

# PLATFORMS OF DISCOURSE BRIDGING CONFLICTING CULTURAL REALITIES

*Will McWhinney<sup>1</sup>, William David Brice<sup>2</sup>,  
James Katzenstein<sup>3</sup>, James B. Webber<sup>4</sup>*

---

## Abstract

*Conflict is rooted in diverse sources of reality and language cannot alone solve conflicts. It is necessary to know the party's grammar and ways of discourse. There cannot be compromise without understanding each parties' reality truths and the rules of discourse relating to the platform of reality with these embedded truths. This work of theory posits that multiple platforms of discourse, each with differing rules, underpins every type of human interaction, political polarization, cultural and ideological clash, and all international relations including that of war. This understanding leads to an engagement strategy for compromise and agreement between the seemingly irreconcilable.*

**Key words:** culture, intercultural communication, conflict management, mental worldviews

---

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a work of theory investigating how we might negotiate diverse views of reality such as those found in seemingly irreconcilable cultural, political, and international disputes. This work is a direct extension of theory discussed in this author's "Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society" (McWhinney, 1997b). However, where the previous work concerned "how to create organizational change", this paper's contribution is "how to make meaning, bridge different world-views, and create new collaborative cultures in place of conflict". The questions include: How do managers organize diverse ideas into discourses, and group diverse and divisive coworkers into teams? The goal becomes setting new rules of discourse. How do negotiators find the most useful language for settling disputes when the warring parties come from diverse beliefs about reality?

---

1 Will McWhinney, emeritus, Fielding University, 2020 De La Vina St, Santa Barbara, CA 93105

2 William David Brice (corresponding author ORCID #0000-0003-2914-6479), College of Business Administration and Public Policy, California State University Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria St., Carson CA 90747, wbrice@csudh.edu

3 James Katzenstein (ORCID #0000-0003-1940-3216), College of Business Administration and Public Policy, California State University Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria St., Carson CA 90747, jkatzenstein@csudh.edu

4 James B. Webber, 6 Wild Pasture Road, Kensington, NH 03833

The belief patterns discussed here are as fundamental as Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. Research concerning culture-based taboos has shown how strong and fundamental these types of conflicting attitudes can be; as well as how they are linked to specific groups in society (Brice, et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the context of overwhelming social polarization, especially in Western societies, it is argued here that we must negotiate across these basic realities when entering a dialogue and facing differences; recognizing the games that are played among participants to attain goals defined in terms of their diverse realities.

David Bohm, physicist and philosopher, suggested that before a group focuses a discourse on some issue, that the participants have a dialogue about discourse and explore the vehicles that they will use to come to a shared understanding and trust before confrontation of issues [Bohm, 1980, 1995]. The first work should be to know each others' way of discourse where participants are "not going to decide what to do about anything" except how to "communicate coherently" [Bohm 1995, p. 17]. Participants need to bring into focus how diverse modes of thinking produce their differences, and frame approaches to working the differences. Discussing a topic without knowing sources of differences typically ends in a power struggle that shuts down dialogue. Bohm notes that whenever a discourse has a definite purpose, it is limited by assumptions relative to that purpose and by those who the purpose serves. Given an awareness of limitations, participants can search for the basis of disagreement so they can agree on what they disagree about. Exploring arenas of disagreement will provide an approach to building coherent discourse.

Bohm's ideal for initiating dialogue without confronting the overt purpose appears as a useful first step in resolving issues. However, Bohm's dialogue, by definition, denies confrontation at the most elementary level. Agreement can be achieved, but it is about nothing. For a dialogue to have substance there needs to be confrontation of worldviews though which ideas, feelings, and observations are realized. If a dialogue is to have an impact, it must begin with the realization and confrontation of different beliefs.

Ideally, a discourse proceeds as a progression of negotiations establishing shared meaning. Bohm considered the first essential step to be establishing trust and common ground that allows each participant to be heard. The common ground will be rules establishing what is valid and true for the participants. The matter of a discussion is established by confrontations between beliefs about sources of reality. What is valid or true in a discourse differs with the fundamental beliefs of the participants. A dialogue's basis is a set of standard rules of exchange between different reality constructions. There will always be a degree of differentiation; for example, the theoretician must establish rules of measurement in dialogue with the empiricist and the writer must find his audience. The rules of correspondence they develop form the grammars though which we notice events and ideas. Through confrontation between realities, we come to know. We establish the ontology and the epistemology of our discourses.

This paper examines the forming of coherent discourses and describes the qualities and rules of arenas where discourses are conducted. These steps take place in arenas labeled platforms of discourse. The platforms serve as the underpinnings for every type of discourse; those that lead to accommodation of differing views, as well as those that support the emergence of new understandings. The platforms are arenas of conflict, say between an empirical observer and a theorist, or between a moral position and a social ethic. Discourse begins in disparity; the work on a platform is to enable mutual discourse. Thus, the major focuses of this paper are on characterizing the platforms and working with conflicts that are at the core of realization and are inherent in the existence of different sources of reality. It is suggested that these conflicts are never fully resolved; leaving an ontological uncertainty.

## The Appearance Of Reality

The appearance of reality follows on engagements between people using different sources of reality. A sense of reality is achieved when an actor projects the datum of one reality into a second reality. The projection takes place on a platform of discourse that substantiates engagements between any pair of reality bases. Initially, the realizations are weak speculations that need to be reinforced by successive confrontations until they become established patterns, or rules of engagement, on that platform. These rules are the processes through which images and words are selected and a dialogue flows. The definitional assumption is that rules, and thus grammars, operate on a single platform, involving only two sources of reality in well-formed propositions. Introducing projections from a third source requires a far more complex set of rules than we can manage in a single proposition. However, in normal discourse we call on more than one platform thus creating changes in logic and worldviews that call on skills associated with gaming and conflict management. Rules of grammar are not sufficient. It is asserted here that we use four sources of reality beliefs, requiring the interfacing of pairs of beliefs. There are six pairings and six platforms, as illustrated in Figure 1.

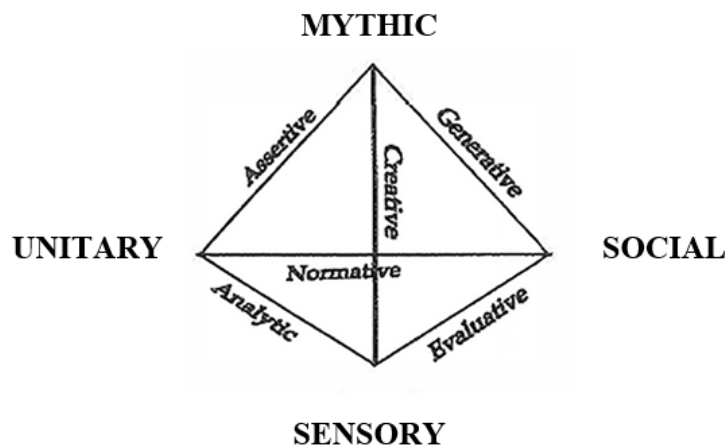
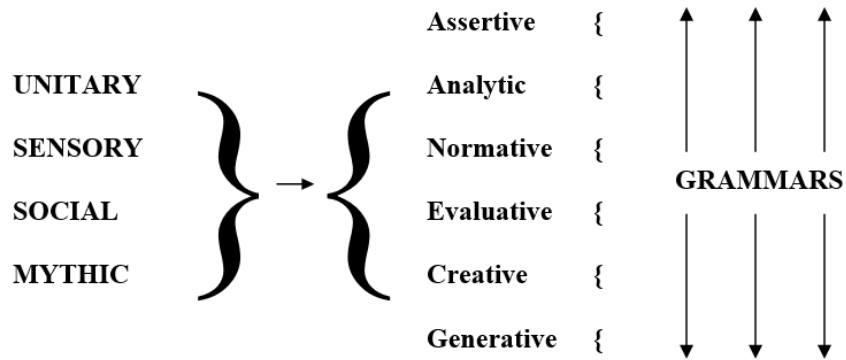


Fig. 1: Six Platforms of Discourse

A platform of discourse carries a realizing process based on confrontations among parties with different beliefs in the source of reality: unitary, sensory, social, and mythic. Meaning is on the evaluative platform. A conversation between a gardener and botanist takes place on the analytic platform with the gardener observing from a sensory view and the botanist drawing on theory based in unitary reality. Other platforms of discourse would appear in dialogues in a church service, in procedural battles on the floor of a legislature, in the metaphors of a poet, or in the internal dialogue between a person's emotions and the concepts used to express it. They are given shape, contoured by the views of participants.

The platforms are sites for activities that create images of events and objects and where reality is felt, created, organized, and projected. They provide places that give structure for meaning which requires expression via a coherent set of rules defined here as a grammar. The grammar is expressed in the vocabulary of a particular discourse and conform to limitations of the reality beliefs on which they formed. A set of rules that does not conform to the reality constructs will produce ill-formed propositions, contradictions, and ambiguities. There is no limitation to the number of grammars that can operate on a platform so long as each conforms to the operative transformations that relate the constituting pair of reality beliefs. The structuring of the scheme of realities, platforms of discourse, and their grammars is shown in Figure 2.



**Fig. 2: The Structure of Realities, Platforms and Grammars**

This illustrates development of grammars: projecting images into reality creates platforms of discourse; negotiation between participants specify the rules of discourse; thus producing a stable set of rules called a grammar. We can specify innumerable sets of rules on each platform and in casual conversations we move back and forth among sub-grammars. In formal discourse, we will stay mostly on one platform with few grammatical variations.

Each platform is an arena for dialogue between two distinct views of the source of reality. The exchange between reality views produces a position statement of what is. In a typical discourse, one or the other reality is likely to prevail. The dialogue may proceed as a power play between the polarities of assertion and dogma. It is similar with each platform where dialogues involve pairs of realities. In some arenas, particularly the analytic, there is a well-formed theory of measurement arbitrating between theory and data. A different experience of dialogues will be built on the generative platform; that may produce “continuous renovation and individualization via stylistically irreproducible utterances. The reality is in its generations” Voloshinov [1986]. Some uses and characteristics of the six platforms are displayed in Figure 3. Note that each platform uses different truth systems and validation processes, extending the range of permissible grammars well beyond the analytic models of most grammatical studies.

	Platforms of Discourse	Polarities	Descriptions	Disciplines
I	ASSERTIVE M-U	Assertion ↕ Dogma	Assertions confront existing structures enforcing a new dominant pattern, or reinforcing and extending the existing rules.	theory construction, theology, mathematics
II	ANALYTIC U-SE	Theory ↕ Empirical Fact	Actions are defined by logical rules and, conversely, rules are sustained by observation and judgment of correspondence.	empirical sciences, craft practices
III	NORMATIVE U-So	Morality ↕ Ethics	Discussions play between the values and principles of the participants, settling if the two overlap.	politics, ethics & morality, negotiation

	Platforms of Discourse	Polarities	Descriptions	Disciplines
IV	EVALUATIVE Se-So	Materials ↕ Values	Exchanges and relations between people trading off things and opportunities for receiving and giving value.	human relations, market economy, communications, management
V	CREATIVE M-Se	Pure Images ↕ Pure Sensation	Images give coherence to physical sensation and plans test the feasibility of ideas.	arts, technology, planning, entrepreneurial behavior
VI	GENERATIVE So-M	Community ↕ Ego	Images capture and give coherence to feelings in a cultural context; ultimately forming meaning.	metaphors, poetics, narrative, drama

**Fig. 3: Characteristics of the Six Platforms of Discourse**

The figure displays the polarities of each platform, between which the particular operators are formed. Thus, on the assertive platform, the extreme positions are the mythic assertions and the unitary dogma.

### Projections shape the platforms

Any expression will appear as a projection on the platform. Every outcome occurrence is a resultant of projection of an input according to a particular grammatical rule. For example: a sensory observation is transformed by social (emotional) function into a fear response on the evaluative platform; or, a collection of concepts is transformed into a quality by a mythic imposition on the assertive platform. A discourse could follow the inverse projection; on the assertive platform, a mythic image can be shaped into a verb or noun or used to posit a new property; on the evaluative platform, the expression of fear can be observed as qualia of the sensory world. In any expression one or the other reality dominates. On the analytic platform, theory dominates the observation, or the observation drives the theory; on the normative platform, emotions evoke ideas, or ideas capture emotions. Some dialogues are dominated by one reality. Einstein hypothesized qualities based on theorizing, making no reference to empirical observation. In some dialogues negotiations settle on a preset pattern; in others, the rules are continually in contention. The varying invocation of rules by participants shapes the platform. For example, a charismatic with devout followers will create a different platform than one used by the participants in a liberal democracy. Generally, the shape of the platform will follow the enduring forces in a culture.

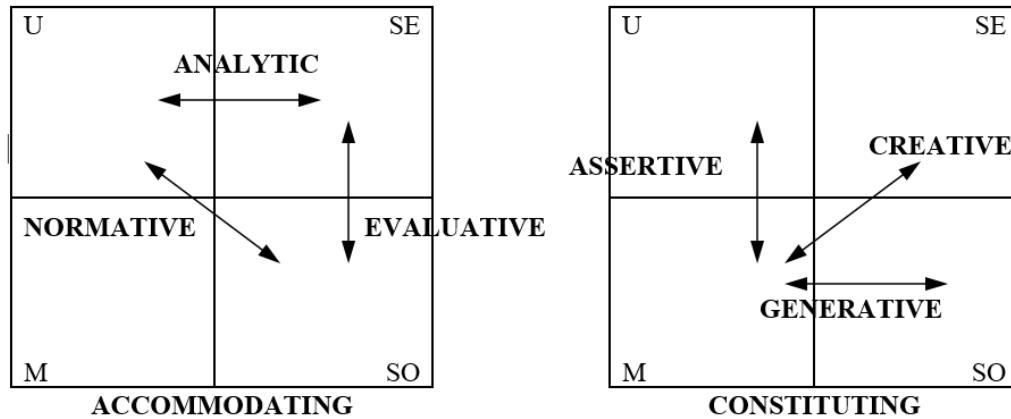


Fig. 4: Accommodating and Constituting Platforms

The platforms support distinct social functions. They can be divided into two modes of discourse: *accommodating* and *constituting*, as displayed in Figure 4. Accommodating is that which works to find a common definition, evaluation, or response. Constituting digests foreign material into a system to be integrated and understood. Each of the six platforms supports discourse in one of these two modes:

- The **Analytic** platform is where empirical observations are made to work with theory propositions and the converse. The scientific method is exactly an accommodative process designed to produce a correspondence of theory and data.
- The **Evaluative** platform provides for an accommodation of desire and the sources of satisfaction: a buyer and seller accommodate each other to close a sale, two people agree on how to share a resource, and two lovers exchange affection.
- The **Normative** platform is the ground for settling between issues of principles and of social desirability, of the moral and the ethical, and of administrative law and a sense of fairness.

The other three platforms provide a stage for constructive integrations, for creating ideas and new understandings. The *constitutive* platforms are:

- The **Assertive** platform is the site of asserting and maintaining principles, laws, theories, and truth. In a discourse, the participants propose principles and rules to others who will follow the orderly dictums on how principles are to be exercised.
- The **Creative** platform is the engagement between ideation and physical realization, where ideas and materials come together for inventive formation of things and processes.
- The **Generative** platform is a meaning-making place, where ideas are valued, chosen, and plotted into narratives from which a society gains cultures, languages, myths, and sciences.

Accommodating platforms identify forms of discourse that tend to keep the status quo, moving it toward social equilibrium and an established scientific paradigm. Constituting discourses add to the culture and can be enlivening, disturbing, or threatening to existing society; they are more likely than the accommodating form to introduce novelty. Concurrence on a grammar is easier within the accommodating platforms than on constituting platforms.

The model assumes that grammars are formed on single platforms. So long as a discourse is confined to a single platform, the grammar can produce coherence. Problems arise if participants attempt to use more than two reality bases, exceeding the defining power of a platform of discourse, resulting in a mix of rules introducing irresolvable ambiguities which interfere with meaningful exchanges. Multi-platform exchanges tend to be disruptive, argumentative, and unmanageable. However, natural speech includes



dialogue from all the platforms. In casual discourse, discordant noise is filtered out. In purposeful discourse, unidentified mixing of platforms can lead to significant ambiguity. To achieve coherence, conversants must stay within the logic of a single platform or co-operatively shift dialogue among platforms. Since most discussions are not so confined, we have to be concerned with the mixed cases.

### **Structure of a Discourse**

Dialogue presumes initial fragmentation, small in a harmonized community, but greater in a diverse group. Successful discourse involves trade-offs between dialogues leading to agreement and increased knowledge. There is no discourse at the extremes. Tensions are progressively resolved by creating agreements from the most fundamental levels; progressing toward communication of information, ideas, and feelings. The sequence:

- The first stage reflects the way participants deal with reality and the selection of platforms of discourse on which to present their positions.
- The second stage concerns selection of grammars, often accomplished by establishing the discipline of the participants.
- The third stage is vocabulary selection of the topic of interest. In academic writing this is performed by referencing other authors' writing; in common conversation it is done by sharing contextual information to get others 'on board' with common meanings.

Only in the face of serious conflict will participants step back to search for common grammar. Luhmann [1995] dissects the role of custom in affairs of the heart, particularly noting the role of silence. Romantic efforts fail if participants adhere strongly to different sources of reality and cannot settle on a platform of discourse. Because participants may not recognize the form of conflict they cannot resolve it. Accepting the other's reality belief may be inconceivable. Even when conflict can be worked, its first appearance is likely to produce a power struggle. Thus in important engagements, even where the intent of all parties is to arrive at understanding, common dialogical practices are likely to induce conflict and power games. Gaming and power are visited in the following two sections.

### **Games as an Expression of the Platforms**

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice joined in on the Red Queen's croquet court, "I don't think they play at all fairly.... And they don't seem to have any rules in particular, at least, if there are, nobody even attends to them." There is an affinity between the use of 'games' here and the heuristic device that Wittgenstein called "language games" [Stern, 1995]. Alice had assumed the conventions of the games she thought she was playing. Her confusion arose because the game was not croquet, but the game of deciding who is to choose the game and its rules. We play similar games in dialogue not knowing the grammar or game rules that have been chosen for us by convention or manipulation. Dialogue is a game played on at least two levels, structural grammar and content. Both must be chosen and understood to effectively communicate.

We have a common experience of choosing a game board and the particular game. We can choose a checkerboard, then decide whether to play chess or some form of checkers. All well-formed games are both competitive and cooperative. First, the players cooperate in choosing the game; then play by its rules. Dialogues are similar in that they need a well-formed set of rules for exchanges. We often forget that those rules come from a vast range of alternatives.

Platforms of discourse are similar to game boards; the platforms are like checkerboards or athletic fields in that they delimit a range of possibilities based on some meta-rules. In the case of the platforms, these are the rules of cause, or sequencing,

of ideas. These delimitations and the opportunities provided by setting rules are made tangible by showing the parallel between games and grammars. So, to ground the 'game' of dialogue in our experience, the six boards of play are described that simulate the platforms of discourse:

On the first board (M-U), labeled *assertive*, games and rules are formulated for games to be played on the other boards. The purpose of first board games is to get proposed rules accepted. It proceeds by specifying legal moves and the consequence of each resulting play situation. The games of the first board are the creation of theories, legal structures, aesthetics, and grammars in which a player presents its orthodoxy. The first board game is an engagement of power for or against established principle.

The second board (U-Se), the *analytic*, is the board on which games such as chess are played, fields where athletic contests are held, and laboratories where we test theories. Aspects of war and high finance are also framed as well-defined games. Their purpose is to exhibit expertise within a set of rules and to win. Most of these games are fundamentally competitive yet are valid only so long as the players conform to the rules. Speech and writing are played on this board.

The third board (U-So), the *normative*, is a stage for politics. These games are played in continuing confrontation between the desires (social) of one party and established position (unitary) of the other. The play is often called gaming the rules. The game is to gain the right to choose what sort of game is to be played. Jean Piaget, the Swiss child psychologist, observed in watching young boys play the game of mumblety-peg, that as they matured, they spent increasing amounts of playtime trying to enforce changes in the rules to gain an advantage. As they mature, they move from mumblety-peg to adolescent testing of their gaming power, then move in adulthood to political games. On this board, coaches, referees, and judges argue over what will be the rules of their games. It is the arena of legislators, spouses, market manipulators, and church cardinals. Play on this board is highly visible in the game of establishing new laws and governmental forms following a revolution. Most games on this board are what James Carse calls "infinite games" as they have no final winners and losers [Carse 1986]. Each side tries to modify rules to increase its advantage without driving the opponent off the field. Driving the other players out of play is a non-accommodating behavior that voids play on this board; perhaps reverting to first board play.

The fourth board (Se-So), the *evaluative*, is the site of games of *relation* between people in a marketplace. The players may be carrying out a courtship or haggling over prices, but the game is played wherever there is discourse among concerns of involved people. The board provides the marketplace in which moves are *evaluations* of opportunities in setting up exchanges where goods are assigned social values. In one form, it is about interpersonal relationships and in another it is pure market economic transactions.

The fifth board (M-Se), the *creative*, is the site for creating and naming sensory images. It creates the game board, the pieces, and rules of play. Mythic images give form to the sensory and plans to the mind; the sensory input stimulates the creation of perceptions. This is the primordial game board, on which engagement itself was created. The creative board is similar to the first board, but the opposition is nature and time.

The sixth board (So-M), the *generative*, is the site for organizing symbols and metaphors to give meaning to dialogue or a community through creating stories and traditions. In this cooperative form, the game seems little different than the creation of literature. It is a game as the creator continually constructs and violates conventions to enliven a community of interest and develop a culture, and in turn the community endorses or rejects the creations.

The properties of these six game boards are summarized in Figure 5. The rules of the games played on each board differ, as do linguistic grammars. On each board rules may be simple or complex, and may never be complete.



PLATFORM of DISCOURSE	BOARD	GAME	OBJECTIVE
ASSERTIVE M-U	1st	New Games	Set rules to gain advantage for play on 2nd Board. This is a power move through which play on the 1st board designs a game to favor its creator.
ANALYTIC U-Se	2nd	The Game	Play most competently within the rules.
NORMATIVE U-So	3rd	Politics	Work for new agreements on rules is the play in this political-ethical game. In its unending form, in social relations and legislation, the objective is to maintain enough advantage to win often but not so often as to discourage others from continuing the play. A clear win can destroy play on this board.
EVALUATIVE Se-So	4th	Market Place	Assign values and priorities to reallocate resources - to arrange 'wins' by producing a surplus of value for one or both (all) parties.
CREATIVE M-Se	5th	New Opportunities	Explore opportunities in new games. These games are often played against nature, to increase resources available for playing any game.
GENERATIVE So-M	6th	New Cultures	Create new meanings; setting metaphors in a culture. A cooperative game, involving players in the design and maintenance of the culture.

**Fig. 5: The Boards of Play**

Rules of a marketplace (fourth board) may be simple but not well-defined and on a creative board (fifth board), the sole rule may be that play may not stop until a novel outcome is found. Play on a given board may be dominated by play in a 'bigger' game. In most of gaming we are playing on two boards concurrently. Players of accommodating games on the second and third boards are dominated by values and opportunities that are 'markers' on the evaluative board (fourth board). Accommodations take place in a market. Professional sports illustrate a double play: to win games to make money. Given that involvement, the focal game can conflict with the market. There should be no gambling by players or political manipulation while bargaining for the players. Gambling on soccer is a legitimate game, but not by those on the field. This analysis argues that we should play one game at a time. Games are most effective when they are played strictly within the game's definition and that each game needs to be played consistently within rules designed for a specific platform. These admonitions apply equally to language games of the accommodating platforms.

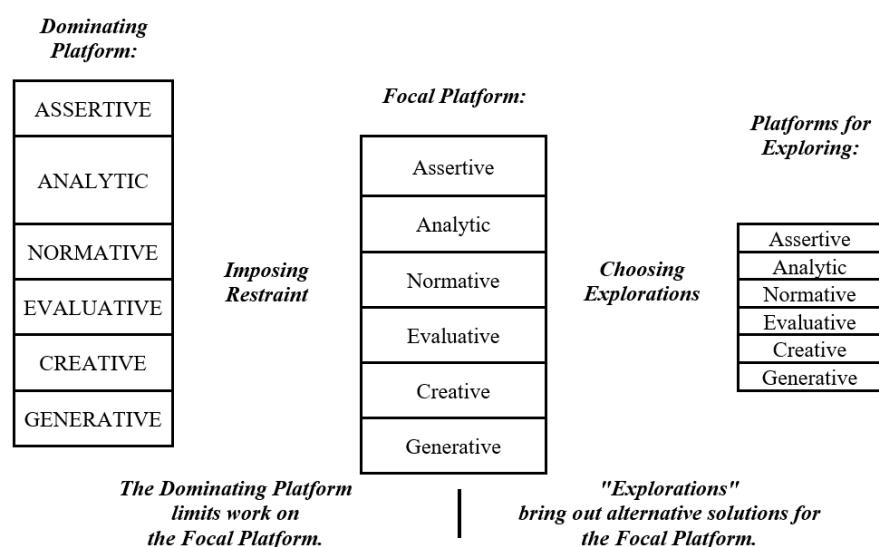
Games played on the constitutive boards (1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>) call for a different awareness. Play is still rule oriented, but often focus is on novel and unauthorized uses. On these boards, play may go beyond the implicit and established rules of behavior. A fe-

cund strategy is to import rules from other games or boards, a metaphoric route to creating new forms and outcomes.

### Dominations and Hierarchies

Discourses and games are often conducted using two or more platforms; thus different grammars and rules. Such mixed sourcing leads to ambiguity and miscommunication unless their use is structured to establish intentional interrelations. Structuring the relation among platforms used in a dialogue allows conversants to select a given platform for a focal discussion and to introduce platforms that frame the conversation or expand the grounds of discourse. The structuring may bracket unwanted platforms that would intrude on to the focal discourse such as a dominating view of reality manifested in another platform. A conversation might be held on a platform that is subordinated to an unacknowledged but dominating platform. For example, a dispute over scientific data (on the analytic platform) might bog down because it is embedded in a political struggle over distribution of rights to findings the discourse produces. Thus, there is a shadow dialogue being carried out on the normative platform. By recognizing that the focal conversation is embedded within a second platform, participants can separate conversations and conduct them sequentially and coherently. An initial conversation might take place on the normative platform to resolve ownership problems, then return to the analytic platform to work out measurement issues. This two-level discourse is illustrated on the left side of Figure 6. Here a focal discussion on the analytic platform is dominated by a restrictive background discourse on the normative platform. Salthe introduces a similar use of the "focal" platform in hierarchical systems [Salthe, 1985].

In scientific discourse, a researcher might introduce speculative reinterpretations of data that appear unjustified or fantastical. This introduces a creative mindset to evoke new solutions beyond limits of scientific creditability. This moves the discourse to a *sub-platform* to explore solutions unavailable to analytic thinking. Testing the generated creations reverts to the focal scientific platform. The creative platform here is *subordinate* to the analytic platform; illustrated on the right side of Figure 6. If the parties recognize a subordinate platform is being used in service to move the main discourse forward, discussants can make this multi-level conversation coherent. Success in this requires agreement to return to the focal platform to complete the task.



**Fig. 6: The Impact of Dominating Platforms and Use of Subordinate Platforms**

Almost every focal conversation is a sub-text to issues on a 'larger' platform. Usu-

ally some personal, cultural, or legal discourse dominates the focal platform. In recent years 'socially correct behavior' has come to dominate conversations; creating a fear of offending. For example, the use of the male gender with a singular subject has become offensive even though English makes no provision for a neuter subject. Such limitations are shadow constraints on the platform of discourse; they censor what we think. We are oblivious to the forces that constrain the focal discourse. Many seemingly acceptable dialogues on the focal platform are now disallowed due to unspoken dominating rules; they are now taboo. Without awareness of the dominating platforms, the mixed discourses are unmanageable. Identifying the dominant and subordinate conversations is an important step in clearing away elements that cannot lead to a resolution. Following the lead of the German sociologist Jurgen Habermas, every discourse is conducted under a power relationship [Habermas, 1984]. Every discourse may be embedded in a variety of supra-platforms, often not apparent to the conversants. By making clear the nature of the power structure, the confusion is understood and the possibility of dialogue increases.

Earlier studies have shown the application of the four realities model in a variety of fields:

- Personality difference, following Lawrence LeShan [1976].
- Leadership and followership interaction [McWhinney, 1997a, 1997b].
- Creativity: Maxine Junge [1992] explored different forms of creativity using the four realities model and McWhinney, explored the condition that support diverse creative styles [McWhinney, 1993].
- Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Peter Young has built a new foundation for NLP based on the four realities [Young, 2001].

### **Conflict Management on The Platforms**

The philosopher, Paul Ricoeur writes of a discourse as "the promise, a bond of good faith underlying all communication" [Clark, 1992, p. 99]. However, given the view that a discourse arises in the exchange between individuals, groups, or cultures which are likely to hold different views of reality, it is unlikely that the discourse arises in agreement. Rather good faith in discourse is developed by establishing rules of exchange, which in turn may be based in a shared belief in what is real. Discourse begins in conflict but continues in a hermeneutic cycle of interpretation and reflection that leads toward a base of trust and respect for differences.

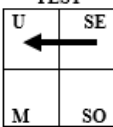
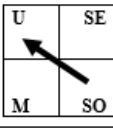
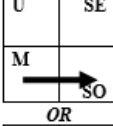
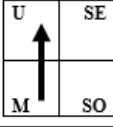
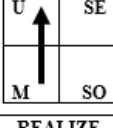
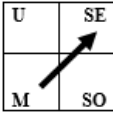
In a study group at UCLA during the 1970s, conflicts were never resolved but their source came to be seen in the differing beliefs about sources of reality that were identified. The enlightening finding of the group was that we did not ourselves share common views of sources of truth, laws of science, or of political-economic realities; it was recognized that these disagreements are pervasive in Western societies. This was not a new finding, but this work contributed a means of mapping the realities that arose articulated these fundamental differences.

Out of the conclusion that conflict is inevitable in any public discourse, an approach was developed to managing if not resolving conflicts. This approach identifies the worldviews of conflict participants and selects the resolution processes that will be most suitable to parties coming from their diverse worldviews. This method assumes conflict arises from differences among parties' views of reality. It assumes that it is difficult for parties to negotiate on platforms they find entirely alien and that they must work from a familiar place. The four realities model suggests that when parties to conflict share the normative platform (U-So), the mode of choice for resolution would be different than when they share an analytic (U-Se) or an assertive platform (U-M). On the normative platform, the approach would be to negotiate. The normative platform is one of the most

discussed arenas of conflict, as it differentiates between the ethics of the socially constructed worldview and that of the unitary morality of conviction. This axis of conflict is fully discussed by Robert Larmore [1987] as a conflict of ethics of responsibility versus an ethics of conviction. Alternatively, if the participants are assertive, one would choose a powering model. And if they are analytic, one would choose fact-finding.

Working from the four-reality model produces a different set of resolution strategies than that which is described in conflict literature. Whereas the four realities model focuses on reality differences among the parties to a dispute, the typical approach today is to begin with characteristics of the presenting problem. It focuses on reconciling interests, establishing rights, and 'powering' a solution [Ury et al., 1988]. This model is based in Habermas's [1984] communicative model, of technology, relation, and power. Another school focuses on moral argumentation, described by Habermas as one in which the "opponents engage in a *competition with arguments* in order to convince one another to reach a consensus." The four realities model first considers reality beliefs to expose intrinsic conflicts among participants; before choosing a process for resolution. This expanded consideration leads to a variety of different modes of approaching resolution.

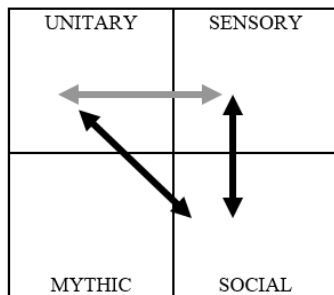
Tamara Bliss [1996] investigated how non-profit groups attacked corporate positions on issues of environment, human rights, and inequalities. She found that the non-profit groups used greatly differing paths of resolution. The differences could be explained by the group's dominant worldviews and choice of platforms. For example, groups coming from a generative base used relational tactics such as boycotts to set public opinion against corporations. Corporations often had legal resources that led them by habit and skill to attempt to arbitrate solutions on the normative platform. Clearly these institutions did not attempt to find a common ground (platform) for resolution. An exception was with environmental groups, often led by scientists, who tended to appeal to pragmatists inside corporations using empirical arguments. This tactic led to mutually attractive solutions as would follow from the disputants' use of a common platform. Examples of approaches based in different platforms are illustrated in Figure 7.

TACTICS TO ENFORCE COMPLIANCE	Mode
Conduct research to produce evidence that existing laws and policies are being violated or are inadequate.	<b>TEST</b> 
Litigate to change laws through judicial reinterpretation of an existing law because it conflicts with core values embodied in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. This tactic can lead to intense conflict between groups that have conflicting values and systems of truth.	<b>ENCULTURE</b> 
Write emotional articles for the organization's newsletters, magazines, direct mail, and electronic bulletin boards to get members and the public to care about the group's cause.	<b>INFLUENCE</b>  OR 
Deliver charismatic speeches that invoke new visions for the future (Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream").	<b>ESTABLISH</b> 
Purchase advertisements in newspapers or magazines explaining the group's point of view and urging citizens to take specific actions.	<b>REALIZE</b> 

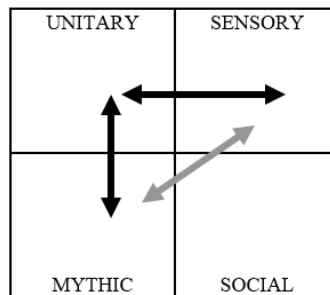
**Fig. 7: Resolving Conflicts - One Platform**

Conflicts in which parties come from different overlapping platforms are most likely to be resolved by moving the discourse to a third platform; one where neither party has advantage [McWhinney, 1997a, 1997b]. For example, a conflict between a party that operates on the political normative platform with one that sees the world in evaluative market terms may find the issue best worked out by developing empirical data about the situation and potential outcomes on the analytic platform. This pairing is shown in Figure 8A. In a second example, conflict between theorists defending theory (assertive) and empiricists with a data interpretation (analytic) may be resolved on the creative platform to evolve a new theory or data interpretation. See Figure 8B.

Conflicting issues between parties on partially shared platforms are worked on a third platform on which each party has a stake.



**Diagram A:** Politics and Marketing are resolved by empirical factors.



**Diagram B:** Conflict between data and theory is resolved by creative development of theory and/or data interpretation.

**Fig. 8: Resolving Conflicts: Two Platforms**

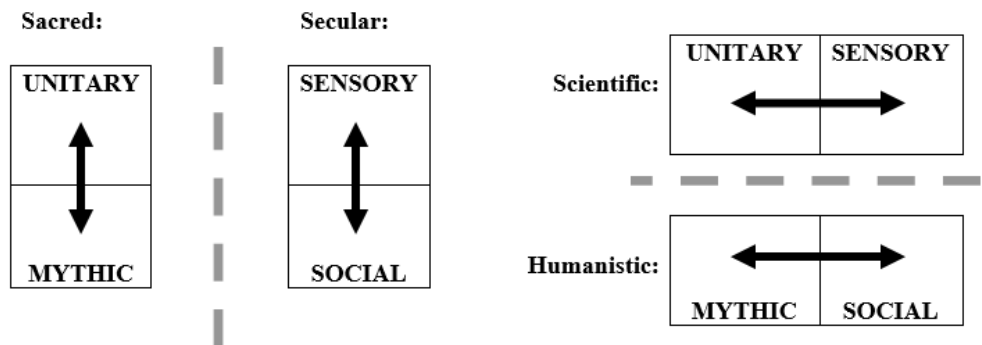
The most difficult cross-platform conflicts to resolve are those in which the contestants share no dominant beliefs about sources of reality. There are three such inter-platform pairs in which the parties have no arena within which to form grammars of conduct. They might better be called stand-offs than conflicts for there are no direct approaches to resolution. These three are illustrated in Figure 9 as:

Sacred versus Secular.

Scientific versus Humanistic.

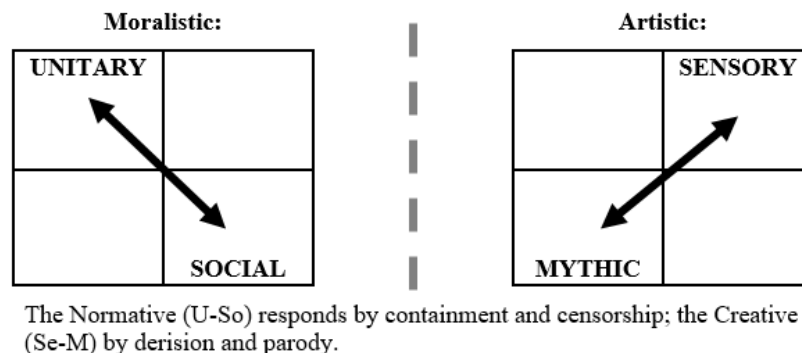
Artistic versus Moralistic.

The four-reality conflicts model the three grand dichotomies that provide the deepest sources of conflict in Western cultures. These images represent the void between pairs of realities. Each pair experiences the world independent of the other's realities with no common ground.



There is rejection between the Assertive (U-M) and the Evaluative (Se-So) platforms. If separation does not occur, conflict is resolved by annihilating the other.

There is a deep enforced separation of interest between the Analytic (U-Se) and Generative (M-So) platforms. They just don't cross each other's paths.



The Normative (U-So) responds by containment and censorship; the Creative (Se-M) by derision and parody.

**Fig. 9: Conflicts Involving Four Realities**

Interestingly, the most terrible conflicts in history appear to have been between ideological groups based on the unitary source of reality. The scheme does not explicitly deal with conflicts on a single platform. However, it does suggest that when groups are attached to a single form of belief they have an insufficient base for reality and subsequently fear their belief may be unsustainable in confrontation with an alternative. It might be that the most threatening condition is to face another culture that also believes it has the Truth.

National culture always embodies many Truths which differ from those of other cultures. Geert Hofstede's work identifying dimensions of national culture (using values) illustrates this in a large-scale way [Hofstede, 2001]. With his approach of culture dimension scores, a concept of cultural distance can be discussed. The widely differing Truths embodied in culturally distant societies mirror those discussed here. Professional classes within the same country have also been found to differ on cultural values and beliefs [Brice and Richardson, 2009]. Differing cultural values and beliefs have also been



found to lead to differing business behavior and performance [Brice and Jones, 2013; Brice, 2012]. On a smaller-scale, populations within the same country have been found to enthusiastically accept or adamantly reject imported products that seemed to violate cultural norms for one group but fit the cultural norms for another [Brice, et al., 2017]. There seemed to be no basis for compromise (with the product or its marketing) with these differing cultural groups as they proceed from differing cultural values, beliefs as well as differing reality platforms.

Conflicts that have driven Western history, and current social polarization, are seemingly irresolvable with no basis for compromise. Sometimes these conflicts are avoided by keeping parties separated, keeping “church from state” and colleges of humanities distant from technological institutes. In the case of sacred-secular issues, the sole resolution is annihilation of one party and its beliefs as we have seen in innumerable efforts at genocide. These conflicts are visible in nations torn apart by wars between theocratic and social-democratic political forces. There is no platform to which the disputants can retreat from conflict. An analysis of polarized conflicts supports the evidence that approaches to resolution through dialogue are unlikely to be successful. This analysis posits that successful resolution can be gained by negotiating the parties differing grammars prior to discussing issues related to differing reality mindsets.

### Conclusions

This paper describes how six platforms, created by confrontations among four realities, generate a base of exploration within the development of diverse grammars. Platforms of discourse are constructions arising out of the process by which we make our world real. Conflict management issues arise when participants use grammars that are mutually incongruent. An understanding that parties to conflict proceed from different sources of reality informs us why negotiation often fails at resolution and illustrate how societies can become culturally polarized. Knowing the conflict parties’ differing truth realities, and the rules of their grammars of discourse, is prerequisite to achieving compromise and avoiding greater conflict.

In the past century there have been a number of major conflicts that were said, beforehand, to be impossible as war was not in any country’s economic interests. However, diplomacy to prevent the outbreak of hostilities invariably failed as the parties proceeded from different realities. There again seems to be great conflict in the offing, and it is again said that large-scale war cannot happen, as it is not in any country’s economic interest. A closer look at the parties’ differing truth realities shows us a different picture, however. It can be seen that the major powers are conversing with differing grammars; mutual incomprehension of their differing realities is moving the world closer to conflict.

### References

- BLISS, T.J. (1996). *Leveling the Playing Field: How citizen advocacy groups influence corporate behavior*. Unpublished Dissertation: Fielding Institute, Santa Barbara, CA.
- BOHM, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- BOHM, D. (1995). *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- BRICE, W.D. (2012). The Effects of Ethnic Culture on Managerial Attitudes and Practices: A Survey in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. *International Journal of Management*, 29(1): 267-278.
- BRICE, W.D. AND RICHARDSON, J. (2009). Culture in Family Business: A Two-Country Empirical Investigation. *European Business Review*, 21(2): 246-262.
- BRICE, W.D. AND JONES, W.D. (2013). The Link Between Family Firm Culture and Performance: A Study in Both a Developed and a Developing Economy. *The Business Review, Cambridge*, 21(1): 81-87.
- BRICE, W.D., CHU, E. AND BRICE, A.S. (2017). Culture-Based Rejection of Taboo-Infringing Imports. *International Journal of Management and Economics*, 53(3): 67-81.

- CARSE, J.P.** (1986). *Finite and Infinite Games*. New York: Free Press.
- CLARK, S.H.** (1992). *Paul Ricoeur*. Routledge.
- HABERMAS, J.** (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. 1 & 2). Polity Press.
- HOFSTEDE, G.** (2001). *Culture's consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across cultures*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- JUNGE, M.** (1992). *Creative Realities: the Search for Meaning*. Santa Barbara: Fielding Institute.
- LARMORE, R.** (1987). *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press.
- LESHAN, L.** (1976). *Alternative Realities; The Search for the Full Human Being*. Ballentine Books.
- LUHMANN, N.** (1995). *Social Systems* (John Bednarz, Jr., Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- MCWHINNEY, W.** (1993). All creative people are not alike. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 2(2): 3-16.
- MCWHINNEY, W.** (1997a). *Formulating a Conflict Model in a Space of Alternative Realities* (draft). In D. B. Price (Ed.).
- MCWHINNEY, W.** (1997b). *Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society*. Sage Publications.
- SALTHER, S.N.** (1985). *Evolving Hierarchical Systems: Their Structure and Representation*. Columbia University Press.
- STERN, D.G.** (1995). *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*. Oxford University Press.
- URY, W.L. BRETT, J.M. AND GOLDBERGE, S.B.** (1988). *Getting Disputes Resolved*. Jossey-Bass.
- VOLOSHINOV, V.N. AND BACHTIN, M.M.** (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Harvard University Press.
- YOUNG, P.** (2001). *Understanding NLP: Metaphors and Patterns of Change*. Carmarthen, UK: Crown House Publishing.