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The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

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In one way of telling the story, formal study and teaching about communication began in Sicily in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E.¹ The Tyrant (the term had not yet acquired its pejorative connotations) had been overthrown and the victors had to sort out conflicting claims about who owned parcels of land. To their credit, they decided to resolve their differences through talk rather than (continued) violence. As they set up courts to adjudicate the issues, an unintended consequence of some importance occurred: They found that some forms of talk were more persuasive than others and that some people were more skilled than others in these forms of talk. Some skilled persuaders became arguers-for-hire and/or speech coaches; some of these began to study what differentiates good from bad argument; and the art of persuasion became an important thread throughout the development of Western culture.

In the subsequent 2,500 years, social and political changes have often challenged the efficacy or desirability of existing patterns of communication. Sometimes the barbarians have won. Instead of institutionalizing more productive forms of communication (as did the citizens of Rhodes), society has fallen back on less sophisticated, more brutal patterns of interaction. At other times, powerful new ways of thinking and acting have been developed, such as persuasion rather than force as a means of governance in ancient Greece and argument based on empirical evidence rather than on authority or analogy in Enlightenment Europe (Toulmin, 1990).

I am far from the only person who believes that the current situation (variously described as globalization, postmodernity, late modernity, or simply post-9/11²) challenge the efficacy and desirability of patterns of communication that

sufficed when most people could live without confronting the fact that their own culture is one among many and without having to engage in interaction with those whose taken-for-granted truths, values, and ways of doing things are not like ours. Berger (2001) described the challenge facing all of us in this way:

The process of modernization, which by now has fundamentally affected virtually every society on earth, has as one of its most important consequences the situation commonly called pluralism. The term means quite simply that people with very different beliefs, values, and lifestyles come to live together in close proximity, are forced to interact with each other, and therefore are faced with the alternative of either clashing in conflict or somehow accommodating each other's differences.

...

Put simply, pluralism *relativizes*. What in an earlier time was a belief held with absolute conviction now becomes an opinion or a matter of taste. . . . This relativization is often experienced at first as a great liberation; after a while it may come to be felt as a great burden. There appears then a nostalgia, a yearning for the comforting certainties of the past. Pluralism, the erstwhile liberator, now becomes an enemy, the "great satan" who must be fought in the name of timeless truths. This social-psychological process unleashes a curious dialectic between relativism and fanaticism. . . . Every fanaticism is vulnerable to relativization, just as every relativism may be cut short by this or that "Damascus experience."

While these two positions are psychological and sociological opposites, they share an important cognitive assumption: Both the relativist and the fanatic believe that there can be no reasonable communication between different worldviews, no worthwhile search for mutually acceptable criteria of truth by which the differences could be discussed. Given that assumption, there is no middle ground between challenging nothing that those others are saying and hitting them over the head until they surrender or disappear. (pp. xi-xii)

Just as the citizens of ancient Sicily avoided continued warfare by developing the arts and habits of persuasion and institutionalizing them into their culture, we are challenged to develop and valorize ways of communicating that transcend the apparent dichotomy between ignoring the Others and hitting them over the head until they surrender or disappear. If we fail to meet this challenge, the barbarians will win again, with more sophisticated social techniques for isolating and oppressing the Others or technical techniques for breaking things and people. Despite their prominence in the headlines, the victory of the barbarians is not inevitable. Berger (2001) notes,

ordinary experience shows that this assumption of non-communication does not hold universally. There have been many cases in which there has been meaningful communication between people with widely differing beliefs and values, as a result of which a middle ground was indeed established so that the several groups could co-exist amicably without either open conflict or giving up everything in their cherished tradition. . . . The success has very rarely been the result of negotiations between theologians or other accredited theorists. The cognitive and moral compromises have rather been hammered out over lunchbreak conversations between fellow-workers, over backyard fences by neighboring housewives, or by parents coming in contact because of shared concerns for their children's schools or recreational activities. (p. xiii)

One of the most exciting aspects of the current, wonderfully chaotic period is the unprecedented attention given by practitioners to finding ways of communicating better. Examples include what some call "track 2" or person-to-person diplomacy, interethnic and interfaith dialogue groups seeking to find ways of living together amicably in support of, or despite, the efforts of their political leaders; the alternative dispute resolution movement that

has experimented with and found ways of institutionalizing nonadversarial ways of dealing with conflict; and nations carrying the burdens of civil war who have turned to truth and reconciliation rather than retribution as ways of moving forward together. I think Berger is, with significant exceptions, right about scholars following rather than leading these developments, but, just as the citizens of ancient Sicily discovered, there are important roles to be played by scholarly contemplation; theoretical formulation; and effective teaching of ideas, values, and skills.

“If I had all my druthers” (a phrase from my culture-of-origin), the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) would be seen as a scholarly response to these unsettled times and a valuable resource for understanding, describing, and facilitating the development of the new forms of communication called for by the challenges of contemporary society.

Vernon Cronen and I were the initial developers of the theory, and we began working on CMM during the middle 1970s. The social and political upheavals in the United States associated with the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, and an unprecedented series of assassinations of progressive leaders, were raising questions for all of us about our culture, social institutions, personal freedoms, and the range of ways in which we might legitimately engage in the pursuit of happiness. The decade of the 1970s was also a time of metatheoretical ferment within the discipline increasingly being called “communication.” The half-century imbroglio between “rhetoric” and “speech” was being set aside by new developments in “communication” (Pearce, 1985) and the generation of theorists who are now full professors or professors emeritus were young turks, excitedly exploring the implications of laws, rules, and systems as alternative frameworks for their theories (Pearce & Benson, 1977).

CMM began as an interpretive theory primarily focused on interpersonal communication, developed a critical edge in work in a wide range of communication settings, and

has now morphed into a practical theory that collaborates with practitioners to improve the patterns of communication that it describes and critiques (Barge, 2001; Cronen, 2001; Pearce & Pearce, 2000). In this chapter, I’ll use these three phases in the development of CMM as a means to describe it and ground the discussion in two communication events that illustrate the challenges Berger described.

A MEETING BETWEEN CENTRAL AND NORTH AMERICANS

Before dawn on November 16, 1989, soldiers in the army of El Salvador crossed the street from their base and entered the campus of the University of Central America (UCA). They broke into the Jesuit residence and murdered six professors and administrators, their housekeeper, and her daughter. The bodies were left lying on the lawn of the campus as a blatant statement of the fate awaiting those who sympathized with rebel forces. In 1991, the officers who ordered the murders (but not the soldiers who carried them out) were found guilty; peace accords between the government and rebels were signed in 1992. With the reduction in violence, Loyola University Chicago (LUC) explored ways in which it might help its sister-Jesuit university recover from 10 years of civil war. I was one of three department chairs sent to El Salvador to participate in the commemoration of the murders—in a midnight mass held on the site where the bodies were found—and to work with our counterparts at UCA.

All of us in the Loyola group appreciated the cultural differences between academics in the United States and in El Salvador and were particularly sensitive to the possibility of reproducing patterns of cultural imperialism. In a planning session before our first meeting, we reminded ourselves that Central Americans have a different sense of time than North Americans. Wanting to respect our hosts’ culture, we agreed that the first meeting would have no agenda; we would concentrate on building relationships rather than discussing

specific decisions. When we met our colleagues from UCA, we North Americans were relaxed, prepared to enjoy good Salvadoran coffee with our new friends, and to end the meeting without substantive discussions.

To our surprise, the Salvadorans had barely greeted us before they began to discuss the agenda for our meetings and to make specific proposals for collaboration. It took only a couple of minutes for us to realize that the Salvadorans had had a planning session similar to ours in which they took into account the differences between North and Central American cultures and decided to accommodate to the visitors' cultural predispositions. With a lot of laughter and goodwill, each group confessed their strategy to the other. Our meetings were reciprocally respectful and productive, and we were able to bring into our discourse our preferences for the pace of the meetings and the needs of both sides to maintain their agency independent of the other.

TWO MORALITIES OF TERRORISM

On February 26, 1993, a bomb exploded beneath the World Trade Center in New York. Six people were killed and more than 1,000 injured. Five years later, a jury in New York City found Ramzi Ahmed Yousef guilty of the bombing. As customary in American criminal courts, he was asked if he wanted to make a statement before being sentenced. This is an occasion in which the person convicted often expresses remorse for the crimes or explains circumstances that might affect the severity of the sentence. In this case, however, Yousef defiantly explained that in his worldview, he had acted honorably. He said,

You keep talking also about collective punishment and killing innocent people to force governments to change their policies; you call this terrorism when someone would kill innocent people or civilians in order to force the government to change its policies. Well, you were the first one who invented this terrorism.

You were the first one who killed innocent people, and you are the first one who introduced this type of terrorism to the history of mankind when you dropped an atomic bomb which killed tens of thousands of women and children in Japan and when you killed over a hundred thousand people, most of them civilians, in Tokyo with fire bombings. You killed them by burning them to death. And you killed civilians in Vietnam with chemicals as with the so-called Orange agent. You killed civilians and innocent people, not soldiers, innocent people every single war you went. You went to wars more than any other country in this century, and then you have the nerve to talk about killing innocent people.

And now you have invented new ways to kill innocent people. You have so-called economic embargo which kills nobody other than children and elderly people, and which other than Iraq you have been placing the economic embargo on Cuba and other countries for over 35 years. . .

The government in its summations and opening said that I was a terrorist. Yes, I am a terrorist and I am proud of it. And I support terrorism so long as it was against the United States Government and against Israel, because you are more than terrorists; you are the one who invented terrorism and using it every day. You are butchers, liars and hypocrites. (Wanniski, 2001).

Immediately after this statement, Judge Kevin Duffy sentenced Yousef to 240 years in prison. He went beyond the requirements of his role by recommending that the sentence be served in solitary confinement, imposing a fine of \$4.5 million, and ordering Yousef to provide \$250 million in restitution. In explaining the recommendation for solitary confinement, Duffy said, "Your treatment is like a person who has a virus that could communicate plague around the world." He explained that he added the fines and demand for restitution because someone might be "perverse enough" to buy the 29-year old terrorist's story and he didn't want Yousef to profit from it. Duffy

then denounced the defendant, quoting from the Koran to accuse Yousef of betraying the humanitarian principles of his own faith. He said,

You adored not Allah, but the evil you had become. I must say as an apostle of evil, you have been most effective. You had planned to topple one of the twin towers onto the other. If your plan had been successful, you would have killed a quarter of a million people. Your god is not Allah. Your god is death. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, January 9, 1998, p. A2)

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THESE COMMUNICATION EVENTS

In both situations, the people involved acted according to the communication patterns of their culture. Each of us as individuals develops habitual or characteristic patterns of interacting with others; these personal consistencies are a large part of what we call “personality.” In addition, those who study family and organizational communication have noted that these systems have their own “cultures.” To be a “native” in your family, school, or workplace is to have learned to act with sufficient coordination within these patterns. In addition, there are cultural patterns—Gerry Philipsen (1997) calls them “speech codes”—that constitute talking like a member of a culture.

When my colleagues and I went to El Salvador, both our Salvadoran counterparts and we were aware that our “speech codes” differed and would cause us problems if both they and we simply followed them. Because we all were aware of what was going on, and were all committed to making the meeting work, we made patterns of adjustments to each other that allowed us to communicate successfully.

The conversation between Yousef and Duffy in the New York courthouse was not so successful. Those of us with an ear for such things noted at the time that they talked past each other. More specifically, each made a

virtue of remaining within his cultural values, beliefs, and manners of expression. Neither felt that the other understood him; both felt that they had acted virtuously; and both felt that the other was a terrorist. And, tragically, we know that the issue was not resolved in the courthouse that day. Eight years later, 18 equally dedicated men succeeded in doing to the World Trade Center (and the Pentagon) what Yousef had attempted—and most Americans were surprised and, although Yousef had explained it clearly, did not understand why so many people hated us so much.

CMM AS INTERPRETIVE THEORY

When Vern Cronen and I began working on CMM, we didn’t know how the communication theory we were developing could be used to engage the social issues of our times, but we were convinced that it would. We were initially concerned with the questions, “What are people doing when they communicate the way that they do?” and “Why did they do that?” The first question located us squarely in the scholarly tradition of those who look at communication as performative (i.e., what people *do* by what they say) rather than (at least primarily) referential (i.e., what are people *talking about*). More specifically, it located us in the Wittgensteinian version of this tradition (see chap. 3, “Speech Acts,” in Pearce, 1994), although we didn’t yet know it.

The second question, why did they do that, has most often been answered within the vocabularies of cognitive states or personality traits. However, since we take communication as performative, as something with characteristics in itself rather than just an expression of or reference to other things, we developed a number of concepts tied more closely to the communication event itself.

One such concept is the notion of multiple levels of embedded contexts, or the “hierarchy model of actor’s meanings.” This model starts with the familiar notion that meaning is

dependent on the context in which it occurs, but adds the idea that communication acts are always in multiple contexts. While there may be any number of stories and these may be in any pattern, we almost always find stories of personal identity; of relationships among the people involved in the communication event; of the episode itself; and of the institutions, organizations or cultures involved.

As shown in Table 2.1, I interpret Yousef's actions, both in carrying out the bombing and denouncing the United States in the courtroom, knowing that it would result in a harsher sentence, in the context of four asymmetrically embedded stories. His declaration, "I am a terrorist and I am proud of it," seems to name his story of himself as the highest/most inclusive context, but, in my interpretation, that statement in that place and time is in the context of his "culture" and perception of the "episode." I'm using the term *culture* in a nontechnical way to index his view of the world, of what is right and wrong, of honor and duty, and of appropriate ways of acting out of and into situations. While Yousef's public actions and statements don't describe them very fully, I'm struck by how much his actions are grounded on these untold stories. Most of what he says describes what I call the "episode," the sequence of events that has a beginning, a plot or narrative development, and an end. Yousef insists that his actions are an honorable response to atrocities initiated by the United States. Within these contexts of culture and episode, Yousef's concept of self is, to use a phrase from literary criticism, overly determined. How could he have acted otherwise? In Table 2.1 I've placed the story of relationship with others as the lowest or least inclusive. By "others," I mean the victims of his terrorist acts. Yousef may or may not regret killing and injuring innocent people and have compassion for their families and friends. Either way, it was not enough to change his actions, and that's why I placed it where I did in my interpretation.

My interpretation of Duffy, also shown in Table 2.1, shows an identical structure in the pattern of embedded contexts, although with very different content of the stories that comprise each level. Like Yousef, Duffy acted out of a largely unarticulated matrix of values, assumptions, morals, and sense of appropriate actions. Within this "culture," the "episode" is a highly structured one with rituals, roles, and prescribed behaviors: a criminal trial in a courtroom. I call this the "episode" because the trial had gone through a long series of turns (indictment, prosecution's case, defense case, deliberations, verdict) and now was in the sentencing phase with appeals yet to come. In this episode, Duffy was both highly constrained and empowered by his role. From the text, it is clear that he had contempt for Yousef, but his role as judge dictates that whatever his feelings, they should be subservient to the rule of law. He was not free to lead a lynch mob, for example. But he did skate close to the line: by quoting the Koran (rather than the laws of the state) and lecturing Yousef about Islam, he blurred the nature of his role and of the episode.

Because actions are meaningful in contexts, the interpretive process of describing the embedded contexts helps answer the question, "What did they do?" To address the subsequent question, "Why did they do that?" we used the philosophical concept of "deontic logic." This is a logical system that uses terms of "oughtness" to act rather than the verb "to be." That is, rather than starting with the premise that "all men *are* mortal," deontic reasoning might start with the premise, "I *should not* kill innocent people." As we employ the concept in CMM, it is a way of expressing the extent to which all of us, when interacting with each other, feel that we must/should/may/must not respond in certain ways.

With this as a lens for reading what Yousef and Duffy said, note how prominent the "imperatives"—must/must not—were in their

Table 2.1 My Interpretation of Yousef's and Duffy's Hierarchy of Meanings**Yousef:**Culture:

Largely unarticulated; powerful sense of morality and duty grounded in a story of oppressive international relations

Episode:

The United States is the first and most prominent terrorist and hypocritically accuses others of being terrorists

Self:

"I am a terrorist and proud of it" so long as it is against the oppressors, the United States and Israel

Relationship:

(to victims): untold story

(to the U.S.): opposing "butchers, liars, hypocrites"

Duffy:Culture:

Largely unarticulated; powerful sense of morality grounded in the rule of law and humanistic ethics

Episode:

The "sentencing phase" of a legally prescribed and carefully followed criminal trial procedure

Self:

I am the judge; an officer of the court; the spokesperson for justice

Relationship:

Perceived Yousef as "evil," carrying a plague-causing virus, betraying his own religious principles

NOTE: Stories positioned lower in the model are said to be embedded in, and derive their meaning from, stories positioned higher in the model.

accounts of their actions. This contrasts sharply with the less categorical "mays" and "shoulds" and "mights" in the meeting between representatives from LUC and UCA. In addition, note that Duffy and Yousef primarily justify their actions by referring to atrocities committed by the other. That is, whatever they are doing—planting a bomb or sentencing a terrorist—it is the other person's fault: "You made me do it!"

In an attempt to distinguish among forms of motivation, CMM has developed some technical language. Both Duffy and Yousef, we would say, are acting because of contextual

and prefigurative forces (i.e., what the existing contexts were and what the other person did in those contexts) rather than because of practical or implicative forces (i.e., what contexts they wanted to call into being or what they wanted the other to do—or not do—subsequently). Neither seemed particularly thoughtful about the consequences of their actions. Would destroying the World Trade Center lead to a cessation of economic embargoes on Iraq and Cuba? Would it stop the oppression of Palestinians? Would sentencing Yousef to solitary confinement in prison and muting him by creating an economic barrier to any profits

Table 2.2 My Interpretation of the Hierarchy of Meanings in the Delegations From UCA and LUC**The delegation from Loyola University Chicago**Episode:

Explore ways to assist UCA recovery from the war while avoiding cultural imperialism

Relationship:

Respect, collaboration

Self:

Thoughtful, sensitive, capable of choosing how to act

Culture:

Aware of speech codes of task-oriented behavior in meetings; great emphasis on punctuality and efficiency

The delegation from University of Central AmericaEpisode:

Explore ways in which collaboration with LUC might assist recovery from the war

Relationship:

Initially cautious

Self:

Thoughtful, sensitive, capable of choosing how to act

Culture:

Aware of speech codes of relationally oriented behavior in meetings; little emphasis on punctuality or efficiency

NOTE: Stories positioned lower in the model are said to be embedded in, and derive their meaning from, stories positioned higher in the model.

resulting from telling his story protect the World Trade Center from subsequent attacks or reduce the fervor of militant anti-Westerners around the world? There is nothing in these stories that indicates that these questions had any part in these men's decisions to act as they did.

My interpretation of the meeting between department chairs from UCA and LUC is shown in Table 2.2. In many ways, this communication situation was easier than Yousef's trial, but had either or both sides determinedly stuck to an enactment of their own culturally appropriate ways of acting, it could have turned out badly. As in my analysis of Yousef and Duffy, I think that both groups had

similar patterns in their hierarchies of meanings, but unlike Yousef and Duffy they also had similar stories within each level of context.

The placement of "culture" is the most striking difference between my analyses of the two situations. Here, I've placed culture as the least inclusive or "lowest" level, deriving its meaning from being contextualized by episode, relationships, and self concept. In fact, awareness of culturally appropriate patterns of interaction was included in the discourse—this is part of what is meant by the term *coordinated management of meaning* that has become the name of this theory.

Another difference from the courtroom confrontation is that the participants explain

their behavior by referring to their intentions to call into being something in the future. In CMM's technical language, the strongest aspects of logical force were practical (intending to elicit specific responses from the other) and implicative (intending to create specific contexts, such as the episode) forces. We've found that when these aspects of deontic logical force predominate over prefigurative and contextual, communicators seem freer to respond to each other and to the immediate situation rather than to follow predetermined scripts, and have more success in finding ways of moving forward together with those who are not like them.

CMM'S CRITICAL EDGE

The primary question in CMM-ish criticism is, "What are they making together?" That is, what kind of identities, episodes, relationships, and cultures are being constructed by the patterns of communication put together as people interact with each other?

Start with the plural pronoun *they* and the modifier *together*. CMM envisions communication acts as doing things (i.e., as performatives) and thus as making the events and objects in our social world. However, communicative acts cannot be done alone. Each act is done *to*, *for*, or *against* someone. Further, what is done is usually *after* and *before* what others do. The events and objects of the social world are not only made in communication, the process is one of co-construction, of being made by the conjoint action of multiple persons.

CMM's serpentine model, shown in Figure 2.1, is designed to call attention to the to- and fro-ness of the process of communication, and to the way it unfolds over time. When we use this model, we begin by describing the communicative acts in the sequence in which they occurred; for example, from left to right on a large sheet of paper. The second step is to use the hierarchy model for each act as a way of understanding what is being done as it

is perceived, first, by the person performing the act and, second, by the person who interprets and responds to it. We often put the hierarchy model for one person above and for the other person below the horizontally arranged sequence of communicative acts. A serpentine movement, from which this model gets its name, is produced by moving up and down from the meanings of the person producing the first act to the meanings of the person responding (the second act), and from left to right through the sequence of acts.

This serpentine path displays the interaction between two or more persons. Two things happen as you follow this to-and-fro movement. First, the force of the deontic logic (the sense of what you "ought" to do) shifts from intrapersonal to interpersonal. That is, the reason why a person in, for example, the fifth turn in a conversation says or does what she does is not only a function of her embedded contexts but also what the other person did and how that intermeshes with her own meanings. After doing this analysis a number of times, I've lost my appetite for judging individuals alone for what they've done; instead, I want to know what happened before the act in question (perhaps the immediately previous act or something a long time in the past) and after they did what they did. This is not a moral relativism; it is a move from an individualist ethic that evaluates specific acts to a social, systemic ethic that focuses on taking responsibility within a dynamic pattern. This social, systemic ethic is far from adequately worked out, but it is clear that the LUC/UCA personnel were working within it while Duffy and Yousef were not.

Second, the serpentine model positions the critic to address issues of which the participants may be unaware. If we were to look only at Yousef's story, we would get a picture of heroism; his statement of being proud to be a terrorist might inspire us in the same way as do Nathan Hale's last words—"I only regret that I have but one life to give for my

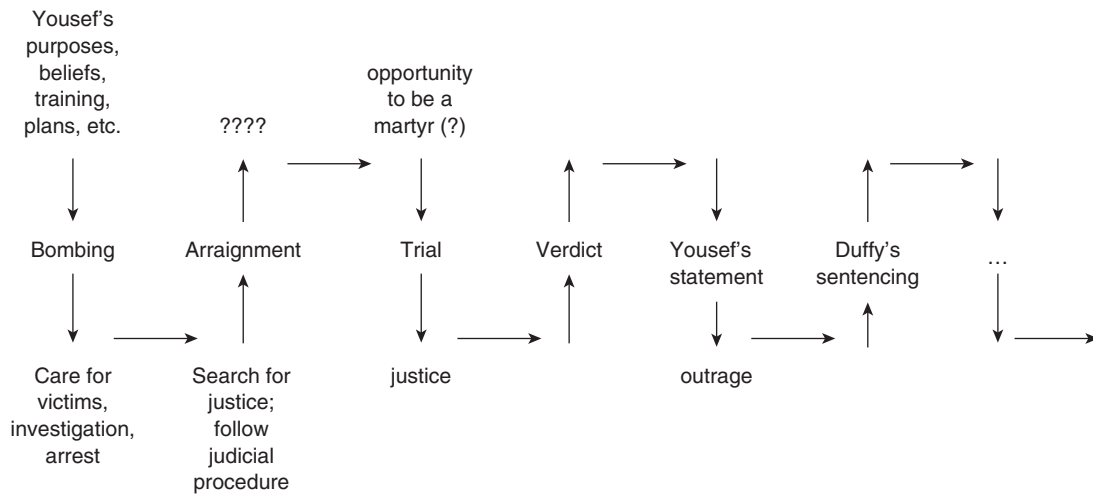


Figure 2.1 An Example of the Serpentine Model, Using the Communication Event Between Yousef and Duffy as an Example

country”—before being hanged for spying and becoming the first martyr for the American revolution. A similar story might be told of Judge Duffy, heroically stemming the tide of foreign terrorism. But the critic using the serpentine model sees both stories simultaneously as well as the way these stories interact and coevolve. From this perspective, the question, “What are they making together?” might be answered like this: Duffy and Yousef were making more terrorists, more Americans who don’t understand why “they” hate us, more acts of terrorism, and more victims. In short, more of the same.

Shifting the scene from a New York courthouse to the streets of Gaza, the way conflicts like this “make” more terrorists was described by Israeli Brigadier General Ya’acov “Mendy” Orr. He tell this story from his time as a division commander in the Gaza Strip during the *intifada*:

I was walking down a street and I saw this little boy—I think he was a boy—he wasn’t much more than one year old. He had just learned to walk. He had a stone in his hand. He could barely hold on to it, but he was walking around with a stone to throw at

someone. I looked at him and he looked at me, and I smiled and he dropped the stone. I think it was probably too heavy for him. I’m telling you, he had just learned to walk. I went home and he went home. I thought about it later, and I thought, For that little kid, anger is a part of his life, a part of growing up—as much as talking or eating. He still didn’t know exactly against whom he was angry; he was too young for that. He will know after a while. But for now, he knew he was supposed to be angry. He knew he was supposed to throw a stone at someone. . . . He had just learned to walk. (quoted by Friedman, 1990, p. 374)

According to some of those involved in it, the Palestinian *intifada* began as an incoherent expression of anger and only later became a sophisticated strategy for liberation (Friedman, 1990, pp. 373–374). But however started, the *intifada* became the social world into which a new generation was born and in which identities, motives, and habits were formed. Friedman (1990) interpreted General Orr’s story as evidence of “just how deep and pervasive was the anger that had burst spontaneously from inside Palestinians” (p. 374).

Another way of understanding it, closer to the narrative itself, is as a description of how the continuing hatred and conflict is made. The conflict may be seen as a factory, mass producing a next generation ready to take their turns as fighters. As General Orr noted, this little boy will soon learn at whom to direct his anger as well as how and when to show his anger. He will develop rich stories about himself, the relationship between the Palestinians and Israelis, and the sequence of events that led to his being who and where and what he is. Someday he, like Yousef, might proudly claim to be a terrorist.

The study of the interactions between the New Religious Right in American politics and those they call “secular humanists” is the largest and most sustained project of critical research in the CMM tradition. In addition to seeking to understand each groups’ social worlds and describing the pattern of their interaction, we evaluated these interactions. For example, despite the stories told about “tolerance” and “civility,” we found that neither worldview contains sufficient resources to understand and communicate productively with the other, hence we deemed the quest for civility “quixotic” (Pearce, Littlejohn, & Alexander, 1987). In our book, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide* (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997), Stephen and I generalized from this and other research to the observation that there exists a category of conflicts in which the cultural resources of the participants differ so much that neither provides a sufficient guide for how to resolve the conflict. In these conflicts between incommensurate social worlds, a minimal requirement of satisfactory performance includes an awareness of one’s own cultural resources, a willingness to move beyond them, and the ability to find ways of cooperatively dealing with the conflict that transcend the social worlds of the participants.

With this generalization in mind, I am distressed by conflicts in which the participants employ strategies of “more of the

same” in attempts to “win,” with the result of perpetuating and escalating the conflict. Based on CMM analyses, I am critical when people involved in unsatisfactory patterns of interaction only blame the other without sharing the responsibility for what they are making and/or when their stories about what they are making are narrow and shortsighted. CMM is grounded in pragmatism, however, not only by its interest in what people actually say and do (rather than abstractions such as attitudes, power, values, etc.), but also in its spirit of wanting to do something constructive in the social worlds that it interprets and critiques.

Since 1980, I’ve had the opportunity to work as a communication theorist and researcher with professionals who improve patterns of communication. These include therapists, mediators, national economic development officials, organizational consultants, and large-group facilitators. We’ve explored several ways in which their practice and my theoretical contributions could be mutually beneficial. I began in an observer’s position, literally behind one-way mirrors watching therapists and mediators at work. Later, my relationship with practitioners became more symmetrical as they learned more about CMM and I learned more about their practice. In recent years, I’ve integrated the roles of practice and theorist in my work with Pearce Associates and the Public Dialogue Consortium. My shift in these roles has paralleled the evolution of CMM as a practical theory.

CMM AS A PRACTICAL THEORY

The primary purpose of a practical theory is to join with the people in various systems and situations to articulate the knowledge needed to act constructively. This purpose stands in marked contrast to that of developing propositions describing situations or the relationships among variables (Cronen, 2001, p. 14). The orienting question for CMM as a practical theory is, “How can we make better social worlds?”

Having done quite a few interpretive and critical studies, I'm struck by how complex even mundane instances of communication are, and how what communicators actually say and do underrepresents this complexity. One way of making better social worlds is to help people enrich the communication patterns of which they are a part and to intervene so that the participants see previously obscured possibilities.

For example, some CMM-ers and some therapists were working with family violence. The perpetrators repeatedly said something to the effect, "I had to hit him [her]! In a situation like that, a person like me has no choice! I had to do it!" You'll recognize this as a description of a powerful deontic logical force, heavily weighted toward contextual and prefigurative forces, and naming the episode ("situation") and self as levels of embedded contexts.

We chose to treat statements like these as honest descriptions of persons' social worlds from a first-person, insider's perspective. But from our third-person, observer's perspective, it was clear that the perpetrator had many other options. The practitioner's task was to help the perpetrator discover that there are other options and learn how to select them. My colleague Peter Lang developed the technique of asking questions like these: "Why didn't you go ahead and kill her?" In the case I observed, the husband recoiled and said, "I'd never do that! I love my wife!" "Ah," Peter replied, "then how did you decide how hard to hit her? Would it have been alright if you had just broken her arm?" "No!" And so on. Peter's purpose was to help the abusive husband discover that he was in fact making choices while telling himself that he was out of control. Once the husband's decision-making process was brought into the conversation, Peter could follow up with a line of interviewing focusing on other options. The role of the practical theorist is to help develop a vocabulary for describing situations like this that can be used by other practitioners in other cases. Many of the models in CMM have this function.

The hierarchy model suggests a variety of places for intervention. I was struck by the questions not asked and the statements not made in the interaction between Yousef and Duffy. I'm convinced that Duffy was constrained by the "episode" of the criminal court. But what if they had been in a different context? One of the things that the Public Dialogue Consortium does best is to design meetings that facilitate forms of communication that don't often occur in public places. What might have happened if, under the patient guidance of a facilitator, the "episode" had been redefined so that Duffy could have responded to Yousef's denunciation of the United States something like this: "You know, you're right about some things. For a peace-loving nation, we have been in a lot of wars and we've done some pretty horrible things in those wars. And the economic embargoes do hurt innocent people. But we live in a dangerous world and there are nations who seek to harm us, just as you did. So, from your perspective, how might the United States guarantee its security without doing harm to others?" No one can tell how a conversation like this might turn out, but (using the serpentine model as a guide) it would certainly have created a different interpersonal logic of action. It is at least possible that Yousef might have made a suggestion more articulate than a bomb, and that suggestion just might have trickled up to appropriate decision makers, leading to changes that would have reduced the number of bombs that have been exploded since Yousef had his day in court.

The daisy model, shown in Figure 2.2, is another CMM tool for exploring the richness of a communication situation. This model is designed to remind us of the multiple conversations that are occurring in each moment. The exchange between Duffy and Yousef was not just between two people; it was a specific "turn" in many conversations, including some with people who were not in the courthouse. As a practitioner, you might use this model by

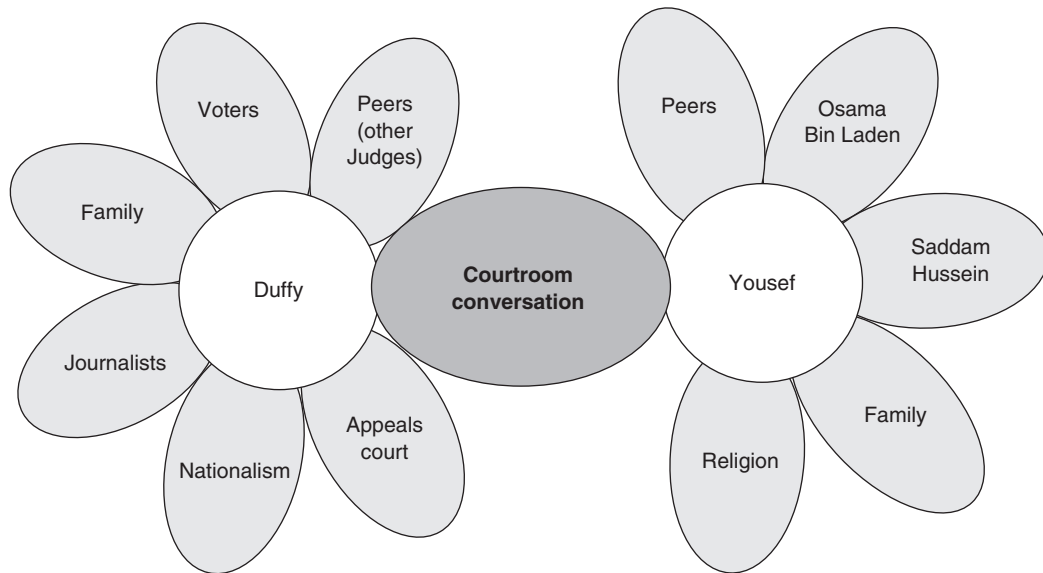


Figure 2.2 An Analysis of the Conversation Between Judge Duffy and Convicted Terrorist Yousef Using CMM's Daisy Model

putting Duffy and Yousef's conversation in the middle of the model and begin to trace out some of the other conversations of which it is a part. One petal on the daisy model might be a conversation including Osama bin Laden. To what extent was the exchange between Duffy and Yousef a "turn" in longer conversations that led to the plans that destroyed the World Trade Center 3½ years later? Was Yousef really the intended audience for Duffy's remarks? Or was he speaking to Yousef but, more important, in front of his family members, other judges, and perhaps the voters in the next election for his office? And to whom was Yousef really speaking? Was he using this opportunity to speak through the media to the girl he left behind, to other young men and women who might rally to his call to oppose the United States' hypocrisy and terrorism, or to Saddam Hussein, who provided financial compensation to the families of martyrs? As you foreground each of these conversations, the meaning of what is said differs, as well as the deontic logical force that explains why they said it.

Another CMM model, called LUUUTT (see Figure 2.3) as an acronym of its components, also helps practitioners enrich specific instances of communication (Pearce & Pearce, 1998). The components are stories Lived, Untold stories, Unheard stories, Unknown stories, stories Told, and storyTelling.

If we take the role of a practitioner seeking to enrich the conversation through the LUUUTT model, we might begin with the two T's: stories Told and the manner of storyTelling. In the UCA/LUC meeting, the participants told stories that included cultural differences and a readiness to adapt to the other culture, and, as it turned out, to adapt again to the specific form that the interaction took in the first encounter. In the confrontation between Yousef and Duffy, the participants told stories that had no provisions for uncertainty or alternative perspectives, and they told these stories in an accusatory manner. As a practitioner, I'd applaud the UCA/LUC participants but feel that Duffy and Yousef present a real challenge.

The accusatory mode of storytelling often leads to an escalation of the loudness and

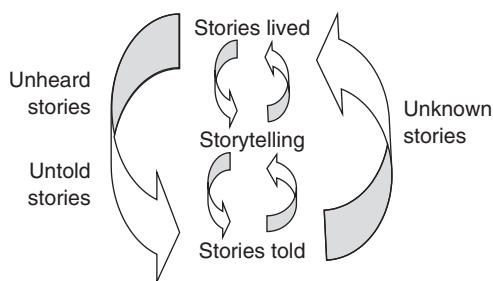


Figure 2.3 The LUUUTT Model

dogmatism with which stories are told; an unwillingness to express one's doubts, reservations, or uncertainties; and an inability to hear nuances in what the other says (e.g., "unheard stories"). Knowing this, mediators or facilitators will often intervene by interrupting; asking the participants to clarify what they are saying; and following up with questions about their uncertainties, perceptions of the other, or persons/situations not included in the talk that has just gone on. By doing this, mediators and facilitators slow things down, change the interpersonal deontic logical force that is driving the exchange, relieve the participants of the obligation to respond immediately to the Other, invite hearing previously unheard stories and telling previously untold stories, and provide a model of listening to and questioning rather than denouncing the Other. All of this is an attempt to change the mode of storytelling to one that has more opportunities for good things to happen.

In my description of the two events, I named some of the untold, unheard, and unknown stories. After doing a LUUUTT analysis, a practitioner should have some ideas about where to start to enrich the communication. For example, the elephant-sized untold story in the LUC/UCA meeting was that the United States overtly supported the Salvadoran military government with money, arms, and training during 10 years of bitter warfare against its own citizens and routinely turned a

blind eye to the government's violations of human rights. At least I felt guilty as I met former FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation) guerrilla fighters and UCA staff who bravely supported the guerrillas' legitimate grievances if not their choice of tactics. I was surprised to be greeted so warmly, particularly during a trip we took behind FMLN lines. Belatedly, I realized that the only Americans these people had seen were like our Loyola colleague (not invited to make this trip) who had inserted himself in the combat zone on several occasions to help the guerrillas. They had not seen that portion of the \$100 billion in U.S. support during the 1980s that came from my taxes that purchased the bullets and bombs used against them. So I was carrying around a tremendous amount of guilt that was never expressed. I never found out whether the UCA department chairs with whom we met were supporters of the government or the guerrillas. Had our conversation included this untold story, it would have changed the pattern of our interaction in ways that can only be guessed.

BEYOND CULTURAL PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION

I began this chapter by quoting Berger's (2001) description of a dialectic, fueled by modernity, between fanaticism and relativism. This description is similar to Barber's (1995) contrast of "jihad vs. McWorld" and Friedman's (1999) paired symbols of the Lexus and the olive tree. These analyses depict a restless dynamic that is present within all ethnic and national cultures, each side imperiling that which the other holds most dear. When threatened, human beings tend to fight, and the gravest danger to humankind as a species is that the barbarians among us—or, more disturbing yet, the barbarian within each of us—will destroy us all while trying to protect us from the satanic Other.

Like the victors in the overthrow of the Tyrant of Sicily, we have the choice to continue to do more of the same—that is, to fight, now with each other rather than the deposed common enemy—or to develop new ways of communicating with each other. The political, economic, and technological world in which we live throws most of us, whether we want to or not, into contact with people who are not (and will not become) like us, many of whom do not like us. And this characterization holds no matter which “us” we have in mind. The contemporary challenge is to find ways of acting together that create a social world that does not take the form of culture wars but, instead, creates a framework within which individuals and groups can find the comfort and stability of their traditions without denying the same privilege to those in other traditions or even those who transcend their traditions.

If it were up to each of us to figure out how to act into this situation, we would have to summon the patience of saints, wisdom of sages, flexibility of diplomats or traveling salespersons, and altruism of consultants or therapists. That sets the bar too high, particularly in those crunching moments of life when circumstances diminish our capacity for acting at our best. I don’t know what gave the citizens of Sicily the idea that it is better to resolve differences through sharpened wits rather than by sharpened weapons and the ability to translate that idea into social habits and institutions, but I hope that communication theory can provide an enabling scaffold on which we can lean as we confront the challenges of our era.

In this final section, I summarize some maxims and values embedded in CMM in the hope that they provide a means for making the kind of social world in which we want to live. After this, I identify some of what I see as the promising directions for the continued evolution of communication theory.

CMM’S CONTRIBUTION TO MAKING BETTER SOCIAL WORLDS

According to the story with which I began this chapter, the study of communication began with the rhetorical question of what the good reasons are for making decisions among conflicting claims. As I see it, the task for contemporary communication theorists is to answer the question of how we can make better social worlds when those involved in the process are grounded in traditions that frequently have been treated as if they are mutually exclusive.

As Yankelovich (1999) puts it, the issue is one of both will and skill. I’m assuming that the descriptions of the two situations earlier in this chapter are sufficient to summon your will to make better social worlds, and that the issue is that of skill. The CMM models—hierarchy, serpentine, daisy, LUUUTT, and others—can help us understand the complexity of and identify some opportunities in specific instances of communication. However, they don’t address the question of how to act into those specific situations.

I’m not a fan of trying to raise anyone’s skill in making social worlds by individual effort. My preference for working with groups and institutions is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the “zone of proximal development.” In his studies of how we learn to do all sorts of things, Vygotsky noted that, at any given time, there is a range of things we can do even without help and/or when circumstances are not favorable (e.g., hitting a routine slice backhand into the middle of the tennis court) and a range of things that we can’t do no matter how much help we have (e.g., hitting a running topspin backhand around the post down the line for a winner). Between these is (a moving) zone of proximal development: things we can do if we have sufficient support.

Having the help of a skilled facilitator is perhaps the best way for us to practice better world-making skills in our zone of proximal development. As coach, model, and skillful

interaction partner, a facilitator can enable us, however briefly, to communicate at a level that we could not achieve unaided. The experience of communicating in this way is both skill building (we become less dependent on the facilitator's help) and addictive (most people want to be involved in this quality of communication again). The Public Dialogue Consortium is the organization in which I've worked as facilitator and through which I've learned a lot about putting communication theory into practice and vice versa (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2000; Pearce, 2002; Spano, 2001).

In the absence of a facilitator, memorable maxims may function as supports for skills in making better social worlds. The following are my attempts to work out such maxims based on the key terms in CMM.

Coordination

The term *coordination* calls our attention to the fact that whatever we do does not stand alone. As shown in the serpentine model, it always intermeshes with the interpretations and actions of other people. Both Duffy and Yousef treated their actions (imposing sentence; bombing the World Trade Center) as if they were the final turns in a sequence. I wonder if they would have acted differently if either had been more mindful about the responses that would have been elicited in all of the conversations depicted in the daisy model.

Being aware of the inevitability of coordination does not, however, imply a commitment to coordinate smoothly with others. Gandhi's social-change producing tactics of civil disobedience were calculated refusals to coordinate within oppressive practices. Some patterns of coordination are simply richer in opportunities than others: a repetitive "hello"—"hello" between neighbors is well coordinated but has within it very limited opportunities for richer forms of relationships. To equip us to make better social worlds, these maxims might help:

- Be mindful that you are participating in a multiturn process.
- Be mindful that you are part of, but only one part of, a multiperson process.
- Be mindful that the process involves reciprocally responding to and eliciting responses from other people.
- Be mindful that this process creates the social world in which we all live.

Management of Meaning: Coherence and Mystery

CMM uses two terms to describe what we can do to manage our meanings: coherence and mystery. Coherence directs our attention to the stories that we tell that make our lives meaningful. Its opposite is something like vertigo, a loss of orientation. Mystery directs our attention to the fact that the universe is far bigger and subtler than any possible set of stories that we might develop. Whatever we think, there's more to it than that; it's not a riddle to be solved but a mystery to explore. These maxims for making better social worlds can be derived from the concepts of coherence and mystery:

- Treat all stories, your own as well as others, as incomplete, unfinished, biased, and inconsistent.
- Treat your own stories as "local," dependant on your own perspective, history, and purposes.
- Treat stories that differ from your own as "valid" within the framework of the other person's perspective, history, and purposes.
- Be curious about other people's stories.

Value Commitments

Theories that intend to describe the world rather than to change it may claim the values of objectivity and detachment; critical and practical theories like CMM cannot. CMM is part of a cluster of schools in philosophy and social theory that recognize that every theory "about" social worlds is also a part "of" those

social worlds and as such should not pretend to be an objective mirror that only reflects them. Paralleling the principles for practice described in the preceding section, these are some of the commitments or responsibilities implied by CMM's view of communication.

- Develop sufficient self-awareness of the “localness” of your own stories to treat other peoples' stories with curiosity and respect.
- Develop habits and skills of articulating what you think, know, believe, and value in ways that enable and encourage others to articulate what they think, know, believe, and value, particularly if they disagree with you.
 - Assume responsibility for authoring the most important stories in your interactions with others instead of allowing those stories to author you. Sometimes this will require changing your stories and/or the way you tell those stories.
 - Develop abilities to think in terms of patterns, relationships, and systems, not just in terms of specific acts, your own intentions, and the way the world appears from your own perspective.
 - Develop habits and skills of listening to other people so that you understand them and that they know that you have listened to and understood them.
 - Develop the ability to move among perspectives, understanding situations from the perspective of other people involved and from the perspective of observers as well as from your own, first-person, perspective.
 - Develop sufficient understanding of yourself, and confidence in your abilities, to be able to enter into high-quality relationships with others, even under less than optimal conditions.
 - Realizing that you as a person are made by the same process that you are a part of making, be committed to improving existing social worlds, preventing the realization of unwanted social worlds, and calling into being better social worlds.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

There is no disrespect for my intellectual forebears implied in my belief that the theories that they developed in response to the challenges confronting them do not necessarily serve us well in confronting the challenges of the contemporary era.

Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction

The first formulations of the art of persuasion were culture specific without being aware of it. The notion was that tests of evidence and forms of valid reasoning were universal. Bitzer's (1968) notion of “the rhetorical situation” was a major step forward, arguing that the arts of persuasion had to be tailored to the exigencies of specific situations. The case for the relativity of persuasion (and other forms of communication) has been further strengthened by studies of cultural patterns of communication (e.g., Carbaugh, 1996; Philipsen, 1997). Nearly 20 years later, I am even more convinced of the argument (Branham & Pearce, 1985) that contemporary challenges require us not only to adapt to different situations, but also to construct and reconstruct the situations that we encounter. For example, I've critiqued the interaction between Duffy and Yousef fairly thoroughly. But the context they were in—a criminal trial—imposed significant limits on what they could do as individuals. In my judgment, many of the institutions and practices of our society are functionally autonomous (Allport, 1939). That is, they served some good function when they were originally developed, but have lingered on—held in place by habits and laws—even though they no longer serve those functions. Communication theory and training, I believe, should focus not only on individual skills within contexts but also on abilities to analyze, critique, and reconstruct contexts.

Toward Transformative Communication Skills

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to a nascent social, systemic ethic, saying that it was necessary but far from adequately developed. McNamee and Gergen (1998) have begun to explore what this type of ethic would look like in contexts of informal interpersonal relations. Is it possible to extend this thinking to corporate, government, and/or legal contexts? If we could, I think that we would see Yousef's trial for bombing the World Trade Center as, for the most part, an irrelevant ritual. What if we were to pose the questions, "How can we construct a world in which sincere young men and women would never think of blowing up buildings?" rather than, or in addition to, the question "Is the defendant innocent or guilty?"

The literature on transformative learning provides an underpinning to the development of these skills of thought and action. As Mezirow (2000) describes it, transformative learning is

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. . . . Transformative learning . . . demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as aware as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives. Cultural canons, socioeconomic structures, ideologies and beliefs about ourselves, and the practices they support often conspire to foster conformity and impede development of a sense of responsible agency. (pp. 7–8)

Just as the rhetoricians of Sicily noted that some people are better persuaders and asked, "How do they do that?" our research might profitably note that some people are better able to understand their own beliefs and cultural patterns, and ask the same question.

Study What Works

One of the underlying concepts of "appreciative inquiry" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000) is the notion that what one studies, grows. If that is true, why should we want to study all the ways in which communication goes wrong? Why—except for the fact that agencies who fund research are set up that way—would we want to become experts in communication problems? Why wouldn't we want to become experts in what works well and to foster its development?

The good news is that the discipline of communication has always and continues to study "good communication." For example, Foss and Foss (1994) began the analysis of "invitational rhetoric," which recognizes that speaker and audience, and members of the audience, may have different cultural patterns of communication. And I'm very excited about the new emphasis on dialogue in many contexts (Anderson, Cissna, & Clune, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Sometimes I look back to the first 5 or 10 years of CMM's development with nostalgia. A closely knit group of us worked with high energy and creativity in the protective grasp of obscurity within a single department at a single university, itself a bit out of the mainstream in our discipline. The situation is very different now. The members of the original group are geographically dispersed; CMM (at least a very early form of it) has become one of the theories routinely included in survey textbooks in the United States; and, to my great pleasure, some of the most active sites where CMM is being

developed are service-delivery centers in a variety of professions (for a reconnaissance of the ways CMM is being used, see Pearce, 2001).

I've described CMM's development as moving through three phases: interpretive, critical, and practical. I don't know what the next phase will be—perhaps it will stabilize as a practical theory, but maybe there will be another unforeseen development. A leader in a political party in Ireland and I recently discussed the possibility of establishing CMM as the Irish National Communication Theory, but perhaps because that conversation occurred over a few pints in a Dublin pub, no one has redesigned the Irish national flag to include the CMM crest and coat of arms. My more realistic hope is that there will be continued interactions between theorists and practitioners that will spur the evolution of CMM as a practical theory, and that it will provide useful resources on which we can all draw when confronting the communication challenges of our time.

NOTES

1. I learned this story through oral history—that is, it is what someone told me when I was a student. It may well be true, but, although I have not spent much time trying, I've not been able to verify it. For more and better information, see Enos (1993).

2. "9/11" refers to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001.

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