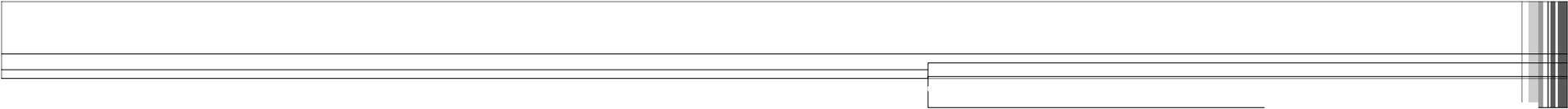


Social Bodies: Bringing Materiality into Theorizing about High Reliability Organizations

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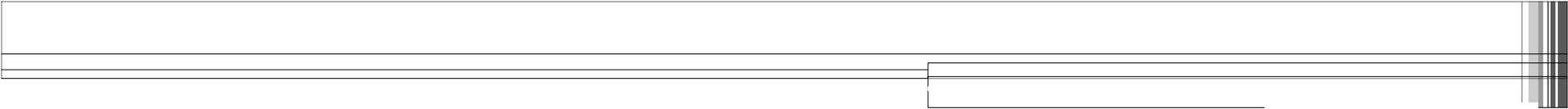
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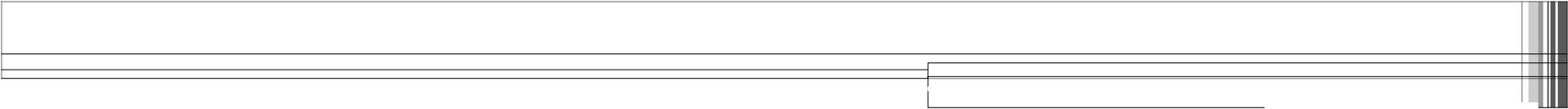
Overview

- Goal: Consider the material body in theorizing about *reliability*.
- Main Points:
 - Current theorizing about HROs and openings for considering the body
 - Promising constructs
 - Lingering questions



Setting: The High Reliability Organization

- Reliability: achieving consistent outcomes through constant awareness of potentially unstable situations and anomalies in the environment.
- Requires that we understand:
 - How knowledge is embodied
 - How the body cues social interpretations



Reliability: Constraints and Enablers

- **Constraints** to reliability
 - Ambiguity
 - Sporadic exposure to relevant hazards
 - Newcomers and veterans
- Reliability is **enabled** by social processes
 - Sensemaking
 - Collective mind & Heedful interrelating
 - Double interact

Previous Theorizing

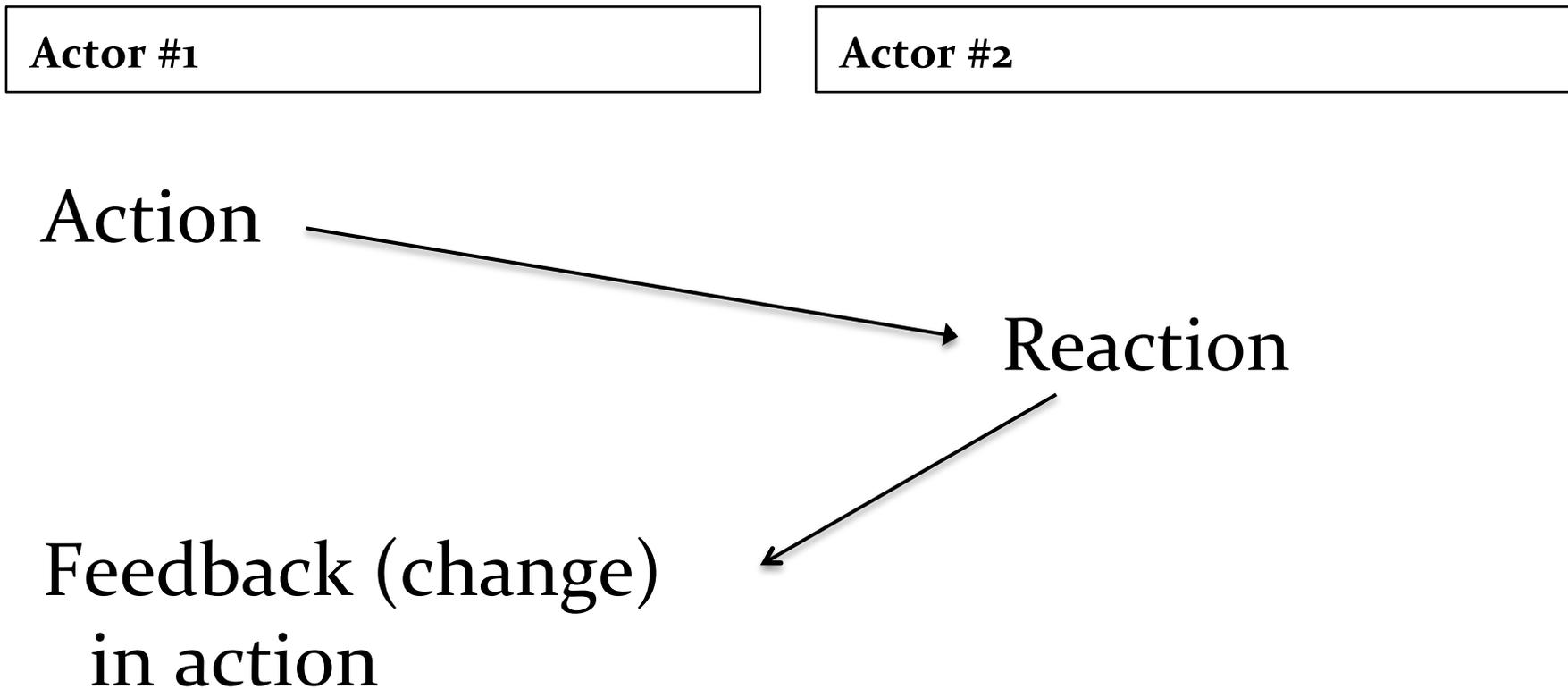
Mind

- Action-centered
- Social (linkages, conduit)
- Cognitive
- Common constructs (Weick & colleagues)
 - Sensemaking
 - Collective mind
 - Heedful interrelating
 - Double interact
- Figure: Cognitive processing
- Background: bodies that act, communication that negotiates

Body

- Calls to consider materiality
 - **Body, sites & text in organizations** (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009)
 - **Body & sensemaking** (Maitlis & Sonnenschein, 2010)
- Embodied Knowledge (Blackler, 1995)
 - **Knowing by doing, within a context**
- Intercorporeal knowing (Hindmarsh & Pilnick, 2007)
 - Actions of other's bodies signal opportunities to act.
- Affordances (Gibson, 1977)
 - Body and physical environment afford agency to act.

Double Interact (Weick, 1969)



Affordances

- Affordances (Gibson, 1977)
 - Ecological psychology
 - How people negotiate features of space and use objects to maximize—or *afford* the most—agency.
 - Example: flat landscapes afford more mobility for walking than do steep landscapes.
 - Critique
 - Potentially too much focus on physicality or ability to negotiate space.

Affordances

- A Social view of Affordances
 - The body as a “knowledge acquiring apparatus” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962)
 - An individual’s **attunement** to:
 1. the ways an individual’s physical experiences have contributed to what they know
 2. the ways other’s actions confirm, disconfirm and shape an individual’s interpretations
 - Allows us to acknowledge the ways in which **cognitive processing** and **bodily enactment** contribute to what an individual knows.

Typology of Affordances

Individual Level

- The “Wise” Body
 - Physical experiences of the body generate and augment what an individual knows.
- 1. *Instantiating Performances*: An individual enacts what they already know conceptually, cementing the information into embodied knowledge.
- 2. *Failure Enactments*: Enacting the worst case scenario, experiencing the sensory inputs and insights.

Social Level

- Coordinating Bodies
 - Bodies of others cue action and interpretations.
- 1. *Improvisational Performances*: Knowing a repertoire of nonverbal cues that facilitate interpretations of another’s actions, allowing novel contributions as the situation demands.
- 2. *Weighted Interpretations*: Distinguishing whether another’s actions confirm, disconfirm, guide an individual’s assessment of a situation.

Lingering Questions

- Is the *affordances* construct appropriate? Or, is this less about *agency* and more about *learning*?
- Operating reliably depends on learning processes, which are not always social. How can new communication theorizing balance between the **individual** and the **social** levels?
- How do we talk about the knowledge gained through **bodily** enactment without over-privileging the **cognitive** experience?

Thank You!

