Organizational Pathologies (Part I- Structural Pathologies)

Identifying a pathology is a prerequisite to prescribing any treatment for a diagnosed deficiency. With that aim I prepared back in 2008 a taxonomy of "**Organizational pathologies**" that I am sharing. I classified the 26 ones I found widespread into three main families or groups.

The first group includes pathologies related to organizations' structural design and how the organization copes with its total environmental complexity by creating the necessary sub-organizations. These I name *Structural Pathologies.*

The second group includes pathologies related to the adequacy of the organizations (at all recursion levels) to the prescription made by the VSM about functional subsystems and their relations. These I call *Functional Pathologies.*

The third group subsumes *Information System and Communication Channel Pathologies*.

I. Structural Pathologies

The four pathologies included in this group (see figure 1) are related to an inadequate treatment of the total complexity faced by an organization. The organization and its relevant environment may indicate the need to divide the environment into sub-environments, and the same with the organization. This vertical unfolding of complexity enables it to comply with Ashby's Law, each sub-organization having to deal with less complexity (variety).

The frequent pathologies in this context are related either to a lack of adequate complexity unfolding, the absence of organizations for handling the intermediate environment levels, or unclear relations among organizations. The pathologies identified in this group are:

I1- Non-existence of vertical unfolding.
When needed, the lack of an adequate vertical unfolding renders it difficult or impossible for a single large organization to deal with the total variety it faces.
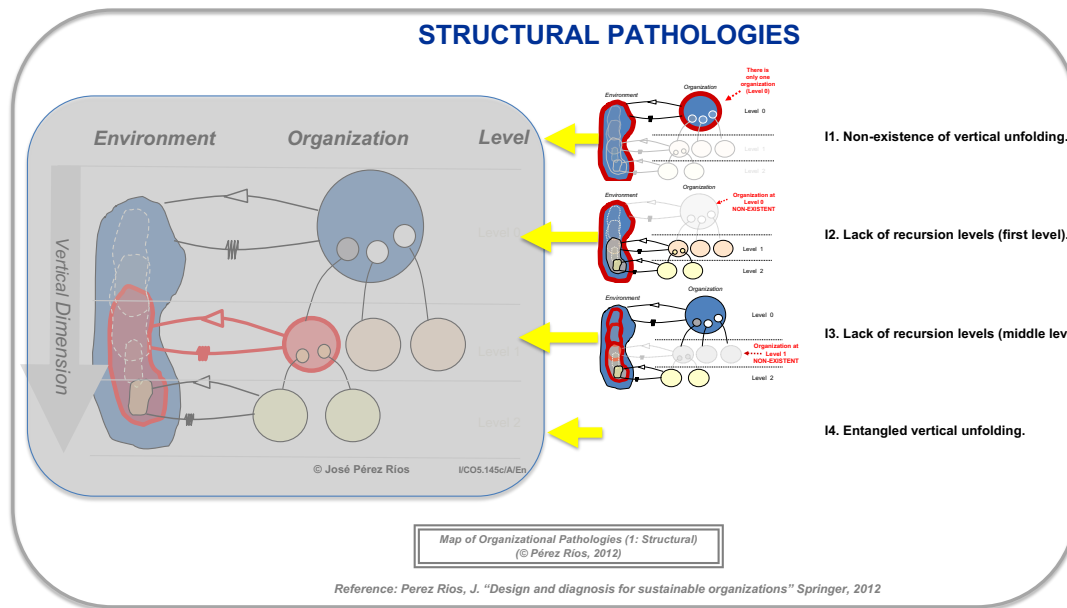*I2- Lack of recursion levels (first level).*
Vertical unfolding is accomplished, but the first recursion level is left empty, leaving a part of the total environmental variety unattended.
I3- Lack of recursion levels (middle levels).
Vertical unfolding is accomplished, but intermediate recursion levels are left empty. The implication is that the corresponding environmental variety will have to be dealt with at either the next or the previous recursion level (which is difficult or impossible) or, even worse, to be handled by no one at all.
I4- Entangled vertical unfolding. Various interrelated level memberships.
Inadequate integration/communication between recursion levels when multiple memberships are present.

STRUCTURAL PATHOLOGIES

I1. Non-existence of vertical unfolding.

I2. Lack of recursion levels (first level).

I3. Lack of recursion levels (middle levels).

I4. Entangled vertical unfolding.

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Map of Organizational Pathologies (1: Structural)
(© Pérez Ríos, 2012)

Reference: Perez Rios, J. "Design and diagnosis for sustainable organizations" Springer, 2012

II. Functional Pathologies
This group includes 17 pathologies related to each of the organizations that compose the entire organization. The aim is to see whether the essential functions (systems) necessary for the organization's viability exist and work adequately.

III. Pathologies related to Information Systems and Communication Channels.
Communication channels are crucial components of the VSM, functioning as the main elements that connect all functions/systems in the organization and the persons who compose it, as well as the organization with the different parts of its environment. Each of these communication channels must have all the components that make possible the transmission and reception of the pertinent information in proper working order (transducers, channels capacity, and a sender-receiver in both directions).
The five pathologies included in this group are related to the existence and constitution of the necessary communication channels and, in broader terms, information systems.

2. In the presentation I made for the **Metaphorum Group in May 2022**, I show (in addition to other materials as the example of use of the "**Recursion Levels-Key Factors Matrix**") **the three global maps** with all these **organizational pathologies.**
https://youtu.be/62mRBzRDxHI

3. A shorter exposition of the methodological approach and the list of organizational pathologies can also be consulted in this paper:
Pérez Ríos, J. (2010), "Models of organizational cybernetics for diagnosis and design", *Kybernetes*, Vol. 39 No. 9/10, pp. 1529-1550.
https://doi.org/10.1108/03684921011081150

4. A detailed description of all those issues can be consulted in the book:
Design and Diagnosis for Sustainable Organizations. The Viable System Method
https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-642-22318-1