Up against a state of perversity

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For over two years now, Information Dynamics has been trying to return to a normality of productive innovation that it finds destroyed by a so-called consortium. Its intellectual property has been stolen, potential customers are lost. Yet, while being subjected (!) to consistent denials, insinuations and intimidations, reading *The Perverse Organisation and its Deadly Sins* (Karnac, 2008) still came as a shock. Its author is Susan Long, psychotherapist turned university professor in Melbourne, Australia. From her analysis there simply is no escaping the diagnosis: consortium Essence, too, is a perverse organisation.

What happened? *Information Dynamics* is a small company based in the Netherlands. It developed and markets a ground-breaking method for information modelling to facilitate open conceptual variety, that is, variety at any imaginable scale. Metapattern helps both recognising and systemising real differences in meaning. With the boundaryless information society already a reality, Metapattern is a method for its interdependent time.[1]

In the Netherlands, the *Office of the Standardisation Forum* (OSF) is a temporary organisation set up as part of the government. It concentrates on open standards for electronic exchange. OSF saw unique merit in Metapattern for solving the basic problem of semantic interoperability. Contracted by OSF, Information Dynamics assisted with modelling exercises demonstrating Metapattern. In addition, OSF had Metapattern evaluated separately by two research organisations. Both evaluations were positive. Information Dynamics had welcomed and actively supported the evaluations on the assumption that the interests of both evaluators would not conflict with the interests of Information Dynamics.

Next, however, OSF and one of these research organisations, *Novay*, teamed up to form a consortium, *Essence*, to compete with Information Dynamics and were subsequently joined by several business and government organisations (with the companies mostly recruited from OSF's suppliers). Essence was founded on the idea of developing and diffusing contextual differentiation (for all both theoretical and practical purposes, also read: Metapattern).[2] Aggravating the illegal competition, Metapattern and Information Dynamics' business interests were left unmentioned in Essence's submission for government subsidy with Essence arguing for … innovation. The disproportionally large subsidy was granted, with later reports by Essence showing definite plagiarism. Metapattern has been copied in detail, but given a different name.[3]

Of course Information Dynamics strongly objected. I repeatedly appealed to get formal rights of Information Dynamics recognised, to resume the earlier productive collaboration between OSF and Information Dynamics, et cetera. Nothing seemed to help, though. Or I should say, nobody seemed to help?

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[1] A vast amount of documentation is available on Metapattern (Dutch: Metapatroon). A selection of *English-language texts* is listed separately on Information Dynamics' website.

[2] The phrase *contextual differentiation* is also taken from the work of Information Dynamics. In English, for example see *Multicontextual paradigm for object orientation: a development of information modeling toward fifth behavioral form* (translated from Dutch original, 1991-1994) and *Metapattern: context and time in information models* (Addison-Wesley, 2001). In 2002, Information Dynamics partly changed the notation for Metapattern as summarized in *Metapattern, development of notation*.

[3] For an analysis of correspondence with Metapattern in both method and notatation, see *In search of differences*.

Susan Long explains why, say, normal efforts can only fail. Why I met with growing opposition. Yes, I am afraid she is right. Organisations may be perverse. I now realise that the evidence is overwhelming of Essence being precisely such a perverse organisation. It exhibits all critical symptoms Long lists for organisational perversity.

Before calling on Long's analysis in more detail, let me emphasise her important proviso. Long does *not* conflate organisation with person. Nonetheless, for purposes of shorthand it may be convenient (p. 16) "to study the organisation 'as if' it had a mind." At (p. 15) "a social level of analysis" Long identifies "five […] basic indicators of a perverse state of mind." I urge you to study Long's book when you at least want to understand current social forces. Long's portrayal of "the perverse state of mind" indicates that a perverse organisation acts (p. 15) "at the expense of a more general good, often to the extent of not recognising the existence of others or theirs rights." This applies to Essence. The consortium's desire seems to be for Information Dynamics not to exist. The same goes for Metapattern. Essence consistently attempts to leave both Metapattern and Information Dynamics unmentioned. When some reference cannot be avoided, Essence will only use my (person) name, i.e. Pieter Wisse, and concede that I had an idea but without going into any detail whatsoever what that idea entails. Without mentioning it as such in the first place, Essence keeps well away from specifying that Metapattern is a full-fledged method for information modelling, with the company Information Dynamics involved as a.o. holder of intellectual property rights. Instead, Essence presents Metapattern under its own name.[4]

Indeed, Essence suffers from (p. 15) "fixed ideation." Or, as Long also puts it, "the perverse state of mind acknowledges reality, but at the same time, denies it." That has exactly been the trap I've fallen in again and again. I thought that I could, actually, that I *should* appeal for at least the reality of formal rights of Information Dynamics to be acknowledged. To put it mildly, the reaction always surprised me until finally the pattern dawned upon me. What I thought was my reasonable rendering of reality, yes, including realistic criticism, always came back as if it were on its head, as the now scarcely hidden substance of wild accusations directed at me. Long makes clear that it is what you have to expect from a perverse organisation. Regretting it doesn't really help. Just stop addressing such appeals at the wrong person "in role."

But who is the right person-in-role to address? Long warns against false hope, for (p. 15) "the perverse mind engages others as accomplices in the perversion." Right on the dot! It is also exactly what I've experienced. My impression is that Novay is the driving force behind Essence. Together with the Office of the Standardisation Forum, Novay has drawn in other organisations, and continues to do so. Making appeals to such recruits to act upon their co-responsibility only meets with stubborn resistance, and so on.

In Long's words (p. 15), "the perverse state of minds turns a blind eye." She adds that it "may flourish where instrumental relations have dominance in the society." Information Dynamics, so Essence might believe, has simply outlived its usefulness, period. Perhaps the consortium even considered it its duty to discard Information Dynamics in order, finally, to get proper results. If only Essence would have a clue about Metapattern. As it is, Essence peddles a lifeless, sterile copy. In itself that doesn't yet constitute a problem. It only starts to be one, but then is it right away really serious in its undermining power, when Information Dynamics loses customers through false competition and innovation is frustrated rather than promoted. Anyway, "instrumentality," as Long emphasises, "ignores the rights of others to have an independent existence." As a perverse organisation, Essence with its accompanying (p. 15)

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[4] According to Dutch Copyright Law, article 25, whether or not the maker has transferred rights to exploit the work — which Information Dynamics certainly has *not* done for Metapattern — as the maker s/he retains the personal right to determine how the work is named.

"state of primary narcissism" declares Information Dynamics non-existent. And whenever Information Dynamics makes itself heard, it is dismissed as a nuisance, at best.

About ever reaching a constructive outcome, Long's realism warns against simplistic cures. "Perversion begets perversion," making (p. 15) "abusive cycles […] hard to break." It is what I've learned from experience with mounting frustration by addressing ever higher-placed civil servants about the conduct of their subordinates.[5] Long (pp. 15-16): "Corruption breeds corruption because of the complicity of the accomplices and their subsequent denial and self-deception." Lawyers also add to, and profit from, the perversion by supplying fallacies on command. On the surface, they seem easy to refute. But what if nobody wants to listen, leave alone be convinced by proper arguments? The (p. 16) "denial of reality," Long insists, and I'm afraid she is right, is upheld "against the weight of evidence."

Why doesn't Information Dynamics just go to court? The main reason is that all along I've felt that some court decision wouldn't fit the case. My feeling has everything to do with what Metapattern is all about, which is recognizing real differences in such a way that equally real coherence is also established. So, Metapattern is about equilibrium at being related. It is definitely not about one-sided winning vs. losing, zero sum, et cetera. Just trying to win in court would therefore already mean losing in the real Metapattern sense.

This is not to say, however, that Essence should have its way. The outright tragic of Essence is that it is undermining what it pretends to offer. As Susan Long gives to understand, it takes a perverse state of mind to do that. It must be stopped. At least, I feel I have to give it an existential try. If not in court, then how? While (p. 161) "to seek out […] corrupt individuals is important, […] we need not see them as personally perverse." I agree with Long that (p. 161) "the perversity [i]s in the cultures surrounding them and their behaviours [a]re sustained by those cultures." It's precisely because social change is especially difficult that we should avoid wasting effort on what is uncharacteristic (p. 21): "Mutual recognition and respect indicate a mature society where differences are welcomed."

Right now, I only start to realise what necessarily fails. I am very grateful to Susan Long for her reality check. At least I'm saved much further frustration from well-intentioned, yet ill-directed efforts at improvement. I'd like to pass on some more of her advice on first of all (p. 163) "how better to avoid the damage [organisational perversity] may cause." I repeat that my selection is almost certainly biased. Please read and study Long's wonderful book yourself!

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[5] The Office of the Standardisation Forum is part of Logius, which is an agency of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior. So, after being side-tracked and stonewalled by the head of OSF I contacted Logius' director and next the director-general at the Ministry who is accountable for Logius and by consequence for OSF. In terms of policy, OSF is (also) strongly tied to the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. That's right, innovation! There, I contacted a.o. the responsible director-general and the minister, especially appealing for their support of Information Dynamics as an innovative enterprise. And I informed the chairman of the Second Chamber of Parliament's Committee on Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. All around they renounced any involvement for OSF and by implication for themselves, declared that the complaints by Information Dynamics had already been refuted, or simply didn't react ...

The pattern of structural evasion was apparent soon enough, of course. I continued addressing officials as an experiment for discovering how far the madness would reach. Following Long I now label it perversity. As she indicates, there doesn't seem an end to it. Actually it spreads with ever new accomplices (p. 17) "persistent[ly] clinging to a chosen scenario."

Basically, what Information Dynamics is trying to set straight with consortium Essence, is that, *what is in fact Metapattern should also be called by that name*. There really must be pathological dynamics at work for such a, on the surface of it, straightforward demand which can simply be read off Copyright Law to propel escalation of denial, cover-up and so on by Essence. Information Dynamics has always explicitly welcomed the widest possible diffusion of Metapattern and therefore does not, repeat, does *not* condition its use except for keeping Metapattern for its name. As a method for information modelling, the use of Metapatttern is free, as evidenced by the documentation made available by Information Dynamics on its website.

Why is communicating with someone operating "in role" in a perverse organisation so utterly frustrating? You are right to feel not being taking seriously, for (p. 18) "the selfishness of the perverse position recognises others not so much as other selves, but as objects to be used." Beware, for you as (p. 90) "the 'other' [are] experienced instrumentally, becoming a subject(ed) object to be *used* rather than a subject to be *known*." It is what Essence does so 'well,' i.e. (p. 18) "instituting parasitic relations with others."

The perverse state of mind finds it (p. 19) "intolerable" admitting "that he/she in fact at one stage did *not know*." Being psychoanalytically quite naïve, what I tried was even to get Essence to admit a known mistake, a known illegal action. It was to be expected that Essence would start by denying. I hadn't expected, though, the extent to which "a blind eye" was turned throughout 'the system.' By filing fully justified complaints and asking for help for Information Dynamics, I was actually recruiting accomplices for Essence. Long has phrased it beautifully, scary as the notion itself is (p. 19): "Knowledge remains the slave of desire rather than the company of reality."

Long has also led me to understand why building a consortium has a special, if not fatal attraction for an organisation such as Novay. With certainty lacking, but desperately desired for that very 'reason,' such (p. 20) pseudo-"certainty requires confirmation by another, so an accomplice is required or created." I for one don't deny that Novay and OSF have been very 'successful' acquiring a following. Almost by definition, those accomplices are not-knowledgeable in the sense that really matters for solving problems at the scale of society. Essence's (non-)results are there to prove its illusion.

There is also something that Long doesn't know, couldn't possibly know of course. It is me writing about consortium Essence as another case study of the perverse state of mind. All the more striking do I find her use of the word "essence" where she states that (p. 20) "the abuse of others is the essence of parasitical forms of relatedness and is derived from an internal perverse psychic organisation." Sic!

What makes the perverse state of mind persist, is that, once (p. 27) "caught in a perverse system […] the exposure of the system threatens or disturbs the ongoing power bases of many role holders." As a professional firm, Information Dynamics does not want to pose a threat to its customers, on the contrary. But then, a genuinely professional attitude including integrity, accountability, a readiness to admit not-knowing, an openness to learning, et cetera are apparently seen to be threatening by the perverse organisation.

An especially profound lesson I see contained in the sentence that (p. 30) "often the description of perversion itself becomes perverse." I take it as a call for self-awareness. For example, am I here really only criticising Essence's perverse behaviours, thereby constructively trying to gain support for equity? Or is this text a display of immature "wrath," one of the "deadly sins" Long … describes?

The fact is that Essence continues its malpractice. When I cannot stop it, at least I want to do what I can to contain it as much as possible. I apply publicity as a means for such containment. My hypothesis is that somewhere along the line some accomplice should submit to shame, fear of loss of reputation, letting the house of cards which is Essence fall apart as a condition for subsequently developing a healthy existence. What counts, I would say, is the appropriate dose, as with any medicine. Of course it shouldn't promote perversity. Frankly, I'm rather at a loss. It's more that I feel it is any way *not* right to leave Essence unchallenged.

What Information Dynamics experiences with formal complaints about Essence seems the absence of checks and balances. It suspiciously looks like what Long sketches (p. 35): "The

perversion of authority into personal power is an insidious organisational process." Appearances may deceive as such perversion "always requires accomplices." It is what Information Dynamics found, subsequently addressing complaints higher up an organisational hierarchy. A correspondingly perverse loyalty is at work. It seems reasonable to (p. 50) "move swiftly to get rid of [an employee] at the root of the illegal [practice] once he [i]s caught out." Why hasn't it happened? It is because (pp. 65-66) "others become drawn into the sphere of perversity." And (p. 68) "when mistakes are gradually recognised because the reality of their effects can no longer be ignored, frantic attempts to bail out or cover-up come into play." Information Dynamics has repeatedly suggested to organisations that are party to consortium Essence the wisdom "to bail out," but so far without any success. Regretfully, their "cover-up" is still in full swing.

Of course I'd like to take the opportunity and point at how Metapattern might be applied to model (p. 73) "psychic development" as Susan Long explains it. As I understand her, "the processing of conceptual experience as the mind and a capacity for thinking grows" involves a "splitting process." Between "the split-off parts [… an] internal balance" should exist, such "relations with one another [being] critical to the growing mind." And such integration being critical for balanced behaviour at any age, of course. Anyway, Metapattern is about *both* splitting *and* connecting. As Long argues (p. 82), "in the systemic approach […] causes and effects are interwoven such that causality is never linear but circular." Metapattern can help meeting what Long identifies as (p. 161) "a challenge for the future," that is, "to contextualise the consumer-provider pair." Metapattern helps to order plural meanings through context and time in information models.

Whereas Essence and/or its participants have never initiated communication with Information Dynamics, they do react albeit in ways attempting to escape compliance with requests made by Information Dynamics. Could it be that Essence actually envies Information Dynamics, "envy" being another of the "deadly sins" Long attributes to "the perverse state of mind"? Is Information Dynamics perhaps eliciting fear in Essence, a fear of shame which aggressively manifests itself as envy? It would explain Essence's failure to reach stated goals, because (p. 93) "envy wishes to spoil and destroy the very quality that is envied."

Susan Long's pertinent advice concerns (p. 143) "a vital need not to get caught in the perverse process." All along there has been and continues to be severe pressure on Information Dynamics to accommodate Essence, to become its accomplice, too. But stepping into a role inside the perverse organisation will surely ruin Information Dynamics. And not only that. It will also rob Essence of the one influence, necessarily outside, still available to promote its health. How can Essence reach the mature knowledge, and responsibly act upon it, that (p. 158) "we are at a time in history when interdependence is critical." Susan Long calls for (p. 159) "the subject's […] recognition of his or her place in the social order."