A Systems Theory of Marginalization and its Implications for Systemic Intervention

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This talk will cover:

• The systems theory of marginalization that I have been developing and applying over a 29-year period.

• Strategies to challenge marginalization, illustrated with examples from my past systemic interventions – but beware the dark sides of some of these strategies!

• Conclusions
The Boundary Idea (Churchman, 1970; Ulrich, 1983)

Values

Inclusion of stakeholders and issues

Exclusion of stakeholders and issues
Process of Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

SYMBOILIC EXPRESSION IN RITUAL

CONFLICT

SACRED OR PROFANE

Secondary boundary

Primary boundary

Values arising within the primary boundary
Process of Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Discourse 1

SYMBOLIC EXPRESSION IN RITUAL

CONFLICT

Secondary boundary

Discourse 2

Values arising within the primary boundary

Primary boundary
Addressing Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Values arising within the primary boundary

Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections
Amplifying Marginalized Voices and Creating Empathic Connection: Homeless Children on the Streets
Addressing Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Values arising within the primary boundary

Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections

Demonstrate the Connections between the Foci of Different People to Blur the Primary Boundary
Demonstrating the Connections between the Central and Peripheral: Bugs in Water

Regardless of whether the price inc. or dec. there is pressure to intensify production
Addressing Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Unite against a Common Enemy

Demonstrate the Connections between the Foci of Different People to Blur the Primary Boundary

Values arising within the primary boundary

Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections

SYMBOLOGIC EXPRESSION IN RITUAL

CONFLICT

SACRED OR PROFANE

Primary boundary

Secondary boundary
Unite against a Common Enemy: Designing Services for Homeless Children on the Streets
Addressing Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Unite against a Common Enemy

Demonstrate the Connections between the Foci of Different People to Blur the Primary Boundary

Transcend Narrowly-Focused Values

Values arising within the primary boundary

Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections

SACRED OR PROFANE
Transcending Narrowly Focused Values: Public Engagement on Sustainable Water Management:

- A new systemic dialogue method for a 2½ hour public meeting:
  - Presented key facts about water systems
  - Explored meanings of drought to different stakeholders
  - Identified relevant values
  - Identified options for water management
  - Evaluated options against the full range of core values
Addressing Marginalization

Values arising within the secondary boundary

Undermine Negative Stereotypes

Unite against a Common Enemy

Demonstrate the Connections between the Central and Peripheral to Blur the Primary Boundary

Transcend Narrowly-Focused Values

Values arising within the primary boundary

Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections

SYMBOIC EXPRESSION IN RITUAL

CONFLICT

SACRED OR PROFANE

Secondary boundary

Primary boundary

Narrowly-Focused Values
Undermining Negative Stereotypes: Genetic Modification in New Zealand

1. Diverse stakeholders are interviewed to determine values that matter

2. In a workshop, individuals order the issues from ‘core’ to ‘peripheral’

3. People discuss their orderings

4. Analysis reveals the importance of particular values to different stakeholder groups

5. People discuss the implications
Addressing Marginalization

- Establish Rituals to Reinforce the Secondary Boundary
- Values arising within the primary boundary
- Amplify Marginalized Voices and Create Empathic Connections
- Values arising within the secondary boundary
- Unite against a Common Enemy
- Demonstrate the Connections between the Foci of Different People to Blur the Primary Boundary
- Transcend Narrowly-Focused Values
- Undermine Negative Stereotypes

SYMBOIC EXPRESSION IN RITUAL

CONFLICT

SECONDARY BOUNDARY

SACRED OR PROFANE

PRIMARY BOUNDARY
Establish Rituals to Reinforce the Secondary Boundary: Stakeholder Consultation on 30-Year Roadmaps for Investing in Controversial Science and Technology

(1) Introduce the roadmap concept to people in the relevant sectors (e.g., through meetings, documents)

(2) Set up the individual roadmaps (e.g., form steering groups, develop generic tools and templates, collate evidence)

(3) Communicate early thinking with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., circulate drafts, hold workshops)

(4) Finalise thinking in consultation with key agencies (e.g., steering groups, ministries)

(5) Support implementation in relevant science sectors
Conclusions

• This systems theory is useful for generating insights into marginalization processes.

• It is particularly useful for informing systemic interventions.

• Systemic intervention processes and problem structuring methods can themselves offer ritual processes to challenge marginalization and move beyond conflict.