

Examples from everyday life that show how, in a complex system, there can often be unforeseen consequences of actions

Instructions

Share some of these stories with the class and then get students to try and think up examples of their own:

- I am looking after my daughter's dog. He is a very energetic and always wants to play but I need him to lie quietly during the day so I can get on with my work. I decide to get up very early each morning and take him for a big run at the park so he is tired. Unfortunately what happens though is the more exercise I give him, the fitter he gets, the more he wants to run around. This is not the effect I was hoping for!
- I am feeling really tired so I decide to have an energy drink to help me get through the rest of the day. What happens though is that I can't go to sleep that night after having the energy drink and so the next day I am even more tired than the day before.
- During class, one of the students just can't sit still, even after lots of reminders from the teacher. The teacher gets really frustrated so when the bell goes for break, the teacher keeps the student in to talk to him about his behaviour. As a consequence the student doesn't get to run around outside so in the class after break he is even more unsettled than he was before.

Thinking behind the activity

These everyday examples are intended to illustrate how in a complex system, things can often act in unpredictable ways. It is also a way of introducing the idea of feedback loops.