



Systems Thinking Leadership

And our ARCHWAY Approach®

What is it?

Systems thinking leadership is about seeing the big picture: understanding how people, processes, and resources connect across the whole organisation.

Instead of treating problems in isolation, leaders look for patterns, root causes, and ripple effects.

Top tips include:

- Maintaining the holistic view by seeing all teams as the various ingredients within the larger recipe that are all focused on the outcome.
- Ensure Kaizen (continuous improvement and development), constant 360-degree communication within the team and with those you rely on and provide for.
- Focus on which regular occurrences have impacts (positive and negative) and adapt accordingly.
- Long-term focus – Balance today's goals with tomorrow's sustainability.
- Collaboration – Break down silos and learn across teams.

For Executives (C-suite)

- Align strategy with whole-system goals, not just departmental results.
- Sponsor cross-functional initiatives and invest in long-term resilience.
- Example: Google is investing in renewable energy for both cost savings and to enhance its reputation.

For Middle Managers

- Map processes end-to-end; avoid “fixing” one part at the expense of another.
- Hold regular cross-department check-ins.
- Example: Operations managers tracking how product defects affect manufacturing, support, and sales.

For Team Leaders

- Treat your team as a mini-system: map workflows and spot bottlenecks.
- Run retrospectives that ask, “How does our work affect others?”
- Example: Sales leaders mapping customer objections and marketing alignment.

Tools You Can Use

- Causal loop diagrams – Visualise connections & feedback.
- **“5 Whys” technique** – Find root causes.
- **System maps/flowcharts** – Clarify hidden relationships.
- **Systems archetypes** – Spot common problem patterns (e.g., “Shifting the Burden”).



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Common Pitfalls & Fixes

- Tunnel vision → Schedule “big picture” reviews.
- **Resistance to change** → Start small, prove quick wins.
- **Siloed thinking** → Create shared goals & cross-team projects.
- **Hidden assumptions** → Regularly challenge “the way we’ve always done it.”

Why It Matters

- Tackles root causes, not symptoms.
- Builds **resilience** against shocks (e.g., Nokia surviving supplier crises).
- Sparks **innovation** by seeing opportunities across the system.
- Supports **sustainable growth** and healthier organisations.

Quick Reflection:

Next time you face a challenge, ask questions like:

- What system am I really part of here?
- What feedback loops or patterns are at play?
- Who else is affected by this decision?

Some years ago, we developed our ARCHWAY Approach® thinking, and it has been said that it reflects a form of systems-thinking leadership in terms of decision-making.

The basic contents are listed in our ARCHWAY Approach handout.

Please see what you think by

[clicking here.](#)

