

What's above water is never the real problem.

Background

Systems Thinking · Donella Meadows · iceberg model

Every visible problem is the tip of an iceberg. Events are visible – they trigger reactions. Patterns are trends over time. Structures are the rules and systems that create those patterns. Mental models are the deepest level – the beliefs and assumptions that created the structures.

How to Run This

- 1 Identify the triggering Event – something observable that actually happened.
- 2 Ask: has this happened before? Find the Pattern over time.
- 3 Ask: what system or structure is creating this pattern?
- 4 Ask: what beliefs or assumptions created and maintain that structure?
- 5 Design interventions at the deepest level you can access.

Facilitator Tips

Common mistake

Fixing events and calling it done. A product that fixes an event will face the same event again next month.

What good looks like

A mental model that, when you name it out loud, makes the people in the room uncomfortable. That discomfort means you've found something real.

When to move on

When you've identified at least one structural intervention that could prevent the pattern from recurring.

About Wade Institute

Wade Institute of Entrepreneurship is Australia's leading centre for entrepreneurial education, based at the University of Melbourne. The Studio is Wade's free, AI-powered innovation workshop platform – making 24 structured frameworks available to anyone, each one facilitated by Pete, an AI coach trained in Wade's methodology.

Try this interactively in The Studio

Pete will guide you through the four levels – from the visible event down to the mental models sustaining it. You'll leave with a systems map and a session report.

studio.wadeinstitute.org.au →

1 EVENTS

What just happened? The visible symptoms you can observe.

VISIBLE

2 PATTERNS

What trends or recurring behaviours have you noticed over time?

HIDDEN

3 STRUCTURES

What systems, rules, incentives, or processes enable the patterns?

4 MENTAL MODELS

What beliefs, assumptions, or values drive these structures?