



# Systems Thinking

This theory illuminates key issues in building partnerships across organisational boundaries. It helps especially our understanding of the dynamics and interdependencies between organisations and individuals. In addition, 'whole systems' concepts offer ways of working with multi-stakeholder groups which can contribute to productive partnership working and user involvement (see Leith's Guide to Large Group interventions in the Learning Resources section).

## A system may be defined as:

- a perceived whole
- whose elements hang together as they continually affect each other over time
- and which operates toward a common purpose  
Senge (1994) p90
- 'system' from Greek - "to cause to stand together"
- you and your work are elements of many different systems.

If you:	then you:
accept dynamics	accept no one right answer
accept inter-dependencies	change system by everyone looking at the whole together
accept multiple perspectives	promote involvement and collaboration
accept limits of cause and effect	allow inquiry, subtlety, experiment, time

Working with systems involves unpacking what is going on at four levels:

- events - the top or most visible level
- patterns of behaviour, which produce the events repeatedly
- underlying systems, which drive the development of patterns of behaviour
- mental models, which are the assumptions which underpin the systems

These four interplay and produce 'lock-in' to existing ways of working which are hard to change.

also see [Fifth Discipline Fieldbook web site](#)

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