

ACTIVITY THEORY AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR BOUNDARY CROSSING BETWEEN RESEARCHERS, ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Yrjö Engeström
CRADLE, University of Helsinki

Keynote at the EU-SPRI Early Career Researcher Conferences (ECC) IRCRES
Rome, Italy

14-15-16 October 2015

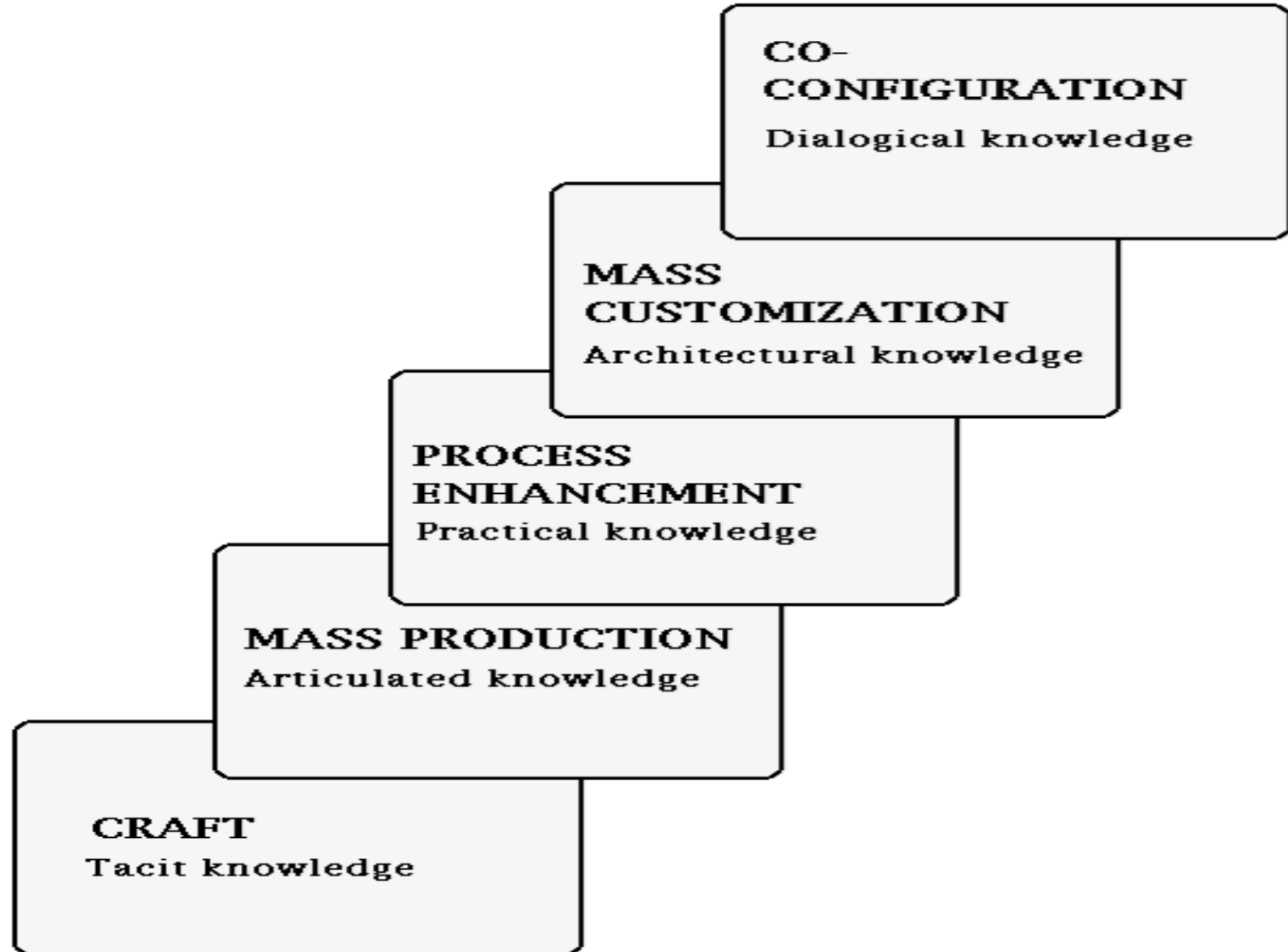
*CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND
TRANSMISSION: TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS*

CO-CONFIGURATION

- **ADAPTIVE 'CUSTOMER-INTELLIGENT' PRODUCT/SERVICE COMBINATIONS**
- **... WITH LONG LIFE CYCLES: THEY ARE NEVER 'FINISHED'**
- **ONGOING CONFIGURATION OF THE PRODUCT/SERVICE IN MUTUAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN CUSTOMERS, PRODUCERS, AND THE PRODUCT/SERVICE**
- **ACTIVE CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AND INPUT INTO THE CONFIGURATION**
- **MULTIPLE COLLABORATING PRODUCERS**
- **MUTUAL LEARNING FROM INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES**

HISTORICAL FORMS OF WORK

(adapted from Victor & Boynton, 1998, p. 6 and p. 233)



**CO-CONFIGURATION REQUIRES
FLEXIBLE 'KNOTWORKING' IN WHICH
NO SINGLE ACTOR HAS THE SOLE, FIXED
AUTHORITY:
THE CENTER DOES NOT HOLD**

(Engeström, Engeström & Vähäaho, 1999)

NEW KIND OF WORK - NEW KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

- **STANDARDIZED MASS PRODUCTION AND BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATION OF WORK REQUIRE STABLE, CLEARCUT CATEGORIES AND PROCEDURES**
- **IN CO-CONFIGURATION, THE CLIENT' S NEEDS CHANGE AND THE OBJECT MUST BE CONSTANTLY RENEGOTIATED AND RESHAPED; THIS REQUIRES FORWARD-LOOKING CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES**

TRADING ZONE

(GALISON, 1997)

- **"Two groups can agree on rules of exchange even if they ascribe utterly different significance to the objects being exchanged; they may even disagree on the meaning of the exchange process itself. Nonetheless, the trading partners can hammer out a local coordination, despite vast global differences. In an even more sophisticated way, cultures in interaction frequently establish contact languages, systems of discourse that can vary from the most function-specific jargons, through semispecific pidgins, to full-fledged creoles rich enough to support activities as complex as poetry and metalinguistic reflection" (Galison 1997, p. 783)**

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRADING ZONES

- **PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES FOR EXCHANGE**
- **MUTUAL BENEFIT: BOTH PARTIES CAN OFFER SOMETHING THE OTHER FINDS USEFUL**
- **BOUNDARY LANGUAGE**

EXPANSIVE LEARNING

- **LEARNING EMBEDDED IN TRANSFORMATIONS IN ACTIVITY SYSTEMS**
- **LEARNING ORIENTED AT THE OBJECT OF ACTIVITY**
- **LEARNING AS COLLABORATIVE CREATION OF NEW PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY**
- **LEARNING DRIVEN BY CONTRADICTIONS IN PRESENT ACTIVITY**
- **LEARNING INITIATED BY MUNDANE DISTURBANCES AND DEVIATIONS**
- **LEARNING AS LONGITUDINAL JOURNEY THROUGH A COLLECTIVE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT**
- **LEARNING REALIZED BY MEANS OF EXPANSIVE LEARNING ACTIONS**
- **INTERVENTIONIST METHODOLOGY; THE CHANGE LABORATORY**

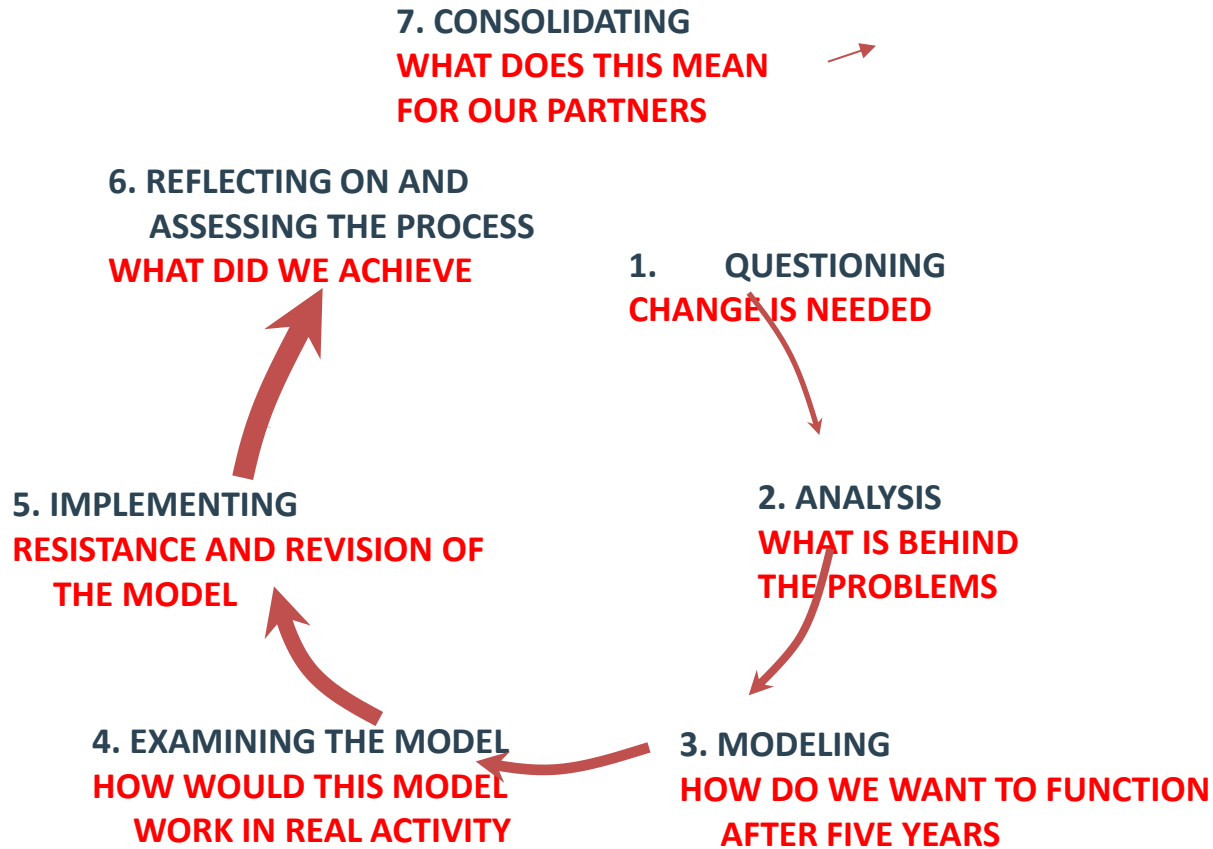
EXPANSIVE LEARNING

- **LEARNING WHAT IS NOT YET THERE: THE OBJECT OF ACTIVITY IS QUALITATIVELY TRANSFORMED SO AS TO OPEN UP A HORIZON OF WIDER POSSIBILITIES AND NEW ACTIONS**
- **COLLABORATIVE CREATION OF NEW CONCEPTS AND PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY, DRIVEN BY CONTRADICTIONS IN PRESENT ACTIVITY**
- **LENGTHY JOURNEY THROUGH A COLLECTIVE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT**
- **SOCIO-SPATIAL DIMENSION: THE OBJECT BECOMES BIGGER IN SIZE AND ENCOMPASSES MORE ACTORS**
- **TEMPORAL DIMENSION: THE OBJECT BECOMES MORE DURABLE AND SPANS A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME**
- **ETHICAL-POLITICAL DIMENSION: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEW OBJECT REQUIRE NEW KINDS OF RESPONSIBILITY**

**EXPANSIVE LEARNING IS ALSO
MULTI-VOICED SIDEWAYS LEARNING**

**STRUGGLE, NEGOTIATION AND PARTIAL
HYBRIDIZATION BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE,
COMPETING AND COMPLEMENTARY
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE PHENOMENA
UNDER INVESTIGATION**

EXPANSIVE LEARNING CYCLE



EXAMPLE:

COLLABORATION BETWEEN CRADLE AND THE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE OF THE CITY OF HELSINKI

- 1994: MY DOCTORAL STUDENT RIITTA SIMOILA DEFENDS HER PhD THESIS AND BECOMES DEVELOPMENT MANAGER OF HELSINKI PRIMARY CARE**
- 1997-1999: HELSINKI CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AND HELSINKI PRIMARY CARE FUND A CRADLE RESEARCH PROJECT FOR DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE CARE FOR CHRONICALLY ILL CHILDREN; THE IDEA OF CARE AGREEMENT IS GENERATED**
- 2000-2002: HELSINKI PRIMARY CARE AND THE HELSINKI HOSPITAL DISTRICT FUND A CRADLE PROJECT FOR DEVELOPING COLLABORATION BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SPECIALIZED CARE FOR CHRONIC PATIENTS WITH MULTIPLE ILLNESSES; CARE AGREEMENT IS TESTED, TOOLS AND PROCEDURES ARE DEVELOPED**
- 2006: MY DOCTORAL STUDENT ANNA-LIISA NIEMELÄ DEFENDS HER PhD THESIS AND BECOMES SPECIAL PLANNER AT HELSINKI PRIMARY CARE**

- **2006-2009: HELSINKI PRIMARY CARE FUNDS A CRADLE PROJECT FOR DEVELOPING NEW INNOVATIVE PRACTICES FOR THE HOME CARE OF THE ELDERLY; ONE OF THE HOME CARE MANAGERS BECOMES DOCTORAL STUDENTS AT CRADLE**
- **2009: BOOK 'PROMISING HOME CARE: NEW MODELS FOR WORK WITH THE ELDERLY' IS PUBLISHED, BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT**
- **2010: THE MAYOR'S PRIZE 'ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE YEAR' IS AWARDED TO THE HOME CARE DEPARTMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INNOVATIVE PRACTICE OF 'MOBILITY AGREEMENT' AIMED AT NURTURING PHYSICAL MOBILITY AMONG OLD PEOPLE LIVING AT HOME WITH ILLNESSES**
- **2010-2012: CRADLE RESEARCH PROJECT (FUNDED BY THE FINNISH TECHNOLOGY AGENCY) FOLLOWS UP AND SUPPORTS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INNOVATIONS DEVELOPED IN HELSINKI HOME CARE**
- **2011-2015: CRADLE RESEARCH PROJECT ON CONCEPT FORMATION IN COLLABORATIVE WORK (FUNDED BY ACADEMY OF FINLAND) FOLLOWS THE COLLECTIVE FORMATION OF THE NEW CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE PHYSICAL MOBILITY FOR ELDERLY HOME CARE CLIENTS**

HOW ARE THE FOUR KEY IDEAS USED IN THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN CRADLE AND HELSINKI CITY PRIMARY CARE?

1. OBJECT-ORIENTATION:

- * COLLABORATION HAS BEEN BUILT AROUND TWO *CONCRETE OBJECTS*:

(1) CHRONICALLY ILL PATIENTS WHO NEED COORDINATION BETWEEN MULTIPLE FRAGMENTED CAREGIVERS (1997->2002);

(2) OLD SICK PEOPLE LIVING AT HOME, NEEDING MORE HOLISTIC SERVICES TO DEAL WITH LOSS OF MOBILITY, MEMORY AND SOCIAL TIES (2006->ONGOING).

- * THESE ARE NOT ADMINISTRATIVE PSEUDO-OBJECTS!



2. CO-CONFIGURATION:

*** MULTIPLE PARTIES AND TYPES OF EXPERTISE HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN EACH PROJECT**

-PRIMARY CARE GENERAL PRACTITIONERS, HOSPITAL PHYSICIANS OF MULTIPLE SPECIALTIES, NURSES, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ABOVE ALL PATIENTS THEMSELVES

-HOME CARE NURSES, SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS, PHYSICAL THERAPISTS AND MOBILITY EXPERTS, AND ABOVE ALL ELDERLY CLIENTS THEMSELVES

*** LONGITUDINAL TRAJECTORIES OF CARE HAVE BEEN JOINTLY ANALYZED AND DESIGNED WITH THE HELP OF MUTUAL AGREEMENTS**

-CARE AGREEMENT PRACTICE AND TOOLS

-MOBILITY AGREEMENT PRACTICE AND TOOLS

3. TRADING ZONES:

- * SPACES OF EXCHANGE: PROJECT GROUPS AND STEERING GROUPS; CRADLE DOCTORAL PROGRAM**
 - SEVERAL HELSINKI HEALTH CARE MANAGERS AND EXPERTS HAVE BEEN OR ARE CURRENTLY DOCTORAL STUDENTS AT CRADLE**
- * THE LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH (ACTIVITY THEORY AND DEVELOPMENTAL WORK RESEARCH) TRANSLATED FOR PRACTITIONERS IN THE FORM OF DIAGRAMS AND VISUALIZATIONS, USED AS WORKING TOOLS IN ANALYSIS AND DESIGN**

4. EXPANSIVE LEARNING:

- * SYSTEMATIC USE OF CHANGE LABORATORY INTERVENTIONS TO GENERATE EXPANSIVE LEARNING BOTH AMONG MANAGERS AND FRONTLINE PRACTITIONERS & CLIENTS/PATIENTS**
- * MULTIPLE CYCLES OF EXPANSIVE LEARNING: BUILDING LONG-TERM CONTINUITY; BRIDGES BETWEEN CYCLES**
- * MINI-CYCLES AT THE LEVEL OF CRITICAL ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN CLIENTS AND PRACTITIONERS ARE OBSERVED, ANALYZED AND DEVELOPED**

CONCLUSION

- **RESEARCHERS NEED COLLABORATION PARTNERS WILLING TO ENGAGE IN LONG-TERM EFFORTS TO RESOLVE COMPLEX SOCIETAL PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**
- **SUCH FUTURE-MAKING MANAGERS AND LEADERS NEED TO BE NURTURED**
- **AT THE SAME TIME, SUCCESS DEPENDS ON FOCUSING ON CONCRETE OBJECTS AND REAL ACTORS; PEOPLE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HIERARCHY NEED TO BE GIVEN VOICE AND AGENCY IN THESE KINDS OF COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS**