

Behaviour and Environment study notes

Module 1: What is the Environment

Three guiding principles that shape our approach to this Journey

- The earth is the only suitable habitat we have, and we exist interdependently with the environment.
- We humans have had a profound effect on the environment, and continue to shape it going into the future.
- Through our capacity for conscious awareness, we are able to identify problems and implement solutions for better ways of existing in relation to the environment

Three key questions

1. What do we mean by the environment?
2. How can we understand and analyse the environment (with a view to identifying areas for change)?
3. What are the environmental domains that determine behaviour?

What do we mean by the environment?

- **the environment:**
 - the multifaceted context within which behavior takes place
 - **comprehensive term** embracing the **physical** and **social** context that is the setting for human and nonhuman existence.
 - Not a single tangible thing
 - **encompasses everything**, from the very small to the very large – a vast system of interconnected systems.
 - the context in which we exist
 - **time** is a significant, albeit neglected, feature of the environment.

Part 2: How can we analyse the environment?

Systems Theory: The environment as a system of systems 'Ludwig Bertalanffy (1928)'

- **A system:** a set of interacting parts that function as a whole, which interacts with and adapts to the wider system in which it has formed and exists.
- **Living systems:** typically refer to groups of organisms that interact in particular ways, to achieve some goal or produce some outcome, and they interact with the wider context in which they exist.
 - **ie our body:** has many interacting parts which can be separated logically but do not function independently
- systems theory has been applied to meteorology, ecology, economy, sociology and psychology

Fundamental principles of systems theory

- units within a system interact with one another and the environment, or other systems
- systems adapt to changing conditions;
- there are processes that initiate, guide, and control adaptation; and

- systems are “greater than the sum of their parts” because systems have emergent properties that arise from interaction at different levels of the system

Implications

- you cannot work out how something works just by observing its parts
- the separate parts interact and influence one another, changing the function of the whole
- The environment can be summarised as a vast system of systems.
- The importance of systems theory, then, is that it acknowledges the complexity inherent in the environment, while also providing tools to analyse that complexity in simpler terms.

how can we describe and analyse the environment (with a view to identifying areas for change)

- To do this, we will identify the broad components that make up any system:

Systems have:

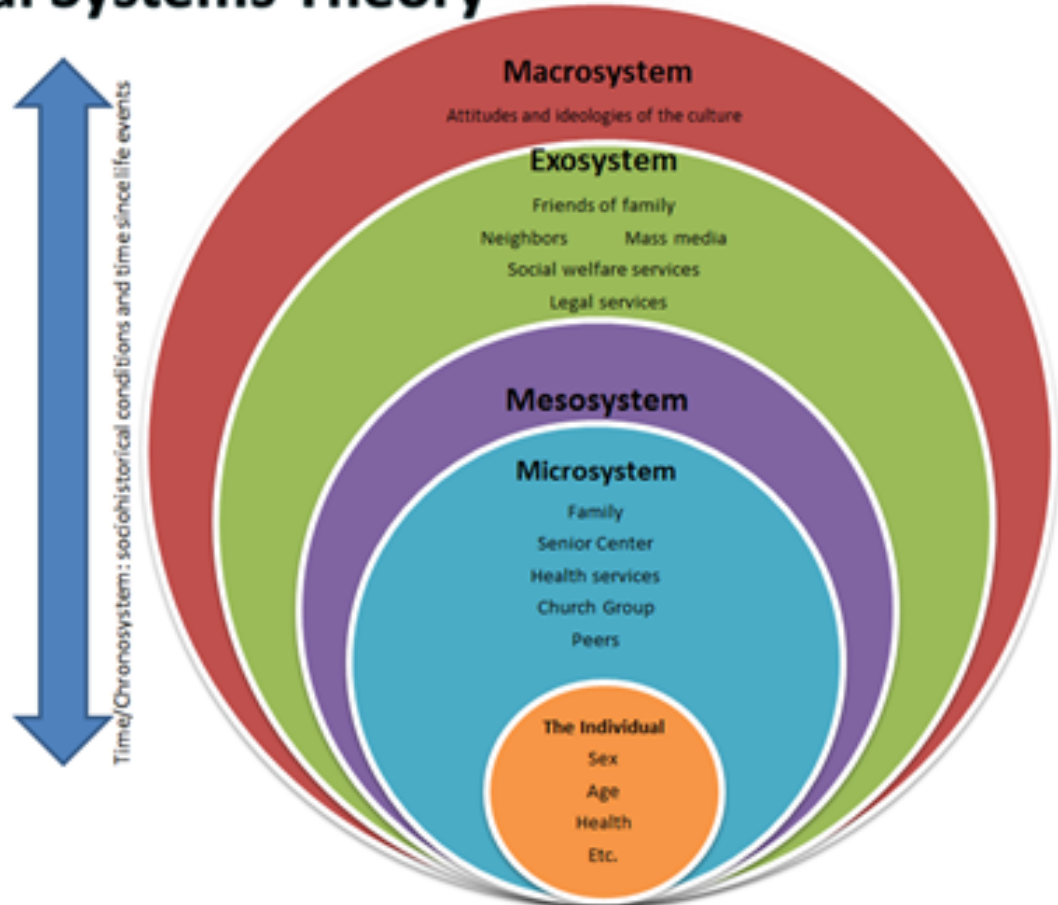
- **Levels**
 - Macrosystems
 - Microsystems
 - Mesosystems
 - exosystems
 - chronosystem
- **Structure**
 - Boundaries
 - Pressures for change
 - energy
- **Domains**
 - Cultural
 - Social
 - Psychological
 - Biological
 - Physical - Built
 - Physical – Natural

Levels

- systems can vary in size and scope (aka level)
- Systems at different levels tend to serve different functions and to range in complexity.
- Identifying the level of a system is an initial step in separating it from the overarching ecosystem and can provide an idea of how it fits other systems
- **Macrosystems:**
 - the organised social and cultural patterns that you find within the overall system of systems (SoS)
 - function across society and influence most of us
 - like the education system
- **Microsystems:**
 - the individual psychological and social dynamics and social interactions
 - what happens within individuals and groups
 - family groups, communities, classrooms
- **Mesosystems/exosystems**

- **Mesosystems:** relations between microsystems
- **Exosystems:** indirect links
- provide the “connective tissues” between individuals, groups of individuals, and society at large
- **Ecosystems:** comprised of multiple interacting systems of systems.

Ecological Systems Theory



Structure

- All systems have structure, based on the relationship between units within the system, and ties or relationships to other systems within the environment.
- The structure of a system is identified in terms of its **boundaries and energy**
- **Boundaries:** the processes and pressures that produce the need to change within the system
- **Energy:** what the system uses, produces and shares with the environment

Domains

- Domains represent broad areas within which we all function.
- **The most important component of systems is their:**
 - **domain of functioning:** a system may function within a specific location
 - **or domain of influence:** or be influenced by psychological, social or cultural processes
- **Domains allow us to:**
 - simplify the complexity of systems.
 - produces an image of how any particular system is organised and how