Zooming In & Zooming Out
BUILDING YOUR WHOLE SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE MUSCLE

Systems thinking is seeing a whole system and its interdependent parts.

Principles

- We are all operating inside of a system of interdependent parts every day, whether we see it or not. Families, communities, teams, and organizations are common examples.
- The interdependencies of the system make it stronger.
- The interdependencies also add complexity. When we decide and take action, we impact people we can't see throughout the system. The larger the system, the more obscured the impacts are.
- Some people have a natural ability to zoom their perspective in and out to understand the entire system. But most of us get "stuck" in the macro or micro view – either seeing the big picture with no idea how to operationalize or down in the weeds oblivious to the broader view.
- The ability to zoom in and zoom out like a telescopic lens can be strengthened with intention and a regular cadence of practice.

Practice

STEP 1: MAP THE SYSTEM

- **Draw the organizational system you are part of.** Using stickies, map yourself to your team, your team to other teams in your function, and your function to other functions. Add the senior leadership team and external stakeholders.
- **Identify high-impact connections.** Highlight the people and teams your decisions and actions have an immediate or significant impact on.

STEP 2: CREATE A SYSTEMS THINKING PRACTICE

- **Define the shared goals of high-impact connections.** The strength of a collaboration is how the individual parts come together to create something of more value than they provide individually. The smoother the collaboration, the better the outcomes. Defining the shared goals of the collaboration and the individual goals of each person/team will make everything easier. If you forget and jump right into doing the work, take time to go back and do this – it is never too late!
- **Check the vantage point of the perspective you are taking when making decisions.** Using the map you've created, zoom out to consider how your actions will affect each of the high-impact connections you've identified. Remember that you want to make decisions from the perspective of the team that you are on, not the one that you lead. How does this change your thinking?
- **Determine, before you take action,** if your high-impact connections need to be consulted, informed, or forewarned – this is a big trust builder.
- **Socialize your thinking with relevant people.** Ask others what they think before you take action. This may feel painful at first because it means slowing down your bias for action, but it will save you from lunging at ideas and creating unintended ripple effects across the organization that dent trust and harm reputation.
- **Make friends.** One of the easiest ways to improve your systems thinking is to make friends outside of your area of the organization. These relationships will make it more likely that you will consider how your decisions will impact others, and the conversations you have with them will inform your perspective.

Leadership Mojo Tips
@gretchenpisano