



Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

Robyn Penman

Independent Scholar

What is it?

The coordinated management of meaning, or CMM, is a practical theory about resources and practices for making communicating more understandable and more able to create better social worlds. CMM theory is premised on what is called a “communication perspective” that orients the practitioner or researcher to look directly at the patterns of communicating, rather than looking through communication to its outcomes.

CMM offers a number of different tools for making sense of the patterns of communication: these include the hierarchy model of meaning; the serpentine model of temporal sequence of actions; and the LUUUUTT model for exploring the differences between stories lived, and stories told and untold. CMM also offers concepts, models and approaches of specific value in understanding such things as moral conflict, dialogic virtuosity, and cosmopolitan communication practices.

Who uses the concept?

CMM was developed as a theory in the discipline of communication. When first proposed in 1980 it countered the prevailing view of communication as an instrumental tool for message transmission and the associated communication science paradigm of the time. The understanding of communication on which CMM is premised still generates controversy in some scholarly circles, although far less so as the importance of coming to terms with the complexities of the actual practices of communication is more widely acknowledged.

The theory has evolved over time and its practical relevance in a number of different contexts has

further demonstrated its worth. It is now used by scholars and practitioners alike in such fields as organizational development and change, public dialogue and democracy, and more generally for a range of matters concerned with personal and social evolution.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The overarching concern of CMM is to make better social worlds. As such, it is of direct relevance to intercultural dialogue, especially in terms of peacemaking, living with diversity and managing differences. CMM has also shown its practical value in developing public dialogue processes.

What work remains?

Because CMM is a practical theory it is, by definition, continually evolving. What remains is to use CMM in more and more diverse contexts as a means of developing further tools for practical use.

Resources

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Littlejohn, S., & McNamee, S. (2014) *The coordinated management of meaning: A festschrift in honor of W. Barnett Pearce*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

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