

## Four levels of structural dynamics in groups

from David Kantor and Nancy Heaton Lonstein, Reframing Team Relationships,  
page 415 in: *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*

“... All of these levels operate at once. All affect the quality of team performance and relationships.

### QUALITIES OF ACTION

The most accessible level of structure to detect and understand, this includes the psychopolitical stances (mover, opposer, observer, bystander) as well as other unspoken messages embedded in people’s behavior. Qualities are most evident not in the words, but in body language, eye movements, facial expressions, voice tone, breathing, and gesture.

### DOMAINS OF PURPOSE

The goals and desires which are fundamentally driving people. Many situations get confused because one person is operating in the affect domain -- seeking nurturance and intimacy. Another converses in the meaning domain, searching for validation, a sense of belonging, or the opportunity to learn more about the world. A third, perhaps unnoticed by the rest of the team, operates in the power domain, pursuing efficacy, competence, freedom, constraint, or dominance.

### PARADIGMS OF THE SYSTEM

The overriding set of assumptions embedded in the organization’s values about authority and boundaries. People may expect their system to be closed (emphasizing stability, group loyalty, security, clear boundaries, and tight controls); open (emphasizing flexibility, collaboration, consensus, and authentic communication); or random (emphasizing variety, individuality, high achievement, excitement, unpredictability, and fun). Any of these may be healthy or unhealthy.

### CRITICAL IDENTITY IMAGES

The deeply guarded views which we hold of our own identity, and which predispose us to act in habitual ways. One hallmark of “lifelong learners” is their ability to transform their own images as they grow older.

All of these levels are interrelated; reactions and counterreactions ripple between them. [For example] a boss’s moves in the power domain feel like the oppressive moves of father. Our identity image influences us to take the role of bystander, even though we have something to say as an opposer.”

(end quote).

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The article by Kantor and Lonstein is written for business teams, but some of their suggested questions could be adapted to the environments of awareness created by spiritual practice groups:

- Is the domain of purpose of this group clear? Is there a consensus on purpose?
- Are there structures or stances or identities in place that contradict the stated purpose of the group?
- Are the group's action stances flexible?
- Have we put in place structures that systematically shut down certain action stances?
- What ineffective sequences do we see take place? Can these patterns be interrupted?
- Can we all expand our repertoire?
- What would happen if a [mover, opposer, observer, bystander] let go of that stance and nobody filled the void?
- To what extent are stances, roles, and structures helpful to the purposes of this group?