Introduction to Systems Thinking for Early Childhood Leaders

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How We Will Work Together

- Be present
- Encourage participation of others
- Speak your truth without judgment or blame
- Be open to new perspectives
- Seek clarification

What we Remember:

- 90% what we SAY (e.g., speaking, shouting, reading)
- 30% what we DO (e.g., interacting, organizing, building)
- 10% what we HEAR (e.g., listening, watching, hearing)
- 5% what we SEE (e.g., looking, reading, observing)
- 1% what we READ (e.g., reading a book, an article, a blogpost)

Based on the work of Edgar Dale

@epiindustries
System Simulation*
The challenge of “seeing” systems

*Adapted from the Systems Thinking Playbook, by Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows

Observers
What did you observe during the simulation?
What rules or policies were in place to generate the dynamics you observed?
How challenging was it to understand the system just by observing it?

Participants
What did you notice during the simulation?
What was your experience like as a participant in this activity?
How was this activity like a system?

Who in the simulation had the most influence? Why?

Levels of System Complexity

Image credit: @JeppeHangaard @Innovisorinc
Characteristics of Systems

- Parts
- Relationships (Interconnections among the parts)
- Dynamics
- Goals

A system is a collection of elements that interact with each other over time to function as a whole.

Systems in Your Life

- Well-being
- Family
- Workplace
- School
- Community

Choose one and describe how it is a system.

Homework tab: Practice the Habit p. 6
And now it’s time to look at your work place system. Consider the 4 system elements below:

Name 4 important elements/parts that are in your system.

What are 2 changes your system is currently experiencing?

What are 3 other systems your system interacts with?

Describe 1 goal or purpose of your system.

Share your system with a partner.

What is systems thinking?

Systems thinking is a way of seeing the world that focuses on relationships that exist between system parts. The structures that define the relationships determine the behavior of the system. The behaviors of systems are viewed as patterns or trends that unfold over time versus a series of discrete events. It is a way of thinking and a language for describing how things work.
The importance of a System View

A Leader is one who influences.

Adapted from S. Covey
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Influential Leadership Positions

Top Leaders have overall responsibility for some segment of the organization or some organizational function, whether as division head, project manager, team leader, instructor, and so on.

Bottom Leaders have limited control over the resources needed to move projects or initiatives forward, yet have a unique perspective of the system that may be essential to surface when making decisions and taking action.
Middle Leaders attempt to function between the conflicting needs, demands, and priorities of others. They, too, have unique perspectives that are key in contributing to system understanding.

Most likely you are all of these.

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What is a ...?

Farmer

Teacher
What is a Systems Thinker?

Habits of a Systems Thinker

First forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit is persistence in practice.

Octavia Butler, Award winning author

What are your strengths and challenges?

Quickly review each card and make 3 piles:

1. Strengths
   Habits you practice regularly

2. Growth Areas
   Habits that need more practice

3. Don't understand
   "I have no idea what this is about."

Choose 2 of your strength Habits and be ready to tell a story of how you practiced those Habits recently.
Habits of a Systems Thinker
Self-Assessment for Individuals and in Group Settings

Mark exercise tab: p. 120-121

Habits Dialogue Walk
*Bring your cards*

Share your strengths and growth area Habits. Why did you choose these Habits? Which Habits are especially important to your early childhood leadership work?

*Systems ink*

Record some insights and reflections from your dialogue walk.
Revisit the goal or desired change you identified for your work system.

Which Habits of a Systems Thinker will be most important for you as a leader when working on this goal or desired change?

Share with a partner.

Think of a leader you know and admire

Example:
*It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Think about your leadership legacy. When people choose you as a leader they admire, which Habits would they identify as those you model and practice consistently?

Why systems thinking?
Systems thinking offers us a powerful new perspective, a specialized language, a series of Habits and a set of tools.
Your system... any system is perfectly designed to produce the results you are obtaining.
(Adapted from Carr, 2008)