



Leadership Through Learning Part 3F: Loop Pattern Dynamics

by Christine Oliver, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko

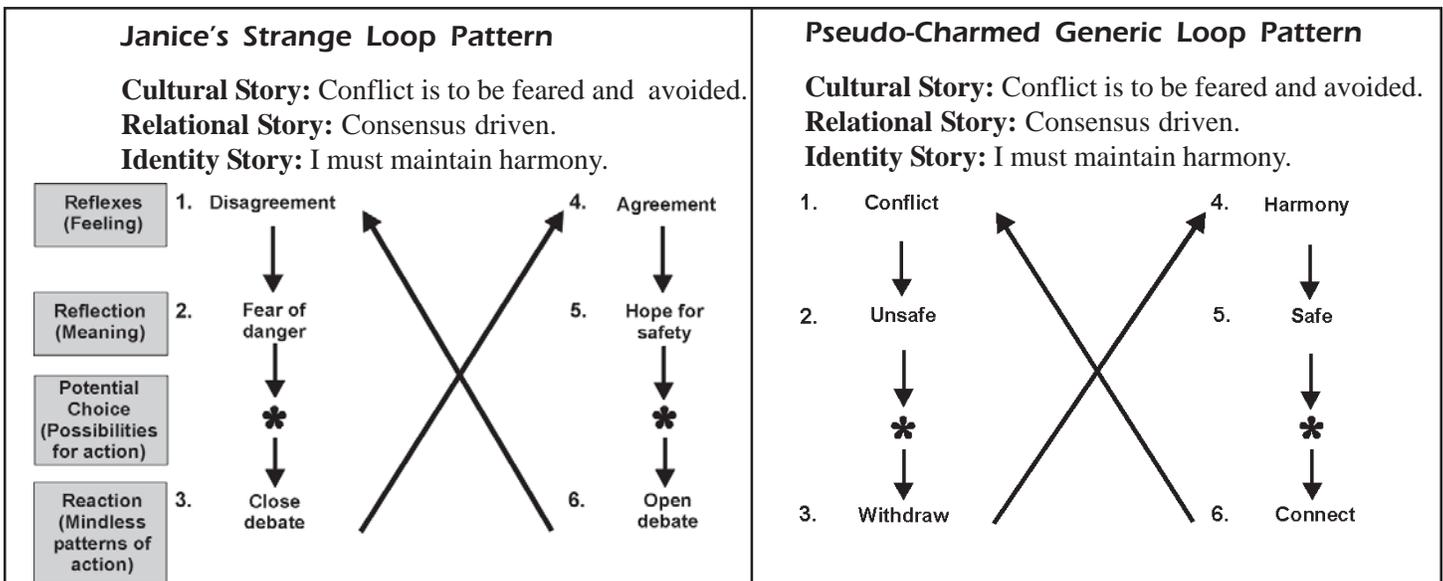
“The six loop patterns are partial representations of people’s experiences. Remember, no one can know reality completely, for it is far too complex. So these patterns do not try to model reality, but provide an approximation to it. They are simply tools that help us to think about our experience.”

— Christine Oliver, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Complexity, Relationships and Strange Loops: Reflexive Practice Pattern** (2003)

In the last newsletter, you were introduced to six loop patterns. In this newsletter, you will be shown how to use these patterns to understand the pattern dynamics within a relational system. The story of Janice and her team will be used to illustrate this concept.

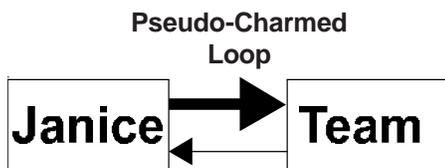
Recall the case of Janice and her team from the May/June and July/August newsletters. Janice is a manager of a team. At meetings, she finds that team members take an argumentative approach to discussion. When this happens, Janice becomes very uncomfortable. Instead of working through the complexity of the issue, she works hard to move the team to harmony. As a result, differences about issues are not resolved, and often go underground. Janice feels good whenever she is able to stop the team from debating an issue. However, team members do not share this view. Below on the left is Janice’s strange loop pattern.

Recall the descriptors from the previous newsletter on the six loop patterns. If you examine each of the six loop patterns, you will find that the loop pattern that Janice is operating from is a pseudo-charmed loop pattern. The generic loop pattern for a pseudo-charmed loop pattern is shown below on the right, so that you can compare it to Janice’s pattern on the left.



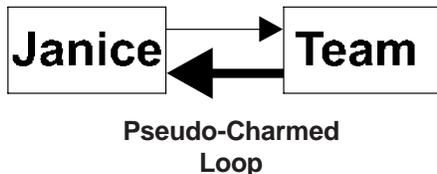
When you know the six loop patterns, and can recognize them in operation, you can draw a relational map of the system to better understand the dynamics of the system itself.

Below is a diagram showing Janice's pseudo-charmed loop reaction to her team.



As a team, everyone tends to avoid conflict with Janice, in much the same way that Janice avoids conflict with the team. The team tends to be consensus driven, which is indicative of a pseudo-charmed loop pattern.

If you were to show this relationship between Janice and her team, it might look like this.

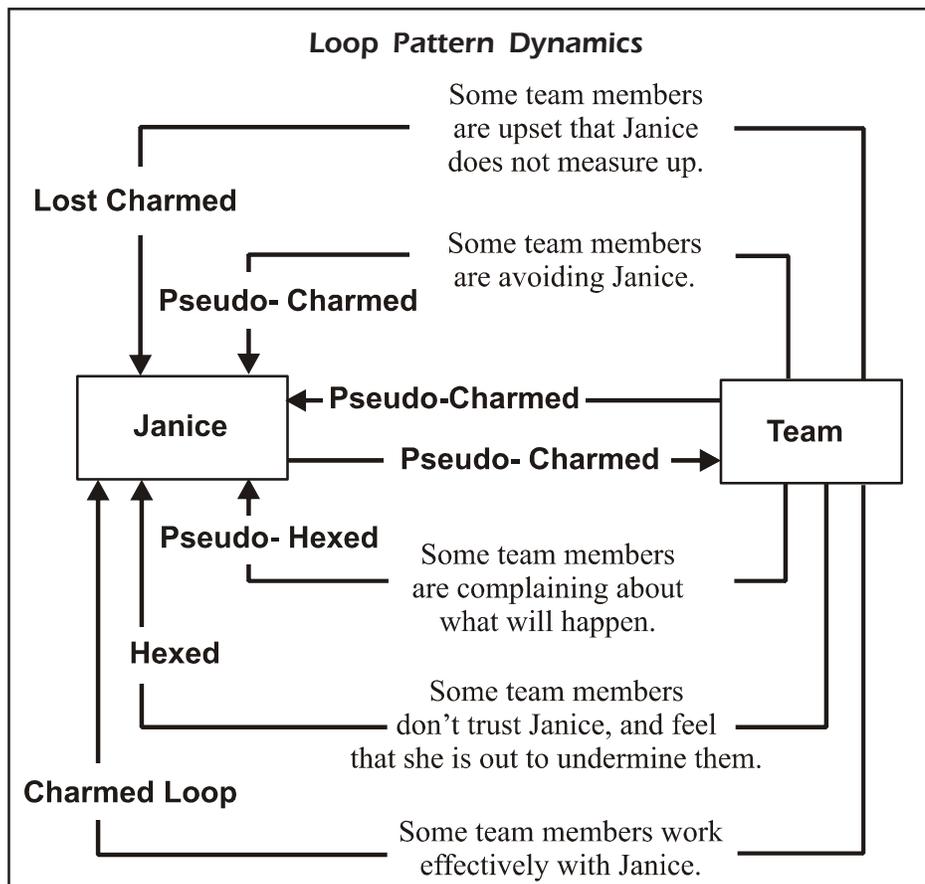


However, relationships are highly complex, and, as a result, difficult to understand. For example, the team can operate from one loop pattern (in this case a pseudo-charmed loop), but individuals in the team can also operate from individual loop patterns that are different from the group loop pattern. This is a natural consequence of people forming a group.

The stories told at a group or team level are often different from those told when individuals are relating with others. Even though the team operates from a pseudo-charmed loop pattern toward Janice, individual team members can operate from different loop patterns. Below is a diagram that attempts to show these dynamics.

“Whether we like it or not, we are never alone in a relational system; we are always in relationship with something and someone else. This creates *constraints* in how we operate, because we are connected to others. And the constraints can be different, depending on to whom and to what we are connected, leading to the possibilities of many *conflicting constraints*. The six patterns are expressions of ways in which one might deal with these conflicting constraints.”

— Christine Oliver, Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko, **Complexity, Relationships and Strange Loops: Reflexive Practice Pattern** (2003)



Complexity, Relationships, and Strange Loops: Reflexive Practice Guide, see www.mhainstitute.ca for more information

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