

# Understanding Reality's Production:

## On methodology and method

It is that methods, their rules, and even more methods' practices, not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand. (Law, 2004, p. 5; emphasis in original)

The implication of John Law's assertion – that methods are generative in addition to being indicative and connotative – suggests that in selecting a methodology and its associated paradigm, a researcher assumes a considerable responsibility. In making his case Law argues for a complexity approach to understanding processes in the real world, noting that imposing an arbitrary order via one theoretical model or other imposes limitations and restrictions that may constrain the world to “behave” in the particular way the model suggests (and therefore enable it to be successfully modeled as conceived by the researcher or theorist). However, a successful characterization of any particular phenomenon does not necessarily mean that the world's processes are best described by that model; nor does one plausible interpretation preclude another model from providing an equally accurate, compelling, reasonable, or useful frame through which one can better understand any arbitrary slice of reality. He writes:

What is important in the world including its structures is not simply ... [that they are] complex in the sense that they are technically difficult to grasp (though this is certainly often the case). Rather, they are also complex because they necessarily exceed our capacity to know them. No doubt local structures can be identified, but, or so I want to argue, the world in general defies any attempt at overall orderly accounting. The world is not to be understood in general by adopting a methodological version of auditing. Regularities and standardisations are incredibly powerful tools but they set limits. Indeed, that is a part of their (double-edged) power. And they set even firmer limits when they

try to orchestrate themselves hegemonically into purported coherence.  
(Law, 2004, p. 6)

Law draws on Latour and Woolgar's seminal, 1986 examination of how scientific facts are produced in the context of "laboratory life" to make the argument that science produces the realities that it describes. This is not an arbitrary, "anything goes" epistemology, but rather the product of a rigorous and difficult process of what I describe as "adding to the cultural compendium of wisdom" (Federman, 2007). Heterogeneous research practices and diverse contexts contributed by researchers and participants alike produce heterogeneous perspectives and interpretive realities – both of which are, arguably, imaginary constructs – that nonetheless manifest in multiple real effects and consequences. Law then proceeds to suggest that "perhaps there may be additional *political* reasons for preferring and enacting one kind of reality rather than another" (p. 13; emphasis in original).

In considering the researcher's responsibility in his or her knowledge contribution, these "ontological politics," as Law calls them, loom large, especially in the context of both affecting and effecting human behaviours in social settings. Peter Drucker differentiates between natural laws that operate irrespective of humanity's often limited ability to understand and describe them, and the basic assumptions held by a particular select group of researchers and practitioners in any given field of human endeavour. These assumptions

...largely determine what the discipline assumes to be reality. ... For a social discipline such as management, the assumptions are actually a good deal more important than are the paradigms for a natural science. The paradigm – that is, the prevailing general theory – has no impact on the natural universe. Whether the paradigm states that the sun rotates around the earth or that, on the contrary, the earth rotates around the

sun has no effect on sun and earth. A natural science deals with the behavior of *objects*. But a social discipline such as management deals with the behavior of *people* and *human institutions*. Practitioners will therefore tend to act and to behave as the discipline's assumptions tell them to. Even more important, the reality of a natural science, the physical universe and its laws, do not change (or if they do only over eons rather than over centuries, let alone over decades). The social universe has no 'natural laws' of this kind. (Drucker, 2001, p. 69-70)

The researcher constructs a system of meaning through which sense is made of perceptions and lived experiences. Those who hearken to the researcher's findings may rationalize behaviours in themselves and others that become reflexively justified according to those interpretations. Karl Weick (2001) argues that normative behaviours in a social setting create interpretations of events that become reified in social relationships, and subsequently crystallize into organizations. Over time, interpretive justifications of events become based on these social expectations of behaviour rather than on individuated reasons. The combination of justification processes and expectations create the effect of self-fulfilling prophecies, as well as self-perpetuating conceptions of reality.

In constructing his "Position Paper for Positivism," Lex Donaldson (2003) recognizes that such sense-making underpins social constructionism which explains "micro-level processes whereby organizational members behave and bring about organizational changes" (p. 124). However, he dismisses the validity of constructionism as an appropriate research paradigm for organizational studies in favour of "a superior, more objective view that the analysts can help actors attain through de-reification ... [of] the common sense of people at a specific time about their organization" (p. 125). The value of a positivist approach, Donaldson argues, is

that it seeks to explain social interactions in a deterministic manner, based on testable hypotheses that can be deduced from theories, the consequences of which can be observed empirically. Seeming to ignore Drucker (let alone Latour and Woolgar), Donaldson contends that the objective of positivism is,

...seeking to build a science of social affairs of a broadly similar type to natural science. The success of the natural sciences provides an inspiration and role model for positivist social science. Positivist social science aims for theoretical generalizations of broad scope that explain social affairs as being determined by causes of an objective kind that lie in the situation rather than in the minds of people. (Donaldson, 2003, p. 117)

Donaldson, a major proponent of structural contingency theory (1985, 1995), contends that individuals are effectively constrained by their situations, deterministically responsive to external conditions, and that the collective behaviours of an organization's members are shaped by material and social-environmental factors. The deterministic conclusion that Donaldson draws leads him to assert that "reliable, scientific knowledge about social affairs will be built most rapidly by following the positivist approach" (2003, p. 117), which is based on "systematic inquiry through rigorous empirical research, [that] can yield knowledge that is superior to common sense" (p. 118).

Thus, positivism is grounded in a phenomenological understanding of organizations as "concrete, stable, and identifiable entities with distinctive boundaries that can be described and analyzed, using appropriate research methodologies" (Chia, 1996, p. 143). The positivist approach assumes that:

...(a) 'objective' reality can be captured; (b) the observer can be separated from the observed; (c) observations and generalizations are

free from situational and temporal constraints, that is, they are universally generalizable; (d) causality is linear, and there are no causes without effects, no effects without causes; and (e) inquiry is value free. (Hassard, Kelemen, & Wolfram Cox, 2008, p. 143)

Is a positivist approach appropriate for answering the research questions posed in the previous chapter? If one reads the historical argument presented in that chapter as technological determinism<sup>1</sup>, a positivist-informed contention logically follows: that the nature of UCAPP organizations should be obtainable through positivist means. However, if one instead chooses to interpret history through the lens of complexity as multifaceted societal and cultural interactions that propagate through a multiplicity of human feedback and feedforward networks, it is difficult to see how positivist assumptions might apply in any but the most simplistic of analyses.

More specifically in the context of the current project, contemporary BAH organizations that are predominantly functionalist and instrumental in their foci exist along side UCAPP organizations, and have been explained in various contingency theory terms using positivist methods. Is it reasonable to conclude that positivism is an adequate investigatory framework to simultaneously explain these two, diametrically polar organizational incarnations? The question is especially salient when one realizes that both organizational forms exist in the midst of the same social

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<sup>1</sup> Technological determinism is the doctrine that suggests that the construction and dynamics of the social world unavoidably and inevitably follow the dictates effected by the introduction of particular technological innovations. It views the world as a Newtonian clockwork following laws of sequential causality that can be empirically discovered. In contrast, a complexity understanding of the world suggests that technologies enable environmental conditions that encourage change from a prior state of homeostasis, in other words, emergence.

“causes of an objective kind that lie in the situation,” to use Donaldson’s language (2003, p. 117), apparently denying the foundational premise of contingency theory<sup>2</sup>.

As useful as positivist approaches may be in certain contingent contexts, understanding the nature and characteristics of UCAPP organizations, and the influences and emergent processes that may effect transformations from BAH to UCAPP and vice versa, necessarily requires other methods derived from a different worldview:

Social construction, or *constructivist* philosophy, is built on the thesis of *ontological relativity*, which holds that all tenable statements about existence depend on a worldview, and no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world. (Patton, 2002, p. 97; emphasis in original)

The preceding argument highlights the importance of assuming a constructivist<sup>3</sup> standpoint when attempting to understand individual and collective interpretations of experiences and events. The primary ontological assumptions of constructivism, can be summarized as follows: (a) truth is formed by consensus among “informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality” (Patton, 2002, p. 98); (b) facts have meaning only within the context of a framework of values that are imposed on any assessment of apparently objective

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, in the positivist paradigm, this observation would falsify contingency theory, rendering it unreliable and unscientific, according to Donaldson’s reasoning. However, this reasoning simply reflects Kuhn’s (1962) idea of paradigm incommensurability.

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between constructivism and social construction is subtle: one deals with individual perception and sense-making, the other with group process: “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for the epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on ‘the meaning-making activity of the individual mind’ and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes ‘the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning’” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58; emphasis in original).

discriminants; (c) supposed causes relate to effects only by being so ascribed; (d) events have meaning only within a context; changing the context will change the meaning and effect of a given occurrence, rendering the process of generalizing dubious at best; and (e) constructivist inquiry yields results that have no special legitimacy over any other, but contribute to the complex emergence of experienced reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 44-45).

One must remain cognizant of the problematics and limitations of constructivism when attempting to understand newly emergent phenomena like those of the UCaPP world. On one hand, “constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Michael Quinn Patton describes it this way:

Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality – indeed, they cannot do otherwise – the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is ‘made up’ and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs. ... *What is defined or perceived by people as real is real in its consequences.* (Patton, 2002, p. 96; emphasis in original)

On the other hand, reality that is perceived and constructed according to a well-entrenched contextual ground is, *de facto*, the interpretive lens through which one interprets all subsequent events and actions. The interpretation persists, irrespective of any as-yet-unperceived changes in the dynamics of the ground that created the meaning in the first place. A way to reconcile this apparent paradox of constructivism – that the effects of individually perceived reality may persist long past the time when the circumstances that constructed said reality have substantially changed – may be

through the application of a complexity model as suggested earlier by Law. Indeed, constructivism is quite consistent with the principles of complexity theory as outlined by Paul Cilliers's characterization of complex systems, if the system in question is a system of *meaning*.

### **Complex Systems of Meaning**

Cilliers (2005) provides a concise, but useful, summary of complex systems framed in the context of their applicability to organizations. Complex systems are comprised of a large number of elemental components, any (or all) of which may be simple. These elements exchange information via interactions, the effects of which propagate throughout the system. Because complex systems – and in particular, systems that are interconnected via a network – contain many direct and indirect feedback loops, interactions are nonlinear with non-proportional effects. This means that seemingly small interactions may have quite substantial effects throughout the system, and what appear to be substantial interactions may have quite insignificant system-wide effects. Complex systems are open with respect to their environment, which means that there are continuous information exchange processes among the system, its components, and their mutual environment.

Complex systems also possess memory – a history of interactions, exchanges and effects – that is distributed throughout the system, and influences the behaviour of the system. This memory is significant: the behaviour of the system is determined by the nature (effects) of the interactions, not by the content of the components. Hence, the overall system's behaviour is unpredictable based on an understanding of

the components' individual behaviours alone. The resultant patterns of system behaviour are called emergence, and refute models predicated exclusively on deterministic causality. Finally, complex systems are adaptive, and can reorganize their internal structure based on information exchange, as opposed to the action of an external agent (Cilliers, 2005, p. 8-9).

Weick (2001) cites Gergen's (1982) three principles of constructivism that I recount here, with particular points of comparison with complex systems emphasized: (a) as events occur, they change the *emerging current context* from which both earlier and subsequent events have meaning; (b) the reference against which the interpretation of any event is contextualized is itself the product of a *network of interdependent events and interpretations*, often mutually and collectively negotiated among a *network of people*; (c) as a consequence of the previous two principles, the meaning of any given event is interpreted differently by different people, with *collectively agreed meaning being achieved through processes of consensus*, or the exercise of power (Weick, 2001, p. 10).

Complex systems are often described in mathematical terms using Henri Poincaré's topological approach. In mathematics, and particularly in topology, solutions to sets of nonlinear equations are often depicted as sets of curves drawn through an  $n$ -dimensional *phase space*, where  $n$  represents the number of variables in the equations. A point that "travels" along one of these curves defines the state of the system at any time; its movement over time is called its *trajectory*<sup>4</sup>. The trajectory of

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<sup>4</sup> This concept is most easily imagined as a point moving through physical space relative to reference axes of length, width, and breadth. At any time, the "state" of the physical system can be defined in terms of the point's position; its path through space is the trajectory.

the point is called an *attractor*, with three topologically distinct forms: *point* (a system that eventually reaches stable equilibrium, representing the end of change and growth; i.e., death), *periodic*, meaning a system that has regular oscillations between two states, and *strange* that applies to chaotic systems such as those characterized by Cilliers as exhibiting properties of complexity.

Strange attractors tend to create distinct patterns of trajectories for a given system, although the precise location of a point in phase space at a particular time cannot be accurately determined. This means that the system is non-deterministic – its future state cannot be accurately predicted from its past state(s). Substantial changes in the type, shape, or existence of an attractor, corresponding to substantive changes in the nature of the defining parameters (e.g., contextual ground of the system), is called a *bifurcation point*, and marks a state of instability from which a new order of greater complexity can emerge (Capra, 1996).

Now, consider a system of meaning, such as that typically described as emerging from empirical observations analyzed according to a particular research paradigm. Constructivism holds that people confer meaning onto their lived experiences by virtue of a complex intermingling of individual and collective past experiences that provide context – in other words, the system's history – to current perceptions of events. A (contingently) stable meaning or interpretation can be considered to be an *emergent property* of that system of lived experiences. In complexity terms, that stable meaning can be described as one point along a trajectory of meaning

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Similarly, in a complex system, there would be more dimensions, each dimension, or variable, referring to a parameter that uniquely defines an aspect of the system being described.

that travels through a phase space defined by a set of parameters that might include individual history and memory, group history or collective memory, consensus processes, cultural influences, normative behaviours of one or more social networks, and other similar factors, forces and causes<sup>5</sup>.

A person's constructed reality, that is, the trajectory of meaning through the phase space of lived and interpreted experiences, can become disrupted when one or more of the parameters of that phase space significantly change. Although an individual may attempt to hold onto familiar, "privileged" (Weick, 2001) interpretations, the time during which the formerly stable meaning becomes disrupted is chaotic, and hence, often confusing for the individuals and groups concerned. At the bifurcation point, sufficient interpretive energy must be injected into the meaning system to enable emergence: the creation of a new stable state of higher order than before. In other words, the creation of new meaning and interpretation of events that is significantly different from the person's prior understanding informs future sense- and meaning-making. This complexity understanding of meaning-making not only informs the current research process; it will also provide a useful framework through which I will later contextualize processes of organizational change.

Because the research seeks to discover what is expected to be a radical shift in organizational perception – from BAH to UCAPP – the specific methodology employed must be a sufficiently sensitive instrument to be able to recognize and report on any potential bifurcation that might occur during the time scope of the

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<sup>5</sup> Used in the Aristotelian sense of formal, material, efficient, and final causes, as opposed to linear, deterministic causality.

research, or laterally among the participating individuals and organizations. The methodology most appropriate to this undertaking is *constructivist grounded theory*, as characterized by Kathy Charmaz (2000).

### Regrounding Grounded Theory

Charmaz describes the nature of grounded theory and the reason to augment it with a constructivist standpoint:

The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. This story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed. ... We can use [the critiques of grounded theory] to make our empirical research more reflexive and our completed studies more contextually situated. We can claim only to have interpreted *a* reality, as we understood both our own experience and our subjects' portrayals of theirs. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522-523; emphasis in original)

Grounded theory as originally conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1973) is rooted in the notion that comparing observations among cases enables theory to emerge, rather than beginning with preconceived hypotheses to be verified or refuted<sup>6</sup>. Like positivist methodologies, objectivist grounded theory presumes a reality external to the researcher that can be objectively discovered, characterized, and reported. In addition, it adopts a post-positivist standpoint that recognizes the existence of a subjective social reality, but attempts to explicitly exclude its effects from influencing

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<sup>6</sup> A rift occurred between Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss concerning the evolution of grounded theory. Strauss, in collaboration with Juliet Corbin (1990), developed ever more prescriptive techniques that, according to Glaser, appeared "to be forcing data and analysis through their preconceptions, analytic questions, hypotheses, and methodological techniques" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 512), effectively making it more science-like. Nonetheless, both Glaser's more classical approach and Strauss and Corbin's more analytic approach remain solidly objectivist in nature and (post-)positivist in outlook.

the objective reality under study. Post-positivism uses human behaviours, responses, and interactions as consequential effects of structural and environmental causes, using the former to deduce the latter.

Grounded theory begins by collecting data concurrently with its analysis. Analysis begins with coding data based on actions, events, and concepts provided by participants in the actual words used, a technique called *open* or *line-by-line coding*. Constant comparison of coded incidents and events among various participants enables individual accounts to be eventually categorized, as open codes are combined and connected via the more conceptual process of *axial coding*. As more encompassing theoretical categories are discovered, the researcher returns to collect additional data that augment the emergent theory by filling in gaps in data created by subsequent questions suggested by the initial data analysis. The researcher formally reflects on this recursive process through *memo writing* that enables him or her to develop nascent ideas, see emergent patterns, and reconcile the developing interpretive analysis with their own lived experiences. The process is repeated until one reaches *saturation*, that is, when no new information emerges from coding, comparison, and reflection (Charmaz, 2000; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In essence, Kathy Charmaz uses the analytical techniques of grounded theory, contextualized in a constructivist standpoint, to enable the emergence of knowledge “that fosters the development of qualitative traditions through the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (2000, p. 522). She describes its purpose, one that is consistent with both the philosophical standpoints offered at the beginning of this chapter, and my own objectives:

A constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true. The constructivist approach does not seek truth – single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human *realities* and assumes the existence of real worlds. ... We must try to find what research participants define as real and where their definitions of reality take them. ... We change our conception of [social life] from a real world to be discovered, tracked, and categorized to a world *made real* in the minds and through the words and actions of its members. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523; emphasis in original)

### Research Design

In order to explore the individually-experienced nature of *organization* in the dual meaning contexts of the BAH and UCaPP discourses, the study examines five organizations, selected purposefully with maximum variation (Patton, 2002, p. 234-235) among organization types, sectors, sizes, ages, profit-objectives, participant gender, and scope of responsibility. I recruited the organizations through several means: two of the organizations were aware of my research through prior engagement and volunteered their potential participation (subject to review of the informed consent documents and their internal approval process); I was introduced to one organization through a mutual acquaintance; two of the organizations became aware of my recruiting efforts via people who read about my recruitment endeavours on my weblog (Federman, 2005-2010).

Because I am seeking to understand issues surrounding the nature of *organization* from the contexts of both BAH-conception and a conception grounded in UCaPP effects, I chose to limit the selection of organizations to those that are primarily grounded in Western cultures and sensibilities – the source of BAH effects – with a grounding in a literate, rather than primary oral, society. Thus, for instance, I

would not choose an aboriginal or First Nations organization to include in this study, as such organizations emerge from a primary oral culture (Ong, 1982). Neither did I select organizations that are based in non-Western countries.

After securing institutional approval (Appendix A) from each participating organization, an email was sent by the organization to its members inviting them to contact me directly if they were interested in potentially participating in the project. I provided all those who responded with an informed consent package (Appendix B) that briefly described the project, the role they might play in it, and the potential risks and benefits of participation. In total, eighteen of the people who responded from among the five organizations that agreed to participate completed the informed consent package.

From December, 2007 through June 2008, I conducted relatively unstructured, in-depth interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000) with each of the eighteen participants, with equal numbers of men and women. Although I acknowledge that racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds might well influence individuals' experiences in organizations when considered from the ground of relationships, the overall sample size of this study is, of necessity, sufficiently small so as not to enable specific selections on these, and other, diverse grounds. Based on the information and preliminary analysis from the first research conversations, and in keeping with the principles of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2000, p. 519; Strauss & Corbin, 1998, chap. 13) in the context of a grounded theory study, I returned to ten of the participants from three of the five organizations for second interviews between March and September, 2008.

## Research Participants

All organizations were offered the option of having their identities disguised. Of the five, two not only requested confidentiality, but required me to sign a non-disclosure agreement concerning any confidential information that might be disclosed to me during the research conversations. I considered this to be advantageous to the interview process, since I could assure the participants from these organizations that they did not have to be guarded in their comments; that I was bound by the same confidentiality requirements as they. The authorizing individual at another organization said that he would reserve judgment with respect to identity confidentiality, pending the research findings (that organization remains confidential). Finally, two organizations gave permission for their organization's identities to be revealed, with two of four participants from one, and both participants from the other organization, giving permission to use their real names.

According to the admittedly subjective and limited criteria described in the previous chapter, I assessed that two of the organizations were predominantly BAH in nature, two were predominantly UCAPP, and one appeared to be more-UCAPP at the beginning of the study and more-BAH in its behaviours and characteristics by the end. Interestingly, the two organizations identified as more-UCAPP agreed to reveal their identities in the research, while the two, more-BAH organizations requested confidentiality. The organization that appeared to transition from more-UCAPP to more-BAH was the one that reserved judgment. It is unclear – and not a part of the scope of this research to conclude – whether a more-UCAPP organization would generally be more willing to be open about its internal processes and organizational

behaviour. However, I would suggest that such openness is consistent with UCaPP behavioural findings, and with the explanatory theory that will be discussed later in this thesis.

A more detailed summary of the participants and the research conversations can be found in Appendix C. Briefly though, here are the five participating organizations, in alphabetical order:

*Organization A* is a division of a Fortune 50 company in the information, computer, and communications industry and is therefore very large, well-established, and global in its for-profit business operations in the private sector. Organization A had recently undergone several years of significant organizational change and disruption to many of its members, and at the time of the research conversations was in a period of relative organizational stability. The five participants from Organization A include “Adam,” “Frank,” “Karen,” “Robert,” and “Roxanne.” One of the participants, Robert, has direct, supervisory responsibility; Roxanne has project management responsibility over a very large project team whose members come from various parts of the organization. The others are relatively senior specialists in their respective areas of expertise. I would consider Organization A to be a more-BAH organization.

*Organization F* is a small, four-year-old company with profit aspirations, considering itself recently out of start-up mode. Throughout the course of the study, Organization F grew from about twelve, to over twenty people. It offers web-based business services, primarily to other small enterprises and home-based businesses,

although some groups in larger firms do use its services. Organization F's three participants include "Aaron," "Jeff," and "Matt," Matt being the founding CEO of the company. Organization F appeared to be more-UCaPP in its nature at the beginning of the study, but by the time of the second set of research conversations, it seems to have adopted considerably more-BAH behaviours and organizational constructs.

*Inter Pares* is a social-justice, non-governmental organization managed explicitly on feminist principles. It is politically active, tending to work with marginalized and oppressed peoples in Canada and in the emerging world. Inter Pares's thematic foci tend to be related to issues like women's rights, local control over natural resources, sustainable agriculture, community rebuilding after war, and similar peace and justice endeavours. Its two participants are Samantha ("Sam") and Jean, both of whom agreed that their organization demonstrated behaviours and an organizational philosophy that are characteristic of what I would call an archetypal UCaPP organization. However, it was not always so: Inter Pares transformed from being a more-BAH organization approximately fifteen years ago, primarily so that its internal dynamics and culture would be consistent with its espoused, externally represented, values.

*Organization M* is a ministry of a provincial government in Canada. Consequently, it is a relatively large, very bureaucratic, administratively controlled, and hierarchical organization—as BAH in its operations as Inter Pares is UCaPP. According to one of the participants, Organization M became increasingly more BAH in its nature beginning approximately twenty-five years ago, resulting in a significant shift in the nature, scope, and breadth of individuals' jobs, and their attitudes towards

their employment in the organization. The four participants vary in tenure from less than one year in the organization, to over thirty years; it was fascinating for me to see the differences in their ascribed relationship to the organization, and their individual outlooks based on the length of their employment. The participants include “Mary,” “Mina,” “Sean,” and “Stan.”

The fifth organization is *Unit 7*, an approximately 100-person advertising and direct marketing agency based in New York City. Unit 7 is part of Omnicom, the largest conglomerate of advertising, marketing, public relations, branding, and event management organizations in the world. It is a for-profit corporation, tending to work with some of the largest organizations in the United States, including those located in the pharmaceutical, financial, health care, industrial, and manufacturing sectors. At the time of the study, Unit 7 was a little over four years into a transformation from being a BAH organization to becoming a more-UCaPP organization; as reported by the participants, the transformation has been, and continues to be, a considerable challenge for many individuals, and for the organization as a whole. The participants include Cindy, “Frances,” Loreen (the CEO), and “Roger.”

### **Research Conversations and Analysis**

Over a period of nearly eleven months, I engaged in a total of twenty-eight research conversations, totalling 38.3 hours; eighteen initial conversations, averaging about an hour-and-a-half in duration, and ten second conversations, averaging about an hour each. The initial conversations were open and unstructured beyond the initial question – “Let’s begin by me asking you to describe what you do in [your

organization]” – founded on an underlying and constant awareness of the necessity to gain trust, and establish and maintain rapport with each participant. I incorporated many of the approaches enumerated by Oakley (1981) to de-masculinize what might otherwise be a more formalized interview: creating reciprocity between me and the participant; encouraging emotional responses from the participant (and allowing them in myself); encouraging the participant to mostly control the flow and sequence of narratives; and by far most important, allowing the participants to create any new, emergent meaning from a contextual ground that may change during the research conversation(s).

The first interviews sought to discover a reference base of each participant’s constructed conception of *organization*. Although I did not directly ask the following questions, these suggest the types of information, knowledge and recounted experiences that seemed to be useful to this endeavour at its outset, and served to guide me through the conversation:

- How does the participant situate her/himself in their organization; in particular, what sort of language is used to describe their situation (e.g., functional, hierarchical, relational, etc.)? What is the primary (and other influential) linguistic basis from which meaning is made in their organization?
- How does the participant describe his/her interactions and relationships among individuals, workgroups, and geo-dispersed or organizationally-dispersed groups/teams, both intra- and inter-organizationally (e.g., functionally, transactionally, exchange of flows, etc.)?

- On what basis are connections primarily formed and maintained within the culture of the organization (e.g., administratively, directly interpersonal, task-oriented, political loyalty, etc.)?
- By what processes are the effects of decision-making and subsequent actions anticipated (e.g., deterministic metrics, explicit analysis of secondary effects, mechanisms primarily designed to keep one's proverbial *derrière* from being exposed, etc.)? How common are so-called unintended consequences of decisions and actions (that can be interpreted as a proxy for systemic lack of anticipation)? How are the decision processes situated within the Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) axes of flexibility, structure, and outcome?
- What are the natures of participants' own attachments to their workgroup, department, and organization (e.g., mercantile/instrumental, identity-forming, social/hedonic, knowledge/experience expanding, etc.)?

The second conversations in which I engaged with some<sup>7</sup> participants from Organizations A, Organization F, and Unit 7 were structured around more specific questions that arose from initial data analysis. Many of the issues pertained to gaining a more in-depth understanding of participant-reported behaviours, observations, experiences, and perceptions that seemed similar among different organizations and may even have had similar instrumental outcomes. However, they often seemed to

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<sup>7</sup> Participation in the second round was voluntary; one participant from each of Organizations A and F chose not to participate. Additionally, consistent with grounded theory methods with respect to data saturation, I did not feel that additional data were required from either Inter Pares or Organization M, each of which seemed to be archetypal exemplars, respectively, of UCaPP and BAH organizations.

have opposite intentions, meanings, and effects, comparing one organization to another. For example, in two organizations, participants report that inclusive meeting attendance – especially in the context of relatively high-profile or strategic projects – is an important part of the organization’s culture. However, further probing reveals that for the more-BAH organization, inclusive meeting attendance is perceived as a defensive move, for example, in the context of someone making a case for their own organizational survival; a way to be seen by superiors as demonstrating one’s value (both individual and group) to the undertaking, even if that value might be judged as tenuous; or aggressive, as in the case of someone seeking to expand their domain of influence or control. This appears to be especially true when a person of higher rank or authority is present at the meeting. On the other hand, in the more-UCaPP organization, inclusive meeting attendance is viewed as an important process to “socialize information” (Sam-1-27)<sup>8</sup> that transcends individual, subject-matter-specific responsibility in order “to understand the organization, and to make sure we understand and can represent the collective mind, the collective positions and approaches” (Jean-1-37).

During some conversations, I perceived a connection or parallel among some seemingly unconnected aspects of information offered by a given participant. In those, relatively very few, instances, I would suggest the connection and ask if it made sense – that is, was meaningful and significant – to the participant. In some cases they

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<sup>8</sup> I am using a notation for direct quotations from participants in the form of Name-Conversation#-Paragraph#. Thus, Sam-1-27 refers to the first conversation with Sam, paragraph 27 in the transcription as it is loaded into the Transana database.

agreed; in others they did not. Where I have included such an elicited connection in the analysis, I make my suggestion explicit in the text.

The approximately thirty-eight hours of research conversations resulted in slightly more than five-hundred, single-spaced pages of transcripts. Research participants each received copies of their respective transcripts and were invited to make any changes they saw fit so as to accurately reflect their opinions and observations. The revised versions were loaded into the Transana qualitative analysis software system (Fassnacht & Woods, 2008), and the data were open coded (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515-516; Strauss & Corbin, 1998, chap. 8), producing codes (“keywords” in Transana terminology) that are described in detail in Appendix D.

Throughout this coding process, and the subsequent axial coding process that combines initial codes into larger categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, chap. 9), I wrote numerous research memos that I posted on my weblog (Federman, 2005-2010), many of them as part of a series tagged as “EMD” or “Emerging from the Mists of the Data.” I received a number of comments on these analytical reflections from members of the public (including some research participants), and these contributions both influenced my thinking and enabled me to more clearly articulate ideas in their formative stages as I responded to the various comments, critiques, and suggestions. These contributors provided knowledge that was valuable to my process and at times, I had the distinct impression that they felt some sort of personal identification with participating in my research process, and gratification that their contributions were indeed valued.

I should note that during the process of axial coding, I made one complete pass through the data with each particular category theme at top of mind, continually asking, “what does this particular excerpt tell me specifically about this theme?” This focus enabled me to better understand the nuances of the participants’ responses, especially since many of the conversation excerpts (“clips”) had multiple initial codes, often spanning several category themes. In all, I made ten complete passes through the data over the course of most of a year during the analytic phase of this project.

The themes that emerge from the data and create the framework for understanding the key distinctions between BAH and UCAPP organizations are:

*Change*: including creating and initiating change within the organization; individuals and the organization as a whole responding to changes both among internal and external constituencies, and environments; and assimilating the consequences of change.

*Coordination*: including the processes through which the members of an organization achieve a sense of common purpose; how the organizations understand collaboration and teamwork (and whether they recognize the distinction between the two); and the underlying philosophy of information flow throughout the organization.

*Evaluation*: including the distinctions between the two types of organization relative to how contributions are valued, and how each judges effectiveness.

*Impetus*: including how leadership is regarded and constructed; the decision-making processes with respect to goals, objectives, intentions, and commitments; the

nature of extrinsic motivation in each type of organization; and the dominant sensory metaphor.

*Power dynamics*: including how authorization and approval for individual or group action is accomplished; how the nature of individual autonomy and agency is regarded in each organization type; and how issues of control, resistance, power, and empowerment are accommodated.

*Sense-making*: including how the organization deals with ambiguity, contradiction, and uncertainty, as well as inconsistent information in its environment; and how it accommodates diverse ideas and opinions among its members.

*View of people*: including whether the organization's dealings with its members are primarily instrumental or relational in nature; as well as whether its underlying philosophy that guides its policy-making favours individuality or collectivity.

In addition to these seven major themes for which there were clear behavioural, attitudinal, and cultural distinctions between more-BAH and more-UCaPP organizations, there was one additional theme that emerged from the data that appeared to be common in its responses among members of both organizational types. *Belonging, membership and boundary* speaks to issues of identification among individuals and the larger groups with which they associate, be they workgroups, departments, or the organization as a whole. While analyzing the data, focusing on this particular theme, it became increasingly apparent that there is something special – dare I say *powerful* – about the process and nature of identity construction between individuals and the specific organization(s) of which they are members, and

conversely, organizational identity with respect to the individuals who comprise its membership. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, the nature of the distinctions between the two organizational types that emerged from parallel 20<sup>th</sup> century discourses, and the key similarity, provide intriguing clues to the fundamental nature of contemporary *organization* itself.

### A Note on My Standpoint

In making the argument that research into human systems *produces* those systems, and in adopting a constructivist approach to research methodology, it should come as no surprise that I do not believe that any researcher – and especially *this* researcher – can be truly objective. I have been influenced in my sense-making by a combination of more than two decades in and about the corporate business world, and fifteen years reflecting on and researching the nature of that world and my experiences in it. The most recent six years of formal study, culminating in this thesis, have been especially influenced by a focus on the critical management discourse and organizational learning for social and cultural change (in addition to the influences of a number of other disciplines and fields of endeavour). It is therefore safe to say that I am not an *a priori* fan of BAH organizations in the general case.

Nonetheless, because I am very conscious of my inherent bias, I am equally aware that my role in this undertaking is not to demonize BAH organizations, but rather to represent as fairly as possible the lived experiences of my participants. It is, therefore, fair game if *they* choose to demonize the idiosyncrasies, dysfunctions, blind

adherence to procedures and protocols, and perceived illogic of their own BAH organizations.

Among the reasons I have gone out of my way to elicit my participants' feedback at various stages of the thesis process is to ensure that their characterizations have been fairly and honestly represented. Among all the feedback I have received, in very few cases have any of the participants disagreed with any aspect of my representation or interpretation of our conversations. In each case of such disagreement, I entered into conversation with the participant to ensure a mutually agreeable understanding of the sense that was made and reported herein.

As I have mentioned – and will reiterate through the latter part of the thesis – BAH and UCAPP represent two idealized, extreme ends of an organization-type continuum. *They do not inherently represent opposing value judgements with respect to management effectiveness, fair or unfair treatment of workers, social responsibility, or any other proxy for a so-called measure of goodness.* Organizations may exhibit particular characteristics that place them at some point along that continuum, but that placement is not static; rather (as we will see in a later chapter) at any given time, their location is a result (emergent property) of complex interactions among the members of that organization. As the research will show, mostly BAH organizations may develop – and even encourage – aspects of UCAPP; mostly UCAPP organizations may require aspects of BAH.

Although I argue that a UCAPP organization is more *consistent* with contemporary societal conditions, that is not to say that UCAPP characteristics are

optimal or most appropriate for all contemporary organizations all of the time.

Nonetheless, given the feedback of many of the research participants, and those who have contributed via my weblog and thesis wiki site, UCaPP organizations seem to be very attractive and compelling to most people. Thus, the descriptions and analyses of the five participant organizations in the following chapters may indeed appear to be more favourable towards those organizations that exhibit more-UCaPP tendencies.