

Change: A Processual-Constructionist Perspective

Dian Marie Hosking

&

Andy Bass

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Abstract

Here we develop arguments about *how* social realities are constructed in ongoing processes, exploring these arguments in relation to existing and potential constructions of change. First, we review different ways in which entities and their relations have been constructed in the literatures. On the one hand are mainstream constructions that seem to solidify or freeze individuals and organizations, treating each as if they have their own, independent, existence or reality. In this context, change is achieved by one stable existence acting to know and to influence some other independent reality. We contrast, this view with a critical alternative that assumes interdependent, socially constructed realities and relationships, and sees these as multiple and local-historical. A view of reality construction processes is outlined, showing how entities and relations may be viewed as constructions and exploring some implications for existing constructions of change. Section 2 puts these arguments 'to work' by focusing on processes in which *stable* realities and relationships can be constructed. We examine and illustrate selected 'generic' models presented as abstract formulations of possible co-ordination patterns. In Section 3 we explore how *changed* realities

and relationships might be constructed - given processual-constructionist premises. A key feature of our argument addresses the question of how change might be constructed in relations between interdependent, multiple, different but equal social realities. A change methodology of this sort constitutes a radical departure from methods that continue to rely on mainstream assumptions and focus on reality 'contents' rather than processes.

Keywords: Social processes, change, social constructionism, relational theory

Constructions of Entities, Relations, and Change.

Within the literatures of organization behavior (OB), work psychology (WP), organization development (OD), and organization theory (OT), certain assumptions and approaches are identified as "mainstream" and others as "critical" alternatives (Thompson and McHugh, 1995). These are briefly overviewed before outlining *one* "critical" alternative. The latter theorizes communication processes as processes in which social realities and relationships are made and re-made. Arguments about these 'relational processes' then are further developed in relation to existing narratives of organizational change.

Dualism and Subject-Object Relationships.

"Mainstream" approaches treat social cultures and structures, and individuals, *as if* they each exist independently, in their own right, so to speak (Thompson and McHugh, 1995; see also Hollis, 1994; Hosking and Morley, 1991). For example, OB focuses on *individuals and groups* 'in organizations'; the organization left as a largely tacit and separately existing context for individual action, perceptions, and satisfactions (e.g., Miner, 1980). In contrast, the literatures of OT have largely focused on *organizations* e.g., as mechanical or organic systems seemingly separate from individuals' activities and constructions (e.g., Child, 1977, 1984).

When objects are separated they also are related in some way. Mainstream literatures have been said to construct a "subject-object" discourse of

relations (e.g., Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Fine, 1994; Harding, 1986; Reeves Sanday, 1988). The term "discourse" is here used broadly to refer to "anything that can be 'read' for meaning...(that) can be referred to as a text" (Burr, 1995p.51). Discourses include written and spoken language along with cultural products (e.g., building design, clothing...) and non-linguistically expressed acts. Their significance can be thought of in terms of what they *do*. The S-O discourse can be said to do three things. First, it constructs relationships between an acting Subject and an acted upon Object, for example, between an organizational leader or change agent, and an organization. Second, these relationships are made sense of with reference to the assumed characteristics and/or acts of entities. So, for example, organizational leaders are assumed to have vision or charisma (e.g., Lord, DeVader, and Alliger, 1986; Bennis & Nanus, 1985), organizations are assumed to have structures, and environments are characterized as complex or turbulent (see e.g., Child, 1977; 1984). Third, realities and relationships are assumed to be made by the Subject. It is the Subject who is understood acts to know and to influence 'other' as a knowable and formable Object. For example, organizational leaders are represented as those who act in order to know their organization and its environment. Further, on the basis of this knowledge, leaders act to (re)structure relations and change organizational performance (Child, 1972; Donaldson, 1985; Rifkin, 1996).

Dualist Narratives of Organizational Change.

These mainstream discourses of entities and relationships are reflected in constructions of organizational change (see e.g., Fineman, 1991). One approach focuses on *individuals* and changing individual characteristics. Examples include Human Relations (see e.g., Guest, 1984;), job enrichment and goal setting (e.g., Miner, 1980), and OD approaches directed towards developing self awareness, building trust, and clarifying roles and roles relations... (e.g., Dyer, 1984; French and Bell, 1990; Schein, 1987, Kaplan, 1969; see discussions by Fineman, 1991, & Hollway, 1991). A second approach focuses on *organizations and environments* and their characteristics. With this starting point, organizational change is considered to be planned and achieved through changing organizational characteristics

such as structures and technologies to 'match' environmental contingencies (e.g., Carnall, 1990; Evan, 1993).

In addition to the above, writings on change have come more and more to emphasize *sense making* (e.g., Tsoukas, 1994; Weick, 1979) and/or to speak of change *processes* (e.g., Wilson, 1992). However, mainstream discourses of entities and relationships usually remain. The individual continues to be constructed as an independently existing agent who makes sense of independently existing realities. Sense making is treated as an intra-individual cognitive activity (see e.g., Gardener, 1985) and conceptual language is assumed to represent the world/reality. Furthermore, strategic or planned change is assumed to be effected by individuals on the basis of cognitive maps 'inside their heads' and through social processes between (already theorized and already existing) entities. Of course where there is a mainstream there must be other streams.

Alternatives To Subject-Object Dualism.

In addition to the mainstream, Thompson and McHugh (1995) spoke of a range of "critical" approaches. In this category they included, for example, variants of critical social psychology, social action theory, Marxism, and related theories. These share three assumptions. First, is the assumption of *inter-dependent ontologies*, rather than independent existences. Second, *language is considered to construct social realities*, rather than to represent independently existing realities. Third, these *social realities are assumed to be multiple and local-historical*, made in action, rather than objective and subjective knowledges of some independently existing world.

The above assumptions are developed in many different ways in very different theoretical frameworks. One general line of approach has been referred to as "social constructionism" - itself a very heterogeneous category - often including assumptions better known as social constructivist (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism typically focuses on socially constructed *products* and the 'how' of social construction processes is largely ignored (e.g., see Pearce, 1992). In contrast, our current interest is in putting the above assumptions to work by showing *how* realities and relationships are constructed. In this paper, our particular concern is with the possible implications of a processual-constructionist view for narratives of stability and change.

We shall shortly outline some central premises concerning 'the how' of relational-construction processes. However, it is important to note that our premises are not intended as substantive claims. Rather, they resemble

Giddens' social theory of structuration, (e.g., Giddens, 1979) in that they express the "*potentials* of the phenomena that constitute the domain of inquiry" - potentials may be very differently realized in the varying "empirical flux of events" (Cohen, 1989, p.17, emphasis in the original). Further, our talk of relational construction could be said to constitute a "style of thinking" (Chia, 1995) that falls within the range of what some call "postmodern" (Gergen & Thatchenkerry, 1996). We assume a "weak ontology of becoming" rather than a "strong ontology" of entities, attributes, and discrete acts (Chia, 1995, p579). This processual-constructionist approach is, as yet, little explored in the field of management and organization studies (but see e.g., Campbell, Coldicott, & Kinsella, 1994; Cooper & Law, 1995; Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995).

Relational-Construction Processes.

In the present perspective, entities-with-characteristics are viewed as social realities that *arise in processes*. The social realities of who a person is, of organizations, of cultures and relations, are considered to be constructed and reconstructed in ongoing communications. This contrasts with the mainstream and social constructionist approaches in which entities are treated as if they exist 'outside' of and prior to relationships and realities. How construction processes might be viewed is the subject of the remainder of this section. We only outline our premises because the arguments and justifications are extensively discussed elsewhere. In particular, literatures such as the philosophy of inquiry, feminism and feminist critiques of science, the sociology of knowledge, social psychology, and micro sociology have made major contributions (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 1994; Gergen, 1994; Harding, 1986; Potter, 1996; Sampson, 1993; Slife & Williams, 1995; Woolgar, 1996). In addition, we only sketch our premises in this section since the remainder of the paper explores them in relation to change and change processes – our central concerns. So, now we overview the 'how' of relational construction processes.

Realities and relations are constructed in written and spoken (conceptual) language as well as through co-ordinations of non-verbal actions, things, and events. Terms such as text-context and act-supplement are used to speak of what is co-ordinated or *related*; we use these terms interchangeably. A text or act may be a handshake or other non-verbal gesture; may be conversations about markets, writing a report, or waiting at a bus stop; may be playing in a string quartet, making cakes, or eating... A text is any action or artefact available to be made relevant or irrelevant, meaningful or meaningless, good or bad, by being co-ordinated with (supplemented) in some way (e.g., Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Gergen, 1995).

Co-ordinations necessarily implicate multiple, simultaneous and interrelated act-supplement relations, many of which are tacit. Take as a text (act), for example, some newly announced corporate mission. Con-texts might well include, for example, discourses of local and of corporate management, of previous change initiatives, of motivation, discourse of what's happening elsewhere in the business world... Further, not one, but multiple social realities are likely to be made in the course of such co-ordinations. For example, the mission statement may be spoken of as the latest management joke, used as the basis for team briefings, referenced in development workshops and so on.

This view of construction processes concerns 'here and now', ongoing, communications. In the course of these processes, "stabilized effects" - identities, social practices, social structures - are produced (Chia, 1995, p.586). This means that being a 'local', being culturally competent, is achieved by relating in ways that are locally warranted (Weigert, 1983). So, for example, someone stands at the bus stop rather than lying in the road and the bus stops; this way of co-ordinating works and becomes an ongoing and stable social practice. In other words, some social realities come to seem relatively fixed and be taken-for-granted as 'how the world really is'. However, we should not forget either the essential artfulness - artificial rather than natural - of these "effects" or the processes that make and re-make them. In addition, 'here and now' co-ordinations *both* resource *and* constrain what follows. Another way to say this is that relating is historically and socially

located. Communicating some company mission statement might well make no sense (non-sense) unless resourced by discourses concerning, for example, collective working, management hierarchies, 'singing to the same song sheet'... And, once particular co-ordinations become "stabilized effects", other possibilities are constrained.

Relational processes make people and worlds as social realities; they construct *self* in text-context relation to some not-self or *other*. This means that self and other exist (as social realities) only in relation (e.g., Harre, 1979; Mead, 1934; Weigert, 1983). One implication is that who someone is (identity) becomes multiple rather than singular, variable rather than fixed. Furthermore, self-making and world (other) making become understood as complementary - like yin and yang each 'is' only in relation to the other. On this view, relational processes are thought of as "reality-constituting practice(s)" that both constrain and resource self and organizational identities, cultures...all social realities (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.27). Relational processes construct markets, management, hierarchy, all social realities. At the same time, they construct these realities as good or bad - fiercely competitive markets, weak or strong management, too much hierarchy and so on.

Last, in the present view, discourse of entities-with-characteristics and subject-object relationships are social constructions. Entities, for example, are viewable as "stabilized effects" constructed and maintained in ongoing processes, and constructions of self and other arise in interdependent relation. This contrasts with the more usual assumption that self and not-self each exist as independent realities in subject-object relationships. So now relational processes, whilst they may construct subject-object relationships, do not have to do so. Some interesting questions result for how change may now be differently constructed. But first, a summary:

- Relational processes are processes of construction in which someone and something is made real and (perhaps) good.
- Entities-with-characteristics *can* arise and subject-object relationships can be constructed - as in mainstream narratives - but
- processes only construct the way someone or something *is* known; other relations always are possible.
- Processes are constructed in multiple, interrelated, act-supplement (text-context) relations, and

- reference co-ordinations already in process.
- Act-supplement relations resource and constrain how a process goes on.
- Relational processes are processes of self making and world making: self and other are 'two sides of the same coin'.
- Social constructions always are in process and stability is an ongoing achievement.

Construction Processes and Narratives of Organisational Change

Our premises about construction processes can be briefly explored by reflecting on existing constructions of change and change issues. This will provide a context in relation to which subsequent sections can implement processual-constructionist premises in relation to the how of stability and change.

Change processes are the norm, stable effects are an ongoing achievement.

We have seen that mainstream conceptions construct entitative discourses in which organisations are represented as relatively static and singular contexts 'outside' and independent of people, language, and action. With mainstream discourses in place processes can only be theorised as within and between entities (Hosking and Morley, 1991). In contrast, processual-constructionist premises allow persons and organizations (indeed all things) to be theorized as arising in ongoing processes. This means that stability is no longer taken-for-granted as 'what really is the case'. Indeed our premises make *change - as a process - the norm*. Entities and their characteristics now are viewed as regularly reproduced achievements constructed and maintained in ongoing co-ordinations. So, for example, it no longer seems so useful to say someone *is* a "blamer" or *is* a "placator" (Satir, 1972). Rather this processual-constructionist style of thinking looks for patterned co-ordinations – for acts (e.g., shouting, generalizations such as "you always...") that are repeatedly supplemented in ways that maintain the pattern (e.g., meek replies "I'm sorry..." "perhaps if you could...") (e.g., Grinder and Bandler, 1976; Watzlawick, 1978).

In addition, and unlike mainstream discourses of organizations, the present arguments provide the basis for theorizing *both* stability *and* change. Unlike subject-object dualism that sets personal and organizational change apart, processual-constructionist arguments integrate talk *both* of individual *and* organizational change whilst avoiding reducing one to the other. They do so by treating persons and organizations as social realities made and changed in relational processes. As a consequence, those interested in organizational change now may consider relevant any processual-constructionist arguments, regardless of their particular substantive focus, for example, in the literatures of therapy (e.g., Anderson, 1997; McNamee, 1989), communications theory

(e.g., Watzlawick et al, 1967), or feminist writings (e.g., Flax, 1987; Harding, 1998).

Change as a construction process.

Shifting ontology away from entities-with-characteristics to relational processes shifts the *locus* of change away from people and organizations. Change talk no longer focuses on objectively identifiable and relatively stable states (e.g., unmotivated or motivated, centralized or decentralized). Rather, attention now goes to processes and how they construct, reproduce, and change social realities and relationships. Of course processes involving multiple simultaneous text-context relations may simultaneously construct *multiple social realities* and these multiple realities could include both stability and change. Our processual-constructionist view does not presume that e.g., the newly announced mission statement is some thing about which all could and should agree, barring ill will and incompetence. Agreement and freedom to disagree now are viewed as a more a matter of power relations rather than of knowledge and rationality. Power becomes understood as constructed in multiple act-supplement co-ordinations and in relations between them (Gergen, 1995) - as we shall see next.

Change as power over and power to.

Dualist assumptions privilege *subjects'* constructions in subject-object relations. For example, a theorist might assume that an appointed change agent's constructions of reality necessarily have more value than other constructions. Indeed, both theorist and change agent might suppose that others are relevant only as objects to be known and changed. Various commentators have spoken of subject-object relations as a relationship of "power over", that is, power of subject over object (see Gergen, 1995; Harding, 1986). And many change methods seem to be of this sort. For example, dialogues about differing constructions of reality often get embroiled in relations of power over - either to get one reality construction warranted as right and the other(s) wrong or to reduce the differences to some(one's) consensus construction. Such ways of relating are, indeed, encouraged the assumption of independently existing realities and knowledge of the same. Power over may, for example, be constructed in talk therapy intended to

change relations between life partners (e.g., Anderson, 1997). Equally, it can be true of attempts to get all organizational participants to 'sing to the same song sheet', to buy in to some shared metaphor or mission statement, or to 'be flexible' (e.g., Carnall, 1990; Dyer, 1984).

When considered on the basis of our processual-constructionist premises, subject-object relationships and power over can be seen to be just one relationship possibility. An additional possibility is an *inclusive* and *non-hierarchical* view of Self and Other and relationship – just as yin is in yang and yang in yin - in text-con-text relation (Hosking, 2000). Such ways of relating are relatively under-explored in discussions of relating in general and change in particular (but see e.g., Reason, 1994; Campbell, Coldicott, & Kinsella, 1994). Constructing multiple different realities viewed as equal, rather than better or worse in some objective sense, can be thought of as "power to" sustain multiple local cultures. And non-hierarchical ways of relating might be better than power over in relation to at least *some* local realities. This view should not be confused with liberal-humanitarian discourses of participative democracy or personal growth; such discourses remain perfectly consistent with entitative constructions and subject-object relations. Rather, we are now speaking of construction processes that: are open to *multiple local-cultural* standards; recognize and work with *power* as an inevitable quality of relational processes; enable ways of being in different but equal relations (e.g., Brown & Hosking, 1986; Fine, 1994; Eisler, 1990).

Resistance to change now is radically re-conceptualised.

When viewed on the basis of a processual-constructionist perspective, mainstream assumptions are seen to locate talk of resistance to change in subject-object relationships. One entity (subject) is presumed to be acting upon another entity (as object). The subject is constructed in relation to discourses of intention, agency, and planning of change; the object is constructed as resisting, known, and potentially formable (see e.g., Hollway, 1991; Giddens, 1979). The metaphor is either mechanistic e.g., overcoming resistance arising from inertial forces, or organic e.g., overcoming individual defence mechanisms arising from previously adaptive behaviours. In the context of these taken-for-granted, resistance is something Other has or

does and has to be overcome e.g., by education or teambuilding (see e.g., O'Connor, 1995); "social change can be accomplished only as rapidly as resistances are overcome and removed" (Jaques, 1947 in Hollway, 1991p.120). In the present perspective, attempts to overcome resistance through more power over will reproduce subject-object relations. This means that they probably reproduce the status quo rather than changing it. Perhaps this is why change attempts are so often felt to be more of the same, even when the content seems so different (TQM, BPR, visioning...). The present view suggests that social realities and relationships are maintained or changed in construction processes. The present view makes it possible to leave aside notions of a singular reality, subject-object relationships, and the emphasis on change programmes in terms of predefined content. We now shall explore how realities and relationships are maintained; how they can be changed is the subject of the final section.

Constructing Stability

Earlier we borrowed a characterization of Giddens' work on structuration to note that our processual-constructionist premises are intended to express "the *potentials* of the phenomena that constitute the domain of inquiry" (see Cohen, 1989, p17). In this section we explore these potentials in a manner similar to that of linguists who have employed formal grammars to express the *potential sentences* in a language - rather than try to list all empirical eventualities (e.g., Chomsky, 1957). We do so by outlining generic models as abstract formulations of *some possible* co-ordination patterns, borrowing from and developing notations from systems thinking. In this way we can illustrate how stable or changed constructions - as content - may be produced.

Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch (1974), Fisch, Weakland, & Segal (1982) and more recently Senge (1990) view problems as achievements where much of the effort required to maintain stasis is contributed (unknowingly by the participants) as solution-oriented behavior. They argue that very often an attempted solution plays a key part in problem maintenance, so constructing "games-without-end". In such games, one or more act-supplement co-

ordinations continue to reference taken-for-granted(s) that reproduce and maintain the status quo. In the following discussion we consider one of Watzlawick et al's examples, along with a teaching case, as examples of selected co-ordination processes, games-without-end, and the dynamics of stability and change. A number of diagrams are offered as 'content-filled' illustrations of our generic models. Each model is intended (a) to be consistent with our relational premises (b) to generate possible change interventions and ways to reflect on them, and therefore (c) to be useful in enabling 'new' ways of going on in relation.

Competition For Who Will Be Subject.

Figure 1, after Watzlawick et al (1974), provides an example of a game-without-end in which two sailors, A and B, are coordinating in the balancing of a boat.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Fig. 2 summarizes Watzlawick et al.'s analysis of this game using Senge's (1990) notation. In Senge's terminology, this is a positive feedback pattern and illustrates the archetype of "escalation".

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Watzlawick and his colleagues reflected on this pattern to note that both A's and B's attempts to balance the boat (by leaning further out) actually contribute to the problem, leading to "more of the same".

Turning to our processual-constructionist terminology, each act-supplement co-ordination reconstructs (maintains) a subject-object frame of reference. So, for example, each might say "I" (self) am being overbalanced (causally effected by) by "him" (other). We have shown that co-ordinations can be thought of as (re)constructing three interconnected realities of self (e.g., person), other (e.g., person or organization), and relationship (e.g., subject-object). Fig. 3 characterizes the discourses in which a particular self-in-relation-to-other is constructed in the boat example. Each discourse is characterized as follows:

- * theme or event constructions
- * self (in relation to construction of other)
- * other (in relation to construction of self)

* relationship between self and other

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The symmetrical interlocks in the boat example become yet more apparent when modeled as follows.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

.The boat example illustrates stasis-producing co-ordinations where both discourses reference similar text-context relations and both construct Other in symmetrical and opposed ways. Subject-object co-ordinations maintain stasis either (a) in competition for who will be subject, or (b) in tacit agreement of subject-object differentiation and who occupies which position in the relationship. Either way, subject-object co-ordinations construct "power over". Other illustrations of stasis-producing processes can be given where the competition is *not only* for who will be subject in some shared (taken-for-granted) reality *but also* competition for whose very different version of reality will prevail. The AW&B case is presented as an illustration of this sort. It is *based on* a published business case, but has been elaborated and changed in order to illustrate and facilitate the appreciation of a processual-constructionist perspective AW&B is run as a simulation with participants, usually managers, for example doing an MBA, assigned to management and consultant roles. Competition Over What Is Real And Good.

The *case materials* present AW&B as one of three biggest national producers of aircraft wheels and brakes. In the mid 1950's UK Aerospace accepted AW&B's tender to manufacture and supply braking systems for a new Royal Airforce (RAF.) plane. However the brake did not meet AW&B's promises and gave many serious problems. As a result, UK suspended them as a supplier and gave them no further orders, leading not only to losses on the original order, but to the even greater loss of continuing business in spares and replacement parts.

In the summer of 1967, UK invited bids for the wheels and braking system for a new light fighter plane. AW&B put in an especially low cost bid, responding to very tight deadlines. Management spoke of the proposed project in terms of buying themselves back into the business, improving the state of their order books, and helping the local economy. UK were attracted by relatively low

cost and by the proposed design which was for a smaller and lighter brake than was usual; AW&B got the contract.

The initial design and construction plans were produced by John Wilson, a long time specialist in aircraft brakes, and Chief Engineer of the aircraft brake department. Wilson appointed a recent graduate, Stewart Losely, to be executing engineer and to take charge of the qualification tests according to procedures and standards prescribed by the military. The brake was delivered by the stipulated deadline in June 1968 along with the required qualification report containing the test data and protocols to show that the brake met requirements and was ready for the flight tests.

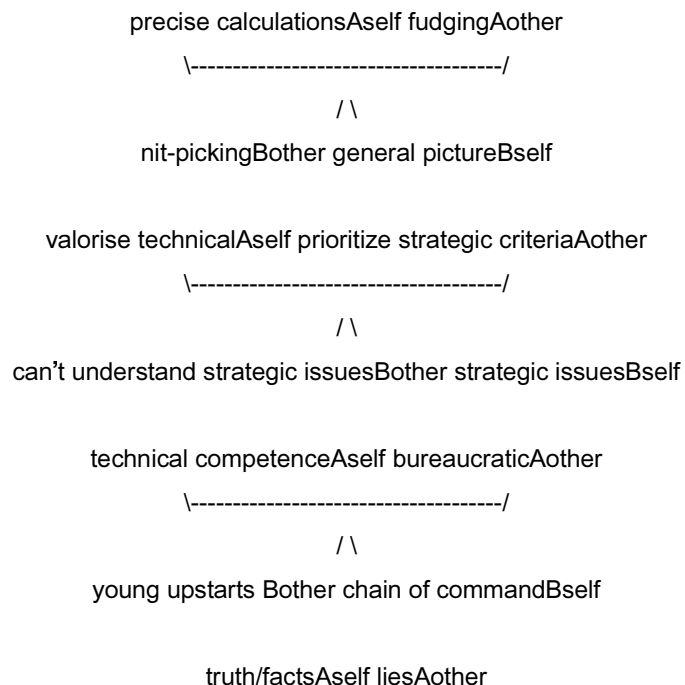
During the flight tests several dangerous situations arose; it became clear that the brake fell a long way short of military requirements. UK made several inquiries to AW&B before finally demanding to inspect the original test data. When eventually they were allowed to do so they found significant discrepancies between the original data and the report. As a result, a fact-finding committee was established consisting of officials from the military, UK, and AW&B. In October of that year AW&B withdrew their brake system and qualification report and offered a new improved brake at the same price. At the same time Losely, the executing engineer, and Keene, the technical reporter who put the documentation together, both resigned.

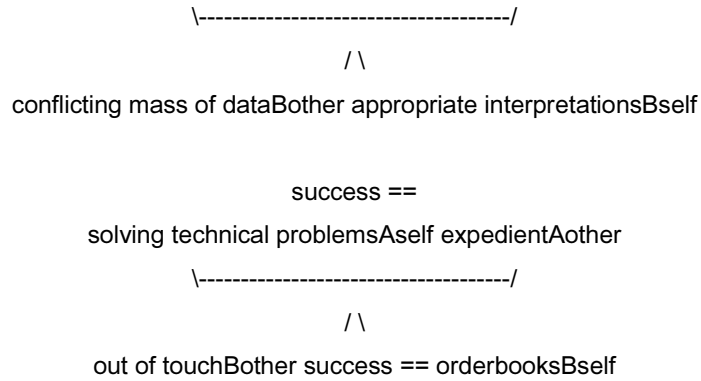
The case materials given to the consultant group contain extensive first-hand reflections - represented as having been obtained by them in their internal inquiry through narrative interviews with those directly involved. *In the simulation*, 'the consultants' and another group given the role of AW&B management start by considering their case materials in order to analyze what happened and why. The consultants explore the differing constructions of reality as described in their version of the case and prepare a report for the management group. After a meeting where management and consultants are supposed to come to a common view, all participants reflect on *their own group's* relational processes and constructions of self, other, and relationship. For the purpose of illustration we can look at reality constructions *in the case* and one theme in some detail i.e., constructions of knowledge and truth. The *AW&B engineers* constructed knowledge in relation to discourses of higher

education and professional training, specialist engineering expertise and experience in performing engineering tasks. These constructions were reflected in actions such as following set procedures, precision measurement and exact calculations. Technical standards were regarded as being there for determining the precise truth of the matter. Procedures, calculations, and data were viewed as either right or wrong; there was nothing in between. In contrast, *managers* in the case spoke with pride of building their knowledge through practical experience/long length of service. They spoke of the ‘big picture’ in terms of local community issues, order books, long term survival ...(and not just engineering details) and valorized their own ability to understand strategic issues. Engineering data were looked on as needing to be interpreted to bring out the general picture. In this way the truth was made evident - especially for those who otherwise wouldn’t understand. The discourses of managers and engineers can be modeled as before.

FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

In contrast to the earlier boat example, the two voices in the AW&B *case* construct very different social realities. Each fishbone below denotes interlocking polar opposites in which the upper line features the engineers’ texts, and the lower line, that of the managers. In each case, what one voice constructs as good the other constructs as bad.





Given the above, the mutual construction of self and other might look as follows.

FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

The above provide potentially useful models of stasis maintenance *as a co-ordination process*. The discourses of management and engineers interlock, restricting subsequent co-ordinations to the small set that fit. Managerial changes such as firing the guilty and tightening up procedures would be likely to be constructed by engineers as yet more bureaucracy, expedience, fudging *etcetera* - reconstructing subject-object relations and, in this context, a game without end. This, in turn, raises the question of how realities and relationships can be changed - the issue to which we turn next.

Constructing Change: Strategy and Methods.

Joining and Acting From Within: A General Change Strategy

In the martial art of Aikido a deliberately non-contentious stance is taken to an attack. Rather than attempting to stop an incoming blow, the skilled practitioner allows the energy of the blow to continue and supplements it in a way that does not warrant it as an attack. Aikido offers an elegant metaphor for a relational approach to change, and in particular highlights the shift from relations of 'power over' between entities in subject-object relation, to 'power to' construct multiple local realities and relations.

Some cybernetic systems approaches to psychotherapy attempt to work in similar ways (e.g. Fisch et al, 1982; Gordon and Meyers-Anderson, 1981).

They too, emphasise the importance of accepting and using client's discourses and then making new resources available is; we term these

aspects 'joining' and 'acting from within'. Joining co-ordinates or 'interlocks' with other's proffered reality. In the case of relationships between consultants and client, one aspect of joining is to complement the client's discourses of self in relation to other(s), including consultants. For example, a client may position the consultant as expert - as knowing – and self as not knowing (object). At first consultants might act in acceptance of this relationship. But then they may *act from within* - offering new text-context (act-supplement) relations as possible resources for self and world enlarging. This could mean the emergence of relations of "power to" - relations in which participants share "relational responsibility" (McNamee and Gergen, 1999) for ongoing constructions rather than remaining in subject-object relations (e.g. Farrelly & Brandsma, 1974).

It is worth making explicit that our processual-constructionist premises, unlike entitative conceptions, do not separate knowing and influencing. This is in marked contrast to intervention/change methodologies that speak of data gathering, analysis, intervention design, and implementation as shifts from analysis to intervention. In the view taken here, *all acts* - asking questions, voice tone, words used, posture... and the artifacts that result (interview findings, percentage summaries, diagnostic classifications...) - influence how a process may go on. These acts may or may not help to enlarge possible worlds and possible ways of being in relationship.

Our processual-constructionist arguments allow us to reflect on existing change methods *and* to generate possible ways in which co-ordinations can create new resources, so constructing power to go on in changed ways. Perhaps the most obvious candidate for de-constructive reflection is the set of approaches that attempt change through explicit discussion; this is where we shall start.

Explicit Discussion About Relationships.

One common change method turns *some* of what previously was taken for granted into the explicit subject of a spoken dialogue, questioning that which previously was unquestioned. Change approaches of this sort include t-groups and assumption 'surfacing' techniques such as those of Argyris (1985), Senge (1990) or Isaacs (1993). So, for example, in the AW&B

simulation the consultants might work with managers and engineers to make explicit some of their previously tacit self-other-relationship constructions. From a relational perspective, *explicit* discussions of self-other relations can have many pitfalls (Bass & Hosking, 1998, Hosking & Bass, 1998). In every AW&B simulation in which we have been involved explicit discussion reconstructs subject-object relations - making more-of-the-same. Argyris' discussion of deuterio learning, the problems trainees experience, and their resistance to change may be similarly interpreted (Argyris, 1985; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000). It seems that dialogues about self-other and relationship very easily develop into a game-without-end. One reason for this may be that attempts to clarify and explain necessarily introduce further material to work on - and so more equivocality (Garfinkle, 1967) such that relating becomes tied up with discussing 'what kind of relationship this is'. However, and perhaps more importantly, a game without end is necessarily constructed when a discussion process tacitly constructs a subject-object relationship in paradoxical relation to discussion content (Bateson, 1972). For example, a manager's attempt to enable others may be co-ordinated with as constructing 'more of the same' in terms of relationship. When e.g., a consultant, leader, or OD expert, is coordinated with as if s/he were presuming greater knowledge and influence then again, subject-object ways of relating are ongoing.

Presupposition.

Presuppositions participate in the maintenance of stasis through their hidden quality; they also may be a resource for change. The use of presuppositions allows *tacit* reference to be made to new resources - and staying tacit means that questioning and subject-object patterns become less likely (e.g., Grinder & Bandler, 1975; Watzlawick, 1978). Following from our processual premises, presuppositions need not be verbal and will implicate self-other relations. Further, if we are right about the limited role of explicit discussion, presupposition - as a way of tacitly changing aspects of context - seems especially promising. Applying these reflections to the AW&B case, another possible change method could be to *work tacitly* with the co-ordinations in which subject-object relations were constructed. This could include, for example, changing the artifacts and practices that contribute to the

construction of such relations e.g., the presence of executive parking spaces and dining room, senior management perks, job titles... Of course, such changes can still be constructed as more-of-the-same, especially when coordinated with in relation to cynicism about management fads. If management's actions were constructed as manipulative this would again reproduce subject - object relations.

Stories and Re-Storying.

We have seen that explicit problem-solving discussion may construct a competition for whose version of reality is right and who knows best. However, it could be possible to construct self-other relations without constructing subject-object relationships; one way is in audience-storyteller relations. For example, a consultant might work with a narrative metaphor, joining with clients to develop new narrative resources. Methods for re-storying or re-authoring self-other and relations are becoming increasingly popular e.g., in family therapy and change work (e.g., White & Epston, 1990; Friedman, 1995). Change approaches such as Future Search (Weisbord and Janov, 1995) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Shrivastva, 1987) along with metaphorical (e.g., Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990) and performative approaches (Boal, 1992) can be re-storied (from a relational-constructionist perspective) as means by which the locals generate their own (multiple) new discourses of self, other, and relations without getting trapped in subject-object relationships.

Metaphors.

The ubiquitous involvement of metaphor in the construction of reality has been addressed by many writers (e.g. Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Bateson, 1972; Lackoff & Johnson, 1980; Palmer & Dunford, 1996). One method works with "operating metaphors" (e.g. Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Lackoff & Johnson, 1980). These are seen to provide enormous resources for change because they are, so to speak, bundles of inter-related text-context/act-supplement relations (discourses) and therefore are often referenced in ongoing processes. For example, given the operating metaphor of "business is war" there is likely to be a corporate uniform, practices constructing a hierarchical chains of command, fixed procedures, valuing of obedience and

loyalty, and so on. AW&B - a military equipment supplier - seemed to construct a culture of this sort. We have noted that change methods commonly attempt to change metaphors through talk, analysis, and critique. Our present discussion suggests a shift in emphasis to ways of relating that are non-conceptual, tacit, both-and, and heterarchical rather than subject-object (see e.g., Hosking, 2000).

Including Other Voices.

Our processual-constructionist perspective opens up a landscape of possibilities to add to mainstream discourses of pre-existing entities, pre-existing identities, individual acts and mono-logical relations. Our perspective suggests that it is never 'just' a therapist or a consultant, co-ordinating with a client, but rather a "speaking of many with reference to many contexts" (Dachler & Hosking, 1995, p.7). Multiple ongoing constructions of self, other and relations may be given space in a great many ways. For example, multilogging may be enabled by including the 'voices' of other(s) with whom a client is in relation, even in the physical absence of those 'others'. One way to do so is through approaches in which participants perform or act out various voices in some relational dynamic (see e.g., Holzman & Morss, 2000). In his 'individual' change work, Farrelly offers possibilities for clients to relate to particular voices by acting them out in the here-and-now of the therapeutic session (see Farrelly & Brandsma, 1974). This way of going on is easily combined with other methods of culture change (e.g., Bate, 1990).

Furthermore, large-scale organizational initiatives such as search conferences, Future Search, participative action, and responsive evaluation increasingly attempt to include 'all' possible voices.

Shifting What's Narrated.

The methods previously outlined initially join with some act/text then go on to introduce new possibilities. However a contrasting method could be to resist warranting some reality claim. This can be transformational when, for example, it challenges taken for granted about the client-consultant *relationship* and/or challenges the *reality* of some problem locally being given ontology. Refusing to warrant someone's problem statement can open up the space for them to 'go on' differently. A number of systemic change

management methodologies seek to avoid a problem orientation - and related discourses of an independently existing reality, analysis of the same, blame, looking back... - and instead shift to requesting appreciation of what is done well, constructing possible futures and the like. These include "appreciative inquiry" (Cooperrider & Shrivastva, 1987), constructionist-systemic work (Campbell, Coldicott, & Kinsella, 1994), and Future Search (Weisbord 1992; Weisbord & Janov, 1995). We will discuss the last mentioned as an illustration of change processes that can construct 'power to'.

Future Search

Future search (FS) conferences involve getting multiple voices together, including e.g., customers, suppliers, community groups... in order to enlarge possible ways of going on in relation. FS agents spend a great deal of time in advance of such a conference negotiating a set of procedural rules to be observed during the conference. The rules are designed to focus attention on future possibilities - instead of past problems, and to give space to many potential futures i.e., multiple realities - rather than one consensus strategy or policy.

When considered on the basis of processual-constructionist premises, FS practices have a number of beneficial features. In the negative, these include *avoidance* of expert - non-expert relations, avoidance of explicit discussion of self-other relations, avoidance of problem solving... all practices that we have suggested are likely to (re)construct subject-object relations. Put positively, a benefit of FS is that it can be self and world enlarging (Harding, 1998) by enabling *new ways of going on in relation*. This can be the case when e.g., everyone has a voice, when voices construct heterarchical relations (equal rather than right/wrong, better-worse), when multiple realities are warranted, and when listening is no longer a means to compete over who will define 'the game'. Following from our earlier discussion, agreement of what are presented as procedural rules might provide an effective presupposition that tacitly introduces new ways of going on in relation. Further, our relational-constructionist premises suggest that the value of such conferences may not be so much the *content* of the particular reality constructions that emerge - since that content will be local and historically contingent. Rather the major

benefit may be in *new ways of relating* - ways that are multilogical, constructing "power to" in different but equal relations.

Coming Full Circle: Relational Processes, Stability, and Change

We began by suggesting that a processual-constructionist style of thinking remains relatively undeveloped in the literatures of OB, OT, and OD. By outlining processual-constructionist premises and working through some of their implications we were able to show that this style of thinking offers new possibilities. Important amongst these was the identification of subject-object relationships and the newly emergent possibility that self and other could usefully be considered as inter-dependent existences capable of constructing multiple, different but equal, realities. This allowed us to reflect on some of the many ways that approaches to change, and commonly used change methods, construct subject-object relationships. Similarly, it became possible to consider relations that are inclusive and "eco-logical" (yin-yang) rather than exclusive and ego-logical (Hosking, 2000), constructing "power to" rather than "power over". There seems much to be gained from approaches: that emphasize processes rather than content; that facilitate inclusive multiloging; that respect multiple local realities, and that develop local resources for continuing local development.

Time to Stop Talking About It.

There were two good friends, Chokei and Hofuku. They were talking about the Bodhisattva's way, and Chokei said, 'Even if the arhat (an enlightened one) were to have evil desires, still the Tathagata (Buddha) does not have two kinds of words. I say that the Tathagata has words, but no dualistic words'. Hofuku said, 'Even though you say so, your comment is not perfect'. Chokei asked 'What is your understanding of the Tathagat's words?' Hofuku said, 'We have had enough discussion, so let's have a cup of tea!' (Suzuki, 1970, p.54-55)...

