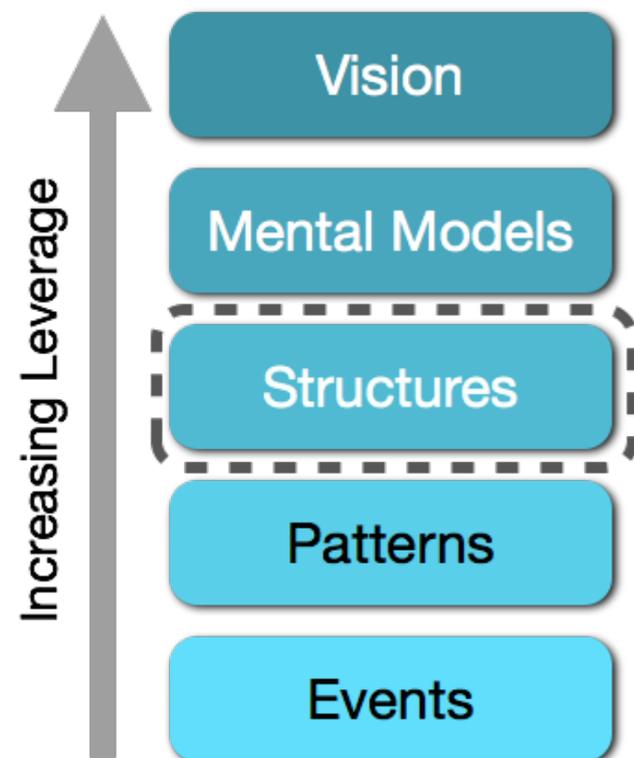


System Thinking- From Becoming Imaginal... Tom Rudmik



“Systems thinking is the ability to see how a system works and where the leverage points are. It is a core competency of *Imaginal* leaders, for at some point one will need to implement changes to the system.

The Systems Levels Model provides insight to why certain patterns of behaviors exist for all kinds of situations, whether in your personal life, or in a broader organizational context. This model presents five levels of recursion, as shown. The model will help you see how system structures drive behaviors and the thinking that supports those system structures.

First let’s define some terms:

System: A system is a collection of parts or elements that are all connected and together act as a whole. The human body is a system that is made up of many parts, or subsystems, that work together to produce an emergent property called life. No single part or subsystem—such as the nervous, endocrine, skeletal, vascular, and so on—can produce life, but all the parts working together in harmony produce life.

Vision: There are two kinds of vision, the vision in use and the vision declared. The vision in use is deduced from one’s actual behavior. One might declare that his or her life’s vision is to be a kind and caring person, and even may say with full sincerity that it is a desire to help needy people, yet act in a way completely contrary to those ideals. In Chapter 3 we introduced the Centers model and the concept that whatever is at your center will become your source of security, guidance, wisdom, and power. If self is at the center of one’s life, then the vision in use may be stated more accurately, “I will help the needy only when I can afford the time and it doesn’t risk personal security and comfort.” Many corporations declare a powerful vision that includes a social agenda, yet at the end of the day the vision of making a difference may only be window dressing or a marketing ploy to the real vision in use which is to turn as large of a corporate profit as possible. There are companies that truly carry a powerful social agenda, and everyone in the company knows it and the vision in use aligns beautifully with the declared vision of the company.

Mental models represent the thinking and assumptions that underlie or are embedded into a system.

Structures are elements within a system that are related to one another, and designed to support and generate certain kinds of behavior. Structures can be physical and non-physical. The physical skeletal structure of a human being is designed to support and protect all of the other structures and organs, and when coupled with other structures enable us to move. If we changed the skeletal structure of humans it would vastly change our behaviors. Buildings have structures, there are hallways, rooms, furnishings and other physical elements that will architecturally determine our behavior. Organizations have many non-physical structures, such as policies, regulations, schedules, compensation plans, performance review processes, etc that drive to a large degree the behaviors of the people working in it. One will see a large number of people eating in restaurants during lunch hour because the structure allows this behavior to occur. In education the assessment structure—how students, teachers, and schools are evaluated—will drive the behaviors of all the key stakeholders.

Perhaps the most powerful structures are those we don’t see—our beliefs, our desires, our thinking, and the mental models we carry. These mental structures strongly generate human behavior, but rarely are they challenge or examined.”