

Understanding Structure and CreativeTension

Structure: The Power and the Beauty

by Robert Fritz

The underlying structure of anything determines its behavior. This is a principle of structural dynamics, which is the study of how and why structure has the impact it does on individuals, relationships, teams, organizations, and so much of our world.

There are some pretty obvious ways structure governs our actions. We walk through a building along the passageways that have been established by the architectural design. We don't go through walls, but are controlled by them. We use the doors to enter and exit rooms. Our lives have similar architectural structures built into the circuitry. These structures are not as visible as a building, but they are just as influential, solid and tangible. The elements of your personal structure include your dynamic urge (from appetites to vague longings to your highest aspirations and values), reality as it actually is regardless of your perceptions of it, and, in certain dysfunctional structures, the various concepts you hold. Together, these elements give rise to predictable patterns of behavior. [BC add in here..Your Models for Action](#)

The structures of our lives produce two types of behaviors, advancing and oscillating. In an advancing structure, you are able to create the results you want, and that success becomes the platform for future success. But in an oscillating structure success is eventually neutralized and reversed: the great relationship that doesn't last, the business success that leads to a financial loss, the project that first looks good, but then creates more problems than it's worth.

You have both types of structures in your life. Most people do not realize that a structure is in play causing these patterns. And, without a change of underlying structure, the pattern will play itself out. If you are in an oscillating pattern, change, even the most positive types, will be reversed, and you will find yourself back in the same boat as before.

Structure generates behavior. It determines outcomes. It produces patterns. You can't fool mother structure. But you can change the structures you are in. The key, in a nutshell, is to create a new structure: structural tension in which you know the outcome you want to create, and are clear about current reality. These two data points create a tension. Tension always seeks resolution. That's a dynamic. In other words, because of the tension a force/energy is generated toward movement. The movement has one of two possibilities: you accomplish your goal; you give up your goal. In the creative process we take action to accomplish our chosen goals, and so the structure usually leads to the outcomes we want.

BC adds here: Internal Due Diligence Process: Future = What's Wanted, Current = What's Working, What's Not Working, Gap or Tension, What's Needed, and then Taking Action to Advance.

But it is easy to say: know what you want, know where you are. It is more challenging to do it. However, you can practice this principle anytime, and the best way to begin is to choose little creating projects: a dinner party, a poem, a rearranged room. Something that can be done within a few minutes or hours. Hold the image in your mind of the outcome you want while being aware of the current reality that exists in relationship to that outcome. Your actions will become more strategic, more effective, and easier to take than usual.

It is your various concepts that create the oscillating pattern in your life. If you can leave your various beliefs and concepts at the door of your creative process, the structure can change. (Check out The Belief Business Vs. The Creating Business:www.robertfritz.com/index.php?content=writingnr&news_id=142)

Structure is causal. And that's pretty darn powerful indeed. But there is also a beauty to structure. In nature, the designs are everywhere from the structure of flowers to snowflakes to the human body to shells of all kinds. Mostly these structures are based on something called dynamic symmetry, which is found in the mathematical proportion: 1:1.618.

In the arts, the beauty of structure is found everywhere from simple song form to the blues to the sonata allegro of the classic symphony to the driving power of the screenplay to the form of all types of sports to the most basic forms of housing to the brilliance of truly innovative architecture. Our world is filled with breathtaking structures of incredible beauty, but mostly, our eyes are closed to them. I suppose it's like the old saying, the fish can't see the water it is in.

Today, you will be surrounded by gorgeous, stunning, exquisite, magnificent structures. If you begin to look, your eyes will become open to an aspect of the world most people miss seeing. Something wonderful can happen as this universe within the world opens to you. The beauty of structure will enrich your life, and your life will become more beautiful.

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Structural dynamics

Structural dynamics is the study of how structural constructs lead to predictable behavioral patterns, otherwise known as macrostructural patterns, the long-range patterns that reoccur in a person's life. Two basic patterns can be observed: oscillating and advancing. These two predictable patterns occur in quite specific and unique ways; and in each instance the same steps and the same sequence can be observed in every aspect of personal and professional life. The oscillating pattern emerges when a person, team, or organization takes action to accomplish a goal; and after achieving the desired result a reversal occurs. Examples illustrating this sequence include the business success that eventually leads to a financial loss, the great love that ends with a break-up, the successful project that turns into an undesirable predicament. In contrast, the advancing pattern creates momentum when outcomes are achieved, and accomplishment builds a platform for future success.

[edit] Tension-resolution systems

Underlying structures cause these behavioral patterns. The basic structural unit is the "tension-resolution system". In musical composition, harmonic tension behaves as a structural dynamic when it seeks resolution. Similar tension-resolution systems appear in behavioral macrostructural patterns. In the oscillating pattern, opposing tension-resolution systems dominate, and "non-equilibrium" occurs when the desired outcome is achieved. Structurally, the opposing tension resolution system remains and resolving it requires moving away from the

achievement. In the advancing pattern, a single tension-resolution system dominates, and equilibrium occurs by achieving the desired outcome, the structural point at which the desired state and the actual state are equal. From these observations, this principle was developed: **the underlying structure of anything determines its behavior. Without a change of underlying structure, change efforts fail, and the original behavior patterns reoccur.** This explains why many sound change efforts fail within organizations. Organizational oscillating patterns occur when building up capacity, then downsizing, then building up capacity again; or centralizing decision making, de-centralizing decision making, and then centralizing it again; or focusing on long-term growth, then refocusing on short-term demands, and later refocusing on long-term growth again. When an underlying organizational structure leads to oscillation and remains unchanged, the structure rejects any change effort in a similar way that a body rejects an implanted organ. Conversely when a change of underlying structure designed to support advancement occurs, any subsequent change effort increases the likelihood of success and sustainability.

[\[edit\]](#) **The creative process**

Fritz developed his ideas about the creative process from the arts rather than psychology, making a distinction between the creative process and creativity. Creativity usually focuses on idea generation and comes from suspending the norm. However, Fritz argues that to advocate withholding critical judgment in favor of free association, brainstorming, or other systems in an effort to bypass the usual thought processes will not guarantee successful creativity or accomplishment of the goal. In the arts a consummate professional must produce consistent quality outcomes and meet rigid deadlines. **Rather than freeing the mind, an artist focuses the mind, often by using *structural tension*—the relationship between two related data points.** With repeated application and refinement what was once the unusual then becomes the usual. A desired outcome or goal, the first data point is contrasted with its relational current reality, the second data point. As the creative process begins, a difference exists between the desired state and the actual state, and this difference creates a useful tension. The composed tension is not psychological nor is it associated with stress, anxiety, or pressure. Rather it is structural. Clarity about the desired outcome and the actual situation, establishes a structural tendency that moves the structure toward tension resolution; and strongly motivates the best actions to achieve the desired outcome. The actions may be conventional. But often inadequate resources limit the conventional means to accomplish goals. Therefore, invention and innovation emerge naturally bringing forth new ways to accomplish goals. Fritz argues against glorifying inspiration. Professionals can create irrespective of their circumstances. Ideas about structure and the creative process fundamentally underscore Fritz's observations that like other structures, the mind seeks equilibrium. By nature, the mind desires a state of equilibrium and attempts to create order out of disorder. Fritz advocates using the mind to compose a structured state of non-equilibrium (structural tension) in order to originate new ideas. The mind then generates structurally relevant ideas which do not emerge using usual thought processes.

[\[edit\]](#) **Problem-solving vs. creating**

Fritz argues for a distinction between problem-solving and creating. Problem-solving is taking actions to have something go away: the problem. While problem-solving has its place, as a persistent approach, it limits accomplishment. The elimination of a problem does not mean that the desired result can be created. As distinguished, solving a problem does not by design lead to a creation. **Creating is taking action to bring into being that which does not yet exist: the desired outcome.**