Systems Thinking - BREAKOUT

BREAKOUT - Leading Change in Early Childhood Education as a Systems Thinker
DESCRIPTION – In this breakout, we delve deep into the practice and adoption of the Habits of a Systems Thinker and apply those Habits and systems thinking tools to leadership at state-level early childhood.
OBJECTIVES – As a result of the session participants will: • Recognize elements of complex systems relevant to state-level work • Identify patterns and trends and causal relationships within your work • Begin to identify possible leverage actions that will move your system toward positive change • Practice and be able to apply systems thinking techniques post Roundtable to state-level leadership and change management
Key concepts • Leading change as a systems thinker is not a solo endeavor • Deep understanding of the system at multiple levels maximizes the identification of high leverage actions • Becoming a systems thinker takes intentional practice • Awareness of mental models, where they come from and how they influence the way people think and act is essential practice of a systems thinker
BRIEF AGENDA ▪ 15 mins – Overview and Check-in ▪ 20 mins – Intro exercise and debrief: “Avalanche” ▪ 30 mins – Systems mapping tools applied to state-level ESSA early childhood provisions ▪ 20 mins – Diving deeper into mental models: “Mindful listening exercise” ▪ 5 mins – Iceberg as a framework for intentional practice (action commitments)

Goal: As a team working together, your goal is to lower the pole to the floor.

Rules:
You can only support the pole with the top of one finger per person.

You absolutely must not lose contact with the pole at anytime.

If you lose contact with the pole, raise your free hand and your group must start over.

DEBRIEF

What happened during this exercise?

What contributed to your team's success?

What got in your way?

Where have you seen examples of this sort of behavior in your own team or organization?

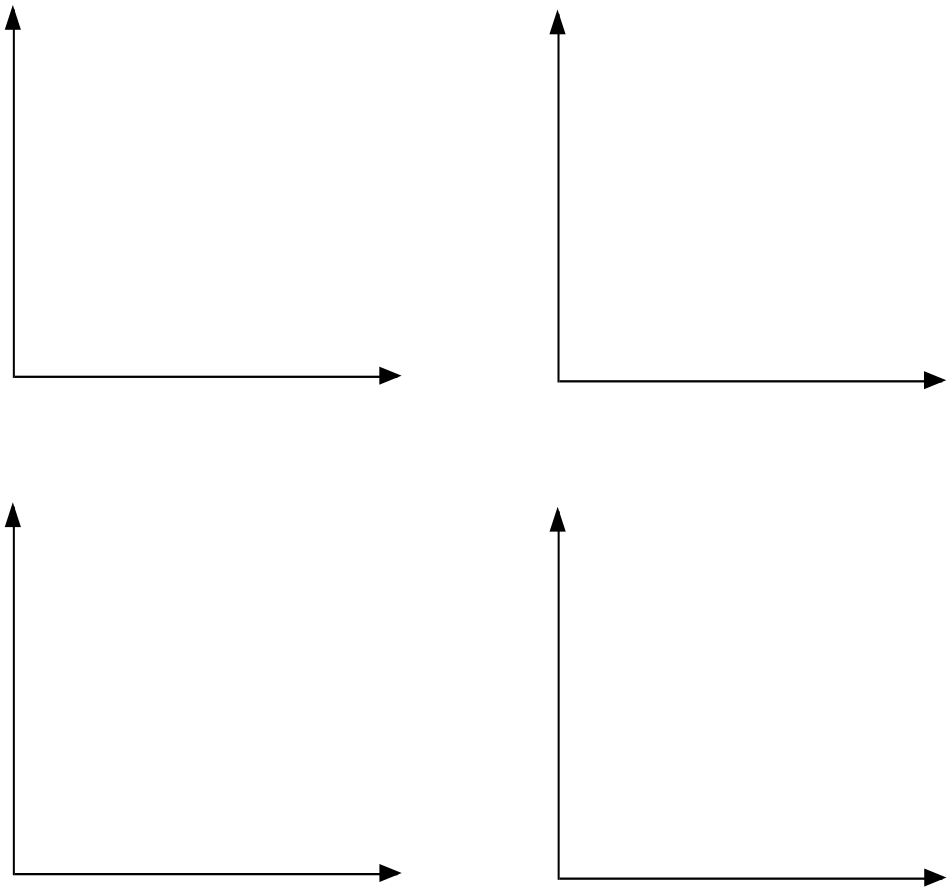
What connections can you make between this exercise and your state-level work?

Key Avalanche Takeaway:
Be aware of the counterintuitive nature of complex systems. When a system has many interconnections, it becomes difficult to anticipate the consequences of a decision or an event.

Behavior-Over-Time Graphs:

What is changing over time?

How are the essential elements changing?



Some sample questions to ask when identifying parts of a system that change over time:

- What important elements have changed over time?
- How has _____ changed over time?
- During what period of time have the changes occurred?
- Where on the y-axis should the graph start and why?
- How would you label the bottom/middle/top of the y-axis?
- What evidence supports the graph being created?

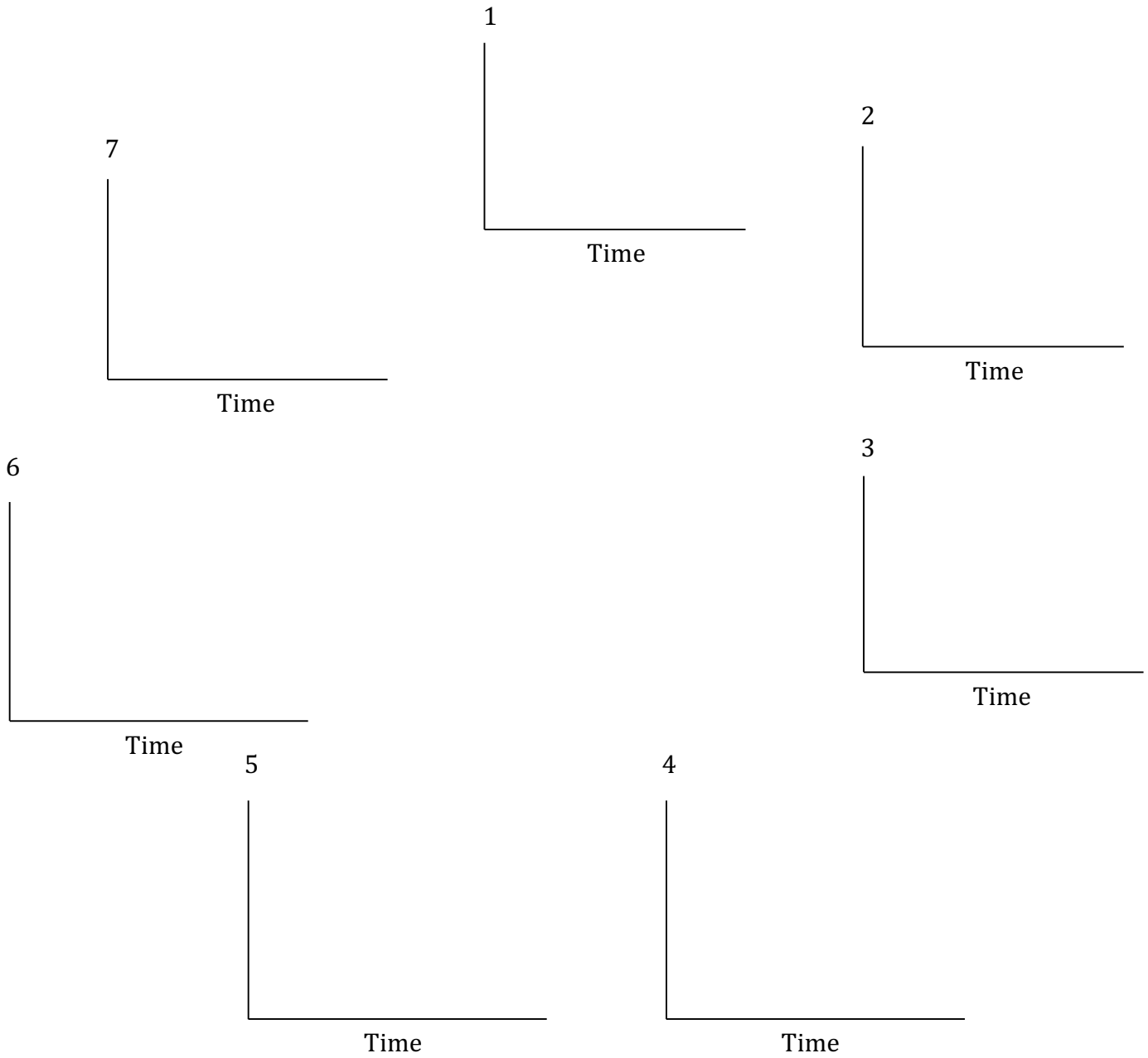
Questions to consider once BOTGs have been created:

- What caused any changes in direction or slope?
- How are interpretations of a graphed element the same or different?
- What changes may happen in the future based on what has been happening?
- Do you see any connections (interdependencies or causal relationships) between/among graphs?

Connection Circle Practice

- Choose a priority from your state's ESSA early childhood provisions (program, initiative or change in practice) with which you have been involved.
- Identify 5-7 aspects of that initiative that has or will change over the course of implementation.

  Choose elements of the situation that satisfy all of these criteria:
  - They contribute to the issue.
  - They are nouns or noun phrases.
  - They increase or decrease in the scenario.
- Draw graphs that represent the change over time for each aspect.
- Draw connection arrows from one aspect to another, indicating whether the change in one aspect was the same (s,+) or the opposite (o,-) as the change in the other.
- Be prepared to share the story of your diagram and any insights that the diagram produces.



Mindful Listening Exercise

PURPOSE: Enables a group of people to intentionally listen to one another in a manner that increases understanding and empathy. It is a dynamic process that brings out deep levels of reflection and sharing of thoughts and feelings. There is no judgement or criticism. Look for the emergence of new viewpoint, possibilities and broader perspectives. Mindful listening contributes to your understanding of complex systems.

GROUP SIZE: Recommended 4 participants – sit facing each other / knee to knee

PROCEDURE: Each participant will have 1-2 minutes to answer the question posed. There is no discussion, comment, or questioning. Each person will be timed. At the end of each answer posed – the entire group will take two deep breaths. Time will then be called for next participant. Proceed through entire group.

NORMS FOR SPEAKING & LISTENING

- Speak only when it is your turn
- While speaking, avoid generalizations and try to respond to questions with specifics
- Listen without judgement
- Refrain from commenting
- Follow confidentiality if that is an agreed-upon expectation

DEBRIEF:
Individual reflection – think about what you heard, the new views and the perspectives presented.
Consider how what you heard impacts your own learning and understanding of your leadership role.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What ways am I influencing the implementation of our state ESSA provisions plan?
2. What am I doing to minimize and overcome current state challenges?
3. What are expectations I have for myself and others as we lead this work?
4. How is the past a barrier to the future?

FOLLOWUP: Habits of a Systems Thinker cards

Based on what you heard during the exercsie, choose 5 Habits of Systems Thinker that would be beneficial for your state work. Think about how you can introduce, share and promote these thinking habits with others post-conference.

Iceberg... Seeing What's Below the Surface

Learning

What is seen

Events

What happened?

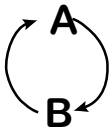
Patterns of Behavior

What is generally unseen

What's been happening?
What are the trends?
What changes have occurred?

Leverage

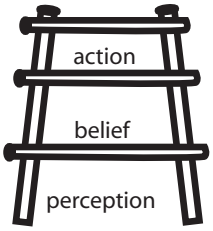
Structure of the System

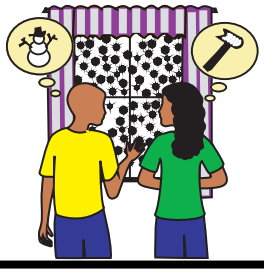


What has influenced the patterns?
(e.g. policies, laws, physical structures)
What are the relationships among the parts?

Mental Models

What assumptions, beliefs, and values do people hold about the system?





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