



The Worldwork Perspective

Why using perspectives

A perspective is more encompassing than a simple viewpoint. It is not only a way of perceiving what we look at, but includes our framework of understanding. It is the manner in which we make connections and draw conclusions about what we observe, and establish categories that help us to structure an event so that we can compare it with other experiences, rather than perceive an endless chain of singularities, which are disconnected from each other. Perspectives are essential building blocks of paradigms, and such always relative.

What do we use the Worldwork perspective on

Worldwork is a process oriented model for working within organizations and communities, and for facilitating processes that are important to the collective. As such it includes the whole body of organizational processes and learning, for example large group facilitation, leadership development, vision and strategy building, business development, peace process facilitation, the facilitation of political processes, large and small scale conflict resolution and prevention, organizational change facilitation, teambuilding, and leadership coaching, etc. Worldwork is the sociological sister of Processwork. They share a psychological focus on awareness and perception, a philosophical basis that integrates modern science with spirituality, and the love for artistic expression. Although Processwork is more often mentioned in connection with the facilitation of individual and relationship processes, in practice the application of both models blends under the umbrella of their shared perspective. Every individual process mirrors aspects of the whole, and every collective process plays out and amplifies aspects of our individual experiences.

Key elements of the Worldwork Perspective

Here are some key points of the Worldwork perspective from which a Worldworker views and works with collective processes.

The Fragmented and the Whole

We frequently experience ourselves as isolated from the events around us. The organizations and communities that we live and work in and the parts that make up the world as a whole seem to be unrelated and isolated fragments of our experience. We feel alienated from what our organizations do, either excluded or overused by the communities that we connect with, and pressured to deal with “resistances” of groups that won’t see our



leadership, or pushed around by leaders who not sufficiently see and appreciate our contributions.

Many cultures have myths that tell stories of how these broken parts can be brought together, showing that this process of dismemberment and rebuilding is needed as a rejuvenation process to experience ourselves as both individuals and a community. Please read [Arnold Mindells Quantum Mind](#) to learn how the Chinese myth of Pan Ku is a metaphor for a collective organizing principle that affects us all. From our Worldwork perspective, conflict and tensions, fights and wars, and competition and the desire to overcome, are holistic attempts from different parts of a collective to relate to one another, and to establish a sense of the whole. In this respect, conflicts and tensions serve the same purpose as alliances with people and groups that share our values and views – to make contact and exchange information. Beyond our isolation, we are an unbroken whole, which actually makes it impossible for us not to relate. We can not not relate, and it doesn't seem to matter to the whole how the relationship looks, as long as the parts relate to each other and exchange information. It is up to us to unfold the meaning of these relationships in a deeper way, so that the pain and friction that is part of conflict can be transformed into synergy and collaboration. The first step in that process is a perspective that says yes to the relationship as it exists, in whatever form it is expressing itself, war or peace, competition or collaboration. Only if the various parts of the system are met first with acceptance can we unfold the important information that is contained in the conflict or tension. This is a counterintuitive statement : how can war create more relationship and how can competition bring us closer together? Equally paradoxical seems the notion that friendship, closeness, and alliances bring us closer, but not only - they also augment fragmentation. From this perspective, an insistence on peace can inhibit the information flow that happens during conflict, and therefore can actually amplify conflict. Anyone who has ever been in the midst of a fight and had friends recommending from the background to forget it all and calm down, knows about this. Consider these following cartoons, and study how the Worldwork perspective sees information flow.

Meet Our First Two Actors

We have two actors to begin with, A and B:



- I am an individual A
- I have an individual view A



- I have individual values A
- I have an individual view A of what the whole is
- I have individual needs A
- I have an individual vision A of what it means to be good or to come together and to collaborate

I am an individual B



- I have an individual view B
- I have individual values B
- I have an individual view B of what the whole is
- I have individual needs B
- I have an individual vision B of what it means to be good or to come together

These two actors relate to each other:



I hate B, B is so round and wavy, B's views are not straight, and B has no angle on life, and whatever B does is a way "around" the real issue. B is round the bend.

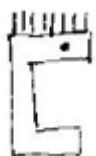


I hate A, A is only angles. A never looks around for other views, A can't stand it if I make waves. A is so straight that it takes all the fun out of everything we ever do. A's angle on everything suffocates everyone that is around.

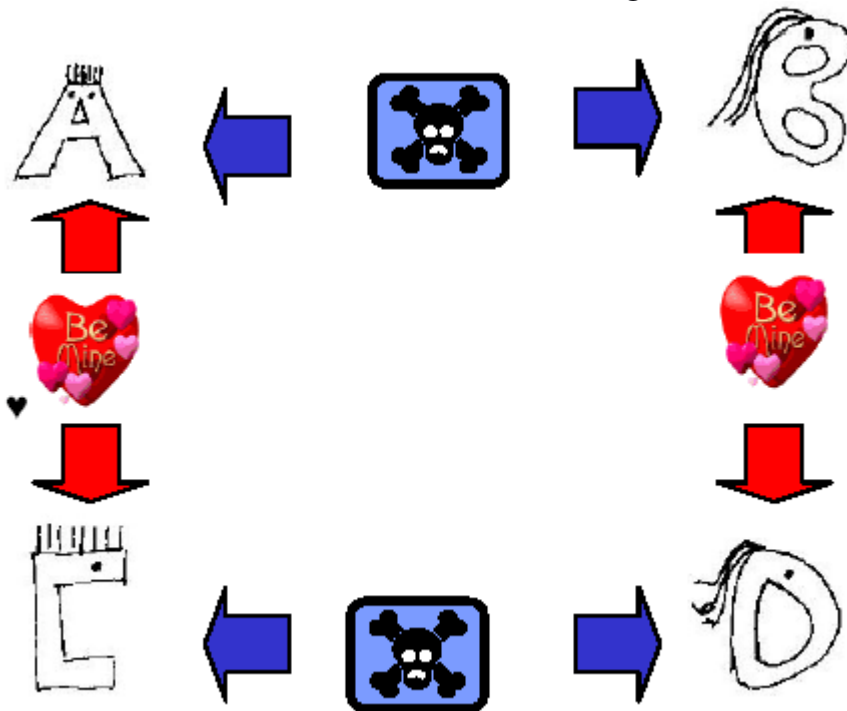
But thank God, A and B don't have to remain alone in their isolation from each other. A has C:



I prefer C, now C is very good looking, I feel aligned with C



well, if more people were like A, we would have more structure in life, and less waves to deal with.



Worldwork capitalize on these effects by adopting an open perspective to conflict and differences, allowing it to happen, facilitating the process, and looking for the relationship component or information flow that can be made useful to all the participants involved in the play. For practical examples please see [case descriptions on working on a conflict between East and West Germans](#).

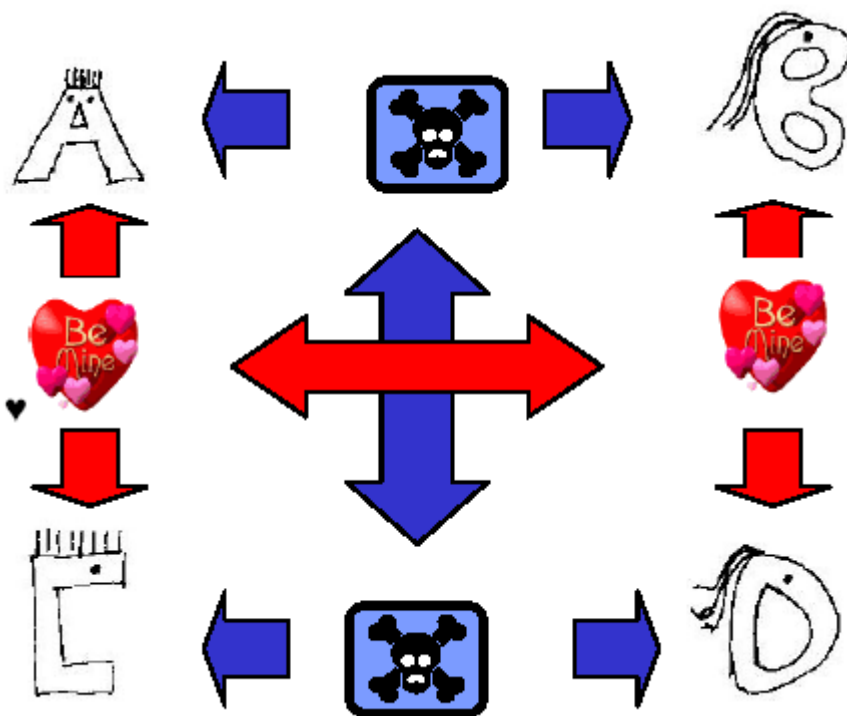
From a Worldwork Perspective, the various relationships in the system are attempts by the system to connect with the whole – as individuals we perceive some units of the whole as sustaining our fragmented identities and others as threatening to them. If we can unfold the relationship aspects behind the conflicts and affinities, we can discover a holistic experience of who we are as an organization or community.

In physics, these relationships are explained in the principle of non-locality. Nonlocality describes the fact that in all our fragmentation, we are essentially also whole and in fact aspects of the whole. It is because of the phenomena of nonlocality that everyone of us can find an aspect of ourselves in the other, and at the same time experience a local, individual identity. We act as individuals - individual subgroups, individual departments, etc, - and this is right and needed. At the same time, we are all living out aspects of the whole that we belong to, the group mind or organizational myth, the principle that affects us all and makes us behave as parts of a larger being. The aggravating attitude that we perceive from A and C is equally strong in B and D, and forms a mirror, a non-local aspect of the community that needs to be brought to awareness. Deep Democracy, a Worldwork



principle developed by Arnold Mindell, believes in the value of all positions, each of which contributes to a flow of information within the system, which in turn is attempting to connect all parts. These “connections” themselves act like agents in the system, and appear to have a life of their own. We experience them as gossip, “emotions”, resistances, atmospheres, etc. If we can understand and play them out as agents, then everything in the system starts to flow; structure, angles, straight decisions, a circle view, and low and high tides of energy waves can co-exist, and actually even enhance each other.

Look how that can work:



Notice in the above pictures two symmetries: On one level, A and C and B and D are symmetric. Each couple enjoys each others' similarity, and believes that the “other” is different and can never be the same. On another level, you can see how their very attitudes show the opposite; the two couples are actually identical in how they view “other” and “sameness”. The attitudes of “sameness” and “difference” can be utilized by thinking of them as additional roles that belong to the field of this group. By giving voice to these roles, a different dialogue appears. To be more accurate, the dialogue that is already present on a systemic level is being unveiled. It is already happening, but has not been made conscious for the agents ABCD.

On one level, AC relate to BD. On another level, the positive and negative roles relate to each other. The heart needs to talk to the skull, so to speak, to understand the whole



system and the relationship between them. For example, consider this simplistic dialogue between the roles of heart and skull, which is meant to illustrate a point.



If I was the dominating style of communication between people, we would have a loving world and everyone would get along and work with each other. The planet would enjoy an amazing productivity and synergy.

Oh yeah? First of all, everything would be a great mush with no differentiation! And second, you say you are all heart, but you hate me because I destroy things.



I destroyed tyrannies, allowed tough decisions that turned out later to have worked best for the whole, the list goes on. If more people were like me, we would have a better world.



Well, I must say, you got me there. I am more you than I thought with my insistence on wanting it all my way, and my hate for you. Go ahead and be yourself, I will try to understand you better.



Well, that feels better, I must say, and since that is important to me, I must have a bit of your heart in me also.



Maybe we can work together then. Both of us are important in this system, and eventually can be used when we are needed without having to have a go at each other whenever one appears for one moment. I guess that is called synergy !



This dialogue is meant to show in a schematic way how the arbitrary roles of love and hate, which are present in the beginning configuration, are both needed within the system for its full functionality. If you would like to see an example of how a dialogue like this might occur in a business setting, go to [case description about a Global 500 company, who works on their diversity issues](#).

Reality, Change and Flow: new categories for describing change and flow based on our levels of perception.

The questions, “What is reality” and “How do we describe change and flow” are of course keeping philosophers busy, but also quantum physicists, mathematicians, systems theory scientists, etc. The measurable aspect of our experiences is most often referred to by “common sense” as “real”. If something remains in the same state long enough that it can be compared with an agreed upon standard and you can come back, compare it to that standard yourself, and come out with the same conclusion, then we have in fact



“measured” it, and we will then call it “real”. Quantum mechanics has destroyed our view of the world as a static picture. It has taught us to think of the world as a culmination of different potentials and probabilities, interacting momentarily with an observer, dancing back into the world of potentials and probabilities, and becoming momentarily “real” through this interaction. Common sense considers “reality” to be the realm in which potentials have manifested themselves. These potentials have a change process that is so slow that they appear to us to be frozen in time and space. As a result, they are measurable. Using the analogy of a play, “reality” as defined by common sense would be equivalent to the backdrop scenery that doesn’t change throughout the various acts. From this viewpoint, the actors that move in and out and tell us a story would be considered unreal and discountable. Although most of us believe that the actors and plots are important when we go to the theater, when it comes to our organizational lives, we believe that reality lies not in the actors and story, but in the backdrop scenery which consists of the organizational facts. Although this mode of perception simplifies things, and therefore has its advantages in many areas of life, it is problematic when we work with organizations that tend to change rapidly. The Worldwork perspective uses categories for describing and working with organizations that relate not only to the measurable aspects of a collective, such as the material outcomes of a meeting that are frozen in space and time, but also to the non-material aspects, by framing the material outcomes in terms of how we experience change, which aspects of the potential have manifested, which are about to manifest, and which could manifest with more facilitation. Although we must keep a steady eye on the bottom line, we can’t be seduced into trying to understand reality from this view. We must keep perspective of potentials and their different tendencies for emergence.

Worldwork has named three levels of experience in this process of categorization, which help us to understand change

1. The first level addresses the measurable Reality – “Manifested Potential” that can be measured, and is therefore considered “real”. The term Consensus Reality Level is used to show that this level does not describe something that is actually “real”, per se, but rather a collective agreement about reality that changes in relation to culture and scientific progress.
2. The second level addresses that which is emerging. It describes potentials that we can perceive, but have not yet manifested in form. This is the “imaginary” level. We can already make a picture of it, it is about to emerge - in fact it actually has emerged as a picture, but this picture has not manifested itself as a measurable event. Following the concept of the Australian Aboriginals, who use different categories of emergence to frame change processes in time, we call this the Dreaming Level, or the emerging level. These potentials will not necessarily become manifest, but they may - (put your money where your mouth is). For



example if you enter a meeting of an executive committee, you might experience 1) apprehension about how to meet a challenge you are facing as an organization, 2) hope and excitement because you have creative thoughts about how to overcome it, and 3) fear and depression because you are nervous it will overcome you. These various potential scenarios are not just imagined, they are very much part of reality, but they are often discounted. This emerging level is taken as serious by the Worldworker as is the consensus reality level. Potential and emerging processes are often referred to as “emotional” processes, which belong to a subcategory of emergence - all emotional processes have an emerging potential in them, but not all emerging potentials are “emotional”. Therefore, when we work with emotional aspects of groups, we are looking for the emerging creative potentials.

3. The Unbroken World Level - Emerged and emerging refer to the relationship between events and the observer’s position in space and time. The experience of events as “real” or “a dream” depends on the state of the observer. It is the relativity of our awareness that creates these fragments. At the level beneath this relativity, we experience a whole, unbroken world. This is a third level that we relate to, a level in which everything is connected. At this level, the organization is an undivided whole with a collective mind - there is no conflict or relationship, all is one. We call this the Sentient Level or Essence Level. On this level, we find basic essences that preclude dualism. Although we can sense this level, it can’t quite be described in words. The essence works on us and we can experience its effects. For example, in a recent meeting with executives, two members with a history of a long, complicated relationship were suddenly able to work together. One member made an unexpected first step, and broke the stand-off that had existed between them for months. Everyone was relieved and moved. I asked one member what allowed her to make the first step. She looked at me puzzled and said, “I have no idea! I wanted to react to her, but then something in the atmosphere that morning was different, a sense of joy, and it just overcame me in that moment and before I knew it, I said something positive about her suggestion.”

Framing the experiences and events that take place organizations according to these levels allows us to understand the organization as a living being in a process of change with a spirit that wants to express itself. Our perspective assists us in understanding that spirit in terms of the direction it wants to take, and therefore helps us to co-create with the members, facilitating the manifestation of these various potentials. See how the local spirit of Swiss businessneighborhood brings everyone together, encouraging them to relate and create synergy between unlikely groups.