Developing a Learning Culture: Systemic Supervision and Consultation

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The Dilemma

- Rapidly changing contexts are unsettling
- Changing beliefs about the nature of work

"….the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives….instability is meant to be normal", however

"..the routine, bureaucratic time which can paralyze work or government or other institutions"

(Sennett, 1998 p.31)

Your Organisation

- Think about your organisation – its beliefs about itself, responsibilities, accountabilty and definition of role

- Think about your clients, referrers, students and other key agencies/groups – what ideas would they have of the service you provide and what would they expect?

Role and the Idea of Fit

- Balancing individual needs with those of the organisation

- Fit vs diversity and difference

- Learning organisations

- The importance of coherence

Continuous Change and Evolution

- The need to balance change and stability

- Change brings losses and gains

- Development of space to reflect on change to individuals' relationship to the organisation and dilemmas these pose.

"….there is no community until differences are acknowledged" (Sennett, 1998 p.143)

Organisations as Interconnected Systems

- The Systemic observer is part of the process of creating meanings
- When we observe connectedness we see pattern and meaning which arise from our interpretations
- Broadening context in order to develop new ideas
- Close collaboration with clients as co-creators of new meanings
- Relative backgrounding of consultant/supervisor and foregrounding of client leadership.

The Importance of Language

- Organisation as a relationally and socially constructed phenomenon

- Language as a powerful process, shaping the texture of organisational life – possibilities and constraints for action and relationships

- Communication makes sense in context

- Organisational culture as sets of individual understandings which concern meanings and values. Conventions of talk locate individuals

A Brief Reflection on your Workplace

- What are the organisational stories, what anecdotes do you tell? How do rumours permeate the organisation and what do they tell you about how the organisation perceives itself at different levels?

- What are the overt (dominant) and more covert (marginalised) agendas and stories? Where are they held? How are they communicated? What makes the unspoken ones difficult to communicate? How do you know?

Multiple Realities and Stakeholders

- Systems are made up of many views, there is no one "truth"

- Being interested in the effects of difference – the importance of questioning

- Aiming to develop curiosity in individuals and organisations

A Model of Change

- The importance of securing support at all levels in the organisation to achieve change
- Change is achieved when "new" practices are the norm rather than the exception – critical "tipping point"
- Needs to address three keys levels:

  Meaning level

  Action and interaction level

  Emotional level

Principles of Epidemic Transmission
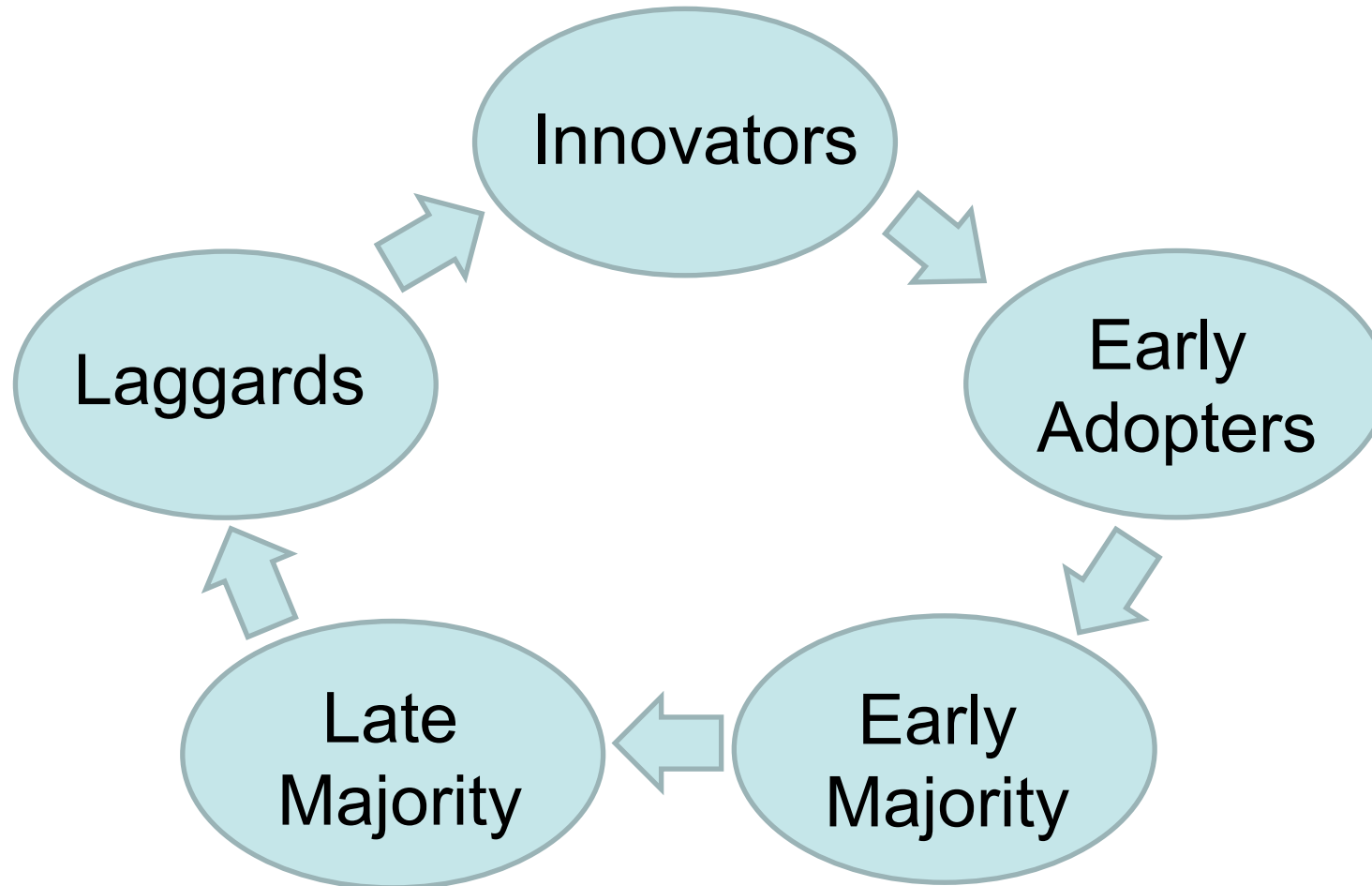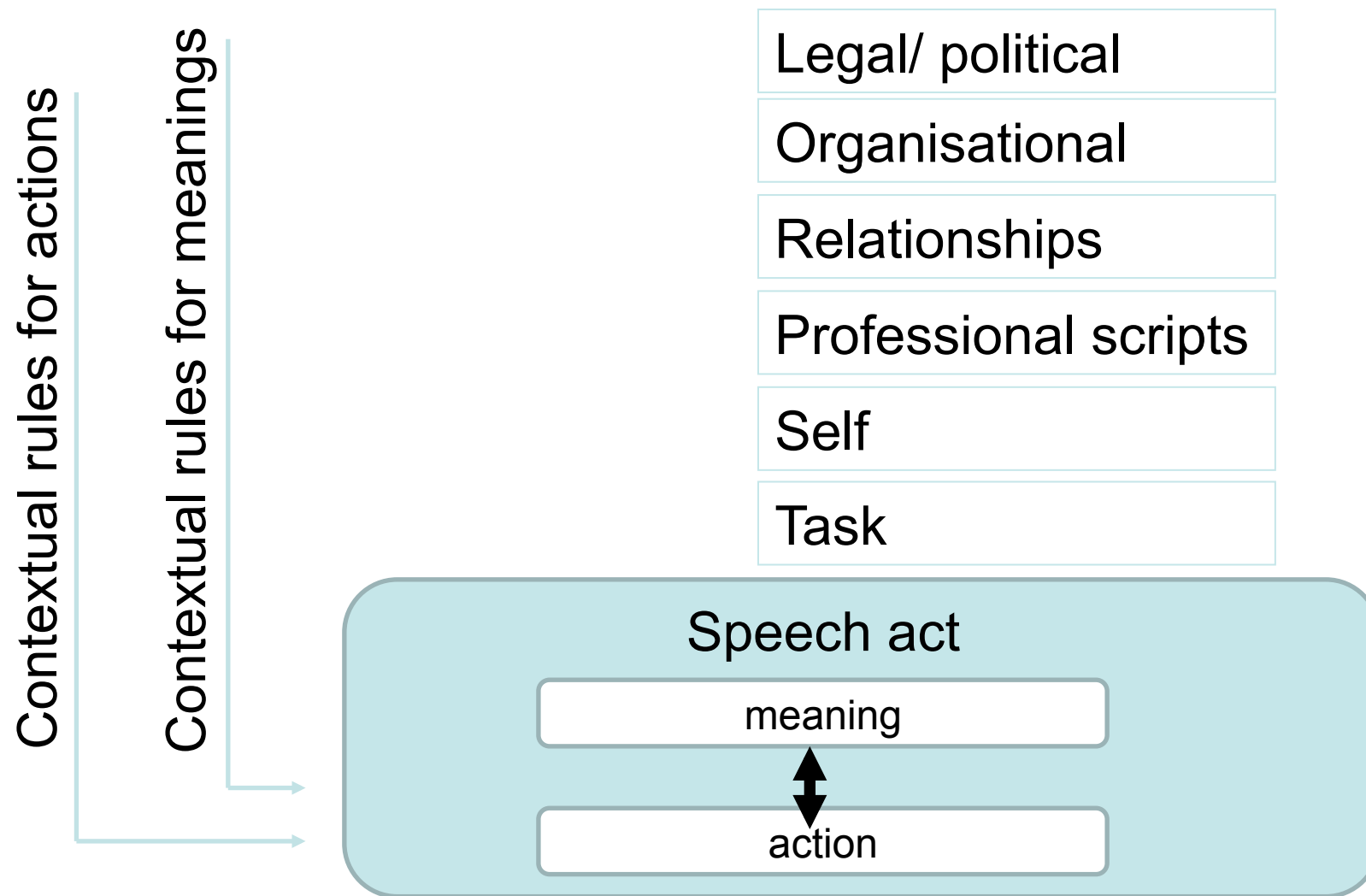

Gladwell,2000 p.195

Another reflection

- Can you identify who these people are in your organisation?

- If one of your colleagues were here now how would they describe you?

- Does this change with context and/or over time?

Communication Framework

- Communication occurs at different levels of abstraction, higher levels having greatest influence on meaning making

- Communication is seen as emerging, co-evolving and recursive

- Multiple levels of context that influence our understanding, actions and relationships

- Episodes of interaction or action cluster create patterns/conversations/relationships = culture or perceived "oughtness" (Pearce, 2007)

Co-ordinated Management of Meaning

Contextual rules for actions

Contextual rules for meanings

Legal/ political

Organisational

Relationships

Professional scripts

Self

Task

Speech act

meaning

action

(Cronen and Pearce, 1985)

An example: A Children's services leadership team

- Context – leadership and strategy
- Aim to create change in conversations within and between agencies
- To develop ways of introducing a new narrative with authority (speech acts) – taking the talk
- Engaging with others (relationships within episodes) – walking the walk

Process

- Aim to enable leaders to locate their own positions within the process

- Developing an observer position

- Questions, reflecting teams and feedback loops.

Understanding the discourses and location of self as leader in the narrative

- What story of this agency was inherited and where does it sit within wider discourse

- What effect do these narratives have on the identity of the agency and staff?

- What effect do you imagine this narrative has on your capacity(individual & group) to create change?

Creating the conditions for repositioning

- What is your current posture when faced with enquiry, challenge or criticism?

- What postures would you like to develop to manage such situations?

- What resources are available to you to bring into your interactions with others?

- What needs to happen for you to hear comments +&-(ve) as feedback? Who can help?

Creating Actions – walking the walk

- What actions do you wish to show that demonstrates a new narrative and retains the best of the history?

- If the workforce experienced your enthusiasm what would they notice?

- Each encounter is an opportunity to develop dialogue – what adjustments for different audiences?

- What forms of feedback have you established?

Wider context

- What stories do you imagine your partner agencies hold of your service?

- How would you like to educate them about the changes you are making?

- If you encounter judgemental narratives how can you be curious about these?

- How will you know when changes become 'business as usual" what needs to be in place?