



Human Systems Dynamics Institute

Coherence Self-Assessment and Option Generator

In each of the following descriptions, indicate where your team, group, or organization would score, using the two statements as opposite ends of the scale. "Connect the dots" to draw a "profile" that points to the degree of coherence that exists in your system. On the final page are some general questions to generate conversation about increasing the coherence.

Shared goals	1	2	3	4	5	
Individual and group goals are shared and discussed.						There is no standard expectation for individuals or groups to set goals.
Individual and group goals are clearly aligned with each other and with the system's direction.						Individuals and groups who set goals focus on their own their work, with little or no regard to the work of the whole.
Shared meaning	1	2	3	4	5	
A common language is used to discuss system issues, processes, planning and decision making.						People use their own, disparate language around issues, processes, planning, and decision making with little or no attempt to include others.
Data and information are shared across the system in ways that builds common understanding and perspective.						There is little or no sharing of information across the system to build common understanding and perspective.
Generally, individuals and groups across the system share perceptions and interpretations of events and issues inside the system and in the greater environment.						There is little conversation inside or outside the system to explore or discuss the real or potential impacts of issues, events, and trends.
People are encouraged to talk about their differences in perceptions and interpretations.						Discussions of difference across the system are not allowed or not valued for their contributions to coherence in the system.
Repeated patterns	1	2	3	4	5	
Similar patterns of decision making and interaction are visible across departments and work groups in the system.						Any one group or department has little or no real awareness of decision making or interactions in other parts of the system.
Similar patterns of decision making and interaction are visible across scales from individual, to group, to department, to division to the greater whole across the system.						There are few, if any, similarities between patterns of interaction and decision making across scales in the system.
Over time, patterns of decision making and interaction are consistent, in spite of small differences that might be situation or time specific.						There is little or no consistency or certainty of interactions and decision making across time in the system.

Adaptation	1	2	3	4	5	
The parts of the system (individuals, groups, teams, departments) are able to respond and adapt in a timely manner to opportunities and barriers that emerge across the system.						The parts of the system (individuals, groups, teams, departments) are unable to respond or adapt in a timely manner to opportunities and barriers that emerge across the system, creating uncertainty and decreasing efficiency and effectiveness.
The system, as a whole, is able to respond and adapt as opportunities and barriers emerge in the greater system.						The system, as a whole, is unable to respond or adapt as opportunities and barriers emerge in the greater system.
Reduced tension	1	2	3	4	5	
The general atmosphere across the system is one of relaxed productivity and engagement.						Across the system, people operate under a sense of tension and anxiety over their work and working relationships.
When opportunities and barriers emerge, individuals and groups deal with challenges calmly and productively.						Opportunities and challenges trigger anxiety and unnecessary stress across the system.
Roles and expectations are articulated and understood so that individuals and groups know they can rely on each other to move the work forward.						Because roles and expectations are not clear, individuals and groups are unsure about how their work contributes to the whole or how others' work supports theirs.
Complementary Functions	1	2	3	4	5	
Across groups and departments, people know how their work fits with and complements the work others are doing.						People and groups across the system seem to work in a vacuum of information, with little or no awareness of how their work contributes to or has an impact on the whole.
People engage in team and committee work, contributing their unique skills, knowledge, and expertise to the success of the whole.						Individuals and groups often find they are working to optimize their own parts/segments of the system with no real engagement with the whole.
Conserved Energy	1	2	3	4	5	
People spend their time doing important work and moving the system toward its stated outcomes.						People find that the work they are asked to focus on work that engages their time, but actually contributes little to the overall success of the organization.
Individuals and groups across the system engage in work that is unique and highly necessary to the success of the system.						Individuals and groups often find the work they do to be unnecessarily redundant in the system's overall productivity.



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Use the following questions to begin discussions in your system about coherence and how you can build greater coherence across the whole.

Shared goals

1. In what areas are our goals not aligned?
2. What barriers make it difficult to share goals? What opportunities can support us in sharing goals?
3. What would it look like across the organization if we had shared and complementary goals? How can we move toward that picture?

Shared meaning

1. Where do our stakeholders get information and data to make sense of their experience of our organization?
2. What is currently in place to help people see what we are about what is important to us?
3. What are the ways in which we confuse people because what we say and what are do are not aligned?

Repeated patterns

1. What barriers prevent similarity in patterns of decision making and interaction from one department to another inside the system?
2. How do people describe the lack of repeated patterns at the various scales of the system?
3. What are the patterns we want replicated across the system at all levels?

Adaptation

1. How do we know that we are or are not adaptable at the various scales and/or across the system?
2. What abilities exist in the system to detect possible changes or trends in the system or in the environment?
3. What skills and understandings are needed to build adaptive capacity and how can we increase those in our system?

Reduced Tension

1. What sources of tension do our employees name that limit their effectiveness?
2. How can we understand and influence the underlying dynamics that are causing that tension?
3. What skills and understandings do our employees need to deal effectively with unnecessary tension at all scales of the system.

Complementary Functions

1. How do we help people understand their contributions to their own functions and to the greater overall direction of the system?
2. What are the ways we can support people in finding creative and productive ways to work together, contributing equally to shared goals?
3. How do we establish organizational structures that contribute to each other and to the greater whole?

Conserved Energy

1. How do we look for and identify unnecessary redundancies in the system where energy is being overtaxed?
2. What are ways we can launch conversations in our system that engage people around the ideas of conserved energy?
3. How can we reward and celebrate innovations in the system that help to conserve energy by building coherence?

Please remember that this document is not an "assessment" and should not be used in that way. It is merely a model that allows you to "map" a few of your own system's indicators of coherence, followed by a series of questions that can help you start conversations about what you find.