

FIND THE PATTERN

A diagnostic for spotting shared structure in your operations.

You've been told "**build once, use everywhere.**" This worksheet helps you find the **once**. Pick two things your organization does that you suspect might share a structure. Run them through the five tests. If both pass, you've found a real pattern.

THE PAIR I'M TESTING

Thing A _____

Thing B _____

e.g. a concert + a fundraiser · an exhibit opening + a workshop · a grant report + a board report · an annual gala + a summer festival

01 THE DOMAIN-STRIP TEST

Describe each thing in one sentence using only functional words — no domain jargon. Use abstract verbs and nouns: gathering, coordination, curation, audience, output. Then ask: can you swap the names and have both sentences still work?

THING A IS:

THING B IS:

Yes — sentences still work with names swapped → candidate pattern. Continue.

No — different shape. Pick a different pair.

02 THE LIFECYCLE TEST

List the stages each thing goes through, in order. If the verbs at each step rhyme — even if the nouns differ — the lifecycle matches.

STAGE THING A

THING B

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Stages rhyme — same verbs in the same order.

Mostly — one or two stages differ. No — different lifecycles.

03 THE ARTIFACT TEST

What does each stage produce? Budgets, run sheets, rosters, marketing plans, debriefs. Same artifacts at the same points = same machine running different content.

STAGE ARTIFACT FROM A

ARTIFACT FROM B

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Yes — same kinds of artifacts at the same points. Partially No

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Tests 4 & 5 — and what to do with what you found.

04 THE FAILURE-MODE TEST

List the top 3 ways each thing typically fails. Usually the test that closes the case — failure modes don't lie. Things that fail the same way share structure.

THING A FAILS WHEN:

THING B FAILS WHEN:

- Failure modes rhyme — same structural weak points → same structure.
 Some overlap — partial pattern. No — different failure modes.

05 THE SUBSTITUTION TEST — the proof

Take a template you already use for **Thing A**. Mentally rename the fields. Can you run **Thing B** through the same template without adding or removing fields?

- Yes — **pattern confirmed**. Real shared structure. Build once, use everywhere.
 Mostly — needs minor field tweaks. Real pattern with variation. Build one template with optional fields.
 No — significant restructuring required. Two things that look alike but aren't the same shape. Don't force it.

What did you find?

THE PATTERN THING A AND THING B SHARE IS:

THE JUDGMENT THAT STAYS WITH YOU (THE PART THE SYSTEM CAN'T REPLACE):

THE STRUCTURE THAT COULD LIVE OUTSIDE YOUR HEAD (THE PART THE SYSTEM HANDLES):

What to do next

1. **Pick the test that surprised you most.** That's the lens to carry into the rest of your operations.
2. **Try the substitution test on a third thing this week.** Same template, different content. Either it fits or it doesn't — and the answer is the lesson.
3. **Watch for the meta-signal:** when you catch yourself thinking "I'm having the exact same conversation about this thing that I had about that thing" — that recognition is the pattern. The eye trains itself when you're in the work.

"A pattern is real when the failure modes rhyme."