Bridging the Gap

Spanning the distance between teaching, learning and application of systems thinking in the workplace

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and Martin Reynolds

Open University Systems Learning

- History of Undergraduate systems modules
- Post-graduate modules Systems Thinking since 2010
- OU Teaching and Learning:
  - Distance Part-time Supported
- 2 taught modules, plus optional and research modules
- Towards Diploma or Masters in Systems Thinking in Practice – orientation towards professional application
- 80 to 100 students on each module at a time
- Team of 4-5 tutors

Project Outline

3 phases of research (c.18 months)

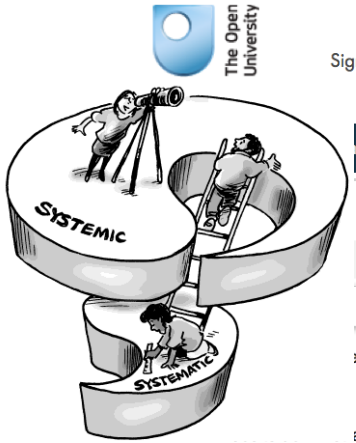
Phase 1
Understanding students experience of **learning** during module

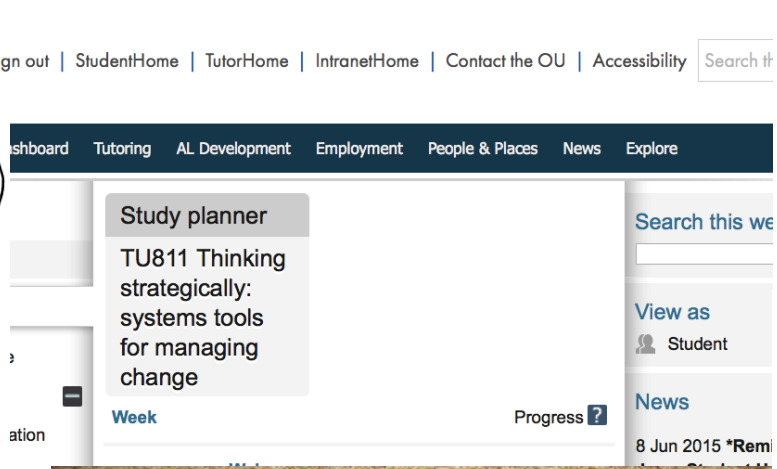
Phase 2
Understanding experience of **applying** ideas in workplace

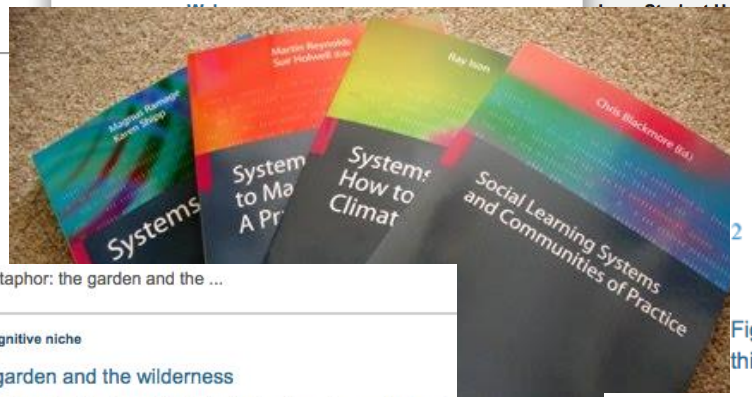
Phase 3
Designing learning for application of systems ideas

Plus informally
Checking in with our experiences as tutors

Student's experience of learning







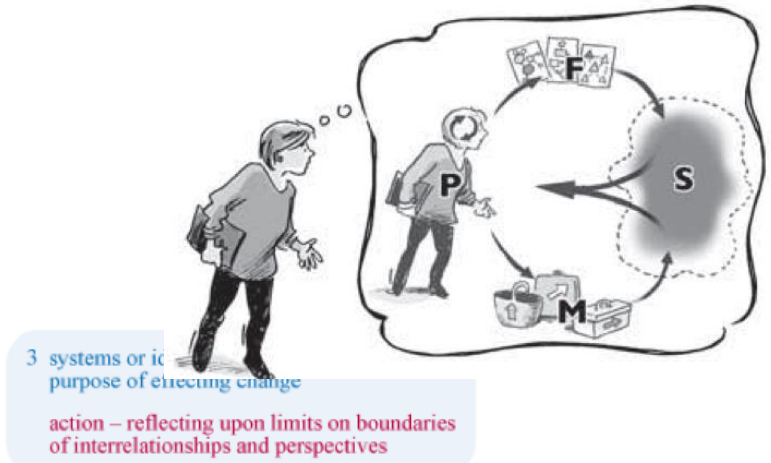
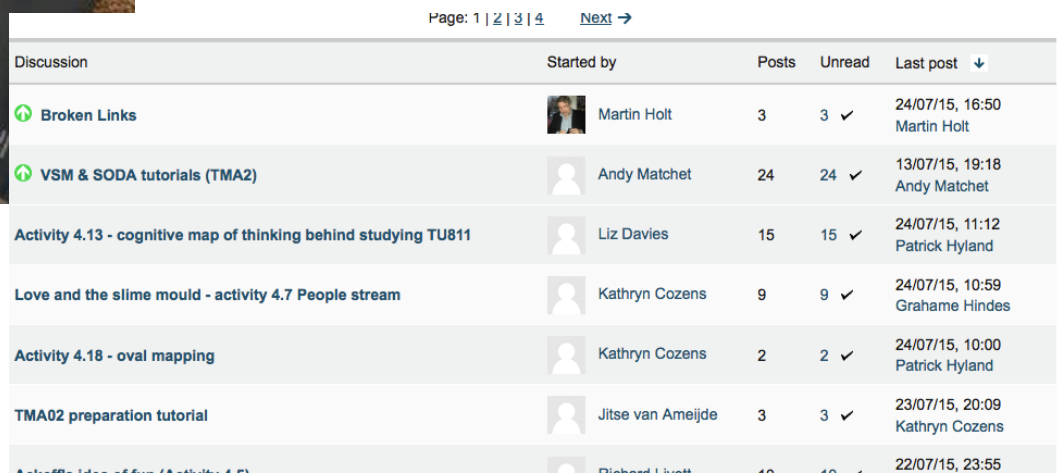
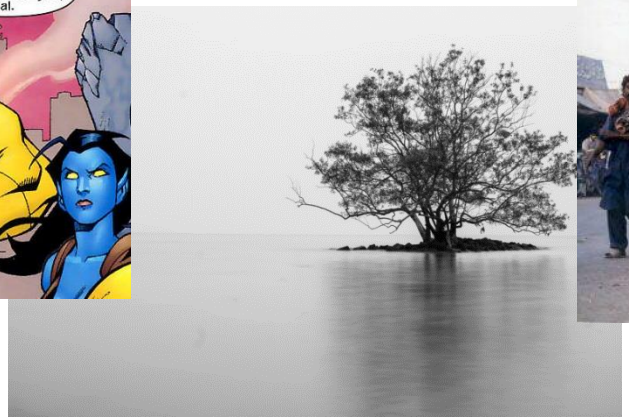
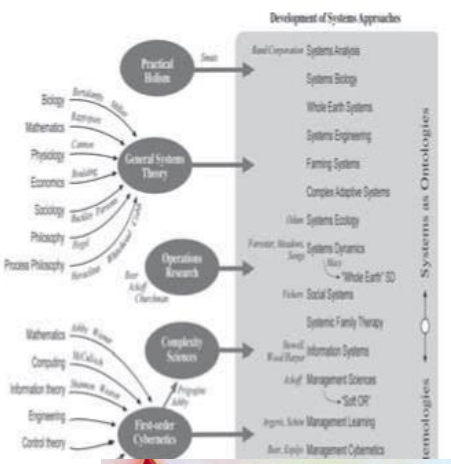


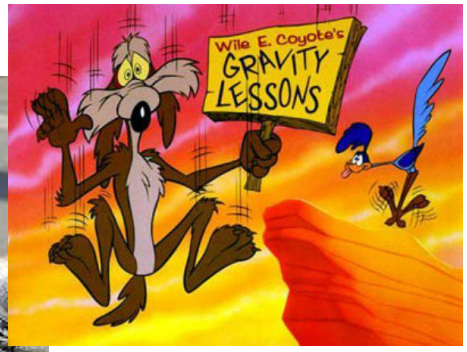
Figure 2.1 Systems thinking in practice heuristic – an approach for strategic thinking

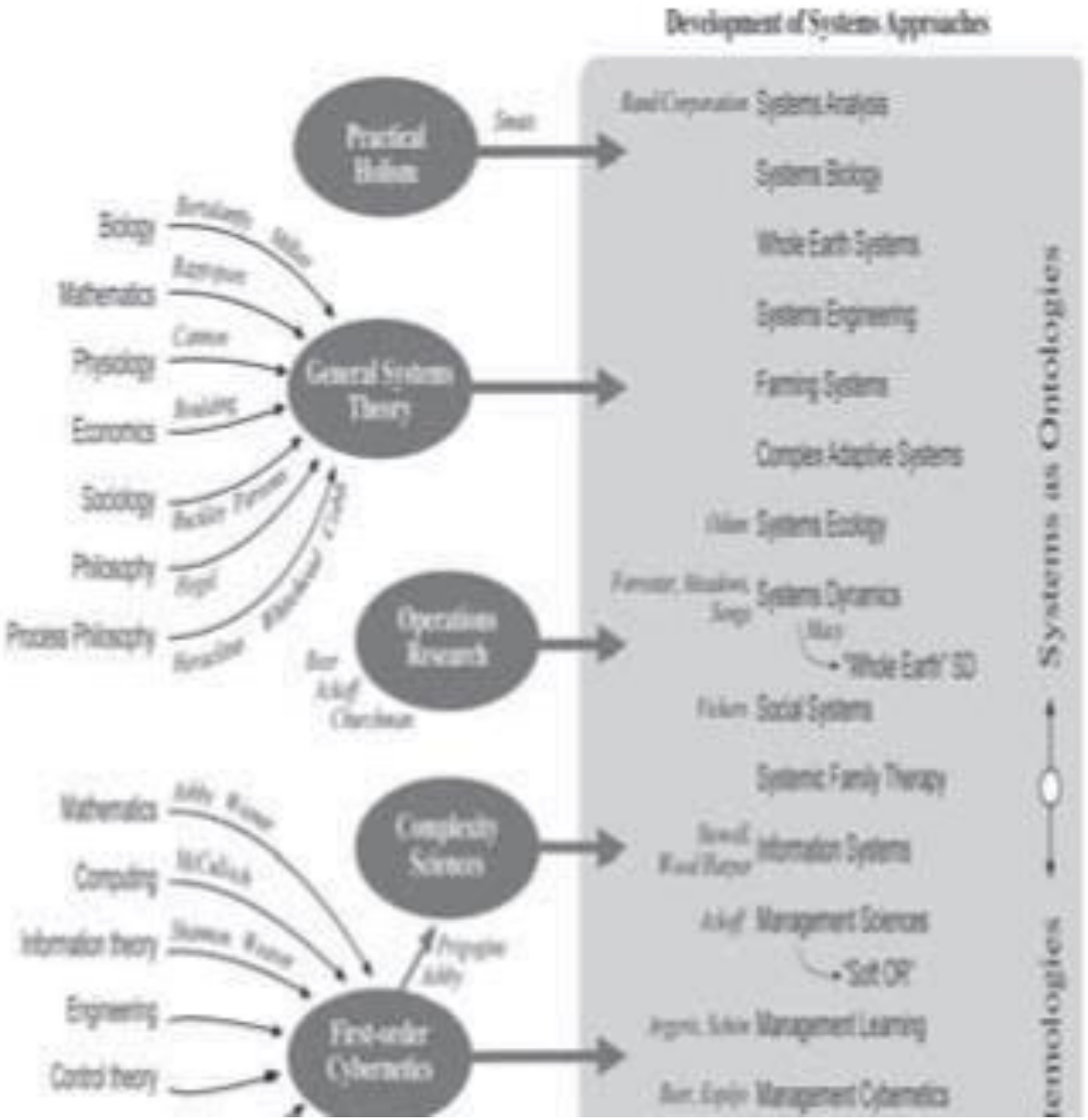




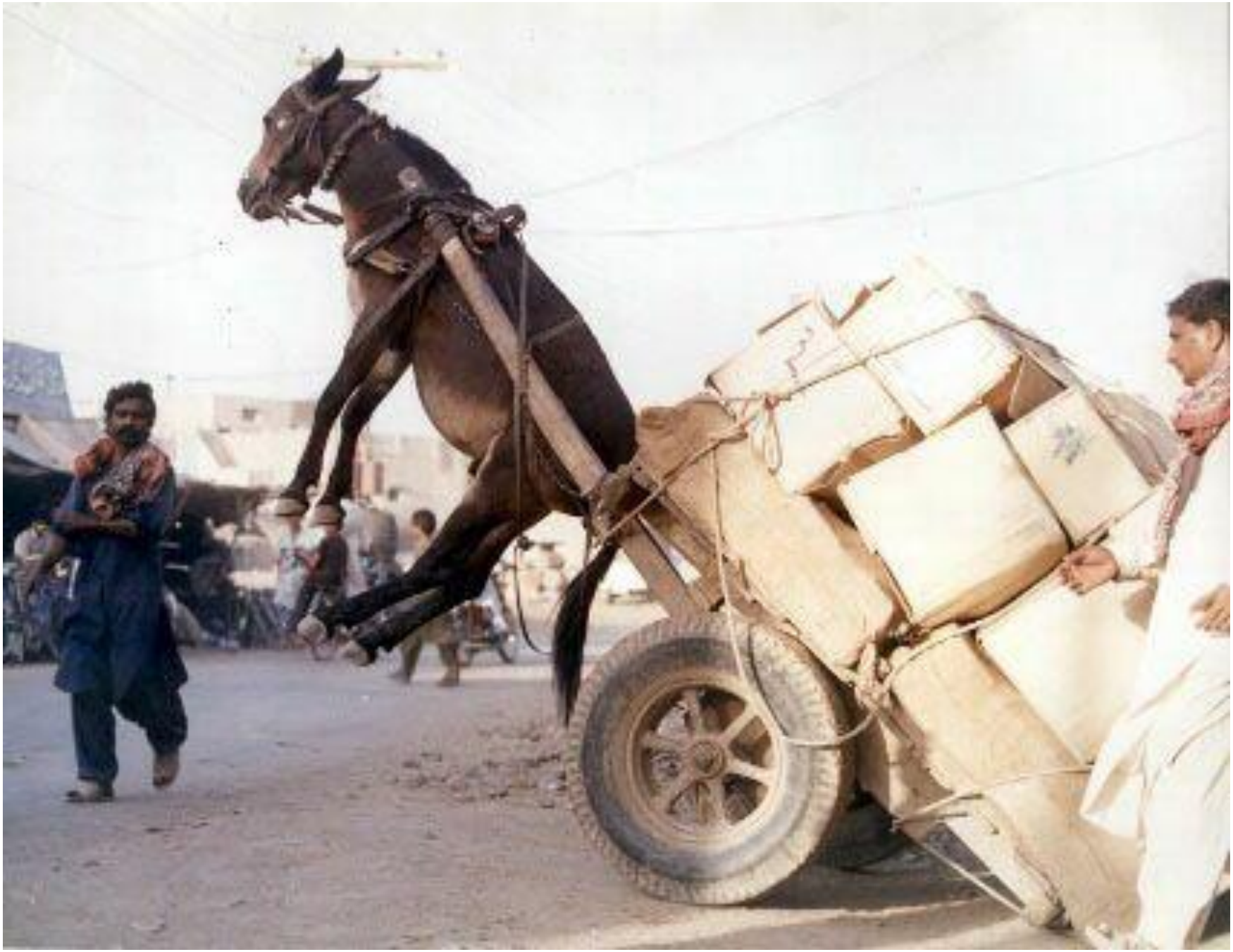


...a range of factors & issues affected learning experience




Development of Systems Approaches
Practical Holism
General Systems Theory
Operations Research
Complexity Sciences
First-order Cybernetics
Biology
Mathematics
Physiology
Economics
Sociology
Philosophy
Process Philosophy
Mathematics
Computing
Information theory
Engineering
Control theory
Systems Analysis
Systems Biology
Whole Earth Systems
Systems Engineering
Farming Systems
Complex Adaptive Systems
Systems Ecology
Systems Dynamics
"Whole Earth" SD
Social Systems
Systemic Family Therapy
Information Systems
Management Sciences
"Soft OR"
Management Learning
Management Cybernetics
Systems as Ontologies

Ison, R. (2010)



The Cat in the Hat copyright Dr Seuss

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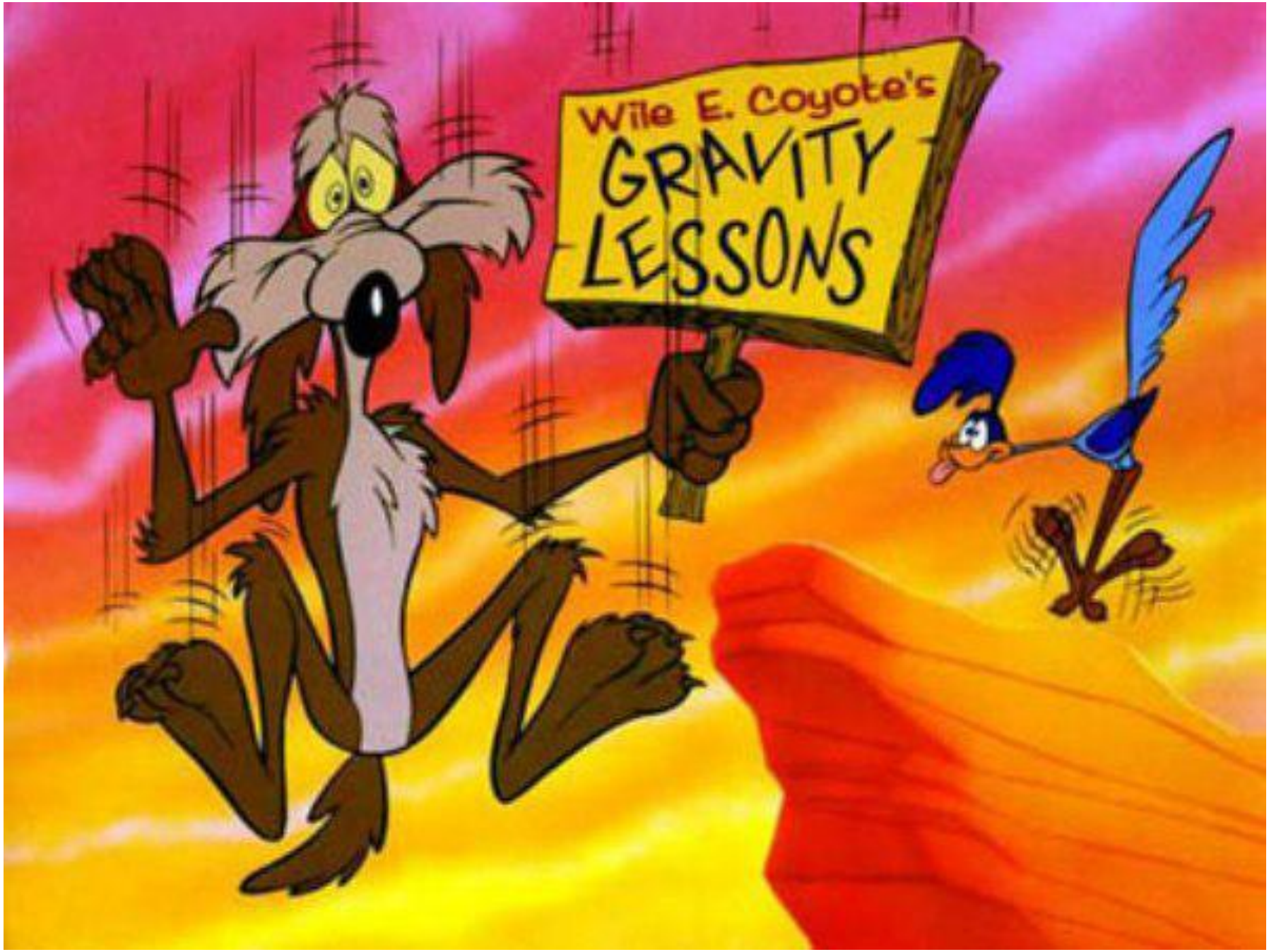
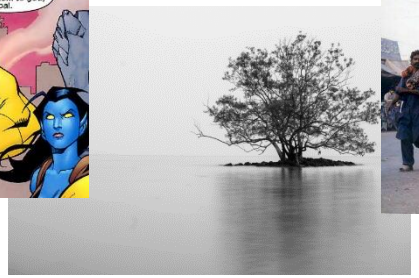
That's Captain Misguided Declaration of Heroism to you, pal.

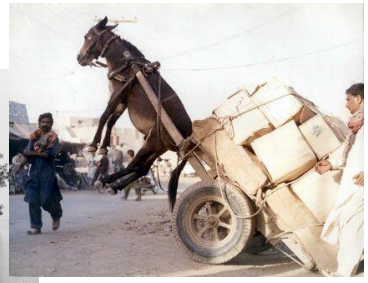

Wile E. Coyote's
GRAVITY
LESSONS

Sense of agency

Experience of isolation

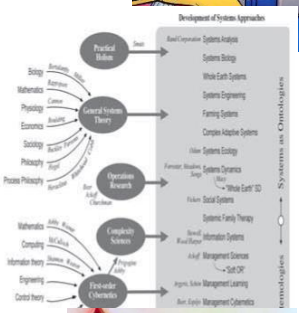
Managing workload





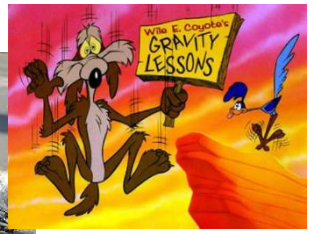
Dealing w. variety of materials, media & voices

Prior experience of systems



...a range of factors & issues affected learning experience

Access to situations



Exp. w. self directed learning

Translating philosophical ideas into practice

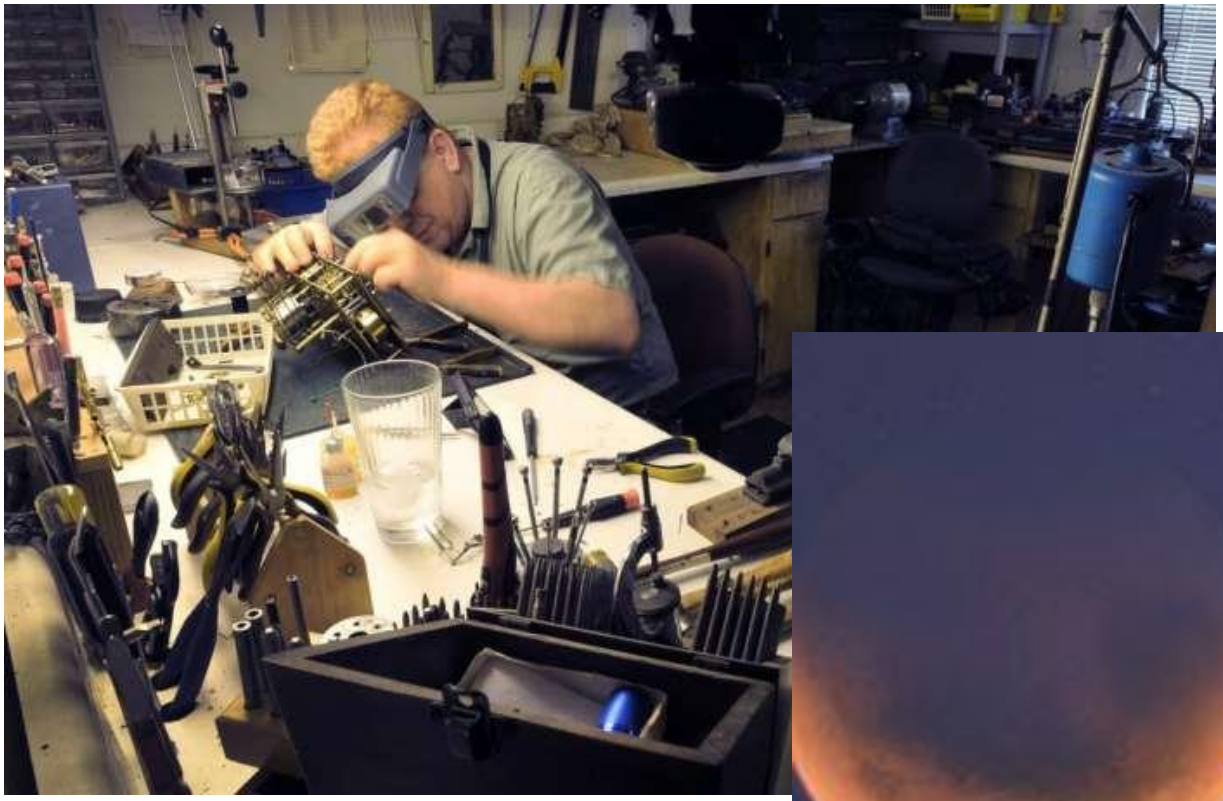
Gaps in getting feedback

Orientation towards online learning

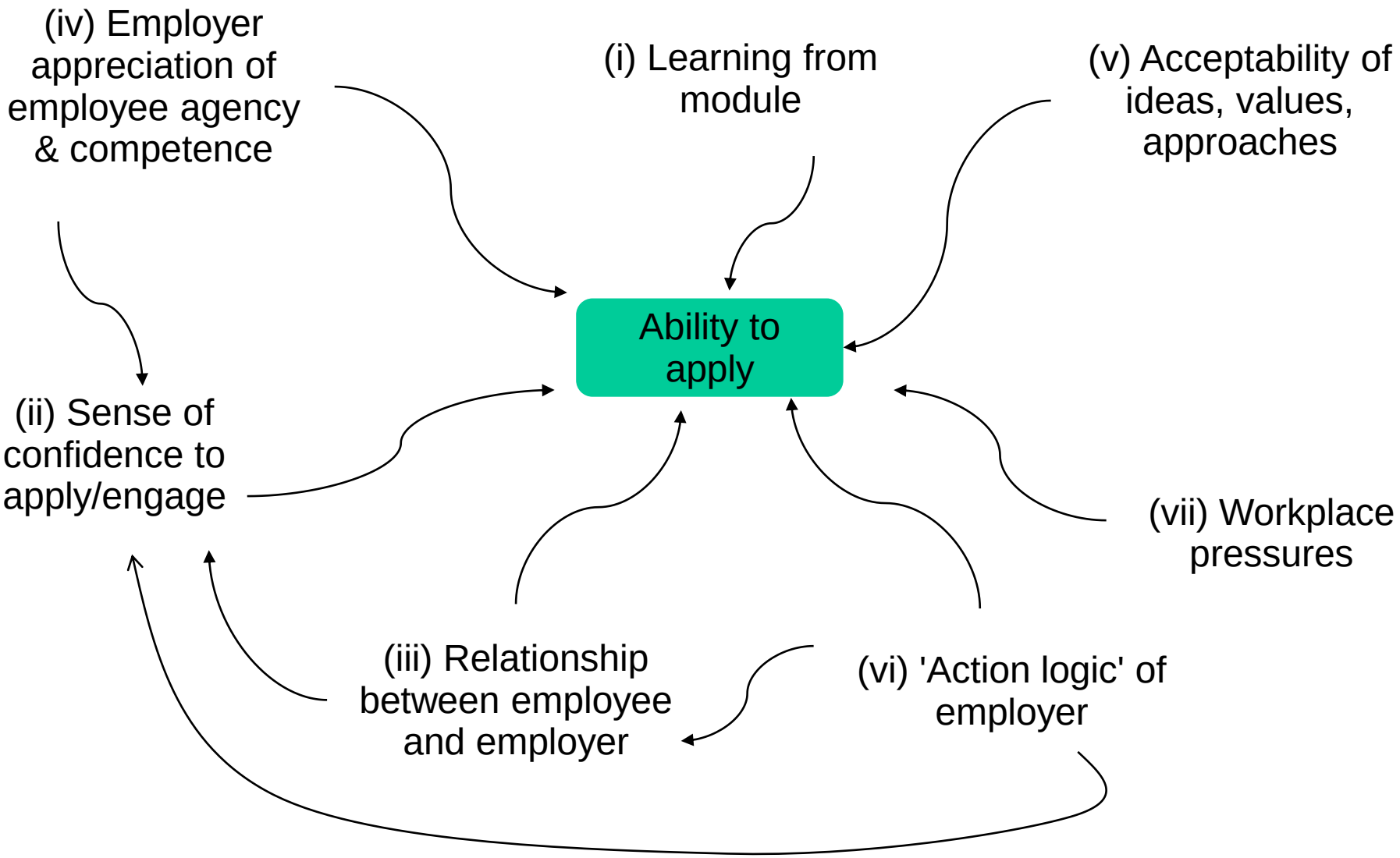
Archetypes of Systems Learning

- Teach me tell me
- MBA ready
- Get the diploma and make hay
- Geoffrey Vickers 'lite'
- Naked systems thinkers

Experience of Applying



Factors affecting application



Bridging the Gap between teaching, learning and applying

During study – joining up learner support

- Supporting variety amongst learners?
  - Use of archetypes?
- Methodological purism amongst advocates?
  - Developing sense of systems practice as 'bricolage'?

Bridging the Gap between teaching, learning and applying

Outside study - shaping landscapes

- Working with employers
  - Provide coaching for employers?
  - Develop better evidence and cases of practice?
- Supporting systems alumni?
  - Promoting action learning amongst alumni
  - Come out from under the radar? Or maybe stay hidden?
  - Professionally recognition? Competency Framework?

Bridging the gap in my own practice

- I don't need to tell everyone its systems thinking
- Make simple offers simply
- Share thinking tools with generosity
- Learn and support systemic practices and systemic being in others