Systems Thinking

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Systems Thinking is the ability to look at the "big picture", whether dealing with a Process Improvement project, or a Facility Planning project, or an Organizational Analysis project, etc. It means including all of the integrated processes that make up the entire system. For Industrial & Systems Engineers, this often means expanding your view at the beginning of a project, to ensure that all of the relevant processes are included, and to not just focus on some of the symptoms. This doesn't mean an unnecessary Scope increase, but it does mean that all of the cause & effect relationships are included, and all suspect processes are examined.

Any benchmarking, whether for comparison of similar problems, or for identifying useful solutions, must also take a Systems View. This means that often the entire organization must be included, when doing comparisons, and there is a need to look at all similar processes. It also means that the benchmarking results must be viewed from a larger perspective, in order to identify all possible solutions.

It often takes some effort to broaden your thinking enough to see the complete system. Where this is very important is at the beginning of a project, when the overall Objective & Scope are being determined. It also helps when doing Data Collection, if the larger view is used when determining what areas to include in the Data Collection activity. It is important to broaden your view when looking at possible solutions, to ensure that all feasible solutions are considered.

As you broaden your view to see the "big picture" make sure that all members of the Project Team are also utilizing Systems Thinking, as they perform their work on the project.