

Essential Mindsets and Practices  
for Leading Systems Efforts

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2018 Partner Plan Act Conference  
Bloomington, IL  
June 12, 2018

You will be able to:

- Describe one reason our system efforts don't always produce the results we desire
- Name key systems thinking practices
- Assess your system thinking mindsets and practices
- Explain why a collaborative leadership approach is necessary for leading community systems development efforts

Assertions

We will be the most effective leading community systems efforts when we:

- Operate from a systems orientation (mental models and mindsets).
- Engage in system thinking practices
- Convene stakeholders and create the conditions that encourages their deep engagement in collaborative efforts (collaborative leadership).

Defining Terms

**Mental Models:**

- Deeply held (often unconscious) internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting

**Mindsets:**

- Values, beliefs, and assumptions that drive our behavior

**Practice:**

- Defining actions that we work at repeatedly to become more and more proficient (noun)
- To do or perform often, customarily, or habitually (verb)

What is one reason our system efforts don't always produce the results we desire?

Our intentions and our mental models are misaligned!

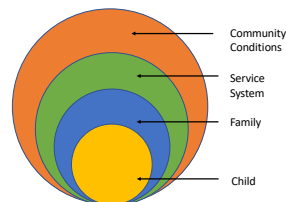
<b>Espoused Theories:</b> What we say is guiding our efforts	Our CSD conceptual framework
<b>Theories-in-Use:</b> what is unconsciously guiding our efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmatic approach</li> <li>• Analytical thinking</li> </ul>

### Programmatic Approach

- Tendency to solve child and/or family problems with programs, services, and/or supports
- Focus is on changing children and/or families
- Assumes a simple cause and effect relationship

**Not all kids are kindergarten ready**  
Why is this happening?  
**Not all kids have the social-emotional skills they need**  
Why is this happening?  
**Solution:**  
 Enroll more kids in high quality early learning programs

It's not that simple...child problems are embedded within many complex contexts



### Program and Systems Approaches

<b>Not all kids are kindergarten ready</b> <small>Why is this happening?</small>		} <b>Programmatic approach:</b> Enroll more kids in high quality early learning programs
<b>Not all kids have the social-emotional skills they need</b> <small>Why is this happening?</small>		
<b>Not all families enroll their children in Pre-K programs</b> <small>Why is this happening?</small>		
<b>Not all pre-K programs are ACCESSIBLE to families</b> <small>Why is this happening?</small>		} <b>Systems approach:</b> Address multiple system root causes
<b>Not all families know about the slots</b>	<b>Slots are not offered when and where families can access them</b>	
<b>Programs are not offered at locations or times that work for families</b>	<b>Parent input is not used to understand and address access issues</b>	
<b>Some agencies are not referring families to preschools with available slots</b>		

### Analytical Thinking versus Systems Thinking



Break things/ideas/problems down into manageable parts  
**Mechanistic worldview**



Understand how the parts interact to function as a whole  
**Systems worldview**

Our prevailing approach and way of thinking are pervasive and counter to a systems approach



It's like trying to coach soccer with a baseball playbook

For better results, align our systems approach, thinking, and practice

- Espoused Theories:**  
 What we say is guiding our efforts
- 
- Theories-in-Use:**  
 what is unconsciously guiding our efforts
- Our CSD conceptual framework**
- Systems approach
  - Systems thinking

In your own words, how would you explain why our system efforts don't always produce the results we desire?

- Tendency towards a more programmatic approach
- Tendency to want to overly simplify complex problems into manageable parts

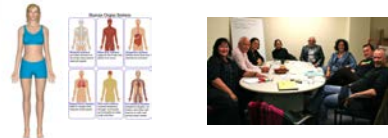
What do systems thinkers understand about complex systems?

*A system is any group or interacting, interrelated, or interdependent parts that form a complex unified whole that has a specific purpose.*  
 ~ Daniel H. Kim

Systems are both part and whole.

A holon is something that is simultaneously a whole and a part.

- As a whole, it has identity and integrity.
- As a part, it is a subsystem of a larger system.



System parts are connected, interactive, and interdependent.

- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Interactions (exchanges) among the system parts give rise to new system qualities, properties, or capabilities.



Systems are purposeful.

- System parts interact and function as a whole to fulfill the system purpose.



Systems are complex and dynamic.

- Living systems, including all types of human systems, are dynamic and ever-changing.
- In complex systems, cause and effect is not linear, predictable, or one-directional; it's iterative.
- Systems work to maintain equilibrium; they don't like to change!



What are some of the essential mindsets and practices for leading system efforts?

How do you tend to lead and approach community systems development efforts?

A Few System Thinking Mindsets

- All problems must be understood in context.
- We can only understand complex problems through diverse perspectives.
- We can address problems more fully by addressing root causes.
- Relationships matter.
- Together we can address complex problems.
- When we align our efforts around a shared agenda we can create synergistic results.
- Deeper partnerships and levels of collaboration are needed to solve complex problems.

A Few System Thinking Practices

1. Create a shared vision
2. Engage diverse stakeholders
3. Seek to understand the big picture and interconnectivity of problems
4. Ask why problems are happening
5. Explore multiple contexts of the problem
6. Design strategies that focus on root causes
7. Align stakeholder efforts for synergistic results
8. Track progress, learn continuously, and adapt as you go

What does collaborative leadership have to do with leading systems efforts?

## Collaborative Leadership

- Complex problems cannot be solved alone; we must think and act well together.
- Collaborative partners understand the critical part they play in addressing the issues.
- Collaborative partners fully engage and commit to doing their part in solving the problem:
  - Sharing responsibility
  - Taking action, and
  - Being accountable.
- Requires a shift from collaborative leader in charge to collaborative leader as convener.



## Summary

We will be the most effective leading community systems efforts when we:

- Operate from a systems orientation (mental models and mindsets).
- Engage in system thinking practices
- Convene stakeholders and create the conditions that encourages their deep engagement in collaborative efforts (collaborative leadership).