



SYSTEMS ARCHETYPES AT A GLANCE

ARCHETYPE	DESCRIPTION	GUIDELINES
<p>Drifting Goals</p>	<p>In a “Drifting Goals” archetype, a gap between the goal and current reality can be resolved by taking corrective action (B1) or lowering the goal (B2). The critical difference is that lowering the goal immediately closes the gap, whereas corrective actions usually take time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drifting performance figures are usually indicators that the “Drifting Goals” archetype is at work and that real corrective actions are not being taken. • A critical aspect of avoiding a potential “Drifting Goals” scenario is to determine what drives the setting of the goals. • Goals located outside the system will be less susceptible to drifting goals pressures.
<p>Escalation</p>	<p>In the “Escalation” archetype, one party (A) takes actions that are perceived by the other as a threat. The other party (B) responds in a similar manner, increasing the threat to A and resulting in <i>more</i> threatening actions by A. The reinforcing loop is traced out by following the outline of the figure-8 produced by the two balancing loops.</p>	<p>To break an escalation structure, ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relative measure that pits one party against the other and can you change it? • What are the significant delays in the system that may distort the true nature of the threat? • What are the deep-rooted assumptions that lie beneath the actions taken in response to the threat?
<p>Fixes That Fail</p>	<p>In a “Fixes That Fail” situation, a problem symptom cries out for resolution. A solution is quickly implemented that alleviates the symptom (B1), but the unintended consequences of the “fix” exacerbate the problem (R2). Over time (right), the problem symptom returns to its previous level or becomes worse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking a “Fixes that Fail” cycle usually requires acknowledging that the fix is merely alleviating a symptom and making a commitment to solve the real problem now. • A two-pronged attack of applying the fix and planning out the fundamental solution will help ensure that you don’t get caught in a perpetual cycle of solving yesterday’s “solutions.”
<p>Growth and Underinvestment</p>	<p>In a “Growth and Underinvestment” archetype, growth approaches a limit that can be eliminated or pushed into the future if capacity investments are made. Instead, performance standards are lowered to justify underinvestment, leading to lower performance which further justifies underinvestment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dig into the assumptions that drive capacity investment decisions. If past performance dominates as a consideration, try to balance that perspective with a fresh look at demand and the factors that drive its growth. • If there is potential for growth, build capacity in anticipation of future demand.



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<p style="text-align: center;">Limits to Success</p>	<p>In a “Limits to Success” scenario, continued efforts initially lead to improved performance. Over time, however, the system encounters a limit that causes the performance to slow down or decline (B2), even as efforts continue to rise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The archetype is most helpful when it is used well in advance of any problems, to see how the cumulative effects of continued success might lead to future problems. • Use the archetype to explore questions such as “What kinds of pressures are building up in the organization as a result of the growth?” • Look for ways to relieve pressures or remove limits <i>before</i> an organizational gasket blows.
<p style="text-align: center;">Shifting the Burden/Addiction</p>	<p>In “Shifting the Burden,” a problem is “solved” through an external intervention (B1) which diverts attention away from more fundamental solutions (B2). In an “Addiction” structure, a “Shifting the Burden” degrades into an addictive pattern in which the side-effect gets so entrenched that it overwhelms the original problem symptom (R3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem symptoms are usually easier than the other elements of the structure. • If the side-effect has become the problem, you may be dealing with an “Addiction” structure. • Whether a solution is “external” or “internal” often depends on one’s perspective. Explore the problem from differing perspective in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of what the fundamental solution may be.
<p style="text-align: center;">Success to the Successful</p>	<p>In a “Success to the Successful” archetype, if one person or group (A) is given more resources, it has a higher likelihood of succeeding than B (assuming they are equally capable). The initial success justifies devoting more resources to A than B. As B gets less, its success diminishes, further justifying more resource allocation to A.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for reasons why the system was set up to create just one “winner.” • Chop off one half of the archetype by focusing efforts and resources on one group, rather than creating a “winner-take-all” competition. • Find ways to make teams collaborators rather than competitors. • Identify goals or objectives that define success at a level higher than the individual players A and B.
<p style="text-align: center;">Tragedy of the Commons</p>	<p>In the “Tragedy of the Commons” structure, each person pursues actions that are individually beneficial (R1 and R2). If the amount of activity grows too large for the system to support, however, the “commons” becomes overloaded and everyone experiences diminishing benefits (B5 and B6).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective solutions for “Tragedy of the Commons” scenario never lie at the individual level. • Ask questions such as: “What are the incentives for individuals to persist in their actions?” “Can the long-term collective loss be made more real and immediate to the individual actors?” • Find ways to reconcile short-term individual rewards with cumulative consequences. A governing body that is chartered with the sustainability of the resources limit can help.

This article was originally published in *The Systems Thinker*® V3N4, May 1992.