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Before meaningful change can occur in our social worlds, we must first ask whether or not the individuals within those social worlds understand themselves to be active participants with choices about how they communicate and what they create through that communicating. If so, *how*? And if not, *why*? Without a sense of agency for self, co-creation of meaning, and participation in coordination, individuals perceive themselves to be not only powerless, but also *choiceless* in a seemingly random or unjust world. This workshop seeks to intervene at the root of this story of inefficacy and instead both equips and empowers participants to get creative about their communication and the worlds they may create through it.

In contrast to the widely accepted Transmission Model of communication, which describes a linear, one-way process where a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver, Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is a theory and practice of communication that claims “persons-in-conversation co-construct their own social realities and are simultaneously shaped by the worlds they create.” It is this more generative, more participatory lens on communication that enables individuals within systems to see themselves as active participants with multiple choices and modalities for communicating to create better social worlds.

The second order cybernetic perspective on communication has resonances with CMM – not unexpectedly, since Barnett Pearce, one of the founders of CMM, drew from Gregory Bateson’s work. Second order cybernetics includes multiple modalities, not just the verbal – embodied non-verbal communication, visual art, sound without referential meaning, etc. – when considering communication between humans and between humans and the world. Deeper orders are added through communicators observing themselves as part of a system, including who or what is communicating, creating “differences that make a difference,” as cycles of initiation and response continue. Further complexity and deeper insight is gained through the inclusion of reflexive feedback loops wherein the observer/communicator is considering their role in relation to that system and as constituting that system, not just specific others, within constraints that may limit their control. All this may seem very “serious,” but cyberneticians such as Bateson, Pask, Nachmanovitch have used and reflected on play and improvisation as ways of using embodiment and reflexivity to heighten the potential of communication for creating and expanding ways of human-being-in-the-world.

However, there are other theories and practices that have also converged on this playful territory – the many approaches to theater and improvisation, improvisational dance and music, etc. – that developed independently of cybernetics but can serve as vehicles for deepening understanding of as well as enlarging formal cybernetic theory of communication. In this workshop we will use exercises derived from several bodies of improvisational practice, including Interplay (www.interplay.com) and Spolin theater games (Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theater*, Northwestern University Press, 1999).

With a particular focus on this kind of communication- including what constitutes communication *beyond* conversation, how meaning gets made within communication, and what stories communicators choose to tell and ignore- Abbie and Eve invite you to this highly playful workshop exploring the process of communication as a coordinated management of meaning. By combining principles of play, improvisation, and coordination, participants will have the opportunity to experience and reflect on the critical moments of uncertainty and possibility within communication.

Abbie VanMeter, is the Executive Director of the [CMM Institute for Personal and Social Evolution](#), which serves an international community of scholar-practitioners dedicated to the ongoing research, practice, and evolution of [Coordinated Management of Meaning \(CMM\)](#), a social constructionist approach to communication that situates each individual as an active participant in the co-creation of social worlds. Through her ongoing learning- both academic and experiential- Abbie has become a champion for a CMM-inspired communication perspective as a transformative framework for individuals and

the systems they live in. Guided by a mission to co-create better social worlds through better communication, Abbie works to equip and empower individuals with CMM language, tools, and concepts that enable more mindful, compassionate, curious, and generative communication to occur. In addition to creating educational resources in the form of videos, infographics, and webinars, as Executive Director of the CMM Institute, Abbie expertly facilitates important conversations on the CMMi podcast, *Stories Lived. Stories Told.*, by demonstrating the practical application of the communication perspective in both content and process. With a particular interest in designing spaces that foster collective storytelling and storyhearing, Abbie brings both attention and intention to the often taken for granted aspect of collaborative meaning-making in processes of communication.

Eve C. Pinsker is a cultural anthropologist (PhD, University of Chicago 1997) who has applied social theory, ethnographic methods, and systems thinking to evaluation research on comprehensive and collaborative public health, community development, and leadership training programs. She has been a core faculty member of the DrPH in Leadership program at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health since 2012.