

# STAGES, SKILLS, AND STEPS OF ARCHETYPAL PATTERN ANALYSIS

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## INTRODUCTION

Archetypal patterns are an unintended, unconscious presence in human life. Archetypes are primordial patterns that operate within the psyche of every individual. They also operate within groups of people. When people gather together for any purpose, they can become unwittingly entrained in archetypal dramas. Not surprisingly, organizations<sup>1</sup> are one rich setting for detecting archetypal dynamics—a setting only slowly beginning to be explored (by consultants such as Michael Conforti, Carol Pearson, and Margaret Mark, and by academics such as Martin Bowles, Manfred Kets de Vries, and Ian Mitroff). Decades ago, Carl Jung recognized that human systems spontaneously organize themselves into unplanned but highly intricate patterns of behavior. While this emergent process is a natural one and can be beneficial, it can also be destructive. In the workplace, archetypal patterns can siphon human energy and organizational resources away from important corporate goals and mandates. So, the spontaneous emergence of archetypes presents an important concern: people become entrained into archetypal dynamics unconsciously and behave in unreflective, sometimes unhealthy ways.

If we want healthy organizations, it is vitally important that we learn to bring ego consciousness to bear on these unconscious workplace dynamics. Fortunately, skill at detecting archetypal patterns is emerging. Today, archetypal

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<sup>1</sup> Archetypal patterns can emerge in groups of any size. In this article, I will use interchangeably terms like “organization,” “work group,” “department,” “company,” or “industry” to refer to the kinds of corporate entities where archetypal pattern analysis work can occur.

pattern analysis is informed by the psychological insights of Carl Jung, system scholars such as the late Erich Jantsch, Ervin Laszlo, and Mae-Wan Ho, and others working in the “new sciences.”<sup>2</sup> Management academics are also studying archetypal patterns in corporations. Since 2001, I have focused on identifying the skills involved in archetypal pattern analysis. I have interviewed and observed pattern analysts<sup>3</sup> who work in organizational settings in North America, South America, Europe, and Australia, and wrote my doctoral dissertation on a detailed analysis of 60 pattern analysis situations.<sup>4</sup>

My goal here is to discuss my academic research in a practical way. Why? Pattern analysts can become adept at using scientific language to understand archetypal dynamics in complex human systems. However, a problem often emerges when skilled pattern analysts attempt to translate the jargon of psychology and the new sciences into language that makes sense to managers and CEOs. More than one pattern analyst has a frustrating story of blank stares and scoffs when people in organizations are told about their “entrainment” in “morphological processes” indicating the presence of a “Demeter and Persephone drama” that requires an “information catastrophe” to create the possibility of a “bifurcation” that might result in a different “probabilistic future state” other than the one indicated by their current “trajectory.” Many seasoned pattern analysts would find the previous sentence straightforward and informative. However, using such language to explain a pattern analysis to managers tends not to go over well—“It’s like you’re walking into a boardroom with a pointy hat and a wand,” according to one analyst who works in Fortune 200 corporations. Others get feedback that is dismissive and blunt: “KISS—Keep it Simple, Stupid.” We need to learn to speak and write about archetypal pattern analysis in ways that people can understand.

This article is written with that advice in mind. I attempt here to describe archetypal pattern detection processes that are tremendously complex, subtle, and difficult by using language that is as straightforward, unambiguous, and simple as possible. This article is far from a complete description of pattern analysis, but it does outline some basics. The process of archetypal pattern

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2 “New sciences” is a term used to refer to scientific approaches that focus on understanding the way complex phenomena are organized. These approaches differ from traditional scientific work that seeks to understand phenomena by analyzing them in isolation from their context – a strategy that can lead to over-simplified findings and an inaccurate view of how the world operates. Most “new sciences” are offshoots of general systems theory: contemporary cybernetics, complexity theory, chaos theory, and network theory are examples.

3 Some of these pattern analysts were participants in Assisi Conferences and Seminars in Portland, Oregon and Brattleboro, Vermont.

4 Pamela Marie Buckle, *Recognizing Complex Patterns in Unexpected Workplace Behaviour and Events: A Grounded Theory* (Calgary: University of Calgary Haskayne School of Business, 2005). Available from the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database.

analysis will be divided into three main stages: (1) Trigger Encounters; (2) Discerning Archetypal Coherence; and (3) Confirmation. In each stage, the skills needed to successfully navigate through that part of the pattern analysis process will be described. In each stage, the steps that a pattern analyst can use as a guide for systematically analyzing an organizational case will be outlined. It is worth noting that few skilled pattern analysts follow this exact sequence every time, and not all steps are necessary for analyzing each case. My goal is to present an overview of the processes involved in archetypal pattern analysis in the workplace. Consider this article one starting point for aspiring pattern analysts who want to understand how to detect archetypal dynamics in corporate settings:

## TRIGGER ENCOUNTERS

Often, the process of detecting archetypal patterns in a corporation begins with unexpected organizational behaviors or events. Unanticipated events can often trigger a pattern analyst's suspicion that certain undetected archetypes may be governing people's behavior. Much of the time, these triggers catch us unawares. Think of a time when you drove along a familiar road and abruptly found yourself entering a stretch being resurfaced. Just as a moment before, your hands remain on the wheel. But as the tires hit the grooves in the stripped-down pavement, your car suddenly moves unevenly, unpredictably. Your steering no longer accounts for your vehicle's direction quite like it did a minute ago. Moments of finding ourselves caught by unanticipated organizational behavior happen also in organizational life. For pattern analysts, such moments can trigger the recognition that an unrecognized archetypal pattern has emerged.

Certain feelings accompany trigger encounters. Realizing that there is a gap between what an organization wants to have happen and what actually does happen plunges people into territory that feels unfamiliar. This territory feels unsettling, destabilizing, or "out of synch." Discovering that our conscious expectations and outer reality are operating in different directions is disorienting. It interrupts our habitual ways of seeing organizational occurrences and catches our attention. A trigger signals to pattern analysts that organizational expectations are misaligned with organizational reality. Like the story of human experience in the Garden of Eden, a trigger is like a "fall into consciousness," in Edward Edinger's words,<sup>5</sup> inviting us to pause, reflect, and explore what archetypal patterns may be operating beneath the surface of a company's awareness. Pattern analysts who work in companies become highly attuned to their own feelings of disorientation and confusion.

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5 Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

Such feelings become an important type of radar, sounding an alert to the presence of an unconscious, archetypal dynamic seeking expression.

### **Trigger Encounter Skills**

Evidence of archetypal patterns in the workplace may be obvious or subtle. One reason why patterns can last so long is that they remain undetected or misunderstood. Archetypal dynamics do leave clues to their presence, and a pattern analyst requires two important skills to detect—to truly encounter—these clues.

First, openness to surprise is the skill of willingly acknowledging that organizational behaviors are not following plans, strategies, or managerial expectations. By definition, corporations are groups of people assembled for specific purposes and accountable to achieve specific objectives. When actual organizational behavior or events diverge from organizational plans, people typically become alarmed that a “problem” has occurred, or that something has “gone wrong.” Pattern analysts must cultivate a different (and rarer) response of curiosity and interest to discover what archetypal dynamics might be causing a company’s behavior to differ from its plans. One pattern analyst described her openness to surprise in this way: “There’s a tremendous gift in things that don’t fit, I think. When I come up against them, I have to rethink some of my assumptions.”

Second, willingness to “Release the Romance” is a critical skill for navigating trigger encounters. This skill involves the ability to decide to reorient one’s expectations when standard corporate explanations of a company’s behavior no longer appear to explain unexpected behavioral patterns. This skill does not come easily in organizations, where people bring years of experience and educational training to their way of making sense of workplace behavior. Experience and training teach people how things should be operating. As long as pattern analysts remain committed to conventional managerial or psychological logic, their explanations for unexpected workplace behaviors almost always focus on psychological pathologies and the failure to meet accepted business performance standards. Strangely, even when an organization’s behavior is clearly unhealthy, if an archetypal pattern is at the root of the behavior, it is counterproductive for pattern analysts to focus on the company’s mistakes, problems, or pathologies. Pattern analysis is a kind of detective work. One pattern analyst explained the difference between seeing unexpected workplace events as unfortunate problems and seeing them as valuable clues about archetypal dynamics:

A client of mine just the other day said, “It always amazes me how you don’t get all upset about something going wrong.” Well, that’s the issue, she thinks of it in terms of something “going wrong.” Instead of speaking

that way, I ask myself, “What’s the real pattern here? Have I really been honest about what’s going on here? Am I really paying attention to what’s actually happening or am I stuck in my romance about it?”

Archetypal dynamics have a logic and language entirely different from the logic and language of business. Archetypal dynamics reflect a primordial, symbolic aspect of human experience; business reflects a contemporary, deliberate realm of human experience. Some archetypal pattern analysts are also skilled business men and women. Corporate pattern analysts must learn when to let go of their “romance” with corporate explanations for unexpected workplace behaviour, and when to seek archetypal explanations instead.

### Trigger Encounter Steps

Clues arise when archetypal dynamics emerge in a workplace. Typically, clues fall into two categories: unusual behaviors and organizational paradoxes. Unusual behaviours include any abnormal or atypical happenings in an organization. Organizational paradoxes include behaviours that seem inconsistent or illogical. Both of these categories involve occurrences other than those managers intend to see in their companies. Since archetypal patterns, too, are unintended, the unusual and the paradoxical are often good clues for pattern analysts. Unexpected events rarely make the particular identity of a pattern instantly clear, but they signal the presence of something worthy of investigation for pattern analysts. Together, unusual behaviors and organizational paradoxes comprise archetypal clues reported by corporate pattern analysts. In fact, analysts report these behaviors and paradoxes so commonly that we can consider the following checklist of questions a useful first step in the process of detecting archetypal patterns in the workplace.

1. **Unusual Behaviors:** Unusual behaviours can range from mildly odd or somewhat unexpected occurrences in an individual or group, to extreme events including dramatic crises and bizarre behaviours. Workplace pattern analysts often note unusual behaviours like the following:

A. **Someone Operating Out of Context or Role Mandate:** Are there organizational occurrences that seem out of context to the ways that behavior usually unfolds in a setting like this? Are there individuals (or an entire company) behaving in ways inconsistent with their history, original business mandate, or industry practice? Often, clues to archetypal patterns come in the form of specific people, departments, or companies operating outside the norm. Examples of out-of-context behaviors are many: one branch office unique amongst its peers for years of high turnover; or an experienced executive arriving for a job interview without copies of the job posting, résumé, and other standard

paperwork; or a business unit with an unusually high number of smokers in comparison with comparable business units in the same organization. Another variant of unusual behaviors involves people or companies behaving in ways inconsistent with or unrelated to their role mandate. For example, one pattern analyst has argued that companies depart from their mandates when they decide to spend millions of dollars to purchase a sports stadium. (Although this is increasingly common, it is, nonetheless, a behavior falling outside the business mandates of these companies: Allianz, for example, is a financial services company, a mandate unrelated to its multi-million dollar investments in stadiums named after it in Australia, France, and Germany; Staples is an office supplies company, a mandate unrelated to its investment in an arena in Los Angeles USA; Air Canada is an airline, with a mandate unrelated to its investment in a sporting center in Toronto Canada; etc..)

B. **High-Volume Reactions:** Are people responding to work situations in ways you would consider extreme or out of proportion, given the circumstances? At times, unusual behavior arises in the form of reactions that are disproportionate to the intensity of response you would expect in a given business situation. Pattern analysts use colorful language to describe high-volume reactions: "I submitted the report and the organization went berserk." Or, "Soon after the meeting began, tension was really high in the room. If these two staff members had had bazookas, they'd have been killing one another." Unusually intense surprise or anger, and unusually pervasive stress-coping mechanisms, are all examples of responses to organizational dynamics that, on the surface, do not seem capable of instigating the strong reactions they sometimes do.

C. **"Fat Files":** Do you find unusual difficulty in dealing with particular individuals or circumstances? Does your file on these interactions grow fatter and fatter, as you document one peculiar request or incident after another? At times, pattern analysts report that interactions with a particular person, vendor, customer, or colleague become considerably more laborious than expected. Routine communications contain much "static," as a person shows difficult or unpredictable behavior for no discernable reason. For example, one experienced event planner described the process of attempting to book a guest speaker, "There were just a lot of unusual, special needs for accommodation: changing times for the lecture, the hotel has to have these special kind of pillows.... My file on this person got thicker and thicker."

2. **Organizational Paradoxes:** If unusual behaviours represent anomalies within a workplace, paradoxes are not anomalous at all. Paradox is both common and surprising in corporate life. Pattern analysts report paradoxes like the following:

A. *The Talk Not Walked*: Do you notice a distinct contrast between what people say they are doing or say that they value and what actually seems to be occurring in this workplace? At times, pattern analysts note a marked difference between what members of a corporation claim is their central objective and what actually occurs. In the 1990s, for example, the Chrysler Corporation extensively advertised the quality of its vehicles. During that same time, one pattern analyst regularly travelled along an Interstate that ran behind a Chrysler plant. As years passed, he noticed that a large pile of bad metal forgings discarded behind the plant grew bigger and bigger. “Why weren’t they making good parts in the first place?” he asked himself. Organizational paradoxes often involve a marked contradiction between a company’s words and its actions.

B. *Turnaround Over Time*: Do you notice a 180° turnaround between initial plans and how people actually behave? Organizational paradoxes can also appear as a contradiction between initial plans and actual subsequent behavior. For example, one pattern analyst hired a Vice President of Exploration for an oil and gas firm. This VP entered the company with a clear and emphatic strategy to pursue a steady flow of modest drilling targets (a reasonable strategy in an era when global oil reserves are dwindling and few mother lode oil strikes are believed to exist anymore). However, within two years, this same VP reversed his position entirely, speaking constantly about hitting jackpot reserves like those in the early days of oil discovery. Such 180° turnarounds happen often in corporate life. To pattern analysts, such events can indicate the presence of competing archetypal patterns at play.

C. *“Dilbert Syndromes”*: Do you find that people in this organization identify with Dilbert cartoon assessments of organizational life—that “people are idiots,” managers are sleepwalking in a “zombie-like” state, that human nature makes absolutely no sense, and that there is nothing that can be done to change this dismal state of affairs? Popular culture has sensitized people to another form of organizational paradox. One corporate pattern analyst suspects that an unintended archetypal pattern is present when organizational behavior looks like a Dilbert cartoon. He comments:

It’s the things that people are dissatisfied with and have tried to address but haven’t been able to successfully—the “Dilbert Syndromes”.... You can ask people in organizations about the crazy things that people see that keep going on, but either [people] don’t feel like there’s any way to really address them—they’re too big and broad—or people feel that [these patterns are] somehow just a part of something that they can’t really get to. Basic human nature sort of things.... [Patterns are] things that are recognized by people. They just don’t know what to do about them.

One example of a problem often observed in corporations comes from a pattern analyst working in a multinational company. He described an initiative whereby managers in one division promised to “remove obstacles to employees’ success.” However, it was obvious to employees and many observers that several of the divisions’ managers were the major obstacles to employees’ ability to do their jobs. The well-meaning initiative failed to have a positive impact and employee cynicism increased.

A confrontation with unusual behaviors or organizational paradoxes is a confrontation with the limits of a person’s standard expectations and explanations about how a workplace should behave. Trigger encounters provide a wonderful opportunity to recognize that other—archetypal—dynamics are operating. In corporations, trigger encounters present pattern analysts with the gift of confusion—a gift that knocks loose our typical understandings about what to expect in organizations. What do pattern analysts do with confusion? They seek to discern how a company’s confusing behavior is, in fact, coherent—archetypally coherent (that is, patterned in a way that is not yet understood).

## DISCERNING ARCHETYPAL COHERENCE

Leaders design their organizations to make sense—to be coherent. Leaders attempt to create coherence by designing strategic plans, writing company memos, and conveying instructions to members of the staff. Unexpected behaviours and organizational paradoxes are baffling because they represent a departure—sometimes a radical one—from leaders’ planned coherence. People in organizations often describe confusingly unplanned behavior and paradoxes as “incoherent.” We might more fruitfully say this confusion signals the meeting of two organizational coherences: the leaders’ intended coherence, and an unintended archetypal coherence that emerged unbidden.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971)<sup>6</sup> tells us that the root of the word “coherence” is the Latin verb *cohaerere*, which means “to cleave or stick together.” Coherence refers to “logical connection or relation; congruity, consistency, . . . harmonious connection of the several parts, so that the whole ‘hangs together.’” Archetypal patterns are one way that a complex system displays coherence—unintended coherence.

However, for modern leaders, it is not good enough to learn that organizational behavior is unexpectedly coherent. When an organization’s behavior is aligned with some unrecognized archetype instead of the plans a leader has designed, a pattern analyst’s challenge is to discern the identity of that archetype and find ways to effectively relate to it. Before leaders can try

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<sup>6</sup> From *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*, copyrighted in 1971; from the twenty-third printing in the U.S., January 1984.

pre-empting or changing an archetypal dynamic, they need to know how to see or understand it. Remembering the dictionary definition mentioned above, the process of discerning archetypal coherence hinges around discovering the particular “logical connection” that makes a system’s unplanned behaviors “hang together.”

I will describe two approaches that organizational pattern analysts use to understand archetypal coherences that can emerge in a workplace, first, the skills needed to discern this type of coherence, and second, the steps involved in the pattern analysis.

### Discerning Coherence Skills

It can be a challenge to shift one’s thinking from the standard managerial ways of thinking associated with organizational life. However, a shift is necessary if we are to perceive the archetypal logic that exists beneath the surface in organizations. Archetypal pattern analysts have certain skills that help them to achieve this deeper form of perception.

**1. Noting—Then “Bracketing”—Intended Coherence:** This is the ability to acknowledge, and then set aside, managerial explanations for unexpected behaviours in the workplace. Bracketing intended coherence is a skill that enables pattern analysts to make a conscious shift from conventional workplace logic to archetypal ways of perceiving organizational behavior. Often, a pattern analyst is invited to consult to organizations finding themselves stuck in dynamics they do not understand. Part of a pattern analyst’s job is to listen to the organization’s explanations of why people are behaving in unusual or paradoxical ways. And importantly, a pattern analyst’s job also requires temporarily setting aside—“bracketing”—the organization’s version of events in order to search for deeper, archetypal explanations. The skill of listening and then setting aside organizational explanations is vitally important for people whose goal is to discern unconscious, archetypal coherence in a workplace. Yoram Kaufmann clearly describes the reason for this skill in his observation that the problem a client reports is invariably not the real problem: “As long as you’re stuck in their definition of the problem, you’ll get nowhere.”<sup>7</sup>

**2. Suspending Judgment:** This is the ability to avoid focusing on the mistakes, problems, and pathologies evident in a workplace. Suspending judgment is a tremendously challenging skill for pattern analysts who have business training or professional experience. Such training and experience teaches

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<sup>7</sup> Yoram Kaufmann, “Archetypal dynamics in treatment and in life,” lecture given at the conference “Way of the Image: Archetypal Dynamics in Treatment and Life,” Brattleboro, Vermont, June 7-8, 2003.

a person to judge most unexpected organizational behaviors as inappropriate. Archetypal pattern analysis takes an entirely different view. Every behavior within an organization is appropriate and necessary to the expression of a particular archetypal dynamic. Every person caught in a pattern is accurately expressing a particular archetypal character or relationship belonging to that pattern. Viewing an organization's behavior as appropriate and necessary does not mean that a pattern analyst forgets that perplexing organizational behavior can be dysfunctional to a company's objectives and harmful to its employees. Rather, the choice to suspend judgment about an organization's behavior allows an analyst to perceive the deeper, unconscious aspects of an organization that are hidden or misunderstood. Successful pattern analysts suspend their urge to be critical about how pathological, counterproductive, dysfunctional, or simply "wrong" people are behaving. Suspension allows them to go about the work of figuring out exactly how it is that this behavior is doing a perfect job of expressing a particular archetypal dynamic.

**3. Neutral Description:** This is the ability to describe the function or fundamental essence of an organization's behavior, focusing on what its behavior is effectively accomplishing, rather than what it is failing to do well. Neutral description is a deceptively challenging pattern analysis skill. Pattern analysts must be able to accurately describe the workplace behaviors they see. The trick is to avoid the habit of describing behaviors in judgmental terms. Pattern analysts do not want their descriptions to focus on how "good," how "dysfunctional," how "well," or how "misguided" an organization is. Successful pattern analysts work to be as neutral and nonjudgmental as they possibly can. Searching for neutral ways to describe a case helps analysts to discern the fundamental essence of how people in an organization are interacting. Language that evaluates how well or how poorly people are interacting obscures the search for that fundamental essence.

Descriptive language is an invaluable tool for gaining insight about the essential functions underlying organizational behavior. One way to engage in neutral description is to ask the question, "What is this about?" For example, pattern analysts examining international relations have asked, "What is diplomacy about?" Analysts working in government have asked, "What is a federally-funded medical system about?" Questions like these can reveal an intimate understanding of previously unrecognized, deeply human experiences and needs being expressed in the workplace. For example, employees at a property development firm worked feverishly to obtain approvals to begin construction on an ambitious, upscale mountain retreat. The staff encountered numerous difficulties in the project. A pattern analyst asked the question, "What are vacation properties about?" The response—"Rest"—surfaced numerous ways in which the firm was overextending itself on this particular project and needed to re-examine how appropriate a venture it was for the company at this

point in time. To an outsider, questions like these and the language that pattern analysts often use sounds simplistic. Don't be fooled—neutral description is very difficult and very important.

## Discerning Coherence Steps

Pattern analysts who work in organizations use different approaches to understand archetypal dynamics that emerge in the workplace. Here I describe two approaches—Archetype Translation and Identification of the Central Axis—together with the pattern analysis steps involved in both.

**1. The “Archetype Translation” Approach:** One approach to discerning coherence involves taking the characters and events unfolding in a workplace and translating them into archetypal terms. The Archetype Translation approach examines corporate people, activities, and occurrences and finds parallel people, activities, and occurrences in the universal dramas found in myths, legends, sacred texts, and fairy tales. Drawing such literary parallels appears strange to most corporate leaders. Nonetheless, this approach to pattern analysis considers universal dramas to be highly-accurate blueprints for the human experience that can help pattern analysts to understand the archetypal ways that people within a company are relating to one another (even if those people have never heard of the ancient dramas that they are enacting).

**A. Identify the Setting:** In what human activity are these people engaged? What is the purpose of this domain of human experience? If this situation were a drama, what does this drama have as its goal?

**B. Describe the Critical Incidents:** In the setting you have identified, what events are occurring? What do these events tell you about how people in this organization are relating to the context you have identified?

**C. Name the Characters:** Every drama has a cast of characters. Who are the individuals involved in this particular pattern? Rather than identifying the characters by name, it can provide important insights to name them by role—for example, “Frank” might be “a son aspiring to assume his father’s leadership of the company.” Translating pattern participants into generic characters helps you detect the timeless characters involved in archetypal stories.

**D. Translate Characters into Archetypal Roles:** In an archetypal story, each character has a specific role. For each character you have identified, you need to understand the archetypal mandate that character is driven to fulfill. For example, the current leader in Frank’s company is, both literally

and archetypally, a father. Archetypally speaking, what does it mean to be a father? Based on the behaviors you observe, what is the archetypal mandate of this particular father? Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson have noted that questions like these help pattern analysts understand the central goals, desires, fears, stages of maturity, weaknesses and strengths that lie beneath a person's archetypal behavior in the workplace.<sup>8</sup>

**E. Note Relationships Among Characters:** Combining your observation of organizational events and the archetypal roles translation you have completed, how would you describe the relationships between the various archetypal roles? Are Frank and the company's leader collaborating well to transition authority? Are they engaged in an antagonistic power struggle? Questions like these help pattern analysts identify myths, legends, or ancient stories with similar characters engaged in similar relationships. Such stories can offer wise counsel about how, if possible, people can navigate such archetypal dynamics to a successful conclusion.

**2. The "Identification of the Central Axis" Approach:** Sometimes, a cast of characters is difficult to discern when trying to understand unusual workplace events. There are times when unusual occurrences in a workplace have no clearly identifiable individuals involved with them. In addition to Archetype Translation, pattern analysts have another strategy for discerning the coherence in apparently incoherent workplace happenings. I call this approach "Identifying a Central Axis." Like the axle in the center of a wheel, the central axis of a pattern holds that pattern together. Once pattern analysts detect a central axis, they can see how the organization's behavior makes sense, that is, how the behavior "orbits" around that axis. Here, I describe two kinds of central axes: a shared emotion and a unifying symbol.

**A. Identifying a Shared Emotion:** At times, an entire department, company, industry, or economy falls prey to a single, shared emotion that unifies and compels certain predictable behaviors. Do you sense a common sentiment or feeling shared by members of this workplace? For example, "The Great Depression" is aptly named for an overall despair that characterized western economies for several years. Stock markets everywhere are susceptible to shared emotions such as fear, greed, or complacency.

**B. Identifying a Unifying Symbol:** At times, an unrecognized symbol (or image<sup>9</sup>) acts as a center of gravity for a particular workplace. How can

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> As reflected in the title of Yorum Kaufmann's book, *The Way of the Image* (Brattleboro, Vermont: The Assisi Foundation, 2004), refers to "images" that govern human behavior.

an analyst discover a unifying symbol? Uncovering a symbol at the heart of unplanned organizational behaviors can provide tremendous insight about an organization's past and likely future behavior. Using the neutral description skills indicated above, one can create a bare-bones outline of observable behaviors and events occurring in this system. Each of those occurrences becomes an image—a photographic snapshot of the organization. Consider the key objects (or nouns) in your description. What fundamental function do they share for this company? Similarly, consider the activities (or verbs) in your description. What commonalities unite them? Essentially, in this approach to pattern analysis an analyst connects the dots between a collage of snapshots that may initially seem unrelated or unimportant. The focus here is a search for similarities, for patterns.

**C. Naming the Coherence:** What concise word or phrase describes the way that this particular workplace is operating, from an archetypal perspective? Examples used by pattern analysts include: “the story of King Lear” (an archetype translation), “fear” (a shared emotion around a central axis), and “undervalued resources”<sup>10</sup> (a unifying symbolic central axis). Both approaches to discerning coherence focus on naming the archetypal logic driving the behavior of a particular company. The name that describes an archetypal dynamic allows the corporate pattern analyst to see how a company's interrelationships, actions, reactions, emotions, and thought patterns are bound together in coherent (though generally unrecognized) ways.

**D. Fit Assessment:** At this point, a pattern analyst has two stories: (1) the organization's own explanation for its behavior, and (2) the archetypal drama or symbolic axis that the analyst has discovered. Comparing the two yields important information about the state of a particular workplace at a particular point in time. How close or distant are the organization's personally held views of reality and the impersonal, archetypal reality in which it is engaged? To what degree is there a fit or clash between the two stories? Can the two versions of reality operate harmoniously together or will there be dissonance? Is this workplace likely to be able to function well and meet its corporate objectives as long as it is engaged in the archetypal dynamic you have identified? This final step in the Discerning Archetypal Coherence process gives a pattern analyst an understanding of how deeply a company is hooked in archetypal “possession.”<sup>11</sup> Careful fit assessments can guide a pattern analyst about how, or whether, to actively intervene in an organization caught by unintended archetypal dynamics.

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10 A. O'Brien, *Hawk Wisdom: Self-Defense for the Marketplace* (unpublished manuscript).

11 Carl Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 7 in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), para. 111.

## CONFIRMATION

Usually, people are made aware of their archetypal entrainments by counsellors working within the safety and containment of therapeutic relationships. Such revelations are rare in organizational life. Not surprisingly, archetypal pattern analysis can have explosive effects in the workplace. When a pattern analyst discloses an archetypal possession that was previously unconscious to members of an organization, those employees are likely to experience such disclosure as a sudden exposure of information that feels private, embarrassing, or even humiliating. The depth of naked honesty involved in admitting how unconscious forces have dominated our behavior is a kind of revelation that people have little practice in confronting in their work lives. Devastating the illusion that our professional thoughts and behavior are consciously chosen creates a sort of catastrophe. A catastrophe can be a crisis of healing, enabling a company to regain its appropriate, conscious ability to chart its path. A catastrophe can also destroy a company's capacity to function altogether. It is entirely possible for archetypal pattern analysis to create more damage than good. Many factors can make the difference between a beneficial pattern analysis intervention and a harmful one. The factor I would like to discuss here is accuracy.

By the time pattern analysts have completed the discerning coherence stage, they have a hypothesis—a hunch—about the archetypal dynamic that is driving the behavior of a group of employees, a department, an entire company, or an industry. Skilled pattern analysts want to validate their pattern hypotheses, to confirm their hunches. Analysts want to be certain that they have an accurate understanding of the archetypal dynamic underlying an organization's behavior. They recognize that it is frighteningly easy to create their own personal interpretation of what archetypal dynamics are operating in a group and to develop allegiance to that subjective interpretation. Pattern analysts' personal interpretations can feel dangerously objective to them.

### Confirmation Skill

Doubt<sup>12</sup> is a vital skill to help prevent pattern analysts from developing their own personalized, fanciful stories about a company's archetypal dynamics. Pattern analysis is a reflective process. When confronted with an archetypal entrainment that they do not understand, it takes time for even experienced pattern analysts to develop a sense of certainty about the identity of that particular entrainment. Spontaneous insights into the nature of a particular archetypal

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12 Jungian Analyst Martha Blake notes that doubt can only occur when someone is not possessed by an archetypal dynamic (personal communication on February 18, 2006). Doubt is good news, then, indicating that a pattern analyst is sufficiently distanced from a workplace's archetypal pattern and not entrained in it him/herself.

dynamic do occasionally emerge. However, pattern analysis is a discipline of careful, often painstaking, reflection. Rushing to premature conclusions in pattern analysis rarely yields the depth and accuracy of understanding that is possible. Pattern analysts must be willing to doubt their initial understandings about a particular archetypal dynamic in every case they investigate. They must be willing to abandon personally satisfying, but inaccurate, explanations for workplace behavior.

For example, midway through a pattern analysis, one pattern analyst commented about his initial understanding of an organization's archetypal entrainment: "I believe pretty strongly in this thing, and I'm open to the possibility that there's a different version [that might more accurately account for his company's behavior]." He called his willingness to doubt his own pattern analysis his "philosophy of fallibilism." In the confirmation stage of archetypal pattern analysis, pattern analysts put their "pretty strong" belief about a particular pattern's identity to the test, seeking to know if their belief is well-founded.

## Confirmation Steps

A. *Enlist Other Pattern Analysts*: What do other experts think about your pattern analysis work on this case? The confirmation stage focuses on weeding out an analyst's own personal, subjective interpretations about the archetypal dynamic underpinning a group's behavior. One way to accomplish this is to consult other pattern analysts. As archetypal pattern analysis becomes increasingly understood, a growing number of people will develop pattern analysis skill. Experienced analysts report that discussing cases with even one other pattern analyst can help overcome the personal biases and blind spots that can color pattern analysis. Of course, even several pattern analysts working together can fall prey to groupthink. Even so, consulting with experienced others is a useful way to check one's pattern analysis work.

B. *Search for Repetition*: Has this pattern repeated itself over time? Does it operate in a similar manner in various locations within the organization? Patterns repeat themselves. The new sciences tell us that any complex system—like a department, company, or industry—slips into unplanned patterns of behavior that occur over and over throughout the organization. Jungian psychology tells us that when an archetype is activated, it shows itself through specific events, characters, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that will continue for as long as that archetype is active within the system. We can take both of these schools of thought as advice to search for instances of our pattern hypothesis within numerous parts of a system.

By definition, archetypes are timeless. Ancient myths and fairy tales, Shakespearean epics, and contemporary dramas all revolve around timeless archetypal themes. Archetypes are blueprints for predictable human behavior in any time or setting. Even in twenty-first century corporations, archetype-driven behaviors are predictable. When certain archetypal behaviors emerge in a company, pattern analysts can expect that they have happened before in that workplace, and will happen again.

Currently, television schedules are filled with programs about crime scene investigation. Just as skilled detectives can accurately infer past events by the way evidence is configured (patterned), the archetypal behavior happening in the present enables a pattern analyst to accurately infer aspects of an organization's past. An accurate pattern hypothesis allows even an analyst with no prior knowledge of a particular company or industry to understand a great deal about that system's history. Making archetypally-informed guesses about past events in a company is one way to confirm or disconfirm an analyst's pattern hypothesis.

Looking to the future is another way to check a pattern hypothesis. Yoram Kaufmann<sup>13</sup> has argued that effective pattern analysis allows us to account for the behavior of a particular group of people in the past and present. He also argues that, because archetypal behavior is repetitive, an accurate pattern hypothesis should allow us to identify behaviors we are likely to observe in the future.

C. *Ask Pattern Participants for Confirmation.* Does your pattern diagnosis ring true to members of the organization? Another way that pattern analysts confirm their understanding of an archetypal pattern is to disclose that information to the people involved in the patterned behavior. If the pattern hypothesis is accurate, participants' reactions to a pattern disclosure are typically strong. One reaction is emphatic agreement—"yes, yes, yes"—often accompanied by other validating examples of the pattern dynamic that participants now recognize themselves. A vehement disagreement or rejection may indicate that a pattern analyst has exposed an archetypal entrainment that members of the organization are too embarrassed to acknowledge. Alternately, accurately naming the archetype that has governed a company can elicit a response of stunned silence—a paradoxical coupling of surprise ("What?!") and recognition ("Of course!"). Whether the reaction is "YES!," "NO!," or wordless silence, accurately naming a pattern dynamic resonates strongly with those who have been caught in it. One pattern analyst who works with executives has noticed, "When you hit something truthful, something opens up and the energy changes." The disclosure of accurate pattern diagnoses often marks a profound shift in pattern participants' understandings of their relationships to one another. Inaccurate pattern diagnoses rarely have such potent effect.

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13 Yoram Kaufmann, "Archetypal dynamics in treatment and in life," June 7-8, 2003.

## PARTING THOUGHTS

In every stage of pattern analysis that I have described here—trigger encounters, discerning archetypal coherence, and confirmation—pattern analysts encounter predictable pitfalls and common mistakes. In particular, Michael Conforti has noted the particularly thorny challenges that occur when pattern analysts themselves become entrained into the archetypal dynamics they are trying to detect.<sup>14</sup> A pattern analyst requires extraordinary skills of self-awareness and humility. An analyst also requires considerable ethical maturity to grapple with the moral dilemmas involved in deciding how to make an effective intervention in an archetypally-entrained workplace. It takes years of practice, trial, and error to become a skilled archetypal pattern analyst. The path is largely uncharted and the challenges are many.

Even so, archetypal pattern analysts have a crucial role to play in our world. When done well, archetypal pattern analysis can make organizations healthier places for the millions of citizens who work in them. Ours is an organizational world. As management scholars David Cooperrider and Jane Dutton have said:

More than anywhere else, the world's direction and future are being created in the context of human institutions and organizations... The significance, in many respects, of the relatively small number of decisions made by our nation-state leaders is pale in comparison to the billions of decisions made every day by members and leaders of such organizations.<sup>15</sup>

How vital it is to our world that organizations be managed as consciously as possible!<sup>16</sup>

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14 For example, in *Field, Form, and Fate: Patterns in Mind, Nature, and Psyche* (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, Inc., 1999), Michael Conforti gives an illustration of a clinician's entrainment in the archetypal dynamics of a couple in therapy (pp. 69-70). In several of his Assisi Seminars attended during the course of this research, he offered non-clinical examples of entrainment as well.

15 E. Raufflet and C. Torre, "Strategy and the Natural Environment: Exploring the Mismatching in Complexity Perspective," paper presented at the International Society for the Systems Sciences 45<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Asilomar, California, July 8-13, 2001.

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