

GLOSSARY

(This gives a brief description of the main CMM concepts and practices, as well as some other ideas and techniques, that are used in articles in this Special Edition)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

This is a method of social action research which explores and creates life enhancing possibilities through constructive and collaborative dialogue. It requires a move out of deficit language into an appreciation of what works well in an organisation - with the belief that you get more of what you pay attention to.

Circular questioning

These are questions which seek to gather information by asking questions in terms of differences between people and events and so enable the questioner to focus on relationships rather than facts.

Circularity

This is the notion that events and relationships do not necessarily follow a linear process of cause and effect, but are better represented as a flow of circular patterns of action and reaction in an organisational system. These patterns can be inquired into through the process of circular questioning in which the relationship between people and events is explored.

Curiosity

Curiosity is a position adopted by the enquirer in a systemic interview or conversation. By being curious in relation to the person or people interviewed, encouragement is given to them to bring forth their stories of significance, thereby focussing attention on their connections of meaning and action.

Daisy model (also called the “atomic model”)

The “daisy model” is a way of calling to mind the various conversations that provide the texture of a given person or event. Visually the model is shaped like a daisy with the person or event in the middle and each of the petals represents one of the conversations related to that person or event. It provides a means of identifying and focusing on the most significant conversations, as well as flagging up those that are being ignored or undervalued.

Episodes

The concept of “episodes” is a way of “punctuating” a stream of events into units that have a beginning and ending point with a coherent storyline. While the punctuation is “artificial,” of course, it is a way in which we make sense of the things that happen in our lives.

CMM uses the concept of episodes heuristically, as a way of inquiring about what people think they are doing in specific situations.

Hierarchy model (or a model of embedded contexts)

CMM takes seriously Bateson's dictum that there is no meaning without context, and the hierarchy model functions as a heuristic that directs attention to the context of an utterance or action. However, CMM argues that there are always multiple contexts. While there is no "correct" list of contexts and no "right" order, it has been that almost every utterance and action is in the context of the "episode" of which it is a part, the "relationship" between the person performing the action and the others (see daisy model) who are relevant, the person's story about their "self" and/or their role, their "culture" or often taken-for-granted assumptions about what things exist, how things work, and what is right and wrong.

Hypothesising

This is the creation of a story or stories which fit a particular pattern or sequence of events. The value of this systemic story creation is in its capacity, through processes of enquiry, to influence and re-edit the prevalent stories told in an organisation, thereby giving the possibility of new meanings and realities to be constructed.

Logical force

CMM assumes that we live within webs of "oughtness." The primary question is not epistemological, "how can I know?," but practical, "what should I do in this specific situation?" When we find ourselves in specific situations in which others are acting in particular ways, we feel that we "ought" (or "must" or "may" or "must not") act in certain ways.

In addition to the strength of logical force, it is useful to discern different configurations. By combining the **hierarchy** model and the **serpentine** model, we can say that:

- (i) **prefigurative force** is that which we feel based on what other people have just done
- (ii) **contextual force** is that which we feel based on the situations in which we are in
- (iii) **practical force** is that which we feel based on what we want the other person to do next in response to our acts and,
- (iv) **implicative or reflexive force** refers to the effects our current actions are intended to have on the contexts in which they occur.

LUUUTT model

This model is an acronym for stories **L**ived, **U**ntold stories, **U**nheard stories, **U**nknown stories, stories **T**old, and story**T**elling. Based on the assumption that what is said and done in any social situation is anecdotal (just part of what the participants are responding to), this model is a heuristic.

The first set of distinctions is between **stories Lived** and **stories Told**. Because the stories we live out in social action are always partly physical and co-constructed, they are never completely equivalent to the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are, what we are doing, the relationships we have with others, etc. By paying attention to these differences, we can get a more richly textured account of what is happening in any specific instance. The model also focuses our attention on **Unheard stories** that are told but not heard by some of the participants,

to the **Untold stories** that are known by some of the participants but not told so that others can hear them, and to the **Unknown stories** that are unknown by the participants. Finally, stories are told in particular ways that constitute their meaning. This model directs our attention to the manner of **storyTelling**, including the genre of the story, the medium in which it is told, the artistry displayed by the storyteller, the nonverbal aspects of the storytelling, etc.

Reflecting conversation

A reflecting conversation is a model in which a conversation is at first listened to by an audience of others, and then these others themselves conduct a conversation about what they have heard, whilst the original conversants become the audience to this reflecting conversation.

Reflexive abilities

These are abilities which enable the systemic practitioner to notice the actions and reactions of self and others in relation to oneself, and use these observations to guide and coordinate continuing dialogue and future action.

Strange loops

CMM analysts do not believe that the embedded contexts of meaning (see **hierarchy model**) are necessarily or even usually orderly. Sometimes two or more contexts are at the “same” level of importance, or oscillate between being contexted by and the context for each other. These patterns produce highly structured confusion and are described as **strange loops**. These loops are a pattern in which a reversal of meaning at some level occurs when one follows the chain of implications from context to text and back to context. For example, the paradoxical command “Be spontaneous!” can be understood as a cryptic strange loop.

Serpentine model

CMM developed a model that shows each successive action in an episode as coming “out of” the embedded contexts of meaning of one participant and “into” the embedded contexts of another, and so on. This model is called “serpentine” because it is built around a sinuous curve that looks like a snake crawling from one person or group to another and back again. This model directs our attention to the “back and forth-ness” of social interaction. Every aspect of our social worlds is made by the collaborative action of multiple people.

Unwanted repetitive patterns (URPs) such as a fight with your neighbor or boss, occur when contextual and prefigurative forces are high and practical and implicative forces are low. In these situations, people feel that they must act in certain ways because of what other people did, no matter how distasteful their own acts or destructive the consequences.

On the other hand, when practical and implicative forces are relatively high, people feel free to explore new ways of thinking and being. One consequence of **circular questioning** is to enhance this configuration of logical force.

