

## **FACILITATION GUIDE: USING THE ICEBERG MODEL FOR LEARNING AND SYSTEMS CHANGE**

**Purpose:** The Iceberg Model is a systems-thinking framework that helps individuals, teams, organizations, and communities move beyond visible events to explore the underlying factors that influence outcomes. By examining patterns, structures, and mental models beneath the surface, participants can develop a more complete understanding of complex challenges and identify opportunities for meaningful change.

At Tiyuv, we frequently use the Iceberg Model in culturally responsive evaluation, strategic planning, leadership development, community engagement, and systems change work. The framework helps participants move from symptom-focused thinking toward deeper understanding and more sustainable solutions.

This facilitation guide was developed to support practitioners, evaluators, educators, consultants, community leaders, board members, and organizational leaders in using the Iceberg Model as a tool for reflection, dialogue, learning, and collective problem-solving.

### **How to Use This Guide:**

This guide provides a flexible framework for facilitating Iceberg Model activities in a variety of settings. It is intended to be adapted based on the needs, goals, and context of participants.

### **The guide includes:**

- An overview of the Iceberg Model and its key concepts
- Suggested facilitation approaches and discussion questions
- Guidance for in-person, virtual, and hybrid sessions
- Sample activity and case study
- Example of visual facilitation using collaborative whiteboard tools
- Tips for adapting the model to different audiences and learning environments

The questions and activities included in this guide are designed to support inquiry, reflection, and shared learning.

### **Flexibility and Adaptation:**

- There is no single “correct” way to facilitate the Iceberg Model.
- Sessions may range from a brief 20-minute discussion to a multi-hour workshop integrated into broader planning, evaluation, or change efforts.
- Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the language, examples, activities, and discussion prompts to align with participants' cultural context, lived experiences, and goals.
- Examples included throughout this guide are intended to serve as illustrations and inspiration rather than prescriptive instructions.

### **A Note on Culturally Responsive Facilitation:**

- The Iceberg Model can be a powerful tool for exploring how systems, histories, values, assumptions, and power dynamics shape experiences and outcomes.
- As facilitators guide participants beneath the surface of visible events, it is important to create conditions that support curiosity, respect, reflection, and multiple ways of knowing.
- Participants may identify different explanations for patterns and systems based on their lived experiences, identities, and perspectives.
- Rather than seeking a single “right” answer, facilitators are encouraged to support collective exploration and deeper understanding of the factors influencing a situation.
- The goal is not simply to solve a problem, but to strengthen the capacity of individuals and groups to think systemically, learn together, and make more informed decisions.

### Materials and Facilitation Options

The Iceberg Model can be facilitated in a variety of settings, including in-person workshops, virtual meetings, classrooms, board retreats, strategic planning sessions, evaluation activities, and community conversations.

Facilitators are encouraged to select the format that best fits their participants, resources, and learning environment.

#### Option 1: Printed Handouts and Group Discussion

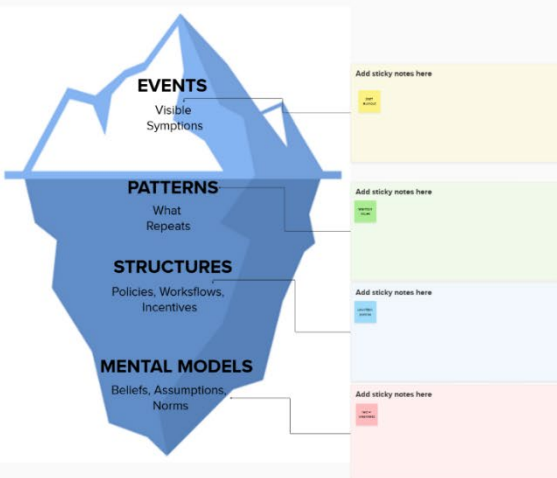
This approach works well for in-person meetings and requires minimal technology. Participants can complete the Iceberg Model individually or in small groups using printed worksheets, flip charts, sticky notes, or whiteboards.

#### Option 2: Virtual Whiteboard Platforms

For virtual or hybrid sessions, facilitators may choose to use an online collaborative workspace such as MURAL, Miro, or other digital whiteboard tools. These platforms allow participants to contribute ideas in real time and make group thinking visible. Below is an example of the model developed in MURAL. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the design to fit their own needs and preferred technology.

### What Lies Beneath the Surface?

Using Systems Thinking to Diagnose Leadership Challenges



**USING MURAL**

- Moving Around the Board**
  - Using your cursor, click and drag the background to move around the mural
- Zooming In and Out**
  - Use your mouse scroll wheel or trackpad to zoom
  - You can also use the + and – buttons in the bottom corner
- Using Sticky Notes**
  - Double-click anywhere on the board to create a sticky note
  - Or select the sticky note tool from the toolbar
  - Click inside the sticky note to type
  - Drag sticky notes to move them around
- During Our Session**
  - At times, I may use the “Summon Everyone” feature to bring everyone to the same section of the board so we can review instructions, discuss ideas together, or move to the next activity.

**SHARED LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

A mission-driven nonprofit organization has experienced recurring staff burnout, increased turnover, and declining morale over the past three years.

Leadership has implemented several wellness initiatives, including self-care workshops and employee recognition activities.

The organization’s leaders are frustrated because they have invested significant time and resources into addressing the problem, yet the challenges continue to resurface.

**ICEBERG INSTRUCTIONS**

- Read the shared leadership challenge
- You will add 1–2 sticky notes to the category areas as we move from the top to the bottom of the iceberg.
- We’ll discuss where leaders tend to intervene, and where leverage may actually lie

#### Option 3: Presentation-Based Facilitation



For shorter sessions or large audiences, facilitators may present the Iceberg Model using PowerPoint slides and guide participants through reflection questions verbally, collecting responses through discussion, chat, polls, or shared documents.

## FACILITATING THE ICEBERG ACTIVITY

### After your welcome, explain:

Leadership often becomes more effective when we explore the deeper factors influencing a challenge rather than repeatedly reacting to visible symptoms. Systems thinking asks a different question: Are we solving the event, or are we changing the conditions that produced the event?

### Facilitation Instructions:

1. Explain the Model.
2. Introduce the Four Levels
3. Present the Leadership Challenge
4. Participant Reflection & Action
5. Reflection & Discussion
6. Moving from Problem to Action
7. Closing the Activity

### 1. Explaining the model:

The Iceberg Model is a systems thinking tool that helps individuals, organizations, and communities move beyond reacting to isolated events and instead explore the deeper patterns, structures, and mental models that shape outcomes. By examining multiple levels of a challenge, leaders can identify more meaningful opportunities for learning, adaptation, and long-term change.

### 2. Four Levels of the Iceberg

Using MURAL, PowerPoint, or a handout, share the Four Levels of the Iceberg one level at a time, starting from top to bottom

- **Events**  
*What is happening right now?* These are the visible incidents, challenges, or outcomes that often demand immediate attention.
- **Patterns and Trends**  
*What has been happening over time?* Looking for recurring themes helps us understand whether an event is part of a larger pattern.
- **Systems and Structures**  
*What policies, processes, relationships, incentives, or organizational structures contribute to these patterns?*
- **Mental Models**  
*What beliefs, assumptions, values, or narratives influence the systems we have created and maintained?*

### 3. Sample Leadership Challenge

To work through the model, use a Shared Leadership Challenge (*below*) to help participants move beyond abstract concepts and experience how systems thinking can reveal deeper drivers of organizational and community issues.

Ask a participant to read the case study aloud.

### **Sample Leadership Challenge**

The following scenario can be used to introduce participants to the Iceberg Model and practice systems thinking.

#### **Background**

A mission-driven nonprofit organization has experienced recurring staff burnout, increased turnover, and declining morale over the past three years. Leadership has implemented several wellness initiatives, including self-care workshops and employee recognition activities. The organization's leaders are frustrated because they have invested significant time and resources into addressing the problem, yet the challenges continue to resurface.

### **4. Participant Reflection & Action**

As you move through each level of the iceberg, starting with the Events. Pause and invite participants to reflect on the challenge and consider where it may exist within the Iceberg Model. If using sticky notes, handouts, or a collaborative whiteboard platform, ask participants to add one or two observations to any level of the iceberg where they believe the challenge is occurring.

**Tip:** As participants work through the exercise, encourage them to move beyond immediate symptoms and consider the deeper factors that may be influencing outcomes.

### **5. Facilitation Reflection and Discussion**

After participants have completed the activity, facilitate a discussion using questions such as:

- *What are you noticing?*
- *Where do leaders most commonly intervene first?*
- *Where might the greatest leverage for change actually lie?*
- *Which level of the iceberg is often hardest for leaders to examine honestly?*
- *What surprised you during this exercise?*
- *Which level generated the most discussion?*

### **6. Moving from Problem to Action**

The Iceberg Model is primarily a diagnostic tool. Once participants have explored the deeper drivers of a challenge, facilitators can help them begin considering possible actions. Help participants brainstorm possible solutions for the challenges that emerged during the activity.

Suggested questions include:

- *If this were your organization, where would you be most tempted to intervene first?*
- *What might be the risks of intervening only at the event level?*
- *What structural conditions might need to change?*
- *What assumptions or mental models might be worth testing or challenging?*
- *Where do you see opportunities for meaningful change?*

## **7. Closing the Activity**

As the discussion concludes, remind participants that the Iceberg Model is not a complete intervention plan. Its purpose is to help individuals and groups develop a deeper understanding of the factors influencing a situation. Better diagnosis often leads to more thoughtful action. Once participants identify the patterns, structures, and assumptions shaping a challenge, they are better positioned to design interventions that address root causes rather than recurring symptoms.