



THE ICEBERG MODEL

WHAT IS THE ICEBERG MODEL?

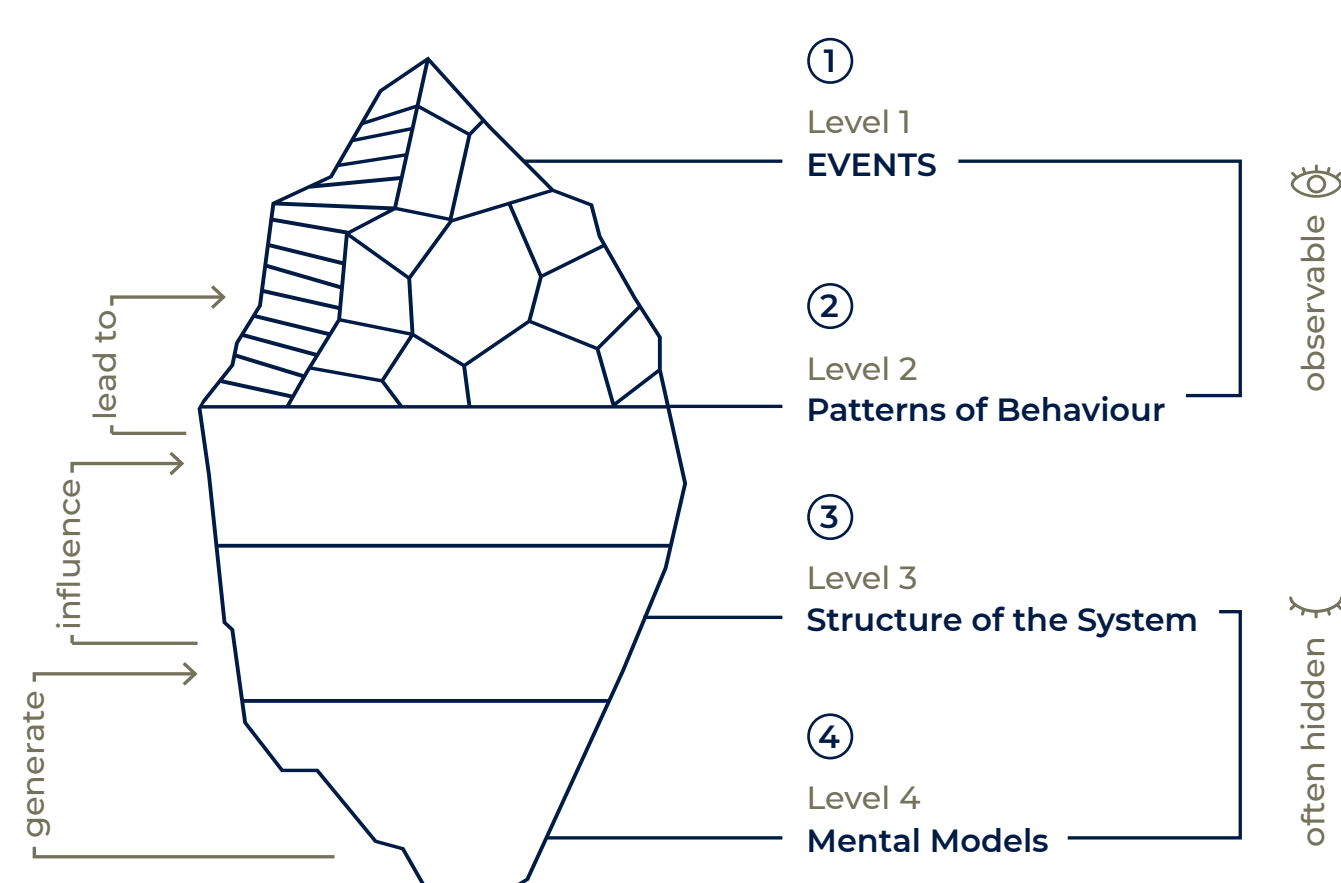
The Iceberg Model is a systems thinking tool that provides insights into global issues. It helps us to look at a problem through different lenses and provides a way to expand our perception of a situation by not looking at just a single event but stepping back and identifying the context of the whole system. An iceberg has only 10% of its mass above the water and 90% underwater. The 90% underwater is invisible from the surface and systemic issues can be considered in the same way. If you can identify the hidden structures under the surface and connect these to the observable events, you may be able to develop lasting solutions to target the whole system rather than short-term and reactive solutions.

WHEN TO APPLY THE ICEBERG MODEL?

If you want to understand the problem from a more profound perspective and you want to change the system systematically behind it, you apply the iceberg model.

HOW TO USE THE ICEBERG MODEL?

The Iceberg Model identifies four basic levels:



① LEVEL 1: Events – represents the visible components and actions

Starts with a clear outline of the problem that we see or hear about happening in the world.

Guiding Questions:

- What is happening right now?
- What can we see?

② LEVEL 2: Patterns of Behaviour – describes trends over time

Investigate if there are patterns to this problem that you are observing. Patterns help understand the trends of the problem of interest over time.

Guiding Questions:

- What has been happening over time?
- What are the trends?

③ LEVEL 3: Structure of the System – describes how the parts are interrelated or interconnected to influence the patterns

Structures can be understood as the “rules of the game.” They can be written or unwritten; they can be physical and visible or invisible. Discern the structure of the system behind this problem.

Guiding Questions:

- What sort of structures might explain these patterns?
- What has influenced and connected the patterns? For example, social rules, policies, guidelines, or distribution of resources.

④ LEVEL 4: Mental Models – reinforces everything else in the system

The mental models define the thinking that creates the structures that then manifest themselves in the patterns of events. Furthermore, mental models are difficult to identify because they stem from assumptions rooted in the surroundings and are intangible.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the mental models that we often learn subconsciously from our society or family and are unaware of?
- What attitudes, beliefs, morals, expectations, or values do people hold about the system?

Example

THE GRAMEEN BANK THROUGH THE LENSES OF THE ICEBERG MODEL

The Iceberg Model identifies four basic levels:



HELPFUL TIPS:

- 1) **Research & Dig Deeper:** answering these questions will require research and critical thinking, especially when it comes to the mental models which are hard to document.
- 2) **Include various perspectives:** interviews of different stakeholders in the system can also help extend your boundaries and create new links in your analysis of the problem.
- 3) **Re-challenge your model:** go through it several times to go deeper in the problem.

