

Habits of Thinking

a routine or behavior repeated regularly
that tends to occur subconsciously

A practitioner in habits of systems thinking...

SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND THE BIG PICTURE

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LESSONS FROM AN ICEBERG

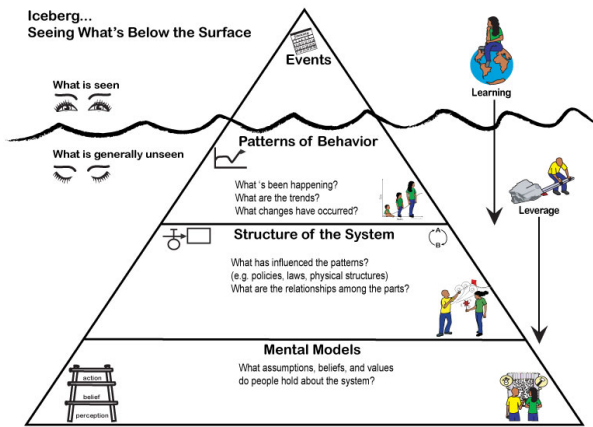
Icebergs are large pieces of ice that have broken off from centuries-old glaciers. Icebergs are subject to the currents of water in which they float. Only 10% of an iceberg is visible above the water's surface.

Icebergs represent a calving event. The historical context of the event, however, has been years in the making. The event is subject to outside forces. There will be more hidden than is visible.

Sometimes understanding the big picture is not about being above and looking down; sometimes it is about looking underneath and around.



<https://www.thescubanews.com/2020/05/24/canadas-iceberg-alley/>



ICEBERG MODEL

The tip of the iceberg represents an event, something easily observed. Just below the surface exist patterns or trends that are consistent with things seen in the event. Below that level are structures that support and create the patterns and events above it. These structures can be institutional, organizational, or behavioral. The bottom level represents the mental models, or the ways we or other people think and feel about the structures then impact patterns that facilitate the event.

Each layer offers a deeper understanding of the system as well as increased leverage for change. The change may lie in the mental models or the structures or the patterns. Seeking to understand the big picture requires looking at what is supporting the event—patterns, structures and mental models.

STRATEGY VS TACTICS

“I can’t see the forest for the trees” is a metaphor to explain the often elusive relationship between strategy and tactics. We see the trees. Trees are the metaphor for tactics. However, in our world, it can be challenging to see the forest, a metaphor for organizational strategy.

Jobs are carried out with specific action steps, or tactics. The effectiveness, efficiency and morale of an organization (or school or classroom) rests on buy-in into the strategy from the whole organization. It is much easier to focus on tactics rather than strategy especially during busy, stressful, or challenging times.

Strategy answers the question of *What?* This is the forest. Tactics answer the question of *How?* These are the trees.

A practitioner in this habit focuses on the forest rather than the details of any one tree.

Adapted from *Strategy vs Tactics or How to See the Forest for the Trees*, IdeaShare, January 23, 2019 and the Waters Center for Systems Thinking

