

# 17 Practices of Systems Thinking

- 1. Considering both short and long term consequences of one's actions**  
*Looking ahead and anticipating not only the immediate results of actions, but also the effects down the road*
- 2. Looking at multiple perspectives of an issue**  
*Changing perspective to see other points of view within a system*
- 3. Looking at the 'big picture'**  
*Focusing on the overall 'forest' as opposed to the details of any one 'tree'*
- 4. Looking for patterns in data**  
*Reviewing information with an eye towards patterns or themes*
- 5. Looking for trends over time**  
*Viewing changes over time as part of the natural dynamics of the system*
- 6. Being comfortable with ambiguity**  
*Holding the tension of paradox and ambiguity; taking the time necessary to understand the dynamics of a system before taking action*
- 7. Checking results and changing actions if needed.**  
*Assessing for improvement using benchmarks; seeing errors as a means to learning and adjustment*
- 8. Looking for interconnected issues**  
*Perceiving connections between multiple issues/parts within a system*
- 9. Looking for small actions that can make big differences**  
*Using systems understanding to determine what small actions could produce high leverage results*
- 10. Considering the impacts of accumulations over time**  
*Paying attention to things that build up (or deplete) slowly over time—both concrete ('money in a bank account') or abstract ('trust within a relationship')*
- 11. Being comfortable with questioning one's deep assumptions**  
*Understanding that one's beliefs of how the world works (mental models) may limit one's thinking.*
- 12. Being aware of boundaries**  
*Understanding that boundaries are arbitrary; checking for consistency of understanding about where a particular boundary is drawn.*
- 13. Thinking critically about causation, not just correlation**  
*Looking beyond basic connectedness to understand the dynamic relationship between the connected parts*
- 14. Being cautious of adopting a win/lose attitude**  
*Being skeptical of a 'zero-sum game' approach to individual goals within a highly interdependent system*
- 15. Considering unintended consequences**  
*Anticipating ancillary effects of actions over time*
- 16. Seeing self as part of system under study**  
*Understanding that one's own behavior within the system, impacts the system*
- 17. Recognizing that a system's structure drives its behavior**  
*Focusing on system structure and avoiding blaming others when things go wrong*