

Welcome to BLINK 8

CONNECTIONS SYSTEMS THINKING

BY STEPHEN ALLAN 15 DEC 2014

Welcome to BLINK 8. This time our focus is on Systems Thinking.

It's an issue that's top-of-mind here at MediaCom, because we've spent a lot of time over the past 18 months working out exactly how to apply Systems Thinking to the task of optimizing our clients' marketing communications.

The result is our new planning process, 20|20 Connections (see p. 36), and our determination that our job is always to optimize the entire system of communications – not just the channel silos.

So what is a System and why is Systems Thinking so important? For a detailed answer, take a look at Putting Systems

Thinking into Communications Practice p. 16 and Language of Systems Thinking p. 06.

For a quicker answer, I like the analogy of “family”, favoured by Peter Senge, who teaches Systems Thinking at MIT Sloan School of Management.

Senge says: “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, how people can produce consequences – how people act, how people feel – that aren’t what anybody intends?’ “

As Senge explains, this analogy takes us away from the jargon of Systems and Systems Thinking, and makes more vivid the undeniable fact that we all live in webs of interdependence. And that, if you’re not extremely careful, you can generate problems in these interdependent webs or systems that you really didn’t mean to.

So Systems Thinking isn’t some abstract buzz-phrase. Being good at Systems Thinking is about foreseeing and preventing problems, and about maximizing the health and happiness of the family – or, in our case, maximizing the effectiveness of a communications system.

Regards,

Stephen Allan

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