Process Methods and Perspectives

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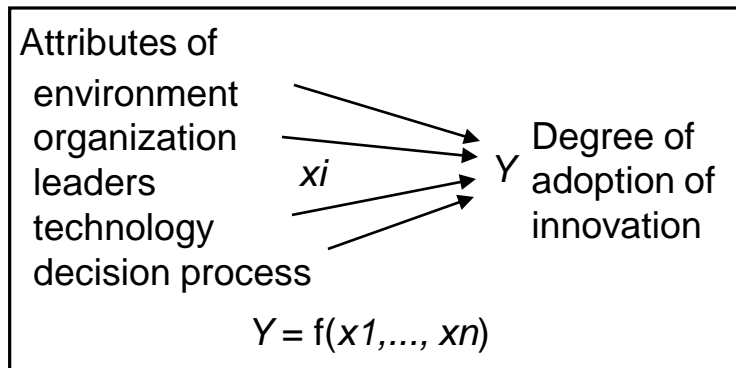
Paula Jarzabkowski
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Sub-plenary 4
EGOS 2014
July 4th 2014
Chair: Ann Langley
HEC Montréal

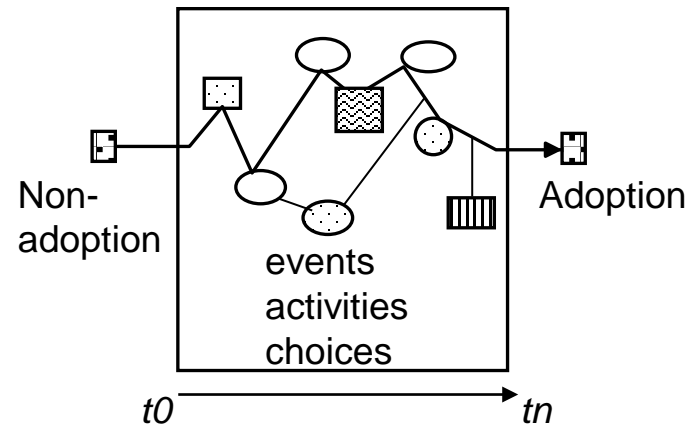# A simple understanding of process perspectives?

Variance theory:
Patterns of **relationships** between **variables**

Process theory:
Patterns in **sequences** of **events** in time

Attributes of

environment
organization
leaders x_i Y   Degree of
technology   adoption of
decision process   innovation

$$Y = f(x_1, ..., x_n)$$

Non-adoption

events
activities
choices

Adoption

t_0 ———→ t_n

Robert Chia

The theory of process research

What Does A Process-Philosophical Approach to Research Entail?

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EGOS 2014
Sub-Plenary Discussion on 'Reimagining, rethinking, reshaping:
Learning from process research

PROCESS PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK: KEY PRESUPPOSITIONS

- A World-View - Reality Perpetually In Flux, Transforming and Ever-Changing

- 'Things' are Secondary Effects of Relational Processes (rejection of the Process Reducibility Thesis)

- Order/Organization/Individuation are Temporary Stabilizations

- Becoming over Being

- Activity over Substance

- Change over Persistence

- Novelty over Continuity

ORIGINS & ADVOCATES OF PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

- In the WEST: Heraclitus, Bergson, James, Whitehead…

  - Philosophers & Physicists: Serres, Deleuze, Hartshorne, Rescher, Cobb, Prigogine, Bohm

- In the EAST:

  - The I Ching (book of Change); Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu

    - Nishida, Nishitani – 'Radical Impermanence'

  - Process philosophy 'seem to approximate more to some strains of Indian or Chinese, thought than to western Asiatic, or European thought. One side makes process ultimate; the other side makes fact ultimate' (Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929: 5)

'BECOMING': THE OVERRIDING PRINCIPLE OF A PROCESS WORLD-VIEW

- 'That *how* an actual entity *becomes* constitutes *what* an entity *is*…Its '*being*' is constituted by its 'becoming' (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929: 31)

- 'What really *exists* is not things made, but things in the making (James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 1909/1996: 263)

- '*what is* is the process of becoming…objects, events, entities, conditions, structures, etc., are forms that can be abstracted from this process' (Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980: 48).

IMPLICATIONS OF A PROCESS WORLD-VIEW

- Immediate sensible life is a 'blooming buzzing confusion' (William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1911/1996: 50)

- Linguistic Construction of Reality – 'Meaning' = 'Mean'

- 'out of this aboriginal sensible muchness…conception names – in the sky "constellation", on the earth "beach", "sea", "cliff"…Out of time we cut "days" and "nights", "summers" and "winters". We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is…all these abstract *whats* are concepts' (James, 1911/1996: 50)

- 'through the meaningless sign linked to the meaningless sound we have built the shape and meaning of Western man' (Marshal McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1967: 50)

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF A PROCESS WORLDVIEW

- 'the universe is to a large extent…essentially formed by disorder, in which order floats' (Prigogine, 'The Philosophy of Instability' *Futures*, 1989: 399)

- Acknowledgement of pervasiveness of 'Unowned' Ever-Changing Processes – Change is NATURAL, 'ORDER/ORGANIZATION, and INDIVIDUATION' Artificial

- 'Individuals', 'Organizations' are 'condensation of histories of growth and maturation within fields of social relations' (Ingold, 2000: 3) - 'We are not things but dramas…we *are* not, though we *live*' (Ingold, *Evolution and Social Life,* 1986: 117).

- 'Order/Organization/Entities' Achievements of Human STABILIZING and ARRESTING actions – Separate and Fix.

A PROCESS-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH

TAKING A CUE FROM JAMES MARCH'S 1972 'MODEL BIAS IN SOCIAL ACTION'

- Rejection of The Assumption that Action must:
  - Have an END-PURPOSE
  - Be Necessarily CONSISTENT
  - Be RATIONAL

- '…of all of man's history, the ideas of purpose, consistency, and rationality are relatively new' (p. 419)….Interesting people and interesting organizations…need ways of doing things for which they have no good reason…sometimes …they need to act before they think. (p. 423)

- PURPOSIVE not PURPOSEFUL (Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 1999; Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice, 1990;* Chia & Holt, *Strategy without Design*, 2009)

- Research: 'Scholarship of Common Sense' (Ghoshal 2005)

LEVEL 1 – SUBSTANTIVE PROCESS RESEARCH

- *Research: 'Scholarship of Common Sense'*
  - *Adventurism and Detective Work (Sumantra Ghoshal)*
  - *Imaginative Generalization (Whitehead)*
  - *Disciplined Imagination (Karl Weick)*
  - *Technology of Foolishness (James March)*
  - *'Syncretistic' vs Linear, Rational Approach (Anton Ehrenzweig) – Essence of 'Artistic Rigor'*

- *Research as Creating Rich, Thick, Descriptive and Speculative Accounts of Organizational Phenomena*
  - *How Things/Situations BECOME – Twists and Turns*
  - *Focus on small, incidental (OWNED/UNOWNED) CHANGES*
  - *Attention on UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES*
  - *Sensitivity to PERIPHERAL happenings*
  - *Loosely-Coupled Causal Mentality*
  - *Research as Relevation: Making the Seemingly Irrelevant, Relevant and Expanding Horizons of Comprehension (Chia, 2014)*

HERACLITUS: 'HARMONIÊ APHANÊS PHRANERÊS KREITTÔN'

- 'The hidden harmony is deeper, the invisible connection stronger, the inconspicuous correspondence more interesting than the apparent' (in G. Parkes, 1987, *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, p. 106)
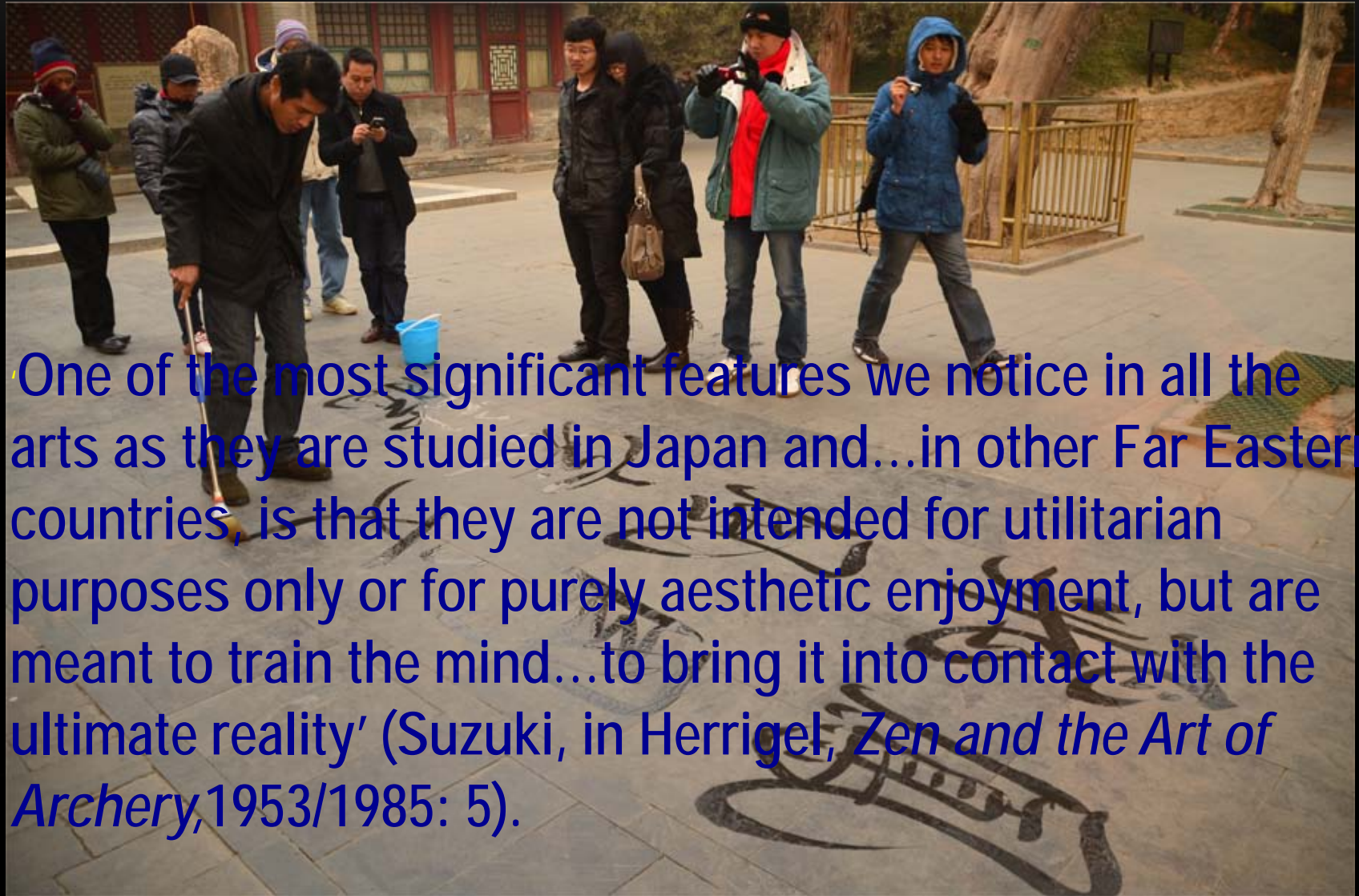
LEVEL 2 – REFLEXIVE RESEARCH

- Honing Empirical Sensitivity – Seeing Anew
  - *'Innocence of the Eye' (John Ruskin)*
  - *'uncompromising democracy of vision' (Anton Ehrenzweig, 1967),*
  - *'Radical Empiricism' (William James),*
  - *Attainment of 'Sunao' vision (Konusuke Matsushita)*

- 'In a world of becoming…even the ordinary, the mundane or the intuitive gives cause for astonishment – the kind of astonishment that comes from treasuring every moment, as if, in that moment, we were encountering the world for the first time, sensing its pulse, marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how such a world is possible. Reanimating the western tradition of thought, I argue, means recovering the sense of astonishment banished from official science' (Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*, 2011: 64)

RESEARCH AS **RE-SEARCHING** INTERMINABLY

- *Self-Cultivation & Re-discovery*

- *'And the end of all our exploring, Will be to arrive where we started, And know the place for the first time'* (T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *The Four Quartets*, Faber and Faber, 2001)

- '*Having searched for her hundreds and thousands of times in the crowd, suddenly turning back by chance, I find her there in the waning candlelight*' (Xin Qiji, 辛弃疾 Song Dynasty, in *Green Jade Table in The Lantern Festival*

RE-SEARCHING INTERMINABLY

'One of the most significant features we notice in all the arts as they are studied in Japan and…in other Far Eastern countries, is that they are not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for purely aesthetic enjoyment, but are meant to train the mind…to bring it into contact with the ultimate reality' (Suzuki, in Herrigel, *Zen and the Art of Archery*,1953/1985: 5).

Thank You for Your Attention!

How are you feeling?

- Swept into real time, everything is endogenous, no static concepts to hold onto, no dependent variables…

Studying Process with Qualitative Data

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Being and Becoming

- Being: In the moment (the practice)

- Becoming: The practice as it is unfolding over time

- Temporary, precarious, unfolding, becoming, flux, (de)stabilizing, unintended, emerging

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- Spee, A. P. & P. Jarzabkowski. 2011. '**Strategic planning as communicative process**'. *Organization Studies* 32.9: 1217-1245.
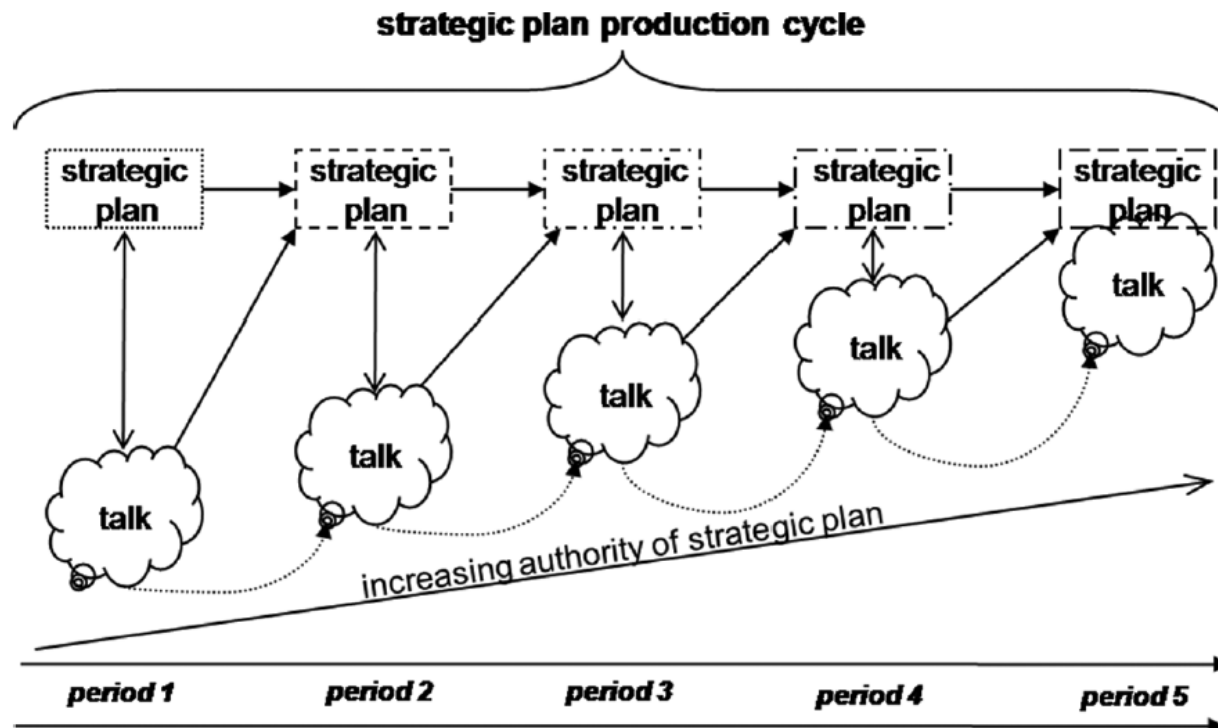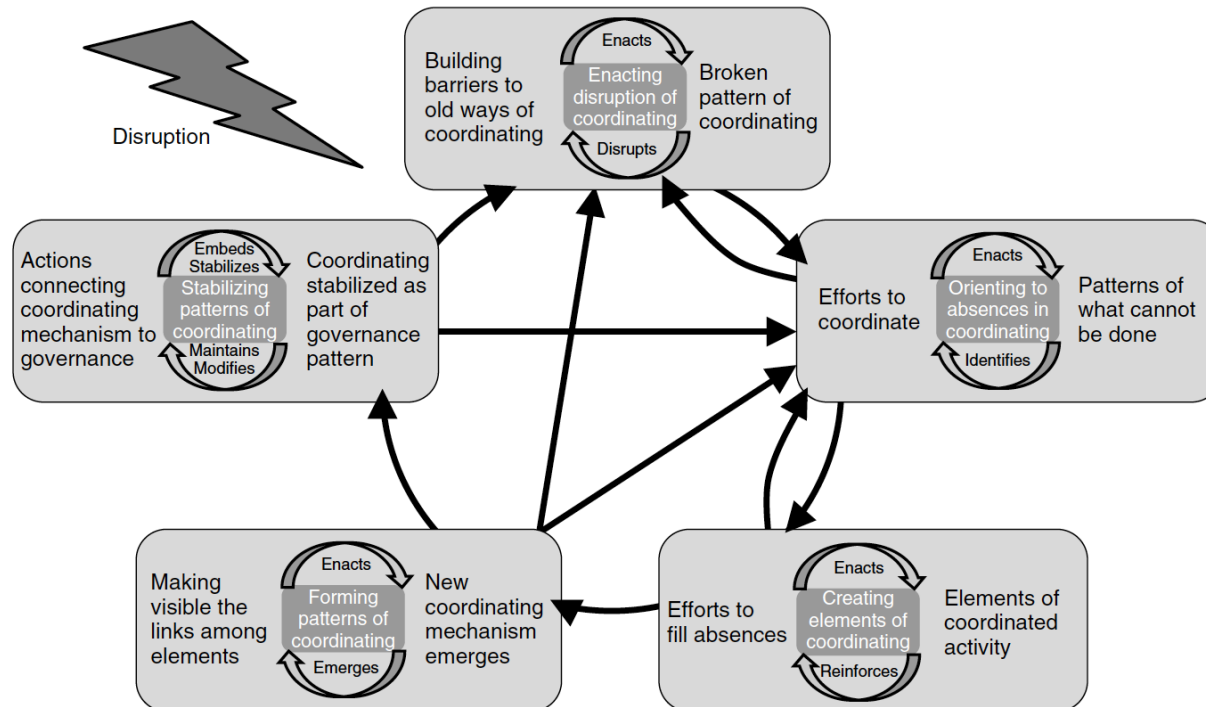- Studying process **within time** and **across time**

Figure 2. Recursive process of recontextualization and decontextualization

- Jarzabkowski, P., J. K. Le & M. Feldman. 2012. **Toward a theory of coordinating: Creating coordinating mechanisms in practice**' *Organization Science,* 23.4:907-927.
- Mass ethnographic data of process over time.
- What is a category? How to **show** patterns of practice
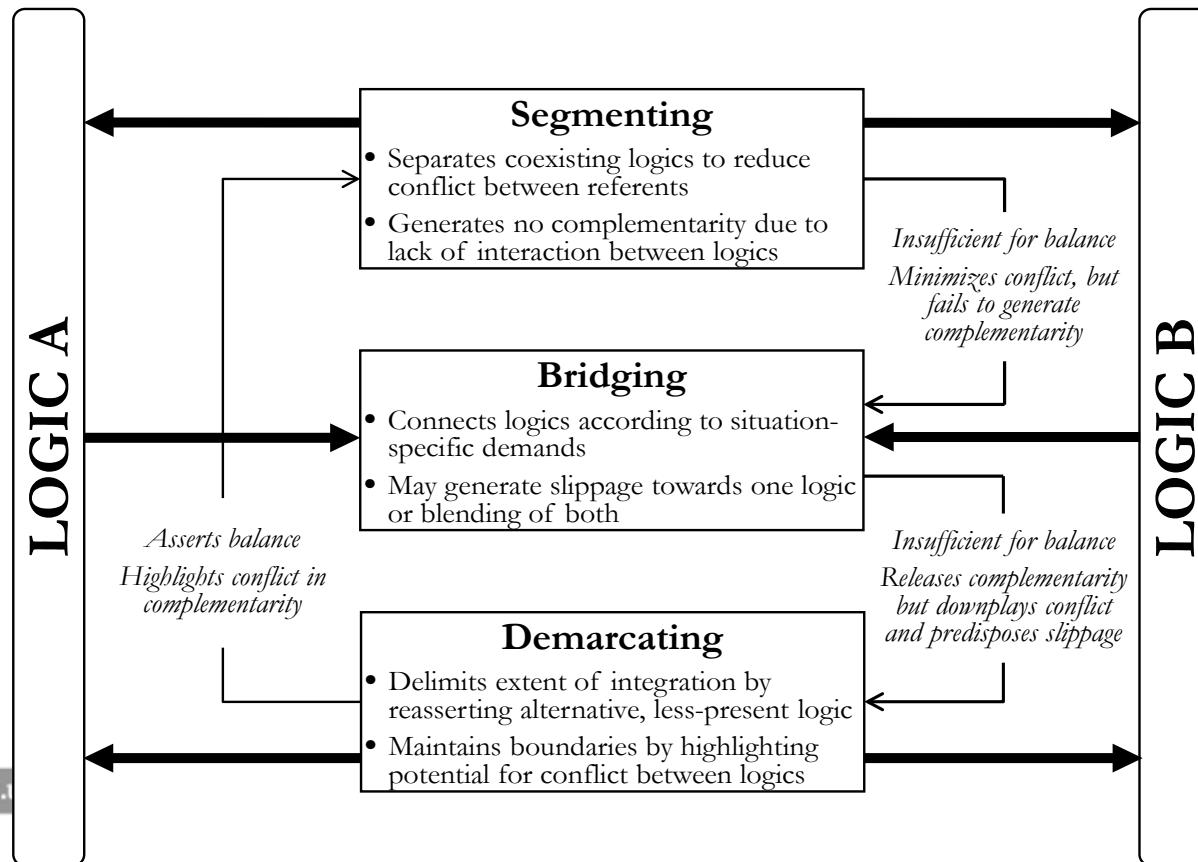

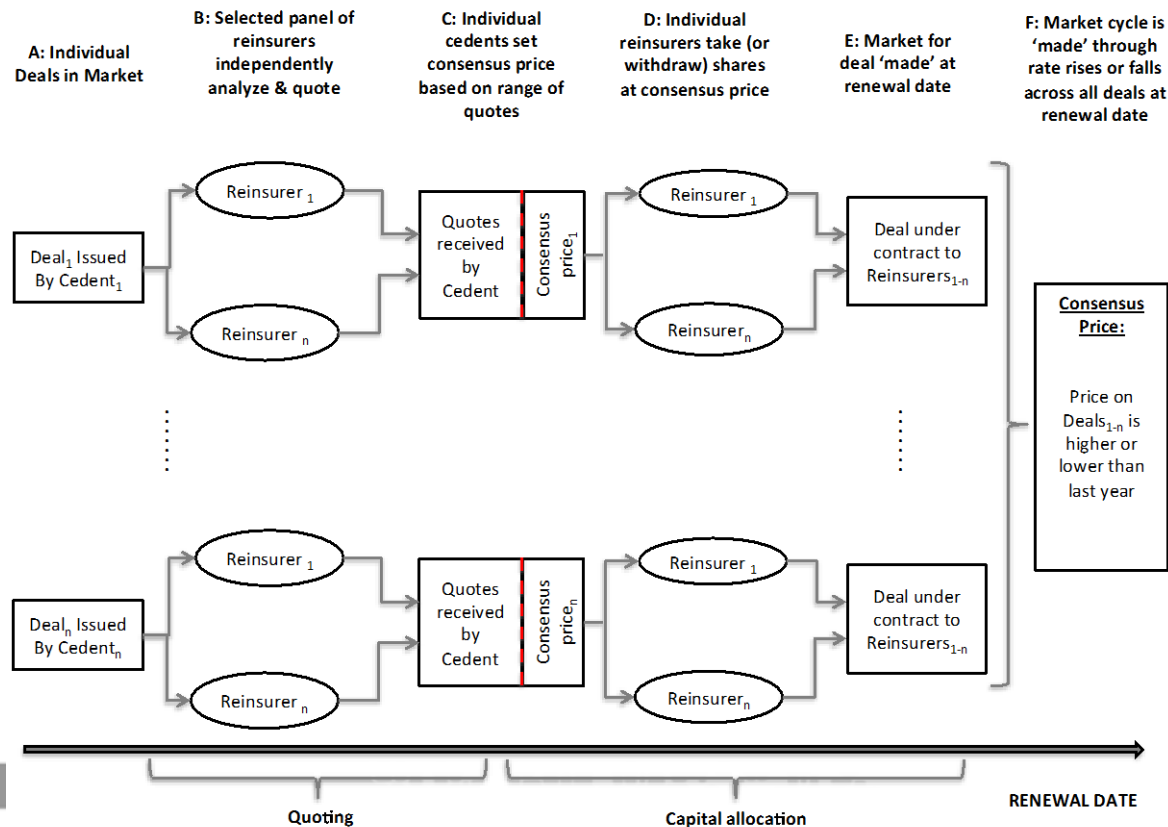Figure 2   Creating a Coordinating Mechanism Through Coordinating

When the practice *is* the process

- Smets, M., P. Jarzabkowski, G. Burke and P. Spee. Reinsurance Trading in Lloyd's of London: Balancing conflicting-yet-complementary logics in practice. *Academy of Management Journal* forthcoming
- Mass ethnographic data. Temporal BUT the process is in the practice

LOGIC A

LOGIC B

Segmenting
- Separates coexisting logics to reduce conflict between referents
- Generates no complementarity due to lack of interaction between logics

Insufficient for balance
Minimizes conflict, but fails to generate complementarity

Bridging
- Connects logics according to situation-specific demands
- May generate slippage towards one logic or blending of both

Asserts balance
Highlights conflict in complementarity

Insufficient for balance
Releases complementarity but downplays conflict and predisposes slippage

Demarcating
- Delimits extent of integration by reasserting alternative, less-present logic
- Maintains boundaries by highlighting potential for conflict between logics
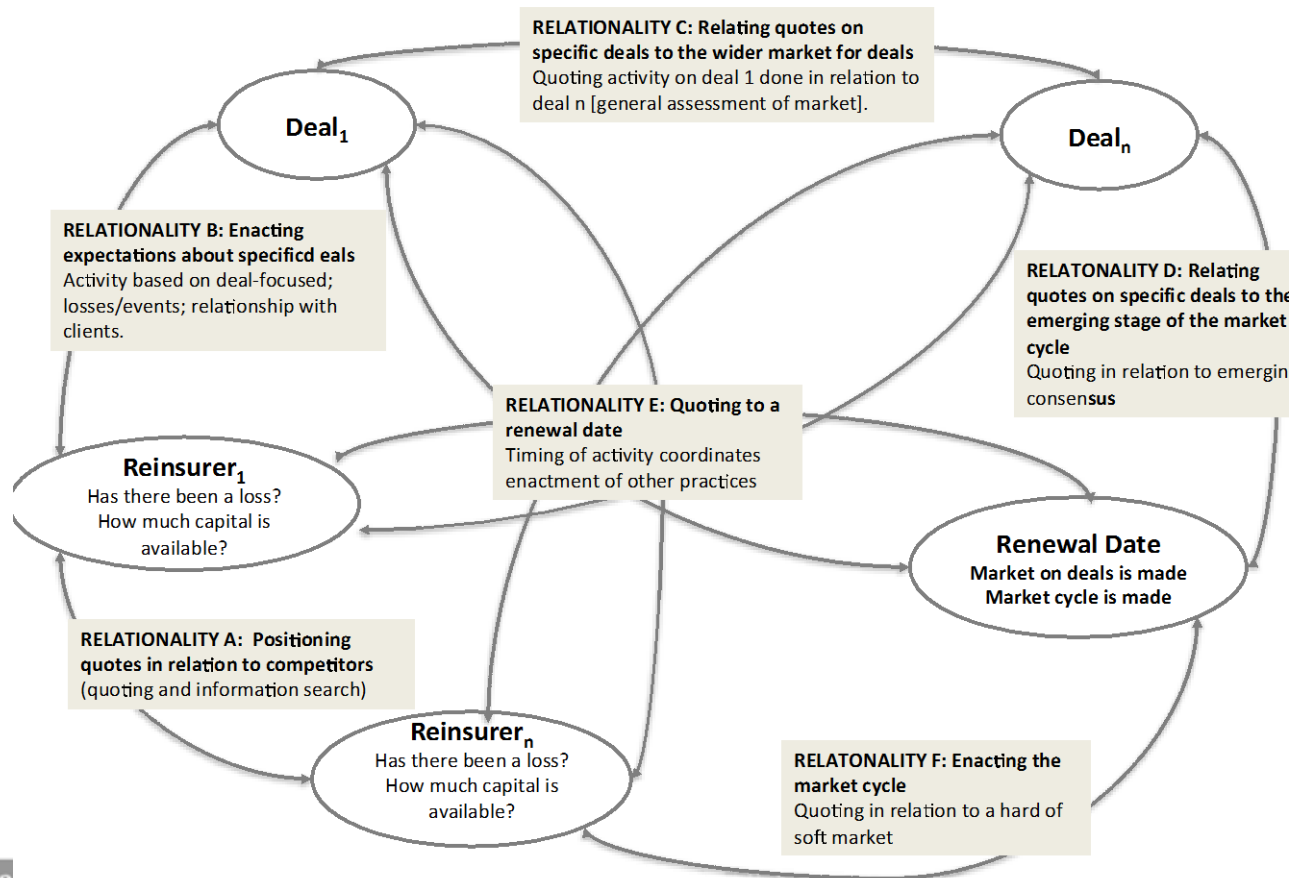
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- Jarzabkowski, P. R. Bednarek & P. Spee *Making a Market for Acts of God: Risk-trading in the Global Reinsurance Industry*. Oxford University Press.
- From this: Process of establishing consensus price on deals

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- To this: Nested relationalities in constructing consensus pricing and market cycles

Concluding thoughts

Does the data matter?

• Somewhat

• Real-time and retrospective

• Interviews, observation, secondary data

• Ethnography

The phenomena you want to explain matters more

Levels of analysis fade into the background

Questions for Robert & Paula

- How are your notions of process similar and different?
- How do you contribute to theory drawing on a process lens? How do you get beyond idiosyncratic stories?
- What role do outcomes play in process perspectives?
- Process philosophy sometimes seems to be associated with ethical, moral or even spiritual issues. How do you view this?