5 Traits of a Future Systems Leader

Villars Institute FELLOWS

Observed Behavior	Why it Matters
1. Comfortable with ambiguity or uncertainty	The idea that no single entity has complete control of an entire system may be surprising or uncomfortable. A system may also appear abstract or its purpose may be unclear. These characteristics may be frustrating, particularly for someone looking for one entity or a powerful figure to come in and "fix" the system.
2. Has an open and adaptive mindset	Understanding a system requires an openness to new insights that reveal the complexity of a system as well as its core purpose and key stakeholders. It requires a willingness to seek out differing perspectives to find and accept new insights. *"If we want to solve a problem that we have never solved before, we must leave the door to the unknown ajar" - Richard Feynman*
3. Naturally shares ideas and knowledge	Mapping a system, understanding its interlinkages, and recognizing its impact on other systems require sharing research, data, knowledge, and expertise.
4. Can "connect the dots" and find the "adaptive problem"	Mapping a system requires seeing its formal and informal dimensions including all of its elements, stakeholders, dynamics and connections. Systemic problems are often difficult to define with no readily understood answers. They are frequently an "adaptive" challenge and not a "technical" challenge where the problem is clearly defined and the solution is known. Addressing an adaptive problem may require roles, beliefs, and/or norms to change.
5. Motivated to build bridges with others and collaborate to get things done	Addressing an adaptive problem requires engaging diverse stakeholders, often with divergent interests. It also requires understanding that exhorting or criticizing others for not solving the problem is a dead end. Instead it entails recognizing a collective capacity and responsibility among stakeholders to solve the problem themselves.

Reference Links:

- Systems-leadership-can-change-the-world-but-what-does-it-mean
- Why-the-world-needs-systems-leadership-not-selfish-leadership/
- Systems-leadership-and-platforms-how-to-mobilize-people-to-transform-systems-and-build-the-platforms-to-scale-these-efforts