

Introduction to Systems Thinking

Lesson 2.1 Introduction to Systems Archetypes

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Overview

Read this to learn how an understanding of systems archetypes can support systems thinking.

Article: "Systems Archetypes I: Diagnosing Systemic Issues and Designing Interventions"

This 31-page article by Daniel Kim is one of the cornerstones of systems thinking, explaining the systems archetypes (typical models or standard forms) that are often identified by systems thinkers. It reviews some basic concepts you have already encountered and then focuses on the key idea of archetypes.


 **Read** ["Systems Archetypes I: Diagnosing Systemic Issues and Designing Interventions."](#)

Key Points

- Experts in systems thinking have developed eight patterns which are so common as to be referred to as archetypes. They are:
 - Drifting Goals
 - Escalation
 - Fixes that Fail
 - Growth and Underinvestment
 - Limits to Success
 - Shifting the Burden
 - Success to the Successful
 - Tragedy of the Commons
- Each archetype is described using a causal loop diagram, a description, and guidelines for identification.
- The archetypes are useful when analyzing real systems. If you can find one or two that seem to match, you can gain insights into your problem.

Article: "Applying Systems Archetypes"

This 18-page article by Daniel Kim and Colleen Lannon adds color and practicality to the ideas of systems archetypes explained in the previous article. You will look more deeply into the characteristics of each archetype.

 **Read** ["Applying Systems Archetypes".](#)

Key Points

The eight archetypes can be used as:

- Lenses through which to view a real-world systemic problem. Trying on different archetypes can help analyze the issues.
- Templates to identify structural patterns.
- Dynamic theories to understand interrelationships.
- Tools to predict behavior.
- Guidelines to design interventions.

Attributions and References

References

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Kim, D., and Lannon, C. (1997). *Applying systems archetypes*. In Pegasus Communications, Inc. The Systems Thinker. <https://thesystemsthinker.com/applying-systems-archetypes/>

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