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## Applying Systems Thinking & Common Archetypes to Organizational Issues Webinar Q&A with Michael Goodman

***Q: How applicable is the content of the course to situations in higher education where you sit at the department level and budget cuts, etc. are happening at the college, university and state level?***

A: There are so many of us facing similar issues where a lot is happening beyond our control or influence. I think that Systems Thinking can help in these situations in a few different ways. At one level to help us make more collective sense of what both the short & long term consequences are likely to be on our department. Second, there presumably are things we do control or at least have influence over within our own department that we might want to examine systemically. This might be in answer to the question: given our limited (or shrinking) budget what are the highest leverage actions (priorities) for us to put our attention on? What can we do as a department to maximize our impact as well as avoid creating unintended consequences down the road given the constraints we face? Finally, just having a productive dialog about the current reality we face as well as the future we want can go a long way in building alignment within the department.

***Q: Have you experienced that the construction industry has used Systems Thinking and System Dynamics?***

A: I have not had experience with the construction industry using Systems Thinking per se. However, there has been quite a lot of work (SD modeling) done in large scale project management which typically focuses on large constructing projects such as oil platforms, manufacturing plants, shipbuilding, etc. I would contact Alan Graham ([GrahamAK@aol.com](mailto:GrahamAK@aol.com)), a long time colleague who can be far more specific about this.

***Q: How would you introduce Systems Thinking for the very first time in an organization? Is talking about it less effective than implementing a project?***

A: Great question and one I get frequently asked. I think the strategy to introduce ST really depends on the organization, its unique culture, and who is doing the introducing. In my own experience, introducing it using a variety of strategies vs. focusing on just one channel is best. If you can get an ST project up and running and demonstrate some real impact (bottom line) that is great. But you may need to in parallel get a broader group exposed to some of the frameworks or tools through some sort of short workshop (face to face or virtual). There is an article and commentary on this topic published in Reflections from SoL (Society of Organizational Learning) that you might find quite relevant to this question (Visit [http://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com/supporting\\_documents/Leveraging\\_Ford.pdf](http://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com/supporting_documents/Leveraging_Ford.pdf))

**Q: Do you know examples of using ST and SD for modeling political systems?**

A: There have been various applications of ST focused on political issues. The following links to one example authored by my colleague David Stroh on the Israeli-Palestine conflict:  
[http://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com/supporting\\_documents/TopicalIsraelPalestine.pdf](http://www.appliedsystemsthinking.com/supporting_documents/TopicalIsraelPalestine.pdf)  
But I am not sure about anything focused on political systems per se.

**Q: In which way can you apply Systems Thinking to teach Systems Thinking?**

A: Whenever I teach ST I make sure that I am myself “modeling” as much as possible what’s contained in the content. For example, one core concept in ST is the idea and power of feedback. Giving students plenty of opportunity to try out the tools, work cases, apply to their own issues and then get (as well as give) feedback on their work is really important. There is a lot on mental models in the content so we spend some time having people identify some of their own or those operating in their organization. Finally the course design itself (online as well as classroom) follows the iceberg from top (events) to bottom (structure).

**Q: So many companies are interested in creating more sustainable business practices. How can Systems Thinking be best applied to help managers find efficiencies and solutions?**

A: I think ST & SD are already helping a lot here. For one thing you might want to check out Peter Senge’s latest book The Necessary Revolution. A *Business Week* review that describes what’s in the book can be found at the following link:  
[http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/jun2008/id20080611\\_566195.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/jun2008/id20080611_566195.htm)

The book uses Systems Thinking throughout and provides actual examples of how many companies have addressed sustainability. There are also whole initiatives and organizations such as the Sustainability Institute ([www.sustainer.org](http://www.sustainer.org)) that apply Systems Thinking as well as system dynamics to issues of sustainability.

**Q: Have you found that you need to go through modeling and developing an intervention to get benefit as opposed to focusing on systems behavior awareness?**

A: It is great to be able to go through a full-fledged modeling process to get to interventions but this is often not possible or sometimes even practical for many organizations. Raising the level of systemic thinking within an organization (or even just a team) can bring a vast improvement in the quality of the thinking and acting. One of the observations I have made over many years is that raising awareness about the nature of the systemic forces and pressures operating in our company or organization goes a long way towards shifting performance.

***Q: What is the relationship between the Balanced Score Card approach and Systems Thinking?***

A: I think there are some important relationships between the balanced score card (BSC) & ST. Putting the two together can be very powerful. In some of my client work I have been involved with both developing and “teaching” people about the BSC. From my perspective, best practice is to use ST or SD to generate deeper understanding about how the system (organization) operates and what are the critical factors (variables) impacting performance. Then the next step would be to develop the critical measures that will make up the score card.

***Q: I want to design a Innovation Management Model for a small business in Costa Rica. Do you think it is possible?***

A: There is a lot published in this area and best practices that you might want to examine. As you create your innovative management model you might want to also keep in mind some of the system principles and lessons contained in both the online course as well as in books such as The Fifth Discipline and The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook by Peter Senge et al.

***Q: Is there any chance that the US Federal government can ever understand these concepts and apply them to the problems we currently face?***

A: Yes! There are pockets (sometimes small groups, sometimes just individuals) within the government that not only understand but have been applying ST & SD for years. For example, I know the CDC (Center for Disease Control) is doing quite a lot in areas such as obesity and diabetes, cardio vascular disease, etc. Senator Kerry (D-MA) recently sponsored a seminar for congressional leaders introducing a system dynamics model focused on climate change in preparation for Copenhagen. Is it widespread? Unfortunately not.

***Q: The "Common Archetypes" in the title of the course suggests there are others, is there any resource on some other archetypes?***

A: Most of the Systems Thinking archetypes are contained in the online course. There are a few “additional” archetypes that have been described. I would suggest visiting the Pegasus website at [www.pegasuscom.com](http://www.pegasuscom.com)

***Q: What written or online materials associated with the course are available after we complete the course?***

A: At this point there are no additional written materials directly connected to the course. However, there are additional articles and cases available on my own web site at [www.AppliedSystemsThinking.com](http://www.AppliedSystemsThinking.com). Additionally there is a vast wealth of materials through Pegasus Communications ([www.pegasuscom.com](http://www.pegasuscom.com)) that are available to supplement the course.

***Q: Is the course completely self-paced? Are there discussion groups with other students? Is there access to a teacher/professor?***

A: The course is completely self-paced and stand-alone. We have not yet offered discussion groups or access to a teacher on a public (open) basis. However, I have done both as part of a team or internal group going through the course with an organization.

***Q: How much does this online course cost and where is it available for purchase?***

A: The online course is licensed per individual for \$299 per license and is available from both isee systems (<http://www.iseesystems.com/store/Training/ApplySysThink.aspx>) and Pegasus Communications ([www.pegasuscom.com](http://www.pegasuscom.com)).

***Q: What is the pricing structure for the course for teachers and schools?***

A: Volume and team discounts are available depending on your particular situation. Please contact isee systems at [support@iseesystems.com](mailto:support@iseesystems.com) for more information.