CMM: A brief overview

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What is CMM?

CMM is an acronym for the theory known as the Coordinated Management of Meaning. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen first introduced the theory of CMM in the 1970s and in 1980 published their landmark work, *Communication, Action, and Meaning: The Creation of Social Realities* (Praeger, 1980). Over the decades, CMM theory has been continuously refined and expanded. Some of the more notable writings that capture this include Pearce's 1989 book *Communication and the Human Condition* (Southern Illinois University Press), and Pearce's *Making Social Worlds: A Communication Perspective* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

CMM is now well accepted as a significant contribution to communication theory. But it is more than just an abstract theory: it is a practical theory that can bring about new ways of acting effectively. When called upon to account for the multi-faceted nature of CMM theory, Barnett Pearce (2009) wrote that this approach to understanding the complex process of communication can be distinguished by an orientation (communication perspective) and a set of practices (CMM models and "tools"), with the goal being to bring about change so as to enhance the quality of social life.

The theory is as complex and nuanced as human communication is itself. However, in order to explain the theory we have made it as succinct as possible, organized around a series of claims about these three facets of CMM: a perspective, a set of practices, and the goal of a better social life.

A perspective: looking at communication

Looking at communication

CMM is distinguished from many other theories of communication because it looks at communication and not through it. This is a shift in the conventional point of

view: from looking at the message, the information, or the effect to looking at what is actually going on in communication between people.

When we look within we are looking at the dynamics in the communication process that enables us to address the question of "what is going on here?" By way of contrast, a simple, more conventional view of communication is concerned with addressing the question: "what is the communication for?" Answers to the latter question require us to name the outcomes, effects, or products of communication whereas answers to the former question require us to consider the internal dynamics.

When we shift our point of view to what is going in within communication, the idea of communication changes from an occasional act of sending messages to achieve something (inform persuade, teach, and so on) to one of complete immersion in the active living of a social life. From the latter point of view we are always in communication and our understanding of things in the world, whether animate or inanimate, emerge from within the ongoing communicative action.

This change in looking, inward to the acts of communication themselves, is the foundation for what has been called a communication perspective in CMM.

We construct our social worlds in communication

Pearce and Cronen start with the premise that the social worlds we inhabit are constructed in the many diverse forms of everyday communication we engage in. We might describe these activities as conversation, play, arguing, peacemaking or work meetings and we might engage in them using talk, gesture, social media, books or film, yet they are all aspects of what we call communication.

Pearce liked to say that we "live in communication" much like a fish lives in water. While oxygen is what keeps our bodies alive, communication is what makes us human. We are so thoroughly engulfed in, surrounded by, and saturated in communication that its effects are often invisible to us. Nevertheless those effects are profound and life changing.

Communication is the primary and fundamental aspect of our lives. We are born into relationships, first with our primary caretakers, later with siblings and peers, teachers and other authority figures, friends and life partners. We extend, disturb, and continually transform our social worlds in these relationships as we continually engage in everyday (and some not so everyday) communication them.

Recent research on "interpersonal neurobiology" suggests that social relationships and the patterns of communication that make them possible are fundamental partners in shaping the neural pathways in the brain and mind (Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind*). That's how deeply social we are, and how intricately linked communication is to what it means to be human.

Communication is fundamentally relational

When we make the claim that communication is fundamentally relational we do so to emphasize that there is always an "other" in communication with you. This "other" may be a partner, an opponent, or even a passing stranger who catches your eye. Regardless of who the other is, we are always in relation with them in communication. Communication is fundamentally *relational*. The meaning of my utterance is incomplete until you respond to it. Your response shapes what my utterance becomes.

The interdependency between people in relation with each other in communication has been described as joint action. It is the way that we engage in joint action together that shapes our understandings in communication. It is the way we engage in joint action that brings about new creations and understandings each joint step of the way. With joint action there is no control by one individual but there can be mutual control.

It is this fundamental notion of communication as joint action, as the *coordination* of action by two or more people that led Pearce and Cronen to call their theory the *coordinated* management of meaning.

Communication is both representative and constitutive

Another way to express this idea of constructing social worlds is to say that communication is *constitutive* or *generative*—it has creative energy—it constitutes who we are, what we become, and what we make together. Thus, communication is the "creative force" out of which we create relationships, social institutions, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, and our sense of self. It is how we connect to one another, experience empathy and compassion, as well as distance ourselves from each other and experience isolation and fear.

This view of communication is not the typical way that social theories conceptualize communication. The traditional or standard view of communication (often called the

transmission model of communication) is that ideas and thoughts exist independently "in the world" and communication (language, in particular) is a means of representing or transmitting these ideas to others. In other words, language is used to stand for, to represent, or point to something that already exists. And this is true. We do use language in this way: to name objects in nature or other "things" (although whether these are actually independent of us can be debated). But that is far from the complete story.

In our use of language and other forms of communication (ritual, gesture, tone of voice, etc.), we collectively create and modify ideas, relationships, and social footings that orient, or give us our bearings with each other and the larger social world. In his book *The Language Animal*, Charles Taylor argues that while most of our theories about language focus on its representative functions the most interesting aspects, the ones that structure how we act together, what we take to be significant and meaningful in our lives, what it means to be human, these operate in the constitutive realm. It is this constitutive realm that CMM theory tries to understand and, in the understanding enhance our capacities for improving practice.

Communication is consequential

This is a phrase you'll often hear CMM theorists and practitioners use. "Communication is consequential." What we mean in saying this is that communication matters and it matters in non-trivial ways. The process of communication itself is significant, or consequential to human affairs.

This notion that communication is consequential follows from the distinction made earlier between the representative and constitutive domains of language. If all language/communication did was "name" things that already exist independently of our talking about them, we would be hard pressed to say that communication is all that consequential. The things-in-themselves (e.g., atoms, trees, tall cliffs) would be far more consequential. But in the social domain, the domain in which language is the fundamental creative force, what we say and do to and with each other "makes" things happen.

"Social things" (like ideas, relationships, selves, etc.) are brought into existence in and through communication. Communication matters. It is the matter out of which social worlds are made.

Communication is about managing meaning

Communication is about meaning but not in the passive sense of perceiving messages, as if that was just one of many things we do socially. From a communication perspective, our social life is imbued with meanings and it is one our life challenges is to manage those meanings so that we can make our social worlds coherent. But this process of managing our meanings is never done in isolation. We are always and necessarily coordinating the way we manage our meanings with other people. CMM offers three basic concepts to capture the dynamics of this meaning management process: coordination, coherence and mystery.

Coordination draws our attention to the way in which we work together in this meaning making process and to the patterns that emerge as we do so. Managing meanings is a joint activity, never one done alone. We make these meanings **coherent** to ourselves, and others, through the stories that we tell. Yet no amount of coordinating or coherence-making will ever produce a "complete" account or "perfect" pattern because there is always something that cannot be explained. **Mystery** reminds us that there is always far more to our social world than we can imagine.

A set of practices: what's going on here?

Communication involves coordinating actions and managing meanings

The very name, CMM, captures the core proposition of the theory: communication is the process of managing meanings and we manage those meanings through coordinating with others. Sometimes our coordinated actions are smooth and we seem to be "in synch" with and energized by each other. At other times, what we are coordinating feels routine and not very engaging or even stuck in a difficult and problematic pattern, bordering on the dysfunctional. But much of what gives these patterns their shape or feel is what we are interpreting them to mean.

In CMM theory, the process of managing meanings is intricately tied to *context* and to the *stories* we draw upon in our meaning-making. We are all familiar with the idea of context, as when we defend ourselves by saying our words were taken "out of context." The term context literally means to "weave together," as one part of an action weaves into the next, forming a sense of the whole. Thus, actions or words

that precede or follow one another become part of the context for making sense of what is happening in the conversation at any point in time.

The trick, of course, is how far we extend the weaving process, backward or forward in time, or which other stories we see as relevant and thus weave into the current situation. If we are having an argument, I may remember a disagreement we had a week ago and weave it into the context for the current conversation, seeing the previous argument as relevant to this one. You may say that's not fair, that was a different issue. Our attempts to manage meaning will not mesh, but will no doubt be consequential to the outcome of our conversation.

Coordination focuses on our **practices** (behavioral patterns of interaction), whereas *coherence* draws upon our **resources** (shared storehouses of meanings captured in shared vocabularies, stories, and myths, beliefs, values, and taken-for-granted common sense). The experience of "talking past each other" is often a case of engaging in the same practice while drawing upon very different resources to make sense of the practice.

Meaning making is contextual and flexibly hierarchical

When we interact, we engage in a sequential turn-taking process (coordinating actions) that simultaneously involves both speaking and listening, with one person's speech act generally serving as context for the other's response. But context involves much more than just one or more prior acts, especially when it comes to making and managing meaning.

 In CMM, we acknowledge that we are always acting and making/managing meaning within multiple contexts. Some of these contexts include our definitions of the episode (the situation at hand), our relationship, our self (e.g., ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, political, religious, national), organizational/group/ family cultures, world-views or philosophical stances, and many more. It may be helpful to think of these various contexts as nesting one within another, much like opening a set of nesting dolls. Larger (or higher-order) contexts can be thought of as encompassing smaller (or lower-order) contexts and thus influencing the action and meaning-making that takes place.

For example, interacting with a co-worker might be nested within and influenced by multiple contexts, such as the episode (a staff meeting), your relationship expectations (as friendly or hostile coworkers), your boss's expectations of both of

you (a different relationship context), and perhaps your relevant individual self-identities (neither one of you likes to lose an argument). Each of these contexts, and perhaps others as well, influence how you coordinate your actions and manage what the interaction means to each of you.

Its important to remember, though, that contextual levels can change and they do so much more easily than we can change the order of nesting dolls. With nesting dolls you can only ever have the bigger one envelope the smaller (without doing something really drastic to the dolls). With hierarchies of meaning, the higher-order contexts can change to a lower and vice versa, sometimes within the same episode of interaction.

Typically, when we interact with a friend (let's call him Ted), the nature of our relationship serves as a higher-order context, such that even if we have an argument, we still feel like we remain friends. We are, in effect, arguing per the ground rules of being friends. But sometimes the argument may veer into territory that brings another context into view or may even challenge our friendship. For instance, a friendly argument about whose employer provides the best benefits package might include a comment from Ted about liberals and their unrealistic expectations about healthcare. This then goes on to make you feel defensive about your political identity, which prior to that comment hadn't ever been a factor in the conversation or the relationship. Now, political identity is introduced into the contextual equation, whereas it hadn't been there before.

This is what we mean when we say that hierarchies of meaning are flexible, or not as fixed as they often appear to be. For most of that conversation (and most conversations you have with Ted), you were contextualizing things in terms of two good friends (higher-order relational context) having a friendly argument (lower-order episode context). Then, all of a sudden it felt more like the "unrealistic liberal" comment (a simple speech act) had turned the friendly argument into a not-so-friendly political argument (now the episode is serving as the higher-order context), raising at least some level of threat to your relationship as good friends (now appearing to be a lower-order context)

Mystery makes hierarchies interesting

So, CMM sees meaning as hierarchically organized (higher-order contexts shape the meaning of acts in conversation) and that multiple layers of this hierarchy can influence speech acts. Moreover, our speech acts reverberate meaning upward on

multiple levels. Our sense of being good friends makes friendly arguments manageable and the more frequently we successfully engage in a friendly argument, the more it reinforces how strong our bond of friendship is.

With CMM, we sometimes describe the various levels in a hierarchy of meaning as "stories" that we tell ourselves and to each other. Thus, we have stories about how various social episodes typically unfold, stories about our relationship, stories about who we are (self-identity or autobiographical stories), stories about what it means to be a citizen in this or that culture, a resident of this or that community, and so on.

An important assumption in CMM is that whatever context or story we bring to bear in understanding a given circumstance, it's only one of several possible stories we could draw upon to make sense out of the current situation. We say then, that all stories are partial: they never offer a complete or immutable story. There's always more that could be said, or another point of view that could be applied.

This sense of there always being more to say, another way of contextualizing events and persons, is captured in CMM theory by the concept of ***mystery***. For instance, a sense of mystery can remind us that our interpretations are always limited, always partial.

Accepting this idea of mystery opens us up to other possible ways of making sense, even encouraging us to seek them out as a way of enlarging the conversation or seeking better alternatives than we might otherwise choose. Mystery can remind you that except for the accident of birth (where you were born, and to whom you were given), you might hold very different beliefs and values than you currently do. You might have grown up in a different religion, or with a different set of family values. That doesn't invalidate the values you do have, it just means that you may be more likely to cut others a little slack or use your imagination to wonder how the other came to such a different interpretation of things than you did.

Mystery sparks curiosity. And if you are trying to find more effective ways to communicate, curiosity is a good friend to have. From a CMM perspective, curiosity is a fundamental virtue because it opens you up to consider new things. The consequence of accepting mystery and displaying curiosity is reflected in the frequently heard CMM mantra: "Good things are likely to happen when we make mystery the highest-order context."

Our storied experiences can be many facetted

Storytelling is a fundamental human activity, and in CMM we find it useful to think that each of us has significant stories that we live by. Our autobiographical stories about who we are and how we came to be a particular self have a profound influence on how we coordinate with others and manage meanings.

 It's not unusual to respond to a behavioral accusation by saying, "I wouldn't do that. That's not something a person like me does." Likewise, there are a myriad of cultural stories that influence our interactions. There are "rags to riches" stories that motivate many of us not to give up when life seems unfair or we've been dealt a bad hand. If we are enchanted by stories of conspiracy, we may tell ourselves that a recent series of conversations with a variety of shady characters reflect that they are "out to get me/us."

An important CMM distinction is the difference between "stories told" and "stories lived." This distinction is fruitful because of frequent inconsistencies between what we actually do—the patterns of interaction we engage in—and the stories we tell ourselves about them. A parent tells himself that he is being protective of his teenage daughter, when in fact the "story lived" resembles more of a prison experience and results in the teenager not having the necessary freedom to experiment, explore, and grow into adulthood.

But there is more to our storied experiences than just stories told and stories lived. There can also be untold, unheard, unknown, and even untellable stories that still matter. CMM practitioners use the LUUUUTT model to explore the full range of storied experience. The acronym LUUUUTT refers to:

Stories <u>L</u>ived (*what we actually did or are doing*)

<u>U</u>nknown Stories (*information that is missing*)

<u>U</u>ntold Stories (*what we choose not to say*)

<u>U</u>nheard Stories (*what we say that isn't heard or acknowledged*)

<u>U</u>ntellable Stories (*stories that are forbidden or too painful to tell*)

Stories <u>T</u>old (*what we say we are doing*)

Story-<u>T</u>elling (*the manner in which we tell stories*)

The un-stories matter a great deal. There are stories we live, that we embody in our actions, in the weathered lines of our faces and the slouch of our shoulders, that we do not tell or do not tell as fully as we might. Some of these stories, even when we try to tell them, may go unheard by others. They may literally be unheard, as in "Sorry, I wasn't listening to what you said," but they may also be unheard in the sense that we as listeners have not grasped the significance of what we are being told. We miss too many of the nuanced aspects of the story, we hear only what we want to hear, or are prepared to hear. And we have all lived through stories that we just can't tell anybody, where the very thought of the story is unbearable. But, none-of these "un–stories" are dismissed or forgotten: they continue to play out in our lives in un-said ways.

 The significance of the LUUUUTT model for communication practice lies not so much in trying to get others to disclose more or to force stories to the surface, but to remind ourselves that what we bring to our joint encounters is often complex and multi-layered, yet still deserves to be respected.

In one sense, knowing that there are other stories at work beyond just what we are told can make us more patient with each other. In relation to the concept of mystery (there's always another story that could be told), the CMM LUUUUTT model reminds us of the power of listening to others (to finally hear unheard stories), as well as listening to our own internal voice (for unknown, untold, or untellable stories of our own). And finally, if we measure our stories told against the stories we live, we may learn to recognize our own blind spots.

Our stories are imbued with logical force

CMM theory uses the concept of logical force to account for the different patterns that emerge in our joint action and in our story telling about it. This logical force is a strongly felt sense of direction that compels action forward in particular ways. It is sometimes referred to as moral force and four distinct types have been articulated.

Prefigurative force is a felt sense of obligation to respond to another person's previous act. Sometimes, we feel obligated to respond "in kind," as when we hurl an insult back at someone we felt has just insulted us, or when one compliment begets another. At other times, the felt obligation is less specific. A friend gives us a gift and we apologize for not having thought to bring them something.

Another type of logical force is **contextual force**. Just as it sounds, this reflects the way in which the well-known rules in each situation or context suggest what we should do to meet expectations or demonstrate our competence. In a classroom setting where a lecture is being given, we are likely to behave as expected, even if it means that we "fake" listening to the instructor by nodding our head occasionally or just sitting quietly at attention. It would be odd to engage in a running commentary on the instructor's statements, simply because such behavior is not appropriate to the context. There is a situational logic that compels us to play our part in the unfolding script of giving and attending a lecture.

Practical force reflects the logic of some goal or outcome we may be seeking in an interaction. What we do or say is not so much a response to the other's previous act as it is a forward projection of what we hope will happen next. We want the instructor to like us, thinking that can't hurt when grades are due, so we sit in the front row, smile a lot, listen attentively, and ask good questions to prove just how well we were listening and how interested we are in the material. It's as if this goal or anticipated outcome is pulling behavior out of us, relentlessly pursuing the objective.

Finally, CMM theorizes that we may frequently experience an interpersonal logic called **implicative force**. Implicative (or reflexive) force refers to the effects our current actions are intended to have on the contexts in which they occur. For example, in attempting to redefine what has been a platonic relationship to a romantic one, you might linger longer, flirt more intentionally, and act more sensuously. These speech acts suddenly *imply* the possibility of a new kind of relationship, and *voila*, that higher-order relational context changes from just "platonic friends" to potential "romantic partner."

Being mindful of patterns of communication is important

One very simple description of CMM could be to say that it is all about understanding *patterns* of communication so that we can answer the question of "what's going on here?" And we answer this question from within a communication perspective that looks at communication.

Looking at communication means to be mindful of, to attend directly to the sequential pattern of acts we are producing. It can help in identifying patterns to provide a short-hand name for the speech acts that occurred. For instance, the statement "Don't you look great" can be interpreted as different speech acts.

Depending on the context and tone of voice, it might normally serve as a speech act of "compliment." But if it comes from an overly protective father to a daughter who is sensitive to slights, it could be heard as a speech act of "criticism." If we were to follow their conversation turn-by-turn, labeling what is said and done in terms of speech acts, the pattern might look like this to the father:

Speaker	Actual words	Speech act (heard or intended)
Father	"Don't you look great"	Compliment
Daughter	"Why do you always do this?"	Unprovoked defensive response
Father	"What did I do? I just said you look nice"	Restated compliment
Daughter	"You never let me wear what I want!"	Making something out of nothing
Father	"Here we go again. Do we have to do this?"	Calling her out

But the daughter hears a different pattern:

Speaker	Actual words	Speech act (heard or intended)
Father	"Don't you look great"	Sarcastic criticism
Daughter	"Why do you always do this?"	Calling him out for criticising
Father	"What did I do? I just said you look nice"	Pretended he didn't mean it
Daughter	"You never let me wear what I want!"	Challenging the tyrant
Father	"Here we go again. Do we have to do this?"	Making himself the victim

Conversations like these are, in CMM terms, often called **unwanted repetitive patterns** (URPs). Most times, we walk away from such conversations feeling misunderstood and blaming the other for causing it. We may even have a vague feeling that this wasn't really a conversation about clothing .We might even sense that this is an example of a larger pattern of talking past each other, but our common-sense education about communication doesn't help us figure out what to do to change the pattern. Often, we just walk away, chalking it up to moody teenagers and overbearing fathers.

But with a little reflection on the pattern of speech acts, including some role-taking to imagine how the other might have interpreted the pattern, and then talking together about the pattern, naming what each thought the pattern to be, they repair the damage. (Probably best to have that conversation a little later when cooler heads prevail.) Then they'd be *looking at* the communication and trying to coordinate their actions and manage their meanings more effectively in the future.

Barnett Pearce suggested some very good questions to help with this mindful, naming process:

- What kind of pattern are we making when we interact in this way?
- Do we like the pattern we are making?
- If not, how can we make better patterns?

Developing the ability to talk about our communication patterns with each other is often called **metacommunication** (i.e., communicating about communication). It is a skill set that takes time and real effort to develop, but we can end up telling very different stories about our relationships when we are mindful of looking *at* communication rather than *through* it.

With the goal of change (for the better)

How can I make it better?

Barnet Pearce wrote more than once that when we are involved in the process of communicating with another, our primary question is a moral one—one of "what should I do?" There is a moral imperative in this question and one answered through the interplay of the logical forces we talked about earlier when it comes to our joint action. We, consciously or unconsciously, make decisions about what we

should do as we weave our ways through the prefigurative, contextual, practical and implicative forces at work in communicating with others.

Along with the moral forces at work leading us one way and another in our co-ordination with others in communication, there is a broader moral question at stake: "what should I do in order to make things better? " And this is where CMM shines. From a CMM point of view, the whole purpose of being mindful of the patterns in communicating and in answering the question of "what is going on here" is to be able to then ask how can I make it better?

Another one of Barnett Pearce's oft-cited observations is that "if we get the pattern (of communication) right, good things tend to happen." CMM describes ways and means of getting this pattern right through particular forms of joint action and ways of constructing stories about it.

Getting the pattern right in dialogue

Dialogue is on of those words that take on different meanings in different contexts. Quite often dialogue is used merely as a synonym for talk or interaction, but within CMM theory it is a special form of joint action.

Dialogue, as a special form, is not so much distinguished by what is said in the process but by how the participants relate with each other. They ask questions to invite answers, not to make a point; they speak as part of their contribution to the joint action unfolding, not to make an impact on the other person; and they are open to being changed, not set in their own stance.

Dialogue can also be described as an interpersonal process in which participants stand in the tension between holding their own ground as a listener and talker and being profoundly open to the other as a listener and talker. To hold your own ground requires displays of genuineness, openness and reflexive awareness. Being profoundly open to the other requires displays of curiosity, creativity and being in the present.

When we engage in communicating dialogically, we are trying to jointly bring about understandings and new stories that allow all participants to go on productively, regardless of what can often be profound difference. This is what CMM would call, getting the pattern "right".

Some stories are better than others

As a general principle, the more often we get the patterns right, the better stories we will have to tell, and of course the better stories we will be living. The stories we tell ourselves are what sustain us, as individuals (the stories of self, career, our moral stances, etc.), as relational partners (being a good friend, parent, significant other), as a community (stories of how we've solved problems together, what we seek as common goods), and even as nations (our national myths, for instance).

The stories we tell on this website about the fictional social community of Cosmopolis in 2045 are stories suggesting better ways to sustain ourselves as social communities. The stories we tell in the section "Can't Wait Until 2045?" are not fictional, but about actual communities around the globe that are experimenting with better ways of being together. We share their stories to inspire and serve as exemplars of what is possible.

You might say that CMM, as both an academic theory and a set of social practices is about understanding communication as a force for good in the world, as a means for turning bad stories into better ones, by making wise communicative choices, and getting the pattern right more often than not.

Cosmopolitan communication is one of those better stories

When Barnett Pearce wrote *Communication and the Human Condition* in 1989, he made this observation:

"*Our civilization celebrates its creativity and technological prowess, but this creativity has not yet been extended to patterns of communication among nations or individuals. Modern men and women are probably more like their primitive forebears in their interpersonal relationships than in any other way.*"

Pearce went on in that book to articulate four qualitatively different forms of communication that we may "live in" and that influence our approaches to communication with other individuals and among nations.

In a **monocultural form** (*its only us*) there is a broad assumption that our group, and our stories—our shared values and traditions—are the only ones possible. Therefore, our social reality is the only reality. If you imagine a tribe of people living deep in the Amazon and never having contact with any other human groups, their reality would be monocultural.

The **ethocentric form** (*us versus them*) is one in which we are aware of other groups, but devalue their existence as sub-human, or at least inferior to us in terms of their values and way of life. In this case, there is awareness of significant differences in values and traditions, but an overriding sense that our practices and our resources are vastly better.

Pearce described a key aspect of both monocultural and ethnocentric forms as "not willing to put our resources (i.e., stories, values, meanings) at risk." It is probably safe to say that many of our contemporary everyday conversations take place within an ethnocentric frame (assuming we are right and the other is wrong). It is probably even safer to say that a great many attempts at communication among nations occurs within this ethnocentric frame. To put our values or our favored ways of sense-making at risk is a serious challenge for any of us.

At our best, we rise above ethnocentrism and recognize that there are other ways of thinking, ways of being that have value for others, even if not for us. When we do this, we are in a sense putting our own resources "at risk," willing to consider, if only for a moment, that there may be other ways of making sense than those we are so familiar with. Pearce saw two additional cultural forms of communication in which people tend to be more willing to put their resources at risk: *modernistic* and *cosmopolitan* forms of communication. But the two forms also differ in significant ways.

The **modernistic form** (*new us versus old us*) is premised on the very Western notion of "progress," in the sense that what is new and improved is better than what is old and stodgy. We see this most easily regarding technological progress, assuming the latest cell phone is clearly superior to older ones. But this also happens in the realm of social values and beliefs. Science has led us to disregard older theories (e.g., the earth is flat, the sun rotates around the earth) for newer ones (e.g., the sun is the center of our solar system). Similarly, it's not uncommon today for people to change their religious beliefs or at least give up some of the older traditions of their faith for newer understandings of what's important.

 We also tend to evaluate nations within this framework. More advanced nations are those that have "developed" modern technology, upgraded their political systems (democracy is often seen as more advanced than other forms of government) and their business practices (to allow for greater free-market capitalism).

Pearce saw a **cosmopolitan form** (*coordinating different ways of being human*) as an emerging way of putting our resources at risk without devaluing them. In other

words, we can be profoundly open to, respectful of, and appreciative about other ways of being without giving up our own deeply held beliefs and values. You should be able to see the link here with the previous description of dialogue.

Part of what makes the cosmopolitan possible is the recognition that all cultures are socially made "in" communication. Engaging in qualitatively different communication practices over long periods of time naturally results in different ways of being, with different language habits and different embodied experiences. Thus, a variety of ways of being human have stood the test of time and have meaning for those who participate in that way of life. The critical challenge for effective communication is not persuading others that our cultural standards are better (ethnocentrism), or treating our respective traditions as outdated by progress (modernistic), but figuring out how best to *coordinate* our differences.

Which of these stories (monocultural, ethnocentric, modernistic, or cosmopolitan) makes more sense, given the state of global complexity and interpenetration of cultures? Pearce clearly thought that the cosmopolitan form is a better story than the alternatives, if our goal is to live in peace and wisdom.

Being cosmopolitan calls for special skill sets

But there is no question that a cosmopolitan perspective requires hard work on our part and development of new skill-sets. Here are just a few of the skills that we'd need to develop in order to create and live in a more cosmopolitan communication form:

- *deep listening* via mindfulness training and an understanding of being 'present' to the other;
- m*indsight* skills, including an emotional awareness of what our own and other's bodies are saying about the level of attunement and empathy between self and other;
- *dialogic skills* in which value is placed on holding the tension between one's own valued traditions/beliefs/practices and a profound openness and appreciation for the traditions/beliefs/practices of the other;
- a privileging of *coordination* skills as a means of keeping conversations going;
- *pattern recognition* in turn-taking, including the perceptual skill of identifying appropriate bifurcation points for different actions as a pattern unfolds;
- *reflective and metacommunicative skill*s in naming emergent patterns and taking joint responsibility for how they are managed or repaired;

- an *ability to invoke relationships and mystery* as highest-order contexts for making meaning of emergent patterns;
- *improvisation* skills and a greater trust in emergence over pre-planned outcomes; and perhaps most of all,
- a fostering of *curiosity* about what is being made in moments of communicating.

Compassion figures heavily in almost all these skill-sets, as emotional attachment—or our ability to feel the other's mental state and be felt by the other (to be present in a way that the other knows they matter)—is a prerequisite to most of the other skill-sets. An ability to take the perspective of the other is also necessary.

We can make better social worlds.

The upshot of all these CMM claims is that because communication is the primary means by which we collectively construct our social worlds, it is also how we can make better ones. It is the case that we have inherited from our various cultures, communication patterns not of our own making. We live in them and they have consequences for our lives. But we can, through the strenuous effort of attending to and naming the patterns we don't like—those that are dysfunctional, bigoted, disrespectful, or just not up to the task of effective coordination and meaning-management—change them. It goes without saying that this effort is not for the light-hearted. Committing to the development of new, more effective ways of communicating is hard work. CMM theory and practice offers some real guidance in navigating the way.