

Archetype creation

Type : Open Source

Family : Perception

Emergent meaning is an approach to deriving meaning (expressed as archetypes, values, themes etc) from a body of anecdotal material either gathered in advance or created in the workshop. the results are cultural constructs and can be used directly or contrasted with espoused values, or with the constructions of emergent meaning from different groups (how do managers see themselves. how are they seen by employees etc)

Background

Archetypes are constructs of shared meaning that encapsulate and articulate social understandings about "the way things are" for a community. Archetypes are not generally about things everyone can easily talk about, but are usually about things that are not well articulated in any other way. The process of deriving archetypes is about disclosure, discovery, and understanding.

Ideally archetype creation is made within the context of another activity (story construction for example). It takes place in the peripheral vision of the group.

Types of Archetypes

- Archetypal characters (often called just archetypes) are extreme representations of characters, such as "he-man", "wimp", and "scholar".
- Archetypal themes are extreme representations of issues or concerns, such as "accelerating pace", "exploding connectivity", and "no room for error".
- Archetypal values are extreme representations of things that are given values, positive or negative, such as "strong defense", "trust", and "uncertainty".
- Archetypal situations are extreme representations of decision-making situations, such as "boxing ring", "fear uncertainty doubt", and "lion and lamb".
- In addition, there are other candidates for archetype status which we have not used much but which may be useful in the future. Consider the possibility of archetypal relationships ("respectful adversaries", "arms-length friends"); intentions ("scorched earth", "fake concern"); changes ("sea change", "mounting jeopardy"); and heuristics ("stop while you're ahead", "step back and look at the big picture").

In general, an archetype is a representation of a *force* acting within a community and with respect to a context, whose derivation and use provides fruitful sense-making opportunities.

Archetypes are not stereotypes

We use three heuristics to distinguish archetypes from stereotypes.

- 🎧 Archetypes are uni-dimensional extremes, caricatures that could never describe a real person or issue or situation. Part of their utility is in their extremity, that they help us to discuss the boundaries of experience, which are usually the places we are most concerned with coping with.
- 🎧 Everyone and everything can be identified with archetypes in some way; but nobody and nothing fits a stereotype. Stereotypes divide but archetypes integrate.
- 🎧 A group of archetypes together represents a "family" of forces within a community or with respect to a subject. Thus one archetype doesn't "work" in isolation but must always be understood in the context of the collective representation of a community and a concern. A stereotype has few if any connections and is defined more by its isolation than by its relationships.

Archetypes are not universal

The archetypes we use are not Jungian archetypes. They are specific to a context and to a community. Archetypes between communities may be similar but are never identical because they are *grounded* in the reality of that community. Finding universal archetypes is not a goal of this method, because we believe it would be counter-productive and even dangerous.

Uses of archetypes

Once derived, archetypes provide a means of developing a common language with which to address issues that are important but not always easily surfaced. For example:

- 🎧 People may use archetypes to organize training material around tacit knowledge skills.
- 🎧 People may use archetypes to help two groups understand their differing ways of working.
- 🎧 People may use archetypes to organize narrative historical data so that they can quickly find meaningful analogies to a situation they are facing today.
- 🎧 People may use archetypes to design products by testing new features against the reactions of a family of archetypes which represents features of the customer community.

METHOD

Preparation

Two-stage emergence (archetype derivation) starts with a body of anecdotes. These will previously have been collected using one or more of several methods, including naive interviews, field

interviews, participant observation, anecdote circles, and the like. The anecdotes may be on audio tape, on video tape, or only in text form.

The people attending an archetype derivation workshop must have been exposed to the body of anecdotes they will be drawing from somehow. It is not usually possible for everyone to have seen or heard everything, so it is useful to arrange things so that everyone has seen some anecdotes and every anecdote has been seen by more than one person. This can be done by distributing tapes, by making an anecdote database available online or through distribution of software and data, or in many other ways.

How exactly people are exposed to the anecdotes is somewhat flexible. For example, you could imagine a workshop in which people are asked to spend time in a museum exhibit in which anecdotes are printed on wall segments, spoken from speakers, printed in handbooks (with multiple versions), shown in video booths, and so on, and then the workshop convenes at the end of the museum "course" and begins to work on archetypes. The only requirement is that all of the anecdotes should have been considered.

Stereotype collection

Start by asking people to recall some of the anecdotes and talk about the items in them. These are items at the stereotype level, obvious, identifiable:

- 🎤 for archetypes, characters
- 🎤 for themes, subjects
- 🎤 for values, issues

Ask people to write these down quickly on hexagons as they talk. They should not debate; they should try to get out as many as possible without bogging down. Keep things moving.

Now cluster all the hexagons into larger groups of stereotypes. But don't call them stereotypes, call them characters or subjects or issues or whatever, because people won't respond well if you tell them they are collecting stereotypes! Ask people to give the clusters names.

Stereotype description

Now take the original stereotype hexagons away and start again with the cluster names. Ask people to describe polar opposites for each stereotype:

- 🎤 for archetypal characters, what their best friend and worst enemy would say about them
- 🎤 for archetypal themes, what an optimist might say about the theme and what a pessimist might say
- 🎤 for archetypal values, what someone who values the thing positively might say and what someone who values the thing negatively might say

It is useful to ask people to arrange these *attributes* around the stereotype-name hexagons with the positive ones on top and the negative ones on the bottom, in a sort of "flower" arrangement. This

helps to remind people to come up with an equal number of positive and negative attributes. There should be about 3-5 positive and 3-5 negative attributes per stereotype cluster name.

Attribute clustering

Now throw away the stereotype cluster names and rearrange the attributes into a giant undifferentiated mass. Then ask people to cluster all of the attributes together, like with like, into new entities. Those new entities are the archetypes. That's it!

There are some things that can help:

- 🎤 It is possible to do this during other exercises if you are pressed for time. Pull one or two people away from each group to do it (but only do this if you are comfortable and experienced).
- 🎤 Don't let people give names to archetypes that refer to real people. Use animal names that connote metaphorical characteristics (badger, lemming), or pop-culture names (superman, queen), or generic role names (recluse, he-man). If they insist on naming a real person, ask what is it about that person that makes them unique, then ask them to rename it that.
- 🎤 Explain the differences between archetypes and stereotypes, but only do this when the people are doing final clustering and naming, and only if they are ending up with stereotypical names.

NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT COMPLETE

IT NEEDS AMENDING TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE NEED TO IDENTIFY THE ORIGINS OF THE ATTRIBUTES AND THE FINAL REPRESENTATION

MATERIAL WILL BE TAKEN FROM THE FRONTIERS ARTICLE