Crafting a Pattern Language for Overcoming Setbacks and Carving One' s Own Path
Drawing Learnings from Shonen Manga

Mizuki Ota[*1], Mimi Kuwataka[*2], Takashi Iba[*1*2]

*1 Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University
*2 Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University

Abstract

In this paper, we present a method and its potential for extracting patterns from manga. We are extracting patterns from shonen manga to create a 'Pattern Language for Overcoming Setbacks and Carving One's Own Path.' We found three important things to achieve this theme, the categories are *BECOME THE PROTAGONIST OF THE STORY*, *STRUGGLE UNTIL BREAKTHROUGH, CONTINUOUSLY OVERCOMING OBSTACLES*. To make these categories possible, we introduce three groups for each and show the whole structure. Additionally, the paper discusses how it is possible to extract meaningful lessons applicable to the real world from works depicted as fiction, based on the phenomenological concept of desire correlation.

1. Introduction

Manga has rapidly gained popularity irrespective of age, gender, or nationality. Particularly, shonen manga, originating from manga magazines like 'Shonen Jump' and 'Shonen Magazine' launched in the 1960s, has been at the forefront of manga culture, leading the industry. The allure lies in its dynamic storytelling, where characters face formidable adversaries at times and overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges with comrades.

However, on the flip side, contemporary shonen manga has earned praise for its ability to depict the internal conflicts of the modern self in a delicate and dramatic manner (Eito, 2018). The portrayal of relatable protagonists grappling with existential conflicts and struggles, persistently questioning their identity, and persevering through their own vulnerabilities has resonated with many readers, providing empathy and courage. A recent trend also highlights the popularity of protagonists in shonen manga who prioritize effort over innate genius, and readers express learning life lessons and attitudes from these characters. Thus, manga serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for readers to overlay societal and personal circumstances onto the characters, deriving inspiration and lessons in living.

Therefore, this paper focuses on shonen manga, particularly delving into the psychological portrayals and actions of characters. It aims to elucidate, in the form of a pattern language, how characters can confront their weaknesses, grow, and persist in their beliefs even when facing formidable challenges. This exploration of practical wisdom embedded in experiences aims to offer valuable insights for contemporary individuals navigating through uncertain and challenging times, empowering them to carve their own paths through determination and resilience.

2. Crafting Process of the Pattern Language

We will present the actual crafting process that we followed. We are currently in the midst of the crafting process.

2.1.   Reviewing Shonen Manga

The targeted works include a total of eight shonen manga titles: *Blue Period* (Yamaguchi, 2017), *My Hero Academia* (Horikoshi, 2014), *Haikyu!!* (Furudate, 2012), *Bakuman.* (Oba, 2009), *Left-Handed Ellen* (Kappi-, 2017), *2.5-Dimensional Temptation* (Hashimoto, 2019), *DAYS* (Yasuda, 2013), and *Blue Exorcist* (Kato, 2009). What these works share in common is the meticulous portrayal of characters earnestly striving through their weaknesses and against formidable obstacles. The psychological depictions of characters grappling with and overcoming conflicts are carefully illustrated in each case.

The selection criteria for these works involved their structural elements portraying quintessentially shonen manga themes such as relentlessly striving towards goals, unwavering beliefs, and overcoming challenges. Notably, these post-2000s works reflect a trend among readers (Abe, 2022) who appreciate the diligent accumulation of effort, the gritty pursuit of goals, and seek protagonists characterized by kindness and thoughtfulness.

We read the shonen manga to identify important things where characters overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges, inspiring the resilience to carve one's own paths, and through collaborative discussions among the group, we extracted fundamental material for patterns. During this process, we introspected on the conflicts within ourselves as young individuals. We aimed to ensure a complementary relationship between the internal struggles we faced and the content guiding those issues and states in a positive direction. We examined the validity of the extracted material to affirm its relevance to our introspection.

2.2.   Articulating the Patterns

The three members responsible for creating patterns individually extracted practices they found crucial in their practical experiences. Through mutual discussion and alignment, we generated 132 materials of the patterns. During this process, each member clarified why they considered a particular practice important and exploratory.

This process employs the concept of desire correlation from phenomenology. Desire correlation suggests that we perceive things based on our desires, finding meaning in objects that fulfill desires (Takeda, 2022). We perceive that emotional arousal arises from the gap between 'how things are' and 'how one desires them to be.' Therefore, in the pattern format, we describe desires as a combination of a situation seeking something (context) + a problem arising from unfulfilled goals (problem) + the forces causing that situation (force). It explains why value is attributed to those practices and why they should be extracted (Figure1).

This implies that our desires and personal meanings, which we intuitively perceive as 'important,' are concealed within our consciousness. By making explicit our implicit desires and aligning them with our practices, we aim to clarify what is a meaningful practice according to our own purposes, rather than randomly extracting from manga.
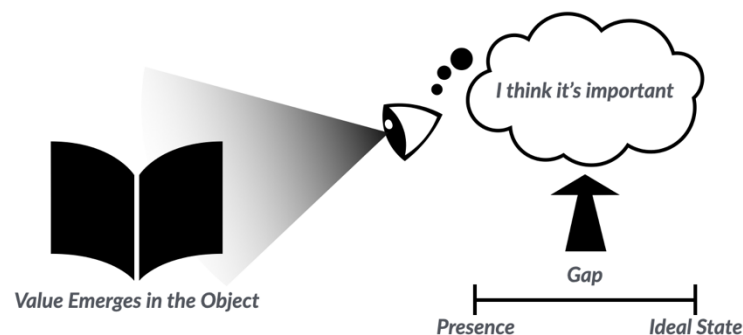

Figure 1: How the Thought of 'Importance' Arises.

We then used a process inspired by the KJ method to categorize similar materials, ultimately forming 58 cohesive patterns (Figure2). From these 58 patterns, we gained an overview of what is essential in the entire pattern language. While examining the entire components and recalling the content mined so far, we derived the crucial three structural elements (categories) and the finer-grained elements (groups) constituting each category within this pattern language.

Here, we began fitting the identified patterns into the system we obtained, establishing their position within the larger framework, and providing descriptions. The descriptions were written in the format of Context, Problem, Solution, unraveling the psychological portrayals in the manga to elucidate the structures that lead to positive outcomes. Moving forward, we plan to add more groups to this framework and continue creating patterns.
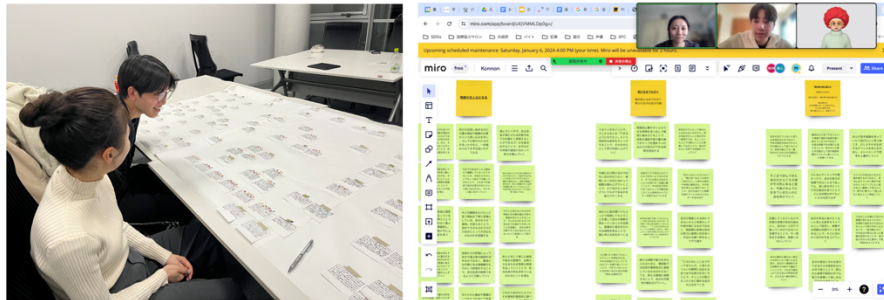

Figure 2: Discussion in Group about Important Practices.

3. Pattern Language for Overcoming Setbacks and Carving One' s Own Path

The three elements considered important are as follows: *BECOMING THE PROTAGONIST OF THE STORY*, *STRUGGLING UNTIL BREAKTHROUGH*, and *CONTINUOUSLY OVERCOMING OBSTACLES* (Figure3).

First category is about *BECOMING THE PROTAGONIST OF THE STORY*: To create a life for oneself, it is crucial to perceive oneself as the protagonist, not just relying on society or others. The narrative of one's life begins by embracing and involving oneself in the emotions that arise. By getting IMMERSING ONE'S SELF IN THE ARISEN FEELINGS, one can harness the momentum buried beneath assumptions and fears. To AIM AS "MYSELF," it's essential to JUMPING INTO THE UNFOLDING STORY by not only thinking but also taking action.

The second category is *STRUGGLING UNTIL BREAKTHROUGH*: Regardless of the goal, enduring patiently until the moment of breakthrough is essential. Rather than exerting effort haphazardly, it is important to CULTIVATE AN UNWAVERING CORE that allows for a return even in the challenging path, and not just work hard but DEVISE A PERSONAL STRATEGY and EXERT UTMOST EFFORT, PUSHING TO THE LIMIT.

The final category is *CONTINUOUSLY OVERCOMING OBSTACLES*: Even after overcoming one obstacle, life presents various challenges. The process of continually overcoming these challenges strengthens oneself. To achieve this, it is vital not to attempt to manage everything alone but to DERIVE STRENGTH FROM THOSE AROUND, DIVING INTO POTENTIALITIES AND WELCOMING CHANGE, and PERSEVERE WITH ONGOING BELIEF AND DETERMINATION to reach unexplored horizons.

BECOMING THE PROTAGONIST OF THE STORY	STRUGGLING UNTIL BREAKTHROUGH	CONTINUOUSLY OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
Immersing One's Self in the Arisen Feelings	Cultivating an Unwavering Core	Deriving Strength from those Around
Aiming as "Myself"	Devising a Personal Strategy	Diving into Potentialities and Welcoming Change
Jumping into the Unfolding Story	Exerting Utmost Effort, Pushing to the Limit	Persevering with Ongoing Belief and Determination

Figure 3: Overall Structure of the Pattern Language.

4. Patterns

In this paper, one distinctive pattern from each category is selected within this pattern language, and a full description of three patterns is introduced. From the first category, *Build the Path from Now On* will be introduced. From the second category is *What Remains After Defeat*, and the last is *Driving Rival*.

4.1. Build the Path from Now On

Build the Path from Now On

You have found something you want to aim for in the future.

▼ In this context

When you see someone admired or excelling in that field, you might feel a clear gap between them and yourself, hesitating to start aiming for something now. When you see people who have reached a level beyond your imagination, it's easy to only see their greatness and high abilities. However, by ignoring the journey and efforts they've made to get there and instead attributing their greatness to inherent talent, you might think it's something only they can do, feeling incapable yourself and hesitating to take the first step towards your goal.

▼ Therefore

By learning about the experiences and efforts that led those you admire to where they are, you can realize that you too can build your future through effort from now on. It might be beneficial to start by researching how the people you admire began and the efforts they've made. Whether you speak directly to them or if that's not possible, searching for articles or books on the internet could be helpful. Everyone wasn't inherently great from the start; it's the accumulation of effort that brought them to where they are now. Understanding this and learning from their journey can help you figure out where to start.

▼ Consequently

By feeling that you can shape your own future, you can take the first step forward. Doing so will gradually clarify what you need as you aim for your goal, and the anxieties that once filled your vision will slowly dissipate. Knowing there are many things you can do starting from now can actually become a source of excitement for your potential growth, allowing you to leap into new worlds with a racing heart.

Examples
In *Blue Period*, the protagonist, Yatora, had never been interested in anything particular and had never been exposed to the world of art. However, one day, he was deeply moved by a senior's painting, sparking his interest in the path of art. Initially overwhelmed by his lack of experience, he felt discouraged. Yet, when a friend told him, "As long as you feel frustrated, you can still fight," he realized that he could start from scratch and began to immerse himself more in the world of art.

4.2. What Remains After Defeat

What Remains After Defeat

Results may not always come as you expect.

▼ In this context

When things don't go well, you might find yourself dominated by negative emotions like "I failed" or "It was no good," making it difficult to move forward. Feeling down or frustrated is proof that you've put in serious effort and taken on challenges. However, if you only focus on the fact that things didn't turn out well and blame yourself too much for what went wrong, you'll get trapped in negative feelings and your thoughts may stagnate. In doing so, you might miss out on the valuable opportunity for growth that comes from practical experience.

▼ Therefore

Instead of immediately pushing forward to the next thing, take the time to dig into the experience and identify specifically what didn't work and what insights you gained that could lead to the next step. For example, upon reflection, you might realize that amidst a series of failures, there was a successful experience in something you previously struggled with, or you might become aware of what was lacking in your current self. By meticulously retracing what happened in experiences you deemed 'bad,' you can gather insights with a solid sense of realization.

▼ Consequently

You can accept experiences you've labeled as 'bad' as opportunities for personal growth and use them as nourishment. In doing so, even if the results didn't turn out well, you can find your own meaning in those experiences and reframe them as 'something I needed.' Each of these experiences will elevate you and build upon your strength for fighting your own battles.

Examples
In *DAYS*, after losing a soccer match, a character named Hoshina felt that everything he had done so far was in vain, and he had nothing left. However, while talking with his friends, he remembered that he was able to overcome a long-standing trauma during the match in which he lost. This realization helped him understand that losing a match doesn't mean losing everything. He made a decision to continue playing soccer on the university team after high school graduation and started to focus on the future possibilities beyond a single defeat.

4.3. Driving Rival

Driving Rival

You aspire to continue growing even further.

<div align="center">▼ In this context</div>

It's challenging to keep pushing forward constantly when you're fighting alone and imposing high hurdles on yourself, leading to a sense of loneliness. The daily effort and confrontation for your goals are always battles with yourself. However, when the opponent is yourself, there's a tendency to become complacent and be satisfied with mediocre results. Moreover, simply putting in effort day after day toward your set goals can turn into a routine, risking stagnation in growth.

<div align="center">▼ Therefore</div>

By setting someone close to you whom you naturally become conscious of as a rival, you can incorporate the fresh and strong feeling of 'not wanting to lose' as energy to lift yourself up. Being conscious of someone means there's something about them that strikes a chord with you. Find a companion striving toward the same goal or someone you admire as particularly influential to you. Even if you're not always consciously aware, when you're about to stop and feel satisfied, recalling your rival can ignite the motivation to surpass your limits.

<div align="center">▼ Consequently</div>

Stimulated by your rival, you gain a strong motivation to push yourself even harder beyond your limits. This generates overwhelming enthusiasm rather than just going through the motions, accelerating growth with each opportunity. If you can become a source of inspiration for your rival as well, your mutual growth will amplify synergistically, allowing you to build a relationship where you continually strive for higher achievements together.

Examples

In the *My Hero Academia* the protagonist, Izuku, was bullied by his childhood friend Katsuki, but harbored a complex mix of emotions: fear and admiration for Katsuki's talent, disgust towards his bullying behavior, and yet an aspiring desire to chase after him. Upon entering the same school, their rivalry persisted, leading to frequent clashes. However, when Izuku found himself directly confronting Katsuki, he realized that he didn't want to lose not only out of fear but also because he acknowledged and respected his opponent. This realization fueled Izuku with a strong determination to win, ultimately leading him to achieve a remarkable victory.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents some patterns from the ongoing development of the 'Pattern Language for Overcoming Setbacks and Carving One's Own Path.' It outlines how the extraction of real-world lessons from works depicted as fiction, such as manga, was carried out. While fictional works like shonen manga are often perceived as separate from reality due to their fictional settings, they possess an internal 'reality' of struggle and growth that transcends different circumstances and worldviews. By elucidating the universal structures embedded in the thoughts and actions of protagonists living in different fictional worlds, it becomes possible to extract insights and the metaphors that resonate with reality and apply them effectively. Future plans include the establishment of a systematic framework and the description of 27 patterns.

Acknowledgments

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