The Role of Structure

David E. Morrison, M.D.

The Role of Structure

by

DAVID E. MORRISON, M.D.

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David E. Morrison, M.D. is a psychiatrist and organizational development consultant who has worked extensively with CEOs of Fortune 500 corporations through the years. His philosophy and practice are directed toward working with people who are "well" and who can increase their "wellness" by obtaining helpful changes in their environment.

In this monograph, Dr. Morrison focuses on some of the problems all leaders face — in particular, one of the most difficult challenges — managing themselves. There is a danger of approaching this subject from a superficial level and falling into the traps of self-indulgence and rationalization. However, anyone who is dealing with the personal side of the work environment must maintain self-discipline above and beyond that required for a technical or impersonal perspective.

Dr. Morrison is a graduate of Arizona State University and the University of Southern California. He received his psychiatric training at the Menninger School of Psychiatry. He heads Morrison Associates, Ltd., a medical corporation located at 650 First Bank Drive in the Chicago suburb of Palatine.

INTRODUCTION

Humans depend upon structure to comprehend their experience. The sources and functions of structure are so ubiquitous that most people don't know they need them until they are gone. This need for structure is an important cause of resistance to change. Understanding the role of structure for human equilibrium is an important part of building a strategy to manage the otherwise confusing human responses to change.

STRUCTURE IS THE MORE STABLE AND CONSISTENT PART OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

STRUCTURE:

1. "A complex entity.

2. The configuration of elements, parts or constituents in such an entity: organization; arrangement . . .

3. The interrelation of parts or the principle of organization in a complex entity."

The American Heritage
Dictionary of the English Language

The human need for structure may seem a far cry from the problems of managing change. In a way that is why it is important—it is the opposite of change. Change always alters some structure. It *rearranges* and moves some things out of their place. In that way it *disorganizes* the parts in relation to the old structure. "Structure" is the answer to the question: "Change in relation to what?" To help people with change it is useful to understand:

- What structure is.

- Where we get it?

- What it does for us?

- Why we respond some of the ways we do to changing structures?

Something without structure is ambiguous. As with a vacuum, however, it is difficult to find anything that is perfectly ambiguous. Everything seems to have some structure in it. Even changes have structure. The sun changes as it moves through the sky each day, but it does so in an organized, or structured way. If it were to rise in the north and set in the east we would all notice the new "*organization*" of its change. It is difficult to think of a place or time without structure. Perhaps outer space is the closest to a place without structure. There are the patterns of the stars, but even up and down is lost as a structure because of the absence of gravity. Probably a time with the least structure is the future. For that reason planning is an ambiguous task. There are usually many techniques to give people structure when it comes to anticipating future events, strategic planning is just one of them.

While it is difficult to imagine something without structure, it is not all that easy to define familiar structures. They become so much a part of our lives that they seem as invisible to us as air. We don't know that we were depending upon them until they are gone. Particularly those we depend upon the most, we take for granted, for example the grammar of our native language. (Generally people don't understand grammar until they study a foreign language.) Most of us "just know" how to talk. We don't define the "*principles of organization*" that govern how words are strung together. When someone gives us those rules they seem strange and unrelated to what we do. We do follow them, more or less. Otherwise others couldn't understand the code we use as we send them messages.

It is not just grammar that becomes a habitual pattern we use when relating to others. Without thinking we can interact with other people for long periods of time in a smooth and mutually gratifying way. We unconsciously follow codes which minimize the chances we will inadvertently threaten the other or provoke attack by them. That is because we share an understanding of what is polite. The expert on manners understands the canons of managing relationships in her culture which the rest of us follow with more or less success. Manners are structures that function as a lubricant in human relationships. They add some "*organization*" to our interactions with other people. They make more of the transactions between people predictable. They help us get past many of the problems of needlessly affronting or distracting someone when we want to relate to them in a particular way.

Grammar and manners are just a few of the structures we get from our culture. A significant part of the "*organization*" of our lives comes from our culture. We don't know how much we use it until we move to a different culture. When you are in a different culture you have to consciously think about what you never considered in your own culture. It is even surprising that people would do it differently than you have learned was the proper way. What your culture taught you was proper is often seen as the only way—like driving on the right side of the road. It tends to be the most routine "minor" things (like breathing) that are taken care of by our

culture. When we stop to see what they do for us they are not minor at all. They are basic activities for mastering our environment. It is useful for us them to use them without needing to think about them.

The culture sets the patterns for: when you eat; what kinds of things you eat; when you sleep; and how you greet one another so there is less chance of misunderstanding of your intentions. All of those things are essential, but usually forgotten, because long ago we made them habits. We don't have to worry about whether or not to dress in a blanket, a loin cloth, or suit if we are preparing to go to the office. The structures of our culture limit our choices—our freedom—and there by enable us to accomplish a great deal without thinking.

We use many structures other than those we got from our culture to free our conscious minds to do something else. We can walk and talk at the same time, because we don't need to think about how to walk, how to talk, how to string our words together, or even what word to use to best express what we think. If we do have to stop to think about any of those things our conversation falters, and we may even lose the thought we were about to express. We can get up in the middle of the night in our familiar bed room and walk to the bathroom without turning on a light, or even opening our eyes very much. Just a minor change in the position of a chair next to our path can have painful consequences for one of our toes. We often don't think about driving when going to or from work. The path to work is a familiar structure and we can traverse it without even thinking. "*The arrangements of those parts*" are structures that we unconsciously use.

Those structures we take for granted enable us to manage numerous complexities which support a task we wish to master. They function in the background like the software in a computer program which performs necessary, but hidden functions while we attend to a higher level task. The military is noted for its use of structure. "The right way, the wrong way, and the army way" expresses the important role of structure when working on challenging tasks. That statement recognizes that when it comes to structure there is always a better way to do it; but for the whole to operate effectively, the individual soldier must consistently "*interrelate with the other parts*" of the "*complex entity*" It also is of use to the individual, for if you are going to operate in a crisis situation, you need to function in a nonthinking manner as far as the essentials are concerned, so you can consciously address the developing contingencies. The "army way" is drilled in until it becomes an unconscious structure, like walking or talking.

Through repetition the structures become unconscious, i.e., habitual. Training is used to enable a person to consciously ignore essential, but routine elements that support a task. Thus training contains a great deal of repetition of activities, which at first are complex and difficult, but later are accomplished with no apparent effort. That is part of the delight that comes from watching a great artist perform,

such as a dancer or pianist. Through their training they have incorporated complex patterns into their activities which they now use while thinking of how best to interrupt their art. Those patterns are unconscious supportive structures.

Just think what happens when you try to change one of those structures, for example when you try to consciously change your golf swing or tennis serve. Everything seems to break down. Small details in the pattern you developed are tied to other parts of the activity in ways you never considered. Then you confront one of the disadvantages of using structures without thinking. There are times when this strength of doing without thinking becomes a weakness. The problem comes when we need to analyze what makes up the supportive, yet unconscious, structure. We will need to do that when:

- What we learned is incomplete, flawed or inadequate for the current task. For example, when trying be more effective in helping people change we have to add to, or correct our assumptions about the *"interrelation"* of human needs and our goals.

- We want to teach someone else what we do without thinking. For example, when teaching an adult how to walk again after a stroke we need to know the elements of walking.

Making unconscious processes conscious always seems strange and far too complicated when we first attempt it. For example, ask a speech therapist how you make the sounds you need in order to talk. When there is a need to make unconscious structures conscious we use another structure—theory. Theories enable us to define the elements in patterns we long ago took for granted. Then we can address what we previously mastered and now consciously ignore. Those who work with grammar all the time don't see the defined rules as strange at all. They are familiar with how the rules fit together with the actual doing. The grammarian uses her theory to analyze what is otherwise unconscious when people put their thoughts into words. The psychiatrist uses his theory to analyze what is otherwise automatic for people as they relate to their environment and themselves. The theory enables us to analyze what is happening so we can solve problems and teach someone else to do what we usually do without thinking, because it makes the *"organization in a complex entity"* explicit.

For that reason we need to get somewhat theoretical when analyzing what most managers already know: the personal consequences of change.

Structure Gives Form And Meaning

So structure is more than just the lines on an organizational chart or the agenda for

a meeting. Structure includes, but is more than rules and controls. Among other things it is:

- Up down, north south, right left;

- The patterns of our culture;

- Our own habits;

- The familiar drive to work.;

- The meaning of the sounds we use to communicate with each other;

- The dictionary that tells us the definition of our words;

- The ritual of toasting before our first drink;

- The melody in a song which let's us anticipate where it is going;

- The stable part of our lives;

Structure organizes our experiences and puts them in their place. It gives form and meaning to the world around us. In the physical world we have a rigid internal structure, a skeleton, that gives form to our body. From a psychological point of view the structures we create to help us understand what is happening or will happen to us are as important. Understanding that the pattern of a harsh growl and bared teeth means danger, as does the sequence of sounds, "I'm not going to tell you again!" enables us to gain some control and predictability in our environment. All the dangers are not outside what we call ourselves—many are inside. Is that strong sensation I feel in my abdomen dangerous or just gas? Is the fear caused by a bad dream something that should concern me? There are myriad patterns to learn if we are to survive. From our birth we rely on those with more experience with the patterns that concern us to help us define and use them.

Not only do we need to know dangers; we need to know where to go for nurturance. The routine of preparing a meal is soon learned by a pet or an infant. The sounds of friendly conversation indicate there may be some psychological nurturance available. A friendly smile is a universal organization of the face that suggests acceptance. As we understand and master the "*principles of organization*" in the world we gain competence to manage more and more complexities.

If things are too ambiguous we create our own structure to give at least the illusion of some control. We may give a familiar form to things that are amorphous. As children, we give understandable form to clouds by seeing pictures in them. When we are older we use more abstract structures and call them "storm clouds," "thunder heads," or "cumulus clouds." We name them and like the primitive feel that by naming them we have more control over them. We name and even anthropo-

morphize dangerous weather called hurricanes. So you can see headlines like, "Sara Takes Aim At Florida Coast." If they have some human traits maybe we can predict or even bargain with them. We may even talk to them, "Oh please don't come here!" All of this is to try to put some meaning and predictability into our lives. We use whatever talents we have to bring meaning out of confusion.

Abstractions help give form to otherwise amorphous phenomenon. Mathematics is a way to find some "*interrelation of parts*" that otherwise seem disorganized. The normal distribution curve, for example, is a way to pick out a pattern in what otherwise seems formless.

Structure even helps give form to ourselves. It gives us an idea of where we fit. "You are a member of our family (organization, or profession)." By setting limits it defines our limitations, and in that way it defines us. I can't fly. I am a being that can't fly. "People in our family don't act like that!" Our identity is reinforced by the world around us. Removing familiar structure is a way to undermine someone's identity.

Without structure, life is chaotic. People then frantically search for clues to try to make existence predictable. Even trivial details take on more significance than they deserve and are used to develop a pattern which gives some meaning. A raised eyebrow, the fact he didn't say something, or the fact his wife didn't come along may be coincidental; but if the context is too ambiguous for comfort the individuals will use whatever is available in their search for some predictability. If some of the clues are ominous the attributed meaning is more likely to be sinister. The behavior of leaders, or those who are supposed to have more experience with such situations, take on more significance as people try to find the "*principle of organization*" in what is happening. Important people are one of the sources of structure.

WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT STRUCTURE

There is a question of how much structure can be taken away from people. That is easiest to study in terms of taking away structures in the person's environment. What happens when you remove as much of the external structure as possible? Sensory deprivation experiments have addressed that question. In these laboratory investigations, subjects are blindfolded, fitted with earphones that produce white noise, and lowered into tanks of water kept at body temperature so that they neither see, hear, nor feel sensations (including weight and temperature). In such experiments, healthy individuals often exhibit psychotic phenomenon. They think in unrealistic ways, see and hear things no one else sees or hears, and often become frightened, even terrified.

To understand those responses, think of the pressures which act upon the essence you call your "self" or "me." First there are forces from the environment: The chair pushing against you; the floor pushing against your feet; the temperature stimulating your skin; and there are many more. All of those forces limit you and in that way tell you where you end and where other things begin, thus they define you. People and other living things also set limits on us. The cat scratches our young hand and lets us know that pulling its tail is beyond our limits. The look in our husband's eye communicates he won't go along with the idea, and once again we are shown the limits of our influence. The first step in knowing who you are is knowing what you aren't.

We Are Left To Ourselves

When there is little activity in your external environment you will begin to notice there are things happening in your internal world (what we called in the first chapter the "very personal" arena). There are nudges from our values, needs, alarms and coping devices. Those internal structures don't just act randomly on each other. They are managed in ways similar to how the different parts of a business organization are managed. There is an executive function which reasons, remembers, perceives, tests reality, and integrates experiences into a meaningful whole. Like any good executive, its function is to "*organize the complex entity* called our

"personality" so that entity can survive and prosper. In order to do that it must relate to both the "real world" and the personal world, which are not always in sync. Thus, a significant part of the work for this executive function is trying to resolve, or at least manage, conflicts outside and inside the organization of our mind. In the circle chart we call it "executive." Technically it is known as "ego." There are many forces for that executive to manage. Only a few of them were included in the chart.
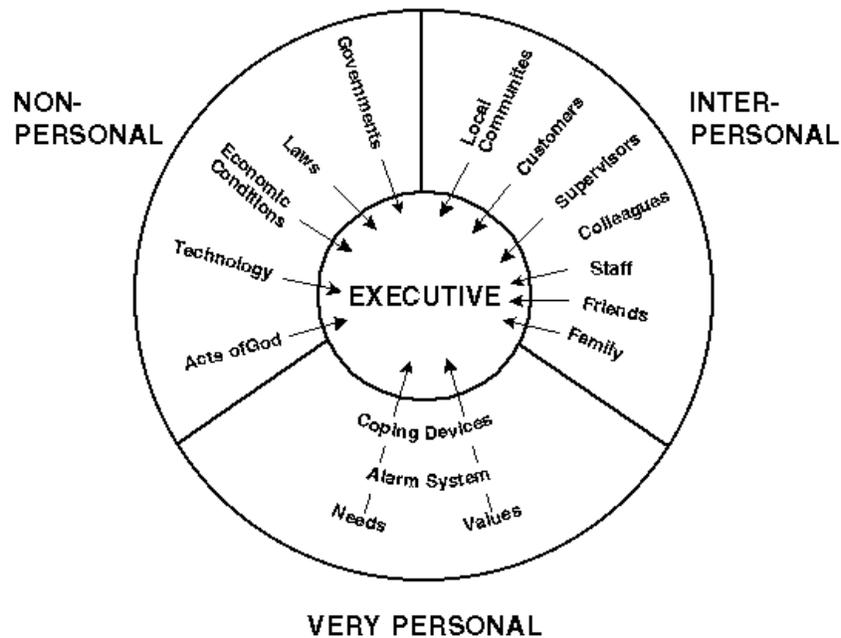
To be human is to know only too well that these forces are often at odds with each other. What your boss wants is in conflict with what your customer demands, and both are in conflict with what your husband needs. Each may fit with a different value of yours ("Thou shalt be tough, be responsive, be helpful"). Your own needs may push in another direction, while your analysis of the most pragmatic action may be in yet a different direction. Those multiple forces can seem to pull us apart. Viewed from another perspective, these forces exert pressure on each other (like the arrows in the chart). The demands of your husband may be a counter force to your own value to be too self sacrificing. Economic realities can push us to be more real-istic about what we need. The awesome power of a tornado can humble us and contain our fantasies of omnipotence.
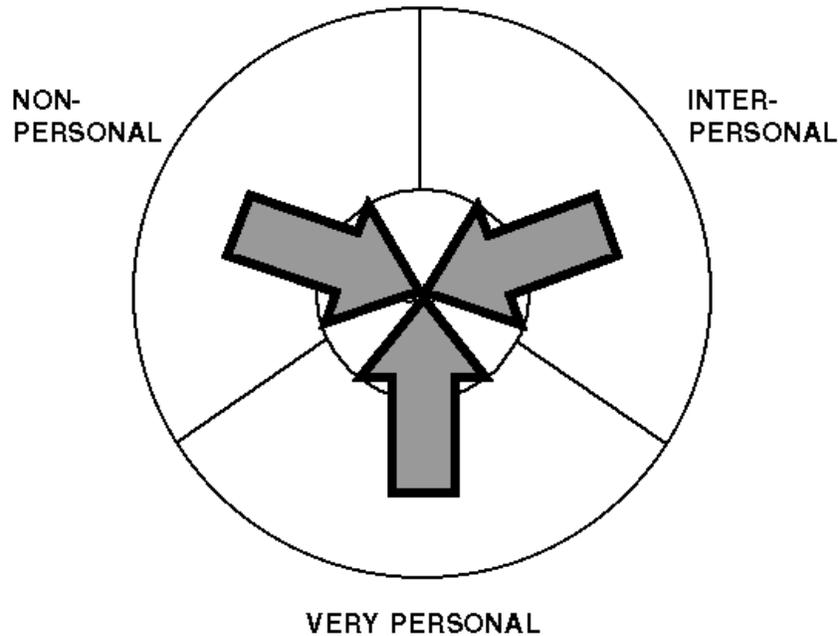
It is much easier to be aware of the outside pressures than those inside us. We are often unaware that we are greedy or have omnipotent fantasies. There is usually enough going on in the world external to our mind that we remain ignorant of the more subtle multiple forces inside. When you take away the external pressures you are left with nothing to distract you from the events inside your own mind. And there is a lot going on inside our minds which needs to be managed in the most realistic way possible.

As much as possible the sensory deprivation experiments remove all structures from outside the subjects's mind. Without the external pressures the forces inside the person's mind push their way into consciousness. They come from our inner and private history. With no external structures to distract us they make themselves known to our conscious mind.

NON-PERSONAL

INTER-PERSONAL

EXECUTIVE

Coping Devices

Alarm System

Needs

Values

VERY PERSONAL
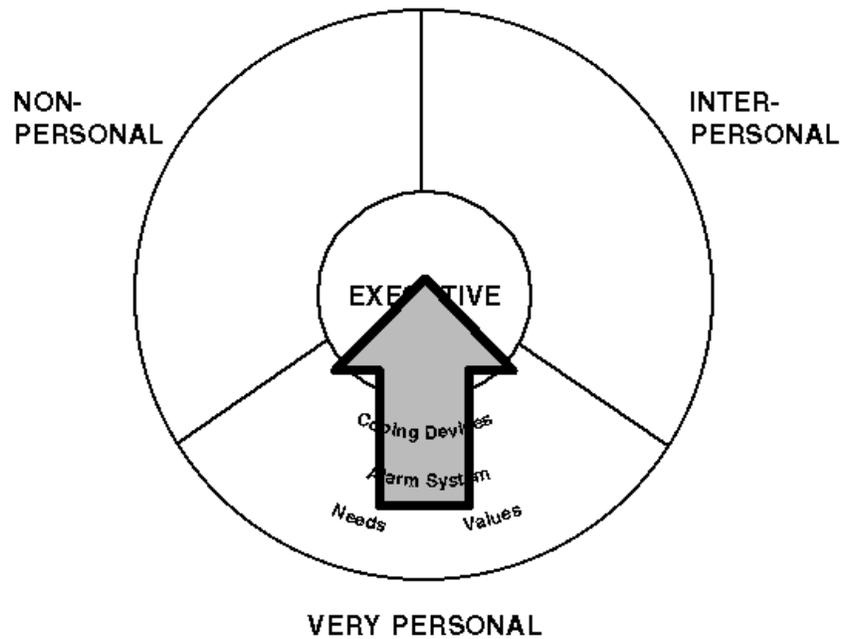
But why should healthy people find them so disturbing? Why are so many people frightened when they are all alone (not even images or sounds to distract them) with their selves? We need some theory to understand that.

Most people are unfamiliar with how their mind functions. They are quite familiar with how their conscious mind works, but we are much more than just our conscious mind. Subtle urges, thoughts, and memories seem to come from nowhere and for no reason. And there are times when our mind does the damndest things. "I don't know what happened. It just wasn't me!" "What was her name?" "Why did I forget that appointment?" It is common knowledge today that the cause of events like that is our unconscious. The unconscious can seem like a vague and ominous force. It is complex, but it is understandable, if you know the rules of "*organization*" it follows, or its structure.

Some Theory About How Our Minds Work

The unconscious, is the largest part of our personality. We see evidence of it all the time, mostly in other people. We see it overtly in children before the age of five or six, in the speech of people called psychotic, in dreams, slips of speech, and in the creative process.

Most often there is an impenetrable barrier between your unconscious and your conscious self. We tend to see it in ourselves only in retrospect. We confront it when we wake up to realize we drove all the way home from the office conscious only of work problems. We use it in our smooth and comfortable golf swing. There are also times when it is more like an imp than the software we use for "automatic pilot." It will suddenly expose itself, and maybe even you. You can't get started on a project you think you want to do, or you find you have started to tell the minister's wife a dirty joke instead of the innocent one you thought you had in mind. Your unconscious can drive for you, embarrass you, take revenge for you, dilate certain arteries, and frighten you.

Like any source of power, this residue of long–forgotten experience can act constructively or destructively. It may contain elements that are scary, deviant and unorthodox. But it also contains the potential for creativity and support. It is this power that is drawn up into awareness when outside structure is taken away. That is one of the things that happens when someone is in an ambiguous situation. The ambiguity is like a vacuum that pulls the hidden elements of oneself up into consciousness.

With the right stimulus, memories or ideas you thought long dead will flare up like stirred coals. A fragrance from the past can evoke with piercing clarity a distant moment with a forgotten girl friend or a grandmother. A flashing red light in the rear view mirror can make you feel like a small child caught with his hand in the cookie jar. No matter that you haven't done anything wrong, and the patrol car is just passing. The symbol of punishing authority is enough to rekindle the old feeling of being naughty. So part of the reason we feel uneasy when we are left with nothing to exert a counter pressure on our unconscious is that it contains impressions from times when we were very vulnerable. But that is not the only reason. Another important reason is that the structure for tying thoughts together—thinking—is radically different in the unconscious.

Conscious thought follows the rules we all understand. Contradictions are to be resolved. Abstractions are used to represent concrete reality, but they are not the same as external reality. Thinking something is not the same as doing it. Those tenets are not followed in unconscious thinking. Unconscious thinking is called "primary process," because it came first. Healthy adult conscious thinking is called "secondary process," because it came second. Four main characteristics of primary process thinking are relevant to our question of why it can be frightening without structure. They are:

1. **Thinking is equated with doing** . Primary process thinking is magical. This makes thoughts seem very powerful and dangerous. For example, a child may believe that his grandma won't die if he can keep from thinking about her dying. No wonder children and cer-

tain adults become frightened of their thoughts and try desperately to control them. This helps us understand the fear some managers have of "negative thinking." It also makes free uncensored thinking feel like risky business. Even though this is unrealistic it can make people feel vulnerable when left to their own muses. Many people become very uneasy when they are given the freedom to think whatever they want.

2. **It is concrete.** We are so accustomed to using abstractions in our conscious thoughts that it is hard to appreciate what concrete thinking means. For example, "give me your ear" is a metaphor for "listen to me." In the world of concrete thinking it means literally sever your ear and give it to me! When someone is thinking in this more primitive way he gets confused with metaphors. "The early bird catches the worm" is meaningless to him. Poetry is treated as if it were a report of concrete events as in a newspaper instead of a means of communicating about life questions which are concerned with more than just events. The "spirit of Christmas" is a real man with a white beard instead of a shared understanding of hope and promise.

   Time is another concept we use without realizing it is an abstraction. There is no past, present or future in the unconscious. Events from the far past live side by side with current aspirations for the future. (One particularly introspective manager said he often felt like he had himself as a boy or teenager inside him looking at an event with him. It wasn't that the younger him was part of a string of events to his past; it was as if his younger self was relating to the things he was thinking at the time.) Because there is no sense of before and after, it becomes difficult to determine cause and effect. Thus, in the unconscious mind, cause and effect are likely to be related to strong emotional experiences, coincidental events or symbols rather than a time sequence. Even words become concrete things rather than abstract symbols of thought, while thoughts are likely to be processed as visual images or fantasies.

3. **It follows the Talion Law** . An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is the rule in the unconscious. It makes no difference if the hurting back does no good it is simply the rule. A man puts some money into a soft drink machine and is hurt by it when it doesn't give him his selection or his money back. So he hurts the machine. He swears and maybe even hollers at the machine. If he is in an even

more primitive state he may start hitting and kicking it. That does no good, but he has an urge to do it. If a priest is nearby his presence may exert enough counter pressure to keep the unconscious impulses down. If the man is all alone he is more likely to express those impulses.

That means that we too will be punished according to the Talion law if we do something harmful. Our unconscious values can be harsh and demand a "pound of flesh" even if what we did that hurt somebody was unintended. It could be frightening to live in a world where even accidents (or angry thoughts) required payment in kind.

4. **Contradictions live side by side without affecting each other** . Ideas irreconcilable by logic can co-exist. Wishes flourish unaffected by reality. Concepts live side by side with their negatives. So a parent may be idealized as all good one moment and after doing something which frustrates the child is seen as terribly evil. We can see this in prejudice when people who are degraded can prepare food, but in other settings are seen as too "dirty" to have around.

Young children use primary process thinking so parents have to help them with some of the problems it can cause. "A tiger in your dream is not the same as a real tiger. It can't really hurt you." Lacking the integration fostered by such conscious tools as abstractions, reconciliation of opposites, and detached reason, experience fragments in the unconscious. It then can recluster in bizarre and often frightening ways. It can be fun. Most of us can't remember when we used to think exclusively with the primary process. An executive gave me a charming example of one incident he remembered.

His earliest memory was playing with a friend in a gravel driveway at about age two or three. He decided to help his father by filling his gas tank with the pebbles from the driveway. This executive remembers believing that if he thought the pebbles were gasoline then they were gasoline. Unfortunately his father didn't think they had turned into gasoline and was furious. His mother had to stand in for him and explain he really believed he was helping. Fortunately, most of us don't have children that know how to get the gas cap off. Primary process thinking is one of the things that makes the ideas of children so charming at certain times and so bizarre at others.

Childhood memories persist undimmed in the timelessness of our unconscious, so that the adult's consciousness can still be victimized by the partial understanding and distorted perceptions (from being so small in the presence of giants) of the child he once was. Such memories, untouched by subsequent experience, can be idealistically enhanced or hideously degraded. The good is glorified and the bad made horrendous because good and evil persist equally unmodified in unconscious memory.

The fantasies created from such memories are contained by structure. Without structure they begin to percolate into awareness. If the setting is cozy and comfortable, with symbols of love and warmth, the fantasies are more likely to be of the idealized all good kind. If there are more ominous signs the fantasies are more likely to be frightening. Then a person may feel anxious or experience an uncanny sense of impending doom. Partial images of disastrous events may flash through one's mind momentarily. Such discomforts give most people reason enough to want to keep their unconscious thoughts unconscious. So they avoid ambiguity and don't develop their capacity to deal with it.

Some managers like to use metaphors and generalities when working with people. That can work well to push people to take responsibility. If the people are distressed, undergoing a great deal of change, or just need more structure than most people, however, he will run into problems with primary process thinking. People get more concrete and become irritated with indirect answers. "I don't want a poet for a manager, I want somebody to tell us what we are to do!" That is a direct quote from one senior executive whose leader didn't give enough structure during an extended time of turmoil in their company. Neither the executive nor the leader made it for another year. Concrete, magical thinking which is governed by the talion law and which doesn't resolve any contradictions usually doesn't help people get through troubled times. But that is just what you get during such times if there is not enough structure to manage the primary process in all of us.

SOURCES OF STRUCTURE

Just because a structure is there doesn't mean people can use it. Some structures require sophistication to be seen, such as the theory used by an engineer or musicologist. Others don't require much of the individual to use them. Psychologically, people get structure in four ways.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

SOURCES OF STRUCTURE:

- **Physical Limitations**

- **People Who Tell You What To Do**

- **Concepts That Help You Decide**

- **Perceived Patterns**

</div>

Physical Limitations

First, we get structure from physical limitations. Physical limitations require the least amount of sophistication in an individual to be used. Whether the person is a regressed patient on a hospital ward or an infant the closed door limits him and gives structure. A locked door limits them even more. The bars on a baby's crib limit his movement. The floor limits me as it supports me. "*The configuration of (the) parts*" is obvious, unmoving, and requires no talent to be supported by them.

In an organization, the physical layout gives structure and influences how easy it is for people to get together. For example locating people in different buildings separated by a turnpike limits opportunities for informally meeting, talking, and getting to know each other. Connected computers, voice mail and the phone may offer alternatives, but there are still limitations on the relationships caused by the physical structures.

People can act as physical limitations. The aides in a hospital or the security guards in a hostile take over literally place themselves in such a way to block unwanted behavior. A parent picks a child up as it refuses to stay away from a dangerous enticement. But people give more structure than just physically limiting someone. Words can take the place of actions for most people.

People Who Tell Us What To Do

Second, we get structure from people who tell us what to do. It requires more sophistication to do what someone tells us than to stop at a closed door, but not much more. This is the second most primitive source of structure. The people who give structure may be individuals or groups. Their instructions—those we choose to accept—help to define our identity insofar as they tell us how we are limited.

Rules are basically people telling us what to do, but in written form. They can function almost as well as physical limitations for many people. They also generally set limits. When they are enforced it requires little sophistication to use them as a structure. Generally, your more limited people will want to be managed more by rules.

Procedures and methodology are the compilation of experts' instructions about what to do. They also limit one's options, and in that way give structure. "'A' must be done before 'B,' except in the case where 'C' is greater than you can lift." The methodology is what enables the individual to negotiate through the "interrelated parts in a complex entity." Library shelves of three hole binders contain the structure for the people using the methodology. That can be so effective in getting people to accomplish complex tasks that some leaders see no limits to the application of methodology. A surprisingly large number of activities can be put into a methodology. It is an indirect way of people telling others what to do.

Such instructions as "Tell me how you feel" gives more structure than one might think. If the person follows the request he must put his vague urgings into fantasies and feelings. That gives them more structure. Then he must put them into thoughts which is even more structure. To identify the feeling as anxiety or embarrassment decreases the tension a little. When he articulates his thoughts he has given them even more structure, and in that way exerted more control over those

vague urges. Then they don't seem so ominous. While it doesn't diminish the pressure enough most of the time, the surprising thing is that it is all you need some of the time. That is one of the reasons why listening to another tell how he feels is so supportive.

Concepts Which Take The Place Of Telling Us What To Do

The third place we get structure is from *Concepts which take the place of people telling us what to do.*Those concepts range all the way from an anthropomorphic, even masculine-like god to more abstract concepts such as E=MC^2, the "learning curve," or the "bottom line." All of those abstractions organize the individual's experiences in some way. Now the structures are inside the person's own mind! That makes her more independent. The more she can explain and manage events on her own the less she needs other people or physical limitations to decide her actions. She will be less likely to say, "Just tell me what to do!"

> Trainers talk about a "learning curve." In seminars you hear such things as, "They are moving up the learning curve." The learning curve does not exist in the realm of concrete experiences, it is an abstraction. It describes trends of how groups change. The trainers concrete experience is of people fumbling around as they try to grasp the new arrangement of information being presented in the program. Some of them eventually catch on, and others follow. Pretty soon almost all of them see the pattern. The abstraction "learning curve," makes the events more predictable and manageable for the trainer. It puts a label on what teachers in the past learned with experience, so that those today can know it with less experience. That is a function of the concepts we use for structure.

Abstractions such as "corporate culture," or the "unconscious," are all structures to help understand otherwise confusing phenomenon in concrete reality. The "vision" is a concept people can use as the structure which is promised to come after a change. When people are in distressing situations with diminished structure such as prisoner of war camps they can use these internal structures as they do math problems or go through literature "in their head."

Ideas can help manage some unpleasant feelings. "Anxiety isn't dangerous" can even diminish the anxiety a little. "You can work through depression" can help the individual feel a little less desperate. The idea that feelings have personal meaning and can be analyzed can help a person feel in more control. "I wonder what that dream meant and why it makes me feel so uneasy." The concepts put those feelings in their place and give some indication of how to relate to them.

There are some things that we understand without having people or concepts that define them.

Seeing Overall Patterns

We also get structure from seeing overall patterns. Then the individual is able to perceive the overall arrangement in one shot. Finding such a pattern or "*the principle of organization*" in our experience can be gratifying. It makes us feel secure. Modern music or art which can confuse, annoy or irritate people may become pleasurable once they begin to recognize patterns and forms that give it an intelligible structure. An engineer feels satisfaction when he finally solves a problem and sees the interrelation of various parts as well as his own intelligible process of solution.

Being able to pick out the patterns supports us. We can't always put those patterns into words nor do we need to in order to use them. Individuals in a seasoned marriage can see the pattern when their partner is "out of sorts" or "on a role." One seasoned executive who grew up in his industry described how he picked out patterns. He was now the CEO and made plant visits around the world. Whenever he came everything was polished and all the problems were hidden. He said he could walk into a plant and within a few minutes "smell" that something was wrong. He called it a "gut feel." Then he would start to investigate and usually found there was a problem. He wasn't limited to just using the abstractions of numbers (or "managing by a Lotus spread sheet" as another frustrated executive put it). Policeman will get the same "feel" in certain groups. Economists express the same use of picking out patterns when they say, "There is a window of opportunity."

With a lot of experience we see patterns, and then we use abstractions to help those with less experience to see them. Until they have mastered the abstractions we have to tell them what to do, or they will only be able to bump up against physical limitations ("The damned thing doesn't work!").

FUNCTIONS OF STRUCTURE

FUNCTIONS OF STRUCTURE:

- **Supports Identity**

- **Network For Obtaining Psychological Supplies**

- **Defense**

- **Limits Frightening Fantasies**

- **Supports Reality Testing**

Gives Identity

Structure reinforces our identity. Our *physical* make up is part of what we believe we are. What other *people tell us* defines us in some ways. "I am a good boy, because Mamma says so." It relates to the *concepts* we use. "A woman of integrity will do…" Our identity relates to the *patterns* we interpret. "I am a Professional, because I stay current on the technology." These structures range from the profound to the trivial. The kinds of clothes you wear and the places where you eat are a part of your identity.

Ambiguous situations undermine our identity. When roles are clear and the patterns are predictable people feel more self confident. They know who they are and where they fit. In ambiguous situations they are more unsure of themselves. Generally they don't use words like "identity" to describe their discomfort. More

commonly they say they don't know what to do. But knowing what to do shouldn't be such a personal problem except for the fact that what we do also defines us. "I am a carpenter" or a house wife, or an accountant. "You are what you do."

Seminars for management development are basically to change the participants and their view of themselves. They are usually put in novel roles, even "role playing." Just to be in the program is to be in new roles for many of them: student, listener, describer of their participation in the discussion. Their identities are to get stretched. If they are too dependent upon their usual roles you can see symptoms in them which are very familiar to trainers and consultants. One familiar symptom is the excessive use of the telephone.

> As the participants struggle with assumptions they have made about themselves and others they test the way they have structured their understanding of the world and where they fit in it, or their identify. A distressed participant can get people back in the office to call him and reaffirm his role by saying something to the effect of, "You are the boss who has special information and makes certain decisions. Only you can answer these questions, and by answering them, you will reaffirm your role."

> Having his role reaffirmed in this way gives him the support he needs to go back into the group. He feels even better if the people he has trained to need him sense his insecurity and dredge up so many problems for him that they make him late for the group. Then as he walks in late, everyone knows that he is so important only he could handle the problem back home. Sometimes the people back home are so well trained that they know they must call every time he goes to any meeting where his role isn't otherwise reinforced.

Of course such behavior is not limited to training programs. Some people get very few calls to disturb their time away from the office, while others with the same job are always called. Often those who are called less frequently do better work than those who are called all the time. You can see the phone being exploited any time you find a group of people who are insecure about their identity.

> Physicians are particularly good at it. At social gatherings and meetings where they risk someone forgetting their roles as physicians, they manage to get patients and hospital staff to find problems only they can solve. Some can even get their roles reaffirmed in front of a theater or stadium filled with people.

> Mothers are also skilled in exploiting the telephone. Like the executive and the physician, a mother also runs a risk when she moves outside her familiar structure. At her husband's office party she

may find that "Mother" is not the only role her true identity contains. Such discoveries are unsettling; they shake our sense of ourselves. Fortunately, baby sitters and children can be trained to come to the rescue. So after arriving late ("last minute problems with the children"), she is called to the phone to discover that her "Mother" role is so urgently needed at home that she must "reluctantly" leave early.

An important element in phone exploitations is to complain to the witnesses of this role reaffirmation about how harassed you are by the "damned phone." Otherwise they may catch on and recognize your insecurity about your identity, i.e., you don't have one without your role.

Network For Obtaining Necessary Psychological Supplies

Structure is also a network we use to obtain necessary psychological supplies. We need acceptance and reassurance. The familiar patter of old friends is comforting. Our individualized ways of letting each other know he or she is accepted are part of a supportive structure. I am often asked to see someone who is having problems as a manager. In the initial work she is described as insecure and needing extra reassurance. Some people need more psychological nurturance than others, and that is why they are seen as insecure. But there are others who don't have more of a need, they just don't have the structures to get the acceptance we all need.

This acceptance is nurturance for our self just as food is nurturance for our body. It comes from people I value who acknowledge me as someone real and worthy of being a part of their lives. Someone who knows me as a person with a past, present and aspirations for my future, not just a role. There may be many good people out there who are willing to give the support, but if I can't pick out the patterns of how they give support, I don't receive the nurturance. Some people give love by teasing and joking, others by aggressively arguing over a point, and still others by sitting quietly and listening. Those are the patterns they understand and can use.

Many years ago I was on the road for about five weeks straight. I would leave Sunday night, travel from one place to another each day, return home on Friday night or Saturday morning, to prepare for the next flight on Sunday. About the fifth week a few things didn't go so well. Friendly people I met afterwards would ask how I was doing. The reality was that I felt tired, somewhat discouraged, alone, and at times inadequate. But I didn't say that, I said,"Fine."

The end of the week concluded my travel for awhile. I wouldn't be on the road for several more weeks. When I walked in the house

> late Friday afternoon my wife greeted me with the words that will chill the soul of any returned traveler: "We are going out for dinner." An old friend had invited us over to his house that evening.
>
> I was furious. I was mad at my wife for accepting and at my friend for inviting. Who did he think he was to invite us for dinner! All the way over I pouted in the car. When we arrived at his house he was in the front yard. He walked up to the car and said, "What's the matter old friend are they getting to you?" Suddenly my eyes misted over and I had an urge to crawl in his lap and tell him my troubles. As the evening went on, he didn't hold me in his literal lap, but we did talk about the work, the frustrations, and some of the doubts. I left rejuvenated.

The old friend was probably no better a person than those other nice people who asked how I was. The words he used were not at all fancy. But we had a history together. He "knew me when." He offered his caring in a form I understood. If you can't pick out the patterns they don't exist for you.

> I have enjoyed trying to raise tropical fish. There is a very nice little fish called an "elephant nose." I have killed a great many of those fish; and would still probably be killing more if the fish store owner hadn't been foolish enough to tell me why they were dying. (He probably could have made a thousand dollars selling me those fish.)
>
> The elephant nose could eat flake fish food but was raised on brine shrimp. They didn't know the flakes were food. You had to give them the brine shrimp for awhile with the flake food until they discovered they could eat the flake food. Those fish were literally swimming in food and starving to death!

When people move from one culture to another they are often like those fish from a psychological point of view. People show they care differently in New York City than in San Francisco. The same is true for Atlanta, Omaha, Houston, Tucson, and on and on. Transplants may see New Yorkers as too pushy and cold, or southerners as too ungenuine, when it is just a matter of their being with people whose structures for supporting one another are different. The same thing can happen when someone moves from one corporate culture to another or is placed on a new team within the same organization. They may be surrounded by caring people, but psychologically starving.

It is not just people that can give that nurturance. The support can come from special objects.

> In my office I have an old black chair. Every wife and every interi-

or decorator that ever came into that office said, "The first thing you must do is get rid of that old black chair." (I've only had one wife, but evidently all you need to be is a wife and you know that chair is ugly.) But the chair is going to stay!

I bought it when I was an intern. All the psychotherapy I ever did was done in that chair. Most of the early work with business clients was done in that chair. Even my sons and wife came in at times when there was a crisis and we cried together as I sat in that chair.

What do you think happens when I sit in that chair today? It whispers, "Welcome back old friend. You don't need to worry about your back, or arm, or legs as I hold you. I remember. You just sit here and I'll take care of your body. You forget about all that, and just focus on the person sitting across the room." It's as if that chair remembers me when: I was an intern, a resident, a budding consultant, a parent, and an entrepreneur. It helps me integrate my experiences.

Special objects are like an old sweater or a baby's blanket when it comes to giving sustenance for the self. We have imprinted our form onto those structures whether they are patterns of interacting with colleagues or a couch in front of the T.V.. It's those "old black chairs" that help you to feel, "Some basic things are taken care of. Now I can focus on this challenge that we were given last night." Structure enables us to obtain psychological nurturance.

A Defense

Earlier we said that structure gives form and in that way supports our identity. The example of a skeleton was used as an internal structure that gives the body form. Sometimes the structure that gives form can be used as a defense

The turtle has its skeleton on the outside so that it also functions as a defense. You can hit a turtle with a stick or even a small rock and it won't hurt the turtle. A cat would be hurt by a stick or a rock. There is another side to this, however. Cats love to be stroked. People who like cats get pleasure from petting them. It is a rare person who likes to pet a turtle.

Think what would happen if someone said, "That poor dumb turtle, He doesn't know what he is missing. I am going to rip his shell off and pet him." What would bring the cat so much pleasure would only cause the turtle excruciating pain. And it would just give the person a sticky messy hand!

That is what you have to remember when you decide to change somebody for their own good. Some of the structures they have are not only reinforcements for their identity they are also defenses. "I am an engineer and they don't have feelings or share personal vulnerabilities." When the defense is gone there will be a tender spot for awhile. A different person might have enjoyed the personal sharing, but this one is made very uncomfortable and doesn't ever want to do it again.

Taking away defenses too fast is sometimes done in programs where personal disclosure is forced and any resistance is attacked by the group. Some dramatic changes may result, but unless the leader is skilled the changes can be pathological regression instead of growth. When the defenses are overwhelmed the person needs skillful help to cope until he has replaced them.

In a less dramatic way we have minor structures which defend us in small ways. It is fun to think about how they are used for many functions.

> Most men have a wallet. And most of them have it in a specific pocket. Some have their wallet in the right pocket, and some have it in the wrong pocket. I know, because if I put my wallet where some people put theirs, it "feels wrong". Where I always keep my wallet, it feels right. If you want to try an experiment, put your wallet, keys, etc., in different pockets for one day. Most men won't do it. Those who try it rarely last a day before putting things back "the way they are supposed to be".

> Once again, the wallet pocket serves more than just supporting our "right identity." Those men who do change their pocket usually go through the day feeling like they lost their wallet. When it is in the right pocket it is a defense against losing or forgetting it.

> Many women have a different defense with their purse. Perhaps you have said, "Honey go to my purse and get the keys." Two days later honey comes back and says he cant find the keys. You go to the purse and say. "See here they are right on top!" There is a structure in that purse that only you understand. That is the way you keep other people out of it. Purses are too personal to let people in them without being bewildered. They only need one or two such humiliating experiences to never want to return.

Limits Frightening Fantasies

Ghost stories and scary movies are purposely vague, and many of the events are shrouded in ambiguity. One of the scariest parts of a movie is when someone walks down a dark hall with indistinct shadows, and nothing happens. When we

finally see the monster or evil person it is almost a relief, because it is not as frightening as our fantasies.

Reality is never as bad (or as good) as our partially formed fantasies. Those fantasies, many of which are not even conscious, generate a spooky eerie feeling. They are under the control of the unconscious with the different way of relating past and present events that primary process thinking entails. In a situation of diminished structure, and with threatening stimuli our unconscious prepares for danger. It prepares us to fight or flee. It uses memories of past dangers, but they are not specific and are organized according to primary process thinking. To put the fantasies into thoughts is to give them some structure and show a direction to feel less frightened. "There is something about to jump out. What can it be. This is just a movie and it can't hurt me." That process relieves some of the tension, and can even feel pleasurable, until the writer sets us up again to wrestle with our unconscious fantasies.

Putting words to the feelings stirred by unconscious fantasies which are provoked by ambiguity peppered with threatening clues is the first step in managing them. So when people see signs that things are not going right for the company and they get no information they have to develop their own ideas to manage the frightening fantasies. "The reason why they are not saying anything about the poor numbers is because they they are pulling something sneaky. They are going to sell this division and just get rid of the people." And rumors are started. Each person makes his own contribution from what frightens him most out of his own unique past. Because they don't have enough information the rumors are likely to be more threatening and bizarre. The leaders often ask, "How could they think something like that?" They thought it because they didn't have all the information the leaders had.

> We worked with one company that was selling a division. Everyone knew it was being offered to other companies. The leaders were exhausted with all the extra work they had to do for the sell. They forgot to inform the people frequently about their plans. They were committed to helping those who would lose their jobs, but didn't get the word out enough.
>
> One of the leaders asked us to give his managers a seminar on managing change so they could help with the transition. In the opening lecture I saw that the managers were not interested in the topic of change, so I stopped the lectures and set up a structure for discussion. It started a bit slowly, but soon everyone was talking about their concerns. They thought top management didn't care and didn't want to know what any of the people problems were. Many were convinced that senior management wanted to keep everyone

in the dark.

The leader of this group attended the last session and took the concerns of the managers back to the executive committee. They were dismayed that people were so distressed. They asked us to do a program on stress. Time was so short that all we could do was give a presentation on managing stress to everyone at that location. Before the presentation the leader asked for any questions about the sale. There was an anxious silence. No one said a word so the presentation was started. It focused on understanding, the importance of structure, some tips, and was as supportive as I could be. Afterwards there were a few questions for me.

When the leader stood up to close the meeting he once again asked for questions. This time they poured out. A few couldn't be answered, but most were about details that had answers. They asked, "Will we have any notice before we are put on the street?" "Will we get any out placement support?" It was obvious that they trusted the leader and liked him. But as he got so busy and didn't communicate with them he became more threatening in their eyes, until even when he asked for questions they were afraid to say anything. These were strong people, but even they needed a structure to help them with the fears that developed when they didn't get information in the face of ominous possibilities.

In business you often hear managers working on a needed change say, "Don't say anything to the troops, we don't want to start any rumors." The "troops" are aware that something needs to be done. Many of them are as bright as the managers. But the troops don't have as much information, so more is left to their fantasies. Then the rumors start, but they are more outlandish than what management is considering. Usually the more information you can give the more you cut down on destructive rumors, because the structure decreases the fantasies—both pleasant and frightening. When the signs are threatening the fantasies will not be pleasant.

Supports reality testing

Reality testing is what we use to differentiate between what is in our own mind and what is happening in the world around us. Day dreaming about being highly desirable to someone is different than being desired by them. Because a man believes he is the best person for a job doesn't mean he is or that anyone else thinks he is. Because someone is convinced that a strategy will beat the competition, doesn't mean it will. Some thoughts are so strong that people accept them as fact

instead of testing to see if there is any evidence that they represent something outside their own heads. We test by checking our perceptions and thoughts with our environment If nobody else heard the melody then maybe it was just running through my own mind. There are certain stable points in the environment with which to check our thoughts. If other companies are having financial problems like mine and the press and national statistics agree, then we are probably in a recession.

Structure acts as a template to help us perceive patterns in the ambiguous world around us. "Total revenue is the most important number on this page," gives structure to a person who may have problems seeing the patterns of how the year's budget fits with his priorities. The concept of the unconscious helps a person see things that she didn't see before. "Globalization of the market place" is a structure that enables a leader to perceive information that was missed before he had it. An engineer, physician, or auditor sees things that other people don't, because of the theories they use which reveal certain patterns of reality.

The problem is that the structure must be realistic to help us be in touch with reality.

Using The Sensory Deprivation Experiences

There is some helpful follow up information about the sensory deprivation experiments. The original experiments were done in the late 40's and 50's when we were thinking of putting people into space. Everyone knew that if you put people in such an ambiguous situation they would go crazy, so they asked the psychologists to prove it. And they did. Sure enough if you took all outside stimulus away people went crazy. One man, Lilly, questioned the approach to the experiment, however. Sure people thought in different ways and hallucinated, but did that mean it was destructive to them? So Lilly did the experiments over again, but he added one small structure.

Before people went into the sensory deprivation tanks he told them what would happen. He told them that they would perceive and think in different and even strange ways. But, he added, "You can come back. You can always come back." They went into the experiments knowing that they would not lose their Selves. They would still have their identity. Then the results were different. The subjects still hallucinated and thought with primary process thinking, but they didn't become frightened. For them the experiences were more pleasant. Some people even used them as ways to enhance creativity.

What happened in terms of the functions of structure? By giving a realistic over riding structure to the individuals Lilly diminished frightening fantasies. The main

frightening fantasy that was managed was the loss of their identity. The structure supported their identity. It also functioned as a defense—the defense of intellectualization. They had a concept to support themselves. Reality testing was supported as they knew that what happened was only taking place inside their head and not in external reality. He didn't just cheer lead and say "You can do it!" He told them what would really happen to them. They learned what they could expect. The one function of structure that isn't in the example is psychological nurturance. Yet he did show that he cared enough to prepare them. That made the primary process a friendlier place.

Structures don't always perform all the functions. Some reinforce identity, but don't support reality testing. Some nurture, but don't act as a defense.

SOME PROBLEMS OF STRUCTURE

Like change, structure is neither all good nor all bad. It is simply one of the basic human needs. We need food, but we can get too much of it as well as too little. Structure performs some important functions for us. As with food, however, we may use one kind while not getting enough of another. For example, we could use structure primarily as a defense at the expense of staying in touch with reality. And not all the organizing principles we use to manage the interrelations of our experiences are useful for optimum mastery of our world. Perhaps it is most important to remember that there was nothing in the definition of structure which required it to be realistic in order to perform some emotional functions for us.

Structures don't have to have anything to do with reality to leave us feeling cozy and comfortable. The mathamatician's structure not only helps her feel comfortable, it helps her to be more realistic. Yet, the bigot feels the same sense of satisfaction when he strikes upon principles he regards as basic, such as "All blacks are lazy," or, "You never saw a woman who could think like a man." It is not necessary for the organizing principles to bring individuals or groups into a closer relationship with reality for them to feel secure and supported by the structures they create or use.

Believing that the earth was flat contributed to the identity, and functioned as a defense (eg., against doubting their common sense view that what they perceived was the way things were) for many people, but it was wrong. It limited their attempted solutions (sailing west in addition to traveling east). It closed their minds to new opportunities. Nevertheless, most people were comfortable with it. Believing the earth was the center of the universe was another structure that reinforced identity and defended against unpleasant feelings. It also functioned to make people feel very special, and thereby functioned as a source of psychological nurturance. No matter how bad things got we were still "chosen" to be the center of the entire universe. How many of our structures today will be seen at some future date to be as unrealistic as those? Perhaps all of them. In the mean time, we must use what we have while remembering that what we use for support is probably only partially true and we may have to give it up someday.

Some groups such as the NAZI's, radical religious groups, etc. use rigid structures

to generate the feeling of proper righteousness as a counterfeit support for their members. All organizations are in danger of trading effective management of problems in reality for comforting support. To use less structure not only means you have more freedom, it means you have more responsibility. There always seems to be a tension between security and freedom. Freedom means there will be personal accountability.

> "In the end, more than they wanted freedom, they wanted security. They wanted a comfortable life and they lost it all—security, comfort, and freedom. When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society, but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free."

Trapped by structure

The Athenians which Hamilton described were trapped by their own needs for comfort and the structures they created to provide it. The structure takes the responsibility and thereby diminishes our individual accountability. "I couldn't get there, because the bridge was washed out." Organizations are great sources of structure. They define limits by giving rules, methodology, codes of conduct, and roles. They organize us by making us fit into the overriding organization. The roles we are given and earn take the responsibility for our actions. "I am only doing my job." In that way they function as a defense, while also contributing to an identity. Some roles also provide a great deal of psychological nurturance. All of that can be very seductive.

We have countless roles available to us as human beings. But sometimes one role is so enticing and the rest of the person's identity is so tenuous that it dominates. Some managers eventually confuse their role with their true or whole identity. It is as though he loses his self and is left with the mere organizational role. He doesn't know how to function as a father, lover, husband, comrade, enemy or as any other human figure requiring a whole person. Such men are sad enough to watch as they struggle to get their roles reinforced, but they become tragic when they undergo role death at retirement. With the expiration of their roles, they seem to have no reason to go on living. They drift about zombie–like when they should be riding the crest of life. They are hollow people, easy prey to illnesses that attack those who retire not only from their jobs, but from life.

Sometimes the organization can give too much structure to everyone. It is accepted and even seen as a plus because people feel comfortable with it. If the structures are not too far out of touch with current reality, they promote high morale and effi-

ciency. Such a company can fall victim to a conspiracy of right thinking which stifles initiative and freedom of thought. Good feedback begins to mean pleasant feedback or saying what is predictable. Constructive criticism is replaced by positive strokes or information intended to please. The pleasure of getting such feedback is really due to a tacit understanding that neither the giver nor the receiver of the feedback will have to change. Each then perpetuates the illusion that the current structures are adequate, good, or even holy—permanently unchangeable and hence, productive of long term security and coziness.

But eventually the friendly old structures must change if the organization is to compete and survive. For the external world changes, and from where will the innovative thinkers who define the needed changes come? The attitudes necessary to solve new problems in fresh ways will seem deviant and destructive to people whom the organization has encouraged over the years to take refuge in the false security of excessive structures

> A man who was assigned the task of developing a "creative" unit within one such organization said he felt like Diogenes, prowling his company with tub and candle, searching for a man who could think in new ways. He said he respected the people in his organization. They certainly knew how to live within their existing structures. But the deviant ways of thinking and perceiving that churned about in their unconscious minds were intolerable to their conscious standards. The problem was that with regard to its structure, the organization was just too efficient for its own good.

Finding The Structure That Is Needed

The art is to find the amount of structure that is needed. Today it is relatively easy for leaders to see the problems with too much structure. But getting rid of all structure is not the answer. Structure is not the opposite of freedom. With no structure life is chaotic. People are then left to the tyranny of their unconscious processes. That is not freedom, as anyone who works on a psychiatric ward with psychotic patients knows. Too much or too little structure inhibits innovation and creativity. The trick is to find the right amount and kind of structure to accomplish what you want.

To move into a time of continuous change you not only need to create structures for the new way of operating, but also for the transition of moving from stability to constant change. The vision is a structure for the new way, but it is not enough. People need concepts, routines, habits and examples for both the transition and the goal. The right amount of structure is the amount the people need not the amount the leaders need. The leaders may need a lot less either because they are ahead in

the transition or they simply are able to do with less structure (a reason they became leaders).

Everyone doesn't need the same amount of structure. In our experience about 70% to 80% of the several thousand healthy managers we have tested need a significant amount of structure. That is probably one of the reasons why groups need more structure than individuals. In an average group the majority of the individuals will need a significant amount of structure if they are to function well. Structure is further required in groups because the relationships ("the interrelation of the parts") are more complex in groups than in one-on-one discussions. The larger the group the more structure is needed.

We have seen three common groupings of individual managers with respect to their need for structure. They are those who need:

- A significant amount of structure and know it
- A significant amount of structure and think they don't need any
- Very little structure to function at their optimum

Those who need a significant amount of structure and know it generally function better as managers. They know they need structure so they establish it for themselves and their people. Those who need much structure and don't know it are usually the problem managers. They don't give themselves or their people structure and their area is usually chaotic. The surprise for us was that the people who don't need much structure also often had problems. You would think that they would do the best since they will operate in ambiguity better. But even though they can deal with ambiguity many of them are constantly putting out fires. Because they don't need structure many of them don't give enough to their people. Thus while they are comfortable, their people are too often left confused, anxious, and dealing with more primary process issues than they should.

The biggest problem with structure comes when it is time to change it.