

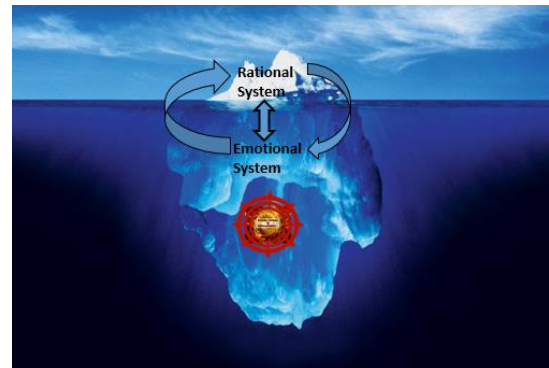


A New Way of Thinking

The Resilient Leadership model calls for leaders to embrace a “New Way of SEEING, THINKING, and LEADING”. In this document we invite you to focus on the nature of the “New Way of THINKING” that has the potential to transform to a dramatic degree the effectiveness of leaders everywhere. “What exactly is this New Way” you might ask. The short answer to this question is to “think systems”, but more specifically it is a mandate to “Think Emotional Systems”. Foundational to this way of thinking is a recognition that every organization—in fact, every group of people who interact together often enough to have formed a cohesive unit—is made up of both a “Rational System” and an “Emotional System”.

The Rational & Emotional Systems

The Rational System is made up of everything that is subject to observation, data gathering, measurement, research and study—including for example the written policies and procedures according to which the group operates and even the tangible artifacts of the unwritten rules that give shape to the group’s distinctive culture. We are consciously aware of the Rational System. We use the metaphor of an iceberg, pointing to the part that can be seen above the waterline, to capture this visible aspect of every organization. Traditional management and leadership training and development programs focus almost exclusively on how to do a better job of analyzing and leading the Rational System of an organization.



The Emotional System, on the other hand, is the larger part of the iceberg that embraces everything beneath the surface of the water and that cannot be directly observed, measured or studied. We often say that the Emotional System is the “hidden chemistry” of an organization because it is the unseen source that influences virtually every aspect of how the machinery of the Rational System operates. The Emotional System operates out of sight, beneath our conscious awareness. It is composed of the instinctive patterns of automatic actions, reactions, and interactions that shape the functioning of the network of relationships within every organization. Most training and development programs for managers and leaders give little or no attention to the Emotional System and its impact on the organization’s Rational System. Little surprise, then, that the elusive data and unfamiliar terrain of the Emotional System has resulted in a level of functional incompetence among many top leaders.

Source and Focus of the Resilient Leadership Model

Pioneering, basic research on the functioning of Emotional Systems was done by Murray Bowen and others who gave birth to the “Family Systems” approach to therapy in the 1950’s and beyond. Frustrated with traditional therapy’s limited focus on the individual, Bowen described how the functioning of individual members of a family is shaped by forces within the family system as much if not more than by forces internal to the psyche of the individual. Building on this insight, an impressive body of research has been done over more than half a century on the Emotional System of families.



These insights have proven to be scalable—the basic principles that govern the functioning of the Emotional System of families have proven to hold true for the Emotional System of other relationship networks, whether of professional organizations, religious groups, civic and political entities, and so forth.

The Resilient Leadership model has drawn on this basic research focus on Emotional Systems and seeks to make its most important principles and findings available in language and using concepts adapted to leaders in a broad spectrum of organizations, all of whom face rapidly changing, complex environments that demand a cool head, a steady vision and a deep understanding of Emotional Systems. The focus of Resilient Leadership LLC and its training and coaching efforts is two-fold: First, helping the individual leader to become more aware of her or his own Emotional System and its impact on how s/he exercises leadership; and, second, helping organizational leaders to deepen their understanding of how the Emotional System of their organization impacts the functioning of its Rational System, with today's demands for greater creativity, efficiency, and productivity.

Latent Life Forces

To “Think Emotional Systems” is to seek constantly to deepen one’s understanding of the nature of an Emotional System, its distinctive components, the patterns that characterize its internal workings, and how those patterns influence the functioning of its own Rational System as well as how they influence interactions with the Rational and Emotional Systems of other organizations.

Among the latent life forces (“the hidden chemistry”) within every Emotional System, there are both *reactive* and *proactive* energies/life forces that operate automatically and instinctively.

- **Reactive Energies/Life Forces:** An abiding threat-monitoring element, called **chronic anxiety**, acts to mobilize a *reactive*, immune response against whatever is perceived as a potential threat.
- **Proactive Energies/Life Forces:** There are also *proactive* life forces, constantly helping us adapt to new challenges in our environment, similarly acting beneath conscious awareness, automatically, instinctively to support not only survival but development toward a stronger and more independent self.
- **Chronic anxiety** (*reactive*) and the drive toward a higher level of **differentiation** (*proactive*), are the two major players constantly at work in every Emotional System.





Only with persistent effort are we able to become more consciously aware of these latent, primal life forces and how they generate feelings, emotions and behaviors, both in us as individuals and in the organizations we lead. Managing those feelings, emotions and behaviors is the life work that produces a balanced, mature, healthy person with the capacity to become a highly skilled, resilient leader. Recognizing and managing the same forces within an organization is the skill and art that sets apart an extraordinary leader.

Research has shown that there is an inverse relationship between **chronic anxiety** and **differentiation** in every Emotional System. When there is a high level of **chronic anxiety**, there is a low level of **differentiation**; when the level of **differentiation** is high, **chronic anxiety** is lower. Resilient Leadership training and coaching helps leaders to understand that *reactive* behaviors escalate chronic anxiety, *proactive* behaviors tend to calm systems and promote greater thoughtfulness. In addition to teaching how to manage reactivity in self and in organizations, we also focus on the “Three Imperatives”—proactive behaviors that foster greater **differentiation**: Stay Calm, Stay the Course, Stay Connected. The presence of a differentiated leader who practices these three proactive behaviors has a profound effect on the Emotional System of the organization.

Paradigm Shift

To “Think Emotional Systems” represents a true paradigm shift from traditional ways that leaders have thought about their own functioning and about that of the organizations they lead. The shift from linear thinking to systems thinking in the Rational System is now commonplace and well advanced in many domains of human knowledge. The history of medicine, for example, has seen a dramatic paradigm shift from isolated cause-and-effect diagnosis and remedies to today’s nuanced, systems understanding of the interactive nature of various bodily organs and systems as well as their complex, reciprocal responses to toxins, surgical interventions, and pharmaceuticals. Leaders of business, government and other organizational contexts are schooled early on to understand and focus on the system dynamics of the machinery of the Rational System. But among many in leadership roles today there is still a widespread ignorance of what it means to “Think Emotional Systems.” The chart below illustrates how profound is the paradigm shift required for leaders to make the leap between linear and systems thinking when it comes to Emotional Systems.



THE PARADIGM SHIFT: LINEAR vs. SYSTEMS THINKING	
Linear Thinking	Think Emotional Systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no direct evidence that what happens in the Emotional System has much to do with the functioning of the Rational System. • Thinking in binary categories (e.g., win/lose, right/wrong) brings the most clarity when seeking to analyze or understand complex situations. • When problems arise, best to look for the single individual or root cause to blame • Searches for the “quick fix” • Tends to assign responsibility (for success or failure) in only one place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks broadly at how interactions between both Emotional and Rational Systems have implications throughout the entire organization. • Seeks to understand how the dynamics within the Emotional System have contributed to forming repetitive patterns + how those patterns may produce symptoms in any part of the Rational System. • When problems arise looks for triangles, asks, “What is my part in this?” and is curious about where there are reciprocal dynamics in play.

Think Emotional Systems

Beginning to Think Emotional Systems is like changing one’s field of view from a microscope to a wide-angle lens. One starts to notice and put together connections between seemingly random events. What might have appeared to be an isolated “problem” in one division or department is understood as a symptom of a larger reality. This new understanding can then serve as a window into the way the entire Emotional System is functioning. When one portion is understood as part of a larger reality, it can suddenly become clear how certain patterns interact and fit together to raise or lower anxiety and reactivity within the entire organization.

Resilient Leadership and Common Patterns in Emotional Systems

Resilient Leadership training and coaching teaches leaders about how triangles form and spread anxiety over a larger geography. Leaders consistently report that understanding triangles is an extremely practical tool that allows them to think systems and understand from a whole new perspective the dynamics of countless everyday issues and challenges. The same is true of how we help leaders recognize overfunctioning as a reciprocal reality that is anxiety-driven and requires a systems understanding in order to intervene successfully, calm the system, and achieve a healthier, more balanced functioning. When a leader becomes more skilled at understanding Emotional Systems, it often is possible to trace certain patterns (both strengths and vulnerabilities) within the Emotional System across multiple generations of the organization. Recognizing and understanding this history from a systems perspective can equip a leader to adjust their functioning in order to help the organization leverage its strengths or defend against its vulnerabilities.



In her novel The Thirteenth Tale, Diane Setterfield speaks about families, but her point is equally valid when applied to how we think of the Emotional System of an organization.

Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families are webs. Impossible to touch one part of it without setting the rest vibrating. Impossible to understand one part without having a sense of the whole.

