

# Narrative models of organizational processes

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## This session will be ...

- Most relevant to repetitive processes
  - Multiple repetitions of "same" process, rather than unique one-time-only processes
- Focused on dealing with data from fieldwork
  - Fragments of stories, multiple points of view
- Experiential
  - We will play a little game and analyze the data

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## Why Narrative?

- Rich source of data on process
- Progression of events
  - Beginning, middle, end
  - Improving or worsening situation
- Point of view & voice
  - Events are meaningful to particular participants
  - Can be interpreted from different points of view
- Evaluative/moral context
  - More than just a chronicle of events

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## Why narrative and process?

- In process domain, stories *are* constructs
- Narrative
  - a progression or sequence of events, as told by a narrator
- Process
  - a series of actions, changes, or functions that brings about an end or result

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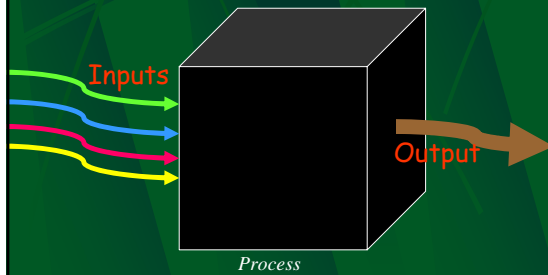
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## Variance model of a process



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## Why open the box?

- To understand and improve how processes work
- To predict/explain changes
- To design and implement effective incentives and controls

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## What's in the box?

- Multiple actors
- Simultaneous, interdependent threads of activity
- Interruptions and delays
- Potentially divergent goals and understandings
- Multiple, different points of view
- Plus: "the box" isn't necessarily a single time/place – could be globally distributed work system

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## What data can we get out of the box?

- Fieldworkers are stuck in time & space
  - one place at a time, one informant at a time...
- Fragments of stories
  - Delay and interruption make it difficult to get whole stories
- "Biased" stories
  - Usually objective, but always from a particular point of view

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## All fragments are not created equal

- Who is narrating?
  - You or someone else?
  - Participant or observer?
- Epistemic status?
  - Actual
  - Typical
  - Hypothetical
  - Fictional

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## Basket of fieldnotes



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## How to analyze?

- Depends on your objectives
  - Black box is very useful for many purposes
- Always a trade-off between
  - Simplicity
  - Accuracy
  - Generality

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## Narrative patterns

- How to summarize narratives in a meaningful, useful way?
  - Single stories can be idiosyncratic
  - We generally have fragments
- Working hypothesis: There are patterns in the fragments
- How to find them?

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## Graphical techniques

- Represent stories as networks (directed graphs)
- Lots of related approaches:
  - Event structure analysis (Heise, 1990)
  - Abell (1987; 2004)
  - Franzosi (2003)

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## Narrative network

- Nodes are “functional events” (Hendricks 1977)
  - Narrative fragments – parts of stories
- Sequence is the relation
  - What happens next?
- Strength of ties can represent frequency of observations

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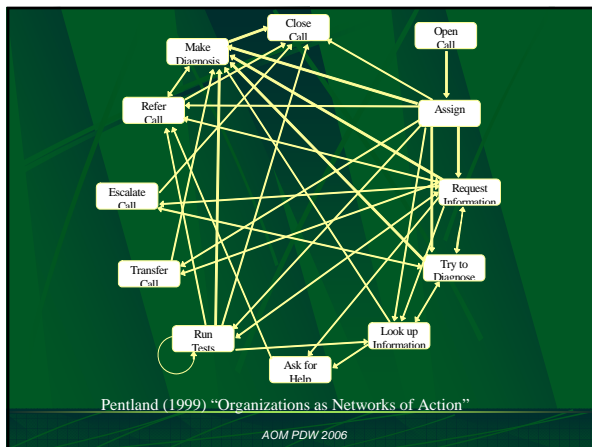
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## Establishing coherence is the main challenge

- Need connections between fragments to identify a coherent narrative
- Various sources of coherence
  - Time & place
  - Central actors
  - Causality
  - Function/Purpose

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## Let's play a game

- Experience our own example
- Choose your own objective:
  - Minimize Variety
  - Maximize Variety
- Trade cards to meet your objective
- Winner might get a fabulous prize!

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## How did you do?

- Who chose minimum variety?
  - Anyone get *all* the same?
  - How similar?
- Who chose maximum variety?
  - Anyone get *all* different?
  - How different?

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## Let's analyze our data...

- What is your story of the game?
- What were the events?
  - Beginning
  - Middle
  - End
- From whose point of view are you narrating?
- Actual, typical, fictional?

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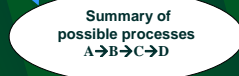
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## Making inferences about structure

Specific narratives:  
Surface level



Narrative network



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## Some questions

- Basic questions:
  - Identification: what is the underlying structure?
  - Comparison: How similar is this network to other networks?
- Under what conditions is the network stable (or unstable)?

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## Some more questions

- Does the observed network match normative expectations?
  - Performative = Ostensive?
- How do controls/incentives/technology influence the relative strength of pathways through the network?
- Which pathways (networks) are preferable? From whose perspective?

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## Some references

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