

Coaching with the Chaos Theory of Careers: Using the Attractors

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Webinar Basics

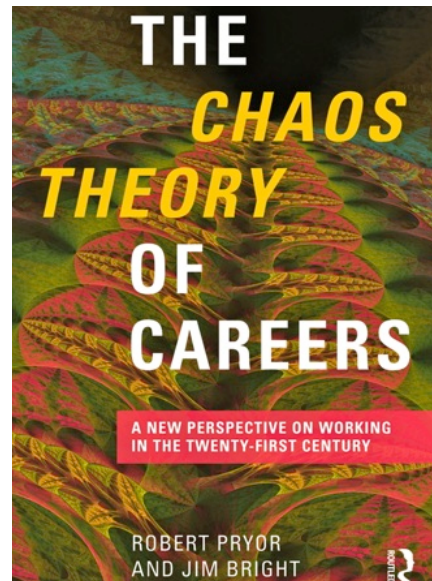
- remind me to record it!
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- you can raise a hand for a question
- I will leave 15 minutes for questions at the end
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Chaos Theory of Careers

Pryor & Bright 2011

Change
Chance
Complexity
Emergent Dynamic
Order (Patterns)
Constructedness



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People as dynamical systems

- a system must have limits or the system is everything
- raises the question:
 - in what ways can you limit an open dynamical system?



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Why are limits important?

- Knowing limitations can help to identify and focus upon strengths
- A song - our limitations are our strengths
- Helps us understand what is possible and worth pursuing
- Reminds us to be aware of clients perception of limitations
 - hubristic client &
 - self-limiting client (more common)

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Attractors

- *Williams (1997) stated that the concept of the “attractor” is the most crucial contribution of chaos theory. The notion of “attraction” in general is not dissimilar to its popular use. Bees are attracted to pollen, moths to light, the hungry to food, enterprises to profit, governments to power, lovers to each other and so on. Pryor & Bright (2011), pp 36*

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Attractors & Feedback

- Negative feedback promotes stability in the system. The system is likely to resist the impact and challenge of changing.
- employees informed that the company is to close that they will be made redundant, failing to take any action to find other employment opportunities until after the company actually makes them redundant. Initiating change is so difficult for institutionally dependent workers that they simply will not face it.

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Attractors & Feedback

- Positive feedback in reaction to change usually means that change will be embraced since it is perceived to be rewarding to the system.
- Work trials for those being case managed by rehabilitation counselors is an example of the use of positive feedback as a way to develop or alter clients' attractors after a sustained period out of the open labor market.

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Attractors as Trajectories

- characteristic trajectories of systems (Kaufman, 1995);
- the typical ways in which systems operate as systems.
- An attractor shows a system's long-term behavior (Williams, 1997).
- instincts, traits, abilities, temperament characteristics, skills, aptitudes, habits, interests

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Attractors as end states

- Kaufman (1995) describes attractors in terms of a basin of attraction and homeostasis. Human homeostasis can be physiological or psychological.
- immune responses to germs, sweating and shivering with temperature changes
- classical defense mechanisms identified by Freud, such as projection, reaction formation, denial and sublimation

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Attractors as boundaries

- core values, interests, ethics, motivation or preferences, and the limits on
- their capabilities as a result of their knowledge, abilities and developed skills

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The four attractors

- Point - aka the Goal Attractor
- Pendulum/Periodic - aka Role Attractor
- Torus - aka Routine Attractor
- Strange - aka Change Attractor

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Point / Goal Attractor

- System limited to end up in a defined point
- water flowing through a plug hole
- predictable because the system is closed - only current state and end state
- Goal setting is an attempt to impose a point attractor on the complexity of reality

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Signs of a point attractor

- complete focus on a goal
- refusal to consider alternatives to one outcome (either preferred or dreaded)
- repeatedly returning to same topic/obsession/concern
- failing or refusal to consider alternatives
- Stubborn determination to stick to one course of action

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Pendulum/ Role

- System limited to move between two points like a pendulum
- Only possibilities are those at each extreme of the pendulum
- Closed system with only 2 alternatives

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Signs of Pendulum Attractor

- Tendency to divide things into either/or decisions
- Black and white thinking
- Rigid and extreme - dichotomous - thinking
- Oppositional thinking
- Pathological Devil's advocate thinking

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Torus Attractor

- Repeating pattern moving through a series of defined points (cf 1 point for point attractor, 2 points for pendulum attractor)
- Exactly repeats over time
- Closed and predictable system
- Hard to identify initially (by counsellor or client) has the facade of change, but ultimately is non changing

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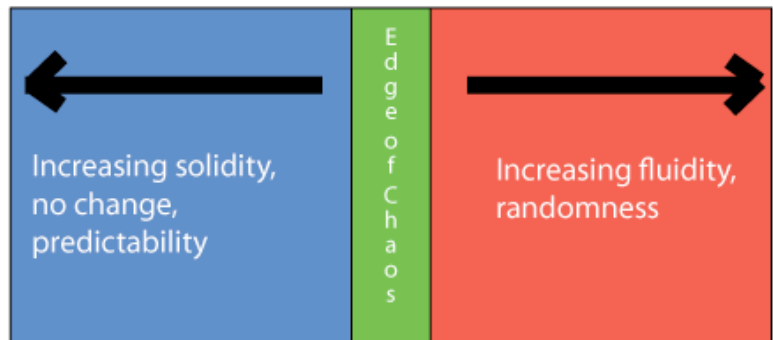
Signs of a Torus Attractor

- Love of routine and habit
- Imposition of rules
- Everything in its place and a place for everything
- Overly attached to tradition & ceremony
- Refusal or reluctance to consider alternatives or change

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Strange Attractor



- Open system
- has elements of order, but is open to new influences
- displays order AND disorder
- unpredictable but over time patterns (fractals) emerge

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Signs of Strange Attractor

- Open to new experiences or ideas
- Continually experimenting
- Curious
- Flexible
- Optimistic
- Patterned, but also Surprising
- NOTE: not totally random, or completely open

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Chaos Counselling Aims

- To move clients supportively to the edge of chaos
- Sufficiently open to change without abandoning order, past or some stability
- Focused AND flexible (Gelatt)
- To help clients practice and appreciate order and disorder as composites and not opposites