



**Why don't you give it a try?  
Sometimes change can be a good  
thing.**

### Leadership Through Learning Part 2F: Systemic Archetypal Mapping

by Marilyn Herasymowych and  
Henry Senko

“Traditionally, those consultants and researchers in the field of systems thinking who use archetypes analyze a system to identify the *one* archetype that characterizes the behaviour of the system. We discovered that it is very difficult for many people to select only one archetype. This led us to realize that, in a complex system, there are often many archetypes interacting with each other. We also found that these interactions between the archetypes could be mapped. Thus, our approach of *systemic archetypal mapping* was born.”

— Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Navigating Through Complexity: Systems Thinking Guide** (2002)

In the last newsletter, we identified the 10 positive systems archetypes that can be used to describe aspects of a complex system. In a previous

newsletter (**InfoMine** Vol. 11, No. 1), we described the negative archetypes that Scott, a police officer with a local Police Service, identified in his analysis of police officers who attend to domestic disputes. In this newsletter, we describe the positive archetypes that Scott selected.

### Identifying Positive Archetypes

Below are a few of the positive archetypes that Scott identified in analyzing his situation. Following each positive archetype are characteristics described in the **Systems Thinking Guide** (shown in *italics*). Then, there is an example of how Scott sees the positive archetype demonstrated, and his definition of the mental model that may be driving the engine of the archetype.

**Collective Agreement:** *Everyone participates in conversations and decisions that focus on the common resources.*

**Example:** However limited in scope, police officers and support services workers converse with each other about the problem. More often than not, they collectively understand the tragedy of being a common resource, and how difficult it is to make any progress in making a difference to the system.

**Mental Model:** Try to play nicely together!

**Cooperative Partners:** *All parties have a high degree of trust that each other's motivations and actions come from best intentions.*

**Example:** Police officers know that social workers cannot be expected to go into volatile situations by themselves. In return, the social workers recognize that police officers have a different mandate than they do, and cannot be expected to try to solve the problem in the way a social worker would.

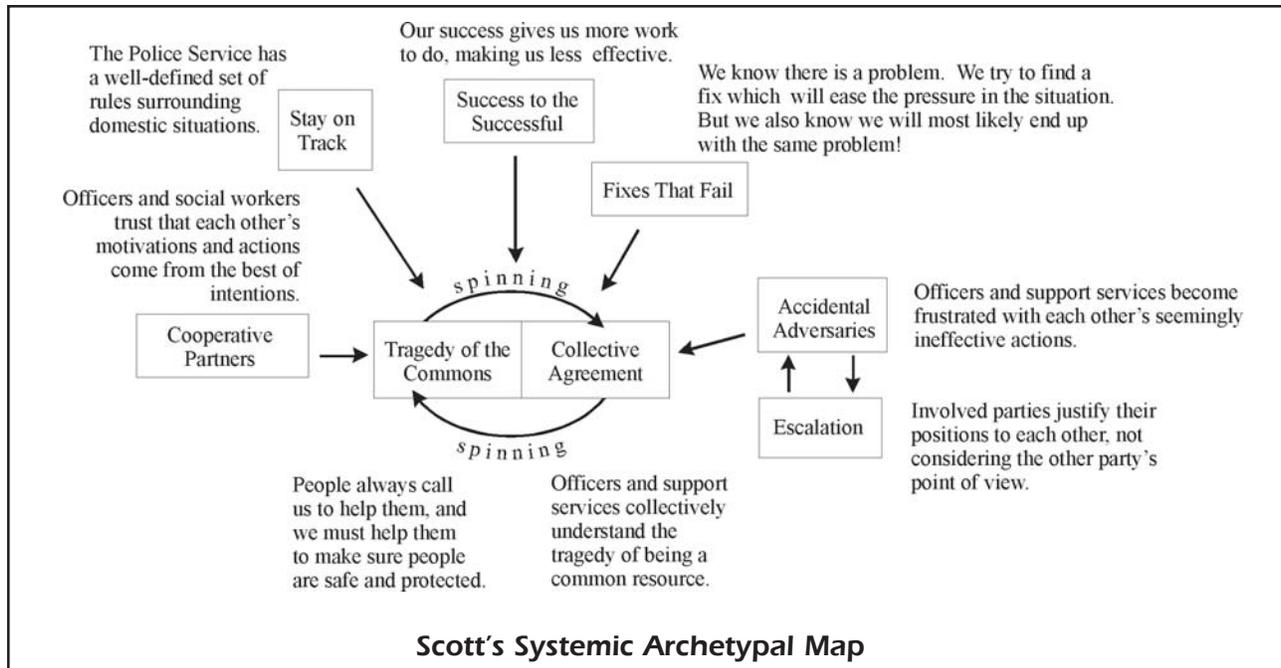
**Mental Model:** We need each other to be successful.

**Stay on Track:** *You are monitoring the situation in order to identify whether or not a goal or standard is drifting. You are staying focused on your goals and trying to maintain your performance standards.*

**Example:** The Police Service has a well-defined set of rules surrounding domestic situations. Officers attending a domestic dispute know their options, and what to do if warning signs are there to warrant further involvement. In addition, officers maintain amazing records of domestic situations, and have a dedicated team (Domestic Conflict Unit) to follow up with repeat problem situations.

**Mental Model:** We have great information and clear direction.

After you have identified the archetypes at play in your situation, you can examine how they are connected to each other. To help people to do this, we have developed a set of *archetype cards* that people can use to develop a *systemic archetypal map* — a type of visual representation that illustrates their understanding of the complex system they are analyzing. Each archetype card has



Scott's Systemic Archetypal Map

the negative form on one side, and the positive form on the other side. People move these cards around, to make what we call a *systemic archetypal map*. It is not important to get the map absolutely right. It is important that the map be meaningful to the people doing the analysis.

Once people have figured out the map, they tell the story that explains their map. The story should *feel right*, rather than *be logically right*. Our approach to systems thinking is not simply an analytical process; systems thinking uses a whole-brain approach (see **InfoMine** Vol. 5, No. 5 and Vol., 5, No. 6), a part of which includes *analysis*. In the human brain, *analysis* occurs on the left side of the brain. However, the right side of the brain helps you to make decisions when things are too complex for analysis alone. The right side of your brain uses *synthesis* to look for patterns. Since you have selected a complex situation, you cannot rely solely on analysis.

### Mapping the System

There are many ways in which to

map the complex system that is occurring. Below is one way in which to map Scott's analysis of police officers attending to domestic disputes. This version uses both negative (-) and positive (+) archetypes within one map. The brief descriptions on the map explain the archetypes, and the arrows show a cause-and-effect relationship between the archetypes.

In the map above, the negative archetype, *Tragedy of the Commons*, is considered to be central to the entire system. Police officers and their support services are all *common resources*. The *tragedy* occurs when people view these services as belonging to them alone. However, Scott discovered that this negative archetype is in a state of dynamic motion, spinning from *Tragedy of the Commons* to *Collective Agreement*, and back again. A spinning dynamic of complimentary archetypes shows a paradoxical dynamic in the system that explains why officers and support services workers may feel both frustrated and supported at the same time. This paradox indicates a high degree of complexity in a system. Just knowing this can make the people

involved in the situation feel better about what they are experiencing, because they now understand why they may be feeling this way. This is one of the gifts of doing systemic archetypal mapping.

"...in any system of which we are a part, we, the human inhabitants of these systems, ... create patterns by how we think and act. In other words, we are all accountable and responsible for what the system is producing. As a result, we have the power to create new patterns and new systems — precisely because of this accountability and responsibility that we, as individuals, have within a system." — Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Navigating Through Complexity: Systems Thinking Guide** (2002)

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