

Learning to ‘see systems’

Sometimes, we all get too close to the trees to see the forest.



Josie McLean

And when we are in such a position, we miss vital clues about the context of the challenge or opportunity in front of us – our next moves then often trigger unintended consequences, those nasty surprises most managers dislike, that either make the problem worse or somehow derail our intended outcomes.

Exercising leadership effectively requires a broader perspective – a systemic perspective. Whether it is in relation to people issues or shaping a strategic response.

But most managers have not been taught how to develop this capacity – in fact the way we have been taught to solve problems “chunk it down to the smallest part” actually works against developing a systemic perspective.

One way that I have been exploring this capacity in our work recently has employed the idea of different personal perspectives, borrowed from neuro linguistic programming (NLP).



1st position – you and your needs, concerns and feelings.

2nd position – the other person’s needs, concerns and feelings

3rd position – being a ‘fly on the wall’ and with some detachment, observing the quality of the interaction between two (or more) people

4th position – the larger context within which the interaction between people is occurring.

You may like to download my *Perceptual Positions Worksheet* that also describes these positions in more detail and the constructive and unconstructive uses of each position. Additionally it provides a framework to discipline yourself to think about your issue from each perspective.

Why not try it out on a current issue and see if you gain more insights into understanding the nature and dynamic of the situation you are in – and developing a better way forward? ■

With Kind permission

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Our Profound Change program cultivates the conditions to form an organisational culture that sustains employees, communities and the natural environment.” Our systemic approach sees and works with the whole, rather than individual parts of your organisation to deliver tangible results.

Perceptual Positions Worksheet
<http://the-partnership.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Perceptual-positions-131028-5.pdf>