Destination Community Collaboration

_____

Systems Change Requires Systems Thinking and Systems Leadership

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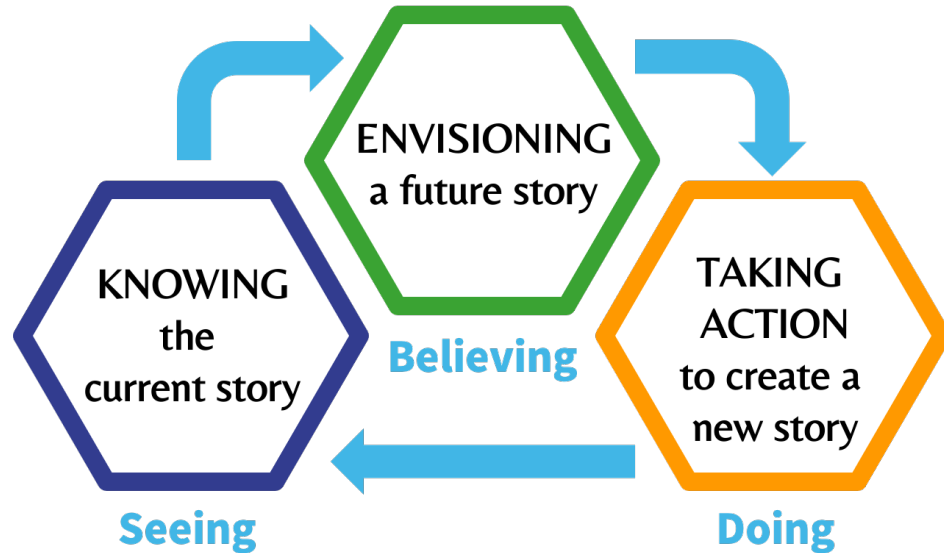
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Presentation Focus

- What are systems?
- The role of mental models
- The value of a systems approach
- Creating systems change
- Becoming a systems thinkers
- Systems leadership in collaboration
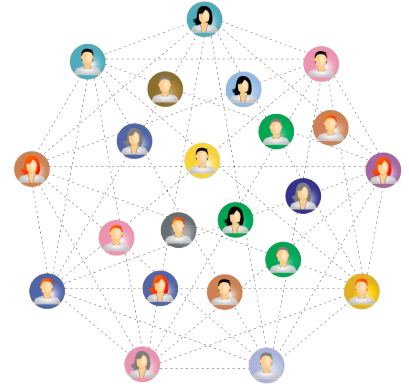
Engaging and supporting leaders through a journey

A SYSTEMS APPROACH IN COMMUNITIES

system NOUN

[1] : a regularly interacting
or interdependent group
of items forming a unified whole

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What is a system?

What are some examples of a system?

◇ **A vehicle**

◇ **The ecosystem of monarch butterflies**

◇ **A hospital**

◇ **A government**

◇ **A school**

◇ **The human body**

◇ **A home**

◇ **The banks**

◇ **Others….**

Four fundamentals re: systems

1. **Synthesis: Consider the whole and the parts at the same time. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.**

$$1 + 1 = 3$$

2.

3.

4.

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What is this?

https://www.insider.com/close-up-photos-everyday-objects-2018-11 | JUPER Communications, LLC. and Maximize NWMO | Communities of Excellence 2026

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Part of a Bell Pepper

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Four fundamentals re: systems

1. **Synthesis:** Consider the whole and the parts at the same time. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. **The parts have their own job but they communicate and react to the other parts of the whole. There are constant feedback loops.**

3.

4.

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Making Bread...EXAMPLE OF A SYSTEM

3

4

2

5

1

7

6

Four fundamentals re: systems

1. **Synthesis:** Consider the whole and the parts at the same time. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. The parts have their own job but they communicate and react to the other parts of the whole. There are constant **feedback loops**.

3. **The whole and parts are cyclical.**

4.

A Snapshot of a System

Sky Pond in Rocky Mountain National Park in the Summer and Winter

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Four fundamentals re: systems

1. **Synthesis:** Consider the whole and the parts at the same time. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. The parts have their own job but they communicate and react to the other parts of the whole. There are constant **feedback loops**.

3. The whole and parts are **cyclical**.

4. **The results of a system are created by shared mental models.**

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mental model NOUN

1 : what an individual believes they know about a system.

https://www.nngroup.com/articles/mental-models/

2 : explanation of how something works; overarching term for any sort of concept, framework, or worldviews that an individual has in their thoughts that help make sense of a situation.

https://jamesclear.com/mental-models

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An Example of Two Mental Models

Not Shared (UNALIGNED)

A Shared Mental Model

**Shared
(ALIGNED)**

Creating shared mental models

1. Ask question and stay curious about the answers.

2. Engage people with different knowledge of the parts to contribute their perspective and experience.

3. Express a learning attitude (growth mindset).

4. Integrate the perspectives and knowledge of each part with the intention of seeing how they fit together to create something unique – the system in which all parts exist.

community NOUN

¹ : can be defined in several ways that either promote inclusivity or polarization

² : geographic place that has a set of systems that must all function together to achieve optimal performance
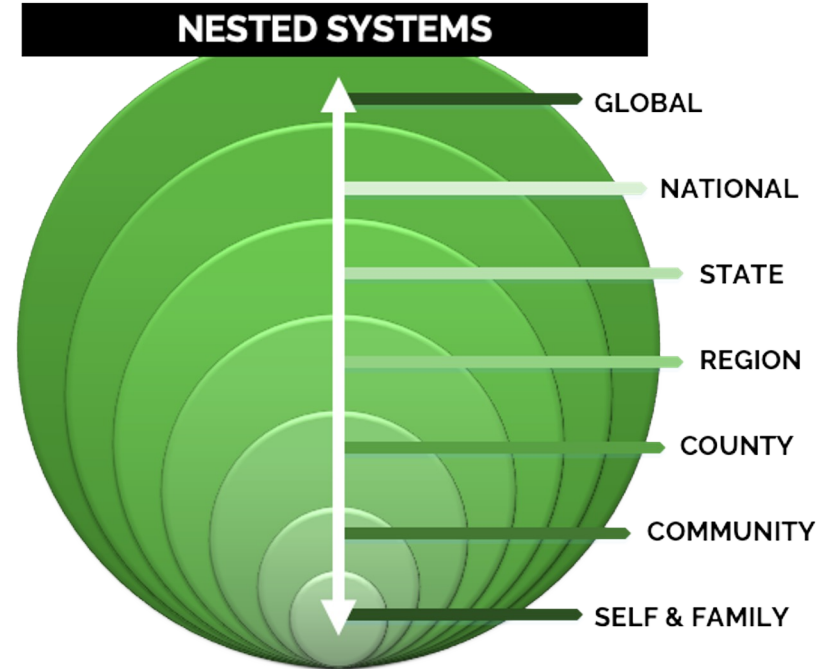
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Communities are Collaborative Systems or Networks
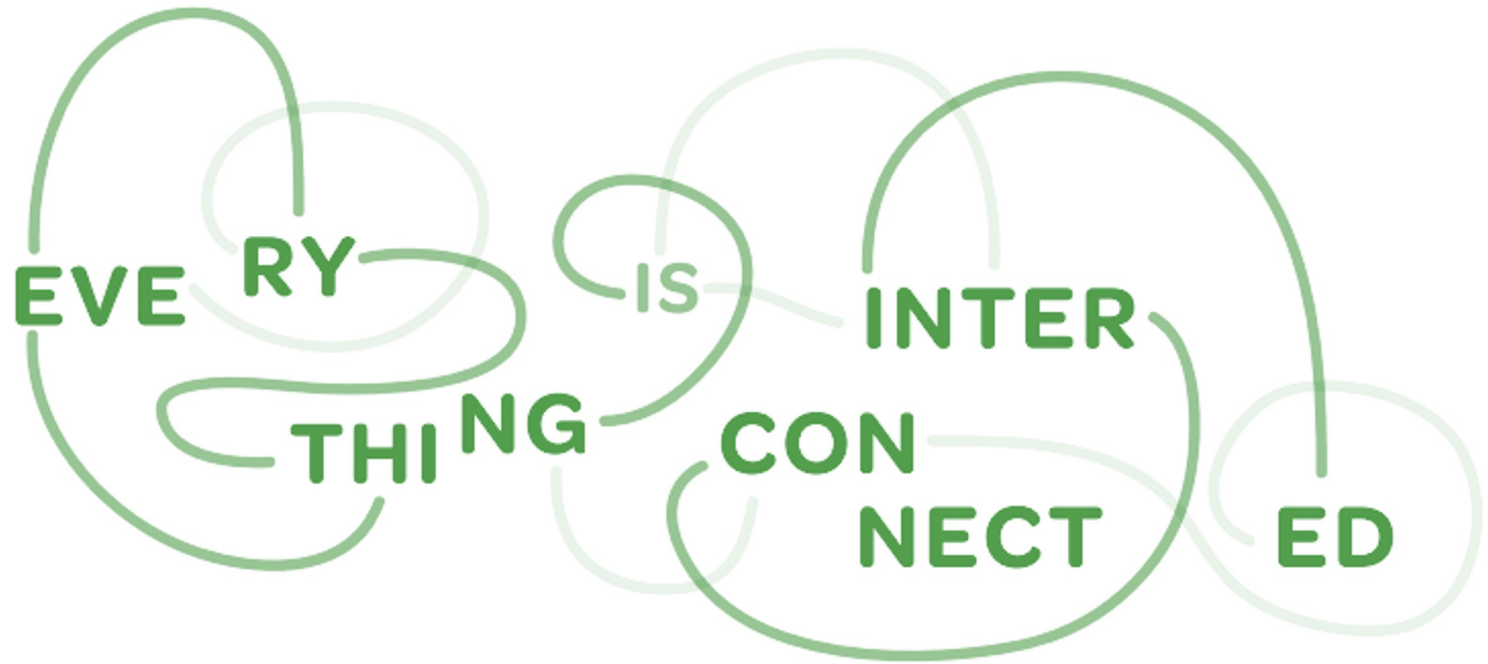
How many networks exist in these photos?

Community Systems are Nested

◇ **Systems exist inside systems**

◇ **Systems often replicate themselves**

◇ **Looking wider and deeper can be helpful in finding the root cause of a problem**

NESTED SYSTEMS

- GLOBAL
- NATIONAL
- STATE
- REGION
- COUNTY
- COMMUNITY
- SELF & FAMILY

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The point of all this systems talk

EVERYTHING IS INTERCONNECTED

Every system is interconnected

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⬡ What systems are you a part of in your community?

⬡ How do each of your systems interconnect?

Why a systems approach?

FOUNDATION STATEMENT

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"For America to sustain its vitality, promote opportunity, and create a more equitable society during its second 250 years of existence, we must improve the performance of communities and the people who lead and live in them."
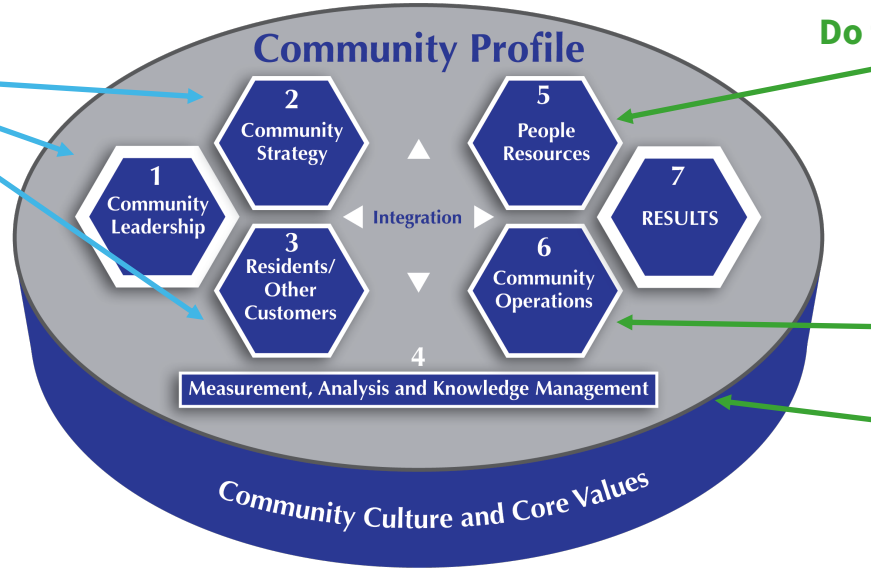
A Proven Systems Approach

Baldrige Adapted for Communities

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Framework

LEADERSHIP:
Do the right thing

MANAGEMENT:
Do things right

Community Profile

2 **Community Strategy**

5 **People Resources**

1 **Community Leadership**

◀ **Integration** ▶

7 **RESULTS**

3 **Residents/ Other Customers**

6 **Community Operations**

4
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management
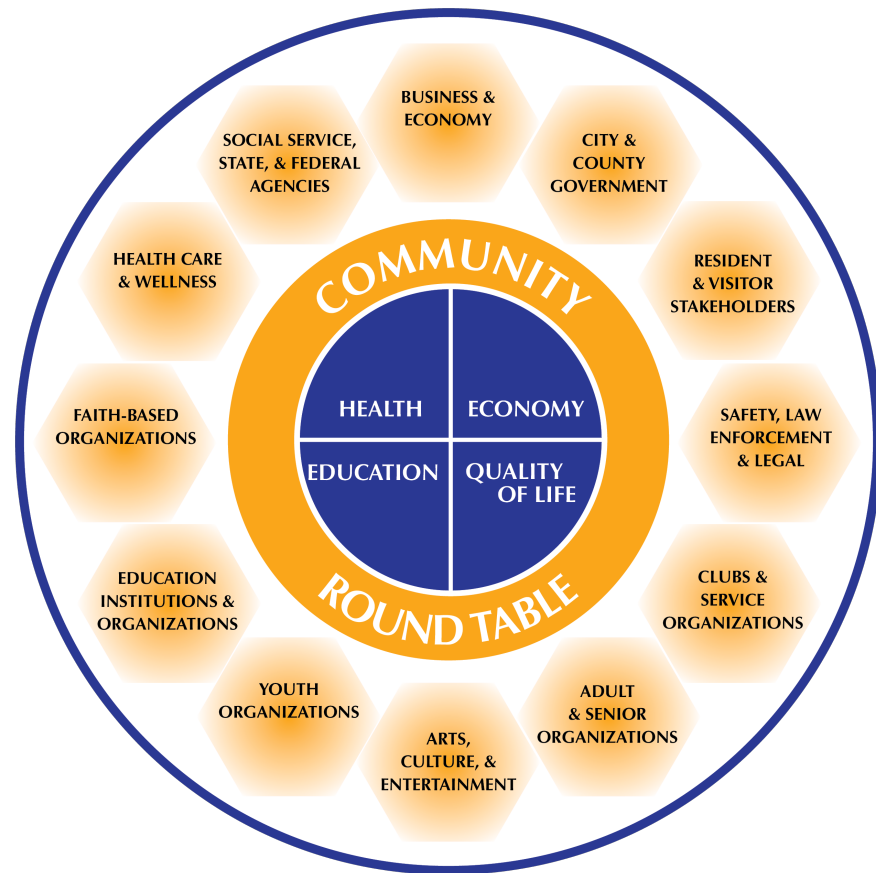
Community Culture and Core Values

Adapted from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2015. *2015-2016 Baldrige Excellence Framework: A Systems Approach to Improving Your Organization's Performance.* Gaithersburg, MD: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. http://nist.gov/baldrige. – UPDATED 6.2020

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A Community's Story Includes Everyone

The framework highlights:

◇ Interconnected reality of communities

◇ Encourages inclusivity

◇ Empowers interactive decision-making with many voices involved

COMMUNITY ROUND TABLE

HEALTH | ECONOMY

EDUCATION | QUALITY OF LIFE

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

CITY & COUNTY GOVERNMENT

RESIDENT & VISITOR STAKEHOLDERS

SAFETY, LAW ENFORCEMENT & LEGAL

CLUBS & SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

ADULT & SENIOR ORGANIZATIONS

ARTS, CULTURE, & ENTERTAINMENT

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

SOCIAL SERVICE, STATE, & FEDERAL AGENCIES

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Leadership Wisdom

"The fundamental rule of our national life, the rule which underlies all others, is that on the whole, and in the long run, we shall go up or down together."
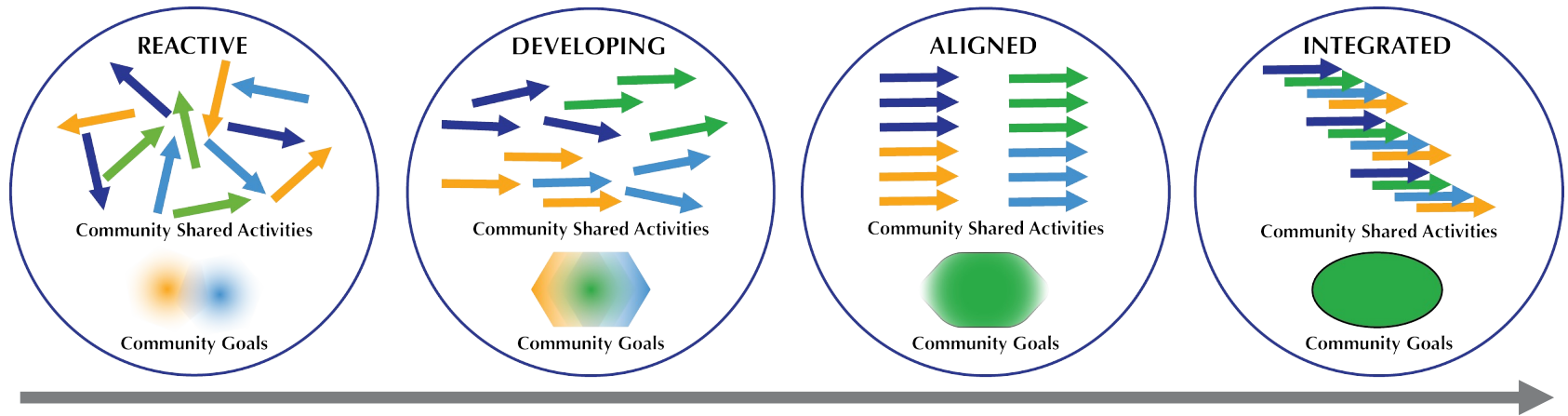
—*President Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., 1901, 26th President of the United States, writer, and explorer*

Photo credit: Official White House portrait by John Singer Sargent

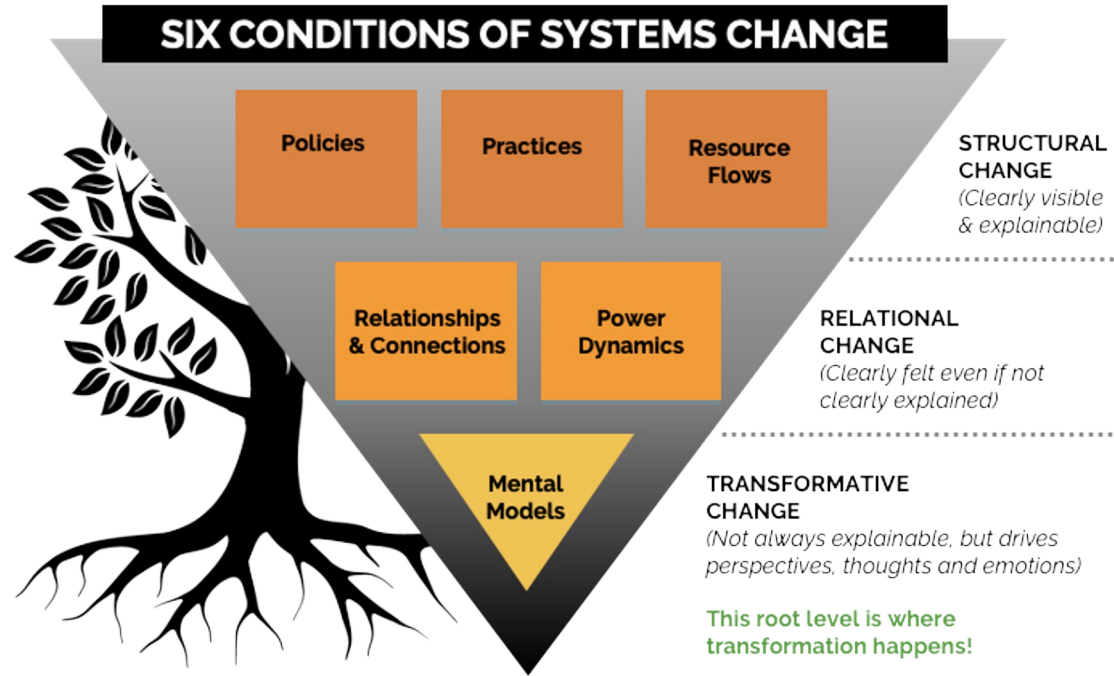JUPER Communications, LLC. | Communities of Excellence 2026

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Growing Knowledge, Involvement, and Commitment to Purposeful Performance Excellence

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Creating Systems Change
Transformative Change Starts With Our Mental Models

SIX CONDITIONS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policies | Practices | Resource Flows

STRUCTURAL CHANGE
(Clearly visible & explainable)

Relationships & Connections | Power Dynamics

RELATIONAL CHANGE
(Clearly felt even if not clearly explained)

Mental Models

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE
(Not always explainable, but drives perspectives, thoughts and emotions)

This root level is where transformation happens!
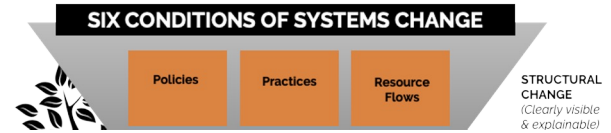
Adapted from the https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change | JUPER Communications, LLC. and Maximize NWMO | Communities of Excellence 2026

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Structural Change

SIX CONDITIONS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policies | Practices | Resource Flows

STRUCTURAL CHANGE
(Clearly visible & explainable)

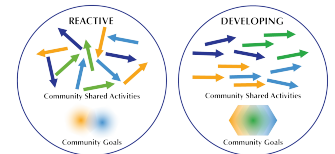## A REQUIREMENT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policies

Government, institutional & organizational rules, regulations and priorities that guide the entity's own and other's actions

Practices

Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks & other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. ALSO, within the entity , the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work
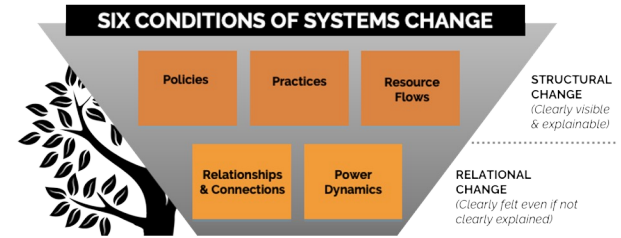
Resource Flows

**How money, people, knowledge, information & other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed**

Adapted from the https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change |JUPER Communications, LLC. and Maximize NWMO | Communities of Excellence 2026

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Relational Change

A REQUIREMENT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Relationships & Connections

Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints

Power Dynamics

The distribution of decision-making power, authority and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations

Transformative Change

A REQUIREMENT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

SIX CONDITIONS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policies | Practices | Resource Flows

STRUCTURAL CHANGE
(Clearly visible & explainable)

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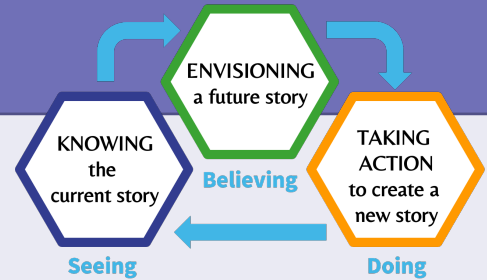## Mental Models

The distribution of decision-making power, authority and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations

REACTIVE | DEVELOPING | ALIGNED | INTEGRATED

Community Shared Activities

Community Goals
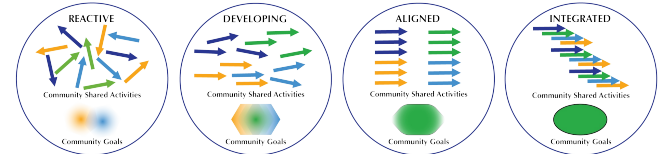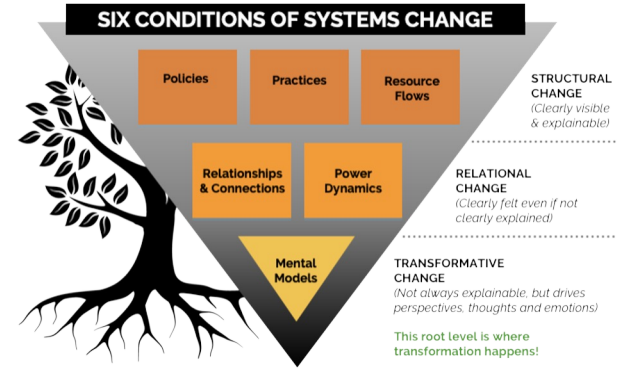
Leadership Wisdom

"Attempting to foster systems change without building the capacity to 'see' systems leads to a lot of talk and very little results."

—The Water of Systems of Change by Kania, Kramer, and Senge

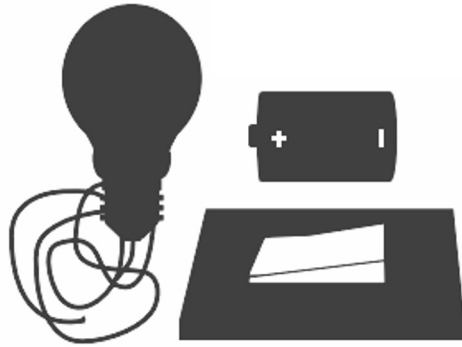**communities** of *excellence* 2026™

systems thinking   NOUN

¹ : understanding a system by examining the linkages and interactions between the elements that compose the entirety of the system

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Systems Thinking

What a System Is and What it Isn't

This is a heap.

Nothing changes when a part is taken away or added to this heap.

This is a system.

Change definitely happens if you add or take away a part of this system. The interconnection and interdependence is the difference.

Example of Systems Thinking

You wonder how you can stop feeling
so tired every day.

NOT A SYSTEMS THINKER

- **Decide** to drink more coffee/caffeine to increase energy.

A SYSTEMS THINKER

- **List** all factors involved with your tiredness.
- **Diagram** how drinking coffee affects your energy as well as sleep.
- **Identify** that coffee interferes with your sleep and that makes you more tired..
- **Decide** to stop drinking caffeine.

InstituteofPlay.org - Q Design Pack Systems Thinking | JUPER Communications, LLC. and Maximize NWMO | Communities of Excellence 2026

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Example of Systems Thinking

Students wonder how to keep their school
from being closed.

NOT A SYSTEMS THINKER

- **Think** of 1-2 reasons why the school is being closed.
- **Talk** to the principal about those reasons and see if she/he can stop the school from being closed.

A SYSTEMS THINKER

- **List** all factors involved in decision.
- **Group** the factors by similarities.
- **Identify** the largest group of factors and create a map of those showing how they are related to one another.
- **Find** places on the map where a specific change might improve the school.
- **Share** and present these changes at a school board meeting.

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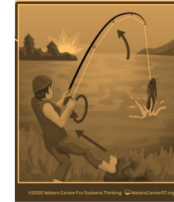
Habits of Systems Thinkers

Thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors

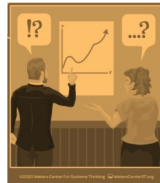 **Seek to understand the big picture**

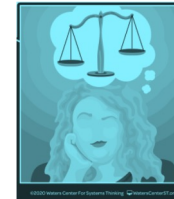 **Identify cause and effect relationships**

 Find leverage points to change a system
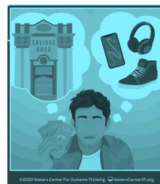
 See patterns/trends in systems

 Surface and test assumptions

 Resist making quick conclusions

 Recognize how a system's structure causes its behavior

 Find where unintended consequences might arise

 Change perspectives to increase understanding

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⬡ What is the value in becoming a systems thinker?

⬡ What is challenging in developing these systems thinking habits for effective systems change?

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Key Elements of Systems Leadership

Understanding Complexity, Coalition-building, and Collaboration

Systems change initiatives are often driven by people who are able to catalyze and empower collective action among other, rather than controlling or directing the action themselves. These people are systems leaders.
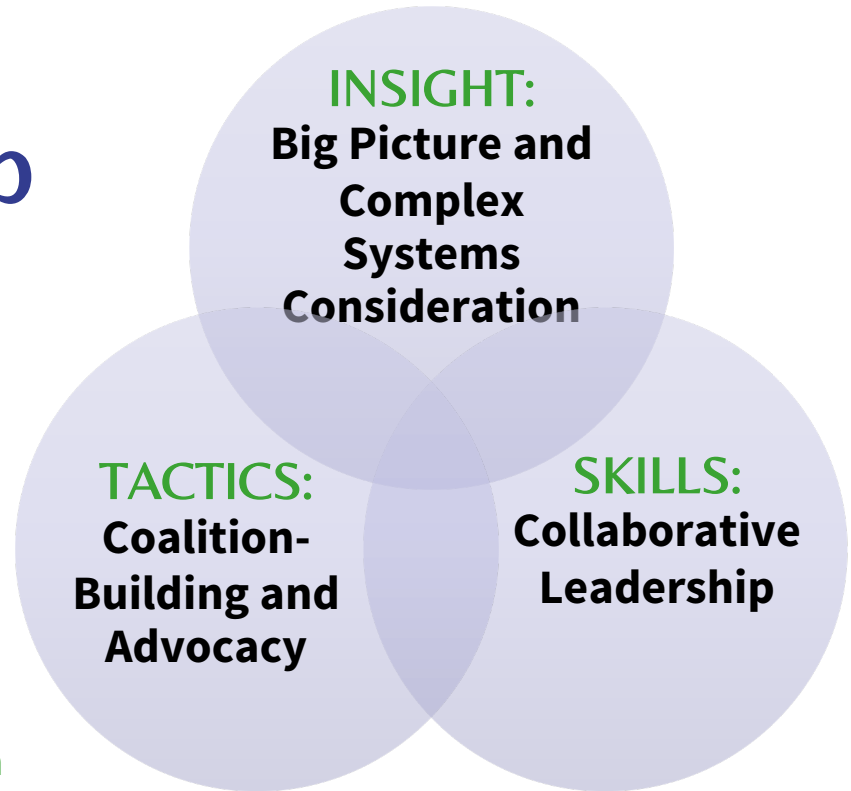
INSIGHT:
Big Picture and Complex Systems Consideration

TACTICS:
Coalition-Building and Advocacy

SKILLS:
Collaborative Leadership

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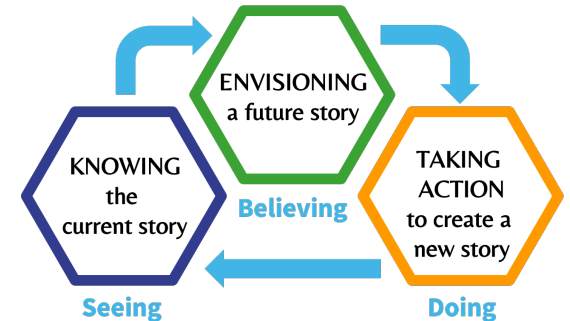
Systems Leadership Summary

Before we get started on the journey it is helpful to acknowledge:

⬡ **There is a system in place for "how things get done around here."**
How well is it working?
Are we getting the results we want?

⬡ **To create the results we want, we must first understand how the system is getting the results we experience now.**

⬡ **To achieve different results, the system must change.**

⬡ **We can be far more effective when we work together across seen and unseen lines of boundary.**

ENVISIONING
a future story

KNOWING
the
current story

TAKING
ACTION
to create a
new story

Believing

Seeing

Doing

Resources

The following websites and publications are referenced in this presentation and offer further information and learning opportunities:

The Communities of Excellence Framework, Communities of Excellence 2026, https://communitiesofexcellence2026.org/what-we-do/framework.html

The Water of Systems Change by John Kania, Mark Kramer, Peter Senge, https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change

Q Design Pack on Systems Thinking, https://educators.brainpop.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/IOP_QDesignPack_SystemsThinking_1.0.pdf

Waters Center for Systems Thinking, WatersCenterST.org

Thank you!

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