

Finding Essence in a VUCA-Plus World I: Patterns, Self-Organization and Illumination

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In this essay and the next, I introduce a diverse set of strategies and tactics which I believe provide a viable alternative to Serenity as a way in which to cope with pressing VUCA-Plus issues. This set of strategies and tools centers on focusing one's energy and engagement on the Essence of each VUCA-Plus issue. I begin this essay by drawing an important distinction between Essence and Essential. I then offer a reflection on the nature of Essence itself and then turn to the ways in which Volatility is transformed to the recognition of patterns, uncertainty is transformed to the maintenance of patterns, complexity is transformed to emergent self-organization, and ambiguity is transformed to Illumination. We find the Essence of life successfully lived in a VUCA-Plus world through a sustained focus on patterns, self-organization and illumination.

Essence vs. Essential

Before delving more deeply into the meaning and dynamics of Essence and the Lens of Essence, I wish to offer a more detailed description of the distinction to be drawn between the two key concepts in this series of essay: Essence and Essential. While these two terms have the same philological origins (Latin: *essentia*) and are often used interchangeably I wish to distinguish between them. In drawing the distinction, I first offer some of the words used in dictionaries when defining each term. The word Essential is used to designate something that is of utmost importance, something basic, something necessary, indispensable, or unavoidable. That which is Essential is important to the highest degree—it is necessary!

The word Essence is used when describing the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something—especially something abstract or elusive. The Essence of something determines its character. It is a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is. At a whole other level, Essence refers to an extract or concentrate obtained from a particular plant or other matter and used for flavoring or scent. I would suggest that these two meanings of the word “Essence” are actually not that far apart. Both uses of this word refer to setting aside the peripheral and finding that which is pure, clear and in some sense unified and coherent.

This attempt to connect the two meanings of Essence leads me to the distinction I wish to draw between Essential and Essence. A lens used to find the Essence of some system focuses on the single, unifying feature to be found in this system. By contrast, a lens used to discover what is Essential in a system focuses on the many components of this system. I suggest that Essential concerns a process for sorting out and prioritizing the many components of a complex system. When we determine what is Essential, we are prioritizing and sorting out what is valuable.

As I noted in one of my previous essays on Essentials, the clarification and prioritization of components can lead not just to ordering of these components but also to their sequencing. Processes associated with finding what is the Essence of a system concern processes of discernment. As I note in the present essay and in the next essay, the Lens of Essence focuses on deep, underlying patterns. That which forms and governs these patterns is discovered or uncovered. Learning takes place on a holistic level. There is no separation of the system into parts; it is not about establishing priorities. Rather, it is about learning about what dwells below and about what is to be most fully appreciated.

A Judging Viewpoint

I would point to a specific personality type and perspective offered by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers (Briggs-Meyer and Myers, 1995) (based on personality types identified by Carl Jung). The type and preference engaged with the Lens of Essentials is called *Judging*. It combines the Jungian preference for sensing and thinking. I offer a summary description of this type and preference offered on the 16 Personality Type website (Sixteen Personalities, 2024)

People with the Judging . . . personality trait feel most comfortable when the course ahead is well-marked. They would rather come up with five backup plans than deal with events as they come. Preferring to consider their options ahead of time, personality types with this trait prefer clarity and closure, sticking with the plan rather than going with the flow. It's as if Judging types always keep a mental checklist. When they cross something off their list – or even start an item on their list – they consider it complete and not open to reconsideration.

I would suggest that to cross something off of one's list, one must first order the items on this list—and this requires identification of that which is Essential.

Whether a life goal or a response to an emergency, people with the Judging personality trait can develop a clear and actionable plan. Judging individuals tend to have a strong work ethic, putting their duties and responsibilities above everything else. To them, rules, laws, and standards are the key to success. They can be too dependent on these measures, whether applied to themselves or others. But the intent is almost always one of fairness and results.

It is where and when one is fully aware of that which is Essential (including Essential values), that one can be clear, consistent and ethical in one's actions. It is also where and when one finds and remains aligned with a rigid set of Essential priorities and values that one can be rigid and poorly adapted to a VUCA-Plus world.

A Perceiving/Prospecting Viewpoint

An important contrast can be drawn at this point. The Lens of Essence is aligned with and energized by a personality type and preference labeled Perceiving by Myers-Briggs. It combines the Jungian preferences for intuition and feeling. The 16 Personality Type authors (Sixteen Personalities, 2024) have renamed Perceiving as "Prospecting" and offer the following summary description:

Prospecting . . . individuals are much more flexible [than the Judging individuals] when it comes to dealing with unexpected challenges. This flexibility helps them seize unexpected opportunities as well. These personality types tend to react to their environments rather than try to control them, helping them to make their own luck in whatever the world delivers. People with this trait hold that life is full of possibilities.

I would suggest that a life full of possibilities is generated by first discovering (or even inventing) that which is the Essence of life. It is in this Essence that all of the possibilities reside or from which they are generated.

People with the Prospecting personality trait can be slow to commit to something because of uncertainty or the potential of everything else. If they don't moderate this trait, indecision or a lack of conviction can be a problem. They can seem unfocused. What was important to them one week may be forgotten the next. . . . Despite those concerns, this personality trait can offer a great deal of creativity and productivity. Theirs is almost a stream of consciousness quality. . . . This can lead to serial passions that keep Prospecting individuals stimulated as they explore the buffet of choices always before them.

It is in this statement that we find both the opportunities and barriers in the life of those with a Perceiving/Prospecting orientation. They can be quite creative and productive if residing in Essence—in a world where there is clarity and consistency at its core. Without this core, the Perceiving/Prospecting person can become “untethered” and may spend their life wandering about in a VUCA-Plus world—living and acting without purpose or direction.

With this distinction between Essential and Essence in hand, we are now reading to delve specifically into the nature and dynamics of Essence.

The Essence of Essence

The Essence of something—some system—concerns the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of this something (system). Ultimately, essence is concerned with an abstraction—an ideal form. A Platonic ideal. The essence of something determines its distinctive character and its purpose for being. There is also an important sense that essence is a property or group of properties of something without which it would not exist or be what it is. From another perspective, essence is a distillation of something. It is an extract or concentrate obtained from a particular plant or other matter and used for flavoring or scent. It is the elixir to be found at the point when a particular entity is at its peak in terms of flavor, consistency or purity.

Essence and Polystasis

In essence, Essence is about going deep. It concerns setting aside the peripheral and the noise in order to find that which is pure, unadulterated and indispensable. We are searching throughout our life for the essence of this life (its ultimate meaning and purpose). We are engaged in the act of appreciation—

looking for that which is eternally fulfilling. We wish to catch ourselves “doing it right [correctly, ethically, effectively].” This search for the Essence that resides in any system, is particularly important with regard to the process of *Polystasis*. This is a process that I have introduced in this series of essay.

As I have noted in previous essays, we need to set the baseline as guide for predictions and actions in the dynamic and ever-changing way in which we seek to understand and work within our VUCA-Plus world. In the midst of this world, we find volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradictions. It is easy when faced with these challenging conditions to be whipsawed and subsequently lost regarding our own identity and the “true” nature of this world. Our search for and appreciation of the Essence to be found in this world—or in some segment of this world—is critical for this sense of Essence provided the anchor point for our sense of self and of our world.

Let me offer a bit more detail regarding this novel concept of *Polystasis*. As I noted in my first essay on Essentials (Bergquist, 2020) this word to designate the multiple functions being engaged by complex human systems. It is not simply a matter of returning to an established baseline of functioning (homeostasis) when considering how actions get planned and taken in a human system. In *Plans and the Structure of Behavior*, George Miller, Eugene Galanter and Karl Pribram (1960) described the dynamic way in which we are guided by a reiterative process of acting, testing, modifying and reengaging our behavior.

They presented a T.O.T.E. (test-operate-test-exit) process that is repeatedly engaged as we navigate our world. As is the case with T.O.T.E, Polystasis blends the concept of statics (stabilizing structures) with the concept of dynamics (adaptive processes). Operating in human systems, we are guided by certain core outcomes that do not readily change (statics); however, we must also be open to modifying these guiding outcomes as conditions in our environment change. The static notion of homeostasis is not appropriate—especially in our VUCA-Plus environment.

The Polystasis model incorporates three processes. First, there is *Appraisal*. As Peter Sterling (2020) has noted, there is an ongoing need to monitor the environment in which we are operating to determine if a new baseline of functioning (outcomes) is required. We informally or formally predict the probability that our current desired baseline of functioning can be achieved or even if it is desirable. As Miller, Galanter and Pribram suggest, we Test out (appraise) the current stasis. Second, we *Adjust* if the current baseline of desired functioning is no longer appropriate. We identify a new level of functioning. An alternative baseline is identified based on predictions regarding probability of being successful in achieving this baseline. Miller, Galanter and Pribram propose that we are Operating (Adjusting) when we establish a new stasis.

Third, we *Act* on behalf of the new baseline of desired functioning. In keeping with Miller, Galanter and Pribram, we then again Test (appraise) to see if the new level is still appropriate given ongoing changes in our environment and our experience of acting on behalf of the new stasis. T.O. T. E. and dynamics feedback systems are alive and well in the world of Polystasis. Under a model of homeostasis, daily adjustments are made by what I would identify as first-level change (Argyris, 2001). They require first-

level learning which is usually based on habitual ways of thinking. Such a model of stasis might effectively operate in a highly stable world.

However, our world might actually be operating in a rugged and perhaps even moving (dancing) landscape that looks nothing like a flat, stable plain (Miller and Page, 2007). There is no return to a previous state. Rather, adjustments are made based on what we predict will be the next setting of this dancing environment. These adjustments require shifts in the interpretation of environmental meaning and anticipation of environmental challenges. These shifts, in turn, require second-level learning and second-level change (Argyris, 2001). Polystasis comes alive when we recognize that this recursive process moves quickly. A new “normal” is quite fluid—for we continue to appraise, adjust and act in our challenging VUCA-Plus environment.

Having offered this brief review of the Polystatic process, I am ready to probe more deeply into the search for Essence—a search that I consider to be critical (as is the identification of Essentials) to the successful engagement of Polystasis.

The Singularity of Essence

Sometime the search for and appreciation of Essence leads us to one factor or desired outcome (the essence of that to which we aspire). I would call this *Portrait Appreciation*. This is the Bliss that Joseph Campbell describes—and that George Lucas has translated into a notion of “the force” in the *Star Wars* movies. According to Campbell (1991):

If you do follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be.

While the bliss and the force might be mythical in nature or the vision of someone who loves to work in the realm of myth, we have a “lived” version of these singular manifestations of Essence in the finding of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who has studied and written about something he calls the *Flow* experience. As in the case of bliss and force, the flow experience lifts one to a high state of awareness.

Flow occurs when one engages in some activity that is both challenging and achievable. Rather than being frozen in a state of anxiety (when facing something that is overwhelming) or stuck in a state of boredom (when facing something that is easily accomplished and often repetitive in nature), one exists in a threshold between anxiety and boredom that is highly motivating. When in a state of Flow (produced by an activity such as rock-climbing or researching a difficult topic), we lose all sense of time and find that all other priorities and perspectives fade from view.

I would suggest that we linger in Flow in order to participate in that which is both beautiful and (at times) terrifying. These strong feelings arise not just from the world in which we are engaged (whether it be a rock face or a pile of ancient texts) but also our internal world of strength. This strength is both beautiful and terrifying. Midst these competing and swirling emotions, we find a balance between challenge and support in the threshold of Flow. Within this threshold we often find significant learning (Sanford, 1980). Fundamentally, we are aware and profoundly appreciative of the emotions and attendant learning to be found in the singular Essence of Flow.

The Essence of Diversity

At other times, Essence is found in the appreciation of diversity. I would call this *Landscape Appreciation*. While Flow is best portrayed as a portrait of someone engaged in a singular activity, the Essence of Diversity is best portrayed as a landscape. As Dwight Jones (2020) (an award-winning photographer) notes, a forest of diverse forms and features cries out to us: “Bring it on!” There are many shapes, movements and forms of light and shade to be found in a forest. A sumptuous feast for the eyes. There is also the diversity of sounds in the forest, as well as many smells. Variable breezes are felt on our skin and there is a variety of adjustments made by the muscles in our body as we walk through the forest. Yes, “bring it on.”

Much like Dwight Jones, one of the primary characters in Isabel Allende’s *Portrait in Sepia* (2006) finds a landscape of interconnected diversity:

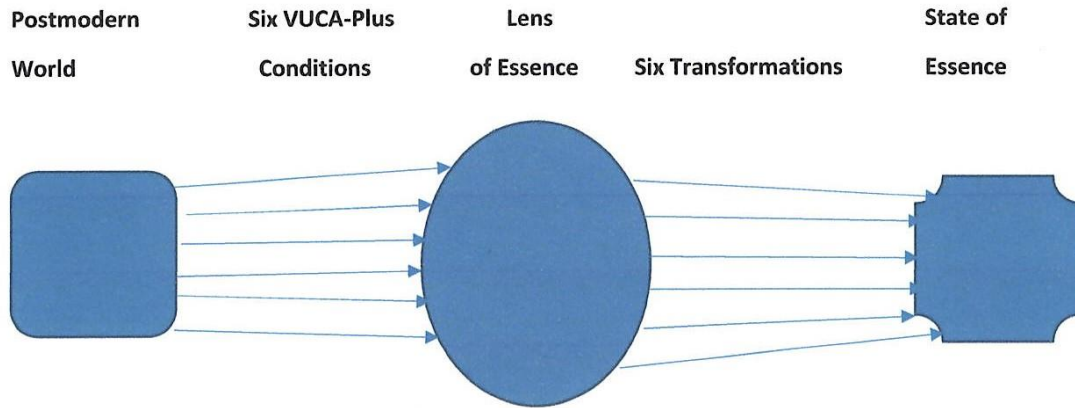
I was discovering that everything is related, is part of a tightly woven design. What at first view seems to be a tangle of coincidences is in the precise eye of the camera revealed in all its perfect symmetry. Nothing is casual, nothing is banal. Just as in the apparent vegetal chaos of the forest there is a strict relationship of cause and effect-- for each tree there are hundreds of birds, for each bird there are thousands of insects, for each insect there are millions of organic particles--so, too, the campesinos at their labors or the family, sheltering from winter inside the house are indispensable parts of a vast fresco.

For this young person in Allende’s novel, the vibrant, tightly woven design “is often invisible: the eye doesn’t capture it, *only* the heart.” I would beg to differ a bit. I think that the Essence of Diversity is experienced not only in one’s heart, but also in one’s eyes, ears, nose, skin and muscles. The diversity is brought together in a manner that may create as much Flow as Csikszentmihalyi finds in the active engagement of a rock face or stack of books. This diversity also sets the stage for the ongoing adjustment of baselines, predictions and actions when engaged in the dynamic and requisite process of Polystasis.

The Lens of Essence

With this introduction of Essence to be found in two forms, I wish to propose a model that portrays the fundamental way in which Essence operates. This portrayal centers on the function of Essence as a Lens that transformed the conditions of VUCA-Plus into forms and processes that not only lead to constructive engagement of the six conditions of VUCA-Plus but also lead to creation of a world of Essence that is learning-rich and life-affirming.

The Essence Model



Four Facets in the Lens of Essence

While I am about to suggest specific strategies in which to engage that moves a VUCA-Plus conditions to a state of Essence, I wish to offer four basic questions that open the way to these transformative moves. These might be considered the four facets of the Lens of Essence.

Leading Part: How is this system governed?

The first facet from which one can view a VUCA-Plus world concerns the leading part of the system being viewed. This might be considered a leadership facet. An organizational perspective is taken which encourages a focus on the person, unit or dispersed function operating in a system that provides guidance and coordination. Our Polystatic baseline is often established in conjunction with identifying and being guided by this leading part.

While the leading part is often found in all sectors of an organization (or any system) when it is young, , this leading part is likely to be found in a specific sector of the system as an organization matures (Bergquist, 1993b). Leaders are identified and provided with both authority and responsibility. One can discover something about the singular Essence of a system by observing what those serving as leaders in this system say and do. One can also gain insights regarding this system's Essence by observing the reactions of other members of the system to these words and actions. Given that polystatic baselines are often influenced by the leading part, members of an organization can be led astray if the leading part is inaccurate or biases in its portrayal of the world in which the organization is operating.

Statics: What provides the stability for this system?

A second facet is to be found in the policies, procedures and processes that hold the system together. This is a structural perspective. This is the conservative element of a polystatic process: the baseline and predictions must remain relatively stable if we are to operate with some level of sanity in our VUCA-Plus

world. While attention is usually drawn to the dynamic properties of a system, there are often overlooked mechanisms in the system that provide stability and continuity. It is in the statics (rather than dynamics) of a system that one will find Essence. That which is repeated and replicated every day and taken for granted constitutes the Essence of a system.

Those involved in the study of complexity would point to the fractals that are found in most living systems—especially those that are self-organizing. We find the same structure replicated at all levels of a pine tree (limbs, branches, needles). It is often noted that Mother Nature is rather lazy: when she finds something that works then she will replicate it many times and at many levels. The same can be said for human systems. It is in these replications that we find Polystatic stability.

Primacy: How does the founding of this system influence how this system is operating today?

A third facet of the Lens relates specifically to the founding experience of a system. What happens at birth and what happens first (primacy). What was the baseline and first predictions to be found when first establishing a polystatic process in any specific system. At the level of an individual human being, we can focus on this person's early life (a psychoanalytic perspective) or even their experience at birth when seeking to understand their motives and behavior later in life. One can engage a similar perspective in seeking to understand why a system operates as it does. There are decisions made early in the life of this system and events that impinge on the system when it is first formed that continue to have an impact on the system throughout its life.

In many cases, the responses made to early challenges in the life of a system continue to dictate the way in which members of this system continue to view the outside world—even when this world has changed and when the system has matured. Old baselines and predictions linger and influence (even determine) how we act in the world. The leadership style(s) engaged early in the life of a system are likely to remain in place, even when new leaders enter the system. Founding stories are told repeatedly as a way to ensure that values and priorities are maintained. Behavioral economists write about the power of primacy in decision-making. This effect operates at the level of an entire system. The Essence of any system resides in this primacy.

Central Operating Principle: What is the fundamental assumption about how this system does/should successfully function?

The Essence of any system contains the core beliefs, principles and assumption that exist in the minds (and hearts) of those operating in this system. My colleague, John Krubski (2023) offers a hierarchical perspective. He proposes that the identification of one central operating principle (COP) is critical when any team is planning, problem-solving or making decisions. The COP is, in turn, built on three distinctive (yet interdependent) propositions that the team identifies. These propositions, in turn, are derived from seven significant facts about the system that are identified by the team. John describes a 7-3-1 process that enables a team to gain clarity and insight regarding steps to be taken in addressing any challenge facing the system.

Much of what John Krubski proposes is based on recent findings from such fields as neurobiology, behavioral economics, and the decisional sciences. I would add to what John has proposed by suggesting that the Essence of a system is to be found in the central operating principle and that the baseline is best established in alignment with this principle. Furthermore, the diverse challenges posed by VUCA-

Plus can be effectively transformed into actionable items through the use of John’s 7-3-1 process. I would also suggest that the central operating principle is closely aligned with the leading part and statics of the system—which were established (at least in part) during the founding moments of this system. Taken together, these four facets constitute the Lens of Essence.

Having identified these four facets, I now turn to the specific strategies and tactics that can be deployed in using this Lens to extract and evolve Essence from the six conditions of VUCA-Plus—and to establish a viable and agile polystatic process.

From Volatility to Recognition of Patterns

In the white-water world, there is the “certainty” of rapid flow of the stream. But this rapid flow is not easily followed for it brings about frequent change. Volatility arises out of this rapidity of change. However, in the second segment of the white-water world we do find continuity and predictability that can offset the volatility. It is in the circular movement of water that repeated patterns emerge.

In the world away from the white water, we find similar cycles and patterns. These can be of great benefit in establishing polystatic baselines and predictions. There is a widely used statement regarding cyclical patterns. It takes several different forms. One is: “While history doesn’t repeat itself, historical events do tend to rhyme.” I might suggest several relevant adages and words often heard by those people who adjust the Lens of Essence to address the matter of cycles and patterns: “This too will occur again.” “Just wait. The opportunity will once again arise—just be patient.” “What can we learn from this event and from our strategy and tactics in addressing the challenge(s) associated with this event—for it will come again and we can be better prepared to address the challenge.” We will inevitably make mistakes; however, we can learn from our mistakes (as well as our successes) for things seems to repeat themselves.”

Appraising and Appreciating Patterns

Systems sustain certain patterns and replicate basic structures everywhere, while also ensuring that each subsystem is a bit different from other subsystems. Scientists suggest that viable systems are in dynamic equilibrium. Each viable system fits into a specific ecological niche and sustains a specific operational pattern that is compatible with (adapted to) this niche. The pattern is sustained and reinforced precisely because of this ongoing adaptive outcome.

The story doesn’t end here. No viable system is totally successful in adapting to its environmental niche. If it were totally successful, then it would dominate and literally take over the niche—leading eventually (and ironically) to its own demise. We see this poignantly and often tragically illustrated in the ways human beings have learned how to adapt with complete success to certain niches. We have “tamed” nature and in doing so have come to dominate specific environmental niches, which in turn has led to the extinction of certain species and to many environmental disruptions (such as climate instability).

In essence, there exists an inevitable tension between adaptive and maladaptive structures and processes that exist in any system as it relates to its environment. A major corporation can be quite effective in altering a product line to meet shifting customer needs—but ineffective in adjusting the complex, digitally-based processes needed to produce this altered product line. A family business can

set up a new research and development unit so that they can “keep up” with the changing VUCA-Plus world—but can’t find the right person inside the family to head this new division.

Patterns provide stability and the capacity of systems to adapt with some success and in a sustained manner to the environment in which it operates. Statics as a facet of the Lens of Essence represents this important function. Polystatic processes rely on these patterns if they are not to be overwhelmed. On the other hand, disruptions of and variations in patterns can be effectively addressed when a polystatic process is engaged, for adjustments in baselines and predictions are fundamental properties of this process. Disruptions and variations accompanied by a polystatic process enable an organization to adjust to changes in its environment. These disruptions and variations also enable other systems to dwell in this environment and enable each system to enter into mutually beneficial relationships with other systems in the environment. Each system is good enough to live in the environment, but not good enough to dominate this environment—this is the beauty of nature when working effectively.

This is all very nice in the abstract—but what does this look like in the real life of organizations and the leaders of organizations? How does the production manager in the corporation keep up with the needed changes in their production process? Should the family business move outside the family to find someone to head the new R and D division? And how does all of this relate to the professions of personal coaching and related organizational consultation? We are about to turn our attention to some of the major benefits and problems associated with organizational patterns and variations—and trace out implications for professional coaches and consultants.

Patterns in the World: Fractals and Sonatas

There is a remarkable structure to be found in nature that exemplifies the interplay between patterns and variations. I have already identified this structure: it is a fractal. We find natural fractals in the structure of pine trees, in the shape of many seashells and in river deltas. We also find fractals in domains other than nature. One of the places where fractals are beautifully displayed is in classical music—particularly the music of the so-called classical era.

In the sonata form, which was frequently used by Classical era composers including Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven, there are usually two major themes presented initially in the exposition. These two themes typically are contrasting. One is loud and the other is soft, one is fast. The other is slow. Or one is in a major key and the other is in a minor key. It is in the exposition that we find the major tensions and often the energy in a particular movement. This is not sufficient, however, to make the movement memorable for most listeners.

It is in the second part of the movement that the piece of music becomes most interesting. This second section of a sonata is typically known as the development—and it contains several (or many) variations on the two major themes. As listeners we may not even be conscious of the fact that these are the same two themes as in the exposition (providing continuity), but also that these two themes are being presented in a wonderfully varied way, often playing off in new ways against one another. The sonata movement then (as a rule) concludes with a recapitulation of the original two themes (allowing us as listeners to return to “the home base”) and perhaps a coda (usually a new theme) that allows the movement to end with a flourish.

If you want to get a sense of how the sonata form operates listen to a symphony by Mozart or Beethoven (though Beethoven often does a whole lot of new things with the sonata form). You can even listen to a later symphony by Brahms or Dvorak to get a good feel for the sonata form. Beethoven's piano sonatas (as the name implies) are built around this musical model. And to get an even more dramatic sense of a theme that is offered in diverse forms, listen to J.S. Bach's amazing Goldberg Variations.

Why do I mention the sonata form? This bit of music theory seems to be a bit distant from the fractal forms to be found in nature, a long way from the statics operating within organizations. I begin with this form because we can so vividly (almost poetically) see the fractal being literally "played out" in a musical sonata. We emotionally experience the divergence (turning outward) away from the comfortable and expected, and then experience the equally-as-emotional convergence (turning inward) back to the origins and to the expected.

I would propose that vital and enduring organizations also contain this balance and sequencing of convergence and divergence. This balance resides at the heart of the Polystatic process. A vital and enduring organization, in essence, creates its own white-water environment. Most importantly, the diversity associated with multiple perspectives, multiple sources of expertise, and multiple belief systems must be balanced against the "glue" that holds the organization together and then provides the container for this diversity. This glue is to be found in the leading part facet of the Lens of Essence.

We see two or more fundamental themes (purposes, directions, patterns of behavior, subcultures) playing out against each other in a variety of ways. We see these organizational themes coming together on occasion and then departing from one another. The patterned interplay between themes and variations are found at all levels of any organization and are manifest in many ways. I offer three of these ways.

Words, Metaphors and Stories

Patterns can be found at the "micro" level in the daily speech of those working in an organization. They are found in frequently used words and phrases and in the metaphors being engaged to describe specific events or desired outcomes in the organization. For example, specific sports or technological metaphors might frequently be used. While some sports metaphors, such as "teamwork" and "winning" are commonly used and are not unique to an organization, other sports metaphors are unique and specific to an organization. Similarly, some technological metaphors, such as "interfacing" and "module" are common, but others are unique to a specific organization. Look for the unique words and phrases that keep getting used. They tell you about the shared perspectives and values of those working in the organization. The central operating principles (fourth facet) might be manifest repeatedly in these words and phrases.

At a second level, we find patterns in the often extensive personal and organizational stories that are repeated in the organization. Parker Palmer (1990, p. 11) points to an approach taken by Barry Lopez who suggests that it is in the telling of stories that we create "an atmosphere in which [truth] becomes discernable as pattern." Stories are likely to be offered in particular to new employees or visitors. These stories might be about the founding of the organization (facet two). They might also be about triumphs or failures, about specific leaders and villains or enemies of the client or organization. It is not important to know whether or not the story is true, but it is important to determine what message is being

conveyed or lesson learned, why this story keeps getting offered, to whom the story is being offered, and why it is being offered repeatedly. Stories can tell us much about the fundamental assumptions, values and aspirations held collectively by members of the organization. Stories contain the glue (facet one) and reveal the organization's central operating principle (facet four).

Interactions, Gatherings and Norms

At a third level we are likely to find fractals and sonatas being observed in the personal behavior patterns of the client and in the widely exhibited behavior patterns of those working in and with the organization. Does your client have a routine each day when they come to the office (or when they work from home)? Is there a certain sequence of informal or formal meetings your client has each day with their staff? Why do these routines and sequences occur and what happens when the pattern is broken? Is there a common sequence of interactions that occur between your client and one or more of the other members of their organization?

At the organizational level, we can readily observe behavioral patterns that often involve the actual movement of people in the organization. For example, we might observe the repeated gathering of people at a specific place in the organization. Those involved with observing social patterns (or those designing buildings and social spaces) describe "socio-petal" (as in centripetal) movement of people toward one another—the pull toward some favored meeting place (Sommer, 1969). Why do they meet there and what transactions occur in these places?

I am reminded of the legendary meeting of the Banians (Indian traders) underneath the spreading Banyan Trees. These traders and travelers met to converse, exchange information, and learn from one another. The Banyan tree operates a bit like the country store where people once met in rural America. This same socio-petal force might be operating in mid-21st Century "county stores" --at McDonalds or Starbucks. They might also be operating in specific social media platforms that populate the Internet. It is not just the Banians who want to converse, exchange information and learn. What is the equivalent in your client's organization? Where are the meeting places (physical or digital) and what does their location and the content of conversation that occur in these socio-petal settings convey about the fundamental values and concerns of the organization?

Finally, we find patterns existing at a much subtler, more pervasive and more profound level with regard to norms (implicit rules) of the organization. What is rewarded repeatedly in the organization and what is punished or ignored? About what can members of the organization speak and about what can't they speak? With regard to your client, what is he "allowed" to do in the organization and what can't he do without taking a big risk (with regard to his reputation, power or status)? We often find that the norms of an organization are "self-sealed" – indicating that they are enforced but can't be discussed. The sealing is usually even more pervasive. We can't even mention that we can't talk about these norms.

Identification of Variations

What about variations in these patterns? We find variations at each of the levels we have just mentioned. It is through variations in the patterns of organizations that we find creativity. Ralph Stacey (1996) writes extensively about this creative dynamic in organizations, noting that organizations grow and adapt precisely because they are not orderly. Systems survive (and thrive) in a specific niche precisely because they are not fully adaptive and therefore cannot dominate their niche. We see what

happens when one organization builds a monopoly in a specific sector of our society and when one leader dominates the decision-making processes of an organization. Some sloppiness and competition are required to not only keep us honest but also to allow for creativity and change.

What do the variations look like in organizations? When listening to a sonata-form symphony we are often unaware of the subtle variations that are occurring—unless we are trained in musical composition and have a musical score in front of us. Similarly, we are often unaware of variations in organizational patterns unless we have a “trained ear” or have organizational documents to review while observing the operations of the organization.

First, we look for the obvious and seemingly trivial clues regarding variations. These are the surprises that occur in the organization: an embarrassing statement made by someone in a meeting (that may be revealing a truth about the organization), a miscommunication that occurs between two leaders (that may indicate two or more contradictory truths in the organization), a set of contradictory decisions or actions taken by two different subsystems (e.g. a commitment made by the marketing department that can’t be fulfilled by the production department).

Second, we look for emotionally charged events. Disrupted patterns will inevitably generate emotional responses: anxiety, disappointment, embarrassment, anger, hope. We can begin our investigation of variations by looking for emotional reactions that exceed those or differ from those occurring on a regular basis in the organization (the regular emotional reactions being part of the organization’s pattern). Once we identify the unique emotional reactions, then we seek out the events that generated these reactions. A variation of the pattern often underlies and has generated the emotional reaction.

Third, we look for rogue events. These are big things that occur in the organization and often serve as the base for the powerful narratives that are to be found in all organizations. These are the narratives about heroic actions, foolish events, a moment of courage or honesty, the critical and unanticipated decision made at the crossroads in the life of the organization, the success of an underdog (person or department) in the organization. An event is rogue if it is totally unexpected and often if it is preceded by a set of very predictable events.

Nasim Taleb (2010) uses the term *Black Swan* when describing those remarkable and powerful events that have caught our world by surprise. We all know that swans are white—but what happens when a black swan is discovered. Similarly, how could we have predicted the Arab Spring, the election of an African American as president, or the rapid expansion in the global use and influence of the Internet. As Taleb has noted, rogue events are not only unanticipated—these events are also often governed by power laws (exponential increases) that move quickly from small to large. Within organizations, small variations in the major pattern of the organization can lead to major changes in certain, unanticipated ways. These are the rogue events and the emergence of a whole flock of Black Swans.

Whether we are navigating a white-water environment, observing a flock of Black Swans, or listening intently to a sonata, it is possible to transform VUCA-Plus volatility to a form and condition that is manageable and a source of creativity and vitality. It is in this transformation that we find the capacity to engage a dynamic, feedback-based process of Polystasis. Specifically, we can apply the Lens of Essence in the identification of patterns and variations that operate in a system of which we are a member. It is in these patterns and variations that we find the leading parts, statics and central operating principle of this system. It is in the patterns that we find stability and in the variations that we

find the capacity to engage a polystatic process and the opportunity for change. Working together, stability and opportunity for change provide the key balancing ingredients for the ongoing agility and development of the system.

From Uncertainty to the Maintenance of Patterns

In engaging the Lens of Essence to address the issues found in any system, one can look for what Talcott Parsons (1955) called the latent pattern maintenance” that operates in any viable social system. Put in less elegant terms, this might mean looking for the Glue that holds a group of people together. This maintenance also provides the Glue that keeps a polystatic process from breaking apart under the pressure of unmitigated VUCA-Plus. Just as the human body can be overwhelmed by the allostatic load of unremitting stress (McEwen and Stellar, 1993), social systems can be overwhelmed by a polystatic load associated with VUCA-Plus. Appraisals become wildly inconsistent and inaccurate. Adjustments occur willy-nilly.

Glue and Load

It is in the maintenance of patterns that any social system finds manageable appraisals and appropriate adjustments in polystatic baselines and predictions. The resulting polystatic actions will tend to conform to (or at least align with) the established patterns of the system—making life inside the system more predictable and less stressful (thus reducing allostatic load on its members). If systemic glue provided by the patterns is not sufficient—if the polystatic load is too great—then the system and its members are likely to either freeze or move into a state of rapid oscillation (“dithering”).

As Karl Pribram has suggested, this state of dithering might often set the stage (tipping point) for a major phase shift. An “emergence” takes place that requires a “radically” new polystatic baseline, set of predictions, and actions. All of this is quite startling for everyone involved—and is a source of major stress (and increased allostatic load) for those who must adjust to this major, transformational shift. A second level of learning (Argyris, 2001) must be engaged. When engaged during a major phase shift, this level of learning requires reflection on one’s own way of processing information. We must also challenge our current way of thinking and solving problems. Increased allostatic load inevitably accompanies this demanding cognitive (and affective) adjustment.

So where do we find the glue that enables us to live with and in a VUCA-Plus world filled with uncertainty? I would suggest two constructive sources of this glue. These are traditions and culture. There is also a third source of glue that is just as powerful as traditions and culture—and is often a primary source of these traditions and culture. This glue is the forementioned social defense mechanism that was first introduced by Menzies Lyth and subsequently studied by other psychoanalytically inclined observers of human systems.

Traditions and Culture

We find the glue operating in such seemingly minor events as the celebration of birthdays or preparing a special dinner every Sunday in a family system. Within organizations and tribal systems, the glue can be found in the celebrations of success (joining the Fortune 500 or returning from a successful hunt). It also

can be found in the initiation rites that bring young people into maturity within a specific community, or in the retirement parties that enable someone to leave an organization with recognition and honor.

This glue might be embedded in the traditions that are embraced and engaged by members of a community. As represented in *Fiddler on the Roof* (a musical about life in an early 20th Century Russian shtetl), the community is sustained and protected through the patterned engagement of rituals such as the Friday evening Shabbat meals. Glue is also found in the central role played by the rabbi and in the marriage ritual.

Even more broadly, the culture of a specific organization or society can play a major role in holding it together—especially during times of collective angst (such as exists in many VUCA-saturated societies today). It is through the culture of an organization that anxiety can be either accentuated or contained. It is also through the culture of an organization, that the bonding of its members can be engaged in the constructive reframing and redirecting of anxiety (Bergquist, 2020)

There is another benefit. A strong culture enables members of an organization to better understand, overcome or adapt to the real (or imagined) threats inherent in the anxiety. In other words, uncertainty and attendant anxiety are reduced and patterns are maintained when members of an organization collectively (culturally) create a narrative about the source of the uncertainty and anxiety—as well as the current impact of this uncertainty and anxiety on the organization. Cultural narratives can also point out ways in which VUCA-Plus conditions (especially uncertainty) and attendant anxiety can be reduced. These ways are represented in the sustained patterns of operation in the organization or society. Pattern maintenance often is based in the creation of, providing support for, and occasionally modifying these organizational narratives.

Proponents of appreciative inquiry (AI) (Cooperider and Whitney, 2005) push the role of organizational narrative one step further. They suggest that the shift in an organization's narrative might be the most powerful way in which to bring about change and improvement in the functioning of an organization—for the narrative provides both continuity and guidance regarding the pathway to change. Edgar Schein (1999) suggests that an organizational culture should be built on the narratives of past successes. The AI practitioners would agree. They would also suggest that this narrative should focus on an organization's real (not imagined) strengths and successes.

The fundamental interplay between the containment of anxiety and the formation of organizational cultures was carefully and persuasively documented several decades ago by Isabel Menzies Lyth (1988). She describes ways in which nurses in an English hospital cope with the anxiety that is inevitably associated with issues of health, life and death. Menzies Lyth notes how the hospital in which nurses work help to ameliorate or at least protect the nurses from anxiety. She suggests that a health care organization is primarily in the business of reducing this anxiety. On a daily basis, all other functions of the organization are secondary to this anxiety-reduction function.

It is specifically the culture of the organization that serves as the primary vehicle for addressing anxiety and stress. The culture of an organization is highly resistant to change—and plays a central role in maintaining the patterns of the organization—precisely because change directly threatens the informal system that has been established in the organization to help those working in it to confront and make sense of the anxiety inherent in the operations of the organization. On the other hand, culture can

facilitate change if it is needed—especially if the culture is deeply embedded in a foundation of appreciation.

Narratives of success in an appreciative culture can provide guidance in plotting the journey of change (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). Furthermore, as Edgar Schein (1999) has noted, the culture of an organization is often the residue of the organization's success in confronting varying anxiety-producing conditions in the world. To the extent that an organization is adaptive in responding to and reducing pervasive anxiety associated with the processes of organizational learning and related functions of the enterprise, the existing cultures of this organization will be reinforced, deepen and become increasingly resistant to challenge or change. It is in this way that organizational culture and organizational containers produce the most effective solutions for addressing the anxiety and sources of anxiety facing the organization. There are other solutions that are not as visible or often as constructive. These are the social defense systems . . .

Social Defense Systems

As I have already noted, Isabel Menzies Lyth (1988) suggested that anxiety gets addressed on a daily basis through cultural structures and processes that operate in an organization. Menzies-Lyth labels these as “social defense system.” They are the patterns of interpersonal and group relationships that exist in the organization. Menzies Lyth's observations have been reaffirmed in many other organizational settings. I have written about social defense systems operating in corporations (Bergquist, and Brock, 2008), postsecondary educational institutions (Bergquist, 1993a; Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008) and (like Menzie Lyth) in health care systems (Bergquist, Guest and Rooney, 2004; Fish and Bergquist, 2024). Anxiety is to be found in most contemporary organizations—for they operate in a world of VUCA-Plus. Efforts to reduce this anxiety are of prominent importance.

Somehow an organization that operates in an anxiety-producing climate of VUCA-Plus must discover or construct a culture-based buffer that both isolates (contains) the anxiety and addresses the realistic, daily needs of its employees. Some organizational theorists and researchers, for example Deal and Kennedy (2000) as well as Schein (1992; 1999) have suggested that the rituals, routines, stories, and norms (implicit values) of the organization help members of the organization manage anxiety inside the organization. It is important to note that these rituals, routines, stories and norms are not a random assortment of activities. Rather, they cluster together and form a single, coherent pattern in the organization—they create meaning as well as contain anxiety.

From Complexity to Emergent Self-Organization

Scott Page is one of the major guides through the world of complex systems. He notes that complex systems not only contain many parts (complicated) they also contain parts that are interwoven with one another (Miller and Page, 2007). It is in this interweaving that we find the Lens of Essence being applied to a system—for the interweaving yields a structure that holds the system together and enables it to be agile and adaptive:

While complex systems can be fragile, they can also exhibit an unusual degree of robustness to less radical changes in their component parts. The behavior of many complex systems emerges from the activities of lower-level components. Typically, this emergence is the result of a very powerful organizing force that can overcome a variety of change to the lower-level components. (Miller and Page, 2007, p. 9)

Self-Organizing

Ilya Prigogine (1984), one of the other (and earlier) guides to the world of complex systems, won a Nobel Prize through his observation of this adaptive process in complex systems. He considered these systems to be “self-organizing.” There is no central control unit in these systems. Much as in the case of flocking birds and swarming fish, there is no one lead bird or fish; rather, there is an emergent interdependence of all members of the flock of birds or school of fish.

The actions taken by any one member of the system (be it an organization, flock or school) are strongly influenced by actions taken by the member next to it. This “neighbor” effect is very powerful and strongly influences the dynamics of most biological systems (including human systems). Our establishment of polystatic baselines and predictions is strongly influenced by the baselines and predictions established by our neighbors. It is not only the leading part in a system that can provide direction. In recent years, an analytic tool called Agent-Based Modeling (Wilensky and Rand, 2015) has emerged that is based primarily on the recognition and study of this neighborhood effect.

There are many benefits associated with this neighboring effect. First, there is no need for designating or empowering a leader. This saves time and resources. Second, there is the potential for greater agility. Influence and information flow through the system, unimpeded by formal hierarchy or chains of command. I bring in several concepts introduced in our first essay on essentials when considering several other important benefits of self-organization and the neighborhood effect. These concepts concern the process of Allostasis as identified by Peter Sterling (2020) and the delay functions that System dynamic theorists such as Donella Meadows (2008) suggest operates in all systems.

When we rely on information received from our neighbor, then the delay in the transmission of this information is much quicker than if it comes from a more distant source (such as a leadership command center). Furthermore, if allostasis rather than homeostasis is operating in most dynamic systems—as we considered in the essay on Essentials—then the ability to predict what is about to occur is critical in the ongoing adjustment of each member of the system to an ever-shifting environment. The neighborhood effect greatly aids this predictive capacity, for the predictive power of any one member of the system is much greater if it is predicting the behavior of its neighbor (proximal prediction) than if it is seeking to predict the behavior of some distant entity (be it a leader or some other member of the system) (distal prediction).

This interdependence is deep and defining of the system’s Essence. Miller and Page (2007, p. 7) put it this way: “We need to find those features of the world where the details do not matter, where large equivalence classes of structure, action, and so on lead to a deep sameness of being.” I would suggest that this search for a “sameness of being” in a system serves the function of moving one from the bewildering challenge of understanding complexity to a clear and useful appreciation for the way in which complexity leads to self-organization. In such a system, we lead by following. We coach rather than control or rescue (Emerald and Lanphear, 2015).

Self-Authoring

The search for “sameness of being” is not easy. As Robert Kegan (1994) suggested prophetically many years ago, we are often “over our heads” when it comes to addressing the complexity of contemporary life. We try to address the complexity by engaging in what Kegan calls third order consciousness. The first order is found primarily among children and adolescents –and I would suggest among those living in the wonderland of Serenity. The second order is found among those adults who are trying to cope with the challenges of VUCA-Plus primarily by “hunkering down” and attempting to merely survive. While the third order is more adaptive than second order to ordinary day-to-day life in most mid-21st Century societies, it doesn’t work when it comes to addressing the critical challenges of complexity—as well as the other five conditions of VUCA-Plus.

A fourth order of consciousness enables one to construct one’s own version of reality (self-authoring) within the context of one’s relationship with other people. While those living in Serenity live in a distorted world that has been constructed by other people (those in authority or with power), those seeking Essence find a way to “self-organize” their way of being in the world that is free of external, hierarchical constraints. Fourth order consciousness, according to Kegan (1994, p. 96) “amounts to the continuous creating and recreating of roles rather than just the faithful adherence to the demands within them.”

Those who embrace a fourth order consciousness take full responsibility for their construction and recognize that other constructions are equally valid. Borrowing from the typology used by William Perry (1970), these folks recognize the relativism of all versions of reality yet find that they can (and must) commit to one construction of this reality. They find the Essence of reality for themselves and allow this Essence to guide their actions in a dynamic, polystatic-based manner.

It should be noted that Kegan introduces a fifth order of consciousness which he suggests is rarely attained. This order involves the recognition of broader patterns and interconnections among people and systems (the approach to Essence found in our analysis of the move from Volatility to Patterns). It should also be noted that Kegan (1994, pp. 100-101) does not envision people living all of the time in fourth order (let alone fifth order) consciousness. He uses the analogy of learning to drive a car using a stick-shift versus learning to only drive a car with automatic transmission.

Some people can move easily between stick-shift and automatic transmission cars. Others are constrained by their failure to learn how to shift gears themselves. Similarly, those who can engage in fourth (or fifth) order consciousness can shift back to third order when living their daily life. Those that are “stuck” in third order will find themselves “over their head” when confronted with VUCA-Plus issues. The rabbit hole with its entrance to a wonderland of Serenity may be tempting for those who are unable (or unwilling) to engage fourth order consciousness that is relational and self-authoring.

From Ambiguity to Illumination

Ambiguity is perhaps best portrayed as a visual display. What we see is ambiguous because it is “cluttered” with many things (the condition of complicated that was identified by Miller and Page). Alternatively, what we see is hazy. It is hard to make out the details through the fog (or through the distortion in our own lens). How then do we engage and overcome this ambiguity. The condition of

Serenity would suggest that we simply eliminate the clutter, leaving us with only one thing upon which to focus (thus blinding ourselves to many important factors). We also can choose to simply leave the scene and look for conditions that are neither complicated nor hazy. We find a rabbit hole down which we can leap in order to enter a wonderland of alternative facts and fake news.

There is an alternative perspective (lens) that enables us to more fully understand and appreciate Essence as it is found even in an ambiguous condition. This perspective enables us to set polystatic baselines and make polystatic predictions even in hazy environment. To illustrate (and illuminate) this perspective, I turn to an analogy I have often presented when teaching about or writing about the processes of organizational consulting and coaching. The analogy concerns a ship entering a body of water (such as the San Francisco Bay) that offers the challenge of many shifting currents and tides.

These currents and tides can be disruptive. The fog might have settled in (as is often the case with the San Francisco Bay). This makes it hard for the captain and crew to see what is in front of them. The alternative perspective involves finding (or creating) a lighthouse that provides information regarding the complicated conditions in which the captain and crew find themselves. A strong light is emitted that pierces the haze. The lighthouse might indicate that it sits on land (to be avoided). It can also serve as a reference point for identification of a safe channel for traveling to an appropriate berth.

One of the primary responsibilities of the ship's captain is to bring the ship safely to the entrance of the harbor (in this case entrance to the San Francisco Bay). At this point, the captain either brings their ship to the designated berth themselves (Model I) or gives up control to a tugboat captain (Model II) or a harbor pilot (Model III). Alternatively, the captain retains control but seeks guidance from signals emitted by the harbor lighthouse (Model IV). What should be done to help the captain of this ship safely come to the designated berth?

Go It Alone (Model I)

The first approach that might be taken by the captain of a ship is to “go it alone.” After all, between harbors, the ship's captain is in charge. As the captain of an organization or captain of one unit in an organization, a leader can use position power or reward and punishment power in order to determine the direction of or guide the implementation of a specific change in the organization or in the life of a specific person. While there is considerable ambiguity in the world of this sole leader—and many currents and tidal changes for the ship's captain to navigate—the ship's captain retains control and learns alone from the mistakes that inevitably occur (in this turbulent VUCA-Plus world).

This first approach to ambiguity begins with the assumption that one should, as a leader, take immediate and primary responsibility for any change that is to take place in the life of their organization. One changes things by doing it himself or herself, rather than by somehow convincing other people that they should implement it. This “Go It Alone” (Model One) practitioner is an administrator, an implementor, an activist. The best thing one can do as a Model I leader is to act in a decisive and courageous manner when faced with ambiguity. One can learn from one's mistakes along the way and adjust things as needed. This is learning by doing—the “American” way.

Unfortunately, this type of activist learning is often done in isolation. One is working alone on the frontier and is not exposed to the challenging and corrective feedback that other people can offer. Those who learn alone are

vulnerable to assumptions that are untested and self-validating. Thinking tends to be fast and filled with distorting “heuristics” (such as doing what I have done before or doing what everyone else is doing) (Kahneman, 2011). Furthermore, if learning does occur then it tends to be first level (doing more of or less of what I am already doing) rather than second level (doing something different) (Argyris, 2001). The Model leader tries harder, puts in more hours at work, and spends more time worrying about the fate of their organization. However, they are still doing the same thing and still eliciting the same outcomes.

Model One leadership is often engaged when an organization is in a crisis mode—which is common in a VUCA-Plus world. Leaders of the organization serve as “firefighters” and quickly put out the fire and resolve the crisis. Unfortunately, the organization usually returns to its previous crisis state, regardless of the wisdom and skill of the Model One leader, for the organization has not increased its capacity to identify and solve problems before these become crises. A vicious cycle of crisis and dependency sets in and is hard to break. Crisis management prevails.

Delegated Authority (Model II)

The captain turns their ship over to a tugboat captain. While not having direct control over the ship, as it is being guided into a harbor berth, the tugboat captain does make use of the energy and other resources of his own boat to move the ship into or out of the berth. The tugboat captain in some sense “persuades” the ship’s captain that it is appropriate for his tugboat to take over control of the ship, because he (the tugboat captain) has expertise (knowledge of the harbor).

The ship’s captain does not (in most instances) have to provide any energy or other resources in order to move the ship into the berth. All of the power that is needed to bring about the change (safe movement of the ship) is found initially in the tugboat captain and is transferred back to the ship captain when the ship arrives at its berth. Similarly, the leader of an organization typically delegates authority and responsibility to someone in their organization to handle the ambiguity by providing resources (money, time, equipment) that are needed to bring about achievement of the desired goal (arriving at the “berth”). However, sufficient resources are rarely enough if there is considerable ambiguity, for these are often the wrong resources or the wrong goals.

As in the case of Model I, the learning usually takes place in isolation and is both fast and first level. The one major difference is that the person making the mistakes and seeking to learn from their mistakes is not the captain of the ship. On the one hand, it is the person to whom control was delegated that makes the mistakes. This makes the stress and anxiety that much greater and the temptation to think fast and engage in first level learning that much greater. On the other hand, the leader can play it safe and declare that it was “not their fault” that the ship failed to arrive at the appropriate dock. They can always fire the employee or an outside consultant (tugboat captain) if the venture fails.

Temporary Leader (Model III)

Under conditions of ambiguity, a leader can temporarily step back (or step down) and ask someone else to take change—this person being better prepared to navigate through the haze or find an appropriate way around the ambiguity. Our nautical analogy further clarifies the Model Three function. In directing a ship into or out of a berth, a Harbor Pilot often takes over direct control of the ship, temporarily, in order to move the ship safely through the harbor. The power or energy that is needed for this change (ship’s movement) to take place resides

within the leadership role (harbor pilot) rather than in the delegation to some other person or group in the organization. (the tugboat).

As in the case of Model I, the authority structure remains unchanged, but a new person (harbor pilot) temporarily assumes this authority. Learning is still likely to occur in isolation. The temporary leaders (like the Model II delegate) will feel the stress and anxiety of monitored performance. They ultimately have little lasting authority and can be easily booted. Everything has to work the first time. In most cases, there is no learning from mistakes. They have no time or space for either slow thinking or second level change.

A colleague of mine told me about her father who served as a harbor pilot working with ships entering the San Francisco Bay. For him there was no apparent ambiguity, for he was well-acquainted with all of the currents and tides and could see through the notable San Francisco fog. Unfortunately, not everyone has a harbor pilot to whom they can turn for guidance regarding the ambiguity they face. Furthermore, there are many people who may declare that they are harbor pilot but are actually simply representatives from a world of distorted Serenity.

The “legitimate” harbor pilot is assisting her client (ship captain) in being successful in not only arriving safely at the berth, but also learning something about the harbor. While the captain will probably still need to bring in the harbor pilot the next time they arrive at this destination, they can serve more as a co-pilot since they “know” their ship better than does the harbor pilot. Collaborative engagement might be of benefit to everyone.

When we generalize beyond the San Francisco Bay, we find that the roles played by the temporary Model III leader are varied: *negotiator, trainer, facilitator, diagnostician, expert* and (less frequently) *judge*. Whereas the Model I and II leaders must have access to power and resources, the temporary Model III must have knowledge of the ambiguous environment in which the organization is operating (e.g. fully “knowledge” about the San Francisco Bay). They must also possess superior interpersonal skills—especially when working with the leader(s) who brought them in.

Illuminating Leadership (Model IV)

To return once more to our nautical analogy, Model IV leadership is provided by a lighthouse. This source of illumination is used by the captain and crew to guide the ship safely into or out of the harbor. Control of the ship resides with the captain and crew. Model IV is all about free will and responsibility. Essence is contained in the light which is emitted by the lighthouse. There is a single source of light. One point of reference. The captain and crew have only to attend to, appreciate, and act upon the information emitted by the light. If the information provided by the lighthouse is ignored, the ship may crash on the proverbial rocks.

The responsibility for this crash resides with the captain and crew -- provided that the lighthouse is providing valid and useful information (Argyris, 1970). More generally, all polystatic processes require that the information being engaged in setting the baseline and directing the predictions must be accurate (valid). The triangulation process that I am about to introduce is directly applicable here. The Information must also be relevant to the predictions and decisions being made (useful). Relevance is often an elusive matter for it is always tempting to make “relevant” that which can be measured rather than that which is truly of use (but difficult to measure).

Neither power nor interpersonal skills are of primary importance to the Model IV source of guidance and information. This type of leadership depends on the skills of those working in an organization to *generate and*

integrate information. The roles played by those doing institutional research and strategic planning are critical. Computer-based tools that enable the synthesis of abundant sources and types of information are required. Most importantly, the four key questions regarding Essence that I noted before have to be addressed based on the valid information available—and information must come from multiple sources using multiple measures.

It is in the fourth model that the Lens of Essence is being fully deployed. Valid and useful learning takes place because it is based on the collection of information from at least three sources using at least three measurement tools. The sources might come from inside one's organization as well as outside. Information might be gathered both from those creating a product or providing a service and from those using the product or receiving the service. At least three sources are used because at least two of the three are likely to provide similar information, while the third source (even if yielding differing information) can further enrich the insights to be gained.

Similarly, the triangulation of methods is likely to produce not only valid information (produced from two of the methods) but also richly diverse insights (coming from use of at least one of the methods). These methods might include collecting existing documents (e.g. sales records, profit and loss statements), interviews, direct observation of the work being done, and/or questionnaires (e.g. consumer satisfaction survey, employee morale inventory). A second-level method might also be engaged. This would be observation (and questionnaire-based ratings) of initial reactions to information received via the other methods and from the diverse sources.

Triangular structures are intended to provide stability when building a bridge or constructing a roof. Similarly, the triangulation of sources and methods provides stability and credibility when constructing a lighthouse to guide a ship/organization and its captain/leaders when coming to its designated berth (desired outcome) midst ambiguity (currents, tides and fog). It is with the information from multiple sources using multiple methods that members of an organization are best able to engage in the process of collective learning regarding its own performance in the past and potential performance in the future.

Conclusions

There is inevitably a sense of Awe – and a touch of mystery--when we approach that which is the Essence of a system in which we are operating. We know intuitively that we have identified, discovered (perhaps even helped to invent) something that is very special. This is the “elixir” or distillation of everything that is unique and of value in this system. This is the loadstone for the establishment of a viable polystatic process.

All of this must be kept in mind when we encounter, work and live in a world that is turbulent and filled with contradictions. We must hold tightly to our chest (and heart) that which is of the Essence—for it can be easily lost or abandoned on a stormy (whitewater) sea with colliding (contradictory) currents and swirling winds. I turn to these challenging VUCA-Plus conditions of turbulence and contradiction in the next (final) essay in this series.

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