

Talking Systems

CoLab.
Complexity | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

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Systemic Design Community of Practice (SDCoP)

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Systemic Design CoP

Our Aspirations:

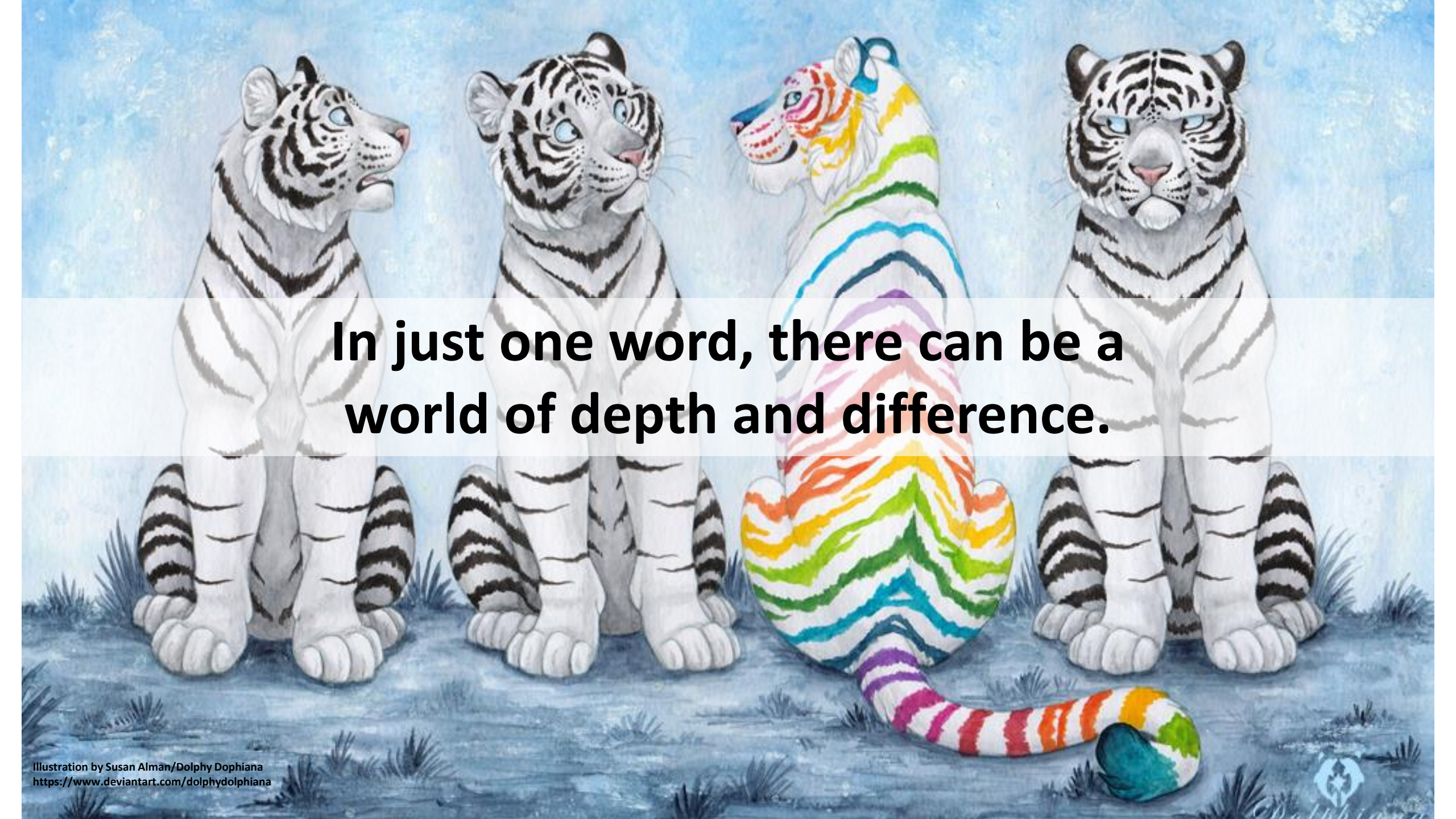
- ❑ **Build** the field of practice around systemic design and social innovation approaches in the GoA.
- ❑ **Catalyze** and **inspire** new ways of working on old problems.
- ❑ **Provide** a safe space for GoA staff to learn from each other, with each other.

We do this by:

- ❑ **Designing** sessions with a mix of theory and learning by practicing.
- ❑ Being **open** and willing to **share** our experiences with others.
- ❑ Having **fun** – we take our work seriously, not ourselves.

Today's Objectives

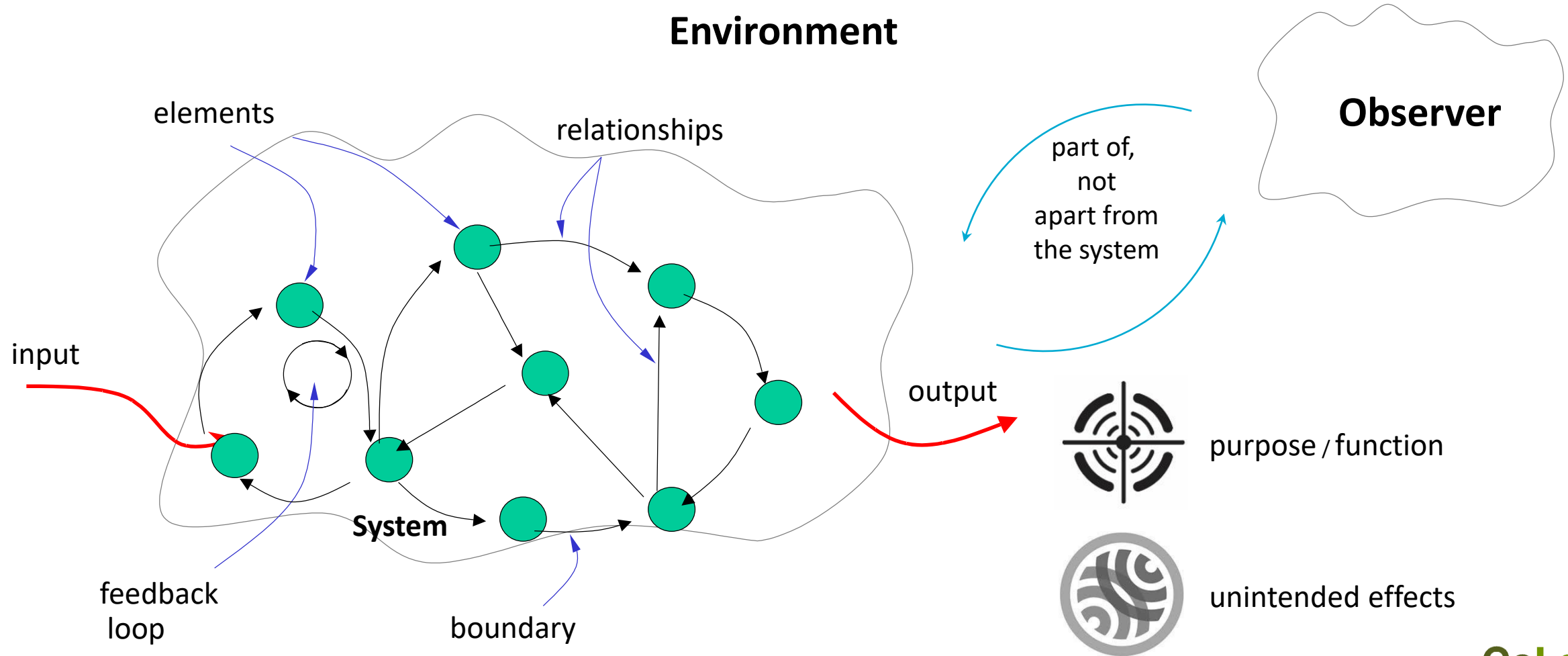
- Understand and be able to explain how conversations are like systems.
- Be able to apply the following systems thinking concepts to dialogue: perspective, mental models, patterns, and feedback.
- Be able to identify common conversation patterns and archetypes.
- Leave ready to practice shifting stuck patterns to more productive, balanced ones.

An illustration of four tigers sitting in a row against a light blue background. From left to right: the first tiger has black stripes on a white body; the second has black stripes on a white body; the third has a rainbow-colored body with black stripes; the fourth has black stripes on a white body. The tigers are looking towards the right.

In just one word, there can be a world of depth and difference.



What is a System?



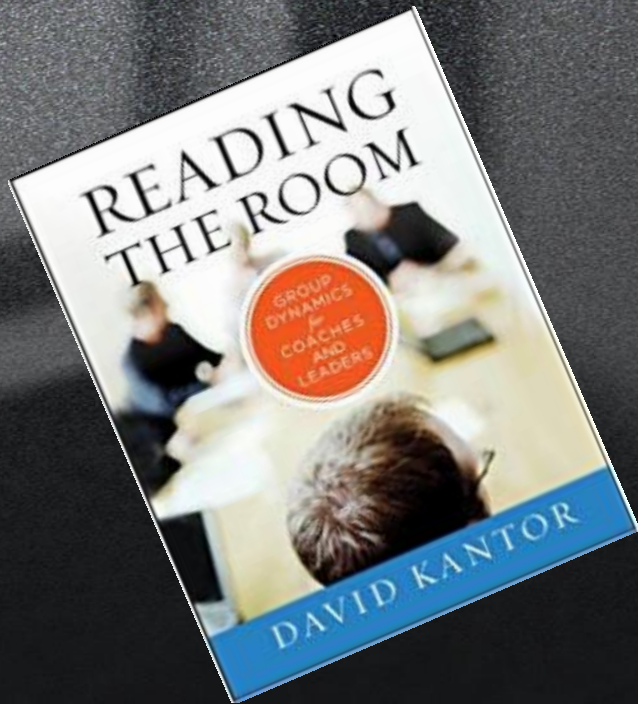
**How are
conversations
like systems?**



Theory of Structural Dynamics

The first step toward becoming a far more prescient and effective leader is being attuned to the signals of a conversational system, what we've determined as "structural dynamics".

— DAVID KANTOR



Structural

When people talk, they make and follow **implicit understandings** and **patterns** in their conversations.

This is often **unconscious**.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“How’s it going?”

“Good. You?”

“Good.”

Dynamics

Ongoing understandings and patterns have **effects** – sometimes **functional** (useful), sometimes **dysfunctional** (not so useful, even harmful).

Models

Conversations succeed or fail based on the interaction of different personal models.

We are all engaged in
cross-model conversations.

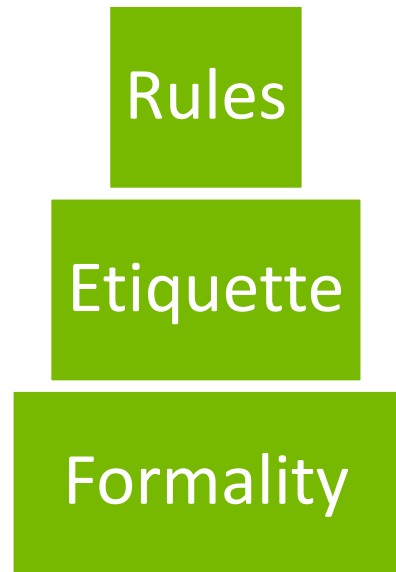


Individual Models
'mine'

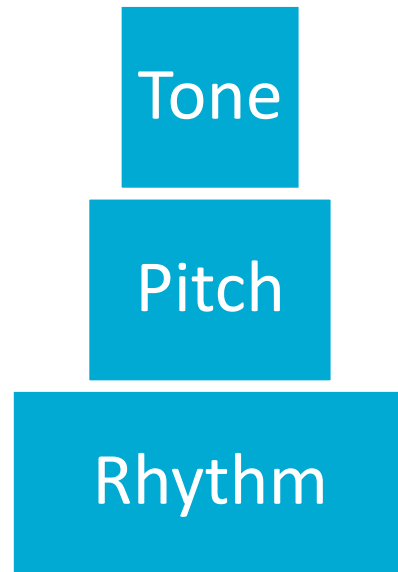


Shared Models
'between us'

What we Hear



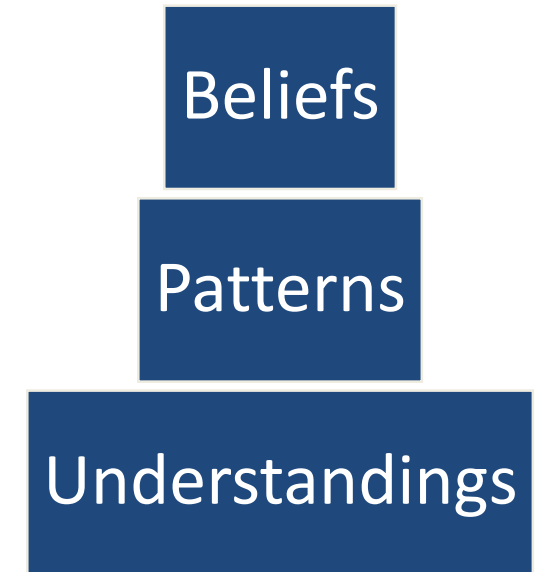
Style



Voice



Content



Structure



Four-Player Model

Movers	They move a team along.	Without movers there is no direction.
Followers	They support the initiative.	Without followers, nothing gets completed.
Opposers	They provide critical feedback.	Without opponents, nothing is corrected.
Bystanders	They often observe the team and its processes from the sidelines.	Without bystanders, there is no perspective.

Movers

- A move **initiates action** by setting forth an idea, a statement or a proposed direction.
- Movers often **introduce** a new idea or concept to the group and, in providing such **direction**, help their group **move forward** and find solutions to problems they face.
- Can be too forceful or in love with their own ideas.



Followers

- A follow **supports** a previously taken action.
- Followers may **agree** with an idea currently being debated or agree to carry others' ideas to completion. Their support serves to **strengthen** others' actions and to **keep** ideas on the table.
- Can get stuck always following, serving.

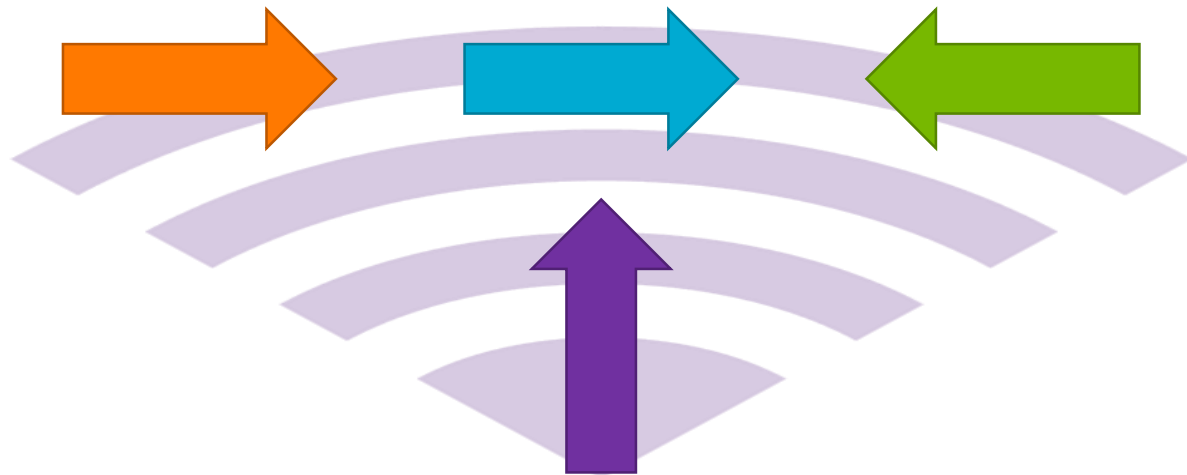
Opposers

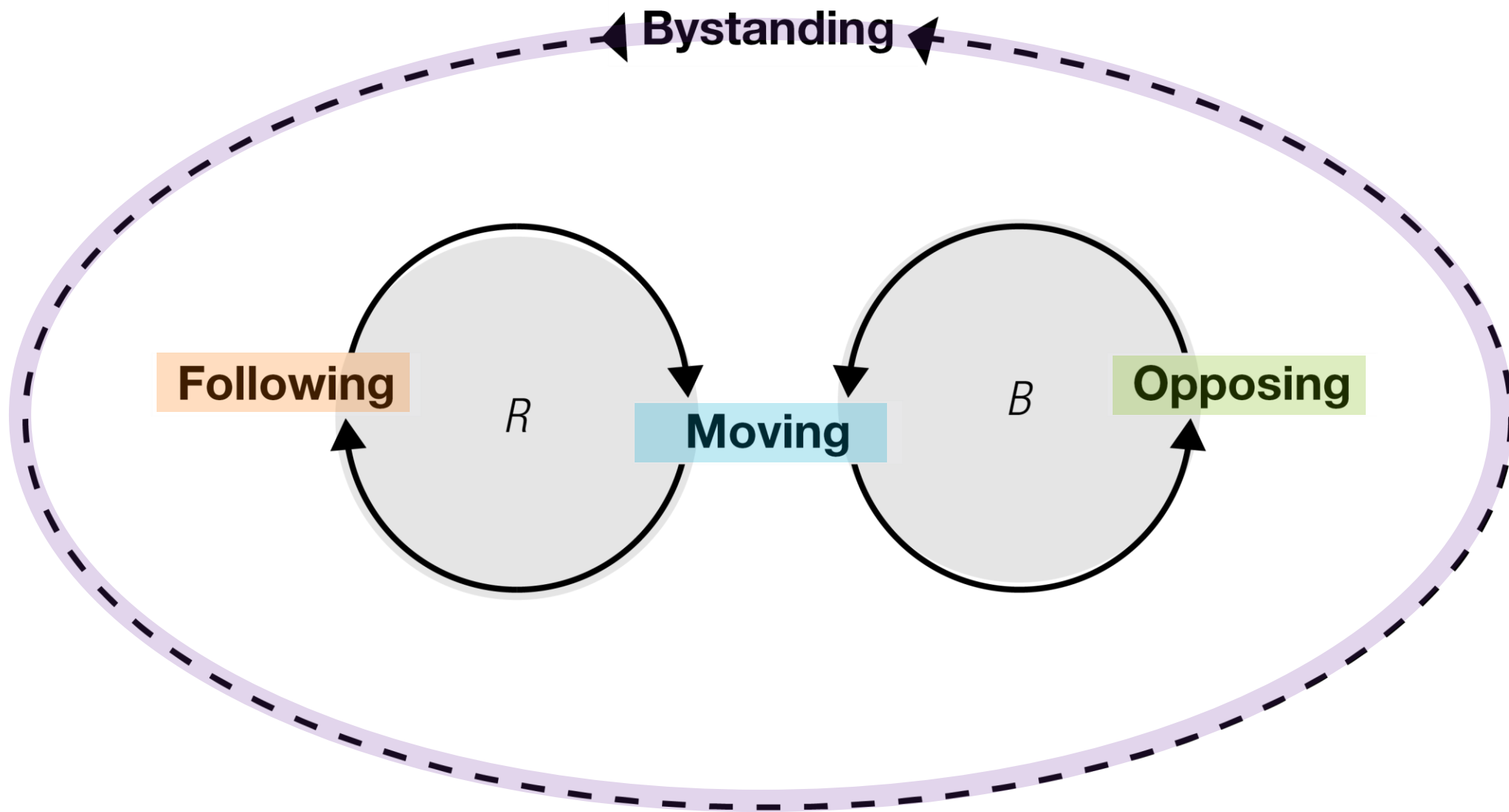
- ❑ An oppose **challenges** an action.
- ❑ Opposers **push back** on ideas, sometimes to make sure they are worthy, and at other times because they genuinely disagree with another's position or where the group is going. Their dissent provides **contrasting** perspective and often needed **correction** to ensure the quality of the group's decisions.
- ❑ Opposers may be protecting something important to them.



Bystanders

- ❑ A bystander **observes**, adds **neutral** perspectives, and **bridges** competing actions.
- ❑ Bystanders are best at **summing up** what has been said and trying to find a solution based on disparate points of view. Their **reflections** help the group members by presenting new **frames** of reference, insights, and observations.
- ❑ Sometimes they need support, or have no voice.





Activity: Four-Player Model

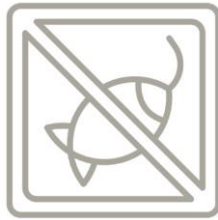
- Form a group of four. Be brave – meet some new people 😊
- Each person embody the role.
- When invited to do so, switch roles by standing up and rotating seats clockwise.
- Conversation topic: have a conversation about healthcare.

Archetypes

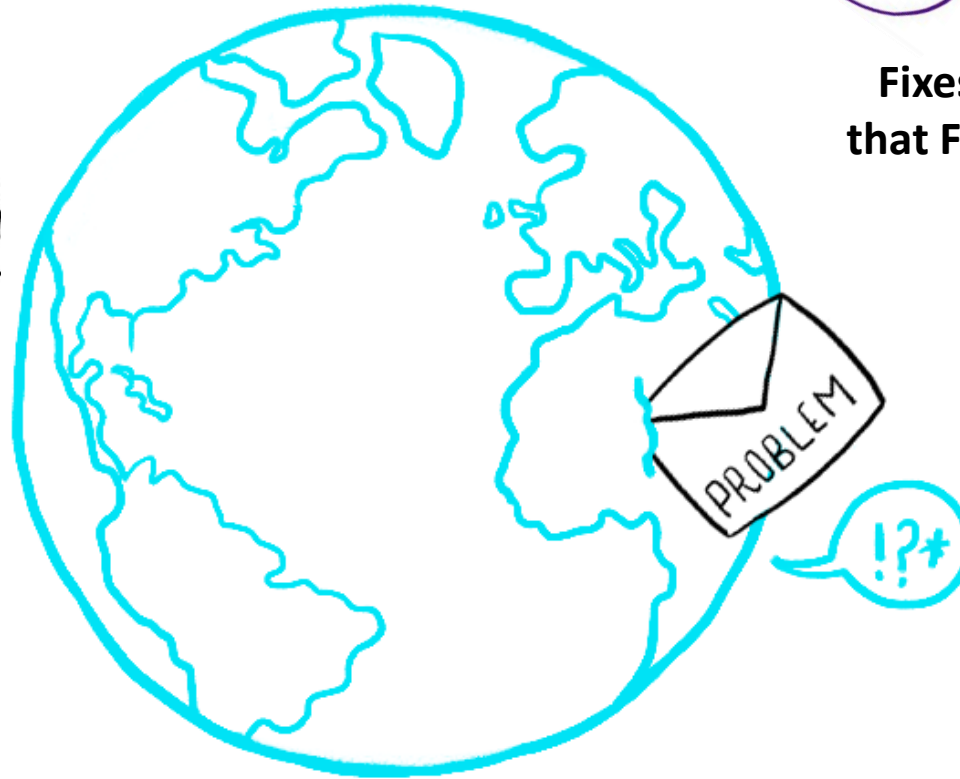
□ An archetype is a commonly occurring **pattern**.



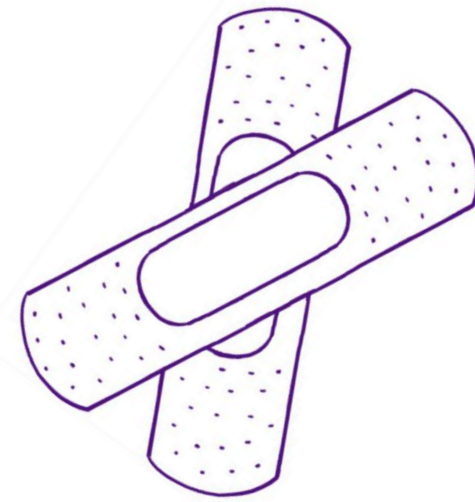
Limits to Growth



Tragedy of the Commons



Shifting the Burden



Fixes that Fail

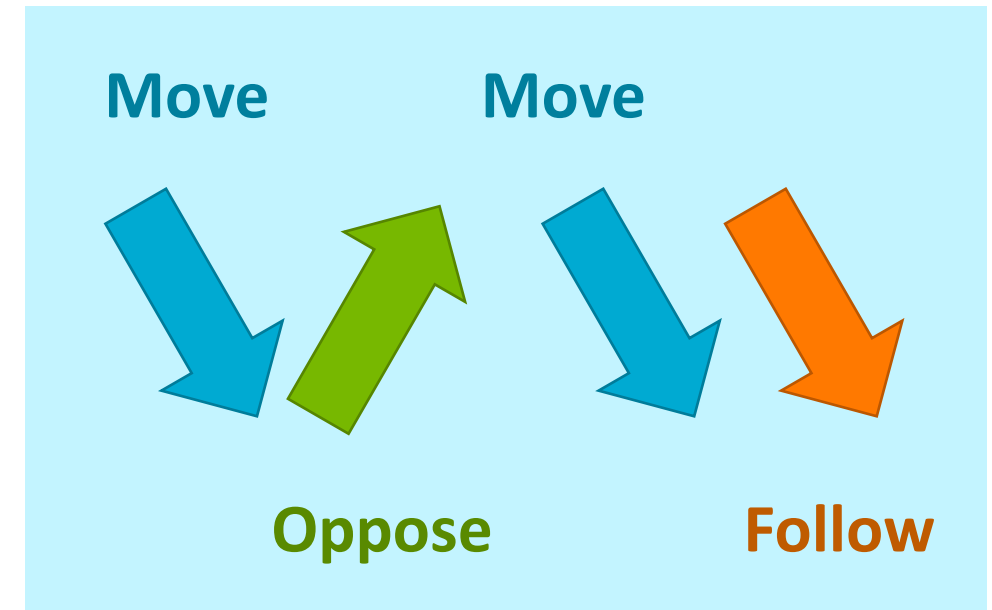
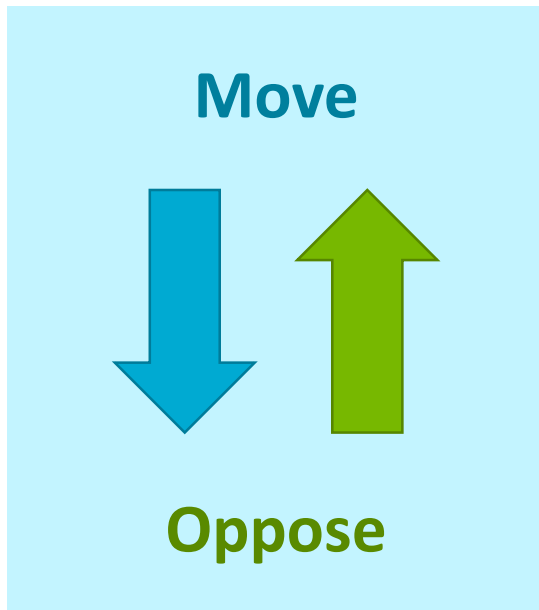


Escalation

Structural Patterns

❑ **Action Structure:** identifiable pairs of actions that occur in an interaction.

❑ **Action Sequence:** a string of three or more action structures.

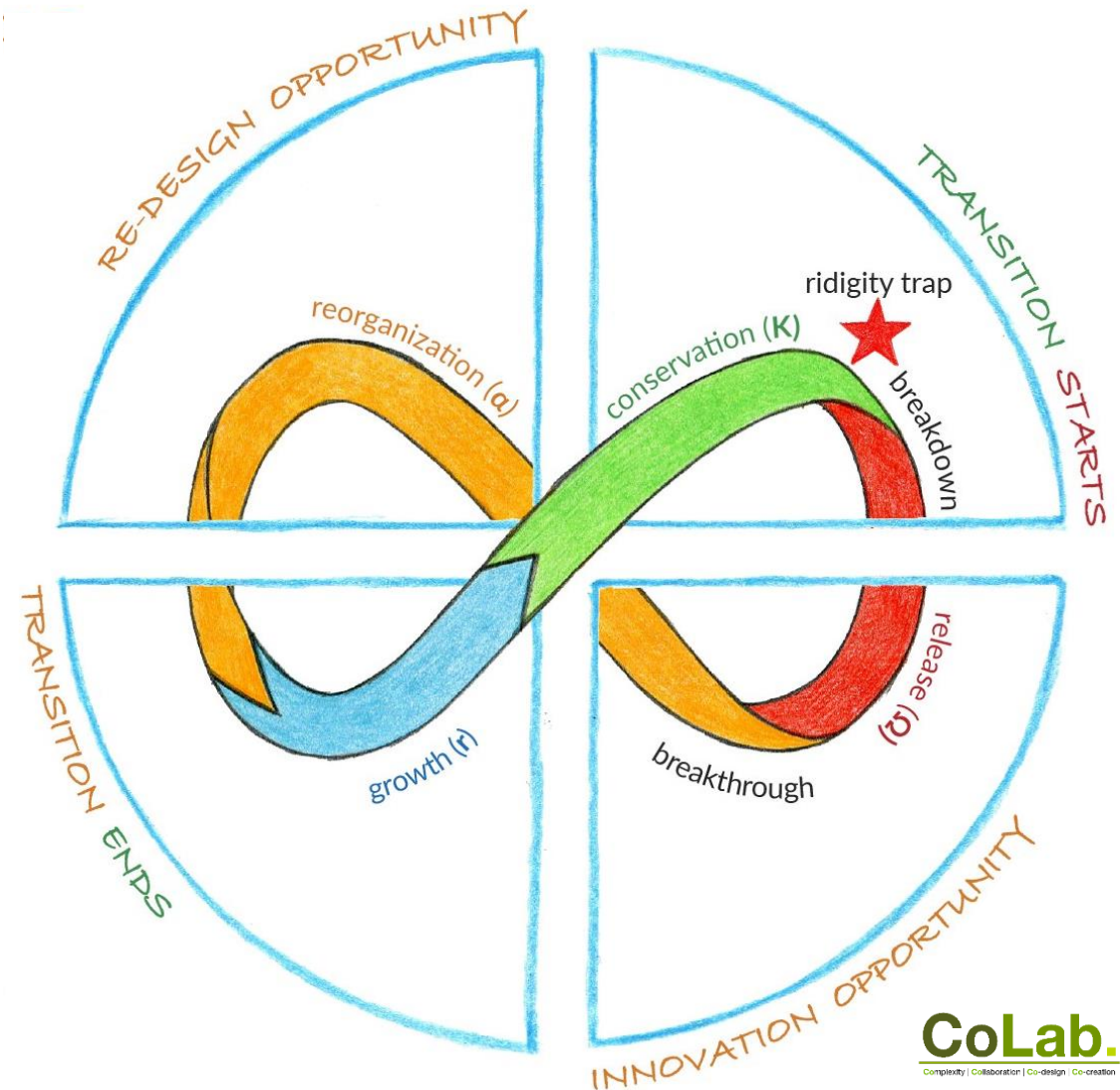


An action sequence that occurs over and over again in a group becomes a **structural pattern**. These patterns can be beneficial or destructive.

Team Traps, System Traps

(AKA when archetypes go bad)

- ❑ **Team Trap:** A vicious cycle of unproductive behaviour that undermines group performance.
- ❑ **System Trap:** places where systems get stuck in harmful behaviour.



Team Traps

- You have 5 minutes.
- Form new groups of 3-5.
- Choose a trap.
- Create a 1 minute skit (30 sec + 30 sec) that demonstrates:
 1. The trap. (from)
 2. A way to fix it. (to)
- Have fun and don't be boring. 😊

Courteous
Compliance

Covert
Opposition

Point
Counterpoint

Point
Counterpoint
Escalation

Empowerment
Paradox

Co-opted Inner
Circle

Hall of Mirrors

Uncorrected
Action

Serial Move

Getting (un)Stuck

- ❑ **All four roles can get stuck.**
- ❑ They can also help each other get unstuck – for instance:
 - ❑ A **skillful oppose** knows how to be fluid and offer another suggestion.
 - ❑ All roles can **help draw out the bystander** to offer their perspective.
 - ❑ If there is covert opposition, someone can make a move by **specifically asking for clear opposition** to make it safer for people to voice concerns.



Remix: Four-Player Model

Return to your **healthcare conversation group** of four.

THIS TIME: try to have a balanced conversation.

Each person shifts through the four roles as they think is necessary for the conversation to be productive.

Conversation topic: have a conversation about **healthcare**.

**What was new that
you tried this time?**

**How was this
conversation
different from the
last time?**



Behavioural Tendencies



Strong

- An action we use **often** and **well**. People often associate us with these tendencies.



Weak

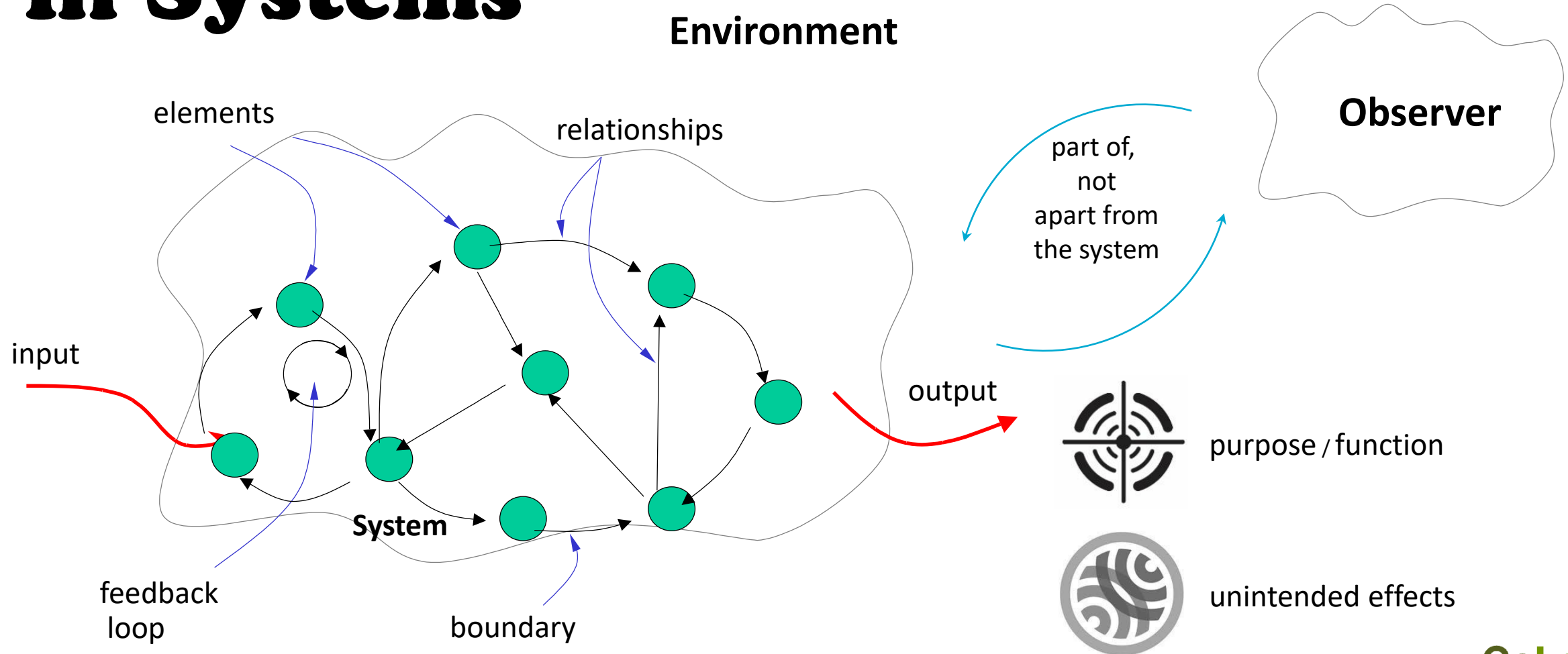
- An action we **fail** or **hesitate to use** when the situation we are in calls for that action.



Stuck

- An action we often use **more than is necessary**, limiting our wider ability to be useful to others.

Behavioural Tendencies in Systems



Homework

- **Identify your/your team's/a system's behavioural tendencies** – how are you:
 - **Strong? Weak? Stuck?**
 - What might be underneath these behaviours? What is one different action you could bring to try to shift a stuck conversation pattern?
- **Map a conversation:**
 - Choose a video/meeting: try to identify different roles as people are talking.
 - Notice if you are seeing any patterns: what's creating this pattern?
Get curious: is something out of balance?
 - Make your team aware of the roles, and ask them to try it out – they may be able to (helpfully...!) notice your unconscious tendencies. After a couple of weeks, go for coffee together and share what you've observed.