

Organizational Development

Systems Thinking Team

Systems Thinking Team - We know our world is highly interdependent, dynamic and complex. Yet we live in a culture of independence and competition which races to place blame and grasp for a quick fix. Our team learns and applies ideas from systems thinking (ST) and organizational learning (OL) to help communities and organizations understand the issues before them within broader social, political, economic and environmental contexts.

The core purpose of our team is to build our capacity to help communities and organizations learn to work with complex situations, to appreciate the longer view of how situations develop, to understand how our short term fixes can make things worse, to understand how our own ideas (mental models) about the world shape our response, to understand how organizations can use processes which bring many ideas and perspectives into conversations about the nature of the situation and alternate courses of action and how organizations can use reflection to learn from their actions

Systems Thinking- In this discipline, people learn to better understand interdependency and change, and thereby to deal more effectively with the forces that shape the consequences of our actions. Systems Thinking is based upon a growing body of theory about the behavior of feedback and complexity-the innate tendencies of a system that lead to growth or stability over time. (Society for Organizational Learning)

Organizational Learning- According to Peter Senge (1990: 3) learning organizations are: "...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

Current Initiatives

Tools for Turbulent Times: A Wisline web adventure series that explores practical systems thinking tools that UWEX Educators can use in their daily work. Four sessions will be held from February through April 2009. Funding for this program was provided by special team funds by the CNRED Program Area. However, all program areas are encouraged to participate.

Systems Thinking Community of Practice (CoP): Through participation at national conferences, System Thinking Team members had the opportunity to meet with other practitioners of organizational learning and systems thinking from Wisconsin. In order to capitalize on these new found resource networks, the Systems Thinking Team initiated the establishment of a Community of Practice in Wisconsin. *Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Wenger)* On May 24th & 25th 2007, community leaders and educators from around Wisconsin gathered in Madison to discuss the conceptual framework of creating a Systems Thinking Community of Practice in Wisconsin.

Upcoming Events

1. Members of the Systems Thinking Team will present during two break-out sessions at the North Central Urban Extension Conference in Milwaukee, WI May 4-7, 2009. Session titles include:
 - A Systems Approach for Complex Urban Issues: Getting Below the Surface to See the Entire Iceberg
 - Dialogue and Deliberation: Public Engagement in Urban Environments

Team members and additional UW-Extension colleagues will also facilitate a World Café session for all conference participants.

2. Members of the Systems Thinking Team will present during a break-out session at the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals 2009 Annual Conference

Resources

- [The Appreciative Inquiry Commons](#)

"AI Commons"--is a worldwide portal devoted to the sharing of academic resources and practical tools on Appreciative Inquiry and the rapidly growing discipline of positive change. This site is a resource for leaders of change, scholars, students, and business managers--and it is hosted by Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management. Appreciative Inquiry is an organizational learning approach which has been used by members of the Systems Thinking Team in working with groups and organizations. The Team has also used Appreciative Inquiry in its own planning. The AI Commons offers access to key resources about Appreciative Inquiry and its application.

- [Pegasus Communications](#)

Pegasus Communications helps individuals, teams, and organizations thrive in an increasingly complex world. Grounded in the principles and tools of systems thinking and related disciplines, practitioners from business, education, government, and the nonprofit world find the freedom to connect with others in new ways and design sustainable solutions to their most persistent challenges. The Pegasus Communications web site offers links to introductory material on systems thinking and related disciplines.

- [Society for Organizational Learning](#)

Society for Organizational Learning (SoL), is an intentional learning community composed of organizations, individuals, and local SoL communities around the world. Their purpose is to discover (research), integrate (capacity development) and implement (practice) theories and practices of organizational learning for the interdependent development of people and their institutions and communities such that we continue to increase our capacity to collectively realize our highest aspirations and productively resolve our differences.

SoL was formed in April of 1997 to continue the work of MIT's Center for Organizational Learning (1991-1997). Peter Senge, author of the *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* is the founding Chairman of SoL.

- [World Café](#)

The World Café site offers background on the conversational process called “the World Café”. This is a technology for hosting conversations about questions that matter. The process uses a set of principles which create the opportunity for discovering collective knowledge and using that knowledge for action. The Systems Thinking team has used the World Café method in a number of settings with community organizations and within UW-Extension.

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