

DOING RESEARCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING (CMM)

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This essay is “a work in progress” and will probably remain so through several additional versions. It is being written for the use of doctoral students taking the module of “Using CMM in Research” as part of HOD 719 Advanced Research Methods at Fielding Graduate University.

“I’ve been studying that,” the chairman of the Board of Deacons told me, “and I think you are wrong.” I had to take the comment seriously. I was the pastor of a small Baptist church in Texas and, to put the issue bluntly, deacons hired and fired pastors.¹

I’ve long forgotten what we disagreed about and I didn’t get fired, but I remember my startled reaction to the phrase “I’ve been studying that” when used by this Deacon. He worked in the Texas oilfields as a “roughneck,” and I was not impressed by his access to and use of materials that I thought of as essential for “study.” For me, to “study” something required the resources of a major university library, several boxes of indexed file cards with notes and citations, and conversations – real and/or imagined – with scholars who had spent their lives researching the topic. What this Deacon meant was that he had been giving focused thought to the topic, perhaps while he was working out in the oilpatch.² My reaction was informative; it taught me that I saw research as “strange,” something separated from the normal activities that people do.

The culture of graduate school reinforced the idea that “research” required professional qualifications and should not be practiced by amateurs. Some professors and graduate students were designated as “researchers” and differentiated from those who were “just” teachers or “consumers” of research. Those of us who were “researchers” would have worn white lab jackets to class to distinguish us from lesser forms of humanity if our professors would have permitted it. We achieved the same purpose by other means by proudly brandishing our slide rules and decks of Hollerith cards.³

This distinction is – and always was, although I didn’t know it -- wrongheaded. Rather than thinking that some people are “researchers” and others “not,” it is more useful to think of all of us – roughnecks on oilrigs as well as professors in laboratories – as researchers. We all ask questions; we all engage in systematic processes to answer

¹ At the time – 1966 -- Baptist churches were very democratic. I’m not sure that they still are. See Carl L. Kell and Raymond L. Camp (2001). *In the name of the father: The rhetoric of the new Southern Baptist Convention*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

² “Out in the oil patch” was a term of art in the working class community in West Texas.

³ I’m referring to artifacts from state-of-the-art technology for data analysis in the late 1960s. If you are too young to know what I’m talking about: 1) go look it up; and 2) wait awhile – the next generation will laugh at what you are so proud of just as you laugh at these antiques.

those questions; and we all – at one time or another – report the results of our inquiries to others. This happens at the dinner table as well as in professional conventions.⁴

Once we say that everyone does research, we are then positioned to make a more useful set of distinctions. My own learning has taken three steps. The first was from the notion that research is a “yes or no” thing (that is, some are researchers and others are not) to the idea that all of us are researchers. The second step was to distinguish “more or less” and “better and worse.” Clearly, some researchers use more powerful research methods than others and some are more easily satisfied by the answers they obtain. But the most useful step was the third: to realize that researchers pose different questions and that these require different methodologies and lead to different kinds of answers. The questions we ask prefigure what we will hear as answers, and we can confuse ourselves mightily by using research methods well designed for questions other than those that we are asking.⁵

In this paper, I offer some disciplining and enabling heuristic models for doing research from the perspective of the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM). I believe that these models help us do research from this perspective better (that’s the second step referred to in the paragraph above). But to understand how to use these tools, it is important to identify the kinds of questions that they are intended to answer (that’s the third step referred to in the paragraph above).

TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I grew up in rural central Florida. When I was a boy, I spent most of my time barefooted, playing in the sandy soil. My mother tried valiantly to keep our house clean. Among other things, she demanded that I enter the house through the back door and only after washing my feet. I found that simply running water over my feet was not enough; I had to sit on the steps and run my fingers between my toes to dislodge the caked sand. This became my favorite time of day.

As I sat on the back steps, I was facing west, watching the sun set and the first stars become visible. I’d often sit there for an hour or more. When my mother asked, “What are you doing out there?” I’d reply “Just massaging my toes,” but what I was really doing was asking questions like these:

- What is that?
- How far away is it?
- What is it made of?
- What are its properties?

These are the types of questions that men and women all around the world have asked at one time or another and about all sorts of things. The passion of inquiring minds in the Western intellectual tradition have often focused on a technique that we have come to call “science.” It involves cutting things into their smallest parts and observing their characteristics.

⁴ Interesting, isn’t it, that the standards required for “proof” are higher at professional conventions while the immediate practical implications of the judgments rendered are often more momentous in dinner-table conversations. This observation, for which no proof is offered (!), is part of my own three-step learning described in the following paragraph.

⁵ My own experience is that the formal elegance of research designs is often poorly correlated with their appropriateness for specific projects. See Uma Narula and W. Barnett Pearce, Eds., *Cultures, Politics and Research Methods: An International Assessment of Field Research Methods*. Erlbaum, 1990.

The power of this approach has sometimes obscured the fact that it is not “neutral.” Like any other form of research, it is better suited for some questions than others, and its own ways of working obscures as well as reveals. For example, the term “science” has the same etymological root as “schism” and “schizophrenia” and means “to cut.” Scientific method is better suited to the analysis of parts than of wholes, and of properties than of relationships. To the extent that science does study relationships, it does better for what Aristotle called “efficient causation” than for more complex forms, such as contextual, reflexive, and moral relationships.⁶

When my mother told me to come in from the back steps, my consciousness withdrew from the dark night sky and I entered into a very different world. This was a world of social relationships and obligations. I was curious about this world as well, and posed questions like these:

- What should/must/may I do?
- What can I get away with?
- How can I get away with it?
- What will happen if I try to get away with it but fail?
- Why did he/she/they do that?
- How does my little sister get away with so many things that I can’t?

These are very different questions than those asked on the back steps. I had no idea that – responding to my mother’s command to come into the house -- I was rediscovering one of the differences between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, or that I had stumbled on one of the great divides in the history of western intellectual thought.

Take rhetoric as an example. Like our own, Athenian democracy was litigious; if you were a citizen, you were liable to be accused of a crime. Unlike our society, you would be expected to stand in front of a jury of your peers and defend yourself rather than hire a professional lawyer to present your case for you. Not surprisingly, many people were willing to pay for lessons about how to argue effectively and speak well in these public settings. Anticipating our current professions of speech teachers, consultants, and coaches, a fast-growing, profitable industry developed that we know of as the “sophists.” Plato and Aristotle had strikingly different evaluations of this profession and of the knowledge on which it was based.

Plato didn’t make a distinction between the two sets of questions that I posed above. Or, better said, he thought that the first set of questions were so much more important than the second set that he focused almost exclusively on them. He was highly critical of rhetoric as a field of knowledge and of the sophists who taught it. He dismissed what rhetoricians know as a “knack” like “cooking” rather than a legitimate subject for research, and accused those who taught it as helping their clients make the worse appear to be the better and the false appear to be the true.⁷ The best that can be said of rhetoric,

⁶ Let me repeat: I am not interested in science-bashing. Rather, I’m asserting that the human passions that give rise to inquiry are richer than any particular method of inquiry can serve sufficiently. All methods of inquiry conceal as well as reveal and are better suited for some purposes than others. At this stage of our development as a community of scholars, I don’t see this as a particularly controversial claim, but it is one that bears reminding and that sets an agenda that any theory that makes distinctive conceptual claims must address.

⁷ See Plato’s *Gorgias*. Relevant excerpts are available at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/platoonrhetoric.htm>, retrieved on July 28, 2006.

according to Plato, is that it is sometimes necessary because of the sorry state of the audience. That is, those who read his books couldn't or wouldn't understand the truth unless it was "made effective" by being dressed up in rhetorical gimmicks.⁸

On the other hand, Aristotle clearly distinguished between the kinds of things we encounter and the kinds of questions that "fit" them. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he noted that there are:

- things that have to be what they are (he called this *theoria*),
- things that are contingent in that what we do changes what happens (he called this *praxis*), and
- things that are made, cut and cobbled together of preexisting materials (he called this *poesis*).

The kind of research that we do, and what answers should satisfy us, depends on which of these we are studying: we should strive for *episteme* ("facts") about things that have to be what they are; *phronesis* (good judgment or practical wisdom in making choices about what to do) for contingent things; and *techne* (technique) for things that are made.

Aristotle clearly realized that rhetoric deals with contingent events (if you say this, your chances of being acquitted of the charges against you are significantly improved) and is important. In fact, he wrote a book on the topic, in which he defined rhetoric as "the art of finding in any given situation all of the available means of persuasion" and said that it is the "counterpart of dialectic" – that is, the means of developing *phronesis* just as the dialectic is the means of developing *episteme*.

HUMAN SCIENCES: THE LARGER CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT OF CMM

Questions focusing on good judgment and practical wisdom have a long history in the western intellectual tradition. They have been involved in rhetoric; the "human sciences" in the tradition of Vico; hermeneutics in the tradition of Dilthey, some aspects of phenomenology in the tradition of Heidegger and Husserl; the dialogics of Gadamer; the philosophical therapeutic intervention of Wittgenstein; and the cluster of approaches based on the American pragmatists (James, Dewey, Mead, Cooley), symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodology, and social constructionism. As shown in Figure 1 (at the top of the next page), these are the intellectual parents, aunts, uncles and cousins of CMM.

Even the term "human sciences" is contested, but I can't think of a better one. ("Social sciences"? "Behavioral sciences"?) Within these approaches, the quest for certainty ("knowledge") has always been in a push-pull relationship with the search for practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and understanding (*verstehen*); as well as the strategy of looking at the smallest possible units of analysis versus taking the point of view of whole systems or of the actor in those systems. But this is a story for another day.

⁸ This relationship between truth and rhetoric was exemplified by Augustine. Before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine taught rhetoric. After his conversion, he confronted the question of what to do with "pagan" rhetoric. His solution: use it to persuade people of the Truth that they otherwise would not believe.



Figure 1: CMM and its conceptual cousins

THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE: THE MORE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF CMM

Some of the approaches in the human sciences take what I call “the communication perspective.” (Some of those who fit in this category would not call it that, and I am not trying to exert linguistic imperialism here.) The “communication perspective” is the knack of looking at communication rather than through it. It is based on the belief that communication acts are real; they are the “stuff” of the social worlds in which we live. Insults, promises, threats, and compliments are not just “about” other people or things, they are themselves things. That is, communication is better understood as ways of doing things rather than (only) as ways of expressing ourselves or talking about things. Patterns of communication such as dialogue, deliberation, reciprocated diatribe, command-and-report are themselves the structures of the social worlds in which we live, and are rewarding topics of study in themselves.

Although the term “communication perspective” as used in this sense may be unique to CMM, I think it names something common to the linguistic turn in philosophy (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein; Richard Rorty), the emphasis on narrative and discourse in psychology (Ted Sarbin; Rom Harre) and organizational theory (Karl Weick), interpretative traditions in ethnography (Clifford Geertz), and the traditions that study talk itself in sociology, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis.

This extended quotation from Liz Clark's HOD 706 paper on G. H. Mead is a useful description of "taking the communication perspective."⁹

One way to look at the patterns of human communication is to ask the question, what are we making? The focus of this question pays attention to the process. Are people in conversation making a relationship? Are they enhancing the emergence of Self? Are they making a culture in, lets say, an organization? Looking at the process by which people create what they create during their time together helps actors identify the bifurcation points and invitations to act. The communication perspective maintains a focus on human action as purposive and ongoing that is expressed through three core principles (Pearce, 2006).

Principle One

"Organizations, families, persons and nations are deeply textured clusters of persons-in-conversation" (Pearce, 2006 pg. 3). Looking at communication means looking at who is talking, who is orchestrating the conversation, where is the conversation occurring, about whom or what and, how are people acting towards one another during the engagement. During the summer of 2006, in a class to prepare soon to be school psychologists for their role as collaborators in the school setting, I asked a group of students to role-play a school meeting. The roles included two parents, a 14-year-old male student, two teachers, a school counselor, and a school psychologist. The school psychologist called the meeting so all could decide the best way to help the student "behave" in the classes of the two teachers present.

During the role-play, the parents told the teachers it was their job to make the boy behave; one teacher said, "If there was proper discipline at home, we wouldn't be here". The boy moved his chair away from his father and sat touching his mother, the school psychologist offered many ideas including punishments (detention) to get the boy to do his work in class. One teacher repeatedly said, "I know he is a good boy and I'm willing to work with him". At the close of the role-play the actors processed their experience. This class was introduced to the communication perspective previously and I began the debrief with the question, What was getting made here? One student playing a parent immediately said "war". The student in the role of counselor said it felt like they were in a bowl with an eggbeater going around and around. I encouraged students to look at the kind of language, rather than the actual words that were used to understand what transpired during the role-play. The actors described the language as confrontational, individualistic, and attacking. I asked them what would have been different if they went into the role-play thinking that this conversation was an opportunity to make something. The tone of the debrief shifted. The psychologist said he was coming from a power position but if he had thought, I am here to make a relationship for the good of this student, he said he would have acted differently.

Principle Two

Here we are guided to attend to the form of communication and the consequences associated with the form of communication. Back to the role-play,

⁹ Liz Clark (2006). Exploring George Herbert Mead's Communication Theory. Unpublished paper submitted for assessment in HOD 706, Social Psychology. Used with permission of the author.

the form of communication described by the actors was adversarial. Using an adversarial form of communication resulted in making war. War was far from what each of the actors went into that conversation to create, yet that is what they made together. A student playing a teacher commented the tone of the meeting quickly changed to “us against them”, us being school personnel and them being the student and the parent. The student playing the 14-year-old boy, reflected that he felt aligned with his father and that his father was “sticking up” for him. This was a surprise for the student who came into the role-play with negative feelings towards his father. The teacher-actor said she was shocked she responded to the parents with a retort that accused the parents of lack of control with their son. I asked the group to think of a form of communication they might take rather than move into adversarial positions. Many students in this collaboration class had a difficult time with this question and told many stories of the “real world” of education reflecting polar positions of the school against the parents.

Principle Three

Built on the social constructionist idea that the world is made, not found, this tenet of the communication perspective “consists of treating such things as beliefs, personalities, attitudes, power relationships, and social and economic structures as made, not found...in reciprocated communicative action” (Pearce, 2006 pg. 3). Pointing the consultation class towards how they made war through the patterns of their conversation, and that by naming what they made as war, they could choose to make something else. This notion moved our conversation. The class began to discuss school relationships with parents in terms other than the static structure of us against them. As a class, we discussed what conversations are like when we tell parents and other staff what to do and when we ask about beliefs and attitudes toward learning and education.

During the 4.5 hours of this class meeting some students in this class of soon-to-be psychologists began to see a difference between treating the role-play as un-real, the school setting as real, and both as inter-related communicative episodes that are human creations, malleable, and fluid. The example of the communication perspective in the consultation class draws on Mead’s tenets that people create meaning together in our conversation of gestures. Attention to the patterns of communication during the role-play resonates with Mead’s conception of the activity of adjusting and responding to each other. When people notice what they are making together, they can choose to make something different.

I believe that all theories within the communication perspective have common purposes, such as these.

- To understand what is happening, at a level deeper/richer/broader than one could without using the disciplining and enabling tools of research.
- To experience the transformative learning that occurs when we understand the world around us more deeply/richly/broadly.
- To create the preconditions of constructive relationships with others with whom such relationships seem unlikely without doing some unusual interpretive and integrative work.
- To stand in front of one’s peers, clients, community to make warranted assertions about what is going on.

- To develop constructive critiques of practices and patterns of social interaction enabling reflection, evaluation, and deliberation about choices among options.
- To develop practical wisdom enabling us to identify and to act wisely into crucial moments.

THE COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING

Many theories can be built that take the communication perspective. Some of those identified in the “human sciences” larger circle in Figure 1 do, and other, new theories could be constructed within this framework. These theories would have in common the knack of looking at communication; they would differ in what they say we should see communication as.

CMM describes communication as a two-sided process of coordinating actions and making/managing meaning. These are inseparable but not the same. Making/managing meaning occurs in the world of stories; coordinating actions in the world of events. In affirming that communication involves meaning making/management, CMM is similar to many others in the narrative/linguistic turn. It differs by insisting that communication also involves coordinating actions. The most distinctive CMM research (and other forms of practice) privileges coordination, looking first at the dances that people do and only then at the stories that inform and interpret those dances.

FRAMING RESEARCH FROM A CMM PERSPECTIVE

In one sense, CMM frames research in the way indicated by the questions I posed when coming into the house after “massaging my toes” on the back steps. But (I’m glad to report) those questions have evolved over the years, sharpened by the conversations among scholars and practitioners. The following is one way of trying to identify the list of distinctive CMM questions:

- What are we making together?
- To what is that a response?
- What response did that elicit?
- What is the context for that?
- What is the highest context for him/her/them?
- How can we make better social worlds?
- What would happen if the contexts changed?
- What would happen if we initiated or interrupted action-sequences?

These questions are elaborations, of course, of the way CMM conceptualizes communication. Figure 2 presents some of the same questions (re-worded to make the connections more vivid), sorted out between the two sides of the process of communication.

CMM has developed some unique conceptual tools and models, including the serpentine, hierarchy, daisy and LUUUUTT models and the concept of logical force, the communicative afterlife, and the conversational triplet. Note that these concepts and models are not themselves of value; they are disciplining and enabling heuristics that explicate CMM’s perspective.

I’ve found it useful to differentiate research that is framed in some other theoretical tradition that might use some of CMM’s models as a way of structuring data collection or analysis from research that is framed in CMM. The former may use the

hierarchy model, for example, as a way of analyzing narrative analysis but not include anything about the coordinated action or the multiple, fluid ways in which coordinated actions and meaning/making implicate each other. Research framed within CMM takes full advantage of its focus on the circular processes in which coordinating actions and meaning/management coevolve.

Coordinating action	Making/managing meanings
Robust patterns – how sustained?	Stories – what? Which? How told? In what contexts? When? To whom?
Unusual/fragile/beautiful/valuable patterns – how achieved?	Relationships among stories – hierarchy? Nested? Loops?
Powerful moves/skillful play – what – why so powerful?	With what logical forces?
People/institutions with affinities for particular patterns – how? What? Why?	

Figure 2: Characteristic questions asked by CMM researchers.

Take the “robust patterns” as an example. Vern Cronen, Lonna Snavely and I noted that when certain people got together, they communicated in highly predictable ways that they did not want. When we asked them, they said that they “had” to act as they did even though they knew it would re-create the unwanted pattern. We became very curious; the research question asked: of all the thousands of ways in which they could interact with each other, why did this particular pattern recur and persist despite their attempts to change it?¹⁰

Similar questions derive from curiosity about other patterns of communication. We know that cooperation is more productive and pleasant than conflict, so how can we act in such a way to make cooperation more likely? Dialogue is a particularly desirable form of communication. What are the ways of coordinating action that call it into being?

In general, all CMM research is a case study, and, in general, all CMM research proceeds through a series of cumulative goals:

- Descriptive;
- Interpretive;
- Critical; and,
- Practical.

That is, the research starts with a careful description of the situation of interest. Next, it interprets what that situation means. Based on this careful description and interpretation – that is, on the basis of immanent (coming from an analysis of the communication

¹⁰ Vernon E. Cronen, W. Barnett Pearce, and Lonna Snavely (1979), "A Theory of Rule Structure and Forms of Episodes, and a Study of Unwanted Repetitive Patterns (URPs)," pp. 225-240 in Dan Nimmo, ed. *Communication Yearbook III*, Transaction Press

situation itself) rather than external (imposed from some other basis) criteria – some CMM research develops a critical edge, making judgments about what is better and worse. Finally, some CMM research is explicitly practical, asking what we can do to make better social worlds.

COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA FROM A CMM PERSPECTIVE

In one sense, there is nothing unique about the way CMM collects or analyzes data. Like their intellectual cousins, CMM researchers use direct observation, interviews, content analysis, narrative analysis, participant observation, etc. In another sense, however, research using CMM looks at some things and not others (e.g., at patterns of coordinated actions, and turn-by-turn sequences of interaction) and looks for some things and not others (e.g., for the patterns of contextual relationships among the stories that make coordinated actions meaningful, and the sense of “oughtness” that people feel in specific moments of interaction). Taken as a whole, CMM’s concepts and models guide researchers in ways that comprise quite distinctive methodologies.¹¹

For what it is worth, here are some of the ways in which I think CMM research differentiates itself from most of its intellectual cousins.

1. CMM looks first toward the sayings and doings of particular actors in specific contexts. CMM researchers share Herbert Blumer’s critique of “variables”¹² and of mindsets that would, in theory or methodology, subordinate specific instances of communication to general principles. CMM researchers are interested in larger social and discursive structures (such as class, gender and race) but these are seen as made in patterns of specific actions.

2. CMM understands social worlds as inherently meaningful. That is, “meaning” is a constituent part of any social action. CMM researchers commit to doing a hermeneutic analysis before engaging in criticism or intervention. In general, CMM research follows this sequence: description, interpretation, criticism, and then practice.

3. CMM understands the social world as polysemic. That is, it assumes that:

- every saying and doing is meaningful;
- every saying and doing is multiply interpreted (not only by different people but by each person); and,
- every saying and doing is always open to re-interpretations (e.g., the answer to the question “what did you mean by that?” is a new “saying and doing” performed in a different context – being asked to reflect and comment – than the first).

As a result, CMM researchers specifically avoid any attempt to determine the “right” or “true” meaning of any saying or doing.

4. CMM understands the social world as made in a spiraling process in which the two aspects – coordinating actions and making/managing meanings – are in irreducible tension. The description of the patterns in which these tensions are played out – and, in the process, what stable forms are made, what is included and excluded, what

¹¹ The appendix contains a brief introduction to some of the CMM concepts and models. More sophisticated versions of some of the models are available (for example, see Vern Cronen, 2004, Something old, something new: CMM and mass communication. *Human Systems*, 11: 167-178), but these suffice for a first introduction.

¹² Herbert Blumer (1956). "Sociological Analysis and the "Variable." *American Sociological Review*. 21: 683-690.

unintentional consequences are experienced, etc. – are the desired results of CMM research and provide a powerful base on which to understand and act wisely into specific situations.

One way of describing CMM research uses the device of eight steps, organized within four functions. Of course, this presentation distorts a spiraling, reflexive process by portraying it as a linear process! I'm willing to accept this distortion in the hopes that it will be of value as a learning model.

I've illustrated these steps by describing how we might analyze a short conversation that occurred in a Chicago public school classroom. All research should start with a purpose. In this instance, we are interested in this conversational snippet because, according to Paul Caccia, who provided it, it (or variations of it) occurs so frequently; it "makes" unwanted things – poor relationships between teacher and students; teacher "burn-out" and ultimately decision to leave the profession; and it is a recurring situation in which the teacher feels compelled to act as he does even though he knows that it isn't effective. The goal for the research is to help teachers in situations like this act into the situation more wisely and effectively, so that they can act responsibly as a teacher without feeling so "beat up" at the end of the day. The pattern goes like this:

Teacher: Eldon, please take your seat.

Student: *I am!*

Teacher: Don't argue!

(Description)

1. Describe the sequence of actions and contextual information

The description of our purpose for doing this study (in the preceding paragraph) already includes some description of what is occurring. There is a necessary circularity: we chose this conversation because the people involved tell us what it makes (poor relationships; burned-out teachers) and we are looking at the conversation to see how it makes those things in order to identify ways of making better things (either by acting differently or re-storying what is taking place). The description moves from general to specific, but CMM researchers will push to get "down" levels of abstraction to get what is actually said and done, and to get this in the sequence in which it was said and done.¹³

In this instance, the data is supplied by the Teacher, and it is based on his¹⁴ recall of the situation. In other situations, we might be able to use a video recording or recall by both participants. Sometimes we are reduced to using public documents. In all cases, the rule is to use all available data and to rely on the best available data.

Notice that the conversation is depicted in a sequence of turns, using the actual words said or acts performed, described in a neutral language. But this account distorts

¹³ My colleague Matt Hamababa (an anthropologist) clearly differentiated CMM's way of dealing with a situation like this from the way someone working with "macro social theory" would describe such a "micro social event." Matt said that he would have no apparatus for getting "inside" the event, and would, to the contrary, begin describing the concentric contexts in which it occurred: the classroom; the school; the neighborhood in which it exists; the history of the school in that neighborhood; the educational system in the city; the city itself; the national system of which it is a part. In hands as skillful and knowledgeable as Matt's, this approach generates a great deal of interesting information. CMM is also interested in the larger contexts, but is primarily interested in how they inform what happens in specific communicative events, and how those events reconstruct those contexts.

¹⁴ This is not a hypothetical situation, and as the story was told to me, both student and teacher were male. This may be an important part of the description of the situation.

oral communication by representing it as if it were only verbal. As a way of noting the nonverbal properties of the conversation – just as important, perhaps more important than the verbal content – Paul Caccia supplied descriptive labels for tone and voice as shown below:

Teacher: Eldon, please take your seat. (quiet; firm; tired)

Student: I *am*! (raised voice, "angry" tone)

Teacher: Don't argue! (command tone)

There are alternative ways of working with nonverbal content, including using the various systems of conversational or discourse analysis (symbols for vocal inflection, pauses, talk-overs, etc) and the use of storyboards that depict each turn visually.¹⁵ In general, techniques that are more descriptive and postpone the fateful moments of interpretation are to be preferred.

CMM's concepts and models both enable and discipline researchers. Starting with the "time line" feature of the "serpentine model," a CMM researcher would want to explore what turns occurred before and after, and perhaps simultaneously with, this three-turn sequence that the teacher called to our attention. The model would remind the researcher to be aware of the possibility that (like most people who describe turn-by-turn sequences) the teacher has omitted some turns from his account. That is, what is remembered as a three-turn sequence might have been a five- or seven-turn sequence, and if so, the omitted turns may well be crucial in our understanding.

The "daisy model" directs attention to other people involved in the conversation. Who else is in the room? What part, if any, are they playing in this conversation?

Finally, we would use all available data to generate descriptions of the situation. For example, we would want to acknowledge that the teacher is a young, inexperienced white teacher, with high ambitions to help his students, and working in a predominantly black school. We would note also that the student is male, black, and intensely involved with his peers (we can see this from the way he interacts with them).

In the best possible research settings, the teacher and the student will know CMM as well as the researcher and the study will be done collaboratively. Even if the teacher and student don't already know CMM, the researcher might invite them to help use the serpentine model as a way of elaborating their story of what occurred. One technique is to place a diagram of the models between the researcher and the subjects, give everyone pens, and work together to fill in the empty places. Whether or not this technique is appropriate for specific settings, the principle is that CMM research does not need to deceive the subjects or keep them in an uninformed state about what is being studied. They can be invited to be co-researchers.¹⁶

¹⁵ This procedure was used effectively by Hilda Carpenter in her analysis of a conversation in which some of the most important interactions consisted of physical movements without speech. See Hilda Carpenter (2006). *Reconceptualizing communication competence: High-performing coordinated communication competence (HP3C) – a three dimensional view*. Ph.D. dissertation, Fielding Graduate University.

¹⁶ Ilene Wasserman was fully transparent in her research with two dialogue groups, in effect enlisting them as informed co-researchers in a collaborative study. See Ilene Wasserman (2004). *Discursive processes that foster dialogic moments: Transformation in the engagement of social identity group difference in dialogue*. Ph.D. dissertation, Fielding Graduate University.

*(Interpretation)***2. Punctuate the sequence of actions**

Note disjunctures and discontinuities. This is the lowest level of interpretation. Without labeling them, CMM researchers look at the sequences of actions and mark those points where something changed. These may be evident in a linguistic discontinuity or in the way people move, their tones of voice, etc.

Let's assume that we agree with the teacher that this three-turn conversation has become a repetitive pattern such that we need not know more about what occurs before and after it. Personally, I think this conclusion is unlikely, and would want to ask questions about when this pattern usually occurs (e.g., morning or afternoon? at the beginning of class or near the end? etc.), but for the purposes of simplicity, let it stand as a recurring singleton.

In the three-turn conversation, I note the incongruity between the content and the tone of voice in the second turn. The content apparently complies with an instruction ("take your seat;" "I am") but the tone of voice does not fit. Continuing, I note that the content of the third turn ("Don't argue") doesn't fit the content of the second turn ("I am!"). This makes me suspect that multiple things are going on in this conversation (that requires no great feat of interpretation, but signals me that I need to bring in some of the models that help me articulate these complexities. One way of marking these punctuations is to make vertical strokes on the time line of the serpentine model, each of which indicates some sort of discontinuity.

3. Note how the stories are lived and told and the manner of storytelling

In what follows, I describe three ways of getting the data that might address the purposes of this step. These move from the researcher as a third person observer to the researcher and those studied as a collaborative team.

The LUUUUTT model disciplines and enables my curiosity at this point. One aspect of this model is the inherent tension between the stories that people tell and those that they live. If all I have is a videotape or transcript of the three-turn interaction, I can make some warranted inferences about this tension, but I feel very limited. I can do better with another part of the LUUUUTT model: the manner of storytelling. If I have an audio or video recording, I can draw inferences from word choice, gestures, facial expressions, tone and quality of voice, bodily movements, timing, etc. etc. But I still feel limited.

A much better research method involves interviewing both teacher and student (perhaps interviewing them alone and together). Interviewing of this sort is as much an art as a technique. A skillful interviewer can ask questions guided by the hierarchy model, the model of logical force, the daisy model and the LUUUUTT model, all of which will provide information that can then be displayed by using those models in the next phase of the research. Some researchers would invite the subjects to work collaboratively, making the models fully visible and co-constructing both questions and answers. The researcher might start by inquiring about the grammar of "take your seat" and "don't argue" and the meaning of "I am" in this situation.¹⁷

An even more collaborative way of collecting data involves forming a research team and using coached performance. The team includes the teacher and student plus at least two researchers. In this way of collecting data, the two researchers take on the roles

¹⁷ The term "grammar" here is borrowed from Wittgenstein, and refers to a structure of meaning and action, not just the relationship among words.

of the student and teacher for the purpose of acting out the conversation, and the student and the teacher take on the roles of drama coaches, helping the researchers perform appropriately. Of course, the researchers perform as particularly inept actors, asking their coaches to guide them in saying their lines with just the right pronunciation, tonal pattern, body language, etc., and asking repeatedly for explanations of their motivations, feelings, expectations, etc. In this highly interactive process, the coaches' questions can be guided by CMM models and will generate rich information for an interpretation of the conversation being studied.¹⁸ The researcher might begin by asking "how do I say this" and "what difference would it make if I said it in another way?" "what emotion am I feeling?" and "what do I think he is doing?"

4. Do a "thick description" of the conversation

The notion of "thick description" merges interpretation and description. Since the elements of the social world inevitably combine action and meaning, a complete description must include interpretation.

The concepts and models of CMM function as enabling and disciplining heuristics, calling the researcher to pay attention to certain things. The serpentine model consists of a time-line surrounded by a hierarchy model of stories for each of the participants in the conversation. The hierarchy model disciplines CMM researchers to look for multiple stories about each act, to inquire whether these stories continue in subsequent acts or are changed, to investigate the relative ordinal position of each story within a structure of nested contexts, and to look for reflexive patterns of relationships. The daisy model disciplines them to look at the variety of conversations taking place, including some of those that might not call attention to themselves and/or include people "present" who do not take a turn. The LUUUUTT model disciplines the researcher to look for untold, unheard, unknown and untellable stories. The model of logical force disciplines the researcher to look for configurations of "oughtness" to act in particular ways. The concepts of strange and charmed loops suggest particular ways of thinking about the relationships among stories.

Using the daisy model, I would expect to find that this conversation includes, in addition to the teacher and student, the other students in the room, the other teachers in the school, the teacher's supervisor, the teacher's parents or role model, the student's family, and the student's out-of-class peers. Using the hierarchy model, I would expect to find stories of what it means to be white and black, of what it means to be a teacher and a student, of what school means, of what a good classroom environment looks like, etc. etc. I would expect to find some strong logical forces ("in a situation like this, when that happens, I person like me **MUST** act like this...") and that they interact in a particular way that reinforces this pattern of interaction.

(Critical)

It is more accurate to say that CMM has a critical edge rather than is a critical theory. The key difference is that CMM performs immanent critiques (based on factors inside the process itself) while the more well-known "critical theory" performs external critique (e.g., based on the apriori assumption that power is the basic structure of social relationships and that the relevant question is who is oppressed by whom). CMM's

¹⁸ This process will also produce "insight" on the part of the "coaches." The researchers need to be very clear in their own minds about their role so that they can act wisely on the threshold of interpreting and intervening.

critical edge comes from the thick description of what is being made and how it is being made.

As an interpretive research program, CMM asks, “what are we/they making?” and answers that in a vocabulary that includes speech acts, episodes, selves, relationships, forms of communication, forms of consciousness, and minds. Based on that description, it is possible to describe what each of these “made things” makes more or less possible. For example, when a CMM analysis of the interaction among various groups shows a pattern of reciprocated diatribe, it is possible to compare what has been made (diatribe) to what those involved avow as their intention (e.g. deliberation) and to draw appropriate critical judgments. For example, public opinion polls have consistently shown that the majority of people in the US want a better, comprehensive health care policy, but congress has failed to enact one. An interpretive analysis of the form of communication in congress would develop a critical edge if extended to show that such policies are difficult to enact given certain features of the patterns of communication that are occurring.

To move from the general critical edge to specific critical analysis, CMM offers a number of tools, among them:

- The notion of bifurcation points: what bifurcation points occurred? How did the participants act into them? What other ways might they have acted?
- What distribution of speech acts have occurred? Who is advantaged and who disadvantaged by this distribution? How is this distribution achieved?
- What episodes have occurred? What is made more and what less likely in these episodes? How do the episodes produced (the stories lived) compare to the episodes intended and/or wanted by the people involved (the stories told)? How are they producing unwanted episodes?
- What forms of communication have occurred? What is possible and what is less likely in these forms of communication?

The following steps describe some ways in which these tools can be applied.

5. Note tensions between stories lived & stories told

In this phase, the researcher moves from an interpretive analysis (a thick description of what happened) to one in which he or she begins to use his or her own vocabulary for naming and describing the events being studied. This process is always value- and conceptually-laden. For example, I might describe this pattern as an instance of inter-racial relationships, inter-generational relationships, resistance to institutionalized power, inadequate communication skills by the teacher, etc. Whatever description I use will bring in evaluative criteria.

As I develop the thick description of stories lived and told, I start to name the differences between them. A comprehensive description of this tension is often sufficient to critique what is going on. In the example, it is possible that the teacher will “tell” a story about being personally committed to student-centered learning but finds himself in a school in which his continued employment requires him to police the classroom. The conflict between these two professional roles is augmented by the disrespectful way he is treated in the classroom by the students. The student, on the other hand, may well tell a story about clearly perceiving the teacher’s conflict between two ways of being in the class and of his lack of respect for the teacher for trying to act in both, mutually contradictory ways.

6. Note untold, unheard...etc. stories

The other CMM models also call attention to various aspects of the conversation, leading to ways of describing the situation in the researcher's language that carry with it evaluation. The Appendix (pp 17ff) includes some suggestions of which models are useful for understanding particular patterns of action.

7. Note bifurcation points, missed opportunities, skillful action.

Returning to the time-line in the serpentine model, the researcher can – on the basis of the thick descriptions and critical analysis – identify those bifurcation points where, if someone had acted differently, different things would have been made.

(Practical)

8. Report/Act/Reflect etc.

The final step in CMM research is to do something with it. Note that nothing said above presupposes what that will be. In this specific case, the appropriate action might involve the teacher's re-storying conversations like these (perhaps as unpleasant but necessary precursors to the development of a different student-teacher relationship) or learning some new skills about how to act into the situation in a way that results in mutual laughter rather than anger and hurt.

CMM RESEARCH AND MAKING BETTER SOCIAL WORLDS

The ultimate goal of CMM research is to contribute to a process of making better social worlds. In this, it is identical to the goal of CMM practitioners in other fields. The process of research should generate understandings of specific settings, practical wisdom about how things work, collaborative relationships between researcher and subjects, and transformative learning on the part of the researcher him or herself.

If we are working as a consultant with a client, we will use these concepts and tools until the client knows how to move forward. As consultants, we might not know what insight the client has gotten or what decision he or she has made, and it is not important that we know. If we are working to inform ourselves about a situation, we might continue using the concepts and models of CMM until we have identified a bifurcation point in which we can act wisely, or we might continue until we have experienced a transformative learning that enables us to engage in gamemastery in our coordination and/or meaning making/management.¹⁹ However, if we are doing research, then we will address an additional set of questions and continue gathering and analyzing data until we are able to make a knowledge claim (e.g., about how particular aspects of the social world were made or about what is being made by a particular set of practices) that will meet the community standards for a good argument or “proof.”

¹⁹ Building on Wittgenstein's concept of “language-games,” I distinguished two levels of competence. One is gameplaying – the ability to follow the rules of a particular language-game and play it, with whatever level of skill. The second is gamemastery – the ability to choose whether to play one language-game or another, and/or to violate the rules of a particular language-game in order to achieve some other purpose. See the second chapter in W. Barnett Pearce (1994/2007). *Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds*. East Brunswick, N.J.: University Publishing Solutions.

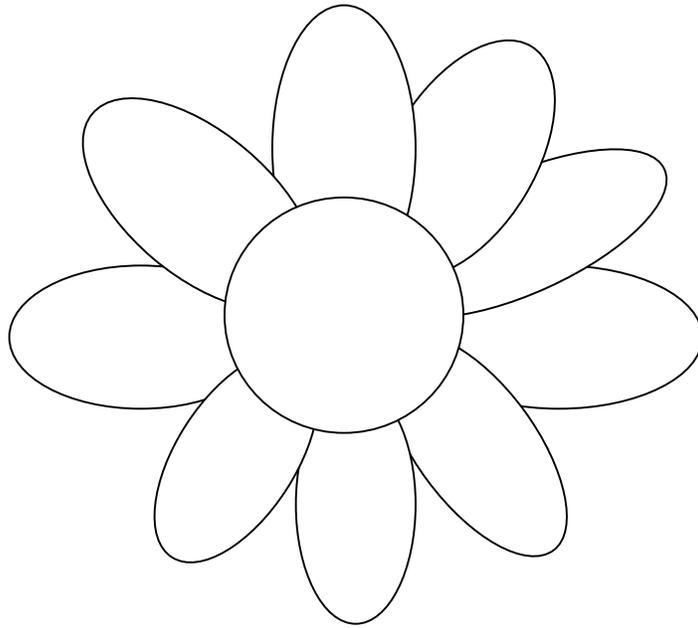
APPENDIX

SOME OF CMM'S CONCEPTS AND MODELS

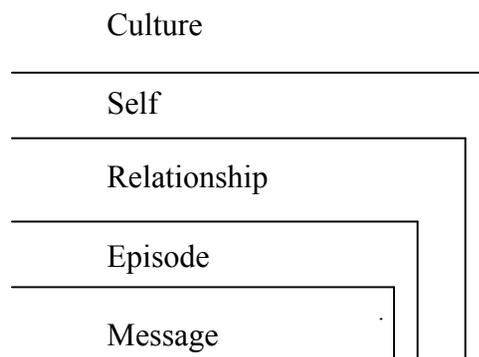
Researchers and practitioners working with CMM have developed an open-ended set of concepts and models that function both as heuristics (techniques for discovery) that guide data-collection, and as organizing schemes that help data-analysis. This is one way of sorting through the way they are used:

- If researchers note that there are several people involved in the situation, they might use the daisy model to identify the participants.
- If researchers note that a particular event is deeply textured, they might use the daisy model as a way of differentiating the strength or salience of particular relationships or conversations;
- If researchers notice gaps between the story told and the story lived (there will ALWAYS be such a gap, but if it seems extreme or important), they might use the LUUUUTT model;
- If researchers notice something unusual, interesting or significant about the manner in which a story is told (for example, the storyteller takes the role of victim or describes events of which he was a part from an objective perspective), they might use the LUUUUTT model;
- If researchers suspect that there are untold, unheard, unknown and/or untellable stories (there will ALWAYS be such stories, but if they seem significant), they might use the LUUUUTT model;
- When researchers hear a story told about what is happening, they might use the hierarchy model, inquiring about what is the context for that model, and what it contextualizes;
- When researchers hear two or more participants talking about a situation, they might use the hierarchy model and ask whether the same story is at the same level of hierarchy for the various participants, or if they have different stories;
- If researchers hear different interpretations of the same actions, they might use the time-line in the serpentine model to see if the participants are punctuating the story in the same way; or they might use the concept of speech acts and/or episodes to see how they are punctuating the sequence of actions;
- If researchers notice a pattern of oscillating behavior, such that one part of the pattern seems the opposite of the other, they might look for a strange loop;
- If researchers notice a pattern in which stories don't stand still; in which one thing leads to another and so on until the first is reached again, they might look for a charmed loop;
- Researchers will listen carefully for descriptions of oughtness, and use the concept of logical force to identify the participants' sense of what they must, must not, and may do; and,
- Moving the perspective back from the immediate actions, the researcher may inquire about the forms of communication that have been made, the forms of consciousness that have been made, and the organizational/ecological minds that have been made in the patterns of interaction.

Daisy Model



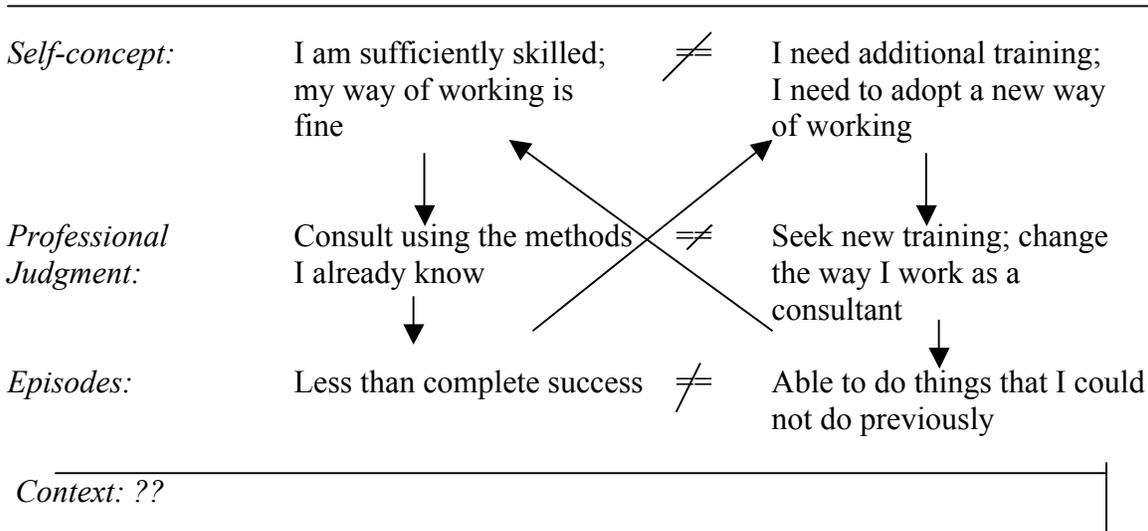
Hierarchy Model of Meanings/Stories



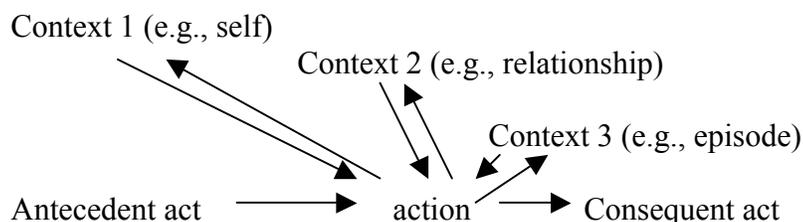
Strange Loops

This example is a strange loop in the hierarchy of a consultant's stories, and is a hypothesis attempting to explain how trainers and writers keep getting rich with "flavor of the month" styles of consulting

Context: ??



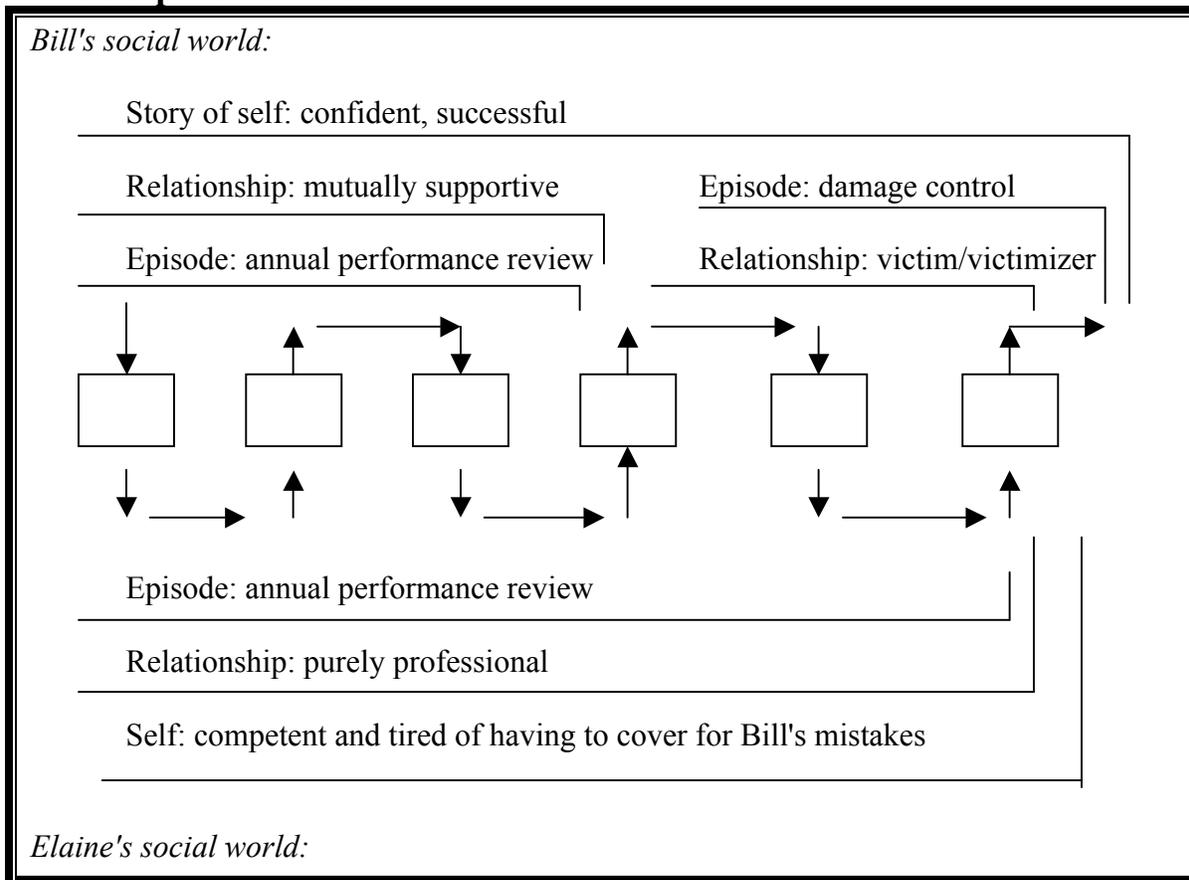
An abstract schema of "logical force" for a specific act:



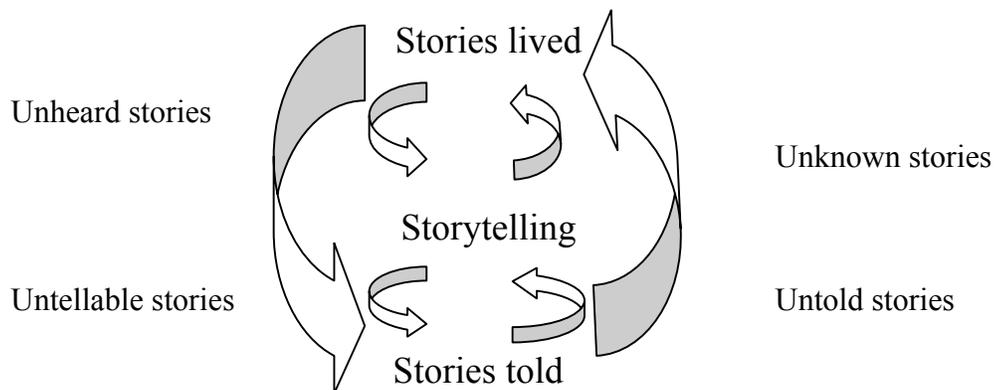
Some recipes for familiar patterns of communication (mix and match):

Luis:	Dora:
In a situation like this, a person like me has to do this, regardless of the consequences.	In a situation like this, a person like me has to do this, regardless of the consequences.
Which of the many ways of acting that are possible to me will achieve the consequent that I desire?	Which of the many ways of acting that are possible to me will achieve the consequent that I desire?
In order to create/maintain a relationship with Dora, how should I act?	In order to create/maintain a relationship with Luis, how should I act?
How can I act in this situation so that we achieve our purpose, without compromising my self or jeopardizing our relationship?	How can I act in this situation so that we achieve our purpose, without compromising my self or jeopardizing our relationship?

The Serpentine Model



LUUUUTT Model



LUUUUTT is an acronym for 1) stories Lived; 2) Unknown stories, 3) Untold Stories, 4) Unheard stories, 5) Untellable stories; 6) Stories Told, and 7) storyTelling.