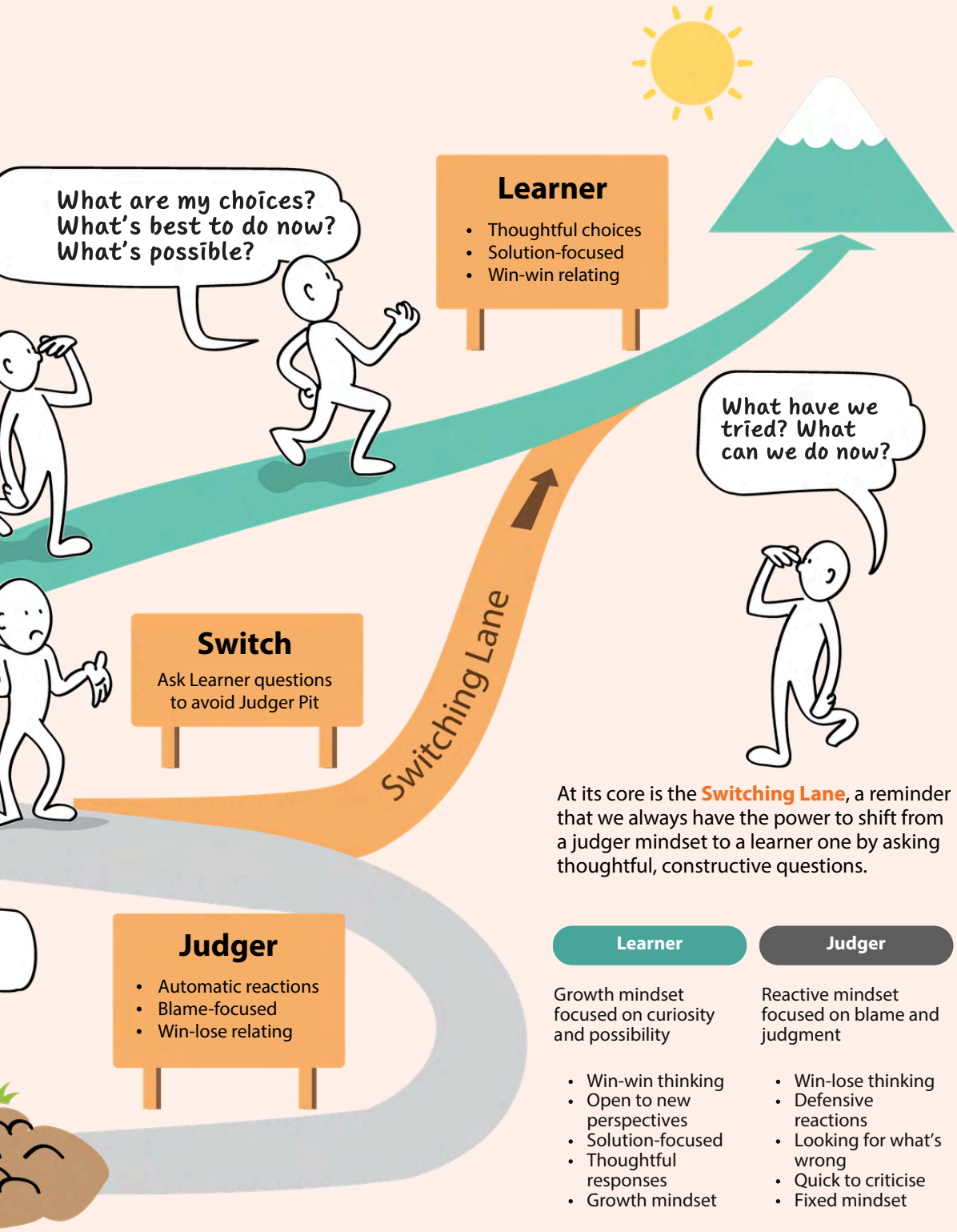
2.2.4 The Choice Map

The **Choice Map™** is a simple yet powerful visual guide that illustrates the **two mindsets** we can choose in any situation.



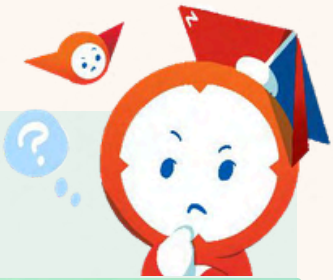
The **Learner Path** leads to curiosity, openness, and growth, and the **Judger Path**, which leads to blame, defensiveness, and limitation.

Copyright © 2004 Marilee G. Adams, PhD. Adapted from *The Art of Question.*



At its core is the **Switching Lane**, a reminder that we always have the power to shift from a judger mindset to a learner one by asking thoughtful, constructive questions.

Learner	Judger
Growth mindset focused on curiosity and possibility	Reactive mindset focused on blame and judgment
• Win-win thinking • Open to new perspectives • Solution-focused • Thoughtful responses • Growth mindset	• Win-lose thinking • Defensive reactions • Looking for what's wrong • Quick to criticise • Fixed mindset



Guiding Questions
on the Choice Map

What possibilities are we not seeing by staying in our current perspective?

Rather than "This approach won't work because...", ask "What if we looked at this challenge from an entirely different angle? What possibilities might emerge?"

How would someone with a completely different background or expertise view this situation?

This shifts from "Based on my experience, this is the problem" to "exploring how might different stakeholders interpret and resolve the same challenge."

What assumptions are we making about the situation that could be tested or challenged?

Instead of "We've always done it this way", consider "What evidence supports our current approach, and what new information might suggest alternative solutions?"

How might this challenge be an opportunity in disguise?

Transform "Why is this happening to us?" into "How could this situation help us innovate or improve in ways we hadn't considered?"

What would success look like if we removed all current constraints?

Rather than focusing on "Why we can't", explore "What would be possible if we started fresh?" This helps break free from limiting beliefs and opens up new solution spaces.

These questions help move from a fixed, problem-focused mindset to an expansive, possibility-oriented perspective that can reveal innovative solutions and opportunities

2.2.5 Quality of Conversations

Effective collaboration begins with understanding the **quality of conversations**. Systems leaders must cultivate environments where **authentic dialogue can flourish**, moving beyond superficial exchanges to **deeper levels of understanding**. This involves recognising and working with different mental models, cultural perspectives, and stakeholder interests.

The quality of conversations directly impacts collaborative success. **Different levels of conversation** serve **different purposes**, and as leaders, we must skilfully navigate these levels to achieve desired outcomes. Surface-level exchanges may suffice for simple coordination, but **deeper dialogue becomes essential** when addressing **complex organisational or community challenges**.



GENERATIVE DIALOGUE

Generative dialogue, the **highest level** of conversation, enables genuine **co-creation** and **innovation**. ***'Generative'*** refers to the capacity to be **more reflective** in our thinking so that we can create or produce new understanding, meaning, possibilities, and insights that didn't exist before a conversation began. Here are some of the ways generative dialogue achieves this transformative impact:

Building Emergent Thinking

Building upon each participant's contributions in ways that lead to emergent thinking - where the whole becomes greater than the sum of individual inputs

Creating Fresh Perspectives

Moving beyond mere exchange of existing ideas to creating fresh perspectives and novel solutions through dialogue

Opening New Ways of Seeing

Opening up new ways of seeing or thinking about a situation, rather than simply defending or debating established positions

Suspending Judgment

Creating conditions for collective learning & innovation through deep listening, genuine inquiry, and suspension of judgement

Gaining New Insights

Fostering transformative moments where participants' understanding shifts, leading to breakthrough insights or innovative approaches

LEVELS OF CONVERSATION

As we move from simple exchanges to **deeper dialogue**, our ability to learn, connect, and innovate grows.

The four zones below illustrate the progression of different **levels of conversation**: ***Surface Exchange, Structured Discussion, Inquiry and Exploration***, *and* ***Generative Dialogue***. Each level invites a different kind of engagement.

Through the visuals, consider how each zone fosters a different conversational climate.

01 Surface Exchange

Basic information sharing

Example: *"Did you finish the report?" "Yes, I sent it this morning."*



02 Structured Discussion

Organised exploration of topics

Example: *"Here are the pros and cons of each option. Let's weigh them and make a decision."*



03 Inquiry and Exploration

Deep questioning and learning

Example: *"Why do we keep approaching this problem the same way? What if we look at it from a different angle?"*



04 Generative Dialogue

Co-creation and innovation

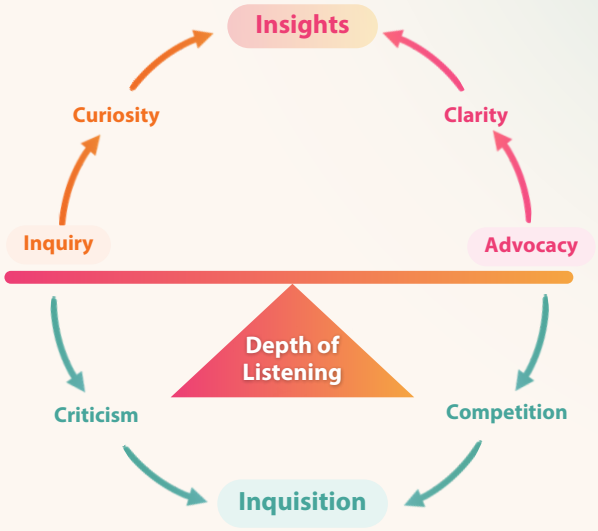
Example: *"What if we reimagine the entire process from the user's perspective, not just improve it? What could that look like?"*



DEPTH OF LISTENING

Deep listening is a crucial foundation that transforms how both **inquiry and advocacy operate** in a conversation.

The framework shows how deep listening enables participants to notice **not just words** but **underlying meanings, assumptions, and emotions,** leading to understanding and more generative conversations.



Source: Adapted from Peter Senge et al., The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (1990)



When **deep listening** is present, **advocacy** shifts from mere **stating of positions** to **sharing thinking** in ways that **invite others to understand** and explore.



Inquiry becomes genuinely **curious** rather than **interrogative** - creating a space where participants can truly hear and build upon each other's perspectives.

In other words, deep listening enables us to listen for **'what people are wanting to say**, '**what they are trying to say**' and **'what they are not saying'**.

At its best, deep listening creates a **container for dialogue** where advocacy becomes an invitation to understand rather than convince, and inquiry stems from authentic curiosity rather than criticism or judgment - this enables participants to move beyond defensive routines and access collective intelligence.



> ***Dialogue*** *is the* ***free flow of meaning*** *between people. It requires the people to* ***suspend assumptions*** *and enter into a genuine* ***"think together."*** *When we advocate without inquiring, we miss other's perspectives; when we inquire without advocating, we keep our own views hidden.*

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1990). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook.

3 Tips to Improve Inquiry Skills



Use Layered Questioning

Practise asking layered questions that move from broad to specific to uncover rationale and reasoning behind decisions or conclusions. Begin with open-ended questions to understand the overall context, then drill down with more focused questions. This approach helps uncover deeper insights and avoids making premature assumptions.

Create Systemic Frameworks

Develop systematic frameworks for investigation and ask clarifying questions without sounding aggressive. When examining complex issues, create structured approaches to gather and analyse information by identifying key variables, mapping relationships between elements, and systematically testing hypotheses.

Embrace Intellectual Humility

Cultivate intellectual humility and genuine curiosity. Approach each inquiry with the mindset that your initial assumptions might be incorrect. Be willing to follow evidence where it leads, even if it challenges your preconceptions, and treat unexpected findings as opportunities to learn rather than disruptions.

3 Tips to Improve Advocacy Skills



Master Active Listening

When advocating for a position, understanding your audience's perspective is crucial. Practise listening intently to others' concerns and asking probing questions that help you grasp their underlying interests and motivations. This allows you to frame your arguments in ways that resonate with their values and address their specific concerns.

Build Compelling Evidence-Based Narratives

Combine personal stories and concrete examples with reliable data and research. People connect emotionally with narratives, whilst evidence lends credibility to your position. When advocating for policy change, pair statistics about impact with real stories of affected individuals to create a more persuasive case.

Cultivate Strategic Stakeholder Relationships

Invest time in identifying and building relationships with key stakeholders who share your interests. This includes developing networks across different sectors, understanding power dynamics, and finding common ground with potential allies. Learn to adjust your messaging and delivery style based on different audiences and contexts.



Guiding Questions
on Balancing Inquiry & Advocacy in a Conversation

The **inquiry questions** focus on **genuine exploration**, while the **advocacy questions** help present your views in a way that **maintains dialogue** rather than creating defensiveness.

These questions create natural openings for both parties to share their stance and deepen understanding of others' views. They help maintain the delicate balance between advocating for your position and remaining genuinely curious about others' thinking, fostering a more collaborative exploration of ideas rather than a debate-style exchange.

Inquiry Questions (to understand others' perspectives)

What experiences have most influenced or shaped your thinking on this matter?

How do you see this playing out in practice, especially considering [specific context]?

What concerns or reservations do you have that I might not have considered?

Could you help me understand the key factors that led you to this conclusion?

What would need to change for you to see this situation differently?

Advocacy Questions (to effectively share your perspective)

I notice we might be seeing this differently - could you walk me through your reasoning so I can better understand?

Before I share my thoughts on this, what aspects haven't we touched on that you think are crucial?

I have some thoughts about this approach that I would like to get your thoughts on, but first I would be keen to hear your reasoning so that I can better understand where you come from and what you see to be potential challenges or opportunities that I might have missed?

I do see a different perspective on this - would you be open to hearing what's led me to this alternative view and why I believe this approach could address your concerns and help achieve what we're aiming for?

Given what we have both shared, where do you see points of connection between our perspectives, and which part of this discussion feels most important for us to explore further together?

2.2.6 Generative Conversations through Team Learning

In support of generative conversations, team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire.



It is about transforming conversational and collective thinking skills so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual members' talents.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEAM BUILDING AND TEAM LEARNING

Team Building	Team Learning
• Focuses primarily on strengthening relationships, trust, and cohesion among team members	• Focuses on developing collective knowledge, skills, and capabilities
• Typically involves activities and exercises designed to improve communication, collaboration, and interpersonal dynamics	• Involves structured processes for sharing knowledge and experiences within the team
• Often includes social activities, games, or challenges that require working together	• Often includes activities like after-action reviews, knowledge sharing sessions, and collaborative problem-solving
• Results are usually seen in improved team morale and better working relationships	• Results in enhanced team performance through improved collective understanding and capabilities
• Aims to create psychological safety and reduce interpersonal barriers	• Aims to improve the team's ability to solve problems and make decisions together

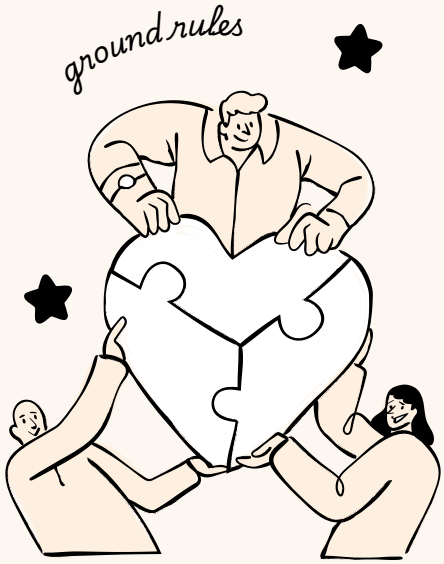
The key distinction is that **team building** primarily addresses the **social and emotional aspects of team dynamics**, while **team learning** focuses on developing the team's **collective knowledge** and **problem-solving abilities**.

However, they often **complement each other** - **strong team relationships** (built through team building) can facilitate better **team learning**, while **shared learning experiences** can strengthen **team bonds**. A well-rounded approach to team development typically incorporates both elements, as they work together to create high-performing teams that both work well together and continuously improve their capabilities.

GROUND RULES FOR TEAM LEARNING

It is important for systems leaders to facilitate the setup of **ground rules or group guidelines** for team conversations to be more generative. Once the guidelines are set by consensus, it is important for the team to discuss how it will deal with violations.

Ground rules or group guidelines are essential agreements that establish how team members will work together, creating a foundation for effective team learning.



They create psychological safety, enable open communication, and set clear expectations for behaviour, which allows teams to engage in productive dialogue, take learning risks, handle conflicts constructively.

When co-created and consistently observed by the team, these guidelines help build trust, ensure equitable participation, engender commitment to group processes and foster a supportive learning environment where members can question, reflect, and grow together.

Examples of group guidelines that support effective team learning might include some of the following:

Listen to understand	*Ask questions to seek clarifications*	*Converse one at a time*
Keep an open mind (speaking and listening)	*Withhold judgment and assumptions*	*Respect one another's views*
Step Up, Step Back	*Everyone to contribute actively*	*Balance group participation*
What's Said Here, Stays Here	*Maintain confidentiality of discussions*	*Share lessons learned, not personal stories*
"Yes, And" Instead of "But"	*Build on others' ideas constructively*	*Welcome innovation and experimentation*
Foster collaborative environment	*Challenge Ideas, Not People*	*Give constructive feedback*
Keep discussion objective	*Separate ideas from individuals*	*Maintain respectful discourse*

These guidelines work best when:

- Agreed upon by all team members
- Visibly displayed during meetings
- Regularly referenced and reinforced
- Applied consistently
- Reviewed and updated as needed



> *These rules are meant to help the team **shape its conversations**, not as an end in themselves; and they should never become so dominant that they override the **team's purposes and learning**.*

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1990). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook.

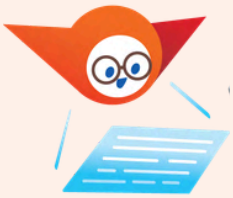


Guiding Questions
for Setting Group Guidelines

- **What do we need to put in place for us to feel safe and participate fully?**
- **How will we handle disagreements and conflicts?**
- **What behaviours are we committed to observe to support our learning together?**
- **How will we hold ourselves and each other accountable in this team?**
- **How will we address specific challenges that we might face?**

A critical aspect of ***team learning*** *is developing a collaborative approach to designing the broader infrastructure that shapes how teams are* ***recognised*** *and* ***supported*** *in their work."*

Senge et al., The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (1990), p. 355



NOTES & REFLECTIONS

2.2.7 Check-In and Check-Out Process

Check-in/check-out is a structured process designed to enable **more reflective and generative conversations** among leaders and teams who aim to improve their collective thinking skills.



The process may be used effectively by groups who are coming together just once, as well as teams that work closely together over a sustained period of time.

The check-in/check-out process is a way of helping people be **fully present in (check-in)** and to **bring closure to (check-out)** conversations. The process is a simple yet powerful way to encourage productive conversations and creation of trust in groups.



The practice of check-in/check-out at the **beginning and end of meetings** respectively, invites people to share what is on their mind so that they could remove usual unspoken thoughts or distractions that they carry in and out of meetings. This allows members to better focus, listen actively and participate fully; improving the quality of conversations.

The process is particularly valuable for:

- *Grounding participants in the present moment*
- *Surfacing important context and concerns early*
- *Creating psychological safety for honest dialogue*
- *Building stronger team connections*
- *Ensuring clear closure and commitment to action*

They are typically used during:

- *Team meetings*
- *Coaching conversations*
- *Training sessions*
- *Learning circles or communities of practice*
- *Project after-action reviews*

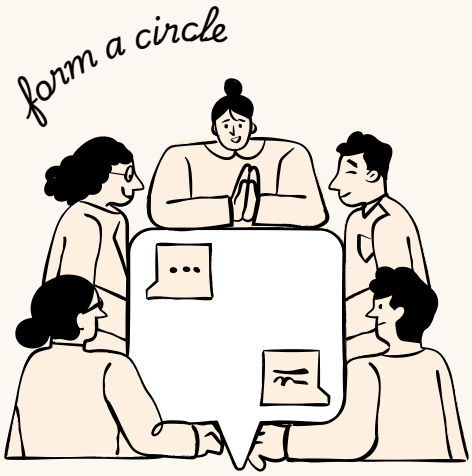
Source: Kim, D., & Cory, D. (2006). Organisational Learning Toolkit (p. 20).

CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT PROCESS

01 Form a circle

It is preferable to have the group **sit in a circle** so that everyone can see each other's face.

This is especially helpful for first timers and/or for groups who are not familiar with each other.





02 Ask a question

Frame a question for everyone on which to check in and agree on the time you would like to devote to the activity.

Many people find it helpful to **provide a minute or two** for people to reflect on the questions and **collect their thoughts** before speaking. Play some music to help create a relaxed environment.

03 Start the process

Someone volunteers to **start the process**.

[Optional] The speaker may **hold talking stick or object** that has some weight or meaning to it. While the speaker is holding the talking object, no one interrupts or responds to his or her statements.

The speaker takes some time to say whatever he or she wants, with no constraints on the content (but within their allotted time).



For the check-in process, when the speaker is done, he or she says 'I'm in'. The rest of the group members will acknowledge the person by saying 'You're Welcome'. The check-out follows the same process as the check-in. The only difference is that each person finishes by saying 'I'm out'.

Once done, the speaker then passes the talking object to the person on his/her left and the process continues until everyone has spoken.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF CHECK-IN/OUT PROCESS



- Constantly remind everyone of the purpose: to improve quality of collective thinking
- Model active listening as a leader - your body language signals value
- Ask thoughtful, divergent questions to spark reflection (e.g. Where is your thinking now on...?)
- Plan the process and always include a check-out (even one word can be powerful)



- Do not reduce it to an icebreaker or rush through with a time-clock mindset
- Don't phrase questions to force emotional outpourings (though emotions may emerge naturally)
- Don't allow interruptions - respect and listening come first
- Don't treat it as an efficiency exercise to cut short when time is tight



Guiding Questions
on Check-In / Check-Out Process

Check-In Questions

Emotional/Energy State: "On a scale of 1-10, what's your energy level coming into this meeting, and what's contributing to that?"

Mental Readiness: "What's on your mind that you need to set aside to be fully present here?"

Expectations/Concerns: "What's one hope and one concern you have about our time together today?"

Current State: "What's one word that describes how you're feeling right now, and would you like to share why?"

Transition Question: "What do you need from this group today to make this time valuable for you?"

Check-Out Questions

Reflection on Content: "What's one key insight or learning you're taking away from today's discussion?"

Emotional Processing: "How are you feeling now compared to when we started, and what contributed to any shift?"

Action Orientation: "What's one thing you'll do differently as a result of our conversation today?"

Group Process: "What worked well in how we collaborated today, and what could we improve next time?"

Completion: "On a scale of 1-10, how complete do you feel with today's discussion, and what would help you feel more complete?"

Future Focus: "What question are you leaving with that you'd like us to explore in future sessions?"

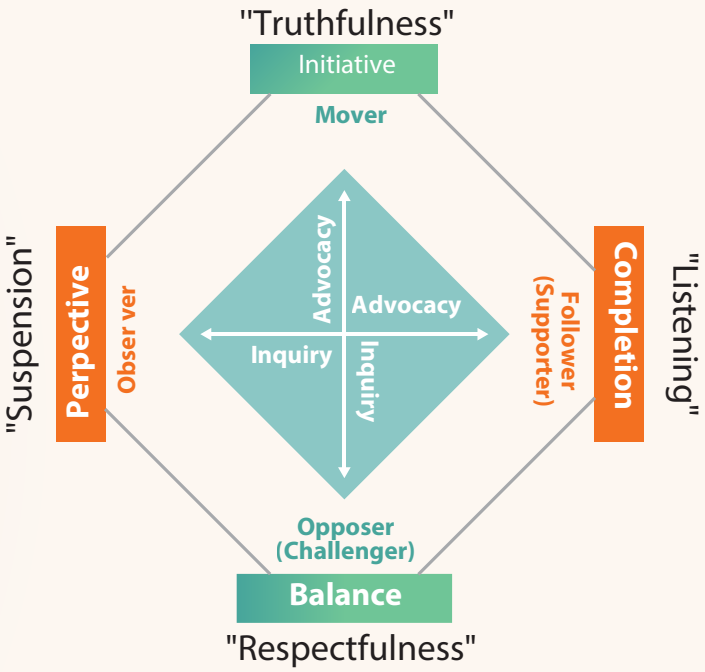
2.2.8 The Four-Player Model

The **Four-Player model** is a tool for creating **more productive team conversations**.

BENEFITS OF FOUR-PLAYER MODEL

- Helps us understand the tendency for teams to take actions that their individual members do not support
- Helps us see the consequences of mismanaged agreement
- Helps us learn to work towards consensual group decision-making – an exchange where communication is open and the climate is supportive, so everyone feels they have a chance to influence outcomes

Four-Player Model



Daniel H. Kim and Diane Cory (Adapted from William Isaacs, 1999 Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together)

Developed by clinician David Kantor, the Four-Player model offers a framework for understanding team dynamics and communication patterns.

FOUR ROLES IN THE FOUR-PLAYER MODEL

Mover

OFFERS Initiative

COMES FROM A PLACE OF Truthfulness

- Initiates action and provide direction
- Makes proposals and suggestions
- Takes charge and drives things forward
- Often starts with statements like "I think we should..." or "Let's try..."

Follower

OFFERS Listening

COMES FROM A PLACE OF Completion

- Supports and completes others' actions
- Provides additional information and helps implement ideas
- Builds upon suggestions constructively
- Often responds with "Yes, and..." or "Building on that idea..."

Opposer

OFFERS Balance

COMES FROM A PLACE OF Respectfulness

- Challenges ideas and provides critical analysis
- Identifies potential problems and raises concerns
- Helps refine proposals through constructive criticism
- Often begins with "Have you considered..." or "What about..."

Observer

OFFERS Perspective

COMES FROM A PLACE OF Suspension

- Observes and provides perspective
- Offers context and the bigger picture
- Helps the team step back and reflect
- Often contributes with "I notice that..." or "From my perspective..."



Kantor opines that healthy organisational systems require **all four roles** to be present and fluid for effective team conversations and functioning.

He argues against **getting "stuck"** in any one position, emphasising that effective teams need members who can **move between roles** as **situations demand**.

THE ABILENE PARADOX

The **Abilene Paradox** (by Jerry Harvey) describes situations where groups take actions **contrary to their individual preferences** because each person **mistakenly believes others want to do it**.

Scan to watch the video on *The Abilene Paradox*

As you watch the video, think about implications when the **four roles in the Four-Player model** are not effectively played out.



The dysfunctional patterns in group dynamics illustrated in the Abilene Paradox video relates to the Four Player Model in several ways:

Dysfunctional Moving

- People initiate actions based on assumed rather than real preferences
- Movers propose ideas they think others want, not what they truly believe in
- Creates false direction and momentum

Ineffective Bystanding

- No one steps back to observe and name the pattern
- Missing meta-view of group dynamics
- Failure to recognise collective misalignment

Problematic Following

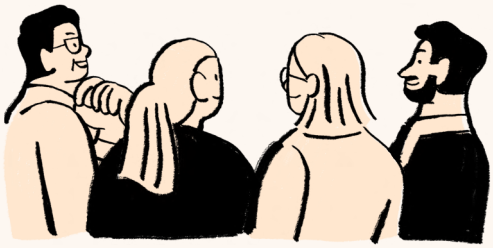
- Members follow without genuine buy-in
- Silent disagreement, outwardly agreeing
- Compliance replaces authentic support

Suppressed Opposition

- Fear of being seen as difficult prevents opposing voices
- Valid concerns remain unspoken
- Group loses benefit of constructive criticism

The paradox occurs when all four roles operate dysfunctionally.

Movers propose what they think others want. Followers agree despite private doubts. Opposers stay silent. Bystanders fail to notice the pattern.



How to break this dysfunctionality?

- Authentic moves based on real convictions
- Genuine following when in agreement
- Healthy opposition when concerned
- Active observation of group dynamics

This creates healthier group decision-making where true preferences are expressed and discussed openly.

Source: The Abilene Paradox and adapted in The Road to Abilene Leader's Guide.



Guiding Questions
to the Four-Player Model

The Mover (Initiating Action from the place of 'Truthfulness')

What specific outcome or change do we need to achieve, and why is it important now?

What's the clearest next step we can take to move this forward?

How can we build momentum while ensuring we're heading in the right direction?

The Follower (Supporting and Providing Completion from a place of Deep Listening)

What aspects of this proposal do I genuinely support, and how can I strengthen them?

What resources, skills, or connections can I contribute to help this succeed?

How can I help refine this idea while maintaining its core intent?

The Opposer (Challenging and Testing Assumptions from a place of Respectfulness)

What potential risks, blind spots, or unintended consequences should we consider?

What assumptions are we making that need to be tested or validated?

How might this approach fail, and what would make it more robust?

The Bystander (Observing and Reflecting from a place of Suspension)

What patterns am I noticing in how we're discussing this issue?

Whose voices or perspectives might be missing from this conversation?

What's the bigger picture or context we should keep in mind as we work through this?

These questions help each player contribute their essential perspective while maintaining productive dialogue. The key is that all four roles are necessary for thorough decision-making, and individuals can shift between roles as conversations evolve.

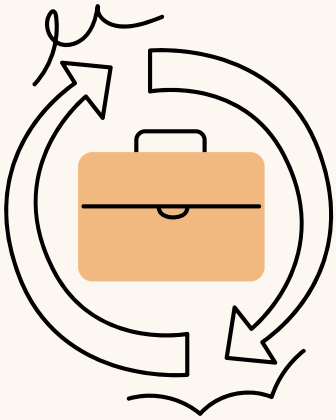
2.2.9 The Effectiveness Model

The Effectiveness Model was developed by General Electric (GE) in the 1990s as part of their Change Acceleration Process. The equation demonstrates that the **effectiveness (E)** of any change initiative is equal to the product of its technical **quality (Q)** and the **acceptance (A)** of that change by stakeholders.

It represents a fundamental paradigm in Systems Leadership, expressed through the equation

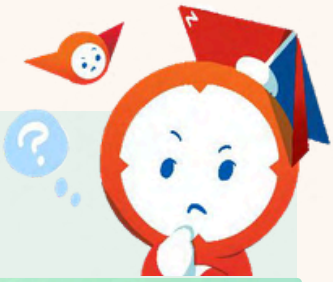
Quality x Acceptance = Effectiveness (Q x A = E)

This multiplicative relationship reveals a crucial insight: the **effectiveness of any initiative depends on both its technical excellence and the degree to which stakeholders accept and support it**.



Within a complex operating environment, this model provides essential guidance for leaders navigating the dual challenges of delivering high-quality solutions while building genuine stakeholder support.

For example, how can we balance quality with acceptance?



Guiding Questions
on the Effectiveness Model

Quality Assessment: "What expertise, data, and analysis do we need to ensure this solution is technically sound and well-informed?

This question helps identify the knowledge gaps, subject matter experts, research, and analytical rigour required to develop a high-quality decision or solution.

Acceptance Mapping: "Who are all the stakeholders who need to buy into this decision, and what are their specific concerns or interests?"

This question surfaces the full range of people whose acceptance is critical for implementation success, from direct participants to those affected by the outcomes.

Quality-Acceptance Trade-offs: "Where might we need to modify our 'perfect' solution to gain broader stakeholder support without compromising core effectiveness?"

This question explores how to balance technical excellence with practical implementability, identifying acceptable compromises that maintain solution integrity.

Implementation Readiness: "What would need to happen for each key stakeholder group to actively support and champion this solution?"

This question moves beyond passive agreement to identify what's required to generate genuine commitment and advocacy from those whose acceptance matters most.

Effectiveness Check: "How will we know if we've achieved both sufficient quality and acceptance to deliver the results we're seeking?"

This question establishes clear success metrics for both dimensions, ensuring the team can assess whether their approach is truly generating effectiveness rather than just another activity.

2.2.10 World Cafe and the Knowledge Travelling Process

World Café is a structured **conversational method** that facilitates collaborative dialogue and knowledge sharing through **multiple rounds of small-group conversations**, where participants **move between tables**, cross-pollinating ideas and insights.

The knowledge travelling process occurs as participants (acting as "travellers") carry key ideas and themes from one conversation to another, building upon previous round's discussions and insights, as they create new connections.





This process **supports generative conversations** by enabling diverse perspectives to emerge, combine and evolve, while fostering team learning through the **cross-fertilisation of ideas**, active listening, and collective sense-making.

The physical movement between tables, combined with the principle of **"harvesting" insights** from each round, creates a **dynamic learning environment**.

Patterns can be identified, collective intelligence emerges, and new possibilities for action can be discovered, leading to deeper understanding and innovative solutions that might not have surfaced in traditional meeting formats.



WORLD CAFÉ PROCESS AND BROAD GUIDING QUESTIONS

Core Process Elements

- Small groups (4-6 people) at café-style small tables
- Visual recording/doodling encouraged on tablecloths
- Multiple rounds (usually 3) of 20-30 minute conversations
- One host remains at each table while others travel at the end of each round
- Harvest and share collective discoveries

Typical Flow

Setting Context

- Clear purpose established
- Key question or theme introduced
- Process explained to participants

Round Progression

- Round 1: Initial exploration
- Round 2: Cross-pollination of ideas
- Round 3: Deepening insights
- Final harvest: Pattern recognition

Guiding Questions for World Cafe Process

Round 1 (Opening Round)

What brings you here?

What's most important about this issue?

What's your experience with...?

Round 2 (Deepening Round)

What's emerging here?

What are we hearing?

What's taking shape?

Round 3 (Meaning-Making Round)

What's at the heart of the matter?

What insights are emerging?

What possibilities do we see?

Harvest Questions

What surprised you?

What patterns did you notice?

What actions does this inspire?

Key Principles for Crafting World Café Questions:

- Should be simple and clear
- Open-ended
- Focus on what matters
- Encourage reflection and discovery
- Build progressively deeper understanding

Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & The World Café Community. (2001). The World Café: Living Knowledge Through Conversations That Matter.

2.2.11 Core Theory of Success



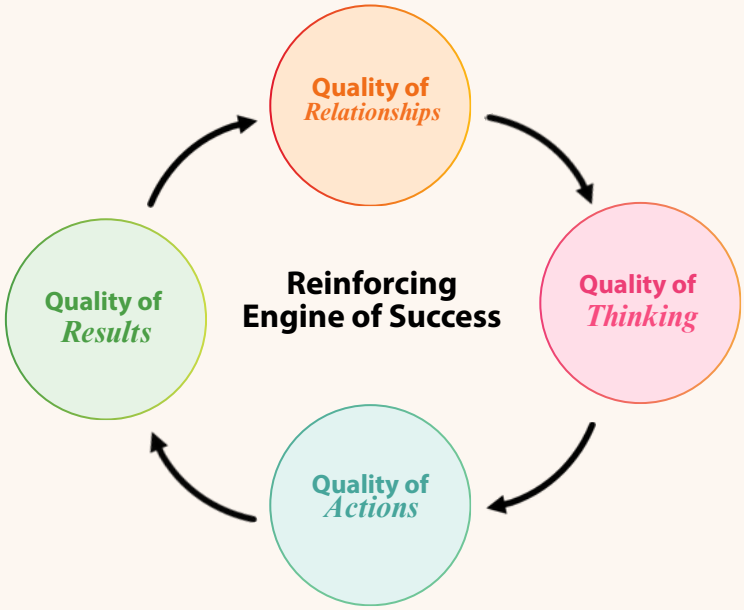
As systems leaders, we should ask ourselves "*What good theories do we have that provide practical guidance for ensuring our organisation's future success?*"

The more clearly we can articulate our organisational theories about what leads to success, the more deliberate we can be about investing in the elements that are critical to that success.

The Core Theory of Success is an illustration of Collaboration Mastery as it involves recognising that organisational success depends on understanding interconnected relationships and managing complex dynamics.

One such core theory would be based on the premise that

- As the **quality of the relationships** among people who work together increases (high team spirit, mutual respect, and trust), the **quality of collective thinking** improves (people consider more facets of an issue and share a greater number of different perspectives).
- When the level of thinking is heightened, the **quality of actions** is likely to improve (better planning, greater coordination, and higher commitment). In turn, the **quality of results** increases as well.



Source: Adapted from Kim, D. H. (2001). Organising for learning: Strategies for knowledge creation and enduring change.

Achieving high quality results as a team generally has a positive effect on the quality of relationships, thus creating a virtuous cycle of better and better results.

Quality of Relationships

- Trust and respect
- Open communication
- Shared purpose

Quality of Thinking

- Collective intelligence
- Innovation
- Systems perspective

Quality of Actions

- Coordinated efforts
- Effective implementation
- Adaptive responses

Quality of Results

- Sustainable outcomes
- Stakeholder satisfaction
- System improvement

Scan to view Daniel Kim's framework for identifying your organisation's core theory of success.

Discover the fundamental patterns that drive sustainable growth and performance.



The most important point about this kind of systemic theory is that the success is not derived from any one of the individual variables that make up the loop, but rather from the loop itself. We need to pay attention to how all the variables is doing and how each is affecting the others in the loop. If any of the variables is not functioning well, the reinforcing success loop cannot be sustained.

Hence, understanding the interconnections among the variables are imperative in helping us identify where to intervene for sustainable success.



*Coming together is a **beginning**, staying together is **progress**, and working together is **success**.*

Henry Ford

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



Sample Integration of Tools for Generative Conversations and Collaboration Mastery

Context	Primary Tools	Supporting Tools
Team Meetings	• Check-In/Out • 4-Player Model	• Quality of Conversations • Mental Models
Stakeholder Engagement	• Quality of Conversations	• Ladder of Inference • Left Hand Column Tool
Problem-Solving Sessions	• Core Theory of Success • Double-Loop Learning	• 4-Player Model • Mental Models
Conflict Resolution	• Left Hand Column Tool • Ladder of Inference	• Quality of Conversations • Mental Models
Strategic Planning	• Mental Models	• Core Theory of Success • Double-Loop Learning
Idea generation and cross-pollination	• World Café conversations	• Quality of Conversations

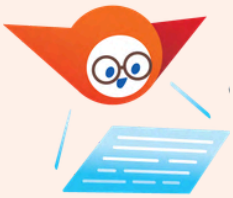


Food for Thought Questions
to Develop Collaboration Mastery

- How are my mental models and unspoken assumptions influencing my leadership approaches?
- In what ways am I creating space that enables authentic dialogue, generative conversations and shared learning to take place in the organisational setting?
- How am I helping diverse stakeholders find common ground while respecting their different perspectives?
- To what extent am I facilitating collective sense-making and shared understanding across the system that others can learn from?
- Which tools would most benefit my team's growth right now? What are you committed to do differently to incorporate these tools into my leadership practices?

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

2.3 Complexity Mastery

Complexity

In today's interconnected world, **Complexity Mastery** becomes crucial for effective Systems Leadership. Systems Leadership acknowledges that challenges rarely exist in isolation - they are typically **interconnected and complex**, requiring leaders to work with dynamic, unpredictable forces where cause and effect are rarely straightforward.



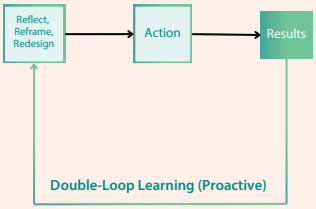
This capability enables leaders to navigate complex systems by understanding both their **visible and hidden dynamics**. Leaders who master complexity use Systems Thinking to grasp the broader context and relationships between different parts of the organisational system, rather than focusing on individual components in isolation. They excel at seeing patterns, adapting their thinking, and responding with insight rather than impulse.

The tools in this section help leaders build that capacity. From learning to **question underlying assumptions** to mapping **feedback loops and perspectives**, each framework sharpens the ability to observe systems as living, evolving wholes. Together, they guide us to identify leverage points, embrace iterative learning, and move from **quick fixes** to **lasting change**.

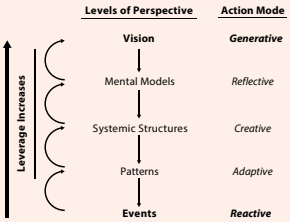


AT A GLANCE: COMPLEXITY MASTERY FRAMEWORKS

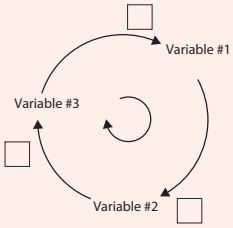
Single and Double Loop Learning



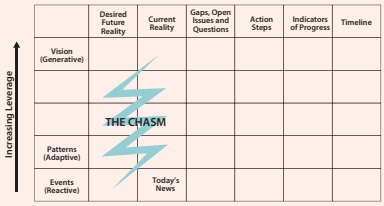
Levels of Perspective



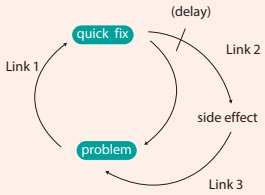
Causal Loops Diagram



Vision Deployment Matrix



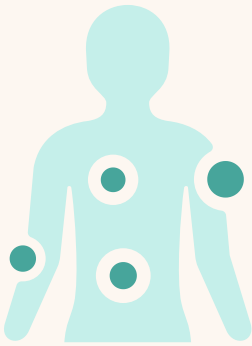
Systems Archetypes



(Source: SIM Academy, 2023)

2.3.1 Single and Double-Loop Learning

ARE WE FIXING THE SYMPTOMS OR ROOT CAUSE?

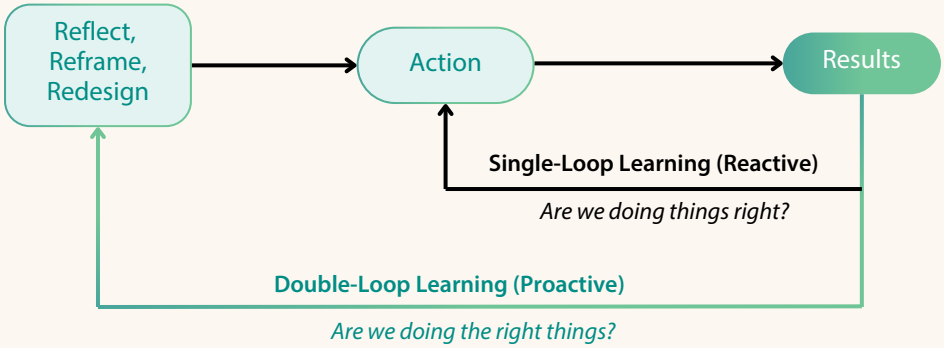


When problems arise in organisations, it is easy to focus on the **symptoms** - the immediate problem in front of us. It is like treating a cough without addressing the **underlying illness**.

To truly lead in complex systems, we need to go **beyond quick fixes** and explore the **root causes** of our challenges.

This is where **single-loop** and **double-loop learning** come in.

Single-loop learning addresses symptoms. Double-loop learning digs deeper to identify and treat the root cause, leading to more sustainable, long-term solutions.

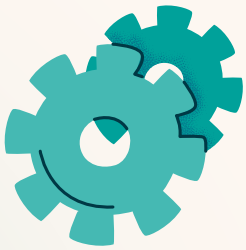


Adapted from Argyris, C. (1977). Double loop learning in organizations. Harvard Business Review.

To achieve more strategic and sustainable outcomes, we need to **move upstream in our thinking process** and engage in a 'proactive' approach to addressing our organisational issues/challenges; going deeper to examine the underlying forces that may not be visible to us.

We need to engage in an **iterative process** of establishing facts, conclusions and implications. This would require us to **go beyond quick fixes** to reflect on our actions, uncover our assumptions, reframe our thinking, identify points of high leverage and redesign our strategies and action plans **(double-loop learning)**.

Understanding and applying both learning loops helps us move beyond quick fixes to create lasting, meaningful change in our organisation. It enables us to not only improve our current programmes and initiatives but also to fundamentally rethink our approaches when necessary.





Guiding Questions
to the Single and Double-Loop Learning

These questions help us differentiate between asking if we are "doing things right" versus "are we doing the right things."

Single-Loop Learning Questions (Correcting Actions/Processes) – "Are we doing things right?"

What specific actions or behaviours need to be adjusted to achieve our intended results?

How can we improve our execution within our current approach or strategy?

What skills, processes, or resources do we need to develop to perform better?

Where are the gaps between our planned actions and actual outcomes?

Double-Loop Learning Questions (Examining Underlying Assumptions) – "Are we doing the right things?"

What assumptions about our goals, methods, or context might be limiting our effectiveness?

Are we solving the right problem, or are we addressing symptoms of a deeper issue?

What beliefs or mental models are driving our current approach, and should we question them?

How might our success criteria or objectives themselves need to change?

What would we do differently if we started fresh with what we know now?

Moving from Single to Double-Loop Learning Questions

We've tried several fixes - what does this pattern of problems tell us about our fundamental approach?

If this issue keeps recurring despite our corrections, what deeper assumptions should we examine?

What would an outside observer say about the way we're framing this challenge?

Organisational Application Questions

How do our organisational values and culture either support or hinder our ability to question basic assumptions?

What defensive routines or undiscussables prevent us from examining our governing variables?



Problem-solving *is an example of* ***single-loop learning.*** *You identify an error and apply a particular remedy to correct it. But genuine learning involves an extra step in which you reflect on your assumptions and test the validity of your hypotheses. Achieving this* ***double-loop learning*** *is more than a matter of motivation – you have to reflect on the way you think.*

Chris Arygyris, Teaching Smart People How to Learn

NOTES & REFLECTIONS

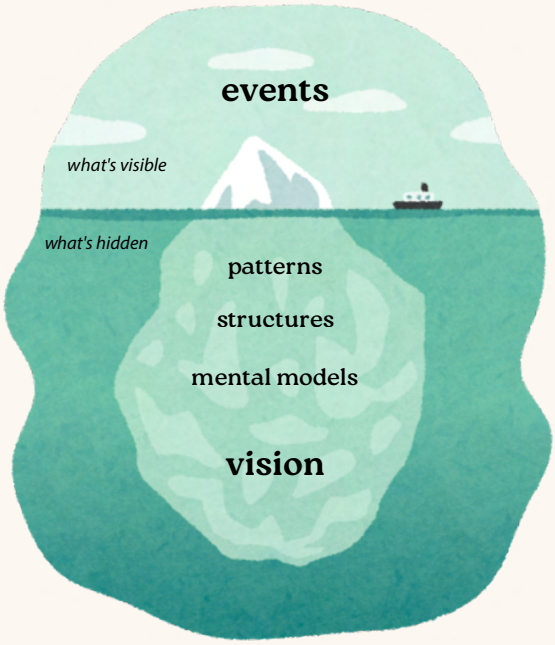


2.3.2 The Levels of Perspective Framework

Our understanding of the world can be enhanced by expanding our view **beyond our usual perspectives**.

The Levels of Perspective (LOP) Framework is like **an iceberg**: **events** are what we see on the surface, **patterns** are the recurring trends, **structures** are the forces shaping those patterns, **mental models** are the deep beliefs behind them, and **vision** is the direction we aim for.

By looking beyond the surface, leaders can move from quick fixes to lasting change.



BENEFITS OF USING LEVELS OF PERSPECTIVE

Mapping the five Levels of Perspective, could potentially help us to

- Move from reactive to proactive thinking
- Guide more sustainable interventions and effective solutioning
- Deepen understanding of the challenge at each level
- Challenge existing assumptions

Scan to access *"From Event Thinking to Systems Thinking"*.

This resource explores how to shift your perspective from focusing on isolated events to understanding broader systemic patterns and relationships.

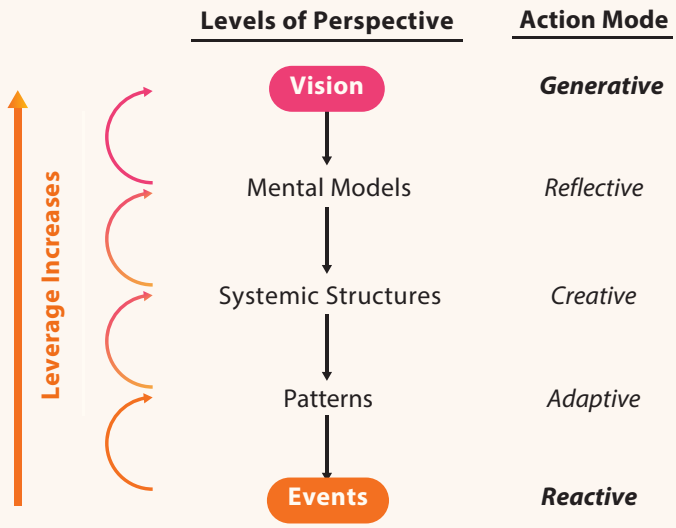


LEVELS OF PERSPECTIVE FRAMEWORK

The Levels of Perspective (LOP) framework stems from the systems dynamics principle that **structure** determines **behaviour**.

To achieve different outcomes, the focus should be on **modifying the underlying structures** that create current behaviours, rather than attempting to change the behaviours themselves.

The framework helps leaders look **beyond surface events** to understand and address challenges at multiple levels, ensuring more effective and sustainable solutions.



WALKING UP VS. WALKING DOWN THE LEVELS OF PERSPECTIVE

The Levels of Perspective can be used in **two complementary ways**, like a game of snakes and ladders: ***'Walking up'*** and ***'Walking down'***.



Walking up is about **diagnosis -** moving step by step from events to deeper structures so you can understand what's really shaping outcomes.

Walking down is about **design -** starting with the vision and working downward to align mental models, structures, and actions that bring it to life.

Together, they help leaders both uncover the roots of today's challenges and create practical pathways to a better future.

"Walking Up" the LOP for Diagnosing Problems

Identify an **organisational problem** that you and your team would like to work on.
Begin at the **event level**, and respond to the corresponding questions (both current reality and actions taken/planned) as you **walk up to the vision level**.

	Events Level (Reactive)
What	Immediate, visible occurrences e.g. poor turnout at CC activities, limited engagement
Timeframe	Day-to-day
Response	Quick fixes, immediate action
Guiding Questions	• *"What just happened?"* • *"What specific incidents or issue are we responding to right now?"* • *"What immediate actions are required to address this event/issue?"*
	Patterns Level (Adaptive)
What	Trends and recurring events over time e.g. consistently lower attendance in certain demographics, seasonal fluctuations in participation, regular cancellation of events due to low sign-ups, declining trend in volunteer involvement
Timeframe	Weeks to months
Response	Anticipate and plan
Guiding Questions	• *"What's been happening recently/over time? What's changing?"* • *"What trends or recurring situations have we observed that are connected to our current challenges?"* • *"What behaviours are consistently producing these outcomes?"*
	Systemic Structures Level (Creative)
What	Organisational structures, policies, communication systems, decision-making processes, organisational infrastructure e.g. event planning processes may not include community input, communication channels might not reach target audiences, timing and scheduling systems may not suit residents, feedback mechanisms might be inadequate
Timeframe	Months to years
Response	Design and redesign
Guiding Questions	• *"What are the forces at play? / What systems influence this? / What policies matter?* • *"What organisational systems, policies or processes are creating these patterns?"* • *"Which structural elements need to change to achieve different results?"*
	Mental Models Level (Reflective)
What	Deeply held theories and beliefs about how the world works e.g. assumptions about what community want, traditional views about community engagement, fixed ideas about programme design, beliefs about resident preferences, views about community participation etc.
Timeframe	Years
Response	Shift mindsets
Guiding Questions	• *"What assumptions or beliefs shaping current decisions do we need to surface, suspend and test?"* • *"How do our current mindsets limit or enable our effectiveness?"* • *"What different perspectives might help us see new possibilities?"*

	Vision Level (Generative)
What	Essence or image of the desired future
Timeframe	Generational
Response	Create and inspire
Guiding Questions	• *"What larger purpose guides our actions and decisions?"* • *"How do we align our current direction with our aspirations?"* • *"What future do we truly desire to create?"*

"Walking Down" the LOP to Co-Create Solutions

While the process of 'walking up' the Levels of Perspective is diagnostic and analytical, '**walking down**' the Levels of Perspective is **design-oriented** and **solution-focused**.

It begins with the desired vision and working downward to create appropriate mental models, structures, patterns, and specific actions needed to achieve that vision – it is about creating desired change and a new reality.

Level	What is Happening in Current Reality	Actions Taken/Planned
Vision	• *What is the espoused vision (what we say we want)?* • *What is the vision-in use that are guided by our current beliefs?*	• *What actions would help generate a compelling vision consistent with our purpose?*
Mental Models (for multiple stakeholders)	• *What theories, beliefs and assumptions endorse and sustain our current systemic structures?*	• *What actions will help surface, suspend and question our assumptions and help us reflect on our mental models?*
Systemic Structures	• *What organisational structures, policies and systems are producing the events and patterns that we face today?*	• *What actions can help create new structures or change existing ones?*
Patterns	• *What kind of recurring trends or pattern(s) of behaviours are we noticing that are linked to the event/issue we have identified?*	• *What actions are being taken to adapt to this trend/pattern?*
Events	• *What specific event(s) are we concerned about?*	• *What actions are being taken to react and address the event(s) at hand?*

Scan here to download
the Levels of Perspective Framework Template

Use this framework as a structured approach to examine issues from multiple viewpoints - moving from assumptions to broader systemic patterns and underlying structures that shape organisational dynamics.





Guiding Questions
to guide LOP 'walk up' and 'walk down' process

	Walking Up the LOP	Walking Down the LOP
Start Point	**Events Level**	**Vision Level**
	What is happening right now?	What future do we truly want to create?
	What issue or situation are we observing?	What would success ultimately look like?
	What specific incidents triggered our concern?	What higher purpose guides our direction?
	What immediate actions do we plan to take?	What lasting impact do we want to have?
	Patterns of Behaviour Level	**Mental Models Level**
	Have we seen this situation before?	What beliefs and assumptions need to shift?
	What recurring behaviours are emerging?	How should we think differently to achieve our vision?
	Are there predictable cycles or habits at play?	What new perspectives will support our goals?
	How have these patterns evolved over time?	What mindsets will enable success?
	Systemic Structures Level	**Systemic Structures Level**
	What systems, policies, or processes might be reinforcing these patterns?	What structures need to be created?
	How are roles, incentives, or decision flows shaping behaviour?	How should we organise our resources?
	What external or internal structures contribute to this situation?	What processes will support our desired outcomes?
	Where might bottlenecks or misalignments exist?	What systems will enable the change we want?
	Mental Models Level	**Patterns of Behaviour Level**
	What assumptions or beliefs might be driving these structures?	What behaviours do we need to encourage?
	What ways of thinking are keeping this situation in place?	What trends should we expect to see?
	How do people currently interpret what's happening?	How should people interact differently?
	What mental blind spots might we have?	What recurring actions will indicate progress?
End Point	**Vision Level**	**Events Level**
	What do these insights reveal about our shared purpose?	What specific actions should we take first?
	What kind of future would we prefer instead?	What immediate changes can we implement?
	What would success look like if patterns changed?	What tangible steps will start the process?
	How does this connect to our broader vision?	What activities will show commitment?

*Reality is made up of circles, but we see straight lines. Herein lie the beginnings of our limitations as systems thinkers. By learning to see **structures** beneath **events**, and to see **patterns** of change rather than static 'snapshots,' we begin to understand how to **influence the future.***

Peter Senge

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



2.3.3 Basic Causal Loop Diagrams

Causal loop diagrams (CLDs) provide a language to articulate our understanding of the dynamic, interconnected nature of our world. These diagrams show how different variables and factors **influence each other** over time.



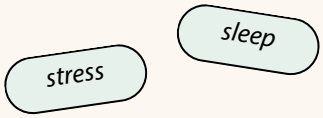
We can think of them as sentences that are constructed by **linking together key variables** and indicating the causal relationships between them. By stringing together several loops, we can create a **coherent story** about a particular problem or issues.

UNDERSTANDING BASIC CAUSAL LOOPS

Each loop consists of variables connected by arrows that represent causal connections showing the movement of feedback throughout the system.

01 Start with variables

Pick two or more things that affect each other.



02 Connect them with arrows



An arrow shows **cause and effect**.

- If both move in the **same direction** (*more studying → more knowledge*), that's an ***S (same).***
- If both move in the **opposite direction** (*more stress → less sleep, less stress → more sleep*), that's an ***O (opposite).***

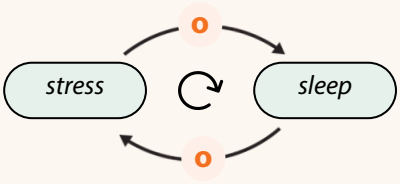


03 See the loop

When these arrows connect back to the first variable, they form a feedback loop.

There are **two types of feedback loops** or building blocks of systems behaviour: reinforcing and balancing loops.

- **Balancing Loop (B):** Works like a thermostat. It tries to keep things steady by pushing back towards balance.
- **Reinforcing Loop (R):** Works like a snowball. It keeps pushing in the same direction, growing stronger or weaker over time.



This a reinforcing loop (R) because the effects compound in the same direction over time (either positive or negative)

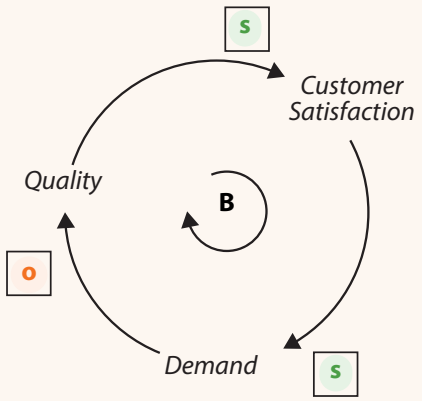
Source: Kim, D. H. (1999). Introduction to Systems Thinking

BALANCING AND REINFORCING LOOPS

Balancing Loops

A balancing loop **stabilises processes**.

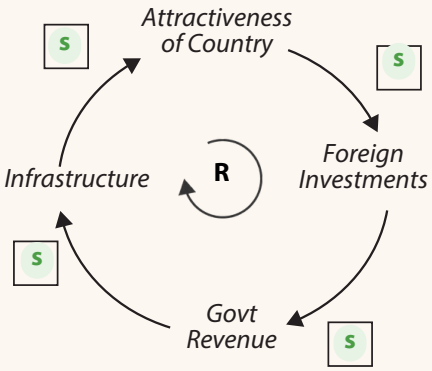
It is goal-seeking in nature and tends to keep the system steady around a particular goal.



Reinforcing Loops

A reinforcing loop **amplifies change**.

It produces either rapid growth or collapse by driving change in one direction with increasing change in the same direction each time you go around the loop.



Balancing and reinforcing processes can be **combined in an infinite number of combinations** to describe the behaviour of all kinds of systems, including the behaviour of organisational systems.

Source: Kim, D. H. (1999). Introduction to Systems Thinking

2.3.4 Systems Archetypes

Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs) are used to illustrate **systems archetypes**. These are **common patterns of system behaviour** that appear across **different contexts and industries**. They are essentially **recurring stories or templates of how systems typically behave**. CLDs help to make the underlying structure of systems archetypes visible and easier to understand.



Systems archetypes are accessible tools with which systems leaders could quickly construct credible and consistent hypotheses about the forces that are governing our systems. **Archetypes** are also natural **vehicle for clarifying and testing mental models about those systems**.

There are 8 key systems archetypes that help to catalogue the most commonly seen behaviours:

Fixes that Fail (Firemen Syndrome)	*Shifting the Burden*
Limit to Success	*Drifting Goals*
Growth and Underinvestment	*Success to the Successful*
Tragedy of the Common	*Escalation*

Scan to access *"Systems Archetype Basics: From Story to Structure" by Daniel H. Kim and Virginia Anderson (1998)*

Explore the 8 fundamental patterns that shape system behaviour.



Source: Senge et al., The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (1990). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (p. 60).
Kim, D. H. (1992). Systems Archetypes I. The Toolbox Reprint Series.

EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMS ARCHETYPES THAT ARE MOST COMMONLY EXPERIENCED IN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING

01 | Fixes that Fail

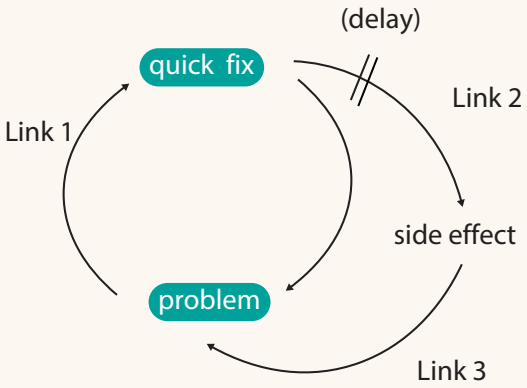
When faced with a "Fixes That Fail" scenario, we often **rush to address an urgent problem symptom** with an immediate solution that appears to **work at first**.

However, this 'quick fix' triggers **unintended consequences which, after some time, cause the initial problem to resurface** - sometimes with even greater intensity than before.

Our typical response is to reapply the same solution or a similar one, creating a recurring cycle of temporary fixes and worsening problems. This **self-reinforcing pattern** exemplifies the core nature of "Fixes That Fail" situations.

When a problem or issue arises, we take quick action to address it. In the **short term**, the problem then **goes away**.

But in the **longer term**, fix creates a **side effect**. This side effect emerges later only to **compound** our **original problem**.

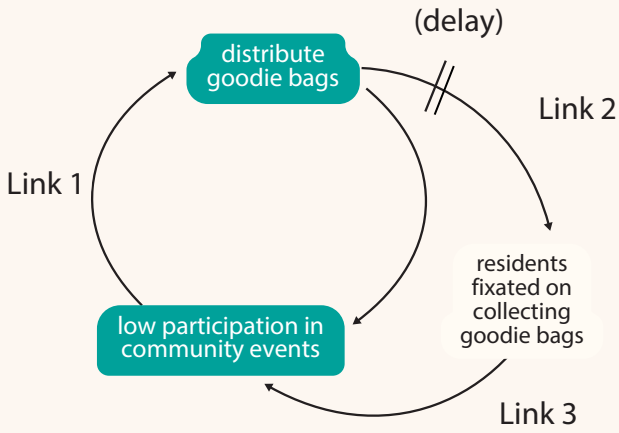


Example | Low Participation in Community Events

Low participation in community events (problem symptom); distribute **goodie bags at events** (symptomatic solution). **Temporarily** the residents' participation numbers **went up**.

Over time, the **unintended consequence** is that residents became **fixated on collecting goodie bags** and were disinterested in participating in community engagement activities.

As a result, the problem of **low participation resurfaced** or even got worse over time.

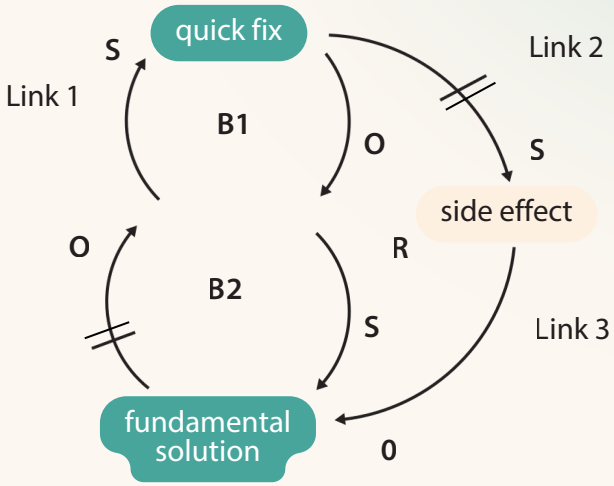


Source: Kim, D. H., & Anderson, V. (1998). Systems Archetype Basics: From Story to Structure. Pegasus Communications.

02 | Shifting the Burden (STB)

In a "Shifting the Burden" scenario, we face a choice between addressing a problem symptom with either a quick symptomatic fix or a more fundamental solution.

When we opt for the **symptomatic solution**, it **temporarily alleviates** or **eliminates the problem** symptom, which consequently reduces the urgency to i**mplement deeper, more fundamental solutions**.



Eventually, the original symptom returns, prompting another application of symptomatic solutions, creating a vicious reinforcing cycle.

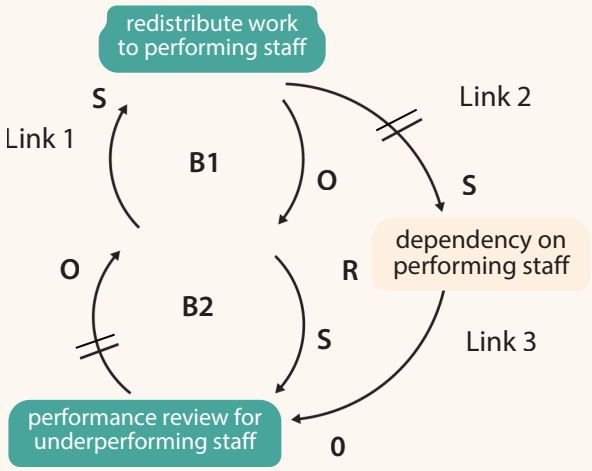
Moreover, these symptomatic fixes often generate unintended side effects that further distract attention and resources from pursuing the more fundamental solutions needed for lasting change.

Example | Underperforming Staff

Staff not performing up to requirements of job role **(problem symptom)**.

Manager redistribute the work to another performing staff. Immediate issue to **getting the work done** was settled **(symptomatic solution)**.

This creates **dependency** on other **performing staff (side effect)** and the manager's motivation to address the issue of the underperforming staff declined.



The symptomatic solution diverted the manager from the fundamental solution of putting the underperforming staff under performance review. Over time, the underperforming staff continued to underperform and affected the team morale.

Source: Kim, D. H., & Anderson, V. (1998). Systems Archetype Basics: From Story to Structure. Pegasus Communications.

STORY OF THE HEALING POISON



Li-Li was a young bride who had just moved into her new home with her husband and his mother.

In no time at all, Li-Li realised that she couldn't get along with her mother-in-law - their personalities were very different, and they had conflicting habits, values and beliefs. The mother-in-law criticised Li-Li constantly.

The months passed but Li-Li and her mother-in-law never stopped arguing and fighting. Finally, Li-Li decided to do something about it. She went to her father's good friend, Mr. Huang, who sold herbs, and asked him for some poison.

Mr. Huang was shocked but seeing how distraught the girl was, finally said, "I will help you solve your problem, but you must listen to me and do exactly as I tell you." Li-Li nodded.

He continued, "You can't use a quick-acting poison to get rid of your mother-in-law, because that would cause people to become suspicious. Therefore, I will give you a combination of herbs that will slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some pork or chicken and put a little of these herbs in her serving. Now, in order to make sure that nobody suspects you when she dies, you must be very careful to act very friendly towards her. Don't argue with her, obey her every wish, and treat her like a queen."

Li-Li followed Mr. Huang's instructions faithfully. Months went by, and every other day, Li-Li served the specially treated food to her mother-in-law.

She remembered what Mr. Huang had said about avoiding suspicion, so she controlled her temper, obeyed her mother-in-law, and treated her like her own mother.

Li-Li practised controlling her temper so much that she found that she almost never got mad or upset. The mother-in-law's attitude toward Li-Li changed, and she began to love Li-Li like her own daughter. She kept telling friends and relatives that Li-Li was the best daughter-in-law one could ever find. Li-Li and her mother-in-law were now treating each other like a real mother and daughter.

Li-Li now regretted her murderous plan and sought Mr. Huang's help for a remedy for the poison.

To which he smiled and said, "Li-Li, there's nothing to worry about. I never gave you any poison. The herbs I gave you were vitamins to improve her health. The only poison was in your mind and your attitude towards her, but that has been all washed away by the love which you gave to her."

Key Takeaways

- Be aware of vicious cycle of quick fixes.
- High leverage or more fundamental solutions comes from questioning assumptions, changing attitudes and beliefs.



*Systems archetypes are like the **grammar** of Systems Thinking: a set of **basic patterns** that, once understood, help us read the story of **any complex situation** more clearly.*

Peter Senge

2.3.5 Vision Deployment Matrix

The journey from **current reality** to **achieving a vision** involves bridging a significant gap or 'chasm'.



The **Vision Deployment Matrix (VDM)** serves as a practical strategic planning and alignment tool to help cross this divide by converting **vision** into **concrete, executable steps**. It enables organisation-wide understanding of three key elements: where we are now, where we want to be, and what needs to be done to get there.

By breaking down goals across different organisational levels, it creates clear connections between strategic intentions and day-to-day operations.

Increasing Leverage

	Desired Future Reality	Current Reality	Gaps, Open Issues and Questions	Action Steps	Indicators of Progress	Timeline
Vision (Generative)						
		THE CHASM				
Patterns (Adaptive)						
Events (Reactive)		Today's News				

Source: Adapted from Kim, D. (2001). Organising for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change.

Scan to download *a Vision Deployment Matrix Template*

The VDM, while appearing sequential in the worksheet, is actually dynamic and ongoing. Success comes not from following the steps once in a linear way, but carefully refining each component of the matrix through repeated cycles of review and adjustment.





Guiding Questions
for Applying Vision Deployment Matrix (VDM)

Level of Perspective	Desired Future Reality	Current Reality	Gaps	Action Steps	Indicators of Success	Timeline
Vision (Generative)	• What is the vision of the future that represents our highest aspiration in pursuit of our purpose? • How will our organisation transform lives and communities? • What meaningful difference will define our success?	• How well is our current direction aligned with our vision? • What aspects of our vision are we currently achieving? • What is our current vision-in-use that poses the biggest challenge for achieving our desired future reality?	• What major disconnects exist between our vision and reality? • Which aspects of our vision are most challenging to achieve? • Where are we falling short of our aspirational goals?	• What key strategic shifts must we make? • Which major initiatives will move us toward our vision? • How should we prioritise our vision-driven actions?	• What indicators define success for us? • How will we measure improvement / progress? • What evidence will show change had occurred?	• When should changes begin? • What's our implementation sequence? • When do we expect milestone results?
Mental Models (Reflective)	• What new ways of thinking would be congruent with our vision? • Which beliefs and values should guide our decisions?	• What prevailing theories and beliefs that are sustaining our current systemic structures need to b addressed? • How do our current assumptions limit our effectiveness? • What mindsets dominate our organisation?	• Which mental models need to shift? • What new perspectives do we need to adopt? • How do our current beliefs block progress?	• How can we challenge existing assumptions? • How do we develop new thinking patterns? • How will we embed new mindsets?		

Level of Perspective	Desired Future Reality	Current Reality	Gaps	Action Steps	Indicators of Success	Timeline
Systemic Structures (Creative)	• What organisational systems will enable our vision? • How can we create structures that are consistent with our new beliefs? • What structures will sustain our desired changes?	• What aspects of the current systemic structure are producing the most dominant patterns of behaviour that must be changed? • Which systems and processes drive our current outcomes?	• What structural barriers block progress? • Which systems need redesign? • What processes are missing?	• What new structures should we create? • How should we redesign our systems? • Which processes need changing?	• What indicators define success for us? • How will we measure improvement / progress? • What evidence will show change had occurred?	• When should changes begin? • What's our implementation sequence? • When do we expect milestone results?
Patterns (Adaptive)	• What behavioural pattern do we want our new structures to produce? • What trends should characterise our work? • What are some key indicators whose patterns of behaviour show that the desired vision is becoming a reality?	• What are the current patterns of behaviour over time for the key indicators identified under our desired future reality? • What behavioural patterns do we observe? • What recurring issues do we face?	• Which patterns need to change? • What new behaviours do we need? • Which trends should we shift?	• How can we establish new patterns? • What interventions will shift behaviours?		
Events (Reactive)	• What specific activities would indicate that our vision had been realised? • What tangible events should illustrate how the vision is operating on a day-to-day basis?	• What are some specific events that characterise the current reality? • What specific incidents occur regularly? • What immediate issues demand attention?	• Which events signal problems? • What actions are missing? • Where do we need immediate change?	• What specific actions should we take? • Which immediate changes will help? • How do we respond to current events?		

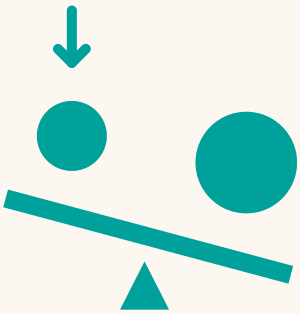
Navigating Systems Change

Now that we can see the system, the next step is acting wisely inside it.

This includes finding leverage points where small shifts create big change, or anticipating unintended consequences so today's solutions don't become tomorrow's problems.

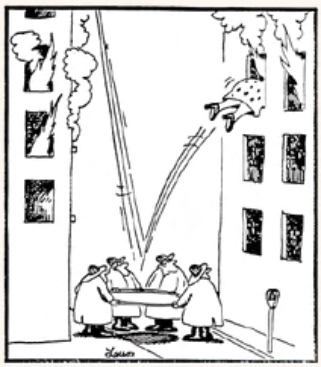
IDENTIFYING HIGH LEVERAGE FOR FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTIONS

Leverage points are places within a complex system, be it a company, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem where a **small shift** in one thing can produce **big changes** in everything.



They are of immense interest to anyone seeking to affect change within our interconnected ecological, social and economic systems.

DEALING WITH UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES



A big part of Complexity Mastery is recognising that in systems, solutions don't always stay neat and contained. Fixing one problem can sometimes create a bigger one somewhere else, or later on.

Every action creates ripples. Some interventions that look effective (especially symptomatic fixes in CLDs) create new problems elsewhere.

By anticipating unintended consequences, leaders avoid short-term wins that cause long-term harm.

Unintended consequences is like saving a lady from a fire with a trampoline, only for her to bounce back to the flames. The system "pushes back" in ways we do not expect.

That is why leaders need to go beyond asking "Did it solve the immediate issue?" and "What ripple effects will this have?"

Here are two practical approaches to deal with unintended consequences:

Take Mitigating Actions

Anticipate side effects and design safeguards to reduce harm (e.g. balancing new policies with support structures).

Use Cost Benefit Analysis

When mitigation is not possible, weigh whether the benefits outweigh the risks, and decide consciously.

Guiding Questions
to Identify Leverage

Where are the bright spots in the system?

Are there surprising areas of positive deviance?
What might these hint at in terms of creative ways to intervene?

Are there factors that have opposite impacts on different loops?

When one factor has an opposite impact in two loops, a powerful intervention can be to amplify the positive impact while finding a way to dampen, or eliminate the negative impact.

Are there factors with higher potential for ripple effects?

Which factors, if changed, would ripple throughout the system based on causal links and reinforcing loop?

What strikes you as prevalent?

Which factors are you seeing appear over and over again, across loops, conversations and analyses?

Source: Donella Meadows, Leverage Points

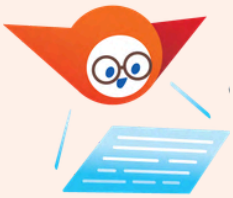


Food for Thought Questions
in Developing Complexity Mastery

- **How well am I recognising and responding to emerging patterns in our complex system?**
- **In what ways am I helping others understand and work with systemic interdependencies?**
- **How effectively am I balancing the need for structure with the need for flexibility in complex situations?**
- **To what extent am I considering both short-term actions and long-term systemic implications?**
- **How am I helping the organisation develop its capacity to thrive in complexity rather than seeking simple solutions?**

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

03

Systems Leadership in Action

3.1 Five Roles of a Systems Leader

As our operating context becomes increasingly complex, with rapid social changes, evolving community needs, and technological disruptions, PA leaders must **transform from traditional managers** to **systems leaders** who can catalyse systemic change.



This chapter introduces **five essential leadership roles** that will help you navigate these challenges effectively.

This transformation involves embracing five distinct yet interconnected leadership roles that enable us to navigate complexity while building sustainable community impact.

These roles represent not just new skills to acquire, but fundamentally different ways of seeing and being in our organisational ecosystem.

OVERCOMING COGNITIVE BLINDNESS

To understand this better, consider the famous **invisible gorilla experiment**. In this study, participants focused on counting basketball passes often failed to notice a person in a **gorilla suit walking** through the scene.



Scan to watch the video on the *Invisible Gorilla Experiment*

This demonstration of **selective attention** and **cognitive blindness** illustrates why traditional approaches may cause us to miss critical systemic elements.

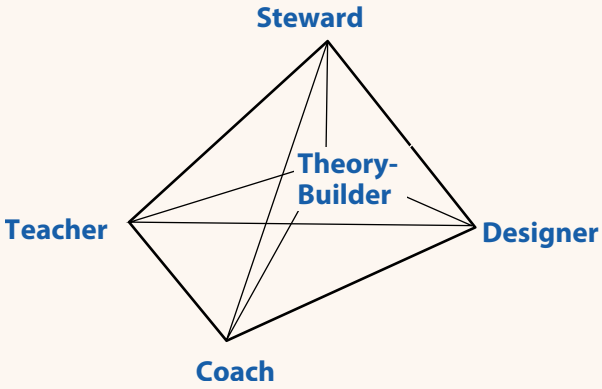
Once again, as systems leaders, we must

- Maintain **broad awareness** rather than tunnel vision
- Question their own **assumptions and perceptual limitations**
- Remain **open to unexpected or overlooked elements** in complex situations

Understanding the Five Roles of A Systems Leader

There are **five key roles** of a systems leader:

Steward, Designer, Teacher, Coach and Theory Builder.



Leader as a Steward



- Serves as guardian of the organisation's purpose and vision
- Takes responsibility for long-term system health
- Balances current needs with future sustainability
- Makes decisions considering whole system impacts
- Acts as custodian of organisational values

Leader as a Designer



- Creates frameworks for effective system operation
- Develops interventions that address root causes
- Builds learning mechanisms into the system
- Designs environments that support desired outcomes
- Shapes organisational structures and processes

Leader as a Teacher



- Helps others understand system dynamics
- Shares knowledge and mental models
- Develops others' capacity to see patterns
- Explains complex relationships simply
- Builds systemic awareness across the organisation

Leader as a Coach



- Provides feedback and guidance
- Supports individual and team development
- Helps people navigate system complexity
- Develops leadership capabilities in others
- Enables learning through reflection and practice

Leader as a Theory Builder



- Builds knowledge about what works and why
- Tests and refines mental models
- Develops frameworks for understanding system behaviour
- Creates hypotheses about cause and effect
- Contributes to collective understanding of systems

These roles **complement each other,** enabling leaders to both understand and influence complex systems while developing others' capabilities to do the same.

FIVE TIPS FOR SYSTEMS LEADERS

Role Intergration



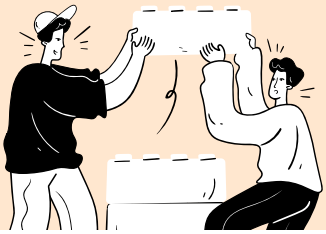
- Start each day identifying primary role needed
- Practice role flexibility
- Build support systems for each role
- Document role effectiveness
- Seek balanced application

Sustainability



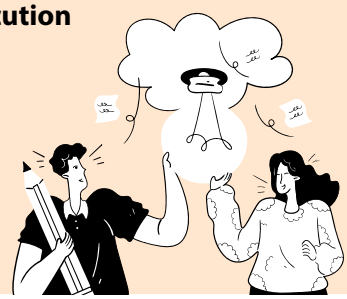
- Build organisational capacity
- Develop successors
- Create support systems
- Document learning
- Share knowledge

Capacity Building



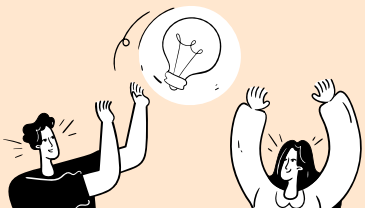
- Develop role-specific skills
- Seek feedback regularly
- Create learning opportunities
- Build support networks
- Share experiences

Execution



- Start with small experiments
- Build on successes
- Learn from failures
- Adjust approaches
- Scale effectively

Mindset Development



- Embrace complexity
- Practice reflection
- Challenge assumptions

By embracing these five tips, systems leaders can navigate complexity and create meaningful, long-lasting change.

With the right approach, you can lead in a way that not only addresses immediate challenges but also sets the stage for future success.

Stay committed to growth, remain open to new perspectives, and continue shaping a better, more resilient future.

3.2 Habits of a Systems Thinker

Seeks to understand the big picture



Observes patterns and trends



Recognises how a system causes its behaviour



Identifies cause and effect relationships



Makes connections within and between systems



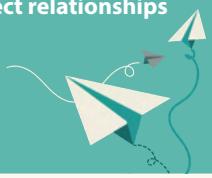
Changes perspectives to increase understanding



Surfaces and tests assumptions



Recognises impact of time delays in cause and effect relationships



Resists making quick conclusions



Considers how mental models affect current reality and future



Finds leverage points to change a system



Finds unintended consequences



Pays attention to accumulations and rates of change



Checks results and changes action if needed



3.3 Next Steps: From Learning to Action

In summary, the journey toward effective community building requires more than just implementing programmes and measuring immediate outcomes.



As PA navigates increasingly complex social landscapes, we must **shift from traditional management** approaches to a more **holistic understanding** of how different elements interact and influence each other.

PA Systems Leadership Journey

In PA, our Systems Leadership journey is guided by a simple framework for organisational learning. The purpose of this framework is to help us not only act effectively in the present but also **build the capacity** for **enduring change** over time.

This framework rests on **two complementary domains**. Each addresses a different but equally important aspect of how organisations transform:

- **The Domain of Action,** also known as **Organisational Architecture** (represented by the **triangle)**

  This domain focuses on the visible structures, strategies, and practices we put in place to achieve results.

- **The Domain of Enduring Change**, also known as the **Deep Learning Cycle** (represented by the **circle**)

  This domain focuses on the invisible shifts in mindsets, attitudes, and capabilities that sustain transformation.

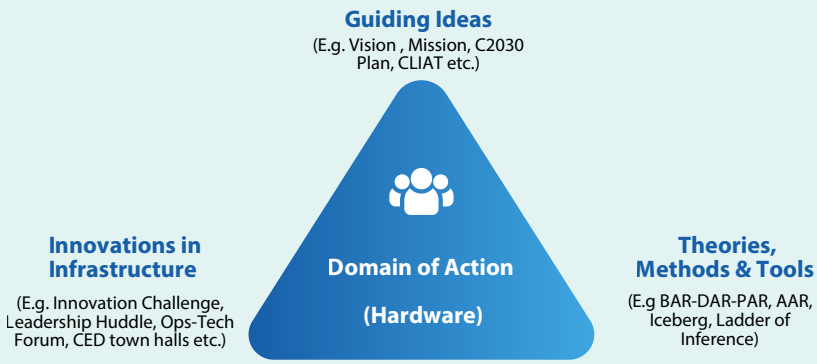
The **triangle** gives us the structures to act, while the **circle** gives us the fuel to sustain change. Both are needed to make transformation lasting.

In the following pages, we will:

1. Take a closer look at **each domain** and what it entails.
2. Explore **how they interact** through causal loops, reinforcing one another.
3. See how the **full framework** comes together as PA's approach to Systems Leadership and organisational learning.

DOMAIN OF ACTION AND DOMAIN OF ENDURING CHANGE

The Domain of Action (Organisational Architecture)

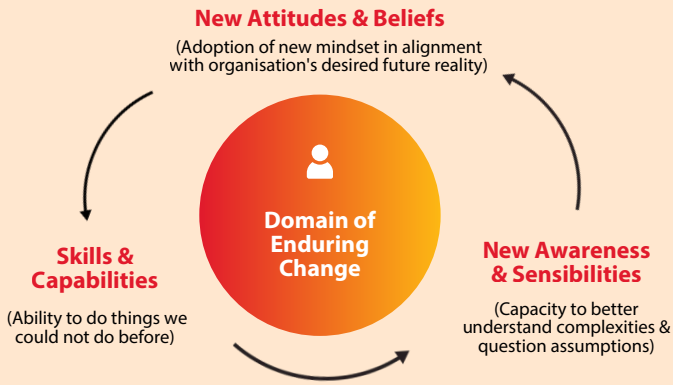


The Domain of Action is about the visible side of change: the concrete structures, tools, and processes that shape what we do. It answers the question: *"What will we do and put into place to achieve the results we desire?"*

This domain consists of

- **Guiding Ideas:** Our vision, mission, Community 2030 plan
- **Theories, Methods & Tools:** Before Action Review-During Action Review-Post Action Review (BAR-DAR-PAR), After Action Review (AAR), Iceberg, Ladder of Inference
- **Innovations in Infrastructure:** Innovation Challenge, Leadership Huddle, Ops-Tech Forum, and CED townhalls

The Domain of Enduring Change (Deep Learning Cycle)



The Domain of Enduring Change is about the invisible side of transformation: the shifts in how people think, feel, and grow as they engage in the work. It answers the question: *"How do we pursue our goals in a way that touches people's hearts and minds?"*

This domain shows up through

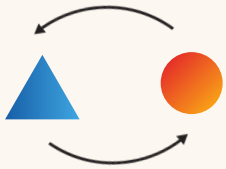
- **New Skills & Capabilities:** Developing the ability to do things we couldn't do before
- **New Awareness & Sensibilities:** Building capacity to better understand complexities and question assumptions
- **New Attitudes & Beliefs:** Adopting new mindsets in alignment with our desired future reality

HOW DO THE TWO DOMAINS INTERACT?

On their own, each domain has its strengths, but lasting transformation only happens when they work together. Let's explore how they interact.

Recap: Linking back to Causal Loops

The **two domains** work together like a **causal loop**. This can be thought of as a **car engine** that needs both **hardware** and **fuel** to keep moving forward.



Domain of Action (Organisational Architecture)

- This is like the **hardware** of the car – the engine, wheels, and frame.
- ***Visible* structures and actions** that get us moving and produce results.
- Without it, nothing starts.
- E.g. Innovation, tools, methods

Domain of Enduring Change (Deep Learning Cycle)

- This like the **fuel** that keeps the engine running smoothly on the long journey.
- ***Invisible* structures** inside people, their **mindsets**, how they think, feel, and grow as they do the work.

Just like an engine, **both parts** need to **work together**. The **triangle (engine hardware)** makes the car move, but without the **circle (fuel)**, the car will eventually stall. Having only fuel without hardware won't get you anywhere.

Together, they form a **feedback loop**: **actions (engine) lead to results**, which feed into **learning (fuel)**, which then **strengthens future actions**.

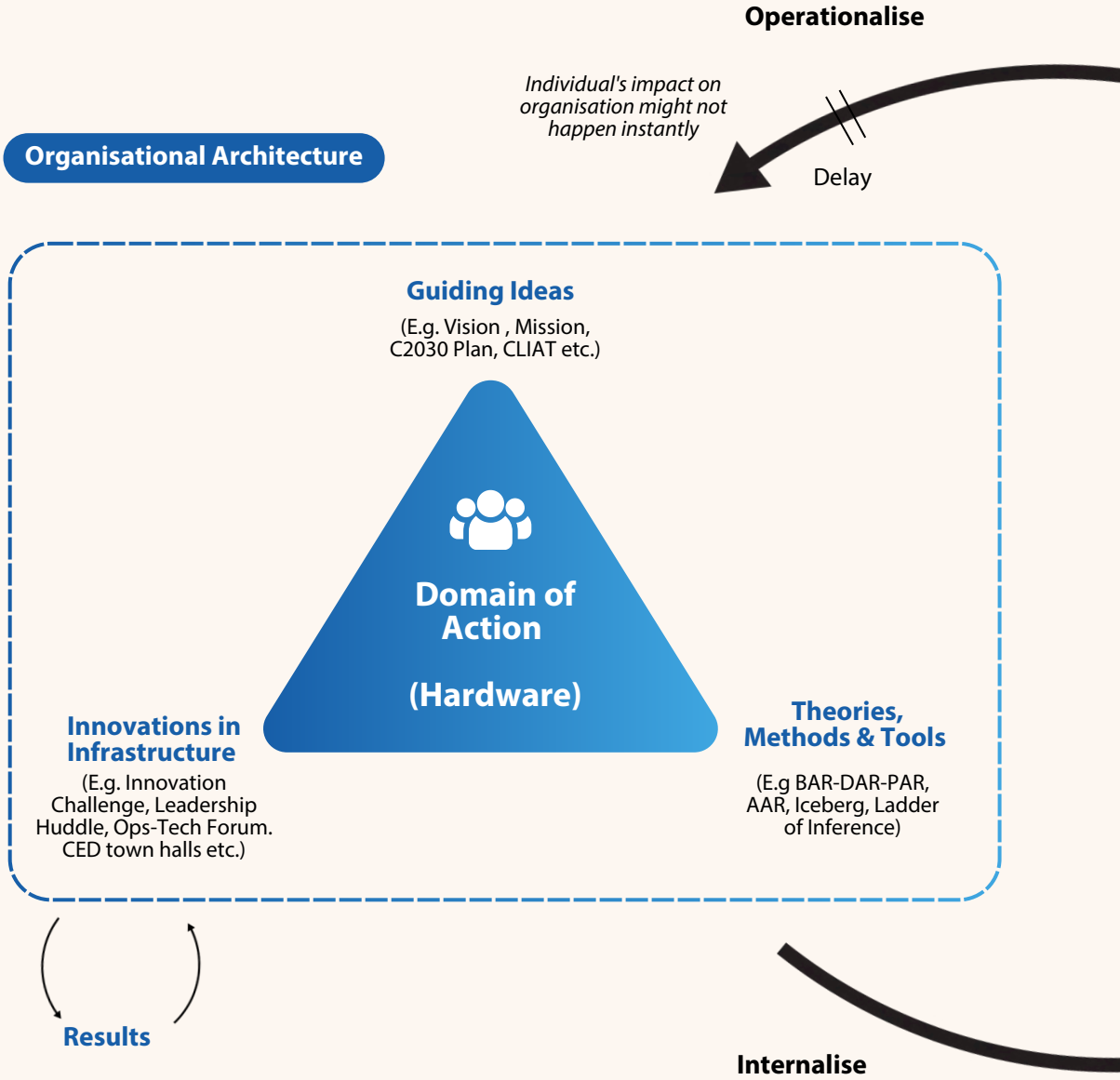
The relationship between the two key domains is illustrated in the framework in the following page.

Guiding Framework for PA's Organisational Learning Journey

The Guiding Framework for PA's Organisational Learning Journey is a framework that PA adopts to guide us towards more sustainable transformation effort.

Domain of Action (Organisational Structure)

Domain of Enduring Change (Deep Learning Cycle)





Deep Learning Cycle

New Attitudes & Beliefs

(Adoption of new mindset in alignment with organisation's desired future reality)

Domain of Enduring Change

(Heartware)

New Awareness & Sensibilities

(Capacity to better understand complexities & question assumptions)

Skills & Capabilities

(Ability to do things we could not do before)

Delay

Organisation's impact on individual might not happen instantly

Example of Application of Framework | Systems Leadership Programme

We can illustrate the use of this framework through the experience of the **Systems Leadership Programme** that was organised by NACLI and HR.

The Domain of Action (Organisational Architecture)



- Guided by PA's vision, mission, our C2030 plan and our vision towards becoming a Learning Organisation, NACLI & HR put in place innovations in infrastructure
- Organised **Systems Leadership Training** for nominated PA senior leaders and a core group of NACLI facilitators
- Equipped them with **theories and methods** such as Creative Tension Model, Levels of Perspectives and Hierarchy of Choices
- Allowed them to lead the change efforts towards creating the PA's desired future

Operationalise

Delay

The Domain of Enduring Change (Deep Learning Cycle)



- While the Domain of Action takes place at the organisational level, the Domain of Enduring Change takes place at the **individual level**
- As the participants go through the training programme, they learnt **new skills** such as ability to diagnose issues and identify interventions using **causal loops**
- Through their reflections, they gained new awareness and sensibilities such as the capacity to see **interconnections and interdependence** across PA divisions and developed **new attitudes** and beliefs such as a more open and collaborative mindset

Delay

Internalise

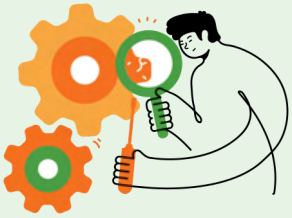
At the organisational level, within the Domain of Action, **additional innovations in infrastructure** may be implemented to support the new skills and capabilities.

Due to a **time delay between internalisation** and **operationalisation** of these new learnings, it will take some time before the impact to PA's work can be observed.

MOVING FORWARD: IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP IN PA

The journey of Systems Leadership is continuous and evolving. As you complete this playbook, consider these structured steps to translate learning into meaningful action:

01 Personal Development Plan



- Imagine your future as a Systems Leader, based on the five leadership roles
- Pause and reflect on where you are at
- Based on your Vision and your Current Reality, identify the goals to bring you closer to your vision
- Identify the potential obstacles and interventions
- Build your routine to form habits that can lead you to your vision
- Set timeline for development

02 Team Implementation



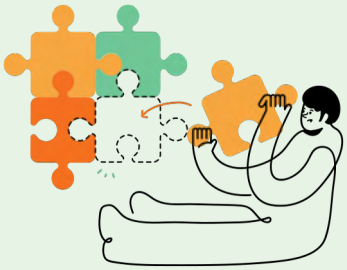
- Share key learnings with your team
- Identify team-level opportunities
- Create safe spaces for experimentation
- Build collective capability
- Establish feedback mechanisms

03 Organisational Intergration



- Align with PA's strategic priorities
- Identify pilot projects for implementation
- Create supporting structures and processes
- Develop measurement frameworks
- Build organisational capability

04 Community Application



- Identify opportunities for systemic intervention
- Design collaborative initiatives
- Build community capability
- Measure community impact

Continuing the Journey

Remember that Systems Leadership is not a destination but a journey of continuous learning and adaptation.



As you implement these learnings:

- Stay curious and open to learning
- Embrace complexity and uncertainty
- Build collaborative relationships
- Share your learning journey
- Contribute to collective knowledge

CLOSING QUESTIONS

01 What key insights will you take forward?

02 How will you apply these learnings in your context?

03 What support do you need for success?

04 How will you measure progress?

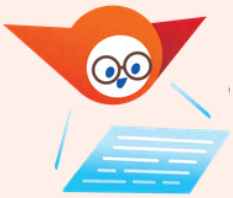
05 What are you committed to practise in the next 3 months, 6 months, 12 months to be a better systems leader?

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS





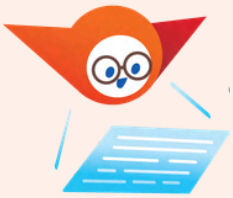
NOTES & REFLECTIONS

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





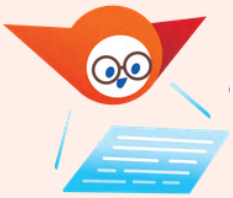
NOTES & REFLECTIONS

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS





NOTES & REFLECTIONS

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS



NOTES & REFLECTIONS





Your journey begins here. If not now, when?

This playbook opens the door to new possibilities.

Your Systems Leadership journey begins here, where every step forward helps create lasting systemic change.

Your contribution is essential in transforming PA's approach to the future of communities in Singapore.

Start where you are, use what you have, and take that first step today.

REFERENCES

Ackoff, R. L. (1989). From data to wisdom. Journal of Applied Systems Analysis, 16(1), 3–9.

Ackoff, R. L. (1999). Ackoff's best: His classic writings on management. John Wiley & Sons.

Argyris, C. (1977). Double loop learning in organizations. Harvard Business Review, 55(5), 115–125.

Argyris, C. (1994). Teaching smart people how to learn. Harvard Business Review, 72(3), 99–109.

Bennett, N., & Lemoine, G. J. (2014). What VUCA really means for you. Harvard Business Review, 92(1/2), 27.

Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter. Berrett-Koehler.

Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & The World Café Community. (2001). The World Café: Living knowledge through conversations that matter. Fielding Institute.

Coll, J. M. (2022). Systems leadership for sustainability. Springer.

Fritz, R. (1989). The path of least resistance: Learning to become the creative force in your own life. Fawcett Columbine.

Ghate, D., Lewis, J., & Welbourn, D. (2013). Systems leadership: Exceptional leadership for exceptional times. Virtual Staff College.

Harvard Kennedy School. (2019). Systems leadership for sustainable development. Harvard University.

Harvey, J. B. (1988). The Abilene paradox and other meditations on management. Jossey-Bass.

Hutchens, D. (1999). Shadows of the Neanderthal: A learning fable of survival. Pegasus Communications.

Johnson, S. (1998). Who moved my cheese? G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Kantor, D. (2012). Reading the room: Group dynamics for coaches and leaders. Jossey-Bass.

Kim, D. H. (1992). Systems archetypes I. Pegasus Communications.

Kim, D. H. (1999). Introduction to Systems Thinking: Growing a systems thinker. Pegasus Communications.

REFERENCES

Kim, D. H. (2001). Organising for learning: Strategies for knowledge creation and enduring change. Pegasus Communications.

Kim, D. H. (2002). Foresight as the central ethic of leadership: Creating meaningful growth in a complex world. The Systems Thinker, 13(5), 1–5.

Kim, D. H., & Anderson, V. (1998). Systems archetype basics: From story to structure. Pegasus Communications.

Martin, R. (2007). The opposable mind: How successful leaders win through integrative thinking. Harvard Business School Press.

Meadows, D. H. (2008). Thinking in systems: A primer. Chelsea Green Publishing.

Mogan, T. (2024). Peter Senge and learning organisations: A path to growth and success. The Systems Thinker.

Senge, P. M., Hamilton, H., & Kania, J. (2015). The dawn of system leadership. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 13(1), 27–33.

Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., & Smith, B. J. (1990). The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organisation. Doubleday.

SIM Academy. (2023). Systems leadership capabilities framework [Internal document].

Last updated November 2025

National Community Leadership Institute
70 South Buona Vista Road Singapore 118176
Tel 6672 5200 | www.pa.gov.sg/nacli

 # learnwithnacli **@naclisg**