

Starting, Revitalizing, and Sustaining WAC Programs with a Whole Systems Approach

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Presentation Outline

A rationale for and introduction to the whole systems approach, methodology, and principles

Whole systems strategies for building sustainable W A C programs

Applying the strategies to the challenges facing your programs

<http://tinyurl.com/IWAC2016CoxGalinMelzer>

Quickwrite (3 minutes): Make a quick list of some of the challenges facing your WAC/writing program.

A Rationale: Why Our Work is Needed

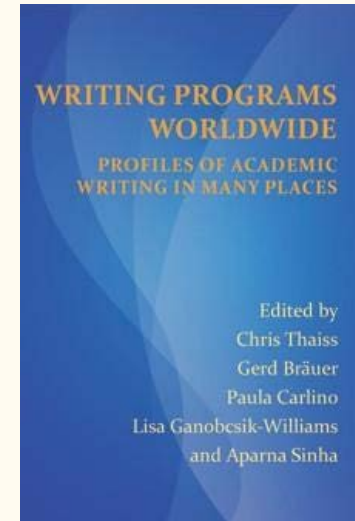
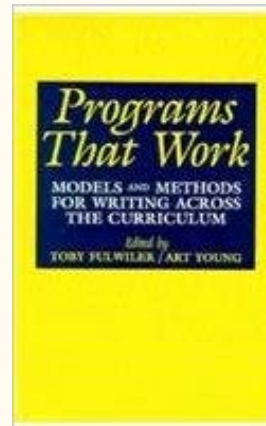
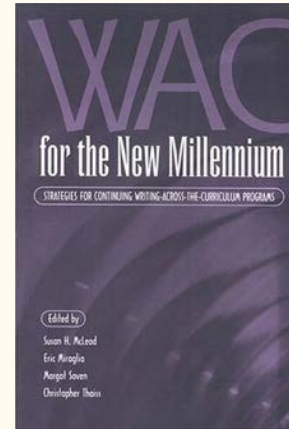
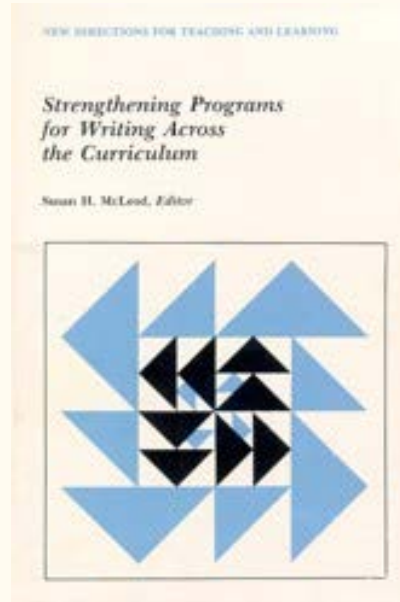
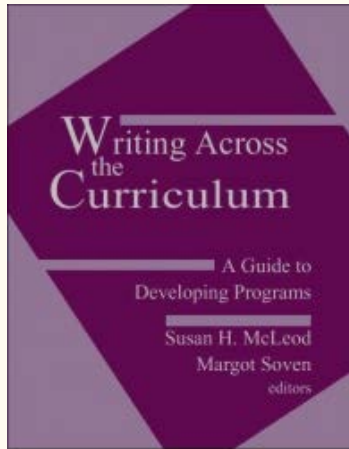
A recent post to the WPA listserv...

I am a junior faculty at a small HBCU in Alabama and I have been tasked with the responsibility of structuring a WAC/WID program on our campus. I have only been here two years, but it seems that several years ago measures were put into place to make writing a more central part of the undergraduate curriculum. Certain courses have been identified as “writing intensive” courses. However, there has not been much more effort, that I can see, other than that. Faculty who teach “W” courses are left to figure out for themselves what that “W” means!

I wonder if anyone can provide me with some direction on how to begin pulling together what is already in place so that there is more direction and purpose. I have a degree in Rhet. Comp, but I did not focus on WAC so I’m simply trying to find a good model to follow and I’m not as familiar with the current scholarship and best practices as I feel like I should be.

Literature on Starting WAC Programs

WAC books...



WAC journals...



INWAC Statement....

The WAC Clearinghouse
supporting scholarly exchange about communication across the disciplines

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Home > Resources > WAC Principles and Practices

Statement of WAC Principles and Practices


This Statement was endorsed by the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) in February 2014 and the Conference on College Composition and Communication Executive Committee in December 2014. It was developed by an ad hoc committee composed of members of INWAC. This committee included:

- Michelle Cox, Dartmouth College, Committee Chair
- Susan Chaudoir, University of Alberta
- Michael Cripps, University of New England
- Jeff Galin, Florida Atlantic University
- Jonathan Hall, York College
- O. Brian Kaufman, Quinebaug Valley Community College
- Suzanne Lane, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Mary McMullen-Light, Johnson County Community College
- Mya Poe, Northeastern University
- Teresa Redd, Howard University
- Lori Salem, Temple University
- Christopher Thaiss, University of California, Davis
- Marty Townsend, University of Missouri
- Terry Myers Zawacki, George Mason University, emeritus

[View the Statement in PDF Format.](#)

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Theorizing W A C Program Building

Barbara Walvoord (1996), "The Future of W A C": Social movement organization framework

Bill Condon and Carol Rutz (2012), "A Taxonomy of W A C Programs": Quantum physics particle/wave

What is the Whole Systems approach?

Five theoretical frameworks that we bring together to inform the whole systems approach:

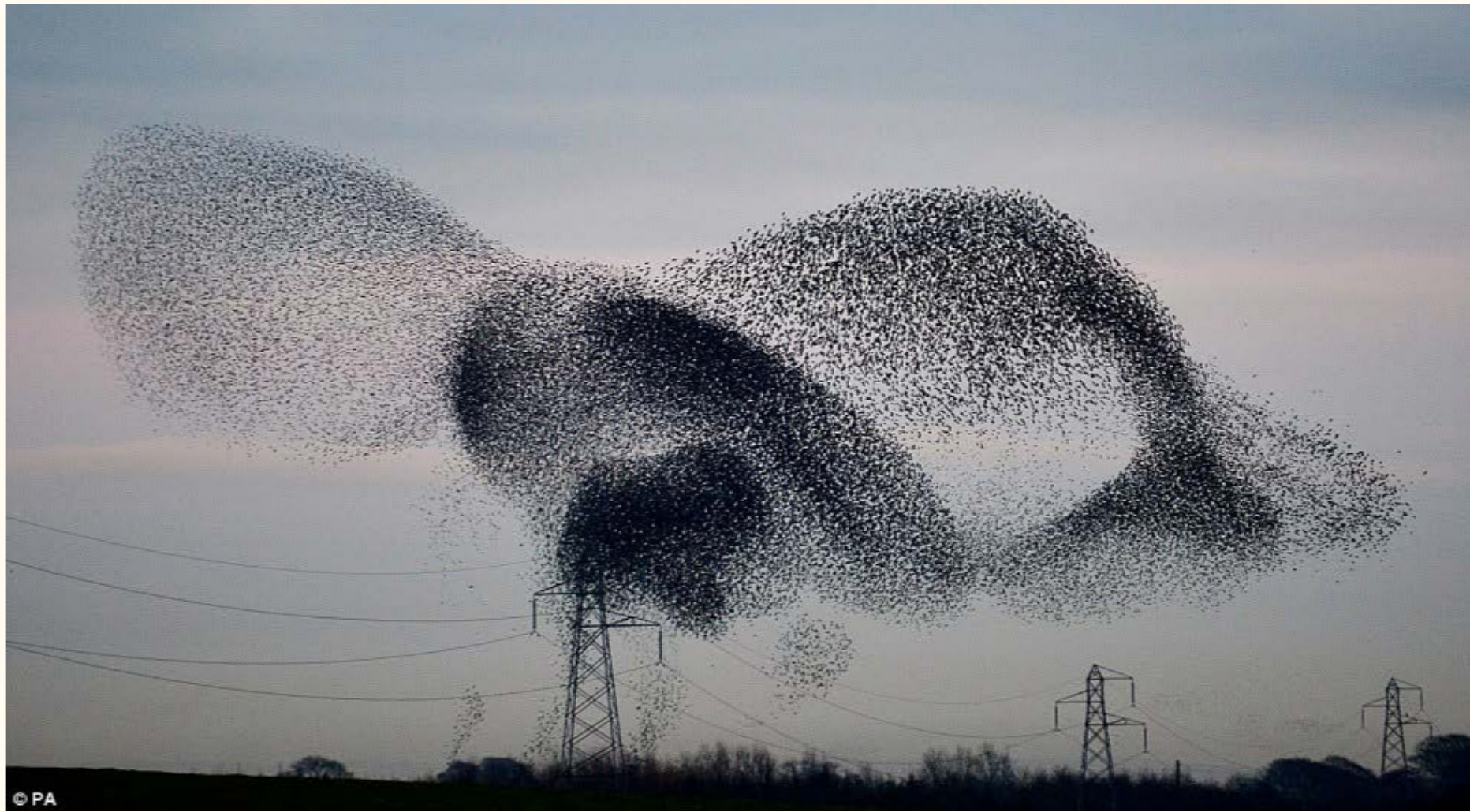
Complexity theory (umbrella theory)

Systems thinking (meta-level)

Organizational network analysis (micro-level)

Resilience thinking (across scales and thresholds)

Sustainable development (assessment indicators at



Complexity Theory

We borrow from complexity theory the recognition that **adaptive systems** rely extensively on **feedback loops** that can cause a system to fall into and out of relative balance, or **homeostasis**.

A complex adaptive system introduces the additional important element of

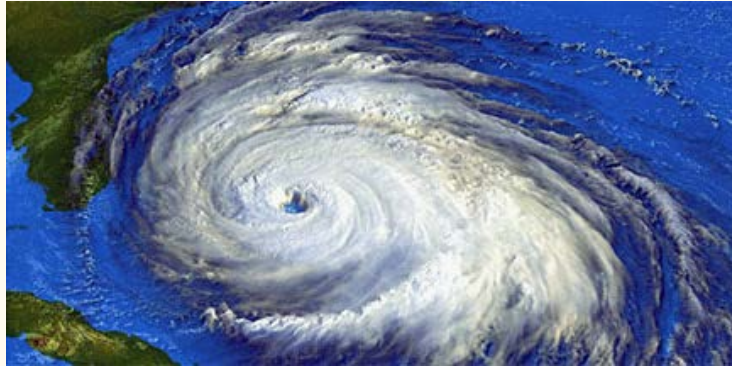
homeostasis, or relative state of equilibrium and . . .



Homeostasis in a WAC program represents a high functioning program that is integrated into the university system.

And it is driven by

feedback loops that either sustain the equilibrium or disrupt it-- what scientists call **positive** and **negative** feedback loops



Positive feedback loops are self-fueling cycles that tend to amplify out of control.

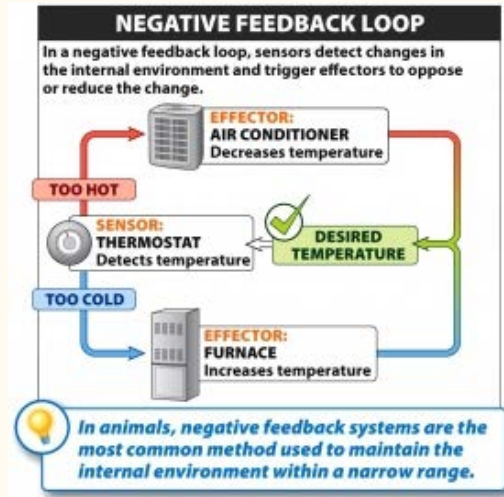


Figure 20-3
What Is Life? A Guide to Biology
© 2011 W.H. Freeman and Company

Negative feedback system has an adaptive controller that changes states based on input from the environment.



Systems Thinking . . .

Encourages us to approach complex natural and human systems by **focusing on patterns of relationships** and by “using the concept of **wholeness to order our thoughts**” (Checkland 4).

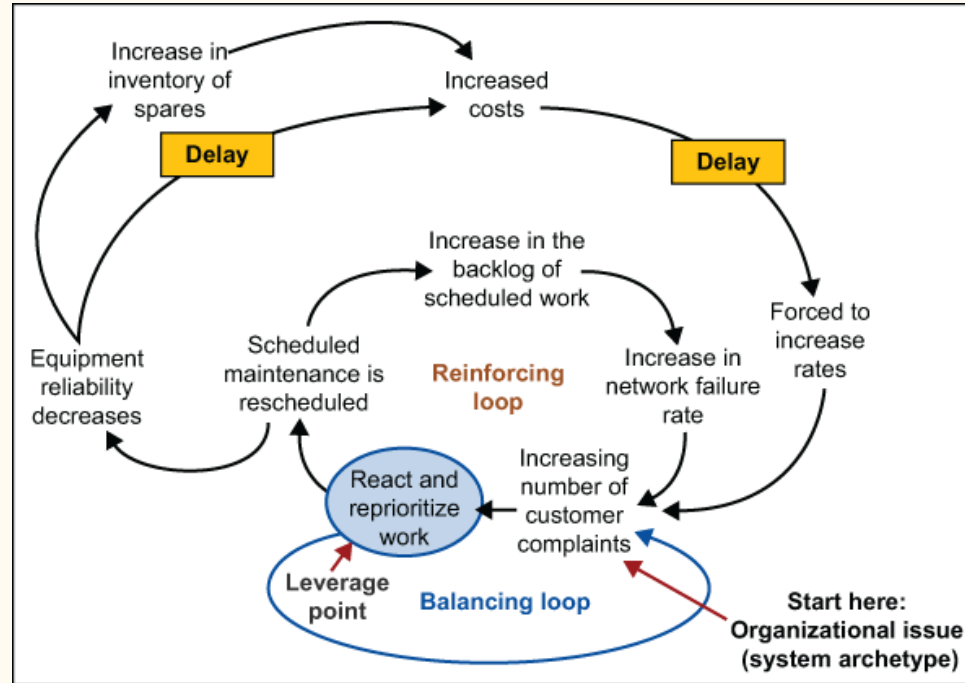


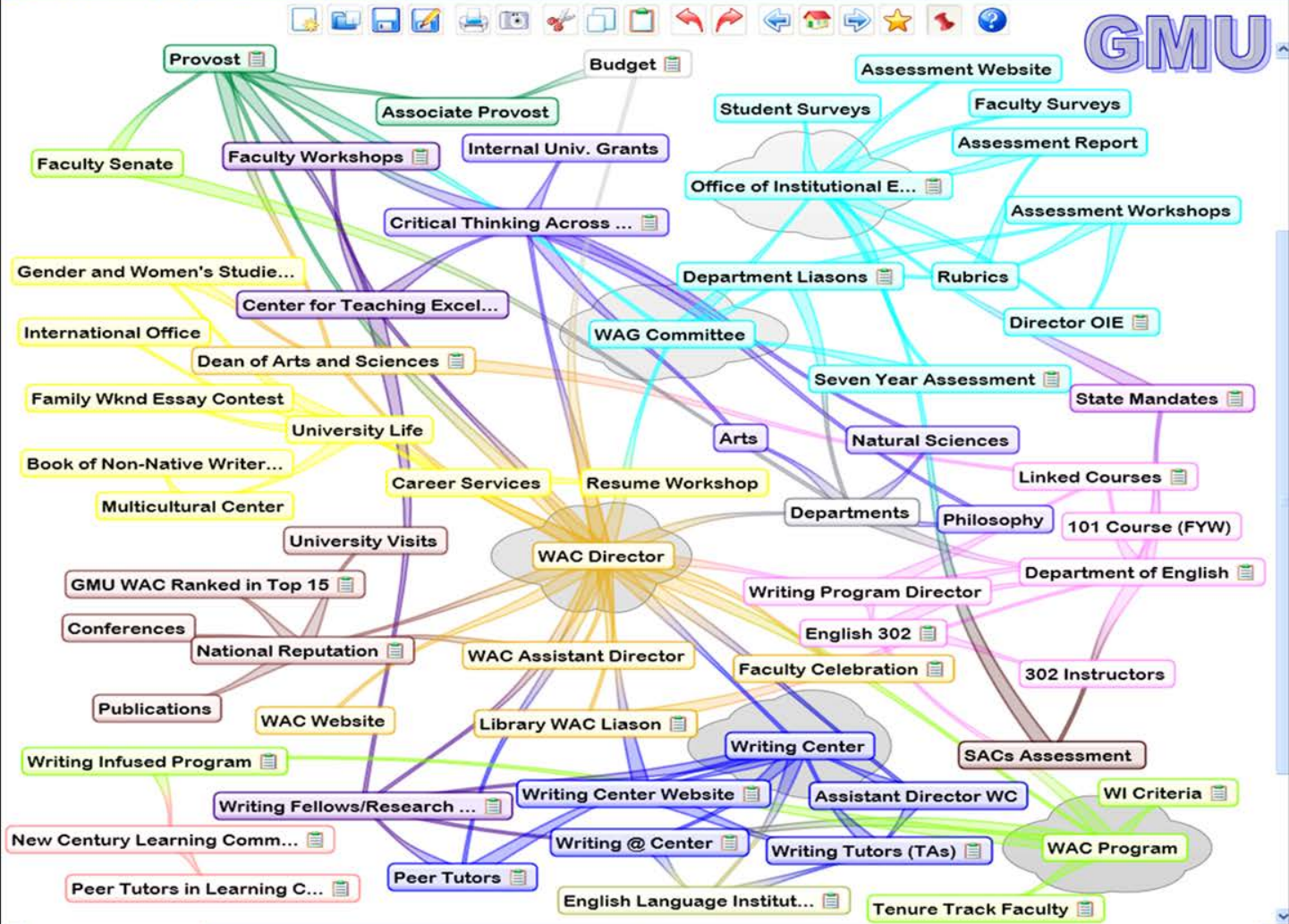
How Leverage Points Work

Typically, points of leverage are highly connected places in the system where even a **small change** might have **significant ripple effects** for the entire system

These ripple effects are what Senge refers to as “**reinforcing processes,**” where a single intervention can have a snowballing effect on students, faculty, and the campus culture of writing.

Finding Points of Leverage in a System







Organizational Network Analysis (ONA)

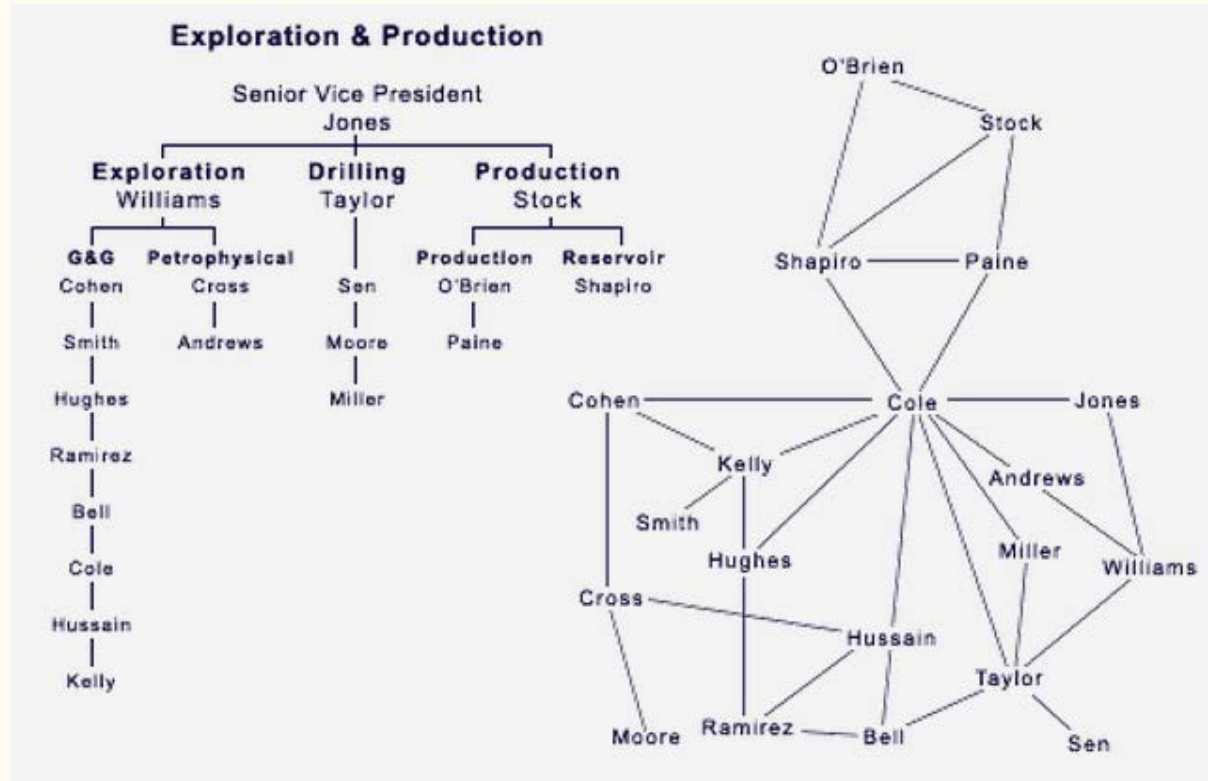
ONA is a form of social network analysis, which considers a group of people as an **interconnected system of nodes**.

visually map connections

trace and examine the lines of communication, patterns of interaction, and distribution of knowledge within that system



Executives in Petroleum Organization



(Cross 2014)



Resilience Thinking

Resilience thinking studies the “**capacity of ecosystems to handle challenges or changes** to the system while **maintaining a relative balanced state** or to shift to an alternative, potentially transformative, state” (Folke et al., 2010, para. 3).

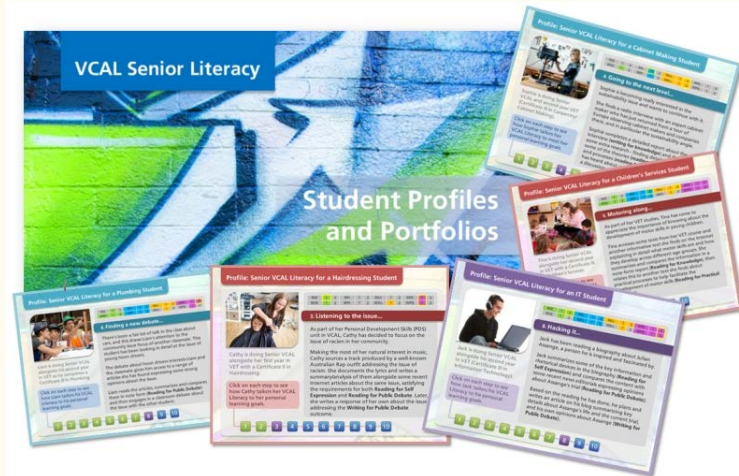
Adaptability and Transformability

Social change is essential to maintain social-ecological systems. “This is why we incorporate adaptability and the more radical concept of transformability as key ingredients of resilience thinking” Folke et al. (2010) (para.8).

High stakes
exit exam



Portfolio review



Agency to Create Change

Furthermore, this focus on adaptability and transformability introduce the focus on agency, which social network theory cannot address.

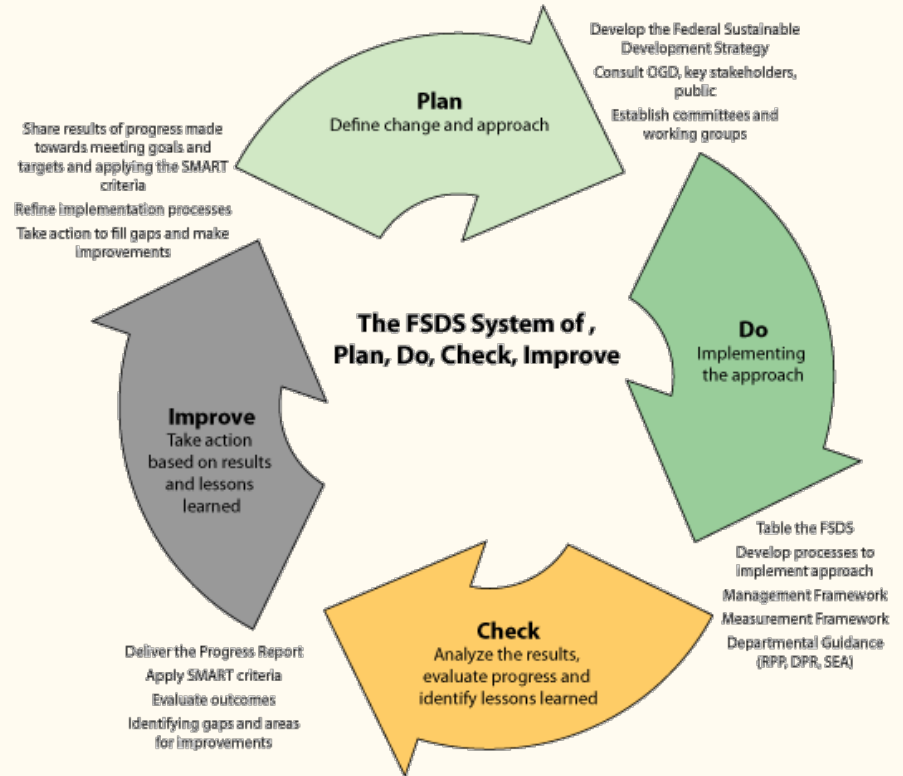
However, given too much stress over time, a complex adaptive system can cross a **band of equilibrium** threshold, and fall into a different, less desirable steady state or fail altogether.





Sustainable Development Theory

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (paragraph 27 Bruntland Report, 1987)

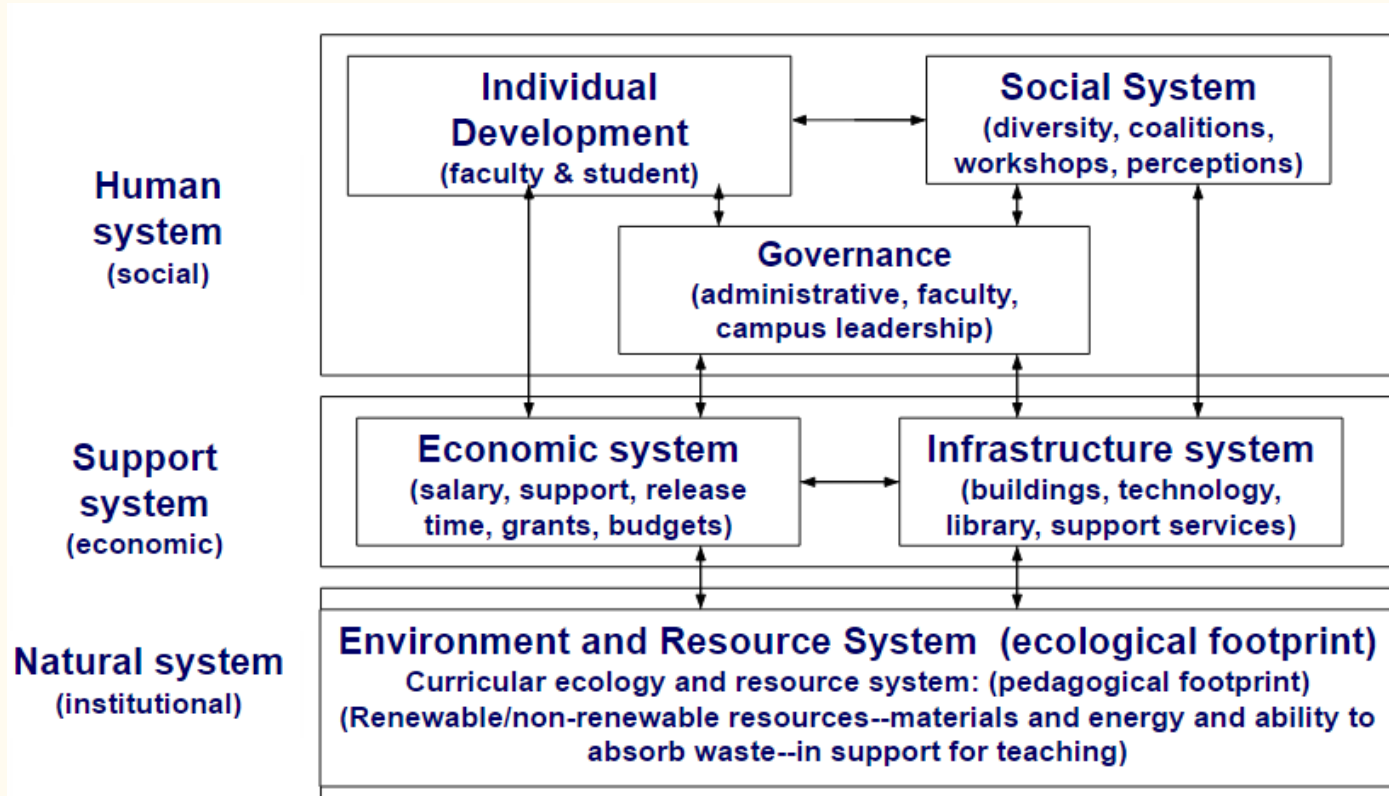


Effective Sustainability Indicators

1. **relevant**—something we need to know
2. **easy to understand**—concrete and obvious
3. **reliable**—direct and significant
4. **assessable**—available data in time to initiate necessary intervention.

Indicators can be positive or negative and can mark inner or outer threshold boundaries. But negative concerns are more likely to inspire action. Thus, we call them warning signs.

Sustainable WAC Program



Individual Warning Sign Examples

Quality of student writing levels off or drops

Student or faculty perceptions shift negatively

Numbers of courses taught or faculty or students participating drops unexpectedly

Syllabus review process stalls

Significant drop in faculty syllabi meeting W A C guidelines

Program not have a dedicated position for W A C Director

Support for Director wanes (concerns over promotion or program effectiveness)

Whole Systems Approach

All five theoretical frameworks specifically talk about the need to examine “whole systems,” but they don’t agree on what this work means because they use different methodologies. We bring them together in an attempt to provide a clear definition.

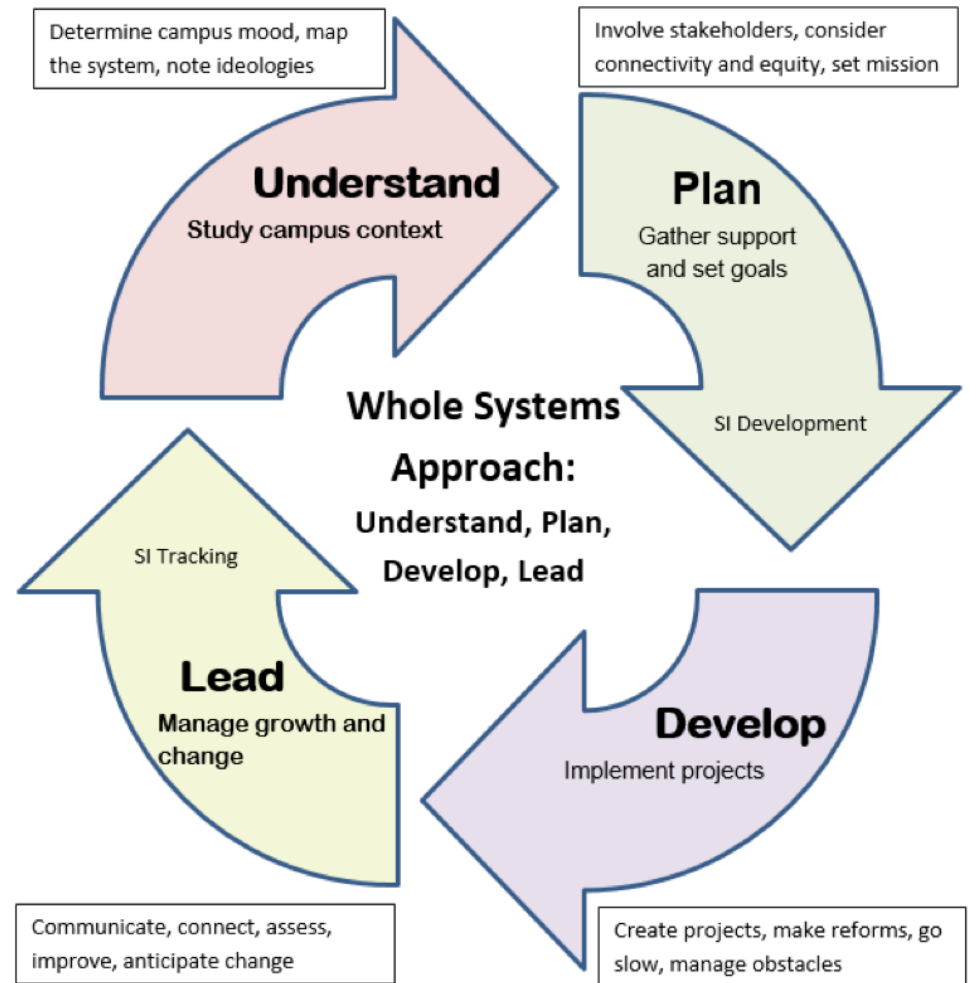
Our Whole Systems Approach

Focuses **outwardly** on tracking system patterns, programmatic feedback loops, desired equilibrium, ideologies that affect the system, thresholds, and leverage points to facilitate transformative change; and

Simultaneously, focuses **inwardly** on key relationships among stakeholders, distinct WAC initiatives within a given program, priorities for intervening within campus writing culture, and indicators of distress and success that can be used to track program viability and longevity.

Whole Systems Methodology

Project-based approach for each program initiative





Whole Systems Principles

1. Wholeness
2. Broad participation
3. Transformative change
4. Equity
5. Resilience
6. Leadership
7. Systematic development
8. Integration
9. Visibility
10. Feedback



Whole Systems Strategies for W A C

Understanding the Institutional landscape: *Strategies 1-3*

Initial Stages of Building a Program: *Strategies 4-7*

Developing Projects and Making Reforms: *Strategies 8-11*

W A C Leadership: *Strategies 12-15*

Responses to the WPA-L Post

Surveying faculty about their students' writing

Forming a task force or advisory group

Visiting other schools that have WAC programs

Inviting in consultants

Attending the IWAC conference

Visiting the WAC Clearinghouse

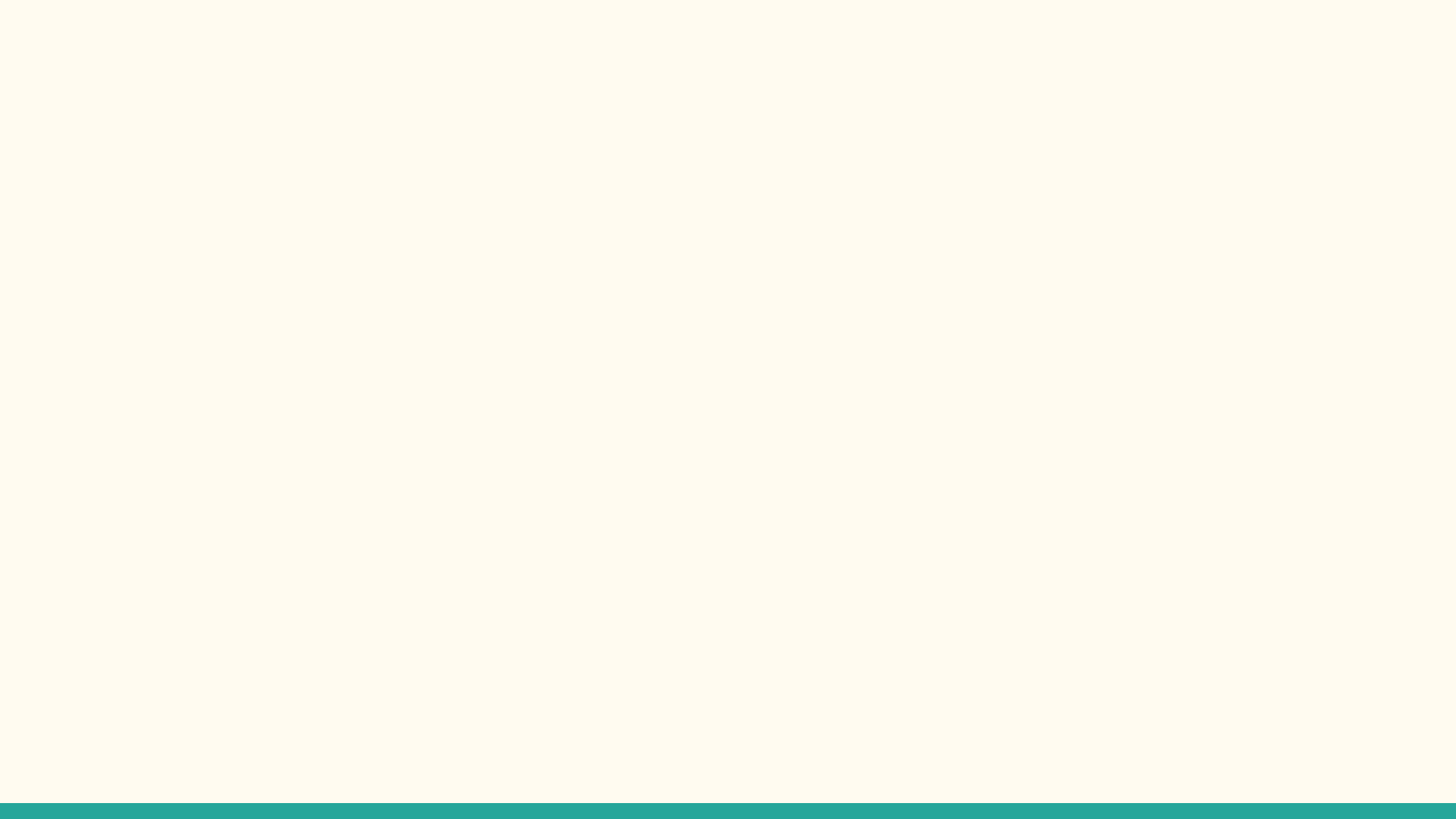
Reading the INWAC Statement of WAC Principles and Practices

Discussion

Which strategies seem most useful to the challenge you wrote about at the start of this session?

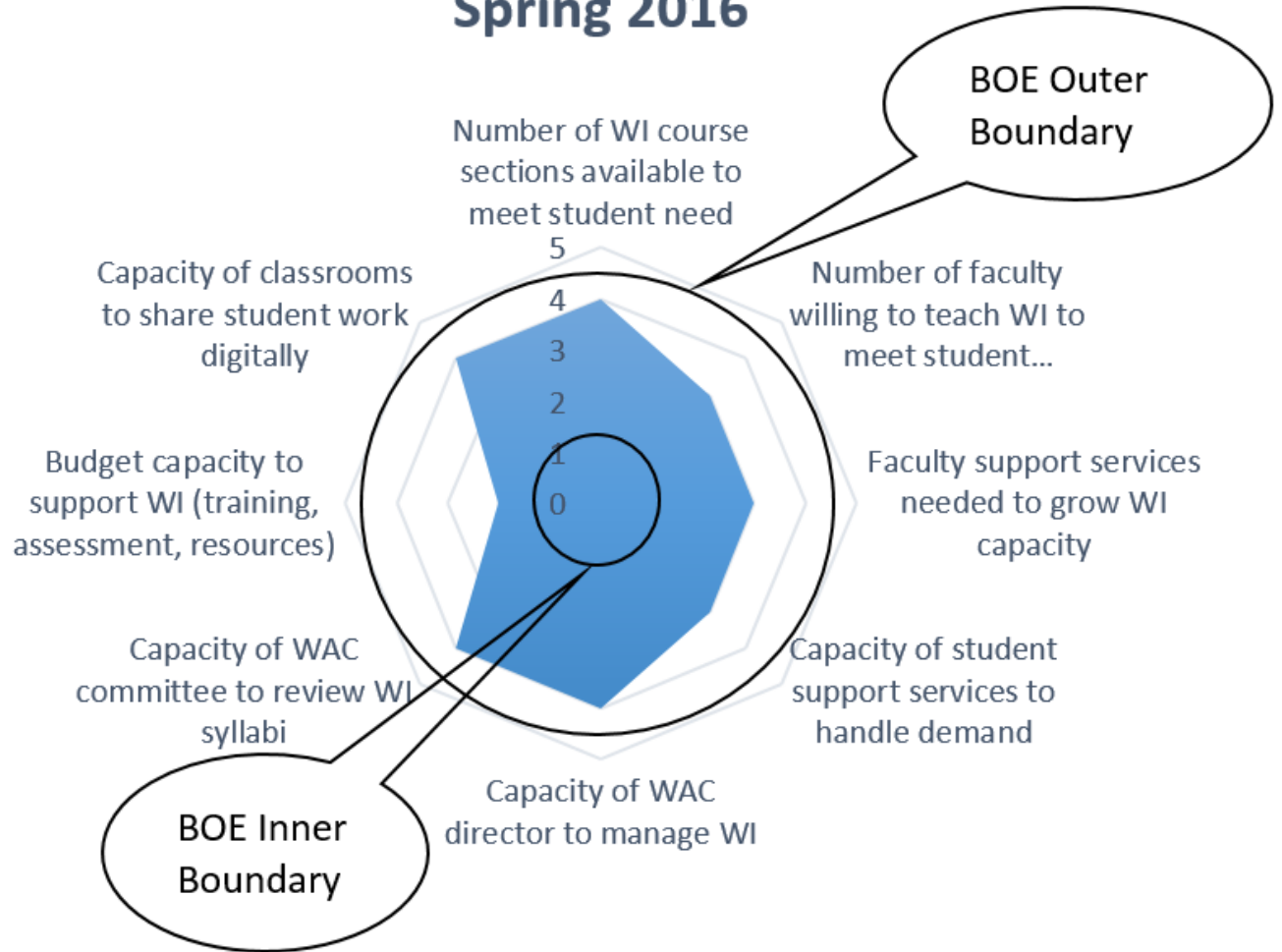
What comments or questions do you have about the theoretical framework, methodology principles, or strategies?

<http://tinyurl.com/IWAC2016CoxGalinMelzer>



Band of Equilibrium (BOE)

Spring 2016



Not Yet Sustainable

