AJMS
Asian Journal of Mathematical Sciences

REVIEW ARTICLE

# Kubernetes Microservices Instability: Theory, Worked Example, and Defensive Pipeline

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**Received: 15-10-2025; Revised: 02-11-2025; Accepted: 29-12-2025**

## ABSTRACT

We present a detailed theoretical and applied worked example of instability in a Kubernetes microservices environment[1]. Starting from FEM-style analogies (mass, damping, stiffness), we show how to estimate a Jacobian from telemetry, compute eigenvalues, track spectral drift as traffic increases, and detect the operationally-critical threshold where the system becomes unstable. A reproducible numeric example (3-node: Frontend, API, Database) demonstrates eigenvalue migration, modal participation, and defensive mitigations. All procedures are explicitly defensive and intended for operators to predict, detect, and mitigate self-reinforcing failures[2].

**Keywords**: Kubernetes Microservices Stability Eigenvalue Analysis, Spectral Drift Detection, Operational Resilience

## SAFETY STATEMENT

All content is defensive: intended to help operators detect, predict, and mitigate instability in their own systems or autho- rized testbeds. No instructions are provided for causing harm.

## DEFINITIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND OBSERVABLES

The solution to optimal control problems involves the derivation of the optimal control characterization and the use of the forward and backward sweep for the state and control trajectories respectively[3]. By the Pontryagin's maximum, the optimal control can be analytically derived by the optimality condition while the state and control variables can be derived numerically using the Runge-Kutta of order six subject to the adjoint and transversality conditions[4].

**Components and state:-**

n components (services); here n = 3: Frontend (F), API (A), Database (D). - State vector x(t) = [xF , xA, xD]⊤ where xi is a normalized internal proxy e.g., queue depth or normalized latency). - External forcing f (t) represents traffic (requests per second).

**Matrices (FEM analogies):-**

Mass M = diag(mi): workload inertia (queue retention). - Damping C: represents dissipation via backoff, autoscaler damping. - Stiffness K: coupling sensitivity; Kij approximates how xi responds to load on j.

**Observables (telemetry):-**

Prometheus/Grafana met- rics: p95 latency, p99 latency, queue depth, CPU%, request rates, error rates, retry counts, inter-service call rates.

**Assumptions:-**

(A1) Local linearizability about an op- erating point $\bar{x}$. (A2) Telemetry sampling interval Δt small enough to estimate derivatives. (A3) Defensive use only.

## FROM TELEMETRY TO JACOBIAN (PRACTICAL RECIPE)

We want a linear model $\dot{\delta x} = J\,\delta x + B\delta f$ around a recent operating point.

Steps (operator-friendly):

1) Collect a sliding window [t − T, t] of state vectors x(kΔt) sampled at Δt.
2) Compute finite differences: $\dot{x}(k) \approx (x_{k+1} - x_k)/\Delta t$.
3) Solve ridge regression (regularized least squares): minimize $\sum_k \|\dot{\mathbf{x}}_k - J\mathbf{x}_k\|^2 + \alpha\|J\|^2$ to obtain $J$.
4) Regularization α (Tikhonov) prevents overfitting from noisy telemetry; typical $\alpha \in [10^{-4}, 10^{-2}]$.
5) Compute eigenpairs (λj, vj) of J. The spectral abscissa $\alpha_s = \max_j \Re(\lambda_j)$ is the key stability indicator: $\alpha_s < 0$ stable, $\alpha_s \geq 0$ unstable.

This is implementable with NumPy / SciPy (see pseudocode later).

## WORKED NUMERIC EXAMPLE (3-NODE KUBERNETES STACK)

We show a compact, reproducible numeric experiment il- lustrating spectral drift as load increases.

*Baseline matrices and parameterized loading*

We construct a baseline Jacobian J0 (stable) and a coupling increment matrix Δ that represents how coupling grows with a scalar load parameter $s \geq 0$ (e.g., more retries, increased contention). We define:

$$J(s) = J0 + s\Delta.$$

Choose (illustrative, defensively chosen) numeric matrices:

$$J_0 = \begin{bmatrix} -0.80 & 0.10 & 0.00 \\ 0.05 & -0.40 & 0.20 \\ 0.00 & 0.10 & -0.30 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \Delta = \begin{bmatrix} 0.30 & 0.10 & 0.00 \\ 0.05 & 0.10 & 0.20 \\ 0.00 & 0.10 & 0.10 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Interpretation: - Off-diagonals in J0 represent modest inter- service coupling under normal load. - Δ encodes additional coupling (retries, backpressure, queuing nonlinearity) that in- creases with s.

*Compute eigenvalue migration vs load scale*

We evaluate $\alpha_s(s) = \max_j \Re(\lambda_j(J(s)))$ on a grid $s \in [0, 1.5]$ (sampled points shown below). The critical load factor scrit is the first s where $\alpha_s(s) \geq 0$.

Sampled points (most-critical eigenvalue real part):

| $s$ | $\alpha_s(s) = \max \Re(\lambda)$ |
|---|---|
| 0.0 | -0.19718377 |
| 0.1 | -0.17301019 |
| 0.2 | -0.14861763 |
| 0.3 | -0.12402810 |
| 0.4 | -0.09925721 |
| 0.5 | -0.07432471 |
| 0.6 | -0.04924707 |
| 0.7 | -0.02404203 |
| 0.8 | 0.00145873 |
| 0.9 | 0.02695763 |
| 1.0 | 0.05235793 |
| 1.2 | 0.10237058 |
| 1.5 | 0.18344988 |

From the table: scrit ≈ 0.795 (numerically observed when αs crosses 0).

*Eigenvector modal participation at near-critical point*

Compute eigenvector vc for the critical eigenvalue at s =0.8 (just beyond critical). The normalized modal participation pi is:

$$p_i = \frac{v_{c,i}^2}{\sum_k v_{c,k}^2}.$$

For the computed vc (numeric), we obtain approximate participations:

p ≈ [0.058, 0.567, 0.375].

Interpretation: the API (A) and Database (D) nodes are the dominant participants in the unstable mode;Frontend (F) contributes little. This directs operators to focus mitigation on API and DB.

## STEP-BY-STEP DERIVATION (NO JUMPS)

1. **Estimating J0 and Δ from telemetry**: - Collect teleme- try at baseline (low load) to fit J0 using the regression recipe above. - Observe how off-diagonal effective couplings rise during controlled load ramps: estimate how entries change per unit load, giving Δij ≈ ∂Jij/∂s.

2. **Form** J(s) = J0 + sΔ as a simple parametric model of how the linearized dynamics shift with load parameter s. This is a defensible surrogate for more complex nonlinear dependence.

3. **Compute eigenvalues** λj(s) numerically for each s (stan- dard linear algebra routines). Track αs(s) = maxj ℜ(λj(s)).

4. **Determine scrit**: the minimal s with αs(s) ≥ 0. This gives an operationally meaningful load margin.

5. **Modal interpretation**: compute vc for the critical mode and compute pi to identify which components are most re- sponsible.

Each step uses standard, deterministic numerical computa- tions; no hand-waving.

## INTERPRETATION: HOW INSTABILITY PROPAGATES IN KUBERNETES

Given the computed participation vector p, the dynamics in our example proceed as follows (operator narrative):

1) **Load increases** (front-door traffic spike). This increases s (retry probability, queueing pressure).
2) **Coupling magnifies** (off-diagonal terms in J grow per Δ), shifting eigenvalues right.

3) **API and DB modes dominate** (high p on API and DB), so these nodes see queue growth, higher latency, and increasing errors.
4) **Retry storms and blocked connections** from API to DB further drive s upward (positive feedback), possibly crossing scrit.
5) **Systemic failure** manifests as cascading timeouts, OOMs, and restart loops (Kubernetes restarts), i.e., self- implosion.

## DEFENSIVE OPERATOR PIPELINE (PSEUDOCODE)

This runtime pipeline continuously monitors, detects, and mitigates.

Listing 1. Defensive Spectral Monitoring Loop

Defensive −only pseudocode (simplified)

```
window = 300          # seconds
dt = 10               # sampling
alpha_reg = 1e−3
while True:
    X = collect_state_matrix(window, dt)
# shape (n, T)
    dX = finite_diff(X, dt)
# shape (n, T−1)
# Solve dX = J X
J = dX * X^T * (X X^T + alpha I)^{−1}
J = (dX @ X.T) @ np.linalg.inv(X @ X.T + alpha
eigvals, eigvecs = np.linalg.eig(J)
alpha_s = np.max(np.real(eigvals))
# Estimate load parameter s est from traffic (s est=estimate s from traffic
(current traffi
if alpha_s >= 0: # unstable
        alert('SRI_CRITICAL', alpha_s)
        throttle_ingress(percentage=30)enable_circuit_breaker
        s()
        increase_autoscaler_damping()
elif alpha_s > −0.05:        # warning band
        alert('SRI_WARNING', alpha_s)reduce_noncritical_work
        ()
        notify_sre_team()
else:
        record_metrics(alpha_s, eigvals)
        sleep(poll_interval)
```

## PROMETHEUS-STYLE ALERT RULES (EXAMPLE)

Listing 2. Prometheus Alert Rules (illustrative)

```
– alert: SRI_Warning
  expr: spectral_abscissa > −0.05
  for: 3m
  labels: {severity: warning} annotations:
```

```
    summary: "Spectral abscissa approaching instab
- alert: SRI_Critical
  expr: spectral_abscissa >= 0
  for: 30s
  labels: {severity: critical}
  annotations:
    summary: "Spectral instability detected
```

## MITIGATION ACTIONS (SAFE ORDERING)

When approaching scrit or upon crossing:

1) Ingress throttling / rate limiting (fast, reversible). Reduces effective s.
2) Enable or shorten circuit-breakers for downstream APIs (reduces Jij off-diagonals).
3) Autoscaler damping: increase cooldown and reduce scale step sizes (increases effective damping, moves eigenvalues left).
4) Add capacity / temporary replicas: increase local stiffness (diagonal Kii) or mass mi via replication (careful: adding capacity must be done conservatively to avoid autoscaler oscillation).
5) Isolate / degrade features: stop noncritical background jobs to reduce coupling.
6) Observability hardening: add targeted metrics/traces for modes with high uncovered scores to reduce blind spots.

## VISUALIZATION: EIGENVALUE MIGRATION PLOT(TIKZ/PGFPLOTS)

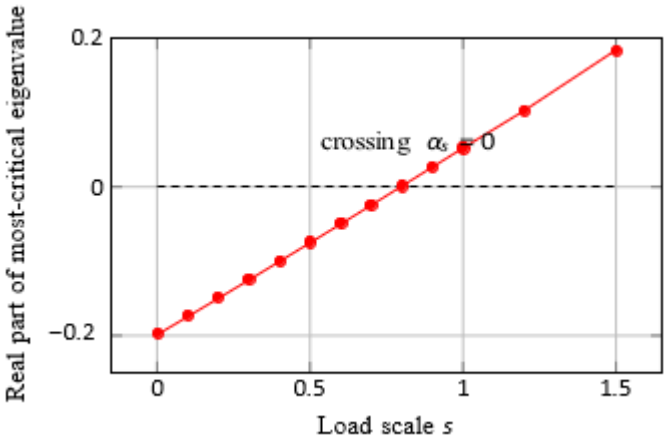


Fig. 1. Eigenvalue migration of most-critical mode vs load scale s. Crossing αs = 0 indicates scrit ≈ 0.8.

## HEATMAP: SRI MARGIN ACROSS TRAFFIC × LATENCY (ILLUSTRATIVE)

We define a practical stability margin metric: margin(s) = −αs(s) (positive when stable).A heatmap over traffic/latency can visualize regions where margin → 0.

## Takeaways for operators (concise)

• Estimate Jacobians from telemetry on sliding windows and track the spectral abscissa αs continuously.
• Map load to a parameter s to compute scrit and maintain safe margins.
• Modal participation tells you which services to prioritize for mitigation.
• Automated safe mitigations (ingress throttling, circuit breakers, damping) should be wired to SRI thresholds.
• Always validate mitigation plans in staging/canary before production execution.

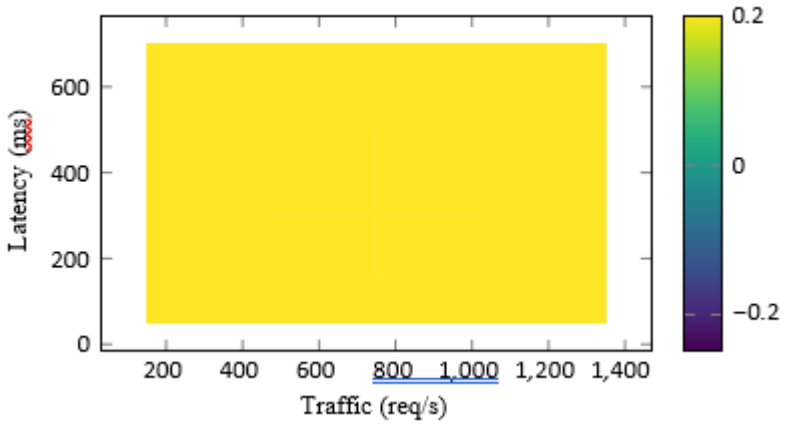


Fig. 2. Illustrative fragility heatmap (margin = −αs). Darker toward zero indicates fragility.

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