

Working with the *Five Energies* framework *Some draft, introductory notes: Nick Mayhew*

[In this I draw considerably from a paper by Julie Richardson: Checking the pulse: how healthy is your organisation? Quarterly Journal of AMED: Organisations & People, November 2002, bringing additions and clarifications based on my particular understanding and experience of this 'cosmology'. I am grateful to her for initiating this work and sharing it with me.]

In Chinese cosmology, everything in the universe is considered to be made up of *chi*. *Chi* can be defined as 'energy' - but in the widest sense, such that this also encompasses matter. (Einstein, of course, showed that matter and energy are interchangeable with his famous equation $E = mc^2$.) So *chi* is the matrix of energy-matter that forms the universe; everything is made of *chi*. It is just that some things are more condensed e.g. rock, metal and muscles - and others are less dense e.g. sunlight, emotions, and 'the soul'.

This provides a lens through which to begin understanding the interconnectedness of things. For example, mind and body are just different forms of 'chi', existing at different levels of vibration - which is why holistic medicine is very interested in both.

The physical is reflected in the mental, and vice-versa. At another level, the health of any individual will be related to the energetic state of their families, the organisations they spend time in, their wider environment and ultimately the ecology of the planet...

Chi/energy has a dynamic quality. Energy is always flowing - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. It is associated with change. In other words, as chi flows, so the energetic relationships within things and between things changes - and this is happening all the time.

The ancient Chinese understood the health, or sustainability, of a system to be dependent on 'balance'. This is not a static quality, but one that involves an openness and ability to change - in a way that is congruent with shifts occurring at the level of both component part and wider system.

Much Eastern philosophy is based on the premise that all life occurs within the circle of nature. Natural systems are composed of complex, inter-weaving patterns of form and movement. These patterns are reflected at the macro-level and in every smaller part of the system as microcosm - whether it is an ecosystem, organisation or an individual. In order for a larger system to be in balance, each smaller system within it must itself be in balance.

This is the 'theory of correspondence' that underlies Chinese philosophy and medicine. Harmonious patterns in one system both reflect and generate harmonious patterns in other systems (individuals; organisations; nation states). Hence the 'organising power' of what chaos theory calls an 'attractor'.

Chinese philosophy and other related systems use the fundamental relationships between the essential elements in nature as the basic, conceptual building blocks to map and understand 'field' patterns. These essential elements, or energies, are fire, earth, metal, water and wood - known as 'the five energies'.

From the theory of correspondence, observations of the characteristics of these essential elements/energies and the dynamic relationships between them, can be applied to reveal and understand systemic patterns at higher and higher levels of complexity - whether it is the human organism, a business organisation or an ecosystem.

The beauty of this 'framework' is that it requires, encourages and nourishes both the logical skills of the scientist and the metaphorical, intuitive skills of the poet and artist. It also has a 'fractal

quality', enabling one to perceive the same principles structuring both higher and lower order phenomena simultaneously.

For example, fire is associated with warmth, excitement, the colours of red and orange, the season of summer and the period between 11am and 1pm every day – which is when, according to Chinese medicine, the heart centre is especially active. 'Fire' corresponds to both the circulation of oxygenated blood throughout the body and the quality of human compassion. In organisations, 'fire energy' corresponds to that of communication and a certain form of leadership: connecting centre and periphery, providing 'heart' and meaning.

Fire is related to the other elements through a pattern of relationships: it is fuelled by wood; the ashes generate earth; it melts metal; and is extinguished by water. The following diagrams show these relationships, via what are called the 'generating cycle' and the 'controlling cycle' – whereby, in an ideal, free-flowing system, the five energies would be keeping themselves in balance. i.e. they are inter-connected and related to each other through a dynamic pattern of supportive and challenging feed-back loops.

Figure 1: Support Relationships

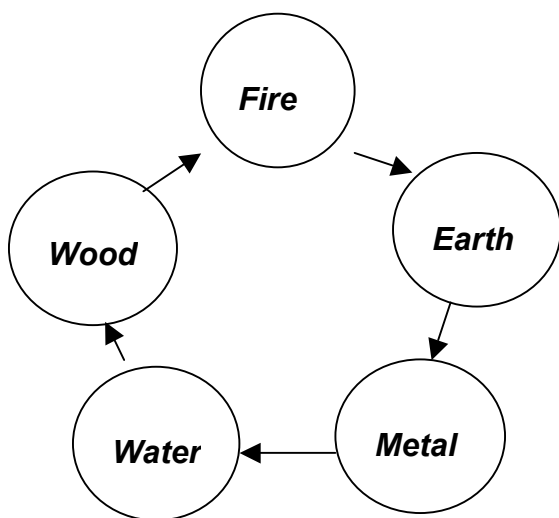
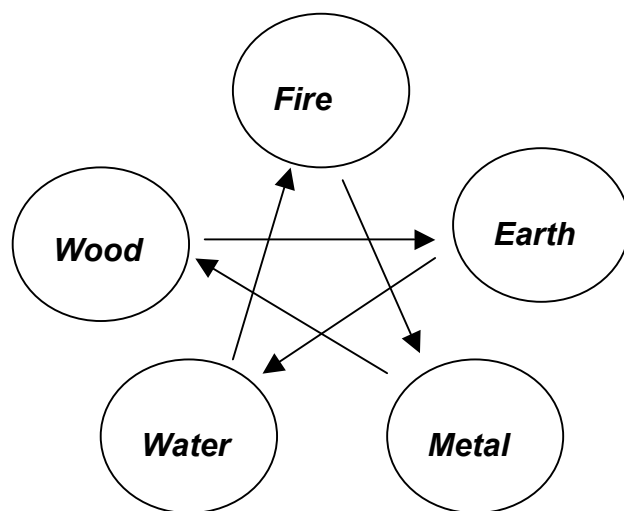


Figure 2: Control Relationships



Dis-ease occurs in human systems when this energetic self-regulation is somehow suppressed or prevented. Then it is possible to begin to see an 'excess' or 'deficiency' in a particular energy (or an 'exaggerated' or 'collapsed' energetic state) – which becomes characteristic of the system. Unless or until the system is able to become more conscious of how it is getting 'stuck', or the wider system forces a shift somehow, the energetic imbalance will tend to worsen until it becomes disabling.

In the accompanying slide pack, I have set out how it is possible to see these five energetic archetypes manifesting in both organisations and individuals. This is simply to give a flavour of how one can begin to work with this framework to both 'map' the field of an organisational system, and to see what might be done to support whatever change needs to happen (i.e. through an energetic intervention that allows the system to 're-balance' and find a more natural flow).

It is easy to start playing with this framework – for example, thinking about how different organisations or individuals known to you exhibit some of the characteristics shown under the different energies, and then exploring how it is that they apparently ‘synergise’, or not, with other individuals (e.g. spouses or colleagues), or organisations (e.g. leaders and their organisations, or successful/disastrous mergers and acquisitions....).

Sometimes an energy will manifest in a ‘shadow form’, which is how the system is able to persist, albeit with a degree of pain and awkwardness present. For example, many robustly male organisations struggle to integrate an ‘earth’ energy into their formal ways of working (e.g. by properly ‘digesting’ the results of their fiery, networking/marketing activity before manically embarking on another round; or attending sufficiently to staff welfare issues), and this will result in say, burdened (maybe over-weight) female PAs manifesting this energy in an especially stuck way.

This five energies framework is at least 3000 years old, and therefore has a certain depth and robustness. It is the basis on which extraordinary systems of medicine, architecture, warfare and martial arts have been developed. So, applied with a dedicated skill, it can produce wonderfully precise and illuminating ‘diagnoses’. However, it is equally powerful being used simply to catalyse the imagination – mobilising an intuitive sense of what is going on in a system that is otherwise proving far too complex and confusing.

Enjoy!