Systems Thinking and Awareness-Based Change

The Iceberg – A Systems Thinking Tool

From Peter Senge

EVENTS: What is happening? What behaviors are you seeing?

PATTERNS of BEHAVIOR: What are the trends over time? What changes have occurred?

STRUCTURES: What has influenced the patterns (rules, lessons, curriculum, societal trends, personnel shifts/awareness)? What are the relationships between the parts?

MENTAL MODELS: A mental model is an explanation of how something works. It is a concept, framework, or worldview that helps people understand the relationship between ideas, experiences, and occurrences. What assumptions, beliefs, and values do people hold about the system? What beliefs keep the system in place?

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Awareness-Based Change: Going Beneath Mental Models

Based on Otto Scharmer's Level 1.0 to 4.0 Thinking

Behaviors, Structure of Attention	Listening	Conversing	Organizing	Learning/Learner
1.0 Habitual awareness	Downloading habits of thought, projecting old judgments, reconfirming what one already knows	Downloading habits of thought from conforming	Centralized control – Organizing around hierarchy	Hierarchy – commanding, directing Learner: Passive recipient
2.0 Ego System Awareness	Factual, open-minded, aware of the world around us, noticing what is different from what one expects	Debate – Speaking from differentiating	Divisionalized – Subdividing an organization into a number of divisions	Competing Learner: Memorize Input
3.0 Stakeholder awareness	Empathetic, open-hearted, seeing through the eyes of others	Dialogue – Speaking from inquiring of others	Distributed/networked – Organizing around groups' interests and expertise	Dialogue, cooperating Learner: Explore new areas and questions
4.0 Ecosystem awareness	Generative – Originating, open, listening from new possibilities, deep self- reflection	Collective creativity – Open awareness, speaking from deep perceptions and new insights	Creative – Organizing around insights that emerge from dialogue and open thought	Awareness-based collective action, co-creating Learner: Co-sense and shape the future

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Applying Awareness-Based Change

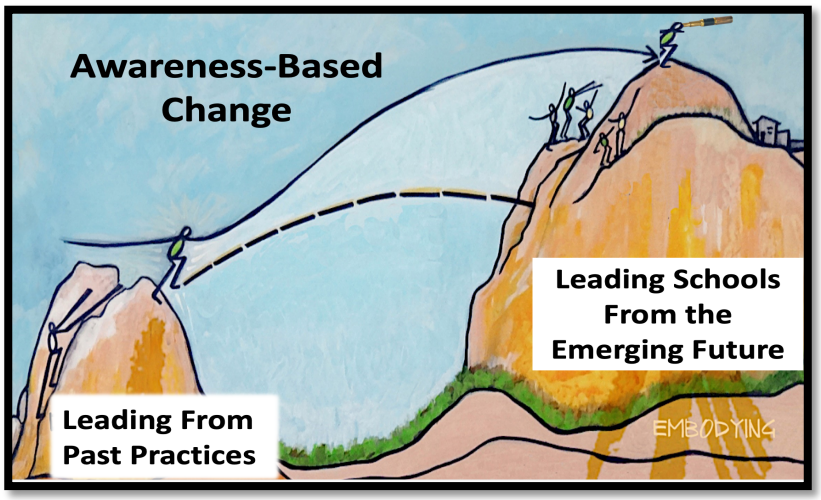

Diagram from the MIT Presencing Institute

We are engaging in a simulation to experience the core process of applying Awareness-Based Change. For this activity, please select an area of focus. Consider the following possibilities:

- Culturally Responsive Practices
- Engaging Classroom Learning
- Attendance
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Overcoming Implicit Bias
- Homework Policy
- Authentic Problem-Based Learning
- Inclusive Practices
- Personalized Learning
- Standards-Based Performance: Reading, Writing, or Math
- Grading Practices
- Professional Learning Communities (Teacher-Based Teams)
- Weekly Early Release Days
- Behavior/Classroom Management
- Restorative Practices

Next, choose a specific conflict, concern, or potential for growth withing your selected area and determine the key players who are vested your focus (e.g., Governing Board members, district and school leaders, teachers, classified staff members, parents, students, experts on the area of focus, etc.). Figuratively, bring these stakeholders to the table and open the discussion from multiple perspectives. Describe each of the following components as it might be played out in real time. Please do not mention specific names in this simulation.

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Applying Awareness-Based Change (Continued)

1. On which **conflict, concern, or area for growth** are you focusing? Please be specific. Why did you select this focus?

2. Who are possible **key players connected to this area of focus**? What might their common **desired outcome** be for the conflict, concern, or area for growth?

3. **Habitual awareness or downloading (1.0)** is reconfirming what one already knows. When downloading occurs, the discussion is frozen by old mental habits and past experiences. Key players respond only through their own narrow point of view without considering another's perspective. What does *downloading* look/sound like by each of the key players in your area of focus? What are their different perspectives?

4. **Ego System Awareness (2.0)** is when key players suspend habitual judgments and notice different views or perspectives. What would this level 2.0 awareness look like from the perspectives of the key players involved in the conflict, concern, or desired area for growth you identified?

5. **Stakeholder Awareness (3.0)** redirects key player's attention so that perceptions widen and deepen. This shift leads to self-reflection so that the boundaries between key players in the conflict, concern, or desired area for growth open up. How would *level 3.0 stakeholder awareness* impact the key players' perceptions and responses in your selected area of focus?

6. **Eco System Awareness (4.0) or Presencing** allows participants to let go of past practices and connect to future potential. The boundaries between key players collapses in order to provide a space for future-focused solutions/paths to emerge. Egocentric perspectives are being replaced by a greater awareness of ecosystem opportunities. What could this transition look like when applied to your selected area of focus?

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Applying Awareness-Based Change (Continued)

7. **Prototyping** leads to action. The relationship between key players continues to shift, blending their perspectives into a future-informed action. During this point in the process, prototypes are co-created, implemented, and evaluated through feedback and dialogue. Prototyping leads to performing and making a collective impact. What *prototype* can you suggest that addresses the conflict, concern, or area for growth that you identified? Please note the seven questions in the box to the right as you develop your prototype?

As your group generates an idea for prototyping, ask the following seven questions:

1. Is it **relevant** for the involved stakeholders, organization, and community?
2. Is it **new and transformative** to your system?
3. Is it **rapid**? Can you test it with enough time to get feedback and adapt (avoid analysis paralysis)?
4. Can you do it on a **small scale** that allows for meaningful experimentation?
5. Does this prototype allow you to **spotlight** the most critical variables?
6. Does it **leverage** the strengths, competencies, and resources in existing communities and networks?
7. Is it **replicable**? Can it grow to scale?

8. In order to engage in awareness-based change, which District values need to be established and embraced?

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