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USING CMM

"THE COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING"

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PART I:

INTRODUCTION TO CMM

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ABOUT CMM

In this section:

- Where CMM Came From…
- What CMM is About…
- Key Concepts
- On Using CMM
- CMM as a Practical Theory
- Something of a Chart of the CMM Project

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WHERE CMM CAME FROM…

By *Barnett Pearce*

This is a personal story. An account from the perspective of the impersonal third-person would be untrue. That's not how it happened.

I think that I am the first person ever to use the awkward phrase "coordinated management of meaning." Of course, tones of voice are often more informative than the verbal content of what is said, and struggle and frustration were expressed in the tones of voice in which "CMM" was first said. For years, I had been trying to bring together what I was learning from social science research, rhetorical studies, philosophy, theology, and, in my father's term, the "School of Hard Knocks." I felt that most of the models of communication that I knew were useful but that all were limited and limiting in some important ways, and that I had to invent something that was better.

My commitment to this struggle derived from a commitment I made in a particular social context. I had a crisis of confidence. Just days after receiving my Ph.D in August, 1969, I stood in front of a Freshman-level class in communication at the University of North Dakota. I was acutely aware of a conflict about what should be my role in the class (reporter of knowledge in the literature or facilitator of my students' learning) and what should be the content of the syllabus. I was torn between opposing ethical imperatives. My internalization of the ethics of science (in my dissertation I had, after all, done a stepwise regression analysis!) required me not to go beyond the data of empirical research. Following this ethic, I should restrict myself (such was the dominant discourse of the era) to propositions whose operational definitions had survived empirical tests. Whatever else I might have thought about it, I was keenly aware that following the scientific ethos would produce a series of lectures that were very thin and narrow in their content but "certain" in their tone. On the other hand, the ethics from my humanistic training (after all, I had majored in philosophy, studied theology and social ethics, and served as a minister in my first career) impelled me to draw on all that I had learned to produce a richer, wider, and much more tentative curriculum.

I "resolved" the issue by going with the wider humanistic curriculum, while making an explicit although private commitment to contribute to the "literature" of empirical scholarship so that it would be more adequate for teachers of courses like mine. In one sense, my commitment to research and theory-building that led to CMM was the payment of the debt that I owed those students in North Dakota for "going beyond the data" when trying to facilitate their learning.

As I write this, I realize that in one way, I have failed to live up to this promise. My contributions, such as they might be thought to be, have included a critique of and development of an alternative to the positivistic literature that I felt was too limited. I came to believe that "more research" in the same vein did not necessarily produce more knowledge.

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Anyway, four years later, in the summer of 1973, I was camping with a group of friends in a state park in Kentucky. While sitting around the campfire, we talked about the life projects that we were working on. When my turn came, I said that I was trying to find a way of integrating the several things that I knew about communication. (I had in mind the various paradigms of research and thinking that were represented in the literature.) "Well, what is it that you know?" someone asked. I understood that the questioner's curiosity had less to do with the professional literature and more to do with communication per se, and I chose to shift conceptual gears and answer the question. As I did, some things fell into place. Communication is about *meaning*, I replied, but not just in a passive sense of perceiving messages. Rather, we live in lives filled with meanings and one of our life challenges is to *manage* those meanings so that we can make our social worlds coherent and live within them with honor and respect. But this process of managing our meanings is never done in isolation. We are always and necessarily *coordinating* the way we manage our meanings with other people. So, I concluded, communication is about the coordinated management of meaning.

In retrospect, I'm somehow comforted that CMM first emerged in conversation, and that the formulation of the theory was a response to a question from a friend.

In publications that appeared in 1974 and 1975, I used the phrase CMM as an "ancestral term" for a synthesis of the best ideas I could find about human communication. This work was more synthetic than innovative. That is, it was what I have learned since to call bricolage: putting together something new out of bits and pieces of other things. In 1976, Vern Cronen asked if he could use the term CMM in a paper he was doing; explaining that it seems to fit. This began a collaboration that continued for nearly two decades. At first, Vern brought into CMM his interest in Kelley's constructivism and his greater expertise in intellectual history and social science research methods. After awhile, it became difficult to distinguish what each of us brought to the development of CMM. The period from 1975 to 1985 was very exciting. Vern and I team-taught at least one graduate courses a year, and these were the sites of creativity as well as more conventional learning. On more than one occasion, the students would send us from the room with the instructions to work out our ideas before coming back! We relished visits from other professors. I vividly remember a visitor who lectured about his current interest. Vern and I took him to lunch and, as he put it afterwards, we developed, tested and rejected half a dozen theories.

CMM developed in conversation. Often these conversations were face-to-face; sometimes they occurred in written form. One face-to-face example led to our confidence insisting that conversations are nonsummative products of the persons who participate in them. We had a visiting lecturer who was arguing for a Cartesian individualism, arguing that if we knew enough about the individuals in a conversation, we could predict, describe, and explain the patterns of conversations in which they engaged. Stimulated by the extent to which I disagreed, while he was speaking, I developed the "coordination game" featuring an artificial language for conversation. A written example occurred very early on. In 1972, Don Cushman and Gordon Whiting wrote a very interesting paper about a rules approach to communication theory. I wrote a reply that both agreed with

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and suggested some extensions of it. The day my reply appeared in print, Don called me and, in his inimitably gentle way, demanded to know who I was and what I was up to. This led to several visits between us and to the publication of our paper on "Generality and Necessity" in social theory, which showed that forms of social theory other than the nomothetic-deductive model were possible. Vern Cronen was distressed by the paper and teamed up with Les Davis to write a critique. Don and I disagreed about the value of the critique and, since Vern and I were then working at the same institution, the University of Massachusetts, we discussed the issues and wrote the paper on "logical force."

CMM has continued to develop in conversation. Some of the most important conversations have included our engagement with family therapists (Karl Tomm, Gianfranco Cecchin, Luigi Boscolo, Peter Lang, Martin Little, Alan Holmgren, Dora Schnitman, Laura Frugeiri and others), mediators (Janet Rifkin, Howard Gadlin), social constructionists (Ken Gergen, John Shotter), and philosophers of science (Rom Harre). The literatures with which CMM engages has also changed over the years. We've given up trying to talk in the language of positivist social science, having learned that it is impossible to say what CMM says in that language (and thanks to Jim McCroskey for help in making that discovery). We've learned to speak in ways informed by anthropology (there's a lot of Clifford Geertz in CMM), Wittgenstein, developmental psychology, and conflict resolution. We've brought more history, cultural studies, intercultural studies, and sociology into our discourse.

In many ways, CMM is a sustained attempt to work out borrowed ideas that are scarcely new. In 1978, I invited graduate students and faculty to join me in collaborating on theory construction. I explained my purpose and frustrations this way:

> *"The conventional wisdom is that 'more research needs be done.' I disagree. I think that thinking, specifically <u>good</u> thinking, must precede more research or that research may well be wasted effort. But the problem is that I am -- and our discipline is -- unaware of/unable to use/negligent in the employment of the <u>tools</u> of thinking.*
>
> *Having decided that one wants to do things with ideas is only the first step. The question is, how? As an old foreman I once worked under said, 'you can't do good work without good tools.'*
>
> *So I propose to read and discuss the potential implications of a variety of ideas and analytic methodologies. Because, dammit all, we are still living in the shadow of big ideas which have been poorly digested and are even then revolutionary in their impact. Whitehead wrote about "process" about the turn of the century; Berlo played with the concept and then fumbled it in 1960; Smith lamented our inability to do research consistent with it in 1973; and we still do not know how to do theory based on 'processual' concepts. And Whitehead and Russell in 1898 and Wittgenstein in 1918 wrote about the reflexive problem in language and it wasn't until the 1950's that Bateson and 1967 that Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson introduced the idea to communication theory, and we still haven't built hierarchically-structured theories."*

This group met every second week to discuss "tools" from analytic philosophy (truth conditions and felicity conditions in the work of Searle, Austin and Wittgenstein)

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and logic (modal logics, deontic logic, field-dependent logic, and a calculus of self-reflexivity in the work of Toulmin, von Wright, G. Spencer Brown and Varela). Our agenda included the notion of process (Whitehead), rules (Kant, Toulmin, Harre), systems (von Bertalanffy, Koestler, Buckley), hierarchy and paradox (Wittgenstein, Whitehead and Russell, Bateson), information processing (Schroeder, Driver and Streufert; Kelley), education and learning (Bruner), and theory-building and modeling (Harre).

Looking at this document twenty years later, I note:

- The pace of technological change: it was written on a typewriter and copied on a mimeograph machine. The schedule of our meetings was reproduced on ditto paper. (Will a fellow geezer kindly explain these technologies to the youngsters among us? Thanks!)
- The fact that twelve people actually showed up, and about nine continued to meet during the semester (the document concluded with this invitation: *"Graduate students -- enroll in a one-hour independent study, and work harder than you ever will before or since for one credit. Faculty: be masochistic."*)
- That none of the ideas we were wrestling with was "new" even then; we saw ourselves as belatedly applying them and using them to build communication theory
- That some of the important ideas in CMM today were not on our list, including social constructionism, narrative approaches of social theory, cultural studies (in their broadest sense), and conflict resolution

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WHAT CMM IS ABOUT…

"…communication theory, I came to believe, must deal with what it means to live a life, the shape of social institutions and cultural traditions, the pragmatics of social action, and the poetics of social order." (Communication and the Human Condition, 1989, p. xvi)

Ultimately, CMM is a way of thinking about ourselves. Its ultimate questions are "who are we?" and "how shall we live?"

However, CMM neither starts at such a high level of abstraction nor stays there. CMM focuses on the patterns of communication in which we participate. It attempts to describe them, explain how they are co-constructed, and intervene to create "better" patterns of communication. Most specifically, it is about the process (and thus only secondarily about the "products") by which we make the events and objects of our social worlds – selves, relationships, organizations, cultures, episodes, etc.

CMM focuses on communication because communication is the primary social reality. Communication processes constitute our knowledge of ourselves and of the world in which we live; patterns of communication shape the persons that we are and the quality of our lives. In a CMM-ish perspective, the events and objects of our social worlds are "made" in social processes of naming, calling, and interacting.

This "social constructionist" perspective stands in sharp contrast with an "objectivist" approach that would look at personalities, organizations, and events as "found" things. Objectivists have to find a way of overcoming all the potentially biasing and distorting factors that humanity brings. They hope to find a way of seeing the events and objects of the world clearly "through" the language, assumptions, and social and political contexts in which their "looking" takes place. CMM believes that the objectivist task is misguided hard -- it is in principle and in practice impossible.

CMM foregrounds specifically those processes that the objectivists attempt to avoid. Patterns of communication are the sites in which we live, move and have our being, and the characteristics of these patterns provide affordances and impose constraints on the kinds of persons that we are.

In Communication, Action, and Meaning, Pearce and Cronen posed three "theorems of wonder." As wonder about anything is extended and empowered, we claimed, it necessarily becomes aware of its own limits and its own techniques. For example, stargazing necessarily incorporates the arts of glass-grinding (and now photography, infrared sensing, and orbital mechanics); contemplation of the world inside a grain of sand necessarily incorporates microscopy, chemical analysis, atomic and subatomic physics. As a result, the attempt to "extend" wonder to the events and objects of our world inevitably and, by now, unsurprisingly, becomes reflexive.

In an ironic variation of the Greek adage that "man is the measure of all things," we have come to realize that human characteristics inevitably shape our knowledge of all things.

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And the most human of human characteristics is that we are involved in patterns of communication with each other and with the animate and inanimate objects among which we live. We use language; we live in constant patterns of call-and-response; we perceive within frames or contexts; etc.

But who is this "we" who perceive the world? Whatever answer to this question that might satisfy us, it is clear that "we" are both product of as well as producer of the patterns of communication in which we live.

- Descartes claimed that "I think, therefore I am."
- Ken Gergen suggested that he should have said, "I communicate, therefore I am."
- Vern Cronen made a more radical suggestion: "We communicate, therefore we are."

It is no longer unusual to claim that our knowledge of reality is mediated by language, or even that our use of language is fateful in shaping our perceptions, relationships and organizations. CMM takes an extreme position among its intellectual cousins, however, by claiming there is a reciprocal, causal relationship between forms of communication and ways of being human.

"Starting with the premise that we live in communication, this book claims that persons who live in various cultures and historical epochs do not 'merely' communicate differently but experience different ways of being human because they communicate differently. At this point, I try to outflank Marx in much the same way that he claimed to have turned Hegel on his head: rather than arguing whether 'infrastructure" determines "superstructure" or vice versa, I claim that both are part of a coevolutionary process whose ontological substance consists in the aggregate of (often mundane) communication actions. The driving force of history -- it seems to me incontestable -- is the way that persons speak, listen, posture, strike, ignore -- and the like -- among themselves. This includes, of course, the hand that rocks the cradle as well as the finger on the button that starts World War III; it includes patterns of honesty and politeness as well as agreements about the distribution of wealth and power; and it includes praying congregations as well as marching armies, spending consumers and unionized workers." (Communication and the Human Condition, 1989, p. xvii)

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KEY CONCEPTS

Coordination: *the process by which persons attempt to call into being conjoint enactments of their stories about what is good, desirable, and/or expedient, and to prevent the conjoint enactments of their stories of what is bad, ugly, and obstructive.* Coordination is the way we "fit" our actions into those of other people to produce patterns. It does not necessarily entail understanding or agreement with others, or that we like or want the patterns that we produce.

Note that the emphasis is on what we conjointly create when our actions join together. Whether we are aware of what we are producing and the extent to which we are acting intentionally are variables. One of the purposes of CMM is to enable people, individually and collectively, to be able to produce "better" patterns of communication. For example, the social and material conditions of contemporary society make some venerable forms of conflict resolution too costly; one of the "agendas" for us as a society is to learn how to produce -- and institutionalize the means of production of -- better ways of handling conflict. This is the context for some of our current emphasis on "public dialogue."

The Management of Meaning or Coherence: *the process by which we tell ourselves (and others) stories in order to interpret the world around us and our place in it.* Coherence is achieved by telling stories about ourselves, individually and collectively, about the world around us, and about the nature of answers to questions like these. "Nothing passes but the mind grabs it and looks for a way to fit it into a story, or into a variety of possible scripts" (Morton, 1984. p. 2).

Note that we are simultaneously meaning-makers (in a world the substance of which is stories) and actors (in a world the substance of which is events). These cannot be separated but neither are they the same thing. We always live in the tension between the stories we "tell" ourselves and others and the stories we "live" with others. This tension is the source of much of the joy and pain of human life; the mother of countless dramas.

Mystery: the recognition that the world and our experience of it is more than any of the particular stories that make it coherent or any of the activities in which we engage. This is not to argue, as George Steiner does, that there is "a small, queer margin at the very top" of "truth and realness" that is the only thing that cannot "be housed inside the walls of language." Rather, it is to recognize that the creative power of language is a two-edged sword. In creating one picture of reality, for instance, it predisposes us to see reality in that way rather than in all the other ways in which we might have seen it; in interpreting our motives for acting in one way, we obscure all the other ways in which we might have understood the event.

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This insight is perhaps best expressed in a very old wisdom book, the Tao Te Ching. See particularly the fourth line in the first stanza.

1

The way that can be described is not the eternal Way.
The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.

That which cannot be named is the eternal reality.
Naming is the source of all particular things.

* * * * * * * *

2

When some things are called beautiful, other things become ugly.
When some things are called good, other things become bad.

Being and nonbeing create each other.
Difficult and easy support each other.
Long and short define each other.
High and low depend upon each other.
Before and after follow each other.

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ON USING CMM…

CMM has been used:

- As a means of understanding particular conversations
- As a means of understanding recurring patterns of communication
- As a guide for intervening in unwanted and unproductive patterns of communication
- As a way of understanding what it means to live a life, be a person, and act into situations
- As a guide for research
- As a guide for consulting with families, organizations, governments and schools
- As the basis for teaching and coaching skilled practice
- As a way of thinking through complex and interesting situations

This list is partial and unfinished. We're glad that CMM is sufficiently "alive" that the list of uses continues to grow.

CMM is a "practical theory" (see the following section). That means that it coevolves with various forms of practice. To say that it coevolves is to make several claims all at once:

- It changes over time *(some textbook writers complain about and criticize it for not being more constant -- there is an important assumption about the nature of knowledge behind that criticism)*
- It "learns" from the practices that it interprets or guides
- It is useful only to the extent that it is in close contact with practice *(some academics fault CMM because it does not stand away from practice to predict and/or explain -- and there is another important assumption about the nature of knowledge embedded in this criticism)*

CMM is a language for talking about social interaction. It is not a series of propositions, theorems (like the claim that parallel lines will never meet) or equations (like $e=mc^2$). It is more a set of concepts, terms, diagrams and the like with which to think than it is a set of truth-claims to think about.

Like any language, it is hard to draw sharp boundaries that distinguish what is "in" and what is "outside" the language. It is a living language. As such, it invents new words; it contains idioms because of historical circumstances; and it is inconsistent. We take its fluidity and inconsistency as a virtue because, as Philip Wheelwright once put it, "if reality is largely fluid and half-paradoxical, then steel nets are not the best thing for taking samples of it."

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CMM AS A "PRACTICAL THEORY," OR, WHAT CMM TRIES TO DO…

Kurt Lewin once said that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. Perhaps he was right, but if so, his often-quoted dictum begs the question of what is a "good theory."

This century has seen both the rise and the transformation of the discipline of the philosophy of science. One aspect of these developments is the recognition that there are many standards for what constitutes a good theory.

Some folks, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Shotter, resolutely resist any attempt to systemize their work. For example, Shotter calls for "a toolbox of concepts" and a "sensibility" rather than anything resembling a "theory." On the other hand, most social theorists still work with the presumption that a good theory is identified with propositions sufficiently general to describe "necessary" relationships among a large class of variables. CMM is criticized by both groups, on the one hand as having too much structure and on the other has having too little!

CMM is best understood as what Aristotle called "praxis." To adapt to contemporary language uses, and to include post-Aristotelian developments, we call CMM a "practical theory." Here are some of the characteristics of practical theory:

1. Practical theory is concerned with the way embodied persons in a real world act together to create patterns of practice that constitute their forms of life.
2. A practical theory provides an evolving grammar for a family of discursive and conversational practices. The grammar of practical theory should be internally consistent and defensible in light of data.
3. These practices constitute a family of methods for the study of situated social action wherein professionals join with participants and clients. As such, practical theory respects the centrality of the grammatical abilities of persons in conjoint action.
4. Practical theories are assessed by their consequences. They are developed in order to make human life better. They provide ways of joining in social action so as to promote
   (a) socially useful description, explanation, critique, and change in situated human action; and
   (b) emergence of new abilities in all parties involved.
5. A practical theory coevolves with both the abilities of its practitioners and the consequences of its use, thus forming a tradition of practice.

(Source: Vernon E. Cronen, "Practical Theory and the Tasks Ahead for Social Approaches to Communication," pp. 217-242 in Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, ed. Social Approaches to Communication. New York: Guilford, 1995.)

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SOMETHING OF A CHART OF THE CMM PROJECT

This is a partial, selective list of references organized around "phases" of the CMM project.

First Phase: (1973-1980): Theory Building

In this phase, we synthesized concepts, sifted through what we found and created so that some ideas became central and others peripheral. Our primary conversation partners were "social scientists" in communication, psychology, and sociology, and philosophers of science. Two questions informed our work:

- "If we had a theory of communication, what would it look like?"
- "In what language can we answer the question, 'why did she or he do that'?"

Metatheoreticial Concerns:

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Second Phase: (1980-1995) Sustained Research Projects

The second and third phases were conducted simultaneously. During these fifteen years, we explored a wide range of topics, some in more detail than others.

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Therapy

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W. Barnett Pearce and Kyung-wha Kang, "Conceptual Migrations: Implications of 'Travellers' Tales' for Communication Theory," pp 20-41 in Intercultural Communication Theories. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1988. William Gudykundst and Y. Y. Kim, Eds.

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Forms of Communication

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Public Discourse

Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "Between Text and Context: Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71 (1985), 19-36.

Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "A Contract for Civility: Edwards Kennedy's Lynchburg Address," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 73 (1987), 424-443.

Michael Weiler and W. Barnett Pearce, Eds. Reagan and Public Discourse in America. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992.

W. Barnett Pearce, "Public Dialogue and Democracy," video, Loyola University Chicago, 1994.

Third Phase (1980-1995) Conceptual Development

This phase is simultaneous with the second. In it, we changed some of our conversation partners. We no longer tried to explain our theory to those who interpreted "social science" narrowly. Our work was subtly revised by taking on board conversational duties with Wittgenstein, systemic practitioners, narrative theory, deconstruction, and critical theory.

Reflexivity/Loops/Further Development of Systemic Ideas

Vernon E. Cronen, Kenneth Johnson and John Lannamann, "Paradoxes, Double Binds and Reflexive Loops: An Alternative Theoretical Perspective," Family Process, 20 (1982), 91-112.

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FOREGROUNDING COMMUNICATION

Not everyone "gets" CMM. Said another way, there are certain assumptions that make CMM seem reasonable and useful, and other assumptions that make it seem … well, not something that repays the effort to learn.

To understand CMM, you simply must see that it foregrounds communication per se as an object of study. To "foreground" communication means to look "at" patterns of communication, not "through" them to that which they refer. It is to take the structure of communication patterns as having consequences for those who produce and are in them. It is to see the events and objects of our social world as "made" by patterns of communication and, simultaneously, as "making" those who produce them. It is to see communicating as actions that are real.

To some extent, this understanding of communication is like seeing the point of a joke or being grasped by the power of a metaphor. That's why we used the term "gets" in the first sentence. Before going farther into this book, it is important to grasp this perspective.

In this section:

- Looking at Communication; not through it
- Concepts of Communication
  - Transmission and Creating Social Worlds: Two Concepts of Communication
  - Naming, Using, and Calling: Three Concepts of What We are Doing When We Make an Utterance
- Person Positions Within a Deontic Logic

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LOOKING "AT" COMMUNICATION, NOT "THROUGH" IT

This is a meditation on the simple act of Thomas, who says in some specific instance, "That's true!" The purpose of the meditation is to show how CMM foregrounds communication.

First note that the content of what Thomas said ("That's true") is itself not a part of the grammar of CMM. CMM is not a metaphysic or an epistemology. However, it has quite a lot to say when someone, in a particular situation, ***says*** "That's true."

A common way of understanding Thomas' statement (and one that is not a CMM-ish perspective) would be to look ***through*** Thomas' statement to the object or relationship that he is affirming as "true." Using this approach, the vocabulary for responding to Thomas would be to pronounce his statement as "true" or "false" or to indicate whether we "agree" or "disagree" with him. The assumption here is that we can and should look at that to which he is referring and make our own judgment. But doubts arise: are we "really" looking at the "same" thing? His perspective is different from ours, and we know that this makes a difference. We know of a Zen garden in which there are ten large, ornamental stones cleverly arranged so that nine are always in sight, no matter where you are in the garden -- but not the same nine. How many things are occluded from our vision because of our perspective? Are the nine stones that we see the same as those seen by other people? Do we even mean the same thing by "true"? And is our agreement or disagreement the most useful way of responding?

Another idea is to look ***at*** Thomas' statement as making a claim. One implication of this shift is that we need a different vocabulary to talk about people's sayings about states of affairs than for describing those states of affairs themselves. The vocabulary we might use for understanding his act in making the claim is different from the vocabulary he used in the act of making the claim. He used a vocabulary of "true/false;" our vocabulary might well include terms of responsibility, credibility, evidence, proofs, etc. Clearly we are moving into the social world…

To move even more into the social world, we might think about what else Thomas might be doing in making the claim that "That's true!" He might be *offering* what he claims is an accurate state of affairs. On the other hand, he might be *agreeing* with someone else's description, in which the "work" being done by the statement has more to do with interpersonal dynamics than objective reality. Or perhaps he is *sharing a perception* (in which case "that's true" could be replaced by "I believe"). Perhaps he is attempting to *persuade* us about a state of affairs (in which case, the untold story is "and I want you to believe it as well"). Perhaps he is *lying*. Or maybe he is *arrogantly claiming* that all people everywhere should believe that that's true -- if so, we wonder about his vocabulary of motives: why "should" we believe or not believe something because he says so?

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TRANSMISSION AND CREATING SOCIAL WORLDS: TWO CONCEPTS OF COMMUNICATION

The most common concept of communication in the contemporary world involves the "transmission" of messages or information from one place to another.

While the transmission and interpretation of messages is, of course, an important function of communication, it is not the only or even the most important function. The tendency to identify communication with this single function is a relatively recent historical development, grounded in the cluster of ideas and practices that we call the Enlightenment. The "success" of this idea of communication was heightened by its "fit" with the new technologies of communication such as the telegraph, telephone, and other technologies for sending messages from one place to another.

The term "communication" itself comes from a late Latin word meaning "to make common." This original etymological sense has more to do with "commune" and "community" than signal generation, transmission, and reception.

Even within this definition, however, there are differences in emphases between those who focus on that which is made common and the process by which things are made. The former focuses on the events and objects of the social world -- personalities, organizations, common sense, rituals, and symbols -- as "found things;" the latter focuses on the processes -- conversations -- by which they are made.

Of the many theories that have focused on communication, most have focused on communication as transmission. Of those that have focused on communication as "making common," most have focused on that which is made. CMM (along with conversational analysis, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and dramatism) focuses on the process by which things are made.

Some of the differences coming from these two concepts of communication are summarized in the table on the following page.

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Transmission Model	*Social Constructionist Model*
Definitions: The transmission model is a very popular way of thinking about communication. It suggests that communication is a tool that we use to exchange information. "Good communication" occurs when meanings are accurately conveyed and received.	**Definitions:** The social constructionist model suggests that the way we communicate, as well as the content of what we say, shapes how we feel about ourselves, the person speaking and even others who are not in the room. The way we talk and the people to whom we talk creates, sustains and/or destroys relationships, organizations, and communities.
How communication works: What gets said? What meaning is transmitted? • How clear is the information? • How accurately is it heard? • How completely is it expressed? • Was the "channel" effective?	**How communication works:** What gets elicited by what is said or done? • What contexts are created for the other? • What language is elicited? • What form of speech is elicited? • What tones of voice are elicited? • Who is invited to speak and who is not? • Who is addressed and who is not?
The work communication does: What gets done? • Is the uncertainty reduced? • Is the question answered? • Is the issue clarified? • Is the problem resolved?	**The work communication does:** What gets made? • What speech acts? (insults, compliments) • What relationships? (trust, respect) • What episodes (collaboration, conflict) • What identities? (shrill voices; reasonable persons; caring persons) • What cultures/worldviews? (strong democracy; weak democracy; no democracy)

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NAMING, USING, AND CALLING: THREE CONCEPTS OF WHAT WE ARE DOING WHEN WE COMMUNICATE

The contrast between the transmission model and the social constructionist model of communication is one way of clarifying CMM's concept of communication. Another is to make some distinctions among various ideas of what we are doing when we communicate.

For this purpose, let's distinguish among "naming," "using," and "calling."

- In his Confessions (I.8), Augustine developed a concept of language as ***naming*** things, and of communication as either agreeing or disagreeing about their names. He said, "as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires."
- Wittgenstein used Augustine's concept as a foil in his Philosophical Investigations, and offered a contrasting idea of meaning as determined by its ***use:*** "the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (#23). There are countless kinds of sentences "and this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we might say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten" (#23). We can imagine any number of new languages "and to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (#19).
- CMM builds on Wittgenstein as Wittgenstein built on Augustine. The meaning of language is not only in its use but in its effects. Utterances such as Thomas' ***call forth or elicits responses from others, and these responses join with the original use to create a co-constructed pattern 1) which shapes but does not control the options open to each participant; and 2) which has characteristics that each participant has shaped but not controlled.***

In summary:

- ***Naming*** has to do with a word and the thing that the word stands for.
- ***Using*** has to do with the context and the intentions of the person using it in that context.
- ***Calling*** has to do with the use and the response that it elicits and thus the interpersonal pattern which is produced.

Recall the situation in which Thomas says, "That's true!" If we see this as "naming," then Thomas has named a state of affairs, and our concern is with the relationship between the name and the object named. If we see this as "using" the term, we focus more on the context and intention of the speaker. If we look at it as a "calling," we also look at what called it forth and what it calls forth. Some of the questions that would guide us are: Who is Thomas? What is the social context? To whom is he speaking? Whom is he ignoring? To what is he responding? Is "truth" part of the dominant discourse in the situation or did Thomas introduce it? How did others respond to Thomas?

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To understand Thomas' claim, we would want to know what was said and/or done by whom and in what context BEFORE Thomas made this claim; what was said and/or done AFTER he made the claim; and what Thomas did after that. This "episode" has an interpersonal "logic" that may make Thomas' statement mean something quite different from what he intended…and he, like we, will have to wait to see what is "called forth" or elicited to find out.

This way of looking at communication puts "time" into the process and looks at things systemically -- as wholes. As an analogy: typing is a linear sequential process in some ways like the co-enactment of episodes such as having dinner together or going to a ball game. The "cu" of "cub" is not the same as the "cu" of "cue" (or "curse" or "cute" or "cure" or "cull"…). In the co-creation of episodes, the "act" of "c" may elicit the "response" of "u" and both persons are still unsure of what episode they are enacting until one of them or someone else performs the next act, which reinterprets what each has done until that point.

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PERSON-POSITIONS WITHIN A DEONTIC LOGIC

All of us are born into social worlds that we did not make and that we did not choose. We come into the world as helpless infants, engendered, with genetic predispositions that will interact with environmental circumstances. We are assigned a name and a place in a cluster of "conversations" that are already going on. Some of us will be assigned privileged positions as members of elite families or dominant classes, others the opposite. It is not fair.

If we are "normal" infants, we will have a marvelous capacity to join into ongoing patterns of social interaction. We will learn to speak a language without studying it, just by being exposed to it. Our capacity for learning is so strong that we will lose the ability to pronounce phonemes that are not in the language that we hear spoken. As we grow older, we will learn to take our place within games and interaction patterns that we could not describe, and we will learn "our" place in them. We will come to believe that these patterns into which we were born are "natural" and "right."

Philosophy books are often written as if the primary question confronting us is "what do I know?" CMM starts at a different place, more consistent with Goethe's statement that "in the beginning, was the act." The primary question, in the grammar of CMM, is "what should I do?" and it is answered in the context of the game-like patterns of interaction that we are in with parents, officials, friends, and strangers.

We find ourselves enmeshed in overlapping, unraveling, unfinished webs of perceived "oughtness." We must do this, must not do that, and may do something else. One technical term for this is "deontic logic." Prior to the 20th century, it was thought that there is only one logic, that its structure was truth-bearing assertions (technically, an alethic logic), that its primary operators were various conjugations of the verb "to be," and that it was two-valued (that is, as Aristotle put it, a thing is either A or not-A). A number of discoveries, culminating in Godel's "Proof" that no system can be both complete and consistent, opened up the subject and logicians realized that there are many logics. Georg von Wright ("Deontic Logic," Mind 60 (1951), 1-15) developed a logic in which the operators were terms referring to various forms of "oughtness" and called it "deontic logic." CMM borrows this concept and postulates that all of us live in a world in which, in any given moment, a primary consideration is what we should and must and must not do.

This concept is very useful in explaining and understanding various aspects of our social worlds. See "Logical Force" in Tab 5.

The grammar of the language(s) that we learn contain an implicit theory of action and of the universe. Distinguishing among persons is one part of the theory of action. We learn to distinguish whether something is done by "me," "you," or "us," and whether we are the person doing the acting or whether we are being acted upon. These distinctions have important implications for the way we assign credit, responsibility or blame, and this links back to the deontic logic.

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The perceived "oughtness" shifts as we move among person-positions. For example, if I take a third-person position and describe you as being hungry, it makes perfect sense for you or someone else to ask "what makes you think so?" And I feel that I "ought" to provide good reasons ("Well, I see you gnawing your finger; your stomach is growling, and I know that you haven't eaten for hours.") However, if I take a first-person position and describe myself as being hungry, it does not make any sense for you or someone else to ask "what makes you think so?" And if you did, I would feel that I "may" ask you, "What's wrong with you?" As a fully-functioning adult in the social world in which I live, I have the right to make first-person ascriptions of my own state of being hungry without the need for explaining. That is, as a first-person, I am differentially positioned within a web of reciprocal rights, duties and responsibilities than I am as a third-person.

The necessary context for the preceding paragraph was "as a fully functioning adult in the social world in which I live." As a way of exploring the topology of deontic logic, identify situations in which I would not have these rights, even as a first person. For example, if I am child, my Mother might say "How can you be hungry! You just ate!" If I have an eating disorder and am talking with my therapist, my self-ascription might be taken as a symptom rather than as a report. If I am an athlete explaining to my coach why my performance was so poor, my statement might or might not be taken at face value.

Communication itself should be defined differently depending on which perspective one takes:

<u>From a first person perspective:</u>
Communication is a process of coordinating actions within a working definition of a situation.
Key questions include:

- What are we doing here? (How are we making it coherent? How are we coordinating?)
- What should I do now?

<u>From third person perspective:</u>
Communication is a game-like pattern of social interaction comprised of a sequence of acts, each of which evokes and responds to the acts of other persons.
Key questions include:

- What are they making? (That is, what game-like patterns are they producing? What events and objects in their social worlds to these patterns constitute?)
- How are they making it?
- How does it fit into other patterns of other conversations?

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PART II

USING CMM TO UNDERSTAND SPECIFIC FEATURES OF OUR SOCIAL WORLDS

In this section, we look at several features of CMM that highlight aspects of coordination and coherence.

- Living in the tension between actions and meanings (coordination and coherence)
- Writing the rules (coherence)
- Unpacking the meaning of messages (coherence and coordination)
- Episodes (coordination and coherence)
- Hierarchies of meaning (coherence)
- Strange and charmed loops (coherence)
- Logical force (coherence)
- Specific Landscapes of Logical Force (coordination)
- Moral Conflict (coordination and coherence)

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LIVING IN THE TENSION BETWEEN ACTIONS AND MEANINGS ("STORIES LIVED" AND "STORIES TOLD")

"The comparison of 'stories told" and 'lived' evokes a recognition of the two sides of human experience. We write of the stars with hands genetically shaped for grasping a branch or crude tools, we dream of universal peace with minds that are affected by the enzymes secreted by our livers, our souls soar with aesthetic ecstasy while our bodies struggle against a maturational cycle that makes hair gray, skin wrinkle and tendons tear instead of stretch.

"We can come to grips with the tension between these two aspects of our experience by contrasting *stories lived* and *stories told*. On the one hand, our experience is the stuff of dreams: in the stories we *tell*, we can be like Superman, leaping over tall buildings in a single bound and feeling more powerful than a speeding locomotive… However, our experience is also the stuff of the physical world. In the stories we live, our attempts to leap too far produce personal injury and public humiliation, and speeding locomotives, in the form of our personal mortality, the whims of the boss, and the routinized practices of the Internal Revenue Service, flatten us where we stand."

"The stories we *tell* are subject only to the limits of our imaginations; however, the stories we *live* are performed in concert with other people…

"Any attempt to reduce our lives to either the stories we live or tell is a mistake. Although inextricably interrelated, they are distinguishable. One expresses our enmeshment in a world of imagination, including both logic and fantasy. The other expresses our simultaneous enmeshment in a world of movement, including the coordination of our movements with those of the objective world and other people.

"Conversations are a fluid result of the interpenetrations of these two worlds. They include both the dream-stuff of the stories we tell and the physical-stuff of the stories we live. Neither is complete without the other; neither is reducible to the other." (W. Barnett Pearce, Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds. NY: HarperCollins, 1994, pp. 63-64).

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WRITING THE RULES: PERSONAL/CULTURAL RECIPES FOR PRODUCING PATTERNS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Many of the events and objects of the social world are the product of what we might call "rule-following" behavior. If you and I and the other people in our group all act according to certain rules, predictable outcomes will occur. We can explain these patterns by writing the rules, and the list of rules functions something like a recipe for producing these aspects of our social worlds.

Although this process seems very mundane, it can be useful because we are often not aware of the rules that we are following, and because we often don't think through the implications of those rules.

For example, Lillian Rubin's study of lower socioeconomic groups in American cities (Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family, NY: Basic, 1976) described an intergenerational pattern of premarital pregnancy, early marriage, curtailed education due to family economic responsibilities, marital unhappiness, etc. As we read her study, it seemed to us that she was describing a recipe for perpetuating this pattern. Assume that young people in this community follow all of these rules, but are aware of them only one at a time.

- Premarital sex is immoral, and a "good girl" does not prepare to engage in immoral behavior
- People get "carried away" sometimes and engage in immoral behavior. If so, they should do "the right thing" and marry
- A "good man" has the responsibility to provide economically for his family, even if it means dropping out of school and taking a low-paying job

Simply by writing these rules, we can understand how "good" young people perpetuate the pattern and are surprised when they do.

About 20 years ago, Steve Chaffee ("Communication Patterns in the Family: Implications for Adaptability and Change," presented to the Speech Communication Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1978) was interested in a curious phenomenon. Many of his students were very well informed, read newspapers carefully, but had very shallow involvement in any political or public issues. He did a study of family communication patterns that, in our reading, provides a recipe for shallow involvement. Assume that everyone in a family follows these rules:

- It is important to be involved in political and social action
- It is important to be informed
- You must be true to your conviction
- Disagreements count as threats to personal relationship

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- It is insulting and presumptuous to disagree with persons of higher status
- It is dangerous and improper to insult persons of higher status
- It is most important that we do nothing that will threaten personal relationships

There is nothing "wrong" with any of these rules, but the combination of them produces a pattern which, if repeated day after day, creates a reality that Chaffee described as "shallow involvement."

These two examples are neither better nor worse than any of hundreds of others that we might cite as examples of a fundamental social process: the creation of patterns by the iteration of behaviors that follow specific rules. By writing the rules, we can explain why some of these patterns of behavior occur.

Vern Cronen and I were invited to observe a therapy session with a family that had puzzled the therapists. The family was happy, closely knit, but had great trouble dealing with people outside the family. To the therapists, the family seemed as if they engaged in "schizophrenic speech." Vern and I spent some time carefully analyzing specific episodes, and found that the family had a relatively simple but highly unusual speech pattern. The key to understanding it was the kind of humor used by Groucho Marx when he said, "I'm going to join a club and hit you over the head with it" and "You expect me, the President of this college, to visit a speakeasy without giving me the directions?" In both instances, he shifted contexts in the middle of a sentence; the humor came from recognizing that "club" meant something different at the end of the statement than at the beginning, or that his moral reluctance to visiting a speakeasy shifted to a more practical concern of finding one. This family engaged in a highly coordinated pattern in which each person shifted from one context to another in the middle of a statement without marking the shift. The other family members, who knew the rules, understood the shift and the next speaker started with the "new" context and then shifted again… leaving the therapists and customers in their store and other innocent civilians bewildered. By writing five rules, we were able to display the organization of the family's artful coordination.

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"UNPACKING" THE MEANING OF MESSAGES

"Unpacking" the meaning of messages is a typical CMM-ish activity. The first aspect of this process is that of seeing messages as "packed" with more meaning than might at first be apparent.

The way we understand communication depends on the mental model we have for what human beings are like. Many of the proudly "scientific" studies of communication were based on the idea that human beings are blank slates on which the moving finger of experience writes. Naturally, they focused on messages as "stimuli" and "reinforcements" and spoke in a language of classical and/or operant conditioning. On the other extreme is Joseph Campbell's notion that "the human heart" is the ultimate mythogenic zone; that each of us is the source of all of the myths and symbols of humankind. Approaches from this perspective focus on messages as tokens of deeper meanings.

CMM is one of the cluster of theories (including dramatism and symbolic interactionism) that takes a position between these extremes, although perhaps skewed a bit toward the latter. These are some of the orienting statements of CMM:

We never say all that we expect to be heard as having said, and we often say something quite different from what we intend to be heard as having said. That is, we expect the hearer to do what is technically referred to as "conversational implicature;" to "add" the implicated meanings and respond to them. In this way, we are able to use jargon, idioms, figures of speech, and the like. As John Parry (The Psychology of Human Communication. NY: American Elsevier, 1968) said, "We must not assume that the whole purpose of communication is to ensure full understanding by every hearer. Such an ideal would entail the banishment of wit and vivacity from human discourse and the anaesthetization of keener instincts by laborious explanation. In these matters, the speaker must at times take calculated risks; some times his remarks will fall on strong ground and he will have lost the gamble"

We are always in more than one conversation. Everything we say has multiple meanings in the various conversations of which we are a part. Sometimes this requires us to be, in H. D. Duncan's terms, "ironic." Duncan says "There is a kind of double-talk in irony where we say one thing, but really mean another. This is not simply an artistic trick, for when we act, we act before several audiences, and sometimes we must act before all of them at the same time." Duncan describes this poetically: "Irony holds belief, the tragic moment of truth, open to doubt." In CMM-ish terms, we are variably enmeshed in multiple conversations simultaneously.

Every message is a token or synecdoche of meaning. If we completely understood even the shortest utterance, we would know the whole social world of the speaker. The corollary to this claim, of course, is that in order to understand even the shortest utterance, we need to know the whole social world of the speaker.

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EPISODES

One way of unpacking the meaning of a message is to look at the temporal context. The meaning of a message is defined, in part, by its placement within a sequence of events. What came before and after the message?

Episodes are bounded sequences of messages that have a narrative structure and are perceived as a unit. The vocabulary of names for episodes is often used for answering the question, "what are they doing?"

The process of identifying when an episode "begins" and "ends" is called punctuation. In much the same way as we interpret oral speech as comprising complete thoughts that grammarians call "sentences," so we interpret the flow of actions into complete units that CMM calls episodes. Examples of episodes include having dinner with a friend; going to a ball game; having an argument; and engaging in dialogue.

Punctuation is always an interpretive process with no external standard for assessing what is "right" or "wrong." However, the way something is interpreted makes an important difference. Consider the differences between these punctuations of the same sequence of events: you arrive at the bus stop only to see the bus pulling away. As a result, you are late for work. In one punctuation, you say, "I missed the bus." In another punctuation, you say, "the bus left me behind." There are striking contrasts in the assumptions of agency and responsibility in these punctuations.

The fluidity of the narrative structure of episodes can vary considerably. Like formal ceremonies (the coronation of a Queen), some episodes are fully charted and any deviation would be scandalous. Other episodes have a rigid structure within which there is a planned uncertainty. For example, the over-all format of a football game is rigidly controlled by the referees as a way to allow the course of play to develop according to its own logic, and for the winner to be unknown until the game is over. Still other episodes, such as casual chats, are so free-form that we feel that there is no order at all. Even these episodes, however, when studied carefully are the product of rule-following behavior and have more structure than the participants in them might know.

One aspect of coherence is knowing what episode(s) you are in, knowing what you should do next, and having at least some idea of what to expect as a consequence of your actions. The opposite of coherence might be called vertigo, and is highly unpleasant, particularly if prolonged. As a result, we are all inveterate episodic punctuators.

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HIERARCHIES OF MEANING

"Even while eating, man does not live by bread alone" (Arthur Koestler, Janus: A Summing Up, NY: Random House, 1978, p 74).

We rarely if ever respond to the events and objects of the social world as such. Human beings treat messages as if they were multiply wrapped in layers of meaning. The "hierarchy model" is designed as a tool to help identify the interpretive wrappings with which communicators surround the messages that they exchange.

Please note: the term "hierarchy" does not refer to rankings in terms of power or authority. Rather, the term refers to multiple layers of contexts, in which each layer is included within others as a box within boxes.

The key idea in CMM is that the meaning at one level of the hierarchy is not necessarily the same as at others. This insight came from our reading of Gregory Bateson's (Steps to an Ecology of Mind, 1972, NY: Ballantine, p. 179) description of monkey's at play.

> "I saw two monkeys playing, i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence of which the unit actions or signals were similar to but not the same as those of combat. It was evident, even to the human observer, that the sequence as a whole was not combat, and evident to the human observer that to the participant monkeys this was 'not combat.'
>
> "Now, this phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message, 'this is play.'"

Bateson concluded that the "metacommunicative" message "this is play" was the context for the message "this is an attack," and redefined the meaning, as he put it, so that a "nip" was understood as not a "bite."

Following Bateson, Watzlawick, Beaving and Jackson (Pragmatics of Human Communication, 1967) proposed that all communication occurs at two levels simultaneously, "content" and "relationship," such that the latter is the context for the former. CMM built on this idea with the following differences:

- There are an indeterminate number of levels of context, but certainly more than two. We often use these: episode, relationship, self, and culture. There may be others or more in any given instance.
- The ordinal position of various levels of context is, at least in principle, not fixed. That is, self may be the context of episode or vice versa, and the relative positioning makes a difference.
- The ordinal position of various levels of context can, at least in principle, change as a result of experiences. For example, initiation rituals may be understood as intending put loyalty to the group at a higher level than "self" or other "relationships."
- The relationships among levels is not necessarily consistent. There are loops and dilemmas as well as a stable hierarchy.

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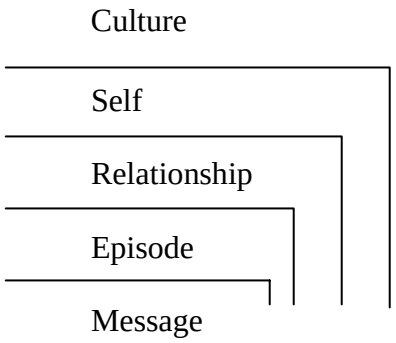
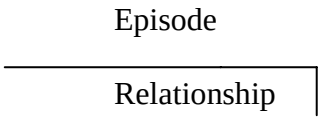
We borrow a symbol from G. Spencer Brown (Laws of Form) that means "in the context of." Using that symbol and the levels identified above, we offer this as a model that can guide us as we unpack the meaning of any message. *NOTE: the number and ordinal position of levels in this model are presented here for demonstration only. The task of any person interpreting a message is to discover what are the multiple levels of context that make it meaningful.*

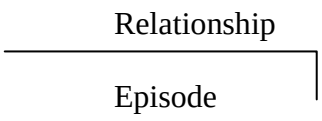


In this model, the message is in the context of the episode, which in turn is in the context of the relationship, which is in the context of the self, which is in the context of the culture.

Here is an example of the use of the hierarchy model to interpret patterns of social behavior. In the beginning of a relationship, a man and woman may go on dates in which the events of the evening are contextualized like this:



That is, the relationship is dependent on the way the episode (the date) is perceived. If the date goes well, they may start telling themselves a story about the relationship: I like this person; we are getting serious. After awhile, the ordinal sequence changes to:



By this time, the relationship has become the higher context. Even if there were a bad date, it would be interpreted in the context of a stable relationship, not the relationship in the context of the events of an evening. However, there are events with sufficient "implicative force" that would change the definition of the relationship again. The dance of contexts is a continuing one.

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STRANGE AND CHARMED LOOPS

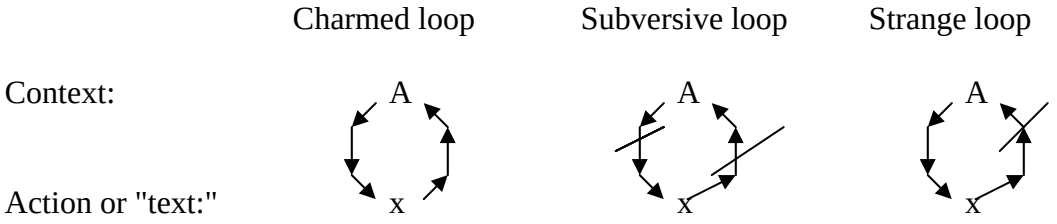
The simplest arrangement of a hierarchy of contexts is a stable hierarchy, in which the meaning at any level is reinforced by the meanings at other levels. In such a stable hierarchy, the cultural meanings reinforce persons' concept of self and relationships, and the episodes that they enact are sufficiently predictable that they reinforce the pattern of other meanings.

This sanguine state of affairs does not always exist, of course. One troubling pattern of meaning is simply a conflict between levels of meaning. Consider, for example, the athlete who was the star of his high school and college team and whose self concept is built around his superiority as an athlete. This young man might move onto professional sports in which he is a marginal player. The daily-repeated episodes of being bested by other players and criticized by the coach is in conflict with his concept of self, and he will have to manage his meanings in some way.

Fortunately for the young man who serves as our example in the previous paragraph, there are some relatively easy ways of managing meaning in such a straightforward situation. He can change his self concept, change his episodes (e.g., by leaving the team), or do something more creative.

One key to understanding much of the complexity of human life can be found in the reciprocal relation between the acts or "texts" that we perform and the contexts out of which and into which we act. Sometimes the act that "fits" one part of the context in which we find ourselves does not fit another. Sometimes we find it almost impossible to act in other than conventional ways. At still others, we must, for reasons of prudence or honor, act in ways calculated to disrupt the contexts in which we find ourselves.

In addition to the "stable hierarchy," there are three other primitive forms of relationships between texts and contexts: *charmed loops* in which texts and contexts are mutually entailing, *subversive loops*, in which texts and contexts are mutually invalidating, and *strange loops*, in which texts and contexts are mutually transformative. (Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "Between Text and Context: Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71 (1985) 19-36)



Charmed loops tend to be stable, reflecting and perpetuating established parameters of what makes sense as well as when, where, and how such senses may be made; they generate expectations and standards of appropriate performance. When intertwined with

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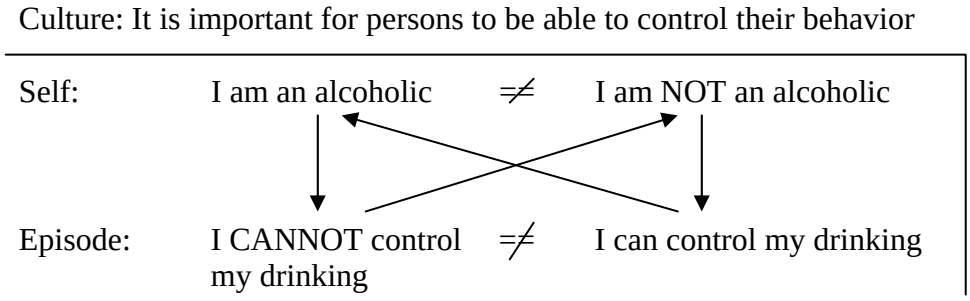
institutions and systems of authority, contexts may be enforced by interpersonal rules, the power of the state, or a tyranny of taste. "Deviant" acts may be recognized and dismissed. Among other things, this creates the "radical's paradox" in which attempts to reform or change a system from within are co-opted and perversely (from the point of view of the radical) reinforce the existing order by fulfilling its definition of the deviant "Other."

In subversive loops, the relation between text and context is irreparably breached in a way that challenges the very possibility of coherence or coordination. Claims of "ineffability" are one response to a subversive loop, in which a rhetor will say "I simply can't tell you…" or deny that "you" could possibly understand "me." A second way of responding to a moral landscape perceived as a subversive loop is to deliberately act in a way designed to be uninterpretable. Some aspects of "modern aesthetics" are a deliberate attempt to challenge conventional contexts by producing art objects for which no context of interpretation are appropriate. Others will act in ways designed to be "outrageous."

Strange loops are a pattern in which a reversal of meaning at some level occurs when one follows the chain of implications from context to text and back to context. For example, the paradoxical command "be spontaneous!" can be understood as a cryptic strange loop. The multiyear and multimillion dollar "development" campaign by India's federal government was designed to produce individual initiative for development by people throughout the country without noticing the strange loop between the messages "you have to do it yourself" and "the Federal Government will do it for you" (Uma Narula and W. Barnett Pearce, Development as Communication: A Perspective on India. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).

Here is a model of one strange loop:



Social worlds that have strange loops in them often are marked by oscillation between patterns of apparently incompatible behaviors, such as episodes of sobriety and drunkenness or between patterns of contentment and discontentment with one's own abilities and training. Jonathan Millen ("Circular Questioning as Mediation Intervention," paper presented to the Speech Communication Association annual convention, 1995) offered a model to account for changes in mediation practices (adapted slightly):

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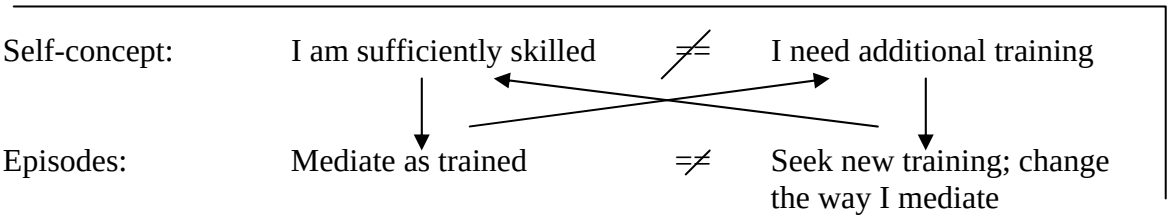
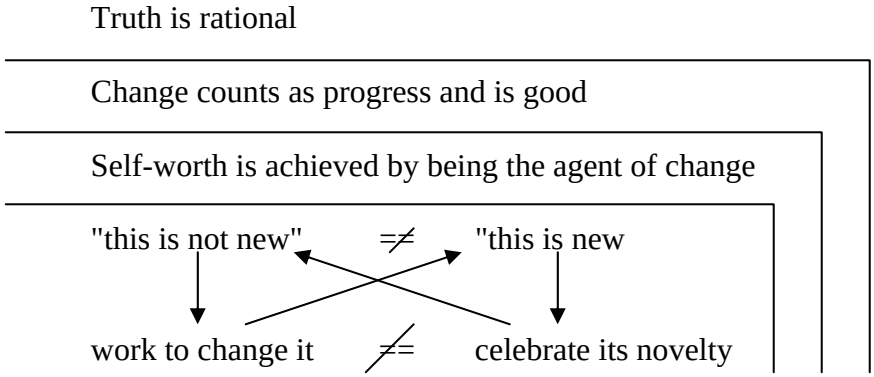
Professional story: Mediators should be highly skilled and continuous learners



Yet another strange loop describes the moral order of "modernity" (see W. Barnett Pearce, Communication and the Human Condition. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 145).



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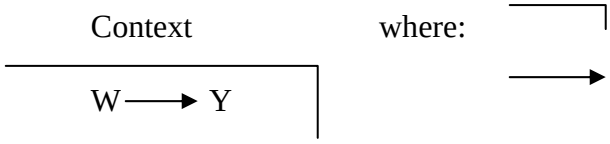
LOGICAL FORCE

People often tell us "I had to do what I did," or "I have no choice." This is a curious expression, even though a familiar one. From a third-person perspective, of course they have choices. They could turn and walk away; they could say something else or nothing at all.

We confronted statements like this in our studies of family violence. People who assaulted or abused members of their families persistently told us that they felt "obligated" to do it. We interpreted these statements as a valid description of the person's social world, and set ourselves to describe what these social worlds are like.

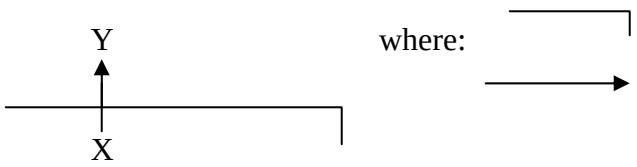
The substance of these social worlds, we assumed, were complex webs of perceived "obligation." To describe the topography of this world, we adapted and integrated two ideas: the notion of constitutive and regulative rules from ordinary language philosophy and the operators from deontic logic.

Constitutive rules are descriptions of what *counts as* what. For example, some statements in some contexts count as insults while others count as compliments. For example, in the context of having dinner at a friend's house, saying "What a wonderful dinner that was!" counts as a compliment to the person cooking it. If we wanted to write that constitutive rule we might superimpose these word on this abstract model:



When we began developing CMM, our primary conversation partners were social scientists, some of whom thought that our project was to "find" the rules that would describe, explain, and permit prediction of social behavior. They sometimes scoffed at us for having so many rules that we could not store them all. Our purpose was something quite different, however. We were interested in understanding specific patterns of communication, and the abstract formula of the constitutive rule functioned as a heuristic, guiding our listening and observation so that we could understand what was happening in particular instances.

Some constitutive rules relate meanings at the same level of abstraction while others relate meanings at different levels of abstraction. Another version of the constitutive rule is:



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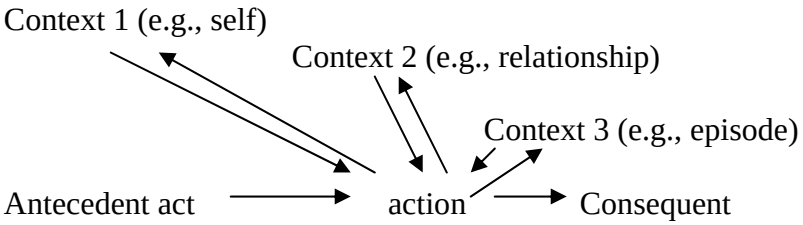
We might use this heuristic structure to ask ourselves, what is going on in the social interaction among these people? When Carey tells his family, "my work is going well," what episode is he trying to call into being -- Boasting? Casual chat? Cover-up? What concept of self is he expressing? What concept of self is he trying to call into being?

Regulative rules describe the sequence of action. When the deontic operators are added, regulative rules describe how a person feels obligated (or prohibited, etc) from acting *because of* what has happened previously and *so that* something else will happen subsequently. During the Reagan Administration, there were periodic instances of what diplomats call "saber rattling" and others call "US imperialism." During one of these instances, young men were ordered to register for to be "drafted" into the military. When the order came, a young man at Humboldt State University became the first to refuse. He said, "when someone orders me to do something against my principles, a person like me has no choice. Regardless of the consequences, I have to refuse."

First notice the constitute rule: "registering for the draft" (at least in those circumstances) counts as "doing something against my principles." With this meaning in mind, the young man described a powerful connection between the antecedent act (the order to register) and his own action (refusing) that was supported by a strong sense of obligation deriving from his perception of the situation (saber-rattling/imperialism) and from his self-concept ("a person like me…"). In addition, he described a very weak relationship between his action and his perception of the consequences, although there is an implicit notion that any other action that he might take would require him to rethink his self concept. There are a lot of things going on in ordinary social behavior, and the regulative rule model is a heuristic for sorting at least some of them out:



This structure functions as a heuristic for understanding the landscape of the social world of the person who performed the action. It directs us to look for the contexts, the action(s) that came before the one we are interested in understanding, and the action(s) that came after.

We often find it useful to make distinctions among four aspects of logical force. Prefigurative force describes the connection between antecedent acts and the action that we are interested in. Contextual force describes the extent to which the contexts that are in place require the action. When we say that someone acted as they did "because of" situations or actions that occurred previously, we are referring to various aspects of prefigurative and contextual force.

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Practical force describes the connection between an action and the events desired to occur next. Implicative force describes the extent to which the action reinforces or changes the contexts of the action. When we say that someone acted as they did "in order to" bring about something, we are referring to various aspects of practical and implicative force.

Another way of describing the landscapes of our social worlds uses the operators of deontic logic. The classic set of operators are these: obligatory, permitted, prohibited, and irrelevant. As we know, there are some social worlds that don't make even this many distinctions. The one moral rule is "everything that is not expressly permitted is prohibited." Such a two-valued moral order, including its opposite that permits everything not expressly prohibited, is not very sophisticated. On the other hand, one mark of refinement and civility is a social world in which there are many gradations of permission, prohibition and obligation.

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SOME SPECIFIC LANDSCAPES OF LOGICAL FORCE

UNWANTED REPETITIVE PATTERNS, OR URPs

Virtually everyone has unwanted repetitive patterns in significant relationships. These are the patterns that are all too predictable, both by the participants and by innocent bystanders, but which seem unavoidable and inescapable to the participants. They take the form of arguments, nag-withdrawal patterns, and other events that diminish the quality of our lives.

When we interviewed people about their URPs, we found a particular pattern of logical force. Every URP was described as having a very strong prefigurative and contextual force, and very weak practical and implicative force. Each person acted as if the deontic landscape for each sequential act had a very strong connection between antecedent and action and between context and action, and very weak connection between action and consequent and contexts.

In language, this pattern is described like this: when my spouse does X in context Y, a person like me has no choice but to respond with action Z, regardless of the consequences. When two or more people have a similar configuration of logic force, this is a recipe for unwanted repetitive patterns.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

We had no idea how prevalent family violence was until we began to study it. We asked Murray Strauss, one of the leaders of this field, how to find families in which there is violence. Ask three people, he said, and you will find one from a family with a history of violence.

We asked the person who committed the violence to describe the logical force of the episodes in which one of the actions they performed was to hit a member of their family. We found a recurring landscape in which the person felt a very strong prefigurative force that impelled them to action and a strong practical force that prohibited them from taking any effective nonviolent action. To put it plainly, they felt obliged to act, but that any nonviolent action was prohibited. As a result, they described themselves as "forced" to be violent.

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MORAL CONFLICT

The landscapes of our social worlds are ultimately moral; they involve the way we "ought" to act and the resources upon which we draw to live lives of honor and dignity. Sometimes we find ourselves in conflict with persons whose moral topography is incommensurate with our own. We call this "moral conflict."

Incommensurability refers to relationships in which one landscape cannot be "mapped" onto another. For example, the Religious Right has a concept of ethics that is very different from that of those they call "secular humanists," so much so that when each group bares its soul and tells the other what they hold most dear, the content of what they reveal offends the other group and confirms their perception that that they are mad, bad, or sick. For example, a central tenet of the Religious Right is that morality is simple and that moral certainty is a virtue; those designated secular humanists are more likely to argue that morality is inherently complex and that virtue is found in humility and tentativeness.

When groups like this communicate, they set off a predictable sequence of conflict that goes something like this:

- Each side uses its best rhetorical eloquence to describe their own position
- Each side politely instructs the other about the perfidy of their position
- Each side is offended and begins to use an attenuated rhetoric in which their precious concepts are not displayed and in which condemnations of the other side is the predominant content
- Both sides try to silence, disempower, and demonize the other.

This last stage is the "normal" state of discourse in moral conflicts.

It is impossible to "resolve" moral conflicts, but they can be dealt with productively if the participants can create new concepts that transcend the differences between them. This takes advantage of the fact that moral orders are created, and can continue to be created.

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PART III

USING CMM TO UNDERSTAND HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

In this section:

- Reflective Effects
- Agency and Responsibility
- Gameplaying and Gamemastery
- Reconstructing Contexts

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HOW CHANGE HAPPENS: REFLEXIVE EFFECTS

There is a cluster of theories within what philosophers call "the linguistic turn." These include narrative analysis, social constructionism, constructivism, and other postmodern traditions of practice. CMM is like these in that it focuses on storytelling and language. It is distinctive because it also focuses on situated actions.

All of these approaches act on the assumption that language is fateful; that the stories we tell prefigure and/or constitute the lives we lead; and that change can be brought about by a process of re-authoring our stories. CMM focuses on the specific acts that make such re-authoring possible or necessary. If we want to bring about change, we ask, "what act could be performed that would have sufficient reflexive effects to bring about change?" If we want to understand a change that already occurred, we ask, "what act happened that had sufficient reflexive effects to bring it about?"

Of course, it is not the act itself that has power, but the act as situated in the social world of the persons involved. Our observation is that some acts have powerful "implicative forces" that change the context in which they are occurred. Here are some examples:

Susan Sontag wanted to persuade the American "left" to include "anti-communism" into its stories about itself, rather than allowing the "right" to have a monopoly on the issue. She gave an important speech in which she failed; the implicative force of her speech was not sufficiently powerful to change the context (the "left's" story about itself) into which she spoke. As a result, she was perceived and denounced as having been "converted" to the other side. (Robert J. Branham, "Speaking Itself: Susan Sontag's Town Hall Address," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 75 (1989), 259-276).

Public speeches have become more "conversational" during the past century. One use of this style is to "position" the audience in a manner that serves the speaker's purposes. For example, Elie Wiesel used the occasion of his speech accepting the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement to persuade then-President Reagan to choose a graveyard other than Bitburg (in which members of the Waffen S. S. were buried) for a post-World War II reconciliation ceremony. During the speech, Wiesel turned his back to the audience and spoke directly to Reagan, seated about ten feet from the lectern. He used the pronouns "I" and "you" as ways of clearly marking Reagan as the "audience" for his speech and those who might have thought that they would be the audience as "witnesses" whose presence create demands of accountability. The speech itself was not a surprise to Reagan -- Wiesel had given him a copy of the text on the previous day -- but the theatricality was intended to have sufficient implicative force that it would cause Reagan to change his plans. It did not work. (Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "The Conversational Frame in Public Address," Communication Quarterly, 44 (1996), 423-439)

President Reagan was known as the "Teflon President" because nothing he did seemed to "stick" to him and because attempts to confront his policies seemed to slide off. In an attempt to describe the "landscape" of the social world that Reagan constructed, Weiler

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and Pearce ("Ceremonial Discourse: The Rhetorical Ecology of the Reagan Administration," pp. 11-42 in Michael Weiler and W. Barnett Pearce, Eds. Reagan and Public Discourse in America. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992) argued that Reagan had put together an interlocking set of three discourses: civil religion, populism, and national discourse. These discourses have two significant features in common: a landscape of deontic logic in which prefigurative and contextual forces are very strong and practical and implicative forces are weak; and a prefigured devaluation of anyone who disagrees. As a result, it is "obligatory" to treat anyone who would oppose Reagan's policies as, using each of the discourses in turn, a heathen, an elitist, and/or disloyal to the country. When people would oppose, for example, the "star wars" initiative or what was called Reaganomics, the issue quickly became the morals of the opponents, not the merits of the issue.

Mikhail Gorbachev was perhaps the most successful person in bringing about a change in Reagan's social reality. Reagan had developed a powerful rhetoric for talking about the Soviet Union (as, for example, the "Evil Empire"). When the two leaders met in Reykjavik in October 11-12, 1986, Gorbachev confronted Reagan with a personable, articulate Soviet leader who outflanked him in his desire to reach an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons. Reagan found that his rhetorical resources were not effective in talking to this Soviet leader and, in the opinion of some, gave away the store.

> *The then national security adviser, Vice Admiral John M. Poindexter, warned Reagan that 'we've got to clear up this business about you agreeing to get rid of all nuclear weapons."*
> *"But, John," replied the President, "I did agree to that."*
> *"No," persisted Poindexter, "You couldn't have."*
> *"John," said the President, "I was there, and I did." (John Newhouse, War and Peace in the Nuclear Age. NY: Knopf, 1988, p. 396)*

One consequence of this change was a lesson learned by the Soviets about bargaining with the U.S.

A family that fought incessantly were very distressed: the husband and wife threatened each other with separation and both had developed psychosomatic symptoms (anxiety, panic, insomnia) requiring medication. We interpreted the moral landscape of the family as structured around two crucial rules. First, the family perceived every issue as having a simple "right/wrong" dichotomy. Second, the family perceived the "worth" of a person as resulting from being "more right" than others. Note that there are two parts to this second rule: worth derives from being "right" and one knows that one is "right" by besting other people in an argument. This is, of course, a prescription for incessant argument. Previously, these arguments were terminated when one person, almost always the wife, began to cry. At this point, a third rule came into play: a good person comforts and supports someone who needs it. This unpleasant but stable pattern was broken when the wife sought individual counseling and received an effective course in "assertiveness training." Now, instead of crying, she continued to argue and the couple had no honorable way of stopping the arguments. At this point they sought therapy. The therapist's

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intervention was to tell the couple that the therapeutic team understood the family very well, but was unable to resolve their disagreement about whether the family could stand being told. As a result, he said, slumping in his chair in a nonverbal statement of indecisiveness, the team had decided to ask the family whether they should be told the diagnosis. The only requirement was that the family should agree what to do. Having said this, the therapist was silent. After a pause, the husband and wife began talking to each other in a completely different pattern of communication. The first statement was by the husband, who asked his wife, "What do you want to do?" By modeling honorable disagreement about a topic that was not simply "right/wrong" and by positioning the family so that they had to come up with a joint agreement rather than an individual proof of being "right," the therapist performed an act with sufficient implicative force to change the family's moral landscape. (Vernon Cronen, W. Barnett Pearce, and Karl Tomm, "A Dialectical View of Personal Change," pp. 204-224 in Kenneth Gergen and Keith Davis, Eds, The Social Construction of the Person. NY: Springer-Verlag, 1985)

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HOW CHANGE HAPPENS: AGENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Consider the difference between the statements "I did it because I wanted to" and "I did it because I had to." These might be two stories about the same event, but the moral worlds in which the event occurs is very different. Because logical force includes both "because of" and "in order to" accounts of our actions, we are poised between being the victims and the perpetrators of the events and objects of our lives, or between being the agents who act or the objects who are acted upon. The portioning out of responsibility is a continuing task.

There is an extent to which we are who we tell ourselves we are. If we tell stories about ourselves, others, and the episodes in which we participate in which prefigurative and contextual forces predominate, we construct ourselves as agents very differently than if we describe ourselves, our relationships, and our episodes in stories in which practical and implicative forces predominate. These differences might be named in many ways, including "active - passive," "actor - acted upon," stable - changing, conventional - innovative, and traditional - modern.

However, because we live in the tension between stories told and stories lived, it is not possible for us to construct ourselves freely by our use of language or in the stories we tell. In addition to this, we have to call into being those patterns of coordinated action which are at least sufficiently close to the stories we tell that we can continue.

Part of being an agent, involves the ability to initiate and/or participate in desired patterns of communication.

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HOW CHANGE HAPPENS: GAMEPLAYING AND GAMEMASTERY

We find the metaphor of "games" helpful. When we communicate, we are doing something very similar to playing a game. Some of the points of similarity include:

- For the game to proceed, we all have to follow certain rules
- Our point of view is as a player, and the meaning and quality of our actions are contingent on the state of play and what other players are doing
- Certain abilities are required to participate in the game, and once in the game, there are differences in our abilities as players

One reason that this metaphor commends itself to us is that human beings are inveterate gameplayers as well as storytellers. Children do not have to be coached to be able to join into games.

We have found it useful to differentiate gameplaying from gamemastery. (W. Barnett Pearce, Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds. NY: HarperCollins, 1994, pp. 84-86.)

Gameplaying consists of knowing the rules of the game and having sufficient skill to be a participant. For example, wearing a conservative business suit while applying for a job at IBM might be considered gameplaying.

Within game playing, we can differentiate levels of skill. Some people do not have the skill to play the game, or play it badly; others do just fine; and still others excel within the game.

Excelling within the game is not the same as gamemastery, however. *Gamemastery* involves the ability to choose whether, when, and how to play the game.

- Gamemastery may consist of choosing not to engage in a particular kind of conversation, or to take a particular role that is offered by others. For example, experienced consultants act as gamemasters when they avoid the invitation to take the role of "expert."
- Gamemastery in a stable and clear game may consist of breaking the rules on purpose and deliberately forfeiting one objective within the game in order to achieve another outside the game.
- Gamemastery in ambiguous and unstable situations consists of creating order where there is none, of calling into being forms of social coordination under perhaps difficult circumstances; or of performing a creative act that generates clarity and stability.

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HOW CHANGE HAPPENS: RECONSTRUCTING CONTEXTS

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation in which it is impossible to be or to do what we want. The challenge is not only to act, but to act in ways that reconstructs the contexts.

Richard Rorty (Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 58n) argued for the "necessity of bad argument." Assume that there are different contexts (or paradigms or argumentative fields or discourses) such that what counts as a good argument in one looks clumsy and weak in another. Assume also that ideas, paradigms, argumentative fields, and discourses have life cycles in which they sometimes change from one to another. Rorty suggests that the arguments that are sufficiently persuasive to cause someone to change from an "old" paradigm to a new one must have a form that is persuasive within the old paradigm. If not, then these arguments will not have been successful and the new paradigm will not have come into being. However, if the arguments are successful in bringing out a new paradigm, those arguments will necessarily look "bad" from the new paradigm because they "fit" the old. The "bad arguments" are those with sufficient implicative force within the old paradigm that they reconstructed the contexts in which they occurred.

On the other hand, some acts are both sufficiently powerful to call a new set of contexts into being and to "fit" those new contexts as having been well-done, or as examples of "good argument."

Self-referential speech is particularly powerful as a way of reconstructing contexts. A speaker may describe his or her perception of the episode, the relationship, self-concept, or culture, and few other things are as powerful as a way of changing them. Here are two examples.

Senator Edward Kennedy's "Television Statement to the People of Massachusetts" followed a tragic series of events in which a young female aide drowned in a car driven by Kennedy under questionable circumstances. "The events at Chappaquiddick put Kennedy in what appeared to be a dilemma. If he confessed to moral peccadilloes, he showed himself guilt of having tried to 'cover up' a serious offense; if he claimed innocence, he showed himself unrepentant or as having handled an emergency badly. The former made him liable for criminal prosecution; the latter would indicate that he lacked the "Presidential' qualities of coolness under pressure and moral sensitivity. The context seemed to demand that he choose one of these equally unpalatable alternatives.

"Kennedy's 'Statement,' however, reconstructs the situation to avoid the consequences of apologia, reconstructs himself as a means of both avoiding responsibility and appearing to act responsibly, and reconstructs his audience to limit their retribution. He imagines a situation in which he has been thankfully freed from the constraints (alleged interference with pending legal proceedings) that had previously prevented him from addressing the

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understandable questions of a compassionate audience. By differentiating between his behavior at the time of the accident and that subsequent to it, he portrays himself as both of the personae between which it seemed that he must choose. At the time of the accident, he shows himself as the shock-ridden hero who risked his life in an attempt to save his companion but was too confused to be held accountable for his contradictory statements and actions later. In this persona, he avoids admitting criminal guilt. However, he represents himself subsequent to the event as a demanding moralist who refuses to accept such excuses and insists on the harshest judgment possible. In this persona, he diminishes practical guilt by avoiding the appearance of being unrepentant and demonstrates the presidential quality of 'acting responsibly.' The simultaneous embrace of both personae establishes himself as the most severe (and only) judge of his own actions. Kennedy imagines two courses of action for the audience: they may pray for him in his (and, as he constantly reminds, his family's) time of personal anguish; and they may send him letters advising him as to whether or not he should choose to remain in office, both of which reinforce the reconstructed context in which he is the effective arbiter of his own destiny." (Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "Between Text and Context: Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71 (1985), p. 31)

Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" was delivered at a Union victory rally. He was expected to valorize the victorious and excoriate the losers, speaking at great length as, among other things, an entertainment for the audience who had come to gloat. Instead, Lincoln's short speech is little more than a meditation on its own circumstances.

"Lincoln acknowledged that it is 'altogether fitting and proper' that he and his audience should have assembled 'to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.' But while a song of deserved praise for these departed souls might best fulfill the participants' expectations, Lincoln sets aside this task as impossible and counterproductive: 'In a larger sense,' he laments, 'we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow this ground.' He denounces the 'poor power' of words as forever falling short of the deeds they would strive to sanctify. This is a straightforward claim of ineffability…the events of Gettysburg comprise a context for which no text is adequate.

"Lincoln, as rhetorical critic of his own prospective address, dismisses the long-winded 'eloquence' expected of him with the sweeping judgment that to make the attempt to sanctify the situation through oratory is to fall short; and to fall short is to demean instead of praise those who fought the battle. Excessive eulogizing of those 'who gave their lives that the nation might live,' particularly while that struggle still persists, would offer a strangely inappropriate tribute to selfless sacrifice, a turning of attention from 'cause' to 'costs' in honor of those who have done the reverse.

"Rather than accepting the rhetorical situation as presented him, Lincoln first dismantles and then reconstructs it. He transforms its temporal context from past to future and its object of concern from the dead to the living. Given the impossibility of constructing a satisfactory tribute to the battle and its casualties, Lincoln proclaims that 'it is for us, the

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living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advance.' Lincoln reconstitutes this occasion as a source of 'increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion,' avoids demeaning their sacrifice, accomplishes an indirect but powerful eulogy ('that these dead shall not have died here in vain'), and at the same time broadens the temporal frame of the situation. The Gettysburg Address avoided the fate Lincoln described for it ('The world will little note nor long remember what we say here…') by reflexively reconstructing the rhetorical situation for which that prognosis was appropriate. By renouncing the expected dedication of the battlefield in favor of the collective dedication of self and audience to 'a new birth of freedom,' Lincoln's address escapes the bonds of its situation and the immediate moment. Its central purpose and metaphor is renewal, not consecration.

"The Address eloquently fulfilled the promise with which Lincoln had closed his first Inaugural Address: 'The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.'…By an act of naming that approached incantation, Lincoln summoned the 'better angels' to transform the event (and its rhetorical situation) from burial to rebirth and its tenor from remorse to renewed commitment." (Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "Between Text and Context: Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 71 (1985), pp. 32-33)

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PART IV

USING CMM MODELS

In this section:

- The Daisy Model
- The Serpentine Model
- The LUUUTT Model

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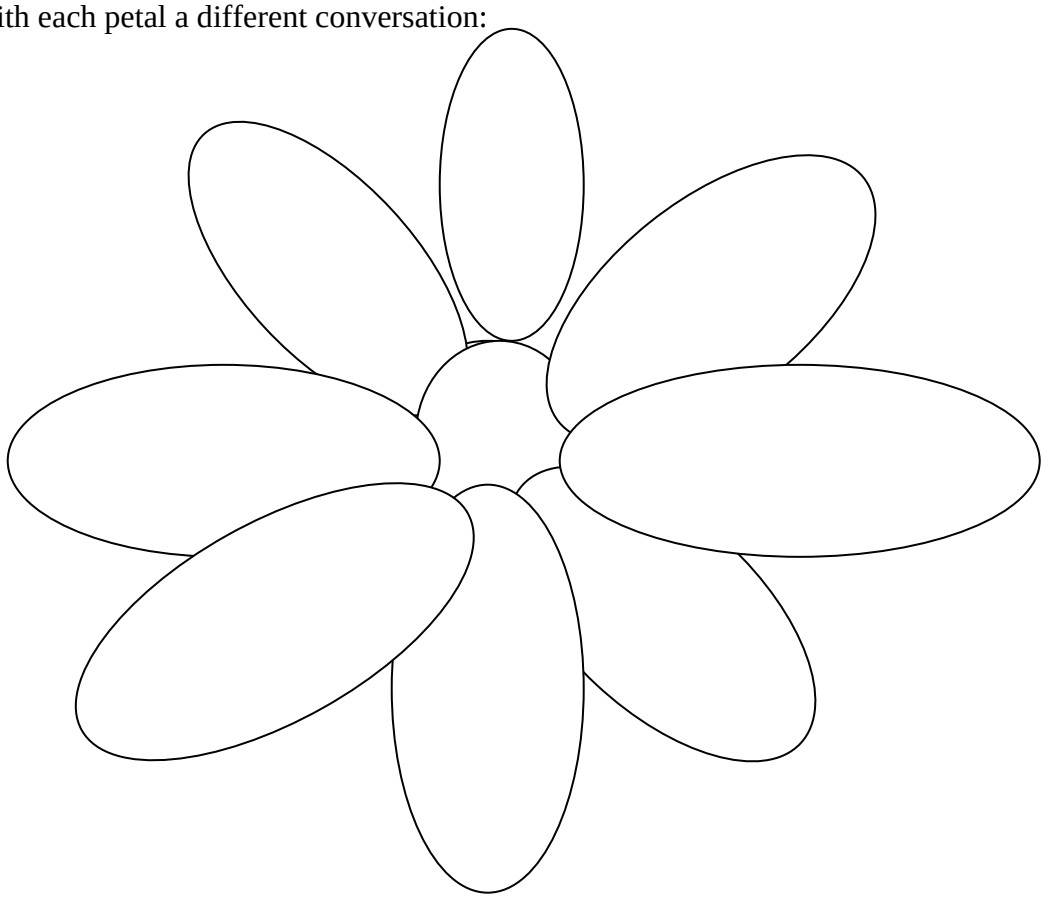
THE DAISY MODEL

As a rule of thumb, it is good to assume that we are never only in one conversation at a time. Even when we are alone, we are in silent conversations with significant others, and when we are talking to one person, we are usually aware that what we say and do there is also a part of other conversations.

The Daisy Model is a way of calling our attention to the multiple conversations of which any given action or statement is the nexus. Imagine a statement as the center of the model, with each petal a different conversation:



To use this model as a heuristic device, put the event or object that you are interested in in the center, then explore all the conversations which constitute it.

Next, identify which conversations are privileged and which backgrounded. Look for subtle patterns of colonization. Which conversations are "shy" and which are foregrounded?

Finally, describe the vocabularies and grammars of each conversation. The result is an enriched description of the event or object that you have selected for analysis.

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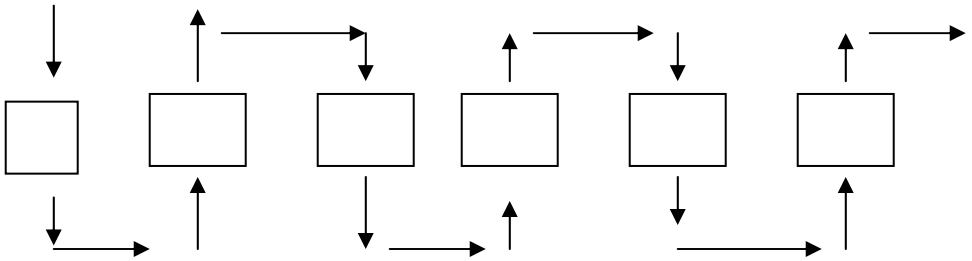
THE SERPENTINE MODEL

The notion of coordination stresses the fact that our actions enter into the social worlds of other people who interpret them according to their own processes, and then act in ways that become part of our social worlds. This describes a snake-like pattern in which each of us, in an out-of-phase sequence, act and interpret the actions of others. One way of describing this process is the "serpentine model."

The simplest form of the model is a wavy line that "starts" within the social world of one participant in a conversation, moves to an action that that person performs in the conversation and then to the interpretation of that action by the other participant. That interpretation crystallizes a pattern of felt "oughtness" about the next act, which continues the pattern. It looks something like this:

Bill's social world:



Elaine's social world:

The Serpentine Model (Abstract)

Each of the arrows in the boxed figure represents a constitutive (this *counts as* that) or regulative (*if* s/he does this, *then* I *must/should/must not* do that *so that* s/he will do that) rule.

Bill and Elaine's social worlds will undoubtedly include a set of nested contexts that we might represent with a hierarchy model. These contexts are not necessarily mutually consistent; we might have to represent them with charmed or strange loops or some other depiction of complexity and disorder.

Each action has some implicative force. Sometimes the implicative force will be sufficient to change the contexts in which it occurred. This may lead either or both Bill and Elaine to punctuate a change in the episode that they are enacting, in their relationship, or in their self-concepts.

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One of our extended studies focuses on the interaction between the Religious Right and those they call "secular humanists." A description of this interaction is presented below.

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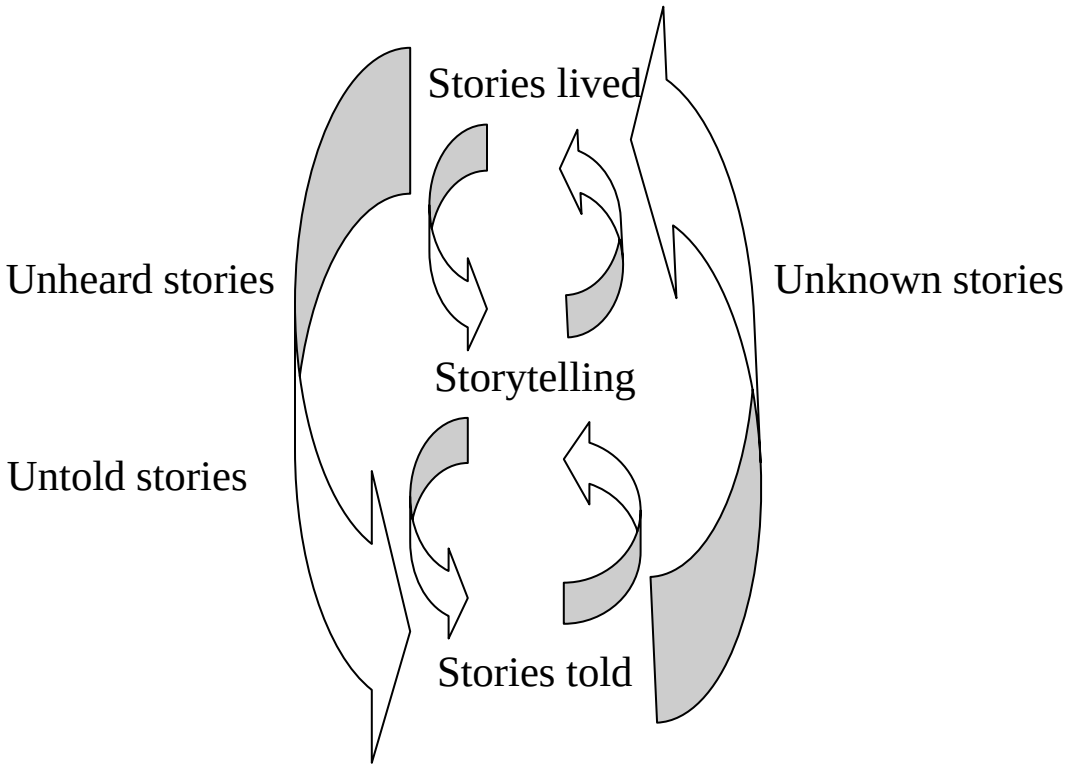
THE LUUUTT MODEL



We have begun to give more explicit attention to the manner in which we and our clients tell stories. The LUUUTT Model is a heuristic for entering the grammar of our clients. While parts of the model formalize what many systemic practitioners do, a distinctive feature is the extent to which it calls attention to storytelling. LUUUTT is an acronym for 1) stories **L**ived; 2) **U**nknown stories, 3) **U**ntold Stories, 4) **U**nheard stories, 5) stories **T**old, and 6) story**T**elling.

The concept of the tension between stories lived and stories told is familiar to many systemic practitioners. Stories lived are the co-constructed patterns of joint-actions that we and others perform; stories told are the explanatory narratives that people use to make sense of stories lived. Although most people feel the need to align stories lived and stories told, they cannot be identical, and the tension between them provides the dynamic for much of our lives. We might say that people live in such a way as to call into being those stories that they love, need, or want, and to prevent the realization of those stories that they hate or fear. It is also true to say that people tell stories in such a way as to make the events of their lives coherent.

But the tension between stories lived and told is not sufficient to guide us to the potential richness of any given communication pattern. In addition, there are unknown stories which the participants are not (currently) capable of telling; untold stories which the

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participants are perfectly capable of telling but have chosen not to (at least, not to some of the others in the situation); and, unheard stories which, although they have been told, have not been heard by some important participants in the situation. We suspect that a spiraling evolutionary process works, so that unheard stories become untold stories, and untold stories become, after a while, unknown stories, and vice versa.

The central feature of the model is storytelling. Unlike the others, it deals with "how" the stories are told rather than their content, narrative features, or place in the conversational interchanges.

We believe that stories are the basic technology by which members of the species homo sapiens (as physical entities) become human beings. Although no longer new, this is still a revolutionary idea. For almost two centuries (since the work of Immanuel Kant, 1724-1803), we have known that human perceptions are structured by the structure of the human mind. But Kant thought in terms of static categories; the newer idea is that human beings' experience occurs in stories. Narrative structures, plots, roles, and the like comprise the templates in which we live our lives. That is, whatever worlds we know will have the fundamental structure of stories because that's the way we perceive, think, and live.

Kathryn Morton (1984) described the ubiquity of storytelling:

> "The first sign that a baby is going to be a human being and not a noisy pet comes when he begins naming the world and demanding the stories that connect its parts. Once he knows the first of these, he will instruct his teddy bear, enforce his worldview on victims in the sandlot, tell himself stories of what he is doing as he plays, and forecast stories of what he will do when he grows up. He will keep track of the actions of others and relate deviation to the person in charge. He will want a story at bedtime."
>
> "Nothing passes but the mind grabs it and looks for a way to fit it into a story, or into a variety of possible scripts: he's late – maybe he was in an accident. Maybe he ran off to Tahiti with a blond. Maybe he stopped on the way here to buy flowers. She will keep writing these 'novels' until he shows up or till she finds one story in which all elements, emotional and circumstantial, blend. Then, whatever he says later, she will know what she 'knows.'"

Not only is storytelling ubiquitous, but the quality of life depends on the richness of our stories.

> "No human society has yet been found in which … mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies; interpreted by seers, poets, theologians, or philosophers; presented in art, magnified in song, and ecstatically experienced in life-empowering visions. Indeed, the chronicle of our species… has been not simply an account of the progress of man the tool-maker, but – more tragically – a history of the pouring of blazing visions into the minds of seers and the efforts of earthly communities to incarnate unearthly covenants…Man (sic) apparently cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the

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> general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of his life would even seem to stand in a direct ratio to the depth and range not of his rational thought but of his local mythology" (Campbell, 1959, pp. 3-4)

But the "depth and range … of … local mythology" is a function of the manner of storytelling as well of the content of the stories.

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PART V

USING CMM AS A CONSULTANT AND/OR RESEARCHER

In This Section:

- As a Consultant
  - Moving Among Person Positions
  - Changing the Landscapes of Social Worlds

- As a Researcher

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USING CMM AS A CONSULTANT

Laura Fruggeri and Elspeth MacAdam taught us that, whatever else a consultant or facilitator does, it includes:

- Joining the "grammar" of the client
- Challenging the coherence of that grammar
- Acting with the client to make changes in that grammar "real

In this formulation, we use "grammar" in the Wittgensteinian sense and it is a synonym for the configuration of logical forces in the client's social world. The key is to "join" that grammar so that the interaction between facilitator and client is coherent and coordinated. This does not mean that the facilitator has to adopt the client's grammar; just be able to move about in it.

"Challenging the coherence" of the grammar refers to many ways of expanding, enriching, and changing that grammar, not confronting it. This procedure is based on two assumptions:

- Helping the client change his or her grammar is a way of changing the client's social world
- Every social world is capable of being altered.

As Emile Shultz (Dialogue at the Margins: Whorf, Bakhtin, and Linguistic Relativity. University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pp. 34-35) put it, "Speakers have far more resources at their disposal than the single set of forms and stylistic conventions of a single 'language.' In fact, every national language is teeming with sublanguages, each with its own conventions. Wherever significant social differentiation occurs in life, there too will begin to form a new sublanguage. In any society of any complexity, therefore, numerous such sublanguages always coexist, challenge one another, and become grist for the verbal mill of those who master their conventions. What we are describing, of course, is the state of heteroglossia, which Bakhtin takes to be the primordial linguistic state for human beings in society." There are always opportunities for clients to re-author their stories and to live/tell other stories.

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MOVING AMONG PERSON POSITIONS

The landscape of social worlds shifts as we move among person positions. Being "stuck" in any person position creates problems. From a consultant's point of view, it is not so much that one person position is better than another but that the ability to move among them is good.

Some ways of helping clients move among person positions include:

- Helping them see the larger systems of which they are a part. This can be done through:
  - systemic interviews,
  - coaching them to use systemic language, or
  - co-constructing systemic diagrams;
- Helping them see themselves from the perspective of the other. Some ways of doing this include:
  - Interviewing the other's voice in them,
  - Putting them in the position of an outside witness for a reflecting team
  - Stage management: positioning them as an audience for an interview with another person about them
  - Having them write about themselves from the perspective of the other

Role-playing is one of the most powerful ways of helping clients move among person position. A first step in role playing is for them to be in the role of someone else in the interaction pattern. For example, Luis Moreno Ocampo does a kind of mediation on television in Buenos Aires. In one instance, he was frustrated when the disputants seemed unwilling or unable to understand each other, so he had them physically change sides, moving to the lectern where the other had stood. He continued the mediation, this time with each disputant answering questions and responding as if she were the other.

A second step in role playing is to invite the client to take an observer's perspective. In this format, the consultant takes the role of the client and the client the role of director of a play. If the consultant takes a not-knowing position, he or she invites the client to instruct and explain what is going on in the situation, and to move to a third person position.

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CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF THE SOCIAL WORLDS

Sometimes the landscape of a client's social world presents problems and it is the consultant's or facilitator's job to invite a change in that landscape. Here are some ways of doing that that focus on "stories told:"

- Join the client's grammar and then challenge its coherence by:
  - Noting and inquiring, from a perspective of not-knowing and genuine curiosity, about contradictions, omissions, inconsistencies
  - Inquiring, from a perspective of not-knowing and genuine curiosity, why, of all the many stories that the client could tell, they have chosen to tell/are fascinated by the present one;

- Change the "direction" of the logical force.
  - If the client describes his or her reasons for acting as "because of," ask a question that implies that it was also "in order to,"
  - If the client describes his or her reasons for acting as "in order to," ask a question that implies that it was also "because of,"
  - If the client stresses contextual force, inquire about prefigurative force, and vice versa
  - If the client stresses implicative force, inquire about practical force, and vice versa

- Increase the client's awareness of his or her own logical force. Most of us are insufficiently aware of the social worlds in which we live; effective action usually demands that we focus on some parts of that world and use the rest as the background or "frame" for what we attend to. While this is efficient, sometimes it leads to problems. In these situations, clients can be helped by increasing their awareness of their own social worlds through:
  - Systemic interviewing
  - Co-constructing graphs of the hierarchy of contexts, strange loops, etc.
  - Helping them identify and name their own feelings of "oughtness"
  - Engaging them in dialogic conversation

- Increase the client's frame of reference of his or her own logical force.
  - Write out the whole episode. Often a client is only aware of part of it.
  - Invite the client to join you in a full serpentine analysis of the episode. By giving the client an opportunity to see how his/her acts are perceived by the other person(s), and the interpersonal logic that is developed as their acts join with each other, they can gain a new perspective
  - Use the daisy model to identify the complex nexus of conversations comprising the client's social world

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- Reframing:
  - Renaming significant grammatical features in the client's social world
  - Identifying or suggesting other contexts for understanding the significant grammatical features in the client's social world

- Shifting from deficit to appreciative language. This is a special case of reframing. Ken Gergen has shown that our "normal" language has a large proportion of expressions and vocabulary that focus on what is missing, what is wrong, and what can't be done. Deborah Tannen has shown that ours is a culture in which the default option is argument and conflict rather than cooperation and dialogue. The landscape of social realities is powerfully impacted by if it is described appreciatively.
  - There is a "technology" of "appreciative inquiry." See Sue Annis Hammond, The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, Plano, TX: Kodiac Consulting, 1996.
  - Appreciative interviewing
  - Appreciative reflecting

These are some ways of changing the landscape of social worlds that use "stories lived" as their entry point.

- If the client is stuck because there is too much information or confusion, do something that clarifies the situation:
  - Eliminate some of the competing conversations/contexts;
  - Enhance the value of some of the conversations/contexts
  - Introduce something new

- If the client is stuck because of a conflict within his or her logical force, do something that changes the balance of conflicting obligations:
  - Act in a way that adds something new (e.g., a new project)
  - Change the situation in some way
  - Engage in dialogic listening. Often people are stuck because they don't feel "heard." Simply allowing them to feel that they have been heard sometimes results in their being able to relax and move on

- If the client is stuck because stories lived and stories told do not match sufficiently:
  - Take charge of the "process" of the interaction between the client and others and introduce a new, more productive narrative pattern (e.g., mediation or a community dialogue process)

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- Become an actor in the stories lived, and do something that the client will have to incorporate in his or her own stories (e.g., organize a meeting or write a report and give it to all parties involved)

DOING RESEARCH FROM A CMM PERSPECTIVE

From a CMM perspective, research consists of joining certain conversations and taking a particular moral role with certain rights, duties, and responsibilities.

This description of research differs considerably from others. For example, this description stands in tension with the idea that the researcher discovers and reports "facts" and cumulatively builds theory (that would be a positivist description). It is not quite the same as the idea that the researcher interprets the meanings of other people and translates them to others (that's an interpretive description, and CMM researchers do that, but not only that). It differs from those who would identify and liberate others from the ideologies that oppress them (again, CMM researchers do that, but not only that). CMM's idea of research is closer to participation research, in that the researcher sees him or herself as part of multiple, on-going conversations.

The idea is that research, like anything else humans do, is an act, not just a report. That is, by looking just here and talking with these people and not others, and producing this report written in this language and submitted to these people… all of this is a "turn" in the ongoing, autopoetic process by which we create our social worlds.

This "research act" can be located at the hub of what CMM calls the "atomic model" or the "daisy model." It is a part of multiple conversations, each of which has a different language and different conventions about what, how, and to whom things should be said. Some of these conversations include the sponsors of the project, supervisors of the research (including the Research Ethics Committee or their counterparts), co-researchers if this is a team project, other researchers who are studying similar topics (including those long-dead and yet-unborn who will contribute to "the literature" on the topic), the editors of the journal or reviewers of the books that will publish the results of the study, and, of course, the people being studied.

These conversations are never fully equal in the production of the research act. Researchers usually "privilege" one/some of them over others. For example, a positivistic researcher will think that he or she should privilege the (technical, precise) language of the conversation with co-researchers and "the literature" over the (vague, ambiguous) language of the subjects. As a result, even if a positivist researcher were to use an open-ended questionnaire, the task would be seen as converting the "raw data" into measures of the variables being studied. It does not matter whether the subjects would understand the researcher's rendering of their ideas into professional argot. On the other hand, participation research and interpretive researchers think that they should privilege the language of the conversation with the subjects, and if the findings do not "fit" the preconceived categories of the professionals or the literature, the professionals should learn and the literature should be revised.

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We might speak about how the languages of some of these conversations "colonize" those of others, and of the differential alertness of some researchers to this colonization. For example, some researchers have said that "the language of science is mathematics" and the characteristics of mathematics -- quantity instead of quality; computation rather than interpretation, generality rather than particularity, immutability rather than flexibility, etc -- have subtly become the standards even in language-based analysis, such as interpretive case studies.

We might look at research design as a way of privileging some conversations while disempowering others. Some conversations in the research act might be call "shy" and others "bold," and we might look to the researcher's skills in bringing out what otherwise might be hidden.

Throughout the previous paragraphs, the researcher has been described in a language of responsibility. One might enter the same conversations with a different moral position, in which case what is being created is not "research" but something else, perhaps "therapy," "consultation," "exploitation," etc. This implies that the exploration of the role of the researcher has at least as much to do with the rights, responsibilities, and duties of the researcher as the "methods" that he or she uses.

What is it that enables a person to assume a position in these conversations as "researcher"? To some extent, it is to "speak" in certain ways. For example, a questionnaire used in a survey of randomly selected consumers is a "grammar" which researchers have been trained to use and to recognize when others use. One way to be recognized as a "researcher" is to use the grammar of the group whose recognition is desired. Other researchers have been trained to use and to recognize other "grammars," of course.

This analysis suggests several important orienting conclusions.

1. Research is a part of human experience, continuous with other forms of human action.
    1) Research can be understood using the same concepts as other forms of action.
    2) The role of researcher is distinguished from other roles by the moral obligations, responsibilities, and duties assumed by the researcher.
2. Research design has to do with choices about which conversations, and which grammars in these conversations, to privilege
3. Research methods (questionnaires, direct observational coding schemes, etc.) are elements of the grammars of particular conversations. These grammars may be further differentiated as "frozen" (they are "fixed" at the beginning of the research project) or "fluid" (they change as the interaction with the subject of the research.deepens).

<u>On Doing Research from a CMM Perspective:</u>

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Note: this is ONE way of doing CMM research and it is best understood as a continually reflexive loop rather than a linear sequence.

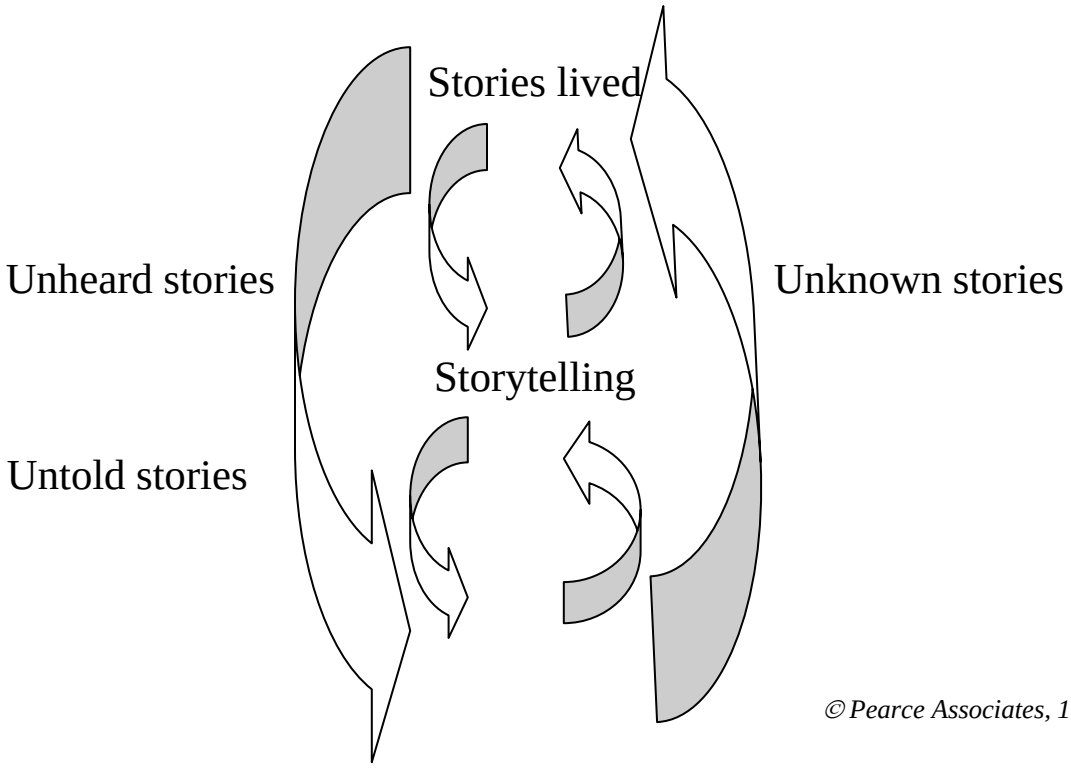
1. Understanding yourself as researcher

   Draw a "daisy" or "atomic" model and identify the most important conversations that comprise this research project. Describe the grammars of these conversations. Specify your moral position as researcher, and make decisions about which conversations you will privilege and how you will prevent these conversations from being colonized by others.

   In this instance, one of our important conversations is with CMM theory and the body of research that has been done. This would probably NOT be the most important conversation if we were doing this research "for real." But as a workshop in order to learn how to use the tools, we will privilege this conversation to the extent that we will at least start using its concepts as we engage the people and texts that we will study. Even with this, however, we will work to prevent our use of these concepts from being "frozen" and will try to help them evolve during the project.

Some of the "grammatical features" that we will use in CMM research include:

- episodes,
- the hierarchy of meanings,
- deontic logic,
- the logical force of the interaction (depicted in the serpentine model),
- reflexivity or loops,
- person position, and,
- the distinctions among stories told/lived/untold/unheard/unknown and storytelling (the LUUUTT model).



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Stories told

2. Understanding "texts:" (a linear description of a reflexive process)

    1) Make an act-by-act description of a sequence of events. This might look like a transcript of a conversation or the script of a play. Use "object language" as much as possible. All namings are interpretive, but the point is to be as neutral as possible at this point of the process.

    2) Identify all the relevant participants. One helpful concept is the "atomic model" or "daisy model" of overlapping conversations that comprise the event being studied.

    3) Review and revise steps 1 - 2.

    4) "Punctuate" the sequence you described in step #1 into "episodes." An episode is a bounded unit of behavior, with a beginning, middle, and end. Look for starting and stopping points.

        (1) Use your own "punctuation"
        (2) How would each of the relevant participants (see #2) punctuate the sequence of events.

    5) Review and revise steps 1, 2, and 4

    6) Explicate the stories that each participant has for the sequence of events. The assumption is that what happens is always a synecdote of larger stories; anecdotes rather than epics. So the task here is to tell the larger stories. Explore the contextual relations among these stories. The hierarchy model and the concept of loops is useful here.

    7) Review and revise steps 1,2, 4, and 6.

    8) Look for connections among the acts in a field of "felt obligation" or "oughtness." Is the connection strong or weak? Is the connection among particular acts prefigurative ("because of") or practical ("in order to")? Is the reason why particular acts are performed because they "fit" already existing stories of contexts (contextual force) or in order to or having the effect of calling into being new contexts (reflexive force/effects)? The notion of a "deontic logic" is useful here.

    9) Review and revise steps 1,2, 4, 6 and 8.

    10) Look for emergent properties of the logic of interaction. That is, are there unintended consequences of actions? Compare what is made by the interaction to

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the intentions and perceptions of the participants. The assumption here is that the events that are coconstructed are in principle nonsummative.

11) Review and revise steps 1,2,4,6,8, and 10.

12) Look for gaps between stories lived and stories told. The LUUUTT model is useful in this and the next 4 steps.

13) Review and revise steps 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

14) Look for untold, unheard, and unknown stories. How do these stories become part of the sequence of events?

15) Review and revise steps 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14.

16) Look at the mode of storytelling.

17) Review and revise steps 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16.

18) Tell your own story of the event based on step 17.

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NOTES

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