

WHAT ARE ATTRACTORS?

A Summary of the Key Characteristics

Essentially, **attractors are change resistant patterns or habits or states of being that we tend to get stuck in.**

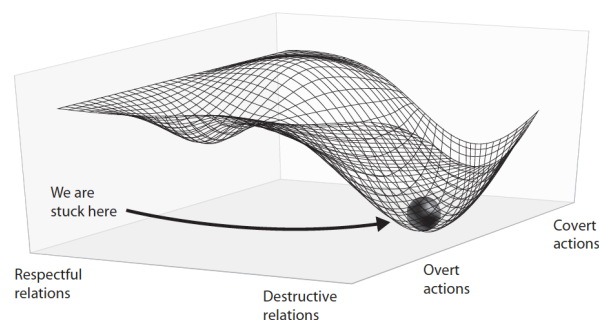
These patterns and habits are hard to get out of because they aren't caused by just one thing—they are **caused by a whole constellation of factors interacting with one another** over time. More specifically, attractors are sticky because they are caused by a combination of mutually reinforcing beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, expectations, norms, etc. that **accumulate over time.**

These interacting factors that serve to reinforce one another can also happen **across levels**—from individual level biology and psychology, to social and cultural norms, to organizational, institutional, and societal factors.

Attractors are also hard to change because they are the habits, states, or patterns that **require the least energy to maintain**—they are the path of least resistance, or the “default” setting in a given situation.

We also tend to get comfortable in attractor states because they meet two core psychological motives that we all have: they provide a sense of **coherent understanding of the issue** (it's easier and more comfortable to know what to expect, and to be firm and clear on what you believe), and they provide a **stable platform for action** (we also like to be able to respond to situations decisively, and strong norms or views help us decide our course of action, and justify our actions).

The opposite of attractors are **repellers**—these are the states that simply require way too much energy to get to most of the time. They are states, or thoughts, behaviors, interactions, or actions that are considered taboo, or that represent counter-cultural ways of approaching situation or behaving—which is usually enough to deter people from changing the existing pattern.



Attractor Landscape Model for Intractable Polarization