The Six-System Map

A descriptive lens for locating events within their environment — before any judgements are made.

Why a systems map?

By the time a situation reaches a practitioner, it has often been distilled into a dynamic between two individuals: the client and 'the other'. Yet almost nothing in human life is truly that contained. The Six-System Framework restores the broader context, allowing events to be located and understood within their environment before any judgements are made.

1. Relational

The specific relationships involved: their history, degree of closeness, mutual obligations, ruptures and alliances.

Who is connected to whom, and in what ways?

2. Cultural

The shared assumptions, norms and stories of the setting — family, workplace, faith community, wider community.

What is considered 'normal' here? What is unspoken or 'unsayable'?

3. Structural

Formal roles, established processes, explicit rules, available resources and defined timeframes.

Who holds decision-making authority? What must occur by when? Which processes are in place — and which are absent?

4. Power

Formal and informal power, and the relational access it confers.

Who can influence whom? Who can withhold resources or opportunities? Whose voice is heard and valued?

5. Individual

Each person's circumstances, pressures, health, history and capacities — including the client's. Held with care, without diagnostic labelling.

What is true for each person here?

6. Communicative

How information flows: channels used, gaps and distortions, who receives what, what is documented, what is assumed.

Who knows what — and how did they come to know it?

Using the framework

The framework is a descriptive tool. For each system, ask: What do we actually know about this system in relation to the events described? Blank spaces can be as informative as filled ones. A situation where little is known about structure or communication often points to structure and communication as central aspects of the problem.

Working Map — What do we actually know?

Situation / events described:

1. Relational

2. Cultural

3. Structural

4. Power

5. Individual

6. Communicative

Blank spaces noticed — and what they might be pointing to: