

Acting with systems thinking: complex responsive processes and systems intelligence

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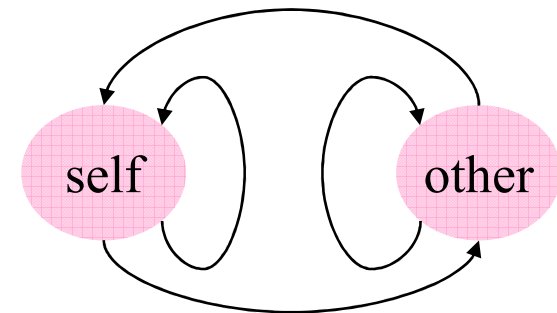
From "CRP vs. ST" to acting with systems thinking

"Managers draw on all the knowledges and insights of the humanities and social sciences ... as well as the physical sciences. But they have to focus this knowledge on effectiveness and results" (Peter F. Drucker)

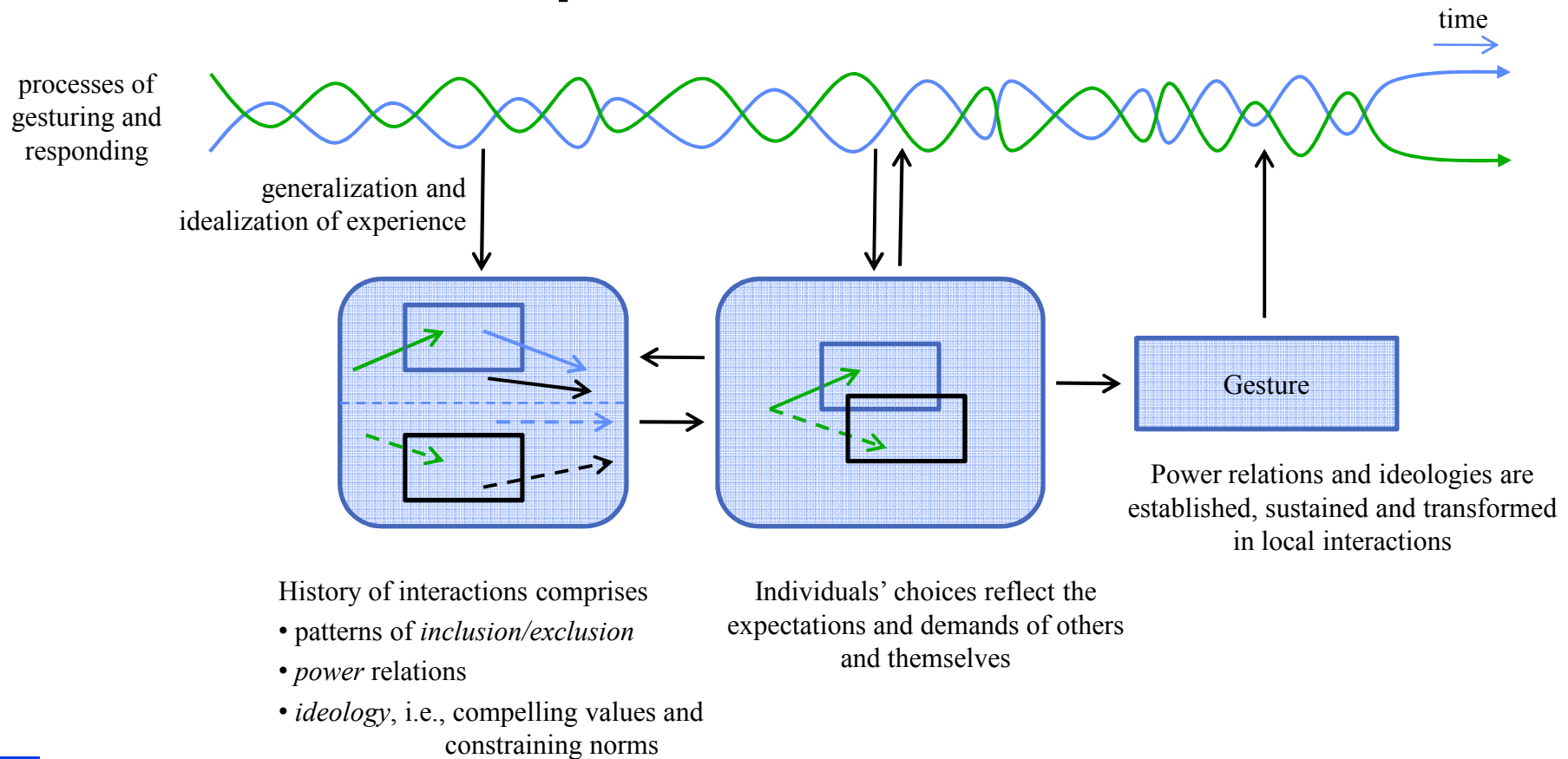
- The theory of complex responsive processes (Stacey et al.)
- Stacey et al. on systems thinking
- The systems intelligence perspective (Saarinen and Hämäläinen)
- CRP for describing acting with systems thinking
- SI as a competence in acting with systems thinking

The CRP unit of analysis: "gesture and response" (G. H. Mead)

- Focus is on the process that gives rise to "the individual" and "the social"
- Gesture + response => social act
- Taking the attitude of the other
 - evoking a similar response in oneself as in the other
- Generalizing the experience of interactions
 - taking the attitude of a "generalized other"
 - groups, organizations, institutions, societies



Complex responsive processes



Stacey et al. on systems thinking

- It is misleading to speak of 'systems' as such 'things' do not exist
- By focusing action and attention upon 'systems', systems thinking bypasses the all-important local interactions
- A theory *of* organizations should describe how local interactions give rise to wider coherent patterns

Systems intelligence

(Saarinen and Hämäläinen)

Refers to "intelligent behavior in the context of complex systems involving interaction and feedback. A subject acting with systems intelligence...perceives herself as part of a whole, the influence of the whole upon herself as well as her own influence upon the whole. By observing her own interdependence...she is able to act intelligently."

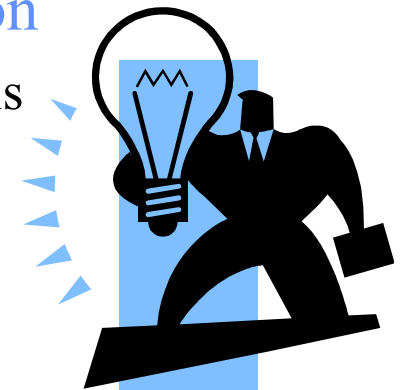
- "This fundamental capacity is **action-oriented** and adaptive, **holistic, contextual and relational**...It amounts to an ability to connect with the environment from the point of view of *what works*."

The systems intelligence perspective emphasizes

- Action
- Improvement
- Embeddedness in systems
- Dynamic and relative nature of 'systems'

SI lens on "CRP vs. ST"

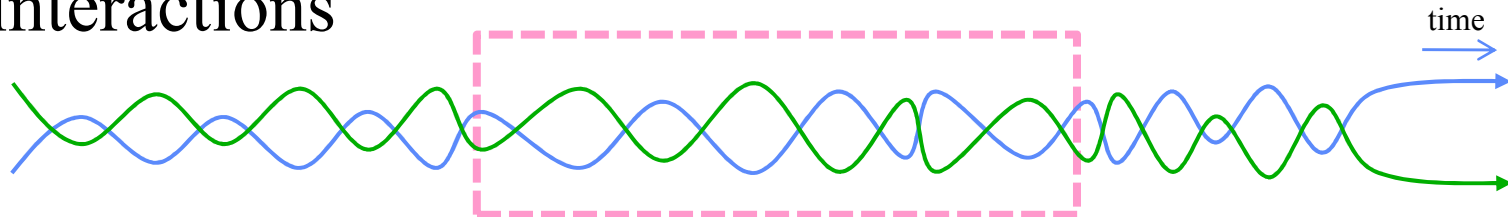
- Actual managerial practice and discourse operates in terms of abstractions
- It is useful to conceptualize actual managerial action as improvement-seeking, rather than as a descriptive endeavor
- 'Systems' provide a useful way of guiding **action**
 - Meaningfulness of describing and modeling systems is conditioned by whether it contributes to achieving **improvement**
 - Model-informed and methodology-driven action are special cases of action



Acting with systems thinking in CRP terminology

- Undertaking an intervention **is a response** to some previous gesture
- Organized interventions **embed gesturing and responding**
- The **intervention is a gesture that calls forth responses** in many subsequent local interactions

processes of
gesturing and
responding



SI is a competence in acting with systems thinking

- There is always “something more” than systems thinking involved in “acting with systems thinking”
- Systems intelligence is competence that manifests itself in the process of “acting with”
- The idea is to start making more and better use of the *systemic* endowment we already have

Conclusions

- CRP draws attention to the local interaction in management
- ...but managers also operate with phenomena that transcend the immediate local context
- No real reason to discard systems thinking

Conclusions

- For most practical purposes, description of the process of *acting with systems thinking* (CRP) is not enough
- Systems intelligence approaches the human *engagement with* the process of acting with systems thinking

Selected references

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