

A New Strategic Theory for Democratization Implies A New Communications Theory for Structured Dialogic Design

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In the preface, the authors (Reynaldo Treviño Cisneros and Bethania Arango Hisijara) cite the 2009 book *Toward a General Theory of Strategy* (1) as the inspiration and “seed of this peculiar research.” In that 2009 work, Rafael Alberto Pérez and Sandra Massoni depict a “New Strategic Theory” (NST) summarized as seven proposals for “drastic changes” regarding the future of strategy. Pérez claims (2) that the conception of NST began as a surprise - even to himself, the “revealing of a secret”, a “breaking proposal”, as he penned page 672 of his 2001 book *Communication Strategies* (3). In *Communication Strategies* Pérez critiqued the logical-analytic paradigm of planning and came to suggest a change in orientation from one based in rationality to one based in complexity.

Pérez expressed the “need” for a new theory of strategy as a set of “pragmatic intentions”:

- to regain the human being as opposed to economic constructs of people as rational actors, voters, consumers, or game players;
- to move away from conflictual models of game theory towards negotiative models with cognitive and valuative processes;
- to encourage empathy in participants through the formation of a dialogic, negotiative, cooperative and consensual orientation;
- to move towards narrative means of managing discourse rather than following paradigmatic rules;
- and restating strategy from a communications standpoint rather than solely from an economic and informational perspective.

A decade after publication of *Communication Strategies*, in reviewing the State-of-the-Art of Strategy (4), Pérez reported seeing progress in the world on communication strategies such as the increased use of dialogue, the ramping up of participatory communication, and the proliferation of social networks. That's the good news. The bad news is that this increased use of dialogue may not yet be having a substantial effect on the world's problems. One of his observations was brought to his attention through the 2011 analysis by our own authors, Treviño & Arango (5), and their views of the world's interdependent problems. While the academic foundations and communicative infrastructure for communication strategies have advanced substantially, it seems that The New Strategic Theory is not yet well diffused in the social change practitioner community. Treviño & Arango call for exactly this diffusion in nominating one of the sixty actions to address the system of Global Challenges:

Action to Successfully Cope with Global Challenges #19 - Creating and spreading a new strategic theory which takes into account the relational nature of human beings, our new value system, and the main trends observed in our environment (Pérez, R., and Massoni, S., 2009)

Treviño & Arango further assert that Action #19, as proposed by Pérez, can exert great leverage in addressing what they discern to be the deepest driver of the Global Challenges:

Millennium Project Global Challenge #4 - How can genuine democracy emerge from authoritarian regimes?

A key foundation of Pérez's proposal for a New Strategic Theory, which pertains to democratic transformations, is an underlying theory of communication forged during just such a transformation.

The communication theory underlying Pérez's proposal is *La Mediación Social (The Social Mediation)*.

Pérez's collaborator on *Communication Strategies*, Manuel Martín Serrano, influenced him in the expression of the "need" for "a less geometric and more hermeneutic new strategic theory, less rational and more relational" (6). Serrano, a Spaniard, is a man of letters, a sociologist, and a philosopher. He developed *Social Mediation*, as a comprehensive theory of communication and the media, over several decades. *Social Mediation* started as a PhD Thesis, (in France), studying the influence of the mass media, and television in particular. It developed through a phenomenological approach to become one of the most influential new foundations for communication theory in the Spanish speaking world over the last thirty years. Development of the first book began during 1969-1975. Towards the end of this incubation period there was a move towards a modest liberalization of the authoritarian Franco regime in Spain. In December of 1973, the hard-line Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco was assassinated. On February 12, 1974 the newly appointed Prime Minister of Spain, Carlos Arias Navarro, "a classic liberal reformer," announced *aperturismo*, 'an opening'.(8) The call for *aperturismo* spurred demand for improving the quality of journalism which in turn created demand for research and a search for theoretical foundations – especially regarding communication theory.

This call for openness reflected an international movement at that time which called for increasing attention to the role of communications and media in culture and politics in the developing world. Emblematic of this concern was the clamor, which led to the creation by UNESCO of The International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems in 1977, which led to the controversial publication of *Many Voices One World*. The first Spanish university communications departments were just starting in the 1970's so they were in a good position for a fresh start on communications theory. The timing was such that communications theorists could draw on previous Anglo-Saxon developments in journalism, but they also drew on developments in European Semiotics. Serrano especially drew inspiration from the phenomenologists. He was positioned historically and geographically (9) to cultivate a theory of communication largely independent of the theory of communication of Structured Dialogic Design. In addition, Social Mediation includes the role of the media – which has never really been addressed in the theoretical foundations informing the methodology of Structured Dialogic Design.

In the first paragraph of the preface to the 30th Anniversary Edition of *Social Mediation* (10), Serrano recalls the abundance of forecasts of social change, during the writing of the first edition. He characterizes most of them on both the left and on the right, as being wrongheaded continuations of the old paradigm, dominated by the perspective of the already-developed-world and resistant to the spirit and desire of the social movements, which had as their hallmark the May Revolution (inspired by critical theories). Serrano highlights one such forecast as emblematic of the forecasts he disdains – the Club of Rome endeavor which led to the Limits to Growth Report. This is the very one our authors, Treviño & Arango, seek to redress, recompose, and transform by revisiting its original premise as espoused by Hasan Ozbekhan et al. Now, they, and the Structured Dialogic Design community, can take advantage of the new foundations in communication theory offered by Social Mediation. We ought to leverage it.

Leveraging Social Mediation implies at least four directives for the Structured Dialogic Design (SDD) community of practice.

- The role of the media should be carefully considered in design of SDD engagements.
- The communication theory underlying the practice of SDD should be revisited and reworked following Social Mediation and the evolution of communication theories.
- The tools of Structural Modeling employed in SDD should be leveraged in understanding social networks and power relationships.
- The approach to science of Social Mediation and communication theories should be considered in enriching the grounding of SDD in the Domain of Science Model and Third

Phase Science.

In SDD applications that are instruments of a broader democratic process, the media should probably always be presumed to be a stakeholder. The inclusion of the media as participants should be evaluated because they will also be part of the logistics management for the event. They will be employed in announcing an SDD event, or inviting participation, or reporting on it. In these ways, media are necessary and could even be considered as part of the event's design and facilitation team. This dual role as participant and facilitation team member is problematic – still we must figure out models of how to deal with this.

An acknowledgement of how media have already framed positions on a situation, constructed rhetoric, and influenced people's mental models should be part of the preliminary fact-finding in an SDD engagement. Media are not just players, but in many cases have already cultivated substantive content, which will be invoked, even unknowingly, by other participants. We have thus a very sensitive dilemma: the authentic voice of a participant may not be immediately discerned in their utterances. Participants' expression of "their opinion" may be, indeed is likely to be, strongly *mediated*, framed, and conditioned by the media. The results of an engagement may also be mediated. SDD engagement designers should consider how this is handled. SDD teams must consider in addition to media involvement in the problematic situation itself, the power asymmetry of the media with respect to their influence in planning events, stakeholder identification, participation, representation, and framing the content prior to and after events. Indeed, an SDD event on the future of Cyprus discerned exactly this concern. Media were seen as deep drivers hindering the peace-building efforts there (11). To accommodate media within the practice of SDD requires us to reexamine our theories of power and generate more sophisticated stakeholder analysis techniques, while designing the overall intervention of which a SDD event is a part. It is not sufficient to merely ameliorate the influence of power within the dialogue event as is already accomplished within SDD. We cannot keep the media at-a-distance; they are already inside the situation and event in many ways. A new theory of communication, especially one that addresses power asymmetries, is needed to direct the practice of the SDD community of practice.

The most influential communication theorist in the early development of SDD in the 1970's, was Harold Lasswell. Lasswell was trained in sociology and political science at the University of Chicago, in the decade following World War I. At that time, the Chicago faculty fostered a call for quantification of social and political phenomena. Lasswell completed his thesis on the use of propaganda and its influence on political behavior in 1927. He invented systematic content analysis, which came to be employed in the study of propaganda in World War II. He formulated a model of communication in the second quarter of the 20th century with a major work on the topic published in 1948 (12). His model is characterized by some as a "transmission model" of communication similar to that which became prevalent in information science and cybernetics in the 1950s and 1960's. He coined the phrase "policy sciences" in the 1950's and turned his interest to how groups could engage large amounts of information about a situation – proposing notions such as "decision seminars," "urban planetariums", and "prelegislatures" as mechanisms to accomplish this.

Lasswell came to influence John N. Warfield, one of the co-founders of the methodology of Structured Dialogic Design. Warfield was trained as an Electrical Engineer, specializing in communications, which in the 1950's & 60's, meant a focus on networks and information theory. Lasswell and Warfield both favored an information-theoretic treatment of communication. In his 1976 book *Societal Systems*, Warfield drew on Lasswell more than any other author except Herbert Simon – an economist and information scientist. Warfield addressed Lasswell's later concerns by developing better infrastructure to ameliorate the behavioral pathologies of groups and enhance their information processing capacity. The infrastructure included the design of the meeting room, computer support, and displays. The development of what came to be known as "observatoriums" as an aid to communication followed from this as a major contribution to the practice of Structured Dialogic Design.

Lasswell had also encouraged the use of diagrams to assist communication. The diagrammatic representations of what was being communicated is perhaps Lasswell's most direct inspiration to a product which is very characteristic of Structured Dialogic Design engagements – that is the “Problematique”. An example of a Problematique appears in Figure 2 of Treviño & Arango's monograph above. In *The Handbook of Interactive Management*, Warfield tells the story of Lasswell's formative experience in group work in a Peruvian mountain village. The project on restoring the viability of their community was having difficulty with communication until they started using “a graphics language that was developed on the spot, using chalk drawings on the wall of a cave.” (pg 109-110).

The use of diagrams as a communication aid very much appealed to Warfield in that he had a deep appreciation for particular kinds of diagrams – that is networks. Warfield became involved in planning very large-scale projects which employed matrices as well as network diagrams and he also was getting engaged in computer programming. In seeking a way to integrate these representations and find a way to leverage them with computers, Warfield developed a relationship with Frank Harary, a mathematician considered a father of Graph Theory. Harary, a professor at the University of Michigan, was known for his good communication skills. He promoted applications of Graph Theory in physics, psychology, sociology, and even anthropology. Already by the 1950's people were starting to apply techniques from the emerging field of graph theory in understanding the nature of power relationships in families, organizations, and politics, such as in the use of sociograms.

In 1953, Harary co-authored a paper on the Theory of Relations with Irving Copi, a philosopher and logician familiar with the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. This is probably the path by which Warfield became aware of Peirce, a polymath most especially a logician. In *Societal Systems*, (pg 202) Warfield cites Copi's 1948 paper which acknowledges the 1870 work of Peirce “wedding logic to matrices apparently aimed in the direction of a theory of structural modeling.” Peirce employed diagrams to represent logic and argument along with abductive inference of relations in the diagrams as key tools in his approach to semiotics. This linking of logic to diagrams appealed to Warfield's mindset. Thus Warfield came to tie together Boolean logic, matrices, algebra, and digraphs along with an abductive inquiry process, in the spirit of Peircean diagramming. This formed the semiotic motif of Structured Dialogic Design. Over the three decades following Warfield's first citation of work by Peirce he increasingly called for people to pay attention to Peirce's work especially Peirce's pragmatism. It supplied the model for science that Warfield employed to evolve the methodology that he helped to create.

Although Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure advanced the field of semiotics in the early 20th century, it was not until the 1960's that semiotics began to be institutionalized. While Warfield found inspiration, and sought legitimacy in Peirce's work, he did not draw very deeply on Peirce's contributions. (One reason may be that Peirce's work was not very accessible and Peircean scholarship was still very young.) Nor did Warfield follow the emerging field of semiotics – at least not in a fashion that he translated into methodology. Still he put out the call for us to pay attention to Peirce and, albeit implicitly, to semiotics. Treviño & Arango provide an important lead in this regard. It was mentioned above that many of the Spanish and European communication theorists engaged semiotics (Sausserian semiology and structuralism). However, Serrano himself was not known as a semiotician. Serrano trained under Abraham Moles, an Electrical Engineer and systems scientist, who had his own model of communication, (one which included the media). But Serrano's most outstanding disciple was Jesus Martín-Barbero who did become a semiotician and a leading communication theorist in Latin America.

In 1987 Martín-Barbero described the formation of a new paradigm of communication in Latin America as starting “at the end of the 1960's when Lasswell's model from an epistemological background of psychological behaviorism was poured into the theoretical mould of structuralist semiology, making

possible its “conversion”(13). Martín-Barbero describes a second major “conversion” in the 1970's as moving away from what he called the 'scientism of information theoretic models' and away from the functionalism of Lasswell. This was driven by “stubborn social processes” in Latin America of the period. Martín-Barbero notes, “The field of studies in communication in Latin America derives from the interplay of two different paradigms: the information/instrumentalism of North American research and the ideological criticism of Latin American social sciences. Between the two, and modulating them, stands French semiotic structuralism” (14). Thus was forged a much richer theory of communication accommodating politics, culture, conflict, ideology, power, transnationalization, processes of collective behavior, markets, the media, and consumption. Today in Latin America half of the professors of Communication Theory claim to not ascribe to a dominant model with the next 30% drawing primarily on Critical Theory, Constructivism, Structuralism, and Phenomenology. Now fewer than one in five focus on models from the previous paradigm – Behaviorism, Functionalism, Informationalism, and Systems theory.

Peirce went from treating semiotics as a science of signs to treating semiotics as a basis for his philosophy of science itself, his “pragmaticism”. There are intimations that Martín-Barbero posits communication theory turning from a field which draws on many different disciplines to becoming a scientific platform underpinning other sciences. So too, Serrano views the frontiers of knowledge to be at the points of human intervention - the very loci of his theory of communication – Social Mediation. Here is one insight regarding what that might mean for Structured Dialogic Design's Domain of Science Model – which has been based on Peircean Pragmaticism and De Zeeuw's Third Phase Science. As one of its motifs, Social Mediation theory posits that in order to develop a plan for intervention in the world, one begins with a world view that is framed to a large extent by the media, and more generally by “mediators”, all with power and special interests. Envisioned actions may also be so conditioned. Furthermore, the social mobilization required for the envisioned transformations will also require the media and be “mediated.” Therefore, in planning interventions our model of the situation must include the intended action and express the embedded context in which it will operate. It must express the intent of the action and describe how action and model are mediated. It must also accommodate the ways various interests will characterize the negotiations and describe the relations among the actors.

The first part of this, the inclusion of the intended action within the model of the situation, sounds very much like Gerard De Zeeuw's self-constructed object notion of Third Phase Science (15) – but was developed and published two decades earlier than De Zeeuw's working paper. Social Mediation theory goes far beyond self-constructed objects. How might Social Mediation theory affect the evolution of Structured Dialogic Design if we were to embrace it? Let's think about that. Treviño & Arango draw us, the practitioners of Structured Dialogic Design, into the solution space of the global problematique itself. In contrast, the *Limits to Growth* project, sponsored by the Club of Rome, treated the construction of the world model as if it was objectively separate from interventions in it. In *Limits to Growth*, Systems Dynamics served as the language to describe the world, but its use was not part of the world model itself. This is a sharp distinction from the nature of critical problems articulated by Hasan Ozbekhan – deep drivers of which implied the need for the methodology he was engaged in developing. Ozbekhan's reflexivity and critical stance was prescient.

Where are we at with a New Strategic Theory for addressing democratization? Pérez, one of the pioneers of Public Relations in Spain, engaged in debates through the Latin American Forum on Communication Strategies (Foro Iberoamericano Sobre Estrategias de Comunicación, FISEC) for seven years following his publication of *Communication Strategies*. FISEC grew from 14 participants in 2002 to more than 480 experts from 120 universities. It has 130 members of the mass media, institutions and firms from countries around the world: Latin America, the United States, Italy, France, Germany and Russia. It has produced over 150 publications. FISEC has proposed the New Strategic Theory as seven drastic changes in: the paradigm, the subject, the collective subject (organization), the object of study and its focus, the matrix of study, applicable tools, and the methodology of strategy.

Those changes are, respectively, viewed as transitions (16):

- from fragmentation to complexity;
- from the rational actor to the relational human being;
- from our view of the company as a production unit to that as a network of innovation and of meaning;
- from the contingent to the immanent;
- from the science of conflict and confrontation to the science of articulation and innovation;
- from a basis in economics to a basis in communication.

In 2005, the President of the United States of Mexico, Vicente Fox, (a beneficiary of Structured Dialogic Design work in Guanajuato, Mexico by our author Treviño) inaugurated the Third Iberoamerican Encounter about Communication Strategies in the Universidad Iberoamericana of Mexico D.F.. At that time, Pérez proclaimed “The new theory received in this way its Latin-American baptism....” (2). Let's get ready for its communion and confirmation.

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