

## APPLICATION OF *THE FOUR HOUSES*

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The primary reason that I have found the Four Houses so useful as a consultant is that it not only explains a great deal about the organizations that I have encountered, but more importantly, it serves as a powerful tool for designing interventions that will move the organization in whatever direction will make it more effective and more in line with the goals of the organization's members. The following chapter contains a number of common scenarios which will illustrate ways in which use of the model facilitates organization change to greater effectiveness.

Underlying this discussion of application is a basic assumption that most organizations, and by extension, most organizational managers, fall into the closed system camp. This is only reasonable, since the closed system has long been the favored view of how organizations operate and even more, how they must operate. Thus, the bulk of scenarios presented lean toward working with closed systems and closed players.

To review some basics about closed system managers, they operate from a belief in legitimate power, cascading from the top of a hierarchical structure. They delegate power to lower levels, but retain the right to pull back any delegated power, which they often do, when the organizations they lead are in crisis. They believe in structuring most aspects of their organizations, so that rules and documented procedures are typical. The notion of free, unobserved, unpredictable, behavior within the organization is one that causes closed managers to be uncomfortable. They believe it is important to control what goes on in the organization for the organization to run properly. This control, of course, also maintains their own personal comfort. The behavior of closed organizations can be found within the descriptions of thousands of organizational books and texts.

There is a large range of behavior of closed managers, all the way from tyrannical to extremely benevolent. In fact, the literature concerning organizations contains many discussions about the virtues of both extremes, as though those extremes were emblematic of vastly different forms of leadership. They are different, but not from the perspective of the Four Houses, in that they are both closed systems in which the power to decide on issues concerning the life of the organization is located at the top of the organization, and is delegated downwards, in varying degrees.

The following scenario illustrates the use of the Four Houses in a benevolent closed system.

### **SCENARIO I: BENEVOLENT AUTOCRAT DESIRING TO CREATE A HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATION**

The following case involved a small organization, with a very capable and well-read manager. I was initially approached to assist in building a high performance organization, and because the client was particularly positive and benevolent toward subordinates, I formed an initial assessment that he was an open player, and hence, would be a good candidate to create an open system. I was to discover that he was also a creator of some chaos in the organization, in that he was continually changing processes and procedures. This seemed to be “stuck initiator” behavior, because his subordinates experienced his leadership as one new goal or focus after another.

The other organization members were positive and hard-working, but because of the industry in which they operated, were accustomed to accepted and common roles and routines that were industry-wide. While they were followers, they appeared willing to help create an open system.

The first intervention was to lay out a plan with the client to create a process which would call on organization members to examine every aspect of the organization’s activities and identify the cases where the organization routinely wasted resources of materials, time, money, and opportunity. Following this examination, organization members would be put to work addressing the major resource wastes, and given the opportunity to develop solutions to those wastes, which they would then implement. The goal of this process, of course, was not only to find opportunities for improving the organization’s work, but to engage the followers in legitimated oppositional thinking and action, the end goal being the development of initiating capacity within the organization.

The second intervention was to lead the above process, which proceeded well through the analysis stage. However, it soon became clear that the client and some of the organization members were becoming restive; they described the process as a waste of time, which drew them away from the “real work” of the organization. This perspective is not uncommon among followers in closed systems, who fear or perceive that they will be called up on act more independently, which would cause them to leave the comfort zone of following. An open manager, at this point, would assure members that the process was in fact the real work of the organization, and that they should engage in helping to find the “right work” of the organization.

The client in question, however, did not do this, but instead stopped the process and initiated a one-on-one process in which he and I would analyze the work of the organization and develop improved processes and tools for effectiveness. This was the point at which he emerged in my view as a closed player. He was highly entrepreneurial, with constant ventures into new sales opportunities and marketing, but he controlled all these ventures without input from his staff. This was another indicator of closed system thinking.

My strategy as a consultant had to change, from working with an open client who would share power with subordinates and serve as a team member on occasion, to working with a benevolent, but controlling leader who would create system changes himself and ask members to operate those systems according to new rules. It is worth pointing out that a

closed manager can be benevolent without being participative. The client was quite willing to reward members (for obedience, apparently) by sending them to special training, providing paid vacations, dinners, parties, etc. He also gave bonuses to celebrate organization performance (but he alone decided what the bonuses were to be and if they would be granted). This was indeed very benevolent behavior, that I perceived as similar to a doting father figure. The reverse was true as well. When failures occurred, he not only jumped in to fix the problems, but he seemed to experience feelings of hurt, as though his “children” had misbehaved. As his consultant, I fed this behavior and its causes back to him, to encourage him to modify his behavior.

The intervention I recommended was designed to move the organization from periodic acts of generosity to programmatic sharing based on total organization performance: gain-sharing. In this way, members could see and feel more directly in control of their financial rewards, and would also be incented to work together rather than separately to create a more effective organization. This intervention would work well in an open system as well, but was useful here too, to counter the parent-child relationship perpetuated by his periodic generosity.

So, the client was benevolent, but not at all participative. Staff meeting, ostensibly initiated so that all members could discuss and resolve organization problems and issues, became forums in which the client introduced new plans and processes, and directed members issue by issue on application of his decisions. He micro-managed, and dictated not only what to do, but how to do it. The next intervention as to convince him, using his at-home parenting as a focus, that the best results come from giving children and subordinates one or the other dictates; either make clear what expectations he had as far as results were concerned, or what the steps were that he expected them to take. I insisted that to dictate both reduces children and subordinates to robots; moreover, it doesn't allow for individual knowledge and initiative to grow.

It is my working assumption that no closed leader can make all the decisions in his or her organization and expect great results. The larger the organization, the less the leader knows about what goes on down in the trenches. Even when delegating, the leader will be ignorant of much of the life of the organization. However, in a small organization, it is less of a problem, though it requires a lot more time and attention for the leader than if he or she can actively involve organization members in creating as well as delivering the right work.

So, the consulting work moved to coaching the client on minimizing his control of the system and to developing improved processes and conditions that would enhance collaboration and attention to the right work of the organization. The improved processes included the creation of an employee “manual” that included specific steps and goals for all work tasks, to be used to standardize task work and to serve as a training guide for all employees. It also included moving to a software program that would eliminate many of the steps in the process map that we created, thus speeding up many of the key processes. Inventory was honed down to a minimum as we tested for actual needs and application, and instituted an adapted form of Kanban, with inventory par levels posted next to all

storage spots, as well as manual inserts showing exactly where supplies were kept, including the inventory par levels.

The net of this consulting project is that the organization is still a closed system; the client is still a closed player, and members still follow. The major change is that the system is far more effective, with bottom line performance figures that are 300% to 400% better than the starting levels. It might be thought of in part as a variation of the way that McDonald's handles its business: The "right work" is determined by management (or by corporate staff) and the members (including the store manager) who apply the right work operate within narrow confines, without participating in the how the business is to be operated. In this project, the weekly meetings did produce some discussion, and the task descriptions did provide clarity about what to do and why, all of which reduced the micro-managing and frequent entrepreneurial flights by the client. The gain-share program was seen as a major benefit, one that encouraged all employees to track and act to influence the indicators upon which gain is measured.

## **SCENARIO II: CLIENT WANTS TO MOVE CLOSED SYSTEM TO OPEN PLAY**

### **OPTION A: CLIENT IS A CLOSED PLAYER**

It is basic to the Four Houses that a closed manager cannot lead an open system. The behavior required of the closed manager in an open system is certainly distasteful to him or her, and is also probably not in his or her repertoire. Even when a closed manager wants vastly better performance from his or her organization, he or she is not the best one to lead it.

What can be done is to encourage a closed client to create a protected organization, one that is resistant to tampering by the client or other organization leaders. There are many agendas in closed organizations; one of the strongest is to control all parts of the organization. If it is possible to mess with the organization, one may be assured that it will happen, and for all the "best" reasons.

The protected organization can take the form of an "experiment" or a spin-off, but it requires very clear and unmistakable umbrella rules that allow the organization to operate its own system its own way, even if the organization is not "producing" at a desired rate as quickly as desired. Failure to protect the experiment in this way will lead to inevitable tampering and eventual return to closed system play.

The only "leader" to head up the desired open system is an open player, because only he or she can work in the milieu where leadership is shared, where the titular leader is a model, facilitator, boundary-rider, etc. and not a boss. Among the many activities he or she will need to undertake is to fend off attacks from the parent organization to "help" the experimental organization.



## **OPTION B: CLIENT IS A RANDOM PLAYER**

Random players are difficult clients and difficult bosses. Their need for variety and change makes them hard to pin down, poor models for collaborative action (which is what is required in open systems), and generally willing to encourage and tolerant individual and non-collaborative behavior by organization members.

This is not to say that a random client would not desire high performance results. In fact, it is likely that if performance is measured in terms of quality and technical excellence, high performance would be extremely desired. The problem is the client's ability to behave like an open system player. If he or she is amenable to consulting guidance, it might be possible to coach him or her to become more "open" as a means of moving the organization to open. To be frank, I don't see this as a great likelihood option; the difficulties are too great. Any consultant attempting to help move a random client to open should expect a constant battle over lack of closure, failure to model or reward collaboration, unwillingness to minimize change for change's sake, etc. Collaborating with the consultant is not to be expected.

Given that the client is currently in a closed system, he or she has probably been exercising a lot of random play choices (resisting rules, authority, tradition, etc.) and is likely to see creation of an open system as a device for actually giving his or her random impulses more freedom to be pursued. This is a faulty assumption, but is likely nonetheless.

It is also possible that the random client is only technically in a closed system, living currently in an in-holding, protected from the larger closed system, to some extent, because of what the random system is producing. Still, the closed system is clearly in control so reducing the closed system's control would also be a motive to seek a move to "open."

If the consultant chooses to engage in helping the random client to move to open, the means to create the open system are discussed in the following option.

## **OPTION C: OPEN CLIENT**

Moving to open is easiest and most likely to be a success for an open player. However, all the "rules" for consultants apply: contracting for what you and the client will do, how you will work together, and coaching to prepare the client for what he or she will observe and experience in the change process. You will need to create a picture for what it means to manage in an open system, since this will be completely new. The roles of all the players need to be crafted, since the move to open includes a shift in power, from top-down to shared. This is the essence of the change, but the nuances all need to be considered and explicitly discussed, since the DNA of closed system functioning is internal to most organization members and will emerge without conscious thought.

Prior to initiating the change process, it is helpful to consider the three keys to successful change in designing the organization, the roles, and its membership:

**Ability:** Can the existing members do what will be required of them? Can they learn the necessary behavior? If not, what will be done? Will they be transferred or fired?

**Willingness:** Are existing members willing to change, to take on initiating responsibilities? Are they negative or resistant to change? If so, what will be done?

**System Support:** Since the existing closed system behavior is currently “supported,” it will be necessary to modify all those support systems currently in effect, so that the new behavior is supported instead. This will require analysis, planning, and effort.

The overall strategy for moving to open is to build the skills of organization members in oppositional behavior. The skill of initiating, an open system skill, requires both following and opposing. Many closed system members have a history of being rewarded for not opposing, or punished for opposing. Consequently, the easiest course is to “order” members to oppose. This was the underlying practice in Work Out, and was the activity described earlier in this chapter where members were required to oppose the current system by identifying how it was wasting resources.

Strongly recommended is a process that requires all organization members to go through it together, without respect for organization level, title, or current power. Silos and turf will block the oppositional process, if it becomes not “okay” to oppose the current system. If only the client is empowered to block the process as it proceeds, the process of building oppositional skills will be maximized.

Following is a list of techniques for creating the high performance open system. We will address them individually. They are:

- Legitimize Opposition

The boss must provide followers with direction to behave actively in an oppositional manner. Identifying new solutions to old problems, identifying resource wastes, brainstorming new products and services, all are oppositional in that they break tradition and put followers in the position of discontinuing action rather than carrying it on.

- Support Risk-Taking and Dissent

Not only must it be okay to oppose, but the process of opposing must be protected. If someone, say, a foreman who fears loss of power, covertly threatens subordinates\* who are working on the “right work” and are thus challenging the foreman’s future power and control, when this comes to light, the client must be encouraged to act to eliminate the threat, and must do it immediately.

\* [footnote] This happens, and on one occasion, a foreman took a subordinate’s report on a new process option, dumped coffee grounds on it, and tossed it in the trash. When the CEO was informed of this, he took it upon himself not only to reprimand the foreman, but to remove him from supervision, as a message to all employees about his support for the oppositional process.

- De-Manage the Organization

Hierarchical structure is typically closed system technology. When power is shared, the need for a traditional management structure disappears. The primary jobs of management are to transmit information up and down the hierarchy and to transmit the orders of higher-ups down the hierarchy. When the organization is more egalitarian, there is only information, which can be transmitted to and by everyone. For that reason, formerly supervisory personnel, having no orders to transmit or information to collect, can use their experience and knowledge to aid the organization in problem-solving. In cases where I have guided the creation of high performance organizations, supervisory personnel became expert trainers, coaches, trouble-shooters, and facilitators, roles they initially disliked intensely, but later came to value as they saw their contributions make measurable improvements in organization functioning.

There is a managerial concept that is not often discussed outside of management: management prerogatives. These prerogatives are the often tacit “rights” that management reserves to managers, and are all closed system artifacts. They might include a manager’s right, when taking control of a new organization, to manage in any way which he or she deems appropriate, regardless of the organization’s present culture or the past experience of the organization with other managers.

Another example is that a new manager might have six months to operate without interference from above, the six months being deemed an appropriate time to demonstrate his or her competence. Freedom to hire and fire are other examples of common management prerogatives. The point here is these are often tacit and assumed, and when shifting from closed to open, a leader might assume that these prerogatives apply,



regardless of the House. It is necessary to clearly spell out the leaders role and rights when shifting Houses.

- De-structure the Organization

An open organization is far less reliant on structure than a closed one. What structure an open system uses is selected to facilitate the functioning of the organization on specific tasks. That is, the open system chooses to use or ignore structure, based on the goals. The consultant's guidance is needed to encourage the exploration of how structure aids or detracts from the goals, and encourage the elimination of traditional, but unneeded structure.

- Build Protective Organizational Umbrellas

The creation of the protected state is crucial if the system that is to change exists in a larger closed system, as discussed earlier. However, there is a crucial need to solidify and guarantee the sharing of power and the egalitarian functioning in the new open system. In the closed systems that I have experienced and with which I have consulted, most organizational members are leery of organizational programs, fads, promises, and changes, because in closed systems, the only true guide to tomorrow is that it will look like it did yesterday. The programs, etc. are typically only temporary, and are discarded in time, whether they are deemed successful or not. Employees dislike being manipulated, and learn over time to take management's assurances that "this time it's real" as just so much talk. Thus, the umbrella within the new open system must do everything possible to protect employees from allowing themselves to move to vulnerable positions of trust and hope, only to have the organization changed or eliminated later as an experiment that went wrong.

Even if the new open system is not destined to exist forever, but is deemed a temporary system, it will need protection from interference or from well-intentioned influence to make it look more like a traditional system. Sources inside and outside the new organization will move to make the organization more like something known and familiar, the old closed system. The open system client or leader must be charged with keeping an ear to the ground and for battling against pressures to be less "open."

If the new system is designed to be an organizational in-holding, it will be subject to the same pressures, and requires the same attentive nurturing, particularly in its formative stages, when it struggles to build skills and processes on which to operate.

- Strengthen Self-Esteem

Since the strategy of moving from closed to open requires a healthy dose of learning oppositional skills, part of the strategy to decrease reliance on following as a primary behavior is to increase self-differentiation.

Following gives organization members self esteem as a reflection of the greater organization, but it doesn't provide self-differentiation. Self differentiation comes from increasing a focus on self, which will involve the system paying more attention to individuals, providing opportunities for skill-building and positive feedback on work performance. This focus is not a retreat from the importance of the group, which the closed system favors, but is a movement to recognize and value the individual as an important resource.

- Provide Achievement and Recognition Opportunities

Anything which identifies and rewards individual performance will aid the process of self-differentiation. Depending on the organization, many avenues can be created, such as recognition of individuals in newsletters, opportunities to make presentations of technical audiences, opportunities to file patent applications, publications, "attaboys," etc. As members receive more support for individual choice and action, they become more free to oppose existing actions, processes, etc. Thus, the time spent in individualized, oppositional, activities is a means to an end; movement toward becoming effective initiators.

- Reward Divergent Thinking

Another aspect of building oppositional skills is to develop the skills of divergent thinking. This is popularly referred to as "thinking outside the box," and involves members in recognizing the tried and true, but looking beyond it to ask "what if?" Rewarding divergent thinking legitimizes and solidifies the behavior, encouraging members to continue the practice. The rewards can be in whatever forms are valued by members, but need to be real.

- Reward for Collaborative Performance

A means of encouraging any behavior is to reward it when it occurs. Collaboration is neither a yielding to the group (groupthink) nor fighting the group for individual preferences, but a valuing of all the perspectives expressed and yielding one's position to the extent that one can support a position that is better. Since collaboration is clearly an open systems behavior, it is crucial to encourage members to add it to their repertoire by rewarding it frequently and well when it is emerging in the organization.

- Reward Team and System Successes

Argyris' article (title: Asking for A while rewarding for B ?) (citation ?) highlighted a common problem in organizations, rewarding the wrong actions. It is crucial that the behavior desired in the high performance system be rewarded and that the behavior not desired is not rewarded. Since team and system success is highly valued in the open system, the reward system must reflect that value. If it is possible, gain-sharing is a terrific means of rewarding achievement by the system. It costs nothing if there is no improvement, but ties individual and group performance to rewards. Since it is based on change over "a line in the sand," it is more real to employees than profit-sharing, where profits are not always visible or a measure of performance. If gain-sharing is not feasible, then some means of celebrating successes needs to be nurtured and maintained.

- Measure for Team and System Performance

For any rewards based on performance, the measures for performance must be real and must reflect the behavior of the system. That means that thought must be given to what measures are chosen. Not all the financial data that accountants collect and report are good measures of performance, since there are many ways to manipulate the financial data for tax reasons, for annual reports, to develop funds for future investment, etc. The metrics need to reflect actual performance before the accountants get their hands on the data. For consultants who have come, as many of us have, from the behavioral sciences, it takes extra work to identify the appropriate measures.

- Flood the System with Information

Open systems operate on free and plentiful information. Moving from closed system play to open means not only having to learn what information is unnecessary, but learning use the information available wisely. Not only is the information in an open system liable to be plentiful, but it is also likely that members will expect other members to seek and use the information in problem-solving. Coming from an environment where information is filtered and censored, learning to exist in an information-rich environment will take some accommodation. Discussion and training are needed to help this learning to occur.

There are also some implications for training. One typical emerging expectation for members of high performance business organizations is that they behave more like business people than as "workers" whose actions are already programmed and are probably unrelated to the changing needs of the business. So, it is reasonable that as they develop as business people, they will want financial data to help them understand

both the needs and their own performance. At this point, organization members should receive training in financial matters. They will want a number of additional new sets of knowledge as their capacity for problem-solving grows in the open system.

- Highlight System Goals and Needs

A focus on the goals and needs of the system is typical of the open organization. Where the closed system asks individuals to focus on goals chosen by management, and the random system supports individual goals, the open system values organization goals. Consequently, the highlighting of those goals and needs is critical to the effective functioning of the members. Everyone needs to know what they are trying to achieve and how their individual contributions support those goals.

- Maximize Performance Feedback

The faster and more clearly performance is made available to organization members, the faster they can adjust their performance to better meet the needed goals. Note that feedback is not the province of management, though management must support the immediacy and clarity. In the open system where leadership (and ownership) is shared, feedback can and will come from workplace data as well as from other members. As a further note, in line with adjusting the system supports to achieve desired behavior, the open system will provide primary performance data to performers, not to management. The reason for this is clear on reflection; it is the members that are in control of their performance, not management, so it is they who most need the data. Management may in fact have a reporting responsibility and need performance data to fulfill that need, but the need is secondary to that of the performers, who must monitor their performance so as to optimize it.

- Provide System Support for Open System Behavior

As in the case of performance feedback, all aspects of closed system support must be explored for their help or hindrance in furthering the work of the open system. Since, as we have said earlier, the system support variables were the underpinnings of closed system behavior, many of them will need to be changed to support the new behavior desired in the open system. The essential questions are: “What structures, rules, policies, procedures and resources support continuing the old closed system behavior (and must be changed)? And what should the system support factors be to support the new desired behavior?”

Creating an open system organization is not simple, because doing so requires reinventing the entire human system. It is probably easier to create the organization as a greenfield initiative, because it allows the creation of all parts of the organization as new parts, whereas moving from closed to open requires a great deal of work in changing old patterns, beliefs, assumptions, and the like. There is no question that an open system requires greater levels of skills to function in it as a member, but the potential for performance is very high because of the involvement and ownership of all the members.

### **SCENARIO III: RANDOM SYSTEM IN CRISIS**

Random systems are often noisy, dysfunctional, and unpredictable. In short, they are oppositional internally, as well as externally, in their relations with others. It is not uncommon for a random system to become embroiled in bitter in-fighting and turmoil, to the point that the creativity that is its typical by-product, is set aside. The Four Houses helps to frame a strategy for returning the organization to a functional basis.

The random system is characterized by individualism, self-interest, and oppositional behavior. When it is in distress, it tends toward extremes of its characteristic behaviors, so that conflict for individual needs, payoffs, and gratification become prevalent, even to the point of hostility, and in the extreme, resorts to power to gratify individuals and coalescing individuals. The system loses its focus on meeting the needs of collective individuals, and loses, as well, the by-products characteristic of the random system, innovation, creativity, and variety. The danger to a random system that is at an extreme of distress is that the characteristic response of the individuals in the system is to flee. The system breaks up, with members opting for life elsewhere. When the system is a normally creative productive entity, this state of distress is alarming.

The options of the consultant are few, but they first require that he or she look for activities that will reverse the separation between members and pull them closer together. Random systems react well to fun, so interventions that are playful and engaging tend to both mute the destructive voices of abandonment and reunite individuals who have become distant. In one such system, my intervention involving three partners in a random system who called me in to aid in closing down their business was to first ask them to think of the reasons that they formed the company in the first place, and then to share the dreams they had at that time. Then we went to the golf course, placed the issue of closing the business on hold, and played golf, had drinks, and ate a fabulous dinner together. The next morning, all three indicated that they had realized that they had forgotten the dreams and the fun they used to have together, and wanted to give the company a rebirth.

Because random systems do not respond well to authoritarian leadership, another option is to work with the charismatic leader, if one exists, to appeal to the members for help in combating a common foe. Members will accept such leadership, and the notion of David

and Goliath is enticing. It worked well at Apple when the vision of Microsoft gave Apple leadership the ability to lead a largely random workforce.

The third intervention for any distressed system is to import behaviors and activities from adjacent systems as a means of reversing the distress. Since random systems are diametrically opposed to closed systems, the source of such imported activities and behaviors is more properly the open system. Activities that involve people in teams that compete against other teams, internally or externally, will re-engage individuals with one another, reduce the hand-to-hand combat and hostility, and allow the return of productive functioning.

Interventions that won't work well are appeals to reason, efforts to control the members, activities that push people further apart, and authoritarian leadership. However, if the random system does in fact fail, and members fly apart, the only solution at hand is for the whole system to devolve into a closed system. No one will like it, but those who do not disappear as isolates may accept it so as to continue employment or work activities that they value.

#### **SCENARIO IV: RANDOM SYSTEM THAT IS FAILING TO PERFORM**

Random systems that are not in crisis, but are “failing” in terms of their charter to produce products, ideas, or services, may also be the focus of consultant interventions. Here, the interventions need to be directed to clarifying the gap between actual and necessary performance. The better source of this clarification is the charismatic leader, but another set of related interventions by the service-oriented leader, the gate-keeper of resources and opportunities for self-gratification will also serve to bring the gap to the attention of the members. Thus, in one technical organization that was failing to provide timely and proper documentation on new products, the service leader informed system members that there was a gap in performance (documentation) and that until it was closed, members would not be allowed to attend technical conferences, publish papers, or do individual research. This was a negative approach, but one that communicated well.

#### **SCENARIO V: OPEN SYSTEM IN DISTRESS**

Open systems, when they become disabled and stressed, again do what distressed systems do, they do more of their characteristic behaviors. Since the open system values the collection and analysis of information to resolve problems, and the debate about possible solutions, it is prone to fall into analysis-paralysis. All this is very reasonable and apparently sensible, but analysis overtakes action, and problem-solving suffers as the dysfunction proceeds. The risk is that the open system will become hopelessly deadlocked and individuals will begin to drop their allegiance to the collective process and behave more like random players, working individually without reference to the larger needs of the system.

The consultant's interventions need to be such that the organization curtails information collection and analysis and moves back to action. Appeals to the collective motive of resolving problems will help. A tactic that I have used successfully is to push for "80% solutions," in which the perfect answer or solution is not identified, but the solution that is identified will move the problem to a state where it is largely resolved. Along with this suggestion is the useful assurance from the consultant that once the 80% solution is achieved and implemented, the learning accomplished in the meantime will make clear how to work on the remaining 20% of the problem. Whether this is entirely feasible or not, it does serve to move open players to move from paralysis to action. Setting deadlines for discussion, tabling lesser issues, looking for "low-hanging fruit" to guide action are all interventions that can move the open system back into productive functioning.

### **SCENARIO VI: INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFERENT HOUSES IN CONFLICT**

There are too many combinations of House-House conflicts to explore the types here. The problem is essentially that each House sees the world differently, and thus players hold different values about what is important, what is appropriate, and what is useful. The consultant may be able to help resolve conflict by first exploring the Four House model with involved individuals and then guiding them to predict, based on the model, where conflict would occur between people in the two Houses involved. This "not-about-us, but-about-the-Houses" discussion can then lead into discussion of the major issues of conflict for the clients, and an identification, given their different perspectives, of actions they can take to resolve present and future conflicts, given their respective Houses.

I have used the model in just this way numerous times, with a fair degree of success. Understanding that each House has its own virtues and benefits removes much of the steam from the conflict, and allows individuals to see each other in a more positive light. When it has been least successful as an intervention is when it has involved closed bosses and random subordinates. Residents of these Houses are not happy companions, and closed bosses often feel that the perfect resolution to the conflict is for the subordinate to knuckle under or resign. Neither of these options is a good solution, and my efforts to engage participants in a search for commonality have often been unsuccessful. On occasion, however, I have had some success in aiding participants in reaching a kind of role negotiation agreement specifying what each will do and not do.

### **FINAL NOTE:**

These are by no means the only problems to be found in organizations to which the Four Houses can yield useful strategies for resolution, but they are common ones. If the scenarios presented here do not offer sufficient guidance to creating needed model-based interventions, I refer the reader to Larry Constantine's (1986) excellent book, which is focused on family therapy, but which offers great in-depth understanding of the Houses.

Use of the Four Houses to strategize and create consulting interventions is a well that has not been plumbed, so the reader may expect to invent ones that will aid to our knowledge of what is possible.