

ENERGETIC DYNAMICS IN ORGANISATIONS

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Many different metaphors and analogies have been used to help our understanding of organisations. In the past, the organisation was often seen as a machine composed of different operating departments. More recently, the organisation is viewed in more holistic and synergistic terms, its operations being greater than the conscious actions and decisions of all its individual parts. This paper develops the metaphor of the organisation as an energetic organism using insights from oriental philosophy and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

In Chinese Medicine, health is the ability of an organism to respond appropriately to a wide variety of internal and external challenges in a way that insures maintaining equilibrium and integrity. Dis-ease represents a failure to transform and adapt to challenge and change and is seen as energetic imbalance in the organism. These energetic principles can be applied to look at health, well-being, and disease at the individual level - but likewise can be used to understand the dynamics within groups, organisations, the nation state, the global environment, and even the cosmos (the general principle being that whatever is going on at the macro level is also reflected in the micro-organism and vice versa). This approach is well grounded in ancient oriental thought where the theory of the *five elements* was not only applied to medicine, but also to astrology, the natural sciences, the calendar, music and even politics (Maciocia 1989; 16). This explains why the internal organs are often associated with political or military officials. For example, 'the heart is like the Monarch'; whereas 'the liver is like an Army General from whom the strategy is derived' (Simple Questions; 58).

In more modern times, the military associations of the five elements have been used to guide competitive business strategies (Lundell 1997); whereas the energetic nature of organisations has been embraced by forward thinkers in the new field of quantum science applied to business:

'Organisations too, are persisting patterns of dynamic energy. That is why they have character, personality, a recognisable style over the years even though their employees and even their CEO's come and go. The company itself, its persisting pattern, is larger than and somehow functions above and beyond the actions and conscious decisions of all its individual parts - the CEO's, the board chairmen, the employees, the shareholders, and so on' (Zohar; 70).

Thinking about organisations in this way is a big step away from traditional organisational management approaches, but it opens up exciting new

possibilities that link personal; organisational and global sustainability within a common energetic framework. Energetic well-being at the level of the individual can be linked to harmony within organisations, and sustainability in the wider environment. The converse being true of dis-ease at the individual, organisational and environmental level.

Organisational
Dis-ease

Individual
Dis-ease

Environmental
Dis-ease

This paper will focus on one aspect of this web: the dynamic link between the health of the individual and the energetic quality of the organisations that they work for. The proposition is that *'thinking structures in the human brain are the prototypes of human organisational structures that we evolve or design'* (Zohar 1997; 96-97). Hence, energetic patterns of individuals can be re-inforced by the organisational structures that evolve in society. Likewise, in order for the larger systems in our society to be balanced, harmonious and healthy, each smaller system within it must also reflect these characteristics.

THE FIVE ELEMENT NETWORK AND ORGANISATIONAL ARCHETYPES

The five element model is used to uncover the nature or personality of an organisation and to reveal its energetic characteristics and the impact this may have on the health of individual employees (and potentially on other stakeholder groups and the wider environment).

The five elements or phases identify stages of transformation, patterns of expansion and contraction, proliferation and withering (Beinfeld and Korngold 1992; 87). Each phase has an intrinsic energy that corresponds with water, wood, fire, earth, and metal. Corresponding with each phase is a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspect. Some of the essential characteristics of the five phases and their potential correspondences to organisational structure and processes are summarised below:

Aspect	Water	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal
Archetype	Minister of Interior	Military Commander	Monarch	Minister of Agriculture/ Environment	Minister of State/Foreign Affairs
Task	Conception; survival; stock-piling	Vision; planning & strategy	Integrating & communicating experience	Nourishment; assimilation & renewal	Sets the rhythm and boundaries
Process	Consolidation & Potentiation	Expansion & initiation	Completion & fulfilment	Stability & poise	Contraction & release

Talent	Inspiration/ Spontaneity	Initiative	Communicate	Negotiation	Discrimination
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The Water Network: Water is associated with winter, the season of deep inward movement, rest and regeneration before the outward thrust of spring. The water element can be thought of as the store house of the organisation which provides essential reserves in times of stress or crisis. The quality of water is endurance, courage and determination - and the energy behind it is the will to survive. Within the deep stillness, or yin aspect of water, the yang seed of action is conceived. The energetic dynamic of the water element can be likened to the 'rest before the storm' or the potential energy contained in the pendulum as it rests between the upward and downward swing. Rest and fallow periods allow excitement and the motivation for action to build. It is this aspect of water that is associated with inspiration and potentiation - the raw conception of an idea before it is put into action. In an organisation, the types of structures and processes that channel the water energy might include:

- Contingency planning
- Long term investments and securities
- Fallow periods (eg. in agricultural systems)
- Creative visioning processes (quantum thinking)

A possible water scenario: An organisation with a water imbalance may be found in risky areas of business (such as the stock market) where courage and risk-taking are highly rewarded, but the potential costs are high. This is life on the edge where high stress, adrenaline and another cup of black coffee is the order of the day - there is no time for relaxation and replenishing vital resources. Here today, gone tomorrow is the motto. The importance of slowing down in order to see the primary threats to the survival of an organisation is stressed by Peter Senge in the Fifth Discipline:

'the primary threats to our survival, both of our organisations and of our societies, come not from sudden events but from slow, gradual processes... Learning to see slow, gradual processes requires slowing down our frenetic pace and paying attention to the subtle as well as the dramatic'. (Senge 1997;22-23).

A water imbalance in an organisation has interesting parallels with a water imbalance at the level of the individual. Health problems in the water element are associated with the kidney and bladder. Both these organs relate to impetus (the seed of action) - providing the initial spark of excitement that enables us to respond to external stimulus. In physiological terms, the kidney provides impetus through the hormonal system; whereas the bladder receives impetus through the autonomous nervous system. If the kidney or bladder functions are underactive, there is no impetus to respond to information

received from hormonal or nervous impulses. However, in the stock market example above, health problems are more likely to be associated with hyperactivity in the water element. In this case, the individual becomes hypersensitive to external stimuli, causing intense stress and exhaustion. There is an inability to recover from stress and relax, allowing essential time to replenish vital reserves. The symptoms are 'workaholism'; impatience; restlessness; nervous sensitivity and insomnia (Beresford-Cooke 1996; 103).

The Wood Network: The wood aspect relates to spring which is associated with creativity, growth and the initiation of action. It relates to overall vision, initiative, decision-making, action and expansion. Whereas the water element provides the impetus or initial conception of the idea, it is the wood energy that allows it to manifest and be put into action. In this sense, the wood energy is associated with the birth of the cycle in which strategic energy is needed to develop new plans along with the courage and initiative to implement them. By its nature, wood represents vigorous and smooth flowing energy allowing sound judgement and decision-making; clear vision; and resolute action. A healthy wood aspect also captures the yielding nature of wood, enabling adaption to new circumstances and the creative resolution of conflicts that may arise as new plans are implemented. In an organisation, the types of structures and processes that channel the wood energy might include:

- strategic planning initiatives (serial thinking: how shall we do it?)
- setting up implementation procedures (project/programme management; accounting/financial structures)
- conflict resolution procedures

A possible wood scenario: Stagnation in the wood element may manifest as authoritarian, top down, rigid management structures that suffocate creativity and disable the organisations ability to adapt to change. The organisation may be characterised by stop-start cycles indicating bouts of high energy followed by collapse; with impatient, impulsive and non-participatory decision-making. Deficiency in the wood element may manifest as a lack of vision and direction and timidity around decision-making (the classic 'liver fog' scenario). The pervasive working climate will be one of frustration and/or boredom as creative energies are never realised.

Parallels can be made with a wood imbalance at the level of the individual. The wood organ network primarily affects the functions of the liver and gallbladder. The wood element allows us to harness our creative energy and attain our maximum potential for self-expression. Like the force of wood in nature, it allows adaption to changing circumstances and provides the energy for conflict resolution and harmonious cooperation. In physiological terms, the blood is stored in the liver and released to the muscles when it is required for action. The smooth flow of blood and qi throughout the body allows action; adaption and cooperation in the fulfilment of the individuals aspirations. Disharmonies

in the liver function are commonly caused by emotional problems relating to repression of creativity and free expression. Depression, mood swings and resentment are common emotional symptoms of a liver imbalance. Various physical symptoms may also manifest, such as those affecting the gall-bladder meridian. Occupations requiring constant decision-making may create stagnation in the gall-bladder meridian manifesting as tension in the neck and shoulders, giving rise to frequent migraine headaches. The whole body may eventually be affected causing postural rigidity - particularly along the sides of the body.

The Fire Network: The fire aspect relates to summer which is associated with ripening and maturation. In this phase the fruits of our efforts are realised allowing satisfaction; resolution; and completion. The fire process ensures assimilation, integration and communication of experience to all aspects of the organisation. It therefore is the main element involved with relationships both inside and outside the organisation - it provides the 'human face' of the organisation. The fire element can be likened to the human hearth of the organisation being the focus for social gatherings, warm open communication and providing a sense of community and integration.

Aspects of fire also encapsulate intuitive and lateral thinking processes based on patterns, relationships and networks. There are strong parallels with associative learning processes which are rooted in our physical and emotional experience (such as learning by doing). According to Zohar (1997;111), organisations that revolve around networks and connections are more typical in Eastern countries. This point is re-inforced by Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996):

'Chinese managers like to boast that, in contrast to their legalistic Western peers, their businesses are based around negotiating relationships, not contracts. The chief assets of an overseas Chinese business are usually its guanxi (or connections).'

In an organisation, the types of structures and processes that channel the fire energy might include:

- team building and group work
- social gatherings and corporate hospitality
- internal and external communication networks (including computer networks)
- synthesising experience/information/statistics
- experiential learning processes (eg. on the job training; trial & error processes)

A possible fire scenario: An organisation suffering from a fire imbalance may lose its sense of integration and community, becoming chaotic and

fragmented with each person or department operating independently. Satellite departments may get separated from the core leading to break-down between policy formulation (core) and implementation (periphery). Open communication breaks down fostering hostility and the development of over-defensive and protective mechanisms fuelling mistrust, and lack of transparency and accountability. Information, statistics and evaluation reports sit on the shelves of the central office but never get communicated in a format useful to the satellite departments.

Again, interesting parallels can be made with fire imbalances at the individual level. In Chinese Medicine, the heart is the primary fire organ and in purely physiological terms is responsible for the circulation of the blood from the core to the periphery. When the heart energy is deficient this may manifest as poor circulation, chilling of the extremities, dizziness and palpitations. In psychological terms, the heart represents our central consciousness and awareness of ourselves as an integrated being. The self conscious awareness of our centre allows the warm, human spirit to blossom. When our sense of self becomes scattered or fragmented this can lead to various symptoms affecting our mental health such as neurosis, mistrust, anxiety and insomnia. The other fire meridians (small intestine; heart protector; and triple heater) are largely seen as protectors or agents of the heart. For example, the triple heater plays a central role in the body's defensive mechanism via the peripheral circulation of blood and lymph. Over defensive strategies associated with a fire imbalance may manifest as hyper-sensitive immune response associated with various allergic reactions.

The Earth Network: The earth aspect relates to late summer and is associated with nourishment and digestion, whether it be of food, ideas or other resources. This is the time for recollection, reflection, renewal and transformation. Returning to the earth energy gives the organisation a sense of inner support, continuity and sustainability (even in the face of rapid external change). A healthy earth element enables the organisation to seek and accept support and nourishment from the outside. In an organisation, the types of structures and processes that channel the earth energy might include:

- collection and analysis of information
- maintenance; repair; renewal of equipment/buildings
- internal support mechanisms (welfare benefits such as paternity leave; occupational pensions; provision of crèche & staff canteen)
- external support networks (local community support; co-operative business strategies)
- staff development strategies
- co-operative rather than competitive strategies
- relationships and contracts based on mutual trust and goodwill
- routine staff retreats

A possible earth scenario: An organisation suffering from an earth imbalance may have the general air that the key resources of the organisation are not properly cared for - whether it be people, equipment or buildings. The pot plants are dying, the photocopier does not work and the whole place is overwhelmed with books, papers and reports. Although there is a pervasive air of lethargy, this is coupled with an introverted type of worry, anxiety and effort. Everyone is in their own world trying to provide intellectual solutions to the 'big' problems of tomorrow, hardly noticing that their secretary has walked out and that its sunny outside.

An earth imbalance in the human body affects the digestive organs of the stomach and spleen. The energetic function of the stomach is to obtain nourishment through the physiological functions of eating and digestion. It also relates to gaining nourishment from other external sources such as relationships, ideas and work. In physiological terms, the spleen transforms digested food into useable energy. The mental aspect of the spleen relates to the processing and digestion of ideas and concepts. Problems in taking in and receiving nourishment from external sources may manifest in a number of different physical and psychological ways. This includes fatigue and lethargy arising from mental unrest and anxiety - ideas, thoughts and problems are constantly churned over in the mind but are never resolved or digested. Eating disorders and many digestive problems often arise from dissatisfaction and lack of nourishment from external sources - whether it be from our food, relationships or our work.

The Metal Network: The metal aspect relates to autumn and it provides the interface with the external environment in the sense of taking in and eliminating what is unnecessary. It is the time for taking stock and refinement.

'This is another season of change, but as spring was an expansive time of breaking through and proliferation, fall is a contractive time of pulling in and dying back. The life cycle completes itself in autumn. The Nei Jing says that the energy of the fall is the "killing energy" - sharp, retracting and finishing' (Beinfeld and Korngold 1992; 205)

The metal energy gives us the ability to say 'no' and break from the past in order to open up to new opportunities in the present. By establishing a clear boundary with the outside world, the metal element safeguards internal resources from external threat. In an organisation, the types of structures and processes that channel the metal energy might include:

- adherence to rules; regulations; and ceremonies that provide both rhythm and precision to the organisation
- ethical and moral codes
- disciplinary procedures
- external security

- stock-taking
- practises that establish the boundaries of the organisation eg. stakeholder analysis; cradle to grave analysis of social and environmental impacts

A possible metal scenario: An organisation out of balance in the metal phase is likely to be living in the glory of past success, ceremony and tradition. There may be an air of moral superiority or detached indifference with an almost clinical separation from the affairs of the world 'out there'. Security is gained from holding onto old ideas; whereas new concepts, technologies and people seem invasive and threatening. Fastidious attention to detail and tidy controlling structures create an overall rather depressing and isolated air of nothing really happening - no creativity; no interaction; no exchange.

In the human body, the metal element relates to our boundary with the external environment. The organs of the lung (taking in) and large intestine (elimination) are paired together to facilitate the process of exchange between the individual and the environment. The lungs are responsible for the intake of energy through respiration, whereas the large intestine is the key organ involved in elimination - letting go of unwanted material and old behavioural patterns. Problems in the metal aspect can manifest as respiratory disorders; constipation; and depression (arising from feelings of isolation and lack of exchange with the outside world).

RE-BALANCING ORGANISATIONS

The five element network is not a static system; each element is part of a complex web of energetic relationships and self regulating processes that work towards restoring balance in nature; in the human body; and in organisations.

'when the balance is broken,... the quantitative relationships among the elements breaks down, so that, at a particular point, one element is excessive in relation to another' (Maciocia 1989;20)

Understanding the relationships between the elements gives insight into what type of re-balancing initiative might be most appropriate and effective. For example, the wood network in an organisation will be linked to the metal element (metal *controls* wood); the water element (water *generates* wood); the earth element (wood *controls* earth); and the fire element (wood *generates* fire). The control and generating relationships are shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

Figure 1: Control Sequence

Figure 2: Generating Sequence

Hence, imbalance in the wood element in an organisation may arise from a variety of different relationships in the elemental networks. Figure 3 shows how collapse or deficiency in the wood element has consequences for the other elements.

Figure 3: Wood Patterns (*adapted from Maciocia 1989;32*)

This snap-shot in the five element process shows how a simple deficiency or collapse in one aspect of the 'energetic organisation' can devolve into complex patterns of disharmony and dis-ease throughout the organisation, eventually generating similar patterns in other related systems and organisms (stakeholder groups; workforce; supporting ecosystems).

As in the human body, there are many self regulating mechanisms within an organisation that allow constant adaption to a disruption in the overall equilibrium in the energetic networks. This disruption may come from internal or external sources, which in a healthy organisation or individual, far from being the cause of disease potentially holds the seeds of growth and development. Disruption in the equilibrium only degenerates into pathological and unhealthy states when the organisation is unable to cope and adapt to new challenges and uncertainties. This process of degeneration is best illustrated with the aid of an hypothetical example.

Suppose the primary symptoms in an organisation are manifesting as deficiency in the wood element: the organisation suffers from a lack of collective vision and purpose, with management characterised by vagueness,

timidity and indecision. As the wood energy becomes further depleted it fails to stoke up the fire energy (generating cycle) of the organisation. Without a clear sense of purpose and vision, the human contacts and relationships begin to suffer. The organisation fragments and internal and external communication networks break down. The fire of the organisation rapidly fades as projects never reach fruition and consequently satisfaction and completion are never realised. Without the creative tension of an active wood energy, the earth element remains unchecked in the control cycle. The nurturing and grounding aspect of earth becomes overbearing and intrusive, further dampening the dynamic tension essential for movement and change. Finally, the metal element in the control cycle becomes overactive, domineering and suffocating with its fastidious attention to detail; tight, controlling structures and strict adherence to rules, procedure and protocol.

Observing the signs and symptoms: Lessons for organisations

The role of the oriental health practitioner is to observe the signs and symptoms, building up an energetic picture of the person. Each person will have a unique energetic pattern often displaying signs and symptoms from many, if not all of the elements. The oriental practitioner works with the client to restore the resilience, strength, adaptability and awareness of the persons energy. The treatment principle is to nourish collapsed energetic pathways and disperse exaggerated or stagnant patterns. The five element system will be used to guide the practitioner towards the most effective treatment strategy within the context of the inter-relationships between the elements. For example, tonification of the wood element may best be achieved by first tonifying the water element (water generates wood) and dispersing metal (metal controls wood). An alternative treatment strategy might be to tonify water and wood and disperse stagnation in the earth element. The particular treatment strategy selected will depend on the particular signs and symptoms presenting. Hence, there are as many treatment approaches as there are individuals.

The treatment principles in Chinese Medicine serve as interesting lessons for understanding the energetic dynamics of organisations. The first phase is to identify the structures, processes and activities within an organisation that best reflect the energetic qualities of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Secondly, identify the key signs and symptoms of energetic imbalance eg.

- core-periphery fragmentation (fire)
- strict adherence to procedure/protocol hindering initiative (metal invading wood)
- cogitation, lack of inspiration and spontaneity (water)
- excessive intellectualisation of problems with lack of grounding in day to day realities (earth)

Finally, develop one or more organisational initiatives that seek to harmonise exaggerated (stagnant) and collapsed (deficient) patterns within the context of the five element network.

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