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Extending the Theory of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Through a Community Dialogue Process

CMM is a communication theory that has most often been used as an interpretive heuristic in interpersonal communication contexts. Within the past 5 years, however, CMM has guided the work of the Public Dialogue Consortium, a not-for-profit organization involved in a multiyear, citywide collaborative community action project. This project has extended CMM from an interpretive to a practical theory and from interpersonal to public contexts. This essay describes the coevolution of the theory and practices that occurred in that project, strongly confirming the utility of treating communication as the primary social process—CMM's central thesis. Six other CMM concepts, including coordination, forms of communication, episode, logical force, person position, and contextual reconstruction, were also significantly elaborated. Appropriately for a practical theory (Cronen, 1995a, p. 231), the extensions of CMM include both new forms of practice and additions and refinements to its grammar for discursive and conversational practices.

Originally introduced in 1976 (Pearce, 1976), the theory of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) was explicitly grounded in an intellectual movement that Langer (1951) described as "a new key" in philosophy. Both that intellectual movement and CMM have developed considerably in the intervening years. The constellation of ideas on which CMM was based has moved from the periphery toward the center of scholarly thought (if contemporary scholarly thought may be said to have a center). Further, CMM has become "an impressive macro-theory of face-to-face communication, by far the most ambitious effort to spring from the ranks of speech communication scholars" (Griffin, 2000, p. 75).

Although Philipsen (1995) judged CMM successful according to the

conventional criteria of social scientific research (ability to account for a statistically significant percentage of the variance of dependent variables), CMM has more often been employed as a heuristic in interpretive studies of interpersonal communication (e.g., Pearce, 1994). However, CMM theorists have not been content to work within the lines. Cronen (1991, p. 49) acknowledged some critics' characterization of CMM as a black hole that sucks in almost every issue of human existence. "CMM's creators," he admitted, "keep dragging it into all sorts of issues that do not seem to be the proper place for communication scholars."

The continuing evolution of CMM may be described in terms of three trajectories. One line of development involved aligning CMM with other traditions (e.g., American pragmatism; Wittgensteinian language analysis) and reconsidering basic theoretical concepts such as language and rules (Cronen, 1995b; Cronen, Pearce, & Xi, 1989/1990; Pearce, 1993). A second evolutionary trajectory retained CMM's interpretive character and applied it to other contexts, including public communication (Branham & Pearce, 1985; Narula & Pearce, 1987; Pearce, Johnson, & Branham, 1991; Pearce, Littlejohn, & Alexander, 1987; Weiler & Pearce, 1991).

This essay continues the third trajectory: a shift from interpretive to practical theory, in which CMM functions as a guide for practitioners and comprises a grammar that makes coherent a tradition of practice (Cronen, 1995a). As a practical theory, CMM was initially applied to the familiar interpersonal communication processes in mediation (Shailor, 1994) and therapy (Cronen & Pearce, 1985; Cronen, Pearce, & Tomm, 1985). However, starting with the Kaleidoscope Project in the late 1980s (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, pp. 197–208), CMM began to be applied as a practical theory to public discourse about controversial issues. The work reported here consists of elaborations of CMM's grammar based on participation in a multiyear, collaborative citywide "public dialogue" project.

In the mid-1990s, a group of communication scholars and practitioners grounded in CMM formed the Public Dialogue Consortium (PDC), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public communication. The PDC began by renewing and then critiquing the Kaleidoscope Project. Although pleased with some of Kaleidoscope's accomplishments, we at PDC found several features inconsistent with the grammar of CMM. We were concerned about its format (a one-shot intervention of complex social processes), location (only on college campuses, although dealing with society-wide issues), framing (as having only two sides of an "undiscussable" issue), and structure (positioning ourselves as expert interventionists).

In 1996, the PDC approached the city manager of Cupertino, California, and proposed a collaborative project designed to identify the most pressing issue in the community and incorporate it in a productive form

of communication. After considerable discussion, the city manager and members of the city council agreed to the project. Subsequently named the Cupertino Community Project: Voices and Visions, the project has continued into its fourth year (see Spano, in press, for a comprehensive description).

A rapid change in the ethnic composition of the city was the issue about which residents felt most concern. The project began in summer 1996, with many residents describing ethnic diversity as "a powder keg, waiting to go off" (Krey, 1999, p. 4) and being unwilling to speak of it publicly, fearful of providing the spark. Although several events and issues that could have ignited ethnic conflict occurred subsequently, there has been no explosive confrontation. Rather, the city has increased its capacity to handle this and other sensitive issues and has improved interethnic relations. In response to an open-ended question about issues confronting the city in a survey conducted in April 2000, only 2% of the stratified random sample mentioned race or ethic diversity. Eighty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that the city "is doing enough to ensure that members of all ethnic groups feel welcome in Cupertino." The largest change between the 1998 and 2000 surveys in responses to relevant items was the number (from 28% to 49%) who said that the increase in ethnic diversity made "no change in how I feel toward people of other races." When providing this information, City Manager Don Brown (personal conversation) interpreted these results to mean that the residents had finished "working through" the issue and that increased diversity is "an accomplished fact of life."

In addition to the unwanted events that did not happen, markers of the success of the project (see Spano, in press, for details) include (a) an unusually sophisticated public meeting in which residents discussed how "hot topics" involving ethnicity had been handled and should be handled in the future (Pearce & Pearce, 2000); (b) the continuing activities of the "5Cs"—the Citizens of Cupertino Cross-Cultural Consortium; (c) the establishment of the "Collaborative"—an organization of high school and K–8 school districts, De Anza Community College, and the city government committed to promoting multiculturalism; (d) the creation of the position of assistant to the city manager for neighborhood relations; (e) the creation in the sheriff's office of a position of which 75% is devoted to community liaison; (f) presentationto the city manager of the League of California Cities' 1999 Managers Award for the Advancement of Diversity (Krey, 1999, p. 8); and (g) the feeling of ownership residents and city officials felt toward the project.

Following the grammar of CMM, we engaged in reflexive assessments of our practice at every opportunity, bringing in outside observers whenever possible. Consistent with Cronen's (1995a) description of practical theory as a coevolutionary process in which traditions of practice in-

form and are informed by grammars of discursive and conversational practices, we found that CMM both informed our participation in the Cupertino Community Project and was extended by what we learned in the project. Our experience increased our confidence in the central feature of CMM—treating communication as the primary social process—and led to significant extensions of six concepts, including coordination, forms of communication, episode, logical force, person position, and contextual reconstruction.

Communication as the Primary Social Process

The "communication perspective" (Pearce, 1989, pp. 23–31) consists of a knack of viewing the events and objects of the social world as made, co-constructed by the coordinated actions of, to borrow gratefully a term from Harré (1984), persons-in-conversation. This perspective involves a radical shift in what is foregrounded when perceiving social reality. We focus on mundane issues of who talks to whom, who listens when they do, how people speak and listen, and what language they use. The communication perspective is grounded in the belief that what persons-in-conversation actually say and do in relation to each other is the "stuff" that makes what otherwise might seem dominating realities such as class, gender, ideology, personalities, and so forth.

This perspective stands in contrast to more traditional top-down social theories and is aligned with theories of so-called microprocesses such as ethnomethodology. Rather than arguing which perspective is best or better warranted, like the good pragmatists that we are, we explored the consequences of our position.

The communication perspective led us to take a principled commitment to process rather than to desired outcomes or initial conditions in the Cupertino Project. We focused our efforts on creating conversations where they otherwise would not have existed and shaping these conversations in specific ways. As a result, the project differed from conventional wisdom and practice in at least three ways.

First, we set ourselves to manage the architecture of conversations about the issue, focusing on their inclusivity and quality. Conspicuously absent were such familiar political procedures as identifying "supporters" or "opponents" on the basis of the positions they affirmed, taking polls to assess the support or opposition of specific decisions, "counting the votes," persuasive speeches, rallying supporters, targeting the uncommitted, and disempowering those who disagreed.

Second, we treated "talk" as a form of action, not as a substitute for it. After the October 1996 town hall meeting (see Spano, in press), one participant expressed his amazement that so many people could talk for

so long without taking any action. He described it as a wasted opportunity. To the contrary, we understood that meeting as having accomplished several objectives in the early stages of a continuing process, the most important of which was that residents saw a model for and experienced talking productively with members of other ethnic groups about a previously undiscussable issue. Later in the project, other residents wanted to go "beyond" talking about the issue and to "do" something about it. Again, we were impressed by how much had been accomplished and wondered what they perceived as missing. Our interpretation was that we had achieved our goals without some traditional markers of "victory," such as the thrill of heated confrontations, vilification of an enemy, and the publicly displayed pain of defeated adversaries. In our view, creating certain kinds of talk—we called it "public dialogue"—was itself the necessary and sufficient condition of success.

Third, we inadvertently developed an alternative model of the function of city government. The currently preferred model features city government providing quality "customer service" to residents (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). Other models position city government as allowing individuals to accept responsibility for their own conditions, as providing solutions to social problems based on professional diagnosis and service provision, and as facilitating community self-help activities (Lappé & Du Bois, 1994). In this project, however, the city government accepted the responsibility of creating the architecture of and then participating in conversations about residents' concerns, their visions for the future, and the actions that they saw as bringing about desired futures. These conversations have occurred in annual town hall meetings sponsored by the 5Cs with city support, in semiannual meetings of the Collaborative, and elsewhere.

The city government was willing to accept this new responsibility because key leaders recognized that familiar forms of political process and public participation were insufficient for the most vexing issues. The city manager (Brown, in press) asked,

> How do political leaders deal with an issue that is generating strong community feeling but is not being openly talked about? How do professional managers tackle an issue that cannot be defined and any potential solution involves risks that it could blow up in your face?

He noted that most communities have taken

> the traditional approach of responding to problems after the fact with proposed actions. Examples include establishing human relations commissions that receive complaints and develop responses. These responses range from some form of mediation to legal prosecution of illegal discrimination or hate crimes.

These conventional practices are usually reactive, occurring after unpleasant or tragic events; remedial rather than preventative; and divisive because they perpetuate discursive structures of blame and victimage. Because taking a communication perspective enabled us to create something different and better than conventional practice, our confidence in the central thesis of CMM increased.

Coordination

The CMM concept of coordination differentiates it from many other theories of communication. Rather than using understanding or effect as the criterion for successful communication, CMM envisions persons as engaging in proactive and reactive actions intended to call into being conjoint performances of patterns of communication that they want and precluding the performance of that which they dislike or fear (see Pearce, 1989, chap. 2; Pearce, 1994, chap. 3). For heuristic purposes, the term "coordination" names this process; it does not imply that persons always or even usually achieve the conjoint enactment of the episodes they intended or desired. The point is that whatever episodes occur are nonsummative products of the interaction of many forces. For this reason, the crucial question for communicators is "what are we co-constructing together"?

One of the virtues of CMM is the richness of the heuristic it provides for understanding the meaning of each act in a conversation. CMM locates each act simultaneously within a series of embedded contexts of stories about persons, relationships, episodes (the "hierarchy model") and within an unfinished sequence of co-constructed actions (the "serpentine model"). Figure 1 consists of a simplified transverse view of a single act in a conversation. As shown in the figure, the meaning of the act derives from its placement in interpretive systems and in sequences of actions, rather than or in addition to features of the act itself. (Echoes of Wittgenstein's, 1967, dictum that "meaning is in use" are deliberate.) All of this occurs within a field of logical force (Cronen & Pearce, 1981) or a "local moral order (Harré & van Langehove, 1999). For our purposes, the most important implication is that the meaning of any act is not under the full control of the actor and is not finished when it is performed. "Our" acts move the meaning of the previous acts toward completion, and thus we participate in the determination of what "they" did, and vice versa. Shotter (1993) expressed this eloquently in his concept of "joint action" and the "rhetorical-responsive" process.

In this project, we moved this concept from a heuristic function for interpersonal communication to a guide for action in public discourse. Versions of the model presented in Figure 1 enabled us to reframe and sometimes redirect events that occurred during the project. For example,

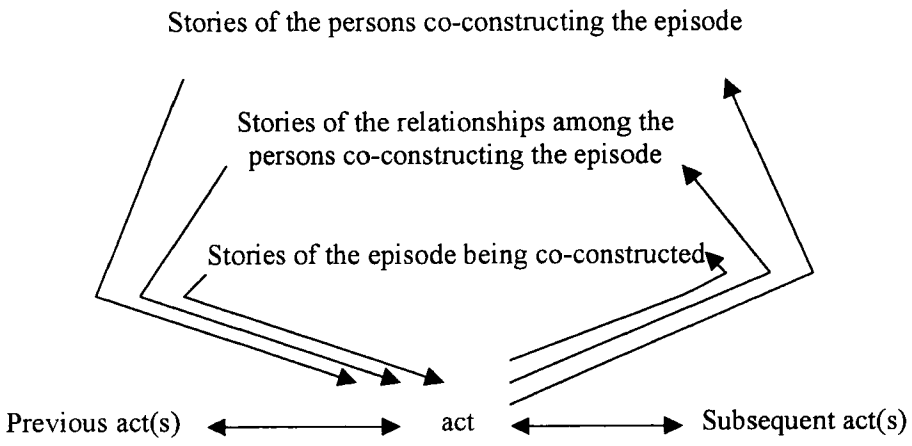

Figure 1. A Heuristic Model of the Meaning of an Act in a Conversation

several people acted in ways that might easily be interpreted as mean-spirited, obstructionist, or oppositional. Remembering that the meaning of their acts were unfinished, we deliberately disregarded the others' intentions and the conventional interpretations and acted in such a way that, for example, "disagreements" became "welcomed identification of sites for further exploration and understanding." When offered acts clearly intended as insults, we responded as if they were welcome offers to be engaged with the project. We saw our responses as part of the process that moved the meaning of what others said and did toward completion and, sometimes, enabled us to change the intended meanings into something that would further public dialogue.

We had to extend our understanding of coordination when we were confronted by the realities of unequal distributions of power. Our purpose was to create a public dialogue process, and we quickly realized that, as Kingston (1999, p. 3) said,

> Politics and dialogue are not at all the same thing; and politics has to do with the exercise of power, a contest in which there are winners and losers—who are powerless. And there is no dialogue between the powerful and those without power.

We deliberately set ourselves to substitute the concept of power as co-constructed in ongoing, unfinished interactions for the more conventional notions that power is a thing, that people have more or less of it, and that power relations necessarily dominate all other possible relationships. We focused on the patterns of interaction involving those who were named as having and not having power and envisioned each act in terms of CMM's serpentine model, which depicts each subsequent action as simultaneously responding to the previous act and eliciting the

subsequent act, and CMM's hierarchy model, which sees every act as simultaneously in several contexts, each of which may frame it as having a different meaning. This deep reading of the multiple, unfinished meanings of each act enabled us to see power as only one of many possible interpretations and helped us to identify openings for interventions that would transform power relations into collaborative participation in dialogic communication. For example, in addition to being careful to invite all stakeholders to our meetings, including some who would not normally be in conversation with each other, we were careful to frame the meetings in strategic ways and used trained "table facilitators" who intervened to ensure that the most dominant, extreme, or simply talkative participants did not dominate the group discussions.

The question, "What are we making together?" became something of a mantra, and, changing the metaphor, our catechism was completed by using the serpentine and hierarchy models as heuristics for the answers. To help us stay with an emphasis on coordination, we developed the contrast between CMM's notion of communication and that of the transmission model shown in Figure 2 (the figure is an extension of Pearce, 1994, p. 19). Among the contrasts between these concepts of communication are shifts from focusing on individuals to what Harré (1984) called "persons in conversation"; from single messages to what Shotter (1993) called the "rhetorical-responsive" process; and from individual intentional or interpretive "meaning" to what is conjointly "made" in the process of communication.

Forms of Communication

The earliest presentations of CMM set its understanding of communication against the idea that communication either is or should be a colorless, odorless, tasteless vehicle for thought and action. Extending the idea that people make their social worlds, Pearce (1989) developed the concept of "forms of communication" and argued that there is a reciprocal, causal relationship between them and various historical and cultural "ways of being human."

A number of social analysts have distinguished debate, discussion, deliberation, dialogue, positional bargaining, interest-based bargaining, collaboration, and so on. Our work was based on conceptualizations of cosmopolitan communication (Pearce, 1989, 1993; Oliver, 1996) and transcendent discourse (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Neither concept had previously been applied to a citywide, multiyear process, but we took from them a series of principles, such as to include everyone as much as possible; to value listening at least as much as speaking; to help others—particularly those with whom we disagree and find disagreeable—to be heard and understood; to incorporate appreciative and inclusive lan-

Transmission Model	*CMM Model*
Definitions: The popular transmission model describes communication as a tool used for exchanging information. "Good communication" occurs when meanings are accurately conveyed and received. In this model, communication works best when it is odorless, colorless, and tasteless, a neutral tool for describing the world.	**Definitions:** The CMM model claims that the events and objects of our social worlds are co-constructed in communication. The form of communication, fully as much as the content of what we say, sustains or destroys our personalities, relationships, and institutions.
How communication works: What is said? What is meant? What is understood? • How clear is the information? • How accurately is it heard? • How completely is it expressed? • Is the "channel" effective?	**How communication works:** What do we make together by what is said or done? • What contexts are created for the other? • What is prefigured by the language used? • What form of speech is elicited? • What tones of voice are elicited? • Who is included 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, weak, or no democracy)
The role of the facilitator: To create a context in which defects in communication processes will not interfere with other, more important, processes of decision making, coalition forming, deal making, and persuading.	**The role of the facilitator:** To shape emerging patterns of communication so that multiple voices and perspectives are honored and the tensions among them are maintained.

Figure 2. Two Concepts of Communication

guage rather than deficit and exclusionary language in our meetings; and to treat disagreements as welcomed sites for exploration rather than obstacles to progress.

City Manager Brown (in press) eloquently described the desired form of communication that was the driving force of the project.

> The "light bulb" moment for me came when I realized that this project was not about changing people's minds, but that it was about giving people a way to talk about tough issues. I also realized that people's fears and concerns are real and legitimate and that they need a way of talking about them without the fear of being branded a racist. . . . One of the most rewarding concepts . . . is that people are allowed to "stand their ground." We are not in the business of getting everyone to think the same way. Our aim is to provide a place where strongly held views can be given and received in a respectful manner. At the least, this will improve the clarity of our respective views. At the best,

through this increased clarity, we may find that we share more common values about our community than we thought.

As the project continued, we refined our understanding of public dialogue. Pearce and Pearce (2000) differentiated among several "flavors" of dialogue, including those whose work is stimulated by David Bohm and those in the tradition of Martin Buber. In the Bohmian tradition, "dialogue" is a noun naming a distinct communication episode that a group might "do." In a dialogue, participants ignore relational issues in order to think together by performing a series of virtually identical speech acts. In the Buberian tradition, it is more appropriate to use the word "dialogic" as an adverb or adjective, describing the manner in which people relate to each other and in which they perform all possible speech acts. Building on Buber's perspective, we (Pearce & Pearce, 2000) developed the idea that public dialogue occurs when there is a "charmed loop" (Cronen, Johnson, & Lannamann, 1982) between stories of "self" (standing one's ground), "relationship" (being profoundly open to the other), and "episode" (co-constructing a sequence of actions that invites participants to remain in the tension between self and relationship). In the continuing evolution of our thinking about forms of communication, the cutting-edge question is how, dialogically, to do all of the rich array of communication acts that occur in politics, community building, public planning, zoning, and the other contexts of public discourse.

Episode

In CMM, "episodes" are thought of as bounded sequences of acts, with a beginning, middle, and end. They have a coherent narrative structure; communicators usually can name the episodes that comprise their lives (e.g., having an argument, dinner with friends, performance evaluation interview) and ensconce them in stories (Harré & von Langehove, 1999; Pearce, 1994, chap. 4). Although the length of episodes is defined by the participants, with a few exceptions, CMM researchers and theorists have usually thought of them as relatively short, uninterrupted patterns of interaction in face-to-face interaction, such as the phases of mediation or therapy sessions. The Cupertino Project required us to think on a very different scale, both in terms of the temporal extension and number of people and groups involved.

We were not the first to use the metaphor of "conversational architecture" as a way of thinking about the social system in which we are working. Our distinctive twist on this idea builds on the concept of episodes. We integrated the concept and the metaphor in a three-level public dialogue process model that has been invaluable in our work while stretching the notion of episode far beyond its original function in CMM.

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Strategic Process Design

The strategic process design is the "largest" episodic concept. It is the plan for a deliberately chosen sequence of events that respond to existing conditions and lead to a desired outcome. The strategic process may last from a few weeks to several years, and the design will certainly change during the process.

Conceptualizing public processes as episodic structures enables us to differentiate public dialogue from other designs. For example, Yankelovich (1991) describes a "public education" design in which those he calls the "elite" spend such time as is necessary to learn and decide about an issue and then attempt to convince ("educate") the public to agree with them with less information and insufficient time. A popular description for the resulting coordinated episode between government officials and the public is "DAD"—an acronym for "decide-advocate-defend"—and its unwanted consequences include public cynicism and official burnout. In contrast, the strategic design for a public dialogue episode typically includes these steps: getting initial buy-in from relevant stakeholders, hearing all the voices, enriching the conversation, deliberating the options, deciding and moving forward together. Some of the differences in these strategic designs involve the placement of "deciding"; the timing of the public's involvement; and the array of actions and communication skills required by and developed by both officials and members of the public. Satisfaction with the process and willingness to accept the product also differ.

Event Design

Each step in the public dialogue strategic process is accomplished by one or more "events." Events are sequences of activities that occur within a single meeting; they may last from less than an hour to several days. Many types of events, deliberately sequenced, may occur within a public dialogue strategic design. Typical events include focus groups, town hall meetings, study circles, public deliberations, future search meetings, and guided group discussions.

The thinking that led to this three-level model began when we observed public participation events that stood alone, with little preparation or follow-up. Participants in these events frequently asked about next steps and received vague answers. With the notion of episodic structure in mind, we immediately saw the need for each event in the strategic process as completing the preceding event and prefiguring the next. That is, if we substitute strategic process design for episode in Figure 1, then each event may be seen in the place of an act.

Communication Facilitation Skills

The success of any event depends in part on the ways that facilitators act or respond, in the moment, to what the participants do. One level of facilitation skills includes conventional practices such as timekeeping, providing supplies, recording conversations, and ensuring that all participants have sufficient "air time." A second level of facilitation skills consists of (re)framing comments by using circular, reflexive, and dialogic interviewing procedures; positioning participants as reflecting teams and outsider witnesses; and coaching participants in dialogic communication skills. We differentiate among these levels because some public participation practitioners have a principled objection to this form of work. However, we think that this level of facilitation is crucial to a public dialogue process. We believe that what happens in the minute-to-minute process of events is important. The success of the event as public dialogue hinges on such subtle things as the difference between asking a question or making a comment at a particular moment, or the way a question is phrased, or the timing with which it is asked. One way of expressing our belief is that these skills percolate up into the events and strategic processes, determining whether they are successful. Another way of expressing it is to say that the strategic process and event designs are intended to create the preconditions for just this kind of intervention and the resulting form of communication.

Logical Force

Logical force is a distinctive concept of the "necessity" in social theory (Cronen & Pearce, 1981). As described in CMM, it is both complex and mutable; it describes persons in webs of perceived "oughtness" or, technically, a deontic logic implicating what they should, must, may, or cannot do in specific situations. As we reflected on our work in the Cupertino Project, we were struck by how far this concept had migrated in our practices.

Perhaps unduly influenced by its use among logicians, we originally constructed quantitative and qualitative ways of translating into research the deontic operators of obligatory, permitted, prohibited, and irrelevant. Because we were dealing with situated acts rather than timeless relations among propositions, we introduced the distinction between future and past in the form of the dichotomy between "causal/because of" and "intentional/in order to" attributions of motives. Using the serpentine and hierarchy model, we developed a complex array of "logical forces" that constitute the moment in which each act occurs, and we distinguished among contextual, prefigurative, practical, and implicative forces. However, we never really got beyond various permutations of oughtness.

Our work in the Cupertino Project, however, led us to describe logi-

cal force in a variety of ways, and we only subsequently thought through the conceptual implications of the shifts we had made. For example, some prevalent stories were determinedly rooted in an orientation to the past (Cupertino was once comprised of vast orchards and a few farms), whereas others were determinedly present/future looking (with over 90% of its residents having Internet access, Cupertino is on the leading edge of technological development even within Silicon Valley). This really was not so much a matter of oughtness as we had originally conceived of logical force but more a matter of discursive habits. These habits, however, had the same kind of effect of shaping how people were thinking and acting and constraining their ability to co-construct desired episodes with others who had other habits.

In addition, we became very sensitive to the habits people have of framing situations as problems and blaming others for the results of their own behavior. Elspeth MacAdam (personal conversation) wondered why people seem so susceptible to what she called the "acquired fascination with deficit language syndrome." Whatever the cause, the effects of these habits are similar to that of particular configurations of deontic logic, but these habits do not seem equivalent to permutations of oughtness.

In our practice, we became insistent about avoiding "problem talk," framing issues appreciatively (Hammond, 1996; Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990), disrupting discourses featuring blame and victimage, and focusing on the positive visions that underlie even the most persistent complaints. In our articulations of CMM, we have become less insistent on equating logical force with deontic logic. Our concept is now more general. We speak of the "local moral order" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1) and the "grammar" of specific stories and ways of storytelling (Pearce & Pearce, 1998).

The Person-Position of the Facilitator and the Reliance on Ordinary Language

Like Wittgenstein (1967), Shotter (1989), and Harré and Grillett (1994), CMM takes into account the different sets of rights, duties, and privileges that adhere to the first-, second-, or third-person positions in the grammar of ordinary language. In the Cupertino Project, however, we often found ourselves facilitating or teaching others to facilitate, and this role does not quite fit any of these person positions.

In our event designs, facilitators' responsibilities include (a) helping the group follow a useful episodic sequence; (b) remaining neutral (actively aligning one's self with all of the participants, creating a climate of reciprocated trust and respect); (c) listening actively and helping participants listen to each other; (d) helping participants tell their own stories

(taking a not-knowing stance, expressing curiosity, asking systemic questions); and (e) helping participants tell better stories by introducing appreciative and systemic perspectives through questions and reframing, weaving participants' stories together. Although this role is somewhat like a first-person position in that the facilitator is a participant in the conversation, it is also somewhat like a third-person position because the facilitator maintains a heightened sense of awareness of the episode being co-constructed and accepts the role of guiding it. It is somewhat different from all of these in that the facilitator's own opinion should be excluded from the conversation.

We became aware of the complexity of this role when some residents we trained withdrew as facilitators of small-group discussions at a town hall meeting. They explained that they wanted their own voice to be heard more directly in the meeting than it would be if they facilitated. As we reflected on their decision, we realized that the role of facilitator was more than a shift among the three positions in ordinary language; it is a move to a stance of indirect influence.

The theoretical implications of this stance are enormous for social constructionists and others who believe that "ordinary language" comprises the limits of our social worlds. Either we must abandon the basic principle or begin to explore much more of the subtleties of language than has been done in the literature to this point. We believe that both alternatives should be explored, but the "conservative" approach is to extend our exploration of linguistic resources.

Most of the discussion of language among social constructionists has dealt with vocabulary (e.g., the difference made by describing a person as a "patient" or a "client"), parts of speech (e.g., the rights, duties, and responsibilities attached to person position as evidenced by pronominal use), and case (e.g., "I statements" that accept responsibility). Perhaps we should explore other parts of speech (e.g., prepositions) and the tense, mood, and voice of verbs. The "middle voice" that was a part of classical Greek expresses clearly and comfortably what requires awkward hyphenated expression in either the active or passive voice, such as co-construction and coevolution. Another avenue of exploration follows McNamee and Gergen's (1999) insistence on the primacy of relationship in a social constructionist perspective. If valid, then prepositions should be a part of ordinary language that we explore for its philosophical and social implications because these are the words that describe relationships.

Exciting prospects for continued theoretical development result from connecting this idea to CMM's claim that ways of being human are reciprocally causally related to forms of communication. The process of more fully exploring the possibilities in the grammar of ordinary language, as well as the limits of language, may be seen as an exercise in

describing and perhaps inventing ways of being human that have been underdescribed or underresourced. The rights, duties, and responsibilities of a facilitator, like those of therapist and process consultant, seem to adhere to a person position in the subjunctive mood and middle voice, with an affinity for inclusive prepositions. Would increased clarity in describing these roles have practical value in developing training programs, making personnel assessments, and developing social theory? Clearly, this is an exploration that we have begun but likely will not finish in our lifetimes.

Contextual Reconstruction

In some of the interpretive and critical work based on CMM, we noted that all actions occur in a context, and usually our rhetorical task is that of acting in such a way that what we do fits the context. However, there are times when we are committed to performing an action that runs against the grain of contextual prefiguration, and we must reconstruct the context so that it fits our action. Contextual reconstruction is a particularly interesting and challenging form of communication (Branham & Pearce, 1985); we found it a recurring form of life in the community dialogue project.

The need to act in ways that bring new contexts into being required us to integrate three ideas that had been developed separately in CMM: implicative force, game mastery, and cosmopolitan communication. In our work on logical force, we had been long aware of the effects that an act can have in changing the contexts in which it occurred. We called this "implicative force," and it is the basis of the idea of contextual reconstruction. However, Branham and Pearce (1985) had conceptualized this only from the perspective of a rhetor and then only from the perspective of a single act such as a public speaking event.

When working with a whole community during an extended period, we found it necessary to engage with a diverse set of people over an extended time. No single act should be expected to be sufficient to achieve contextual reconstruction. Among other things, this was one of the lessons we drew from the critique of the Kaleidoscope Project. This brought to mind the concept of game mastery, originally developed in the context of interpersonal communication (Pearce, 1994). Exhibiting game mastery, a participant in an ongoing sequence of events violates the rules, intentionally, in order to bring about a desired new state of affairs.

However, the diversity of the community made it unlikely that any act of game mastery would be equally effective with different groups. By adding the concept of cosmopolitan communication (Pearce, 1989), we arrived at a fundamentally different orientation to contextual reconstruction. In our current view, contextual reconstruction is most likely

to be successful when it is the result of collaboration, neither a single act nor a unilateral one.

Conclusion

Because CMM is, among other things, a practical theory (Cronen, 1995a), it is appropriate that this essay closes the loop in the coevolution of a tradition of practice and the discourse that guides it and makes it coherent. CMM informed the work of the PDC in a multiyear community project, and the PDC's experience in that project significantly extended CMM.

However, practical theory differs from other forms of theory and is extended in distinctive ways stemming from its nature. To extend an alethic or truth-bearing theory, for example, we would seek to make it either more general (embracing more of the world) or more rigorous (perhaps by specifying the effect of additional mediating variables). Since practical theory develops in a coevolution between traditions of practice and a grammar for discourse and practice, it is "extended" by adding useful concepts and models, developing more precise or descriptive vocabulary, learning new ways of working in difficult or new contexts, and exchanging outworn or limiting metaphors with fresh ones.

One criterion for assessing a practical theory is its ability to guide practitioners. The meaning of the term "guide" is significant. It does not refer to a "cookbook" or set of instructions; rather, a good practical theory increases the prudence or social eloquence of practitioners by enhancing their ability to discern and draw upon the resources of particular social settings in order to produce desired effects (Oliver, 1996; Pearce, 1989). If we assume that "acting naturally" is what brings us to any situation that we perceive as needing to be changed, the one sure recipe for preserving that which we want to change is to continue to act naturally. A practical theory is needed when practitioners must act sufficiently unnaturally so that they can be successful. In the Cupertino Project, we were particularly well served by CMM's insistence that communication is the primary social process. Temptations to lapse into traditional discourses of power, politics, and applied sociology were very strong, and we did well to resist them. In addition, CMM's emphasis on communication as making the events and objects of the social world was a pivotal part of our ability to reframe events and participate in a collaborative process of contextual reconstruction.

A second criterion for assessing a practical theory is its capacity to provide a grammar in which practices can be discussed coherently. This criterion is perhaps the shadow of CMM's heuristic qualities. Not only did CMM enable us to discover openings for effective action (its heuristic function), it enabled us to describe and explain those practices coherently.

Third, practical theory is appropriately assessed by the extent of its continuing coevolution between practice and grammar of discourse. This essay has described some of the major sites of the evolution in the grammar of CMM, as it evolved from application as a practical theory to a long-term, citywide public dialogue process.

As a result of this project, our understanding of "coordination" has been increased by having to come to grips with issues of power. One implication is the radical use of the question, "What are we making together?" as a way of inviting participants to step outside traditional power relations.

We have continued the development of our understanding of "forms of communication." Specifically, we have explored several traditions of dialogue and developed our own notion of "public dialogue." This notion is operationalized in our development of a three-level model of different dimensions of episodes in a multiyear project.

The concepts of logical force and of person position exploded. Their limitations were clearly seen, and we have taken the first steps toward opening these concepts for additional development. Further, the way that their limitations were revealed predisposes us to see them as "open sets" rather than expecting to find another, more comprehensive set of formulations. This development only strengthened our confidence in the basic ideas of the concepts, that actions occur within a context of rights, duties, and obligations and that these adhere to different roles we take. However, we are now much more open to finding new roles and subtle differences among roles, and we accept the necessity of a pluralistic way of describing the constraints and affordances within which we act.

Finally, the necessity we faced to do contextual reconstruction required us to integrate several concepts and to arrive with deepened understanding at the place where we began: "Persons collectively create and manage social reality" (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 305). The reconstruction of contexts, and most other things worth doing, cannot be done unilaterally or in a single act. Social change, just like its apparent opposite, social order, is co-constructed in a recursive process that reconstructs us as persons, relationships, and institutions.

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