March 2018

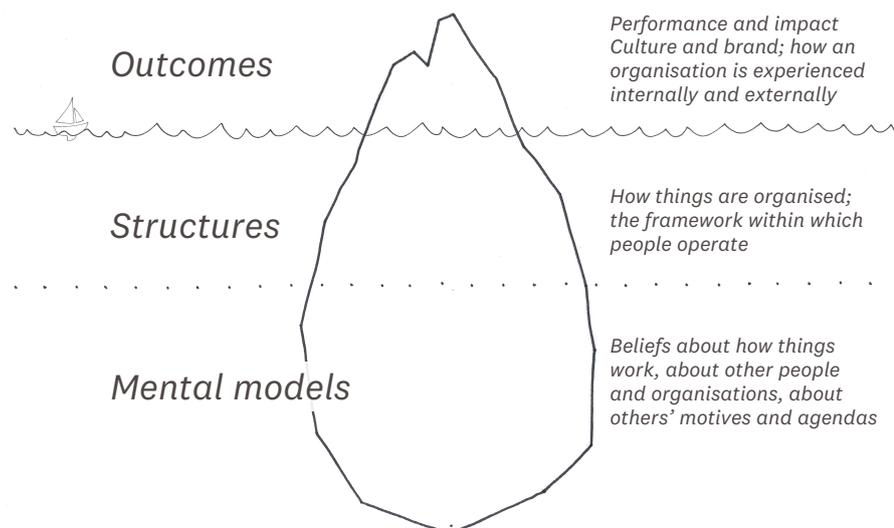## Involved in transformation?
People love this model

I had the experience again. I offered a simple 'iceberg' model and my client seized on it, waved it around and started using phrases like "going deeper in the iceberg". It happens every time I share it; people love it.

Outcomes

Performance and impact Culture and brand; how an organisation is experienced internally and externally

Structures

How things are organised; the framework within which people operate

Mental models

Beliefs about how things work, about other people and organisations, about others' motives and agendas

You might not love this model if you're a purist about complexity science or a stickler for precision. You might balk at its simplicity and the things it omits. You might find it wonderful and marvel at how it helps people shift to a more systemic way of looking at things.

The iceberg model and why people seem to love it

There are many 'iceberg' models. The original for this one came from The Systems Thinking Playbook by Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (thanks and respect - it's a brilliant book). I have adapted it as I've used it with people.

This model is a very simple representation of a complex system. It uses the metaphor of an iceberg to illustrate that our experiences are deeply influenced by dynamics we cannot easily see: the

structures that form the framework within which we operate, and the beliefs we hold about how things work.

It's simple and easy to understand and seems to be at a 'Mummy Bear', medium level of abstraction - not so specific that it's scary and not so vague that it loses all meaning.

Its great strength seems to be that it puts the client in the driving seat in a conversation about the interventions to try in their organisation. A light goes on for people when they see the list of structures, the 'levers' they can pull. It often triggers new insight about what they're experiencing and new ideas for how to intervene.

The conversation often starts with structures and flows into beliefs, and a richer picture emerges.
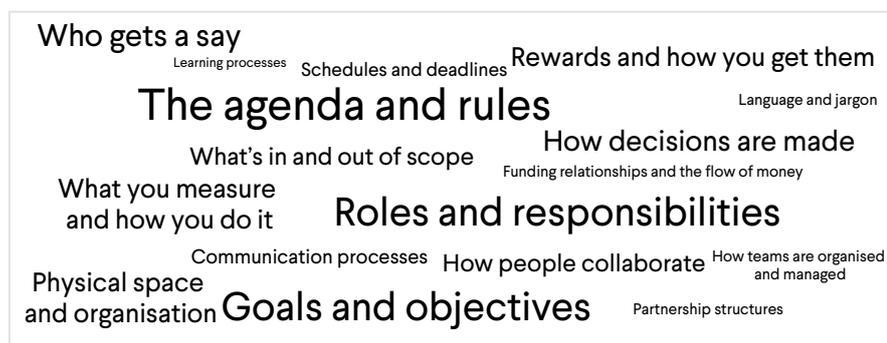
Who gets a say
Learning processes Schedules and deadlines Rewards and how you get them
The agenda and rules
Language and jargon
What's in and out of scope How decisions are made
Funding relationships and the flow of money
What you measure and how you do it Roles and responsibilities
Communication processes How people collaborate How teams are organised and managed
Physical space and organisation Goals and objectives Partnership structures

Exhibit A: finding the place to intervene in an arts organisation

This example comes from a transformation project I ran for an arts organisation. One of the 'hot' presenting issues was the pickle they were in with creative meetings. "People weren't talking and the meetings weren't functional. Our work is creative, about emotion and passion, but people were detached; I was flummoxed as to why people weren't contributing," said the meeting owner.

Some of the hidden dynamics were around the power structures underpinning the ideas process: whose ideas were taken seriously and the process by which ideas came to life. It pointed to some organisational beliefs about creativity and the hierarchies that existed but neither of these were safe topics for discussion at the time. We could however talk about their structures such as their processes of communication and collaboration.

A shift happened after a systems game when I used the iceberg model to help them make sense of their experiences and open up a conversation about the experiments they could run in their organisation. They wanted to put their energy into something that felt exciting and began talking about a new area in their building and how they could set it up as a hot-desking space.

It proved to be a key intervention. People from other departments began to mix with 'the ideas people' and take part in the informal

conversations leading up to creative meetings. The conversations shifted and the old beliefs about who was qualified to develop ideas began to dissolve - without us having to address them directly. There were other dynamics and interventions but the hot-desking space was an important catalyst for change. It seemed to unlock enough for people to begin to experiment in other areas.

"You can't underestimate the incredible difference moving offices made, and it already feels different, with a focus on conversation rather than email."

"Creative team meetings have a new lease of life. They aren't about putting ideas into practice any more; they're about practising being creative together. We're changing the format every time and asking who wants to get involved from the whole of the organisation."

"There's a new mindset; we understand things differently."

Exhibit B: be careful what you measure

There's another aspect to this: using the model to remind ourselves about the influence the structures and beliefs can have on behaviours - and how creative people can be in delivering exactly what you ask for.

A very large, global organisation wanted to increase 'employee engagement' in community investment across their offices around the world. 'Engagement' was defined as 'the number of employees participating' across a set of programmes and a high target was set.

The retail guys rolled up their sleeves, delivered some amazing projects, raised a record-breaking amount of money for charity and moved the dial on brand loyalty with some great local PR. Employee satisfaction moved up a notch with community participation cited as one of the top 3 reasons to work for their part of the organisation. They did a great job - but missed the participation target.

The finance guys took a different approach. Their manager heavily promoted payroll giving where employees could donate the 'pennies' from their salary - so each person would donate between 1-99p (or cents) each month. They raised relatively little money and people didn't have the experience of participating in anything so it didn't affect employee satisfaction or the brand. They did however completely blast the target, the only part of the organisation to do so.

It won't go down as a great example of employee engagement, but was a lovely lesson in how influential measurement is.

Contact

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