

CERTIFIED PUBLIC MANAGER PROGRAM
Florida Center For Public Management
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

LEVEL 6 ASSIGNMENT (NEW)
GUIDELINES

IMPROVING SYSTEMS

February, 2008

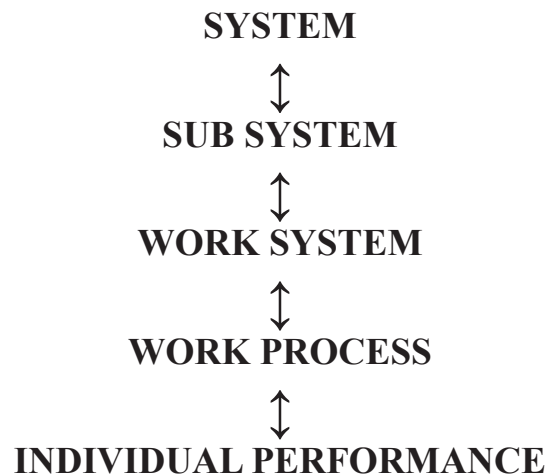
BACKGROUND

Many practitioners, writers, and scholars believe that government must be transformed from time to time to better serve the public. In this Level 6 Assignment, you are asked to apply systems thinking to address a “big picture” systems problem that impacts your agency.

Traditionally, most improvement efforts focus on the work process level (such as the CPM Level 2 Assignment), but in this assignment we want you to focus on a higher level: the system, sub-system, or work system level. These may cross over traditional organizational boundaries to include other divisions, agencies, or customer groups.

Peter Senge proposes that one reason improvement strategies fail is that they focus too narrowly on “detail complexity” instead of seeing the interdependencies and relationships that affect the overall system—what he calls “dynamic complexity.” This assignment asks you to shift your thinking from the detail complexity of your individual work processes to the dynamic complexity of systems and the relationships between multiple elements in those systems.

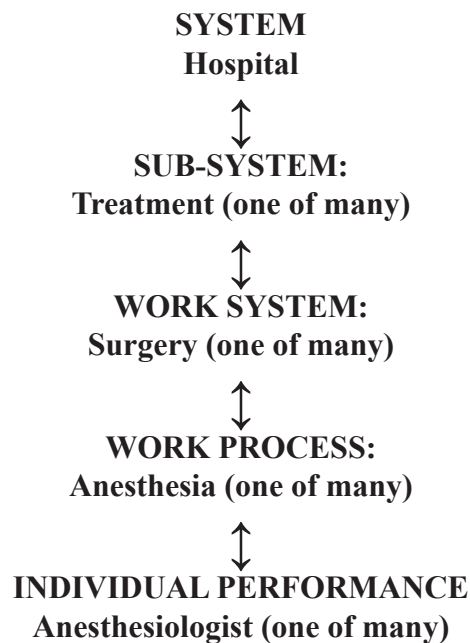
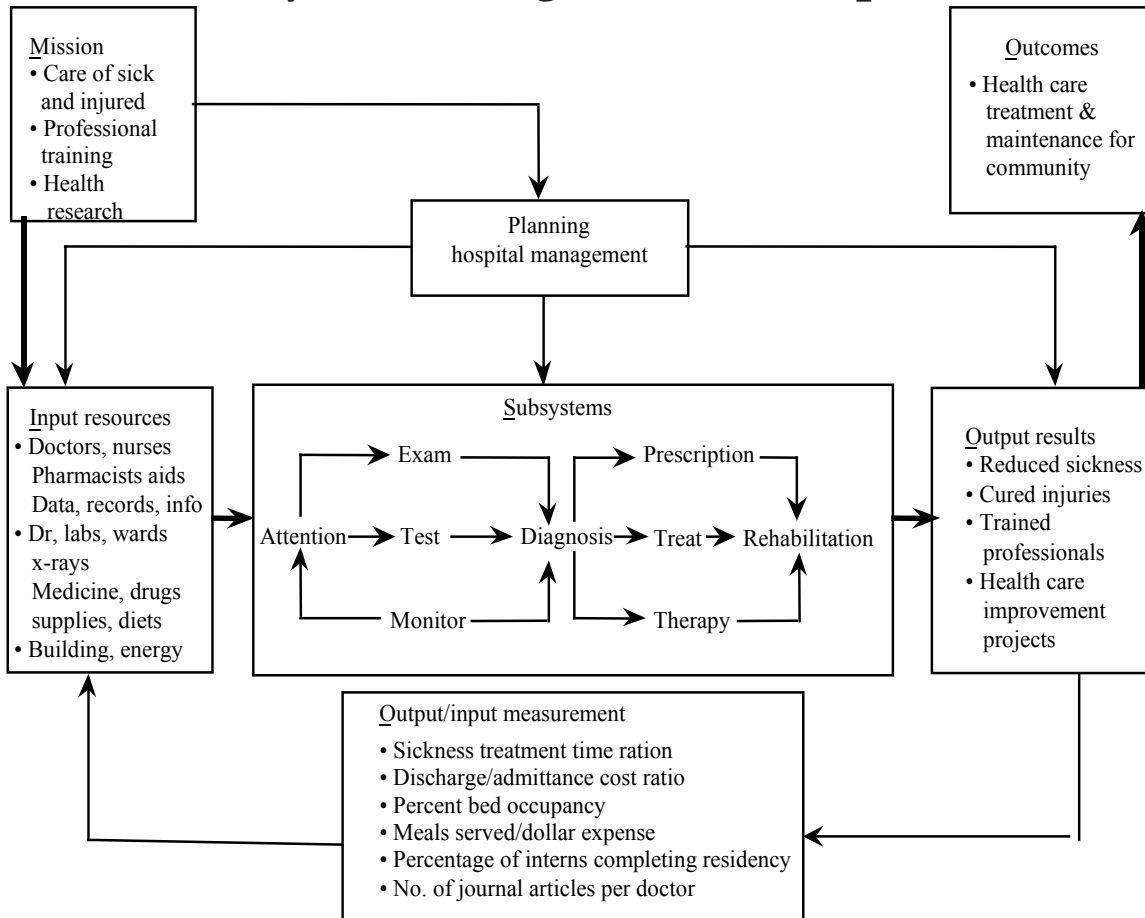
The following illustrates the relationships between these terms:



The delimitation between these five layers can be illusive and can sometimes be applied differently depending on what is being viewed and by whom. When you focus at the work process level, you can identify various work processes fairly easily. As you move up to higher levels, however, there are multiple relationships that come into play.

We have included a diagram that illustrates these levels in one organization.

A Systems Diagram of a Hospital



PROCEDURES

1. This application may be done individually or as a group.
2. Follow the steps as outlined on the next page of these guidelines.
- 3.. Be certain to address all of the elements in each step.
4. Cite any course materials you use as you address each step.
5. Type your application in a double-spaced format and include a title page with your name(s), date of submission, email addresses, and your work phone numbers.
6. There is no minimum or maximum length but obvious understanding and meaningful application of systems thinking are required.
7. Upload your assignment on the FCPM website. If you don't know how to do this, there is a tutorial on the website.

For further assistance, contact Dr. Dan Vicker (the CPM student liaison) at 850-597-1084 or dvicker@admin.fsu.edu. You may also call the FCPM office at 850-644-6460, or SC 284-6460.

OVERVIEW

This assignment requires you to apply the concepts of systems thinking, as discussed in Level 6, to a “big picture” systems problem that impacts your agency. You are expected to draw upon and reference materials from the notebook or from outside reading on systems. Your submission must include the following steps:

STEP ONE

- A. Identify a “big picture” systems problem that impacts your agency and you as a stakeholder.
- B. Give a detailed description of this problem and how it diminishes your agency’s ability to achieve its desired outcomes.

STEP TWO

- A. Describe the larger system(s) which this problem affects (this could be at the work system, subsystem, or system level).
- B. Describe the purpose of this system in terms of its desired results.

STEP THREE

- A. Drawing on Level 6, Module 2 (Systems Modeling), draw a systems diagram (model) of this work system, subsystem, or system.
- B. Be sure to show the various elements in this system and the connections between them.

STEP FOUR

- A. Provide a narrative description of the relationships between the elements of this system and any patterns of influence among them.
- B. Be sure to describe the interdependencies that exist among these elements (describe any reciprocal influences or feedback loops among the elements).

STEP FIVE

- A. Systems thinking attempts to understand why complex problems exist. In your example, provide an in-depth description of why you believe this problem exists. You should provide background information about how this problem arose and any previous attempts that failed to solve it.
- B. You may find it useful to reference some of the basic systems principles covered in Level 6, Module 1.

STEP SIX

- A. Russell Ackoff suggests that there are four ways to treat a problem: absolve (wash your hands), resolve (quick fix), solve (satisficing), and dissolve. Systems thinking attempts to redesign the system so the problem is dissolved. As a systems thinker, how would you recommend that this systems problem could be dissolved? Provide detailed recommendations for your proposed treatment.
- B. Based on your recommendations, what changes would need to be made in the elements of the system, and what outcomes would you envision?