EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SYSTEMS THINKING*
BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

NAEYC Professional Learning Institute  June 3, 2019  Jana Martella  Tom Rendon  Diane Schilder
Session Description

Nothing happens in early childhood except in a system. That system has profound influence on whether what happens is successful and supportive of children ... or is not.

But too few early childhood professionals understand how early childhood systems work at the local, state or national level.

This session provides a primer on systems thinking and systems leadership, and how these concepts apply to early childhood systems. Through simple explanations and focused discussion, this session will help you become more adept at understanding how best to operate within your system.
Session Objectives

1. understand the key terms of systems thinking (what is a system? what is system building? what is system thinking? what difference does thinking in systems make?)

2. learn where you are in the system, and why it's a beautiful day in your neighborhood (if you only knew your neighbors)

3. practice the fine arts of system leadership
Session Overview

Definitions
What our system looks like
Using system thinking and leadership for system improvement
B-5 Early Childhood State System. -- The term “B-5 Early Childhood State System” refers to core early childhood care and education programs, including the Child Care and Development Fund and State child care, which may include center-based, family child care, and informal care providers, Early Head Start and Head Start, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, and other State or locally funded home visiting services, Part C and Section 619 of Part B of IDEA, State preschool programs, and programs funded by Title I of the ESEA. In addition, it also includes a wide range of early childhood care and education programs and services that strengthen, engage, and stabilize families and their infants and young children including supports that target health and wellness, such as Medicaid, the Children's' Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Title V Maternal and Child Health Programs, Healthy Start, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the infrastructure components that support these programs and services. (p. 7; emphasis added)
Mixed delivery system. -- The term “mixed delivery system,” as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pub. L. 114-95, Section 9212(b)(5), means a system of early childhood care and education services that are delivered through a combination of programs, providers, and settings, such as Head Start, licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, and other community-based organizations, that is supported by a combination of public and private funds. (p. 8; emphasis added)
What is a system?

**DEFINITION:** a set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole.
What is system building?

The ongoing process of developing the structures, behaviors, and connections that make all the components of an early childhood system operate as a whole to promote shared results for children and families. System-building is dynamic and can occur in fits and starts or double back and start over.
What is system-thinking?

A transformational approach to learning, problem-solving and understanding the world. Systems thinking helps people see beyond the heart of a problem to find fair and lasting solutions that deliver benefits.

About seeing life in motion, recognizing that the big picture is rarely static, but almost always a web of factors that interact to create patterns and change over time.

Adapted from https://www.watersfoundation.org/systems-thinking-tools-and-strategies/what-is-systems-thinking/
Where am I?

Finding yourself in the system.
Your system...any system is perfectly designed to produce the results you are obtaining.

(Adapted from Carr, 2008)
Figure One. Six Key Strategies to Improve the Functioning of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

Define & Coordinate Leadership
Recruit & Engage Stakeholders
Finance Strategically

Early Learning & Development
Outcome: Thriving Children & Families
Family Leadership & Support

Health
Ensure Accountability
Create & Support Improvement Strategies
Enhance & Align Standards

WHAT WE THINK THE SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE

FIGURE 1-1 The complex landscape that affects children ages 0-8.
The Big Picture

Seeks to understand the "big picture"

Iceberg... Seeing What's Below the Surface

Events
What happened?

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

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?
Fixing the System
Addressing challenges
What are challenges we face as an early childhood system?
What is system-thinking?

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Habits of Systems Thinkers
Analyze your challenge through a specific system thinking lens.
System Narratives

Fixes that backfire
Shifting the burden
Limits to growth
Success to the successful
Accidental adversaries

SYSTEM NARRATIVE: Fixes that backfire

SYSTEM NARRATIVE: Shifting the burden

SYSTEM NARRATIVE: Limits to growth


**FIGURE 4.6 LIMITS TO GROWTH.** Limits to Growth is the story of growth inevitably constrained by limits that must be overcome in order to sustain success. Innovation Associates Organizational Learning.
SYSTEM NARRATIVE: Success to the successful

FIGURE 4.7 SUCCESS TO THE SUCCESSFUL. Success to the Successful explains how one party’s success and another party’s failure can be so closely linked. Innovation Associates Organizational Learning

SYSTEM NARRATIVE: Accidental adversaries

Getting unstuck: What we need to know before we can address the challenges?

BAR/T

Boundaries
Authority
Roles

_________

Tasks
Think about a group, team or committee you sit on. What is your BAR/T?
System Leadership
Leading change at a system level
How to address challenges?
System level approaches*

- Technical vs. Adaptive Leadership
- Managers vs. Leaders
- System Thinking Habits
- BAR/T
- System Scenarios

APPLYING LEADERSHIP APPROACHES
ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP – The challenges we face

Technical Challenges
- Know-how currently exists
- Requires authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures to solve

Adaptive Challenges
- Solution not currently available
- Requires innovation/experimentation, new discoveries, adjustments on multiple levels
- Risk and courage involved as uncertainty and resistance is encountered
- Solved by the people experiencing the problem

1. What kind of challenge it is? Technical or adaptive?
2. Depending on the kind of challenge it is: what does a technical vs an adaptive approach tell you about how you should solve this problem?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGERS</th>
<th>LEADERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administer</td>
<td>Innovate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask how and when</td>
<td>Ask what and why</td>
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<td>Focus on systems</td>
<td>Focus on people</td>
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<td>Do things right</td>
<td>Do the right things</td>
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<td>Maintain</td>
<td>Develop</td>
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<td>Rely on control</td>
<td>Inspire trust</td>
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<td>Have short-term perspective</td>
<td>Have long-term perspective</td>
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<td>Accept the status quo</td>
<td>Challenge the status quo</td>
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<td>Eye the bottom line</td>
<td>Eye the horizon</td>
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<td>Imitate</td>
<td>Originate</td>
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<td>Emulate the classic good</td>
<td>Are their own person</td>
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"The best way to optimize the system is to improve the relationships among its parts, not to optimize each part separately."

--David Peter Stroh, Systems Thinking for Social Change
“All real living is meeting.”

--Martin Buber, I and Thou
We can’t do this alone...

Watch this video here:
https://youtu.be/YRX2y46fHXE
THANK YOU! – MORE INFORMATION

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