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Our Haines Centre for Strategic Management utilizes the Science
of Systems Thinking as embodied by General Systems Theory and the Society of General Systems Research (now ISSS). The Systems Thinking Approach* is our foundation, our core
technology, and a new orientation to life. It is the best, most
holistic organizing framework and language available in the
world to guide all our consulting, training, and keynoting with
clients. Why?

Systems Thinking is a heavily researched and rigorous macro-
scientific theory with its roots in the Universal Laws of Living
Systems on Earth and in ecology and biology. It is analogous to
DNA in humans; it defines our life-giving characteristics. An
Austrian, Ludwig von Bertalanffy is the father of what he called
General Systems Theory when he formed the Society of General
Systems Research in 1954 with Margaret Mead and three super-
star Nobel Prize winners from economics (Kenneth Boulding),
physiology (Ralph Gerard), physics/math (Anatol Rapoport).
It has been a more recent focus of Dr. Russell Ackoff (renaissance
professor emeritus at University of Pennsylvania) and
Dr. Jay Forrester at MIT in Systems Dynamics, among others.
In fact, we have identified over 30 other scientific disciplines
such as electronics, architecture, complexity, chaos theory and
project management, whose leading thinkers and writers are
moving in this direction. This is the long-term result of the five
superstars above whose goal was finding a unity of science for
all complex living things on earth. Von Bertalanffy was nomi-
nated for a Nobel Prize himself by Buckminster Fuller, another
renowned Systems Thinker. However, von Bertalanffy died before he could be awarded the prize which is given to only liv-
ing persons.

In short, Systems Thinking is an old/new orientation to life. It is
"the natural way the world works" and thus, a better, more natu-
rnal, simpler, and holistic view of living systems, such as individu-
als, teams and organizations, as they try to survive and thrive
in today's dynamic complex global environment. This holistic
and more purposeful outcome-oriented approach distinguishes
Systems Thinking and our Centre from other consultants who
have a primary focus on separate challenges, issues, and organi-
zational functions (a more narrow, piecemeal, and fragmented
approach to life and work).

While von Bertalanffy is relatively unknown to most people, his
impact through his disciples is enormous. We all know who
Peter Drucker is—the most revered management thinker, father
of management thought, and number one management consult-
ant in the world in the 20th Century. Well, he also was from
Vienna, Austria where Systems Thinking was (and is still being)
taught and where he was influenced by von Bertalanffy and his
Society of General Systems Research.

Others he influenced include Victor Frankl (In Search of
Meaning), Aldous Huxley, Karl Menninger, Arthur Koestler,
Norbert Weiner, Russell Ackoff, Abraham Maslow, Ervin
Laszlo, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget to name only a few.

While we do not know of von Bertalanffy, we all know W. Edwards Deming, the father of quality and his TQM approach. The "T" in TQM means "total" or "entire system" and was his approach as another renowned Systems Thinker. Unfortunately his thinking was not initially accepted in western management
and society. So he had to go to Japan and became so revered
that their top quality award is the "Deming Prize". We later
established ours as the "Baldrige Award for Quality", a much less
prestigious name.

The question we are often asked is; who were some of Deming's
prime clients in Japan and what were their results? Toyota was one. They now have the famous "Toyota Management System", resulting in Toyota becoming the world's largest and most profi-
table automobile firm in 2007. They have now surpassed General Motors (GM). GM, despite learning about Toyota's management system through their joint venture in Fremont, California, called NUMMI (New United Motors Manufacturing Incorporated),
ever could implement this management system. GM's culture
has rejected this "management system" concept.

In fact, it takes a higher, more integrated "Helicopter View" in-
tellect and level of human maturity (Erickson's "Interdependence
Level") to utilize this different and more effective worldview.
Some people see and understand it naturally. Others never get it.
As Martin Luther King said, "many attend but few under-
stand" (about church and religion).

However, the author has found leading theorists in over 30
scientific disciplines who are now moving towards the higher
level concept of Systems Thinking in their writings. Seeing the
world as one living system due to global warming as a huge issue
has only accelerated this view and understanding.
WHAT IS SYSTEMS THINKING?

A system is defined as “a set of elements or components that work together in relationships for the overall objectives/vision of the whole”. The focus of all systems’ elements in an organization should be the attainment of an organization-wide shared vision of customer satisfaction within today’s complex and changing environment.

How we think...is how we plan...is how we act..., and that determines the results we get in work and life. Systems Thinking is a higher order thinking about the whole system first rather than its parts.

CONCEPTS AND RESEARCH : FIVE STRANDS

This 50 plus years of rigorous scientific and biological research on Systems Thinking has been translated, interpreted, and updated by us at the Haines Centre. Our Systems Thinking Approach® uses five interrelated main concepts from the research to clarify and simplify how we view our complex world. They help us improve as individuals, teams, and whole organizations. These concepts give us a broader and better framework, or mental map, to see, to think, to understand, to diagnose, and to act more effectively. The most powerful way to improve our effectiveness is to improve the way we think!

Therefore, these five interrelated Systems Thinking DNA concepts that follow create a more elegant simplicity for ease of use (the KISS method) out of our complex and chaotic world. These five strands include:

#1. The Seven Levels of Living Systems are in natural hierarchical relationships with each other, starting with (7) Earth as the largest (7th) living system and progressing downward to (6) societies/communities, to (5) organizations, to (4) teams/families/departments, to (3) individuals, and finally to (2) organs, and to (1) cells as living systems!

We have adapted this to look at the three key levels of living systems that affect organizations (individuals—teams—organization-wide) and their three levels of collisions/collaboration (1=1, team-team, organization-environment). This leads to Six Natural Levels of Leadership Competencies and focus for planning, people, leadership, and change. These Six Natural Levels of Leadership Competencies are found nowhere else but at the Centre. They are the Number One corporate-wide core competency of all successful organizations. James Grier Miller was the Systems Scientist who popularized these seven levels in his landmark book, Living Systems, originally published in 1978 and revised in 1995. If Systems Thinking seems close to the field of Behavioral Science, it is. Miller is the person who named the field “Behavioral Science.”

II. THE INNER WORKINGS: Synergy, Relationships and Interdependence

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#2. Standard and predictable System/Organizational Dynamics are based on 12 Characteristics (or DNA Codes) of open/living systems. It is from the research of the Society of General Systems Research. The original research was first published in the 1972 Yearbook of the Society for General Systems Research through the Academy of Management Journal, December 1972. This research listed the 12 Codes or DNA of Successful Living Systems of all types, organized along two similar DNA Strands (our internal and external Strands of Life). This allows us to work in and compare one organization versus another in different industries, as well as one human being to another. We
humans are all quite similar with these 12 predictable human dynamics/DNA Codes split along our internal and external Strands of Life. Further, the Centre recently researched these 12 Codes and Characteristics extensively versus many of the other 30 scientific disciplines and found these 12 original characteristics still to be THE complete set of Characteristics of the "natural way the world works". For reference, see Volume IX of the Haines Strategy Library for the complete comparisons of the different disciplines that are only partial Systems Thinking at: www.SystemsThinkingPress.com

#3. Within today’s dynamic and ever-changing environment, the Standard Functioning of every Living System includes a circular “input—throughput—output—feedback loop”. We copyrighted this as The Five Phases (A-B-C-D-E) of the Systems Thinking Framework based on six of the 12 characteristics of Living Systems in the 1972 Yearbook. We then applied them as a very simple, yet comprehensive set of ABC’s as the organizing framework and language to an integrated ever-growing suite of over 20 seamless daily applications and language.

SYSTEMS THINKING VS. STRATEGIC THINKING

Systems Thinking is based on 50+ years of scientific research on the characteristics of the "natural way the world works" as a hierarchy of living systems within living systems.

Strategic Thinking is the application of Systems Thinking to the world’s problems, issues and challenges at all seven levels of living systems. It is the “helicopter view” of work and life based on Albert Einstein’s famous quote:

Levels of Thinking

“Problems that are created by our current level of thinking can’t be solved by that same level of thinking.”  
-Albert Einstein

Too many people and executives are using this term, Strategic Thinking, without knowing or understanding what it really means. In terms of the ABC’s in the Simplicity of Systems Thinking model, it is Phases E-A-B, first and foremost. It is the right side of the model - simple - yet usually not done as we read left to right linearly. We need to use "backwards thinking", thinking from right to left to come up with the actions to achieve our desired outputs.

Lastly, Strategic Thinking is also seeing the connectedness and integration of the components of the system, Phase D (1) with each other (2) with the desired outcomes and (3) with all the key stakeholders in the environment. In sum, Systems Thinking is the scientific research, and Strategic Thinking is it’s application.

#4. In addition, we use The Rollercoaster of Change™ as the fourth Systems Thinking Concept and Framework (see figure on next page). It is the natural and historical “cycles of change” that are also based on the 12 characteristics of Life on Earth. It is all you need to know from over 20 so-called “different” change theories to assist senior management and all employees in being proactive, innovative, and more successful with any kind of personal, team, and/or organizational change. This is the organizing framework for the simple to complex strategic and systematic, transformational change processes worldwide. This individual and psychological change cycle is “natural, normal, and highly predictable”. We copyrighted this fourth Systems Thinking Concept as The Rollercoaster of Change™. It has proven to have universal application on how all Seven Levels of Living Systems undergo change naturally with Six Basic stages of any Change processes (including the one stage usually ignored, a Smart Start).

#5. The Law of Unintended Consequences, otherwise known as the six-sided Rubik’s Cube Effect or archetypes by Peter Senge. We have so far identified 8 of these common analytic situations that occur time after time.

Note: Please see these five concepts in our color Job Aids/Models, four-page Executive Summary White Papers, and Assessment Instruments that describe Systems Thinking and their universal applications in more detail. There are over 100 of these applications and growing. www.SystemsThinkingPress.com has all these specific Systems Thinking products and their many, many universal applications.

Call us for details or assistance at 619-275-6528.
**SEMINAL BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR SYSTEMS THINKING RESOURCES**


