

# Systems Thinking for Leaders in Social Change

## An Interactive Workshop that Uses Systems Tools to Boost the Effectiveness of People in Organizations and Networks

### *Sustainability Institute*

#### The Opportunity

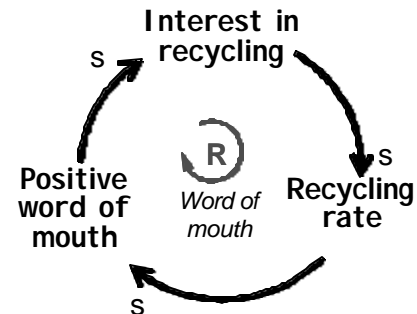
Sustainability Institute, a not-for-profit center that applies systems thinking and organizational learning approaches to economic, environmental and social challenges, offers a one-to-two day workshop to teams, organizations and networks of collaborators.

#### The Workshop

The workshop, “Systems Thinking for Leaders in Social Change,” includes PowerPoint-based lectures, interactive discussions, physical challenges, case studies, and diagramming exercises. Workshop participants boost their effectiveness through the application of systems thinking tools and approaches. Unlike many training curricula in the field, the goal is not to condense a full semester academic course into a short time frame, but, instead, to help people apply the insights of the field that are most relevant and applicable to their current work.

The heart of the workshop includes:

- **Graphing:** Exploring historical and future trends with behavior-over-time graphs. The Lovins’ “Soft Energy Paths” case study.
- **Diagramming:** Drawing feedback loops – reinforcing and balancing.
- **Case studies:** Water efficiency case, “Broken Windows” case from *The Tipping Point*, “Getting Spread Too Thinly”, Word-of-Mouth success, and others.
- **Physical challenges:** “Speed Catch” challenge and “Living Loops” demonstration designed and integrated by Dr. Dennis Meadows and Linda Booth Sweeney.
- **Small group work:** Using indicators to define goals for social change and applying systems thinking principles to the group’s work.



The workshop can stand alone or supplement curricula focused on strategic planning, team-building, sustainable development, change management and other topics.

## Results

Reactions from past participants include:

- “It was a great fun-filled action packed day! The program helped me to think of ways to think more precisely about complicated issues and problems. The fact that we covered all this in a day added to the strength of the program because it encouraged precision and clarity.”

– Workshop participant, University of New Hampshire, Durham NH

- "The workshop is simply amazing- it touches on basic, practical areas of change."

– Workshop participant,  
2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development,  
Johannesburg, South Africa

## Credit

The workshop was developed in collaboration with Professor Dennis Meadows through a contract with London-based LEAD International. Additional support was provided by the Surdna Foundation.

## Scheduling a Workshop

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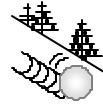
## Facilitating Self Sustaining Change -- Tip

*Note: Most Important Slide of the Session!!!*

- ♦ When you want your effort to achieve progress without constant energy input, ask yourself:

**Are there ways for our efforts to trigger reactions in the wider system that sustain the positive effects of our actions? Can small results “snowball” into large results?**

- ♦ The idea is to find cycles of growth in the world that build on themselves.
- ♦ You know this to some degree already, but it helps to focus directly on these processes and appreciate their power.



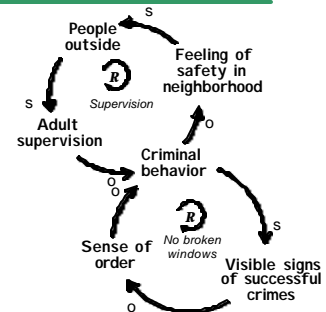
Session 3  
Facilitating Change-7

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## Fixing Broken Windows Case -- Bonus Story

- ♦ Leaders from Boston, USA, have described a secondary effect.
  - Less criminal behavior creates a feeling of safety in the neighborhood, leading more people to spend time outside. The resulting adult supervision restores a sense of order and lowers crime.
- ♦ If these social scientists' theories are correct, the leaders tapped into some powerful reinforcing feedback loops to meet their goals.



Session 3  
Facilitating Change-22

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