

## Brief Encounters from the Taos Institute

June 2011

### COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY: A POSTMODERN APPROACH TO ORGANIZATION CONSULTATION



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Our collaborative approach to consultation is collegial and egalitarian. It is the framework for a conversational partnership in which consultant and client combine expertise to explore their dilemmas and challenges and develop new possibilities for resolving them. Whether we work with individuals or groups, members of a family or organizations, our collaborative approach remains the same. In organization consultation, the method is a way of integrating people and business strategies in building pathways to change and success. In this paper we describe and illustrate this postmodern approach to thinking about and working with human systems and the problems they present.

In its simplest form, postmodern refers to an ideological critique that departs radically from modernist traditions in its questioning of the mono-voice modernist discourse as the overarching foundation of literary, political, and social thinking. Although there is no one postmodernism, in general it challenges the traditional notions of knowledge as objective and fixed, the knower and knowledge as independent of each other, language as representing truth and reality, and human nature as universal. Consequently, the postmodern perspective challenges the technical and instrumental nature of consultation and the notion of the consultant as the expert on organizational culture and its members. It favors, rather, ideas of the construction of knowledge as social, knowledge as fluid, the knower and knowledge as interdependent, and thus knowledge as relational and the multiplicity of "truths." Said differently, knowledge and language, as a vehicle for creating knowledge, are the products of social discourse.

We view human systems as language and meaning generating systems in which people create understanding and knowledge with each other through communicative action. Communicative action involves dialogue within a system for which the communication has relevance. An organization is one kind of language and meaning generating system that has a relevance specific to itself. For organizations that seek consultation, our relevant role is to join with them as they seek a solution to a problem.

To read the full article:

<http://www.taosinstitute.net/Websites/taos/Images/ResourcesManuscripts/CollabInquiry.doc>