

Chapter 6

The Coronavirus: A Jungian Analysis



Since we've talked repeatedly about the importance of Systems Thinking, we want to examine the Coronavirus from a different form. It brings out different aspects of the Virus that along with the Psychodynamic theories we examined in Chap. 1 are difficult to ascertain without it.

The approach that's the subject of this chapter is based on four very different perspectives and styles of decision-making, indeed fundamentally different views of Reality. In this regard, it does not use the widespread and commonly accepted notion of a System as a series of boxes composed of key activities, decisions, and/or processes that are connected by a complex tangle of arrows running each and every which way between them. In this framework, the arrows represent the multiple interactions and feedback loops between the various elements that comprise a System.

It's not that this more common notion of Systems is wrong. Rather, it's limited in that it leaves out some of their most crucial aspects. For one, it doesn't account for how different types of people have very different perspectives that not only depend on each other, but have to work together. If they are not able to do so, then a more comprehensive system can't exist in the first place, let alone accomplish its intended goals. In this sense, the common approach is not Systemic enough in the truest sense of the term.

The approach adopted here is based on the pioneering work of the Swiss Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst Carl Jung. It pinpoints the different types of activities and processes that are essential if organizations, societies, and now most crucial of all, the entire world are to survive in today's turbulent environment.

Figure 6.1 outlines four essential sets of activities that all human Systems in one way or another need to accomplish. They fall into four distinct quadrants. More than ever, the leaders of all organizations and institutions are challenged with ensuring that the four quadrants not only support one another, but work together seamlessly if they are to be successful in realizing their intended goals. Acting alone, none of them can succeed by themselves.

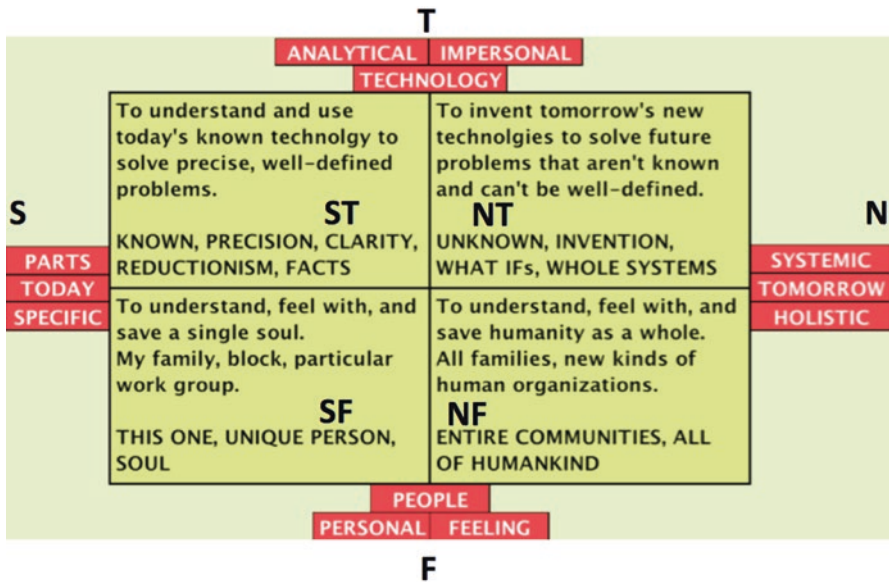


Fig. 6.1 The Jungian Framework

Two basic dimensions are fundamental to, and thereby underlie, the Jungian Framework.

The horizontal dimension refers to how one initially represents, structures, or views a complex entity. The vertical dimension refers to how one analyzes, responds to, or the process one uses to make an important decision with regard to the entity. To reiterate, taken together, they comprise two of the key aspects of the Jungian Framework.

As a highly educated European of his time, Jung was well versed in a wide variety of fields. He observed that no matter what the particular field of human endeavor he studied—Art, History, Literature, Psychology, Science, etc.—the same two dimensions emerged repeatedly. They captured the essential differences between how different people viewed any situation, field of human knowledge, or practice.

The left-hand side “Details Parts” refers to the fact that no matter what the particular entity or situation, there is always the perspective or point of view that instinctively breaks a complex whole (problem, situation, system, etc.) down into its so-called separate, individual parts and then analyzes/studies the parts in isolation and independently of one another. In other words, some people are comfortable if and only if they can break a complex problem or whole—a Mess—down into its “individual parts” so that they can focus solely on the parts alone. The left-hand side also represents those aspects of a system that can be understood in terms of well-established concepts, measures, and theories.

The left-hand side is called Sensing or S for short. Sensing Types—people whose S side of their personality is strongly developed—prefer to gather information in

terms of their senses, or more generally, scientific data. In fact, anything that isn't ultimately based on or reducible to "hard data" isn't considered to be "valid information."

The right-hand side "Wholes" stands for those who instinctively prefer *not* to break something down into its so-called independent parts. Instead, they instinctively look at the whole—The Big Picture—of any entity or situation. If they consider the "parts," it's not only to draw out all of the interconnections between them, but to create a whole whose value is greater than the "product" of the values of the individual parts. In other words, they don't look at anything in isolation. Finally, the right-hand side also represents the use of nontraditional concepts, innovative ideas, and measures to assess the performance of a system.

As an important aside, the term "product" is used deliberately because the typical notion that a "system is more than the 'sum' of its parts" does not fully capture the Reality of the situation. Instead, a "System is the product of its critical interactions." Again, this is especially true of Wicked Messes.

The right-hand side is called Intuiting or N for short. (In the Jungian Framework, the letter I is reserved for Introversion, and E for Extroversion, which is a whole other dimension altogether.) Intuiting type personalities—people whose N side is strongly developed—prefer to gather information in terms of their imagination. Indeed, they focus on "possibilities," not "what currently is." In fact, anything that isn't ultimately based on imagination—"possibilities"—isn't "informative," and hence "not information." In other words, so-called hard facts hem Ns in. It's not that facts don't matter, but that today's facts have a way of becoming the discarded realities of yesterday. In different terms, facts only matter to Ns in the aggregate, not in isolation.

The top of the vertical dimension, "Analytic," represents the use of impersonal means (Logic, Science, Statistics, etc.) of analyzing entities and situations, and reaching decisions. The bottom "People" represents the use of Feelings to assess a person, organization, or situation. The bottom also represents looking at an organization, situation, etc. in intensely personal terms.

It's important to note that the dimension "People" does not mean "emotional" for all of the types can be extremely "emotional" in defending their positions.

In terms of the Jungian Framework, the top of the vertical dimension is called Thinking or T for short. Thinking Type personalities—people whose T side is strongly developed—prefer to analyze situations impersonally. In sharp contrast, Feeling or F Types respond to every situation in intensely personal terms, e.g., "likes and dislikes." It's not that one Type is "right" and the others are "wrong," but that all of them depend upon and need one another in order to pick up and respond appropriately to all of the factors that are involved in every situation.

Putting the horizontal and vertical dimensions together results in the four quadrants, or Personality Types, in Fig. 6.1. With these ideas in mind, we turn to the Coronavirus.

6.1 The Coronavirus

The ST approach is concerned primarily with the search for the single best model that correctly explains the origin, spread, and hopefully treatment of the Virus. Starting with the correct explanatory variables—numbers of people who have been exposed, rates of infection, mechanisms for spreading, speeds of transmission, etc.—the variables are combined mathematically to result in a single model that best predicts the numbers of people who will be infected in the future, and worse yet, die from the Virus. Models are also devised to predict the numbers of beds, Doctors, and Medical Personnel required to treat the disease, and most of all, when the Virus will run its course, i.e., “the flattening of the curve.”

The ST approach typically does not treat more than one model. The consideration of the respective strengths and weaknesses of multiple models, and especially the surfacing and assessment of the assumptions that underlie them, is the province of NT. But more than anything, NT looks at the entire system of factors that are not only integral “parts” of the Virus, but affect it in a myriad of ways. Thus, to reiterate, the Economic Crisis that has resulted from the fact that in order to control the Virus, people have been ordered to shelter in place, thus bringing economic activity to a halt, is an inseparable part of the entire crisis. Even more, the fact that that serious defects have been exposed in virtually all of our key societal systems are key parts as well. The fact that the US Public Health System has been weakened under The Trump Administration is another key factor. So is the fact that Trump was warned repeatedly about the serious nature of the Virus, but on multiple occasions, deliberately ignored the warnings, and intentionally chose not to warn the American people. Indeed, it’s absolutely reprehensible.

NT also looks at other variables for which traditional medicine gives lip service, for instance, obesity and diets, but to which it often does not give enough serious attention. Thus, obesity puts one at greater risk for the Virus.

The key point is that NT fundamentally looks at the whole System. Indeed, from the standpoint of NT, no single model or set of variables can be evaluated apart from the larger whole.

NT also has alternate interpretations of the concept of a “model.” Thus, as before, NT is concerned with Architectural models of new kinds of Hospital, Nursing, and Retirement Homes that will protect both the Medical and Service Personnel and the Patients and Residents. The point is that NT’s approach is not strictly mathematical.

NF also looks at the Virus systemically, but whereas NT does it impersonally, i.e., analytically, NF does it in intensely personal terms. Thus, NF is concerned primarily with how the Virus affects society as a whole in terms of how people are coping and dealing with feelings of Loneliness, Anxiety, Depression, Upsurges in Domestic Violence, Alcoholism, Divorce, Suicides, etc. NF is also concerned with what can be done to bring people together as a total community in times of a national and worldwide tragedy. It is especially concerned with the state of First Responders, Medical Personnel, and Funeral Directors who put their lives on the line every day.

Where NF focuses on society as a whole, SF focuses on particular people and how they are coping with Loneliness, Isolation, Anxiety, etc. How are they, their individual families, and loved ones bearing up? What support do they need?

The Jungian Framework also helps to make clear how and why each of the Types gets hung up. For example, STs often have an inordinate need for clarity and precision far beyond what a particular situation demands. In sharp contrast, NTs and NFs often float off into futuristic fantasies that are not “grounded in today’s ‘Realities’,” etc. In turn, SFs make everything personal that completely revolves around them, etc.

While it’s certainly not the only framework that one can use to understand both people and organizations, it’s one of the most powerful ways of analyzing an organization as a Total System. For instance, the ST aspects of Organizational Health are concerned fundamentally with efficiently well-planned and run meetings. It is also concerned with individual Physical Health. NT is concerned with innovative, strategic thinking and plans, NF with how much an organization works together as a community, and SF with how much it really cares about individual people.

It should come as no surprise to point out that Expert Consensus and Analytic Modeling are the two preferred Inquiry Systems of STs. Multiple Models and Dialectical Inquiry are preferred by NTs. Given their preference for human interaction, NFs turn to the Feelings inherent in both sides of a Dialectic. SFs prefer those particular experts that they know and trust intimately. And, Pragmatic Inquiry stresses the need for all of the quadrants to work together.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

The Jungian Framework leads to the following definition of a problem: *something is a problem if and only if it has significant aspects in each of the four Jungian quadrants*. To turn it around, *something is an exercise if it exists or emanates primarily from one or two at most of the Jungian quadrants*. *But most of all, exercises are the province of ST*.

There is no doubt that on their surface and when they are first presented, many problems, primarily technical, do not involve all of the Jungian quadrants. Nonetheless, from our experience, we’ve never seen a “problem” in the truest sense of the term that does not have important aspects in all four quadrants. For instance, every problem has technical aspects of some kind (ST/NT). But given that it is humans who perceive what is and is not a “problem,” every “problem” impacts human behavior and thereby has important NF and SF components.

To reiterate, something is a problem if and only if it has significant aspects in all of the quadrants. The danger is that the aspects we neglect or downplay often come back to haunt us in the form of major crises.

In sum, in terms of ST, we need the best models we can build that will not only help explain the Coronavirus, but will help us contain and ultimately defeat in. But to do this requires the intense cooperation of NT, NF, and SF.

We also note that we've used the Jungian Framework as follows to help organizations better understand their problems. Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Assessment, all the STs are put in one group, all the NTs in another, and so on. Each group is then asked to describe the problems the organization is facing and how they would handle it.

After each group has presented its deliberations, we then present the Jungian Framework and thus how the groups were formed. We've never seen a case where the Framework has failed to explain how and why each group has analyzed the "same problem" differently.

Next, four new synthesis groups are formed by taking at least one person from each of the "pure Jungian groups." The task for each of the new groups is to integrate as best as they can the different perspectives of the "pure groups."

The point is that synthesis does not always happen naturally by itself. It has to be aided by the best we can do to ensure it.

We also need to note that the Coronavirus has resulted in overwhelming feelings of enormous loss and that each of the Types experiences it in very different ways. For STs, it's the loss of certainty and prediction as to what will happen. For NTs, it's the loss of an overall pattern that makes sense of the Mess. For NFs, it's the loss of far too many members of one's community, indeed the entire world community. And, for SFs, it's the loss of one's personal friends and family that have succumbed to the Virus.

More than ever, we need to understand the different senses of loss. We need to bolster one another.

Finally, we refer the reader to Appendix 2 where Dis- and Misinformation are analyzed in terms of the Jungian Framework.

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