Tidal Waves of Change

As individuals, people are complex — a mixture of genetic personality traits, influenced by an environment full of experiences. Put several people together in a group, and complexity increases. Put several groups together into a community, such as an organization, and complexity increases even more dramatically. In fact, every time you add another person to a group, another group to a community, complexity increases substantially.

Add to this equation ferocious competition, globalization, technology, and speed, and suddenly you have complexity beyond anything that people can comprehend. Because complexity is also unpredictable, we can only guess at what is happening, thus increasing uncertainty. This can leave us feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, grasping at anything that might help to ease the situation. To deal with this increase in complexity, we often run even faster, trying to compress time, until we have no time at all!

Who believes they have the time to slow down to think about a complex situation, to gather data, analyze the data, and understand what the data tells us? Even when we know we should take the time to think things through, we do not believe we have enough time. And yet, we have enough time to make mistakes over and over again. We have enough time to be overwhelmed, to be frustrated, and to feel out of control. We even have enough time to put up with mediocre performance, and to settle for less. We are caught in the tidal wave of complexity and change, and we so often act as if we have to run faster and faster before it sweeps us under.

But there is another way — you can surf the waves of change. Using this Decision Support System, you become an expert surfer, riding the dynamic turbulence of rushing water under your feet, engaging the energy of change and complexity to shape the future you desire.
Thinking in Living Systems

Since the latter half of the 17th Century, the time of Isaac Newton, science has come to dominate our way of thinking. Whether we like it or not, we are living in the **age of science**. Almost everything we touch is defined by scientific principles: our computer, our television, even the language we use. The news is filled with applications of science in the fields of technology, medicine, and economics. This, in and of itself, is not an issue. What *is* an issue is that we might need to become more aware of how this age of science affects our way of thinking, and how our thinking creates the reality in which we live.

Our current way of thinking is based in a science that was born at the time of the Greeks, around 500-400 BCE. The Greeks wanted to explain their world, and they did this through observation. This method caused them to focus primarily on the pieces, rather than on the relationships of the pieces to each other — in other words, a *system of connections*. Over millennia, this way of thinking was lost, but re-emerged about 500 years ago. It has evolved into our current way of thinking, which reduces everything to its parts. In science, this is called the **reductionist model**.

It is much easier to study parts of things, because it is a less complex process. We do not have to think about the system of connections, and how everything is affected; we simply focus on what we believe are the essential pieces, and observe their behaviour in isolation. The underlying assumption is often that knowing the parts can be translated into understanding the larger system. This has some truth, but perhaps only in circumstances in which systems can be knowable.
**Section 1: Getting Started**

The current age of science was born about 500 years ago, during a time of great change and turbulence in the Western world. It was the time of the birth of four pivotal movements that now underlie Western Culture:

- The Renaissance
- The Protestant Reformation
- The Enlightenment
- The Scientific Revolution

The Renaissance was a movement that focused primarily in the areas of art and architecture. Its foundation lies in the concept of *realism*. The concept of *perspective*, giving painting a sense of reality, was born in The Renaissance. The Protestant Revolution was a movement that focused on *going back to the basics* of faith, and making faith accessible to the people (e.g., printing the Bible, and conducting the liturgy in the language of the people). The Enlightenment gave birth to the Age of Reason. It was based on logical reasoning, an emphasis on what can be observed in the material world, a belief in the ideas of progress and growth, and a questioning of anything that seemed to hold the seeds of mysticism, including religious authority. The Scientific Revolution was based on theories, and the testing of theories by observing evidence, gathering facts, and analyzing the facts and evidence in a rigorous way so as to discover the *truth*.

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The numbers don't lie Norton.  
*We're definitely nerds!*
These pivotal movements set the foundations for what would become the Industrial Revolution — the culmination of these ideas into the development of a machine age, heavily steeped in the philosophical underpinnings of each of these four movements. It became a very short step to transfer the workings of machines to that of understanding and dealing with humans as if they, too, were machines.

Many people seem to think that we are now in the Information Age, and that the Industrial Age is over. In fact, the Industrial Age is alive and well. Currently, the industrial model is used pervasively to design and run organizations, and to understand and deal with all systems, including relational ones. The industrial model assumes that all situations, including human systems, are similar to machines. This means that they can be designed and controlled. If there are any issues or problems, they can be solved. This mechanistic way of thinking uses a linear approach to deal with complexity by fragmenting it into pieces and parts, and dealing with only those pieces and parts that seem to be important — simplifying the complexity, calling it a problem to be solved, and then fixing it.

Before you go, maybe you could have a look at Ronald. He’s been running very slowly lately.
Section 1: Getting Started

Key Point
Our world is becoming more and more complex, and our ways of thinking and acting in this brave new world are no longer working. The reason is that the system has outgrown the linear approach that created it.

Note
In Section 1, the authors are presenting an argument for a systemic approach to understanding living systems. Throughout this section, the authors state their thoughts on what this means, in terms of their understanding and experience of complexity and change.

These movements never intended to remove the mystery in life, but an effect of these movements was to develop a form of pragmatism that had no room for mystery or mysticism. One effect of a linear approach has been the enormous amount of progress Western Culture has witnessed in the last 50 years or so. This progress has been a result of the last 500 years of evolution of the four movements (i.e., The Renaissance, The Protestant Reformation, The Enlightenment, and The Scientific Revolution). The graph below attempts to show the resulting increase in complexity that these movements, along with The Industrial Revolution, have created.

![Graph showing increasing complexity](image)

In addition to this progress, something else has been created, something unforeseeable — the emergent property of an exponential increase in change and complexity. Many of us can still remember the prediction that the computer would lead us to have more leisure time, and to use less paper. As we all know, both predictions, based on a linear approach to thinking, have been proven false over and over again. Our world is becoming more and more complex, and our ways of thinking and acting in this brave new world are no longer working. The reason is that the system has outgrown the linear approach that created it.
Key Point
Most of us use a linear approach to problem solving because it seems to yield quick results. It also takes so little time to figure out a solution. And the solution seems logical and workable, given what we know about the situation. In other words, we become seduced by our belief that our solutions should work.

The graph below attempts to illustrate how increasing change and complexity is outstripping the capacity of a linear approach to deal with it. You can think of the dotted line on the graph as our current learning curve, based on a linear approach to thinking.

A linear approach is so much a part of our thinking and acting that we are often not aware of the impact it has on systems of connection. Most of us use a linear approach to problem solving because it seems to yield quick results. It also takes so little time to figure out a solution. And the solution seems logical and workable, given what we know about the situation. In other words, we become seduced by our belief that our solutions should work.
To keep pace with change, we believe that we need to move faster and faster, which causes us to focus only on what we believe are the essential pieces. We focus on effectiveness and efficiency, but as time becomes compressed, we narrow our focus to efficiencies. Efficiency focuses on the task at hand, or how to work with minimum waste and the least effort. Effectiveness focuses on the outcome, or how to produce the results that work.

However, both efficiency and effectiveness are reductionist and linear in nature. Both fragment themselves from the living system. Efficiency measures everything in terms of metrics (e.g., time, costs, productivity, revenue, numbers of people). Effectiveness starts out with the end in mind. Often set out as goals, strategic plans, and vision, effectiveness is built on the assumption that we can create the future simply by stating what it is, and then going for it. This way of thinking represents a major movement in management theory and practice in the last few decades. But starting with the end in mind, while perhaps useful in producing an orientation to the future, is itself limiting. It does not leave room for creativity and emergence, essential requisites for invention and innovation.
Key Point
This new way to learn invites and supports *learning as you go*. It is based on the assumption that we need to focus on how the fragments of life connect. The question is not how to manage change and complexity, but how to live and work with change and complexity in a way that recognizes and honours these interconnections.

What is needed is not more of the same, but a new way to think and act — a new learning curve that surfs the tidal waves of change and complexity. The graph below illustrates this new learning curve as a spiral, riding the curve of increasing change and complexity.

This new way to learn invites and supports *learning as you go*. It is based on the assumption that we need to focus on how the fragments of life connect. The question is not how to manage change and complexity, but how to live and work with change and complexity in a way that recognizes and honours these interconnections. The most deeply seated issue that Western Culture faces in dealing with complexity and change is its heavy reliance on linear thinking — the birthright of the four movements. And it is this birthright that is now threatening to overwhelm us.

As change and complexity increase, we can lose more and more of our sense of coherence, becoming less and less able to make meaning from what we are experiencing. We deal with the complexity by becoming more and more localized and fragmented from the living system. In fact, we are not disconnected from the living system; it is our *ways of thinking and acting* that can become disconnected from their contexts.
Living systems operate under different assumptions than do mechanistic systems. This is because living systems are non-linear and dynamic in nature. The four basic assumptions underlying non-linear dynamic systems are:

1. Change is constant, and ever present. It cannot be managed or controlled. It must be worked with as if it were a partner, rather than an enemy.

2. Non-linear dynamic systems are emergent in nature, and cannot be reduced to their parts. You can study patterns within the living system, but you will gain little by studying the parts in isolation of the interconnections and the emergent property that occurs only when the living system is operating as a whole.

3. All agents within non-linear dynamic systems are interdependent, and are mutually dependent on each other. Everything and everyone in a living system is connected.

4. Non-linear dynamic systems behave in paradoxical ways. Large actions often produce little or no results, whereas small actions can produce huge effects.

Living systems are highly complex. They are made up of complex interconnections of people, groups, things, events, processes, and cultures. Living systems are also unpredictable, because most of the interconnections are self-organized by the people interacting with aspects of the system. As people interact, the system interacts in response. People are acting within the system, and are the system itself at the same time. A living system has no boundaries because it is connected to everything else, including the universe. It is useful for us to impose artificial boundaries in order to study aspects of the living system, as long as we are aware that these boundaries are artificial.
It is helpful to examine the difference between a photograph and a hologram to illustrate how, like a hologram, a living system is irreducible to its parts. To explain, consider a photograph of a tree.

If you cut the photograph in half, you get half the tree on one half, and the other half of the tree on the other half of the photograph.

However, living systems are not like photographs — they are like holograms. Many holograms are made of thick glass, and when you look at them, the image within them appears three-dimensional. The effect is so stunning that you can look around the image in the glass and believe it to be real. The three-dimensional quality of the image makes you want to reach into the hologram to touch the image.
Each piece of hologram, no matter its size, contains the entire image of the tree in it. The smaller pieces contain dimmer and less detailed images of the whole tree; larger pieces contain sharper and more detailed images of the whole tree.

That is not the only difference between a photograph and a hologram. You cannot easily cut a glass hologram, so imagine breaking the glass on the floor. A linear approach assumes that if you pick up a piece of glass, you will see only the part of the hologram from that area of the intact glass hologram. But this is not what you will see. Each piece of glass, no matter its size, contains the entire image of the tree in it. The smaller pieces contain dimmer and less detailed images of the whole tree; larger pieces contain sharper and more detailed images of the whole tree. The point is that every part of a hologram contains the essence of the whole three-dimensional image of the tree.
Non-linear dynamic systems operate like holograms. From whatever aspect of the living system, the essence of the system is present. This means that multiple realities are present within a living system, because each person operates from a slightly different facet of the system. And, like a hologram, everyone has access to the living system. There are as many ways to view the system as there are people within it. And if we focus on using only a linear approach, we have limited the number of possibilities available to us. Imagine what we are missing! The Decision Support System in this Guide invites you to enhance your access to this multiple range of possibilities, so that you can become a holographic thinker.
A linear approach works very well, as long as everything remains relatively stable and predictable over time. A linear approach is based on the following assumptions:

- The situation is stable and predictable.
- Everything affected by the action will remain stable and predictable.
- We know enough about the situation to solve the problem.
- Certainty, control, and order are more desirable than disorder.
- We have no time for reflection.
- There is a problem that needs to be fixed.
- Taking action on this solution will solve the problem as we intend it to.

At its core, a linear approach uses the strategy of polarization to simplify the inherent complexity in a system. This strategy relies on either/or thinking, such as right/wrong. Although there are times when you can use a linear approach, a systemic approach is much more effective when you need to think in more complex ways about the realities of which you are a part. Of course, our daily lives require us to manage the complexity of information facing us. It is not the act of simplifying that is the issue, but how we simplify the issue.
In a *systemic approach*, the emphasis shifts from viewing an organization as a *machine to be designed*, or a *problem to be solved*, to seeing it as a *mystery to be explored*. It is a living system, in which people and their relationships within the organization make the organization live and thrive. If people want to create and sustain a desired outcome, such as increased productivity, then they need to create and sustain the relational systems that have the best chance of producing those outcomes. Unlike a linear approach, a systemic approach assumes that situations are complex in nature; so complex, in fact, that it is impossible for anyone to know everything about the system itself.

A systemic approach:
- Focuses on complex patterns of relational connection
- Assumes that there is a network of relationships that act in a way that shows this connection
- Assumes that our working achievements, identities, relationships, and cultures both shape, and are shaped by, each person’s contribution to the living system
- Assumes that actions can be made sense of, where there is sufficient understanding of the relational contexts that shape them

The table on the next page contrasts the *linear approach* with the *systemic approach* from a number of aspects. Be aware that this table — as are all tables — is a simplified representation of highly complex ideas.
## Linear and Systemic Approaches

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Linear Approach</th>
<th>Systemic Approach</th>
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| **The System** | We believe that we can understand the whole system and its parts, and that we can diagram it accurately.  
We know what we need to know about the system, so we operate as if we know enough. | We appreciate that we can only understand the partial system, and that stories we tell cannot be accurate representations of the patterns we live.  
We know little about the system, so we take a position of curiosity about the system. |
| **Rules**    | We believe that the rules are fixed. There is only one way to work within the system, and we must follow that one way. | We believe that the rules are emergent. The system is dynamic, so we can learn as the system changes. Our learning changes the system, thus creating new rules. |
| **Truth**    | We search for objective truth and certainty. There is only one truth. We can know it, and we can act as if we do know it. | We search for hypotheses. Truth is an emergent and dynamic property of a system. We cannot know truth, because stories and narratives on which truth rests are socially constructed. |
| **Reality**  | We believe that language and stories reflect reality. The stories we tell about the patterns we live are accurate reflections of reality. | We believe that language and stories create reality. The stories we tell about the patterns we live create relational expectations, possibilities, and constraints. |
| **Knowledge** | We believe that knowledge arises out of generalizability and consistency. All knowledge can be used in similar situations across a wide range of different contexts. | We believe that knowledge develops out of local, situated action. All knowledge is modified within and for each different context. |
| **Complexity** | We can reduce and simplify complexity. All complex systems can be simplified, so linear thinking can deal with all situations, regardless of how complex. | We accept and inquire into complexity. Complex systems need ways of thinking that work with complexity. |
When we think and act systemically, we automatically treat every situation as complex. We assume that our point of view is only that — a point of view — and nothing more. We act as if we, and others, are part of a living system of patterns of meaning and action that are in constant change. We seek to understand the points of view of others, and the implications of these different perspectives. We are mindful of our role and relational responsibilities, which may require us to choose which point of view takes precedence in a given context.

At the heart of a systemic approach is an interest in patterns of connection and, by implication, patterns of disconnection — where events, actions, and meanings are fragmented rather than connected. We look for patterns in how people make meaning, in how they act, and in the interplay between the two. The word pattern is used here to mean forms of thinking and action that repeat over time becoming embedded as stories in culture, relationships, and identities. This is a helpful idea because it gives us the power to make changes in the conversations in which we live. If we can think about conversations in ways that help us act differently, we can create a more desirable reality.

A systemic approach invites and supports a learning as you go method called action learning. In this method, one continuously tests hypotheses in action, learning from that action, and then refining the hypothesis for the next action (shown below).
Rather than needing to know where we are going, and what it will look like when we get there, we focus on understanding where we are right now, from a systemic perspective. Then, we hypothesize possible consequences of the ways we are thinking. This is the essence of a systemic approach.

Learning as you go is based on an experimental frame. It is fundamental to building resilience in any whole system. When you approach the future as a blank slate full of multiple possibilities, you open yourself to the possibility of creating something truly novel. That is the power of a systemic approach. Rather than focusing on knowing and creating the future, you focus on the adventure of learning as you live in connection with the whole system.

At present, there are many difficulties that people experience in organizations. These are often characterized by complaints of:

- Lack of communication or poor communication
- Lack of recognition
- Lack of vision, direction, goals
- Lack of respect
- Silo mentality
- Power dynamics

When you analyze such comments, what is often at the heart of them is a lack of understanding of, and engagement with, patterns of connection. If we operate from a linear perspective, as we often do, all we see is them and us, rather than the pattern of connection between them and us. A systemic approach focuses our view on those patterns of connection, and the multiple realities that those patterns of connection create.
Systemic Eloquence

Living systems, such as organizations, are made up of human interactions. From a human perspective, these interactions are in the forms of human feelings, meaning making, communication, and other forms of social action. We spend much of our time attempting to make sense of what we experience within these social systems. How we make sense of our experiences shapes how we participate in creating the dynamic of the system.

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is a systemic approach that was developed by communication theorists Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen, and others in the worlds of systemic psychotherapy and organizational practice. CMM focuses on recognizing and analyzing the patterns of communication that make up the social worlds in which we live and have our being. CMM is also a philosophy that focuses on taking systemic actions that are socially responsible and accountable, informed by an understanding of patterns of communication. CMM offers a distinctive approach to making sense and participating within our social worlds. It focuses on the links between the patterns we live, and the stories we tell about these patterns, in order to make meaning out of our experience. Our patterns lived are forms of communication that repeat over time; our stories told are our descriptions of communicative experience.

The words coordinated management of meaning are used to emphasize that communication is a social process of negotiating meaning in such a way that our actions connect to meaning and form patterns within relationships. These patterns can be either more or less effective for the functioning of the relationship, team or organization. For instance, if a member of a team acts in a way that appears angry, another team member responds by showing curiosity, asking, “why are you feeling so passionate about this?”
Section 1: Getting Started

The negotiated and emergent quality of meaning shows through a shift in the interpretation or story of the communication (from anger to passion). This, in turn, shapes the possibilities for patterns of action. Person A may find himself or herself in a position of explaining the communication, rather than acting out a feeling. Person B becomes positioned as a listener, rather than an opponent. This exchange may represent a change in a previously coordinated pattern of mutual anger, or it may represent an existing pattern of coordinated learning in that relationship or team. Our abilities to negotiate meaning, and to coordinate action, are powerfully affected by our capacities to take a systemic view.

Offering a framework for communication analysis, and a guide for communicative action, CMM invites us to focus on specific moments and episodes of interaction and to consider:

- Who is telling the stories being told, to whom, and in what way?
- Which stories are heard, and which become less visible?
- Which stories have the strongest influence on action?
- What is the nature of connection and influence between stories?
- What forms of emotion, identity, relationship, and culture are constructed?
- How do our actions and stories connect with the wider system and its patterns lived?
- What choices do we, as individuals, have in the stories yet to be told and patterns yet to be lived?
- What part do we play in shaping the choices of others?

CMM is a systemic approach that enriches our abilities to tell stories about our holographic experience of, and within, a living system. This connects us to the system, and the system to us, in a way that suggests a coherence of practice that could be called *systemic eloquence.*
**Systemic eloquence**

*Systemic eloquence* is an approach that highlights communication as a *moral decision making activity*. Systemic eloquence focuses on the ways we communicate, and hold responsibility for, the possibilities and constraints for thinking and acting that are created in a living system.

If we operate as if we are fragmented from the whole system, we are *systemically disconnected*, which undermines how we think and act. We are less likely to understand what choices we are making, why we might be making our decisions, and how our choices and decisions might affect others. We may even be operating as if we need to consider only our own interests. Even then, if we are not mindful of the complexity within which our interests exist, we may not be as conscious as we need to be to make effective decisions. We can thus create a pattern of disconnection that can lead to less mindful patterns of action.

**Reference**
The term *systemic eloquence* was developed by Christine Oliver in 1996, and it extends Barnett Pearce's notions of *social and rhetorical eloquence*. For more information, go to Section 5, page 168.

If we operate as if we are part of the system, we are *systemically connected*, and how we think and act is based on this systemic connection. We are more aware of what choices we are making, why we might be making particular decisions, and how our decisions might affect others and ourselves. We operate as if there are other multiple realities to consider.
Section 1: Getting Started

Key Point

The emphasis on communication abilities, or eloquence, implies the importance of voice. Voice is a vehicle that connects emotion and language, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Note

According to the Oxford Dictionary, eloquence is “…the action, practice or art of speaking ..... with fluency, force, and appropriateness so as to appeal to the reason or move the feelings”.

The ways in which we think and act relate to how we communicate with each other and ourselves. There is a concern here for how eloquent we are in our communication abilities. Eloquent abilities are those that show effective coordination, coherence, fit, and impact.

The emphasis on communication abilities, or eloquence, implies the importance of voice. Voice is a vehicle that connects emotion and language, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication. An interest in voice leads us to wonder how talk is put together, including what vocabulary is used, and the patterns of connection that result. Voice implies position. In thinking about voice, we are led to ask:

- From what place is the voice speaking?
- Who is speaking to whom?
- Who is speaking most or least loudly?
- What is noticed about what is not said?
- How do I and the other position each other in the conversation?
- What pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and other parts of speech are used, and what might be their significance?
- What emotions are enabled or constrained through this positioning?

For your information, I am engaging the energy of change and complexity to create the future I desire.
Systemic eloquence aspires to show the following relational commitments:

- **Systemic humility**: Humility is often used as a word to sensitize us to our limitations. Here it is also used to imply *sensitivity to the powers of the impact* of our actions. When we practice humility, we are prepared to notice and sense the power and shape of our contribution to the experience of both self and other. We examine the relevance, purposes, and effects of the contexts that shape our actions, and how our actions shape communicative abilities through pressure, instruction, and invitation.

- **Systemic discernment**: More often than not, there can be a discontinuity between a story told and a pattern lived. When we practice discernment, we can tell the difference between the stories told and the patterns lived, between our experience and the accounts that we, and others, give of that experience.

- **Systemic responsibility**: Organizational systems are full of complex social accountabilities. When we practice responsibility, we participate in a way that honours the multiple realities and accountabilities of a situation. We treat all perspectives as valid, even though we might not make sense of them or find them desirable. The positions of others may seem ungenerous, inaccessible, unreasonable, or fixed, but we take responsibility for respecting that such positions do make systemic sense. As a result, we attempt to hypothesize about their systemic meaning.

- **Systemic courage**: Our practice of courage shows in our willingness to reflect on, and challenge, our own stories told and patterns lived. Courage requires us to be open to change, and prepared to adopt a position of *safe uncertainty*. 
These five relational commitments encourage us to make socially negotiated decisions that coordinate the management of meaning. Practicing systemic eloquence requires us to facilitate this coordination in ways that maintain or improve the powers in ourselves and others to describe, explain, critique, discriminate, justify, and make choices.

- **Systemic generosity**: Generosity is more complex than simply sharing resources and abilities — it is also about *giving grace*. Giving grace means that when, in moments of certainty, we experiment with uncertainty and elaborate our understanding, we widen our view and make it more complex. When we practice generosity, we are generous to ourselves and to others in taking time to listen and understand, and to value others’ experiences.

These five relational commitments encourage us to make socially negotiated decisions that coordinate the management of meaning. Practicing systemic eloquence requires us to facilitate this coordination in ways that maintain or improve the powers in ourselves and others to:

- **Describe**, so as to give voice to a story not yet told
- **Explain**, so as to tell stories about our stories
- **Critique**, so as to treat descriptions as stories among stories, to treat ourselves as a commentator on stories, and to appreciate links and contradictions between stories
- **Discriminate**, so as to articulate distinctions, analyze freedoms and constraints of stories for self and others, define the contexts of significance, and connect actions to consequences
- **Justify**, so as to attempt a coherence between intention and outcome through a commitment to social accountability
- **Make choices**, so as to facilitate a belief for all participants that choices can be made

Developing the ability to be systemically eloquent seems difficult to do, because we have to think about what we are thinking, what we are feeling, what we are saying, and how this is affecting others as well as ourselves. This is not easy. Learning to tell *systemic stories* can help us to become systemically eloquent.
Systemic storytelling

Note
There is a difference between conventional systems thinking and the systemic approach being offered here. Most conventional approaches to systems thinking are based in scientific management, in that they focus on diagramming the system using mathematical approaches, such as stock flow and causal loop diagrams. In this Guide, the authors use a systemic approach that focuses on understanding system dynamics through stories told and patterns lived. The systems thinking aspect of the Decision Support System is also a systemic storytelling approach.

Systemic storytelling is an attempt to piece together the multilayered complexity of the connections, discontinuities, contradictions, and openings and closures of the stories that we live as participants in communication. As systemic storytellers, we develop a systemic perspective of a situation with others. We are collectively guided by a desire both to make sense of the situation, and to discover a way to deal with the situation, in order to help others and ourselves move forward.

The activity of telling stories creates a context for us to develop systemic eloquence, so that we can invite change for the good of the system we are examining. It provides a structure through which we can explore the conditions that allow for particular stories to develop. We can examine the purposes and effects of such stories on our abilities to identify and construct certain kinds of identities, relationships, and cultures. Systemic storytelling provides a framework for thinking about our abilities to gain access to, make use of, and exercise choice, in order for us to act coherently.

The Decision Support System in this Guide uses three storytelling devices, each having specific areas of strength:

- **Systems thinking**: Systems thinking is the best systemic storytelling device for diagramming the operational system dynamics. It focuses on planning for action, planning for possible side effects, and monitoring actions and learning from actions over time.

- **Reflexive practice**: Reflexive practice is the best systemic storytelling device for diagramming the relational system dynamics. It focuses on understanding the stories told and patterns lived within and between relationships, identifying the loop patterns that are occurring, making a reflexive choice, and taking action on that reflexive choice.
Key Point

The Decision Support System uses all three devices in an integrated way, because this develops a broader and deeper form of systemic eloquence, and produces the most effective form of action and learning.

- **Strategic practice:** Strategic practice is the best systemic storytelling device for diagramming the cultural system dynamics. It focuses on understanding the ideological and cultural patterns from which people and groups may be operating, making a strategic choice, and taking action on that strategic choice.

Each one of these devices has weaknesses when used in isolation. For example, systems thinking does not examine relational or cultural dynamics; thus, using systems thinking only, you may not be effective in your actions because the relational and/or cultural dynamic is also at play.

Without question, you can use any of the three devices by itself, but if you find that you are not achieving your desired results, it may be that your understanding will be enhanced by using the other two devices as well. The Decision Support System uses all three devices in an integrated way, because this develops a broader and deeper form of systemic eloquence, and produces the most effective form of action and learning.

Give up Doctor Madd!! Your weapons are no match for CAPTAIN HOLOGRAM!
Using this Guide

When to use this Guide

You use this Guide when you, a team, a diverse action learning group, and/or an organization wants to:

- Learn how to develop systemic eloquence
- Use systemic storytelling as a way to recognize stories told and patterns lived, and as a way to act effectively within the nature of a system’s dynamic
- Work more effectively within the constraints of a whole system’s dynamics
- Understand the effect of change efforts within the constraints of a whole system’s dynamics
- Develop a systemically eloquent way of operating with complexity, change, and uncertainty

Who might use this Guide

This Guide can be used by:

- **Individuals** who prefer to examine whole systems on their own, or who are not in a position to have support to examine whole systems
- **Teams** in which members depend on each other to do their work and/or report to each other. These teams include cross-functional teams, work teams, project teams, and management teams.
- **Diverse Groups**: This is a group of people who do not work together all the time, or who come from a variety of occupational backgrounds. It can include people who come from within an organization or from a variety of organizations. Examples of teams that are also a diverse group include management teams, such as a senior management team, or a group of supervisors reporting to the same manager. Some teams, such as Human Resources, can be quite diverse (e.g., a person from staffing, a person from compensation, a person from employee relations, a person from training and development, and so on).
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How this Guide links to other Guides

This Guide is the fifth of five Guides in the Leadership Through Learning (LTL) series. The LTL series focuses on:

- Developing ways of thinking and learning that assist leaders to understand and deal with increasing complexity, change, and uncertainty
- Using a decision support system that assists leaders to thrive in conditions of increasing complexity, change, and uncertainty
- Learning in action within an action learning community in which leaders apply their learning to their own specific real-life situations in organizational settings

This Guide integrates the four methods examined in the other four Guides in the LTL series:

1. **Solving Real Problems in Real Time: Action Learning Guide**
   Leaders examine workplace situations using an action learning process that focuses on people learning in collaboration by solving real problems in the workplace in real time.

   Leaders examine workplace situations from a tactical perspective in which all aspects of the work being done are considered as part of a larger and more complex system.

3. **Complexity, Relationships, and Strange Loops: Reflexive Practice Guide**
   Leaders examine workplace situations from a relational perspective in which fears, anxieties, expectations, and hopes create patterns of action that are often ineffective in the work place.
4. **Corporate Culture and Organizational Change: Strategic Practice Guide**
   Leaders examine workplace situations from a cultural perspective in which the cultural stories told create patterns of actions.

5. **Surfing the Waves of Change: Decision Support System Guide**
   Leaders examine workplace situations using the decision support system trilogy of systems thinking, reflexive practice, and strategic practice while applying the action learning approach.

   This Guide uses action learning as its underlying learning as you go process. The Decision Support System in this Guide integrates systems thinking, reflexive practice, and strategic practice through a process of systemic story-telling and developing systemic eloquence.

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### How this Guide works

This Guide has 5 Sections:

**Section 1: Getting Started**
- The age of science
- Whole systems and complexity
- Linear and systemic approach
- Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)
- Systemic eloquence
- Systemic story-telling
- Using this Guide

**Section 2: Start Here! Road Map**
- Instructions on using the road map
- Road map
Section 3: System Analysis

- Instructions on how to analyze a whole system
- Instructions on how to make reflexive and strategic choices
- Instructions on how to take action on the reflexive and strategic choices

Section 4: Case Studies

- Introduction to the case studies
- Case studies, using real-life situations

Section 5: More Information

- Research references
- Guide references
- Other Guides and products
- MHA InfoMine newsletters
- Useful contacts
- Author information

Bucking the system again, Walters?!
Are you still at it? You're like some kind of machine!