

# Sarah Cornally

*Evolving Leaders • Transforming Organisations*

## Unlocking Systemic Intelligence

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If you think about the world in which we live today, which is full of pace, complexity and ambiguity, there are many unknowns. How do we move forward when there are so many unknowns? How can we start to map and model possibilities? The power of systemic intelligence is that it reveals things that we can't see. It also allows us to test ideas to see how they would impact the system that we're operating in, or that we're wanting to influence.

### What does it mean to unlock systemic intelligence?



Firstly, there's the intelligence that lies within a system itself. We're all familiar with that because we talk about 'the system' and the power that it has – in fact we often make reference to the system as if it were an entity. And this is actually correct, it is in fact an entity. The system itself is the net effect of all of the dynamics that exist within it. Those dynamics are to do with the relationship of every single element in the system, such as individuals, roles, decisions, incidents and history. You can imagine in an organisation there are hundreds and thousands of elements; therefore the interactions affected can be exponential. That might seem overwhelming to try to comprehend all that, but systemic intelligence provides us a framework with which to look at systems and develop discernment about those dynamics. Importantly, it puts us in a position of being able to influence them.

The other half of the equation is the capability to do that. Can we actually attune to systems? Do we know even how to attune to systems? Do we know how to listen to them, how to pay attention to things that we otherwise don't notice? And yet when we do we see new perspectives it leads us to discover new possibilities.

Systems are communicating to us all the time. How do we pay attention to all of the ways in which they're communicating to us, and then how do we respond to what it is that we perceive in a way that is respectful of systems and how systems operate? If we breach any of the principles of healthy functioning of the system – which we do regularly as human beings – we actually cause more difficulties. We can actually be generating the resistance of the system ourselves from ignorance about systemic principles and how they work and apply.

I think this is a really interesting area because if you watch children, they are actually very intuitive and sensitive to systems. This implies that we all innately have systemic intelligence and systemic capability, but through our education system and our tremendous bias towards the logical and rational we've extinguished that capability. Working with systemic intelligence is very much about awakening what, at some level, we already know. If you think about how, in difficult or challenging situations, we will rely on our gut and our intuition and our instinct, which live in the body. Conversely, many people admit that when they haven't followed that, they wish they had. Instead they followed their rational mind over their intuitive or gut instincts.

A lot of systemic intelligence is opening up to all of that sensory awareness that we've pretty much shut down from being hyper-rational and hyper-logical.

### **When is it most useful to tap into systemic intelligence?**

Systemic intelligence is a very powerful resource to help us deal with the pace, complexity and ambiguity that organisations and leaders face. It's also profoundly useful when things are stuck or difficult or complicated in a way that you just don't seem to be able to get past the issues. There is usually a system dynamic at play that is producing those challenges. It can reveal things that are hidden or unseen, that are material and make all of the difference in terms of you being able to move forward.

In these complex, ambiguous times we need to reawaken our innate capability. We need access to greater wisdom that we can leverage, so we can handle challenges much more effectively.



**Sarah Cornally** was sought out by C-suite executives to provide consulting services in the area of leadership, culture change and issue resolution as a result of her reputation in resolving complex and challenging issues in the field of Occupational Rehabilitation and Occupational Health & Safety.

For over 30 years she has consulted to and advised leaders in many of the top 100 companies, federal and state organisations in Australia including AMP, Allens, APRA, AstraZeneca, CBA, the Dept of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Coca Cola Amatil, King & Wood Mallesons, KPMG, Macquarie Bank, Microsoft, NSW Department of Human Services, PWC, NAB, Woolworths and multinationals in the Asia Pacific region.

She is best known for her work with executive teams, senior leaders and boards creating the adaptive leadership environment that enables organisations to perform and the people to thrive.

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