

The Viable System Model: A systemic approach to understanding and designing organisations

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This session gives an introduction to Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model - a systemic and cybernetic approach to understanding and modelling organisations. In developing the VSM, Beer was seeking to develop a "science of organisation" a way of understanding how an organisation - any sort of organisation functions. Key concepts were understanding organisations as whole entities, understanding how they manage complexity and understanding what it needs for organisations to be "viable" - to be capable of transforming themselves to fit their changing environment. As well as introducing the VSM, we will also look at the common theory underpinning both VSM & System Dynamics and some practical relationships between them.

Patrick Hoverstadt has worked as a consultant since 1995 with organisations in both the private and public sector, mainly on strategy, organisational design and change. He specialises in using systems approaches for analysing and designing organisations and in working with very large complex organisations including whole sectors. He has developed methodologies for several difficult business problems:

- Large-scale organisational change
- Strategic risk
- Measuring management performance
- Measuring organisational agility
- Collaborative governance
- Business Strategy

He has worked on many restructuring projects, analysing structural weaknesses, designing appropriate solutions and practical change plans.

Patrick ran an engineering business for 13 years before becoming a consultant and founding Fractal. He has written numerous research papers, is a regular keynote speaker at conferences, has contributed to several books on systems, organisation and management, is the author of "Fractal Organisation" a book on organisation published by Wiley in 2008 and used on seven masters programmes around the world, and is co-author of "Patterns of Strategy" a book on a systemic approach to strategy published by Gower in 2016.

He chairs SCiO a group of systems practitioners and is a Visiting Research Fellow at Cranfield School of Management.