What Is Systems Thinking?

*Whenever I’m trying to help people understand what this word ‘system’ means, I usually start by asking: ‘Are you a part of a family?’ Everybody is a part of a family. ‘Have you ever seen in a family, people producing consequences in the family, how people act, how people feel, that aren’t what anybody intends?’ Yes. ‘How does that happen?’ Well… then people tell their stories and think about it. But that then grounds people in not the jargon of ‘system’ or ‘systems thinking’ but the reality – that we live in webs of interdependence.”*

What Is The Fundamental Rationale Of Systems Thinking?

*[The fundamental rationale of systems thinking] is to understand how it is that the problems that we all deal with, which are the most vexing, difficult and intransigent, come about, and to give us some perspective on those problems [in order to] give us some leverage and insight as to what we might do differently.”*

3 Characteristics Of A Systems Thinking Approach

1. *A very deep and persistent commitment to ‘real learning.’*
2. *I have to be prepared to be wrong. If it was pretty obvious what we ought to be doing, then we’d be already doing it. So I’m part of the problem, my own way of seeing things, my own sense of where there’s leverage, is probably part of the problem. This is the domain we’ve always called ‘mental models.’ If I’m not prepared to challenge my own mental models, then the likelihood of finding non-obvious areas of leverage are very low.*
3. *The need to triangulate. You need to get different people, from different points of view, who are seeing different parts of the system to come together and collectively start to see something that individually none of them see.”*

A Fundamental Principle Of Systems Thinking: Smart Individuals Are No Longer Needed, Collective Intelligence Is

*We all have probably spent too much time thinking about ‘smart individuals.’ That’s one of the problems with schools. They are very individualistic, very much about ‘the smart kids and the dumb kids.’ That’s not the kind of smartness we need.*

*The smartness we need is collective. We need cities that work differently. We need industrial sectors that work differently. We need value change and supply change that are managed from the beginning until the end to purely produce social, ecological and economic well-being. That is the concept of intelligence we need, and it will never be achieved by a handful of smart individuals.*

*It’s not about ‘the smartest guys in the room.’ It’s about what we can do collectively. So the intelligence that matters is collective intelligence, and that’s the concept of ‘smart’ that I think will really tell the tale.”*