Transforming *Accidental Adversaries* Dynamics in Client Systems and Ourselves

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**Summary**

This dissertation is a story about a company that found itself entrenched in an escalating relational *and* structural dynamic known as *accidental adversaries*. When the dynamic takes hold of an organization, it can quickly limit collaboration, innovation, resilience, and growth. The dynamic continues to be a leading cause of waste in enterprises (e.g. time, effort, strategic resources and relationships, etc.), especially during times of crisis or critical transitions.

The narrative analysis upon which the dissertation is based took place at an information and communications technology company, *CT, Inc.*, based in the Silicon Valley region of California, USA. The company had recently acquired a software company from which it imported a cadre of engineers and managers. Shortly following the merger, a new, high profile CEO was hired to leverage further development and delivery of a key technological breakthrough. At the time of the study, the company was being heralded widely in technology and business media both for its recent technical innovation and business turnaround. During the course of the 35 project interviews, however, a different story began to unfold. Groups that needed to collaborate in order to innovate and grow the company, instead appeared to be working at cross-purposes, embroiled in counter-productive adversarial dynamics.

This dissertation is also a *play within a play within a play*, suggesting and illustrating how (a) accidental adversaries dynamics also may exist within ourselves, individually and as members of professional affinity groups and communities of practice, (b) they reflect our own relational multi-being and most practiced or preferred ways of being, and that (c) to be in service to our clients, OD practitioners need to be in coordinated dialog both with clients’ socially constructed beliefs, assumptions, and values *and* our own.

While written from a social constructionist perspective, this dissertation does not suggest that practitioners and researchers should discard all cognitive change models in favor of purely affective or relational ones; nor does it negate the former as positivist, modernist, or mechanistic. Instead, it proposes to augment their effectiveness by coupling them with a constructionist overlay that may enable them to more effectively address the affective, relational aspects of organizations—effective work relationships, trust, willingness to collaborate, exploring shared values and aspirations, resilience, and more— that are key leverage points for long-term strategic success and for transforming the accidental adversaries dynamic.