ORGANIZATIONAL CYBERNETICS AS A METHODOLOGICAL PLATFORM FOR AUTHORSHIP AND AGENCY IN MANAGEMENT – REFLECTIONS ON A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE.

Key Words: Organizational Cybernetics, Authorship, Agency, Meta-language, Language Community.

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Abstract
This paper explores the potential of a cybernetic methodology as a platform to facilitate authorship and agency through the review of the linear analysis of one intervention. This work suggests the use of the Viable System Model to induce awareness and the participative construction of a mental model and organizational discourse; aimed to facilitate the management function and the adaptation processes of the organization. Improvements in the decision-making process of the case study after the introduction of the VSM suggest its effectiveness for this purpose. Also, this research suggests a lack of well-documented meta-languages in management.

Introduction
In the last decade particular attention has been given to leadership as a perspective/theory to analyze management and the organization - e.g. transformational leadership theory (Bass and Riggio, 2006) – assumed as capable to deal with the current volatile climate of business.
In this context, agency has been defined as the power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices (Murray, 1997); and the perception of creating change, that is, the perception of having some impact (Mallon, 2008). Similarly, authorship was defined as a dialogical process between people that allows managers (leaders) to shape the constitution of organizational realities; in which possibilities emerge for constructing some kind of sense, shaping common meaning and creating opportunities for action (Cunliffe, 2001).
Recently, a critical approach has come from the theories of organization as a process (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010; Langley, 2009) and communication (Putnam and Nicotera, 2009). These theories challenge the dominant leader-centered narrative of the organization and management where grater agency is attached to the leader assisted (more or less) by solid hierarchies and stable networks; hence, diminishing others' agency, legitimizing differential power relations and the concentration of decision making powers in the hand of managerial elites.
Instead, the process and communication approaches suggest that organizations are created not by an individual persona; but through interaction processes among members of a community; in which interlocking patterns of communication mediated by language

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(Guney, 2006) can be viewed as the driving force behind many organizational phenomena, including leadership (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014).

Consequently, authorship and agency emerge through the interaction of social actors in a given social situation for a specific amount of time; in which meaning is dynamically and fluently constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed between leaders and followers (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010; Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Therefore, implying that management (sense making: Authorship & Agency) is a dynamic, co-created and co-evolutionary discursive phenomena (Guney, 2006).

This description of management also suggest leadership as a co-orientation event which behavior provide to both - authorship and agency - a transitive property in which the conducting role of the dialogical process may shift from one person to other or is expressed simultaneously in multifocal points in a given context and moment of time – as it naturally happens in a group conversation; offering a possible alternative framework to explain the emergence of distributed and transitive leadership and autonomy - as expressions of agency and authorship.

Theoretical framework for language and organizational cybernetics

From the previous discussion, the dialogical process of authorship and agency can be understood as a critical, dynamic, emergent, co-evolving and adaptive phenomena. In accordance to this, Tourish (2014) states that there is not a universal set of rules to adopt, but the recognition of (1) the (communicational) limitations of individual agency – as a result of a dialogical process – and (2) the agency of others. Also, that due to the dialogical nature of authorship; confrontation, dissent, ambiguity, and disagreement will emerge and should be embraced – as recognition of linguistic and cognitive differences; rather than pursuit the illusion of discourse closure and invariability – particularly when associated with the variety coming from differences in interpretation as between persons not sharing the same codes and (elements of) meaning[2]; and the incompleteness of language itself – about the limitations of language self-referencing (Godel, 1931).

Consequently, to examine such dynamic conversational process a systemic approach and a perspective that regards organizations as complex (adaptive) system should be adopted. To create such theoretical framework we use an organizational cybernetic perspective; in which linguistic communication has been explored as a key element to facilitate emergence and self-organization[3] (Holten and Rosencranz, 2011; Yolles, 2004). To do so, this approach takes on the Viable System Model (VSM) as a (meta) language for mapping organizational functions, actors and the information channels among them. The basic assumption is that agency and authorship unfold to sustain a mutual/consensual objective (construction of meaning – authorship and the generation of self-awareness and –operative- autonomy – agency; ultimately: Self-organization) of organizational viability; therefore, the first step is the creation of such shared sense of meaning through a dialogical process (the definition of purpose and identity).

The construction of meaning as a linguistic phenomenon has its foundations in the Language Critique theory (Lorenzen, 1987, 2000) that states that human beings use language to disclose the world; and every perception of the world is language-bound so that the language becomes a mediator between reality and the individual. Therefore, we use language to represent some meaning that we conceive (Buhler, 1990).

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[2] By elements of meanings we understand in this paper differences in motivation, purpose, culture and cognition and structural position at the time of being part of a social group (organization)
[3] We believe, via authorship and agency

Also (pragmatically), it offers the construct "language community" to explain why a group of people is able to develop understanding and to establish the conventions making the semiotics: syntax, semantics and pragmatics of (shared) symbols. Therefore, if a group of people communicates, and each has an aligned semantic and pragmatic dimension, then the group of people forms a language community. These language communities can be created by introducing symbols and by explaining them; the semantics and pragmatics of the symbol are introduced together to create a term. A new term is thus introduced by explicit agreement – shared co-created understanding and meaning – between members of a language community; and the recombination of such linguistic symbols generates a discourse. In other words: to coin a term to refer to a thing the (language) community must agree on a simple meaning (inter-tangled coding and decoding) within their language – but that term can only transmit that meaning within the language's grammatical structures and codes. A collection of shared codes can be recombined and create a discourse that reflect a shared mental model/meaning of a thing (e.g. defining values, culture, identity). These stages are required – and can be induced as we propose in this paper – to develop the dialogical exchange that conduces to the creation of meaning through specialized kinds of discourse competence that enable them to participate in specialized groups and to know what is being communicated and believe to be true about certain organizational realities (Faigley et al, 1985; Argyres, 1999; Cronin and Weingart, 2007).[4]

VSM as a platform for authorship and agency

Beer (1979, 1981, 1985) developed the VSM based on - among other cyberneticians - Ashby's cybernetic principles. The VSM consist of five main components, each one with his own characteristics, symbols and codes (language) as presented in figure 1. For instance: The System 1 makes operative decisions, have contact with its close environment and is managed by a divisional management unit. The System 2 conducts a service for the systems 1 and damp oscillation or disruptions between operative units. System 3 makes operative decisions focused in the "inside and now"; by supervising the state of affairs and allocating resources at the operative level. System 4 makes tactical and strategic decisions and take actions focused on the "outside and then"; by monitoring the wide environment and providing guidance for the adaptation of the organization. Finally, System 5 makes normative decisions and takes actions governing the orientation of the organization as a whole. Information channels and feedback loops interconnect these sub-systems, and the whole architecture of sub-systems and interconnections present a recursive structure (Note the recursive design inside the Systems 1). [5]

His model specifies the minimum but sufficient functional criteria, components, systems and information channels by which a given system can be viable – able of independent existence in a constantly changing environment. Based on these fundamental building blocks, the VSM provides the elements to develop a model to control and manage the interactions within an organization, becoming a common language that makes organizational structures visible and comparable (Britton and Parker, 1993).

Beer (1959, 1966, 1981) noted that systems communicate about what they do (the language of their operations). Also, that the normal occupation of management is to develop and talk the language of the firm's operations; but such language can be defective as such language may not provide the terms for the management to speak about -an to discuss – its own structure: it can not develop propositions to talk about itself.

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[4] Note here the similitude whit the definition of authorship.
[5] We do not discuss the VSM in this paper. A detailed description of the VSM can be found in Beer (1985), Espejo and Hardem (1989), or Walker (2006)

Therefore, he introduces the term metasystem – to group and describe better the functions of the systems 2,3,4 and 5 – as the residence of the meta-language: a second order system from which language about the system itself and its language is originated that also responds to the recursive structure of the organization – as suggested in the VSM.
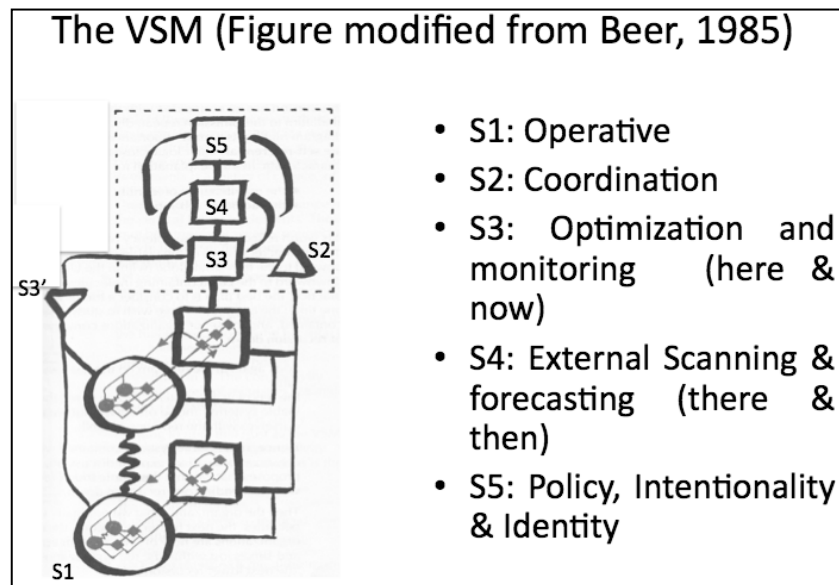

Figure 1. *The Viable System Model. Note the recursive structure inside the Systems 1*

Following the previous argument, to facilitate authorship and agency we propose the VSM as a "lingua franca" based on the need to reduce the (linguistic/cognitive) variety of human actors in an organization as they interact and adapt their domain-specific languages to new or changed situations to generate a sort of social cohesion. This behavior is anchored on the principles of language critique.

In the co-construction of meaning, the VSM provides a set of linguistic symbols that provides uniformity and reduces the variety contained in individual perceptions or the organization. It facilitates the task of conceptual modeling as prerequisite for the development of a language community and a shared mental model. Once the (VSM) symbol is related with a definition of a term – e.g. a circle represents an operative unit, a square represents a management role/function; a (re)construction of the existing (managerial) languages is generated towards a more unified and uniform language community that, ultimately, evolves into an emergent discourse founded in an shared mental model of the organization using the VSM as template – following the linguistic/cognitive stages described by Lorenzen (1987, 2000); Kamlah and Lorenzen (1984).

The discourse/shared mental model facilitates agency as the individuals of the language community gain in awareness and understanding of the organization, the meaning and the implications of their individual and group actions – we may think that the shared mental model provides an scenario that favors autonomy and distributed agency rather than the settlement of leader-centered notion of agency in which such awareness/understanding is limited to a few members of the organization.

Similarly, the shared mental model reduces frictions and linguistic barriers, optimizing the managerial dialog and sense-making processes as well as the creation of opportunities to take action. In this sense, the VSM could be understood as the grammar used to co-create a managerial narrative that evolves, adapt and flows in response to the changes of the

organizational context and its environment and is consistent at different structural levels in the organization.

The introduction of the VSM modeling language is done by "experts"[6] generating a critical (re)construction of the language community by inducing change, recombination and variations that lead to a new conceptualization (mental model) of the organization.

It is important to make sure that the expert's solution is adequate to identify business problems. Also, that the VSM model must serve as a basis for individuals who are non-experts to create a shared understanding of the business problem.

The Szyperski-Model (figure 2) helps us to understand how the expert's knowledge can be provided to non-experts (users, developers) and its possible implications:

1. Expert's information is transformed into languages which can be understood by the targeted users (these users are organizational members who act as participants in internal business process (multiplier) or which act as providers for information. In order to perform these transformations, there needs to be at least one individual who is member of both language communities - the experts' and the language community of the organization. Additionally, language transformation can only work if the expert's VSM inspired language features at least the same expressive power as the existing language(s) in the organization. This is a high-risk scenario because too many transformations may be required. Especially if the languages involved follow completely different paradigms or if they differ highly in their expressive power; in which case language transformation may be impossible

2. The expert's information is maintained reducing the complexity of the VSM language (this allows for adequately providing organizational members and multipliers with that part of the VSM template for a mental model which exactly represents the information they need to perform their tasks). Since the information provided to users is an original VSM language of reduced complexity, the recipient community languages and the (simplified) original language share the same expressive power. In this scenario, the intended users of the simplified VSM language must be at least members of a part of the expert's language community in that they have a shared understanding of the symbols collaboratively used. One remaining problem can be the acceptance of the VSM language. Since all problems solving competences shift to the experts' group, the targeted users of the (simplified) original language are reduced to basic implementers. If they had more power in the past, they might resist the application of the VSM language. The disadvantage of this way of providing expert information is related to the complexity of the VSM language. If each facet of users' language needs to be adjusted by the expert group, the modification can become an overwhelming project. Additionally, the expert group must be qualified to also understand the user's business problem from various other perspectives.

3. The expert's information is maintained keeping the VSM original complexity. The original VSM language stay unchanged, experts and users necessarily constitute a language community regarding the used language (as their languages may have structural equivalence, e.g. Complex Adaptive Systems and VSM). The information provided by experts constitutes a framework in which the targeted users must make extensions. In this case the users need to have problem solving capabilities because the experts' language leave certain aspects open. This fact constitutes the only perceivable risk in this scenario, despite the low complexity involved in the transference of the expert's information.

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[6] We name "experts" the external academic consultants who facilitate the introduction of the VSM to the organization via workshops and dialogical processes; initially to a select group of key individuals (developers) and later to the whole organization – consider in the case study of this paper the Szyperski-Model implication 1.
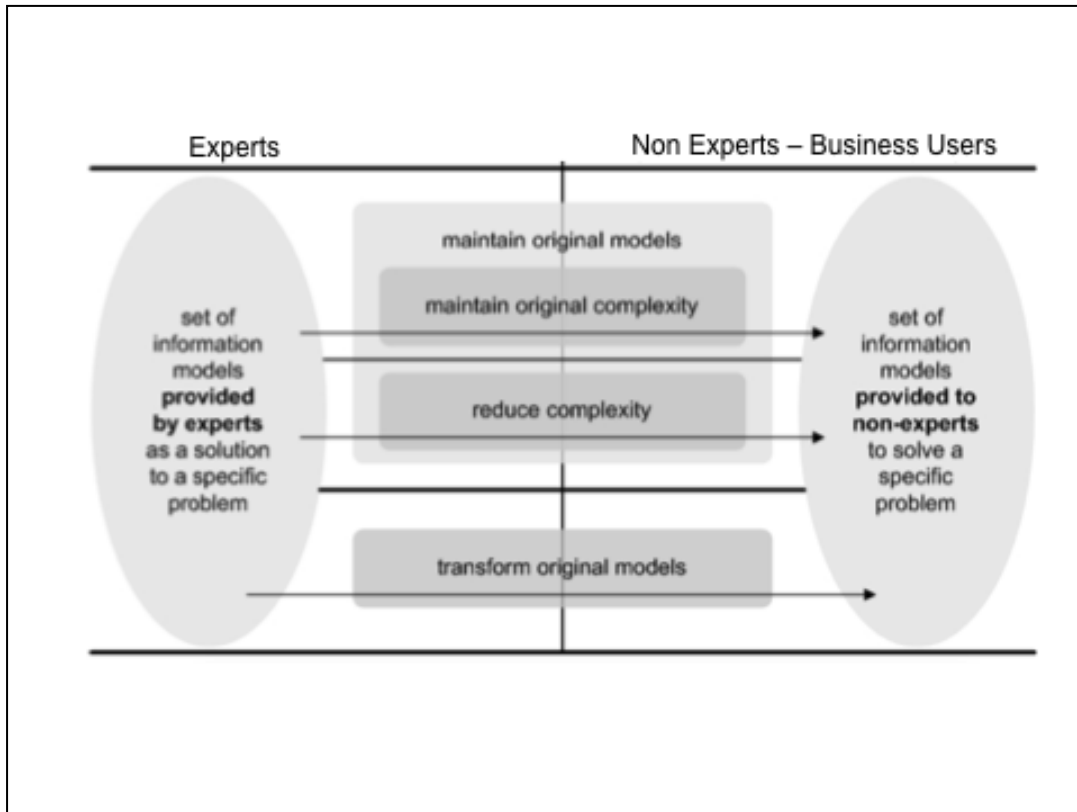
Figure 2. *Szyperski-Model*

Application

To explore the use of the VSM as platform to facilitate authorship and agency we used the dataset collected during the academic consultancy realized in a rural regeneration project from 2007 - 2010 previously described in Cardoso (2011), Espinosa et al (2011) and Espinosa and Walker (2013). The next section summarizes the organizational context.

As part of an EPSRC funded project "Defying the rules: how self-regulation works in social systems", an action-research intervention provided support for a process of self-transformation in a rural regeneration project (XOOP)[7]. To support their self-organization process the a VSM inspired methodology was introduced to the community and a select group of members (see details in Espinosa & Walker, 2013), and then, the dynamic co-evolution of the community during the period of the VSM intervention (Cardoso, 2011; Espinosa et al, 2011) was analyzed.

To register the co-evolving process in the community multiple interviews with managers at different organizational levels as well as their narratives originated during the cybernetic intervention were analyzed; showing different stages/expressions of leadership and management over time. These descriptions and narratives were correlated with different descriptions and understandings of the (managerial) environment, the activity and dynamic of the community (their agency and authorship).

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[7] To protect the identity of the project it will be presented as the "XOOP in this paper.

Initially, the organization was a new venture established by fifteen funding members and led by two dominant characters, recruiting followers with diverse backgrounds[8] and none of them with experience of formal training in management. The XOOP project didn't have a clear definition of its identity or nature beyond the intention to create an eco-village.

> *... it wasn't really an organization, it was a company (XOOP), but it was really just a framework that required people to develop it, to develop an idea and to put in some money (interview with **D**, page 1).*

> *...That was established by those people, those 15 people… and there it was the consensual decision-making, but, there was also a very strong drive from **B** and **A**… so. I think that it was quite a strong top down driven process as well. (Interview with **D**, page 2).*

As the size of the project grew, the established consensual decision-making protocol and the top-down leader-centered management started to collapse due to both, the increasing (linguistic) complexity of the members and the nature and scope of the project. These new conditions exacerbated the problems related with the sense-making/authorship of the organization. Conventional practices where adopted (generation of mission & vision statements) but these didn't succeed in the provision of a unified code/symbol/language to be used in the coordination of the project.

> *...There were 15 members at the beginning – when I joined the project – and it was though that we should keep it up to 40 or 50... and we tried to keep it small to make easy make decisions, but that changed, that changed… we ended with more than 120 members with different motivations to be here and different views on how to run the project (Interview with **C**, page 2).*

> *…**B** was the driving force behind this for a long time. We came to a point when **B**, for the project to succeed, **B** had to realize that it was bigger than him. That it wasn't his project and that he was only part of it. And that was a big crisis point as it was evident that other members where assuming some leadership. (Interview with **C**, page 2).*

> *... a statement of mission and vision to show what they want to do... but there was no real... again, probably links into a strong working plan... just people coming up with ideas, let's set up a working group to look at this or that... and then it started to get too big with the amount of ideas and the amount of things they were trying to achieve and loosing focus on the critical planning, finances and legal issues... (Interview with **A**, page 8).*

To adapt to the new situation new managers where appointed (**N** and **Z**) but tensions and communication (linguistic variety) issues where not solved. Poor or ineffective dialogical process continue to exist in sense-making scenarios where circular inconclusive narratives where constantly exposed. Consequently the organization adopted again a top-down mechanism of control to centralize the vision (mental map) of the project in few members, limiting the access to information in order to take the correct actions but also eliminating possibilities of agency from other members.

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[8] From the first cohort of XOOP members where listed: Linguist, actor, musician, writer, farmer, therapist, nurse, schoolteacher, journalist, lawyer, barrister, environmental activists, lecturer (multiple disciplines related with arts and humanities).

*… My sense of this time is that it was incredibly bad managed, the directors ended up effectively as executives and **AD** was all around the country looking for engineers and … well … **AD** is an actor I don't know how … I joined the board after that [the clash between **N** and **Z**] and the meetings we were having like 6 hours long... the agendas were so long and... They were dealing with everything! … it was total micromanagement… and chao…s (interview with **C**, page 8).*

Under this critical period, academic consultants through a series of workshops introduced the VSM language. As the expert's VSM diagnostic revealed problems with the identity of the project, the XOOP adopted an eco-charter as their core philosophy, and a cooperative way to organize themselves. Nevertheless, in their initial stages just a self-selected group on XOOP members (multipliers) joined in depth VSM workshops (mostly leaders of operative teams) followed by open workshops to all the XOOP audience. From this fist stage, an internalized version of the VSM was generated by the multipliers in which in simple terms they describe the VSM language through the analogy of riding a bicycle (Apendix 1).

…We already had a system of self-organizing workgroups, but they were not working together very well. The VSM allowed us to restructure the groups rationally and to put structures in place for them to cooperate more effectively. It was of great benefit, and will be more so in the future, but it was a slow process due to natural resistance. It was hard to get the buy-in of Members, or to get more than a few key people to study VSM in any depth…
*…There is more confidence that the organization is under better control. The general manager gained better access to necessary information, but less need of detailed info. There has been some mild confusion as people experimented with the VSM and its language without necessarily understanding it fully, but this will improve as the learning grows. (Interview with **J**)*

The VSM narrative developed by the XOOP after its introduction evidences that the symbols, and VSM language has been appropriated, rearranged, and recombined to generate their own dialog/narrative. Ultimately, their own conceptual model (shared mental map) that they used to improve the agency of the operative units and their functions of coordination. A later development on the evolution of their dialogical/narrative process allowed them to develop a new description of their organization (appendix 2) in which they change the analogy from riding a bicycle to a house. This new narrative is accompanied by a rich picture (figure 3) and evidences a highest level of abstraction and visualization of their shared XOOP mental model. This new narrative also reinforces the perception of the existence of greater autonomy (agency) all over the project as well as authorship (expressed in better management and the sense-making and response via emerging new ventures).

Figure 3. Our House (Rich picture of the XOOP after the academic intervention) the narrative of this rich picture denotes the emergence of new business units evidencing greater agency and authorship

Lessons learned from the application

This paper suggests that both, authorship and agency can be engineered via the introduction of a cybernetic meta-language to enhance the emergence of effective managerial dialogical processes. This case study showed a process of language appropriation in which the simplified original version of the VSM is initially recombined and presented as a new narrative; to later on be fully appropriated and expressed as new (different) language that allow the XOOP to develop a more complex conceptual model of their organization (Rich picture). Note that in the last narrative elements of the original (simplified) VSM language remain (e.g. process group, coordination, primary activity, etc – equivalent to the VSM Systems 1-5).

The implications for authorship are that in diverse and large groups, the co-generation or appropriation of symbols to describe a common reality allowed the organization to communicate more effectively, coordinate, and identify and generate new opportunities based in a common understanding of the organization and its environment. This also applies to their agency.

With regard to the introduction of the VSM language, it seems that the use of the an hybrid of the modes 1 and 2 of the Szyperski-Model is the form that naturally emerged to introduce the VSM language. In this case study, as described by Szyperski, the limitations of this hybrid mode of introduction where the ones related with the existence and role of multipliers in the XOOP and the structures of power existing previous to the introduction of the VSM that generated opposition to the adoption of a unified language to manage the XOOP project.

Conclusion

The VSM is a rich and adaptable language to be used in conceptual modeling aiming to facilitate commutation and organizational transformations in organizations.

The case study provides empirical evidence of the impact that the use of a common language may have in the facilitation of authorship and agency. Yet, as these dialogical processes can be guided with many other different frameworks; we believe that the VSM used as a template/grammar for the emergence of such common language – language community makes more efficient this process due its flexibility and richness if compared with the standard language of management.

This study does not provide conclusive evidence that the VSM is unique for this purpose as other conceptual frameworks could be used to guide the emergence of a common language to facilitate authorship in the organizations. In this respect, techniques such as participative planning of problem structuring methods would be useful, but they lack the syntax and grammar elements of the VSM.

We may criticize the VSM as a template language to be prescriptive and rigid but this case study shows that as a language it evolves, recombines and adapts to new forms that adjust to users the cognition and acts as a nested meta-language. Therefore, the VSM can be useful in situations when the communicational potential is low (due to excessive linguistic/cognitive variety) and the existence of many different language communities in the organization.

Finally, after an extensive literature review it seems that the VSM is the only documented and well structured existing meta-language for management. However, more research and documentation of empirical cases should be done to confirm and explore the practical applications of this fact in contemporary management.

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Apendix 1. Description of the VSM by the XOOP (segment. The full description can be found in Cardoso, 2011)

[…]To maintain Viability the model must be kept in Balance, both with itself and with the constantly changing external Environment. It's like riding a bicycle, as you go along you maintain your balance by making constant adjustments to your steering in order to keep yourself upright. If you're good at cycling this process will be easy and almost imperceptible, but if you've just started learning then you will probably find balance hard to achieve. In this regard the history of XOOP has been somewhat Wobbly as we try to develop a new approach to organising ourselves without the steadying Parental hand of the old Hierarchical Command-and-Control systems.

Balance also has to be maintained over any type of terrain that we wish to cross. There is a reason why most of us follow the Mainstream and that is because it is a nice flat well-surfaced road that is easy to cycle on. Unfortunately it is clear that it has now become the Road to Destruction and that we must find another Way if we are to survive. When we encounter   ground then keeping our Balance becomes more difficult. As the ground becomes more varied then we have to pay more attention and respond by making more complex adjustments in our cycling maneuvers.

This principle is referred to as 'Matching Variety' in the language of the VSM and means that we must match any changes in the variety (or complexity) of our environment with equally varied responses from our own organization. The Model itself is broken down into different spheres of involvement, each of which performs a different but complimentary function in the overall scheme. These are numbered 1 to 5 and it is this language that you will hear most often.

"Our system 3 is out of balance with our system 4, so our system 1's are not clear and system 2 is getting overloaded" is the kind of thing that you might hear from someone conversant in VSM-speak. It seems daunting, but you soon get the hang of it, and it allows us to discuss our organization in strictly functional terms without it becoming "Wilma and Fred can't get their act together so now Barney and Betty are squabbling and it's doing my head in ". Problems that seem to be about personalities may often in fact stem from systemic imbalances, and it's best to deal with them in neutral systems terms.

System 5 is what we are about, our identity. It is the meaning of why we are doing what we are doing. In XOOP our basic statement of Identity is 'Building Sustainable Community' and from that flow other policies about how we go about things. Thus system 5 is the sphere of Policy and has a twofold aspect.

On the one hand our policies are decided by the whole membership through the passing of motions, by consensus, at our formal meetings and are enshrined in our Rules of Operation and other policy documents. The other aspect of system 5 is in making sure that these policies are held to. Our Board of Directors has the legal responsibility of XOOP according to Company Law and therefore are in the position of having to oversee the company in legal terms. We also designate to them the task of making sure that the whole thing stays on track according to what we have agreed as a Community.

In our cycling analogy System 5 encompasses what philosophy to take (it's a nice day, let's take a scenic route), our policies (going safely and slowly, rather than fast and reckless) and whether we are on track (is this the way to the park, or did I take a wrong turn ?). This is not a static fixed situation and what we do can change at any time (if it starts to rain, we might decide not to go through the park after all) – although we are still working within the same System 5 policies[…]

Appendix 2. Our House explained.

[XOOP is the owner, the landlord, with whom we all have contracts.]
XOOP is the legal entity through which our project is run, and as a registered company it must comply with both the terms of its own Memorandum and Articles of Association as well as with legislation in general. It is also a charity and has to make sure that its charitable aims are followed. XOOP has legal title on the eco-village land and has responsibilities towards how that land is developed. It is XOOP with whom we negotiate the contracts to buy or to lease individual sites as part of the project.
We also join XOOP as members and all have a contract with the company which grants us certain rights and obliges us to certain duties. These are set out in a collection of documents we call the Village Charter. The Village Charter contains all the terms of the Members' Agreement, the registered Memo and Arts of the company, and any other by-laws that the organization has agreed such as the Ecological Charter and the Rules of Operation.

[These contracts forms part of the roof of our symbolic house. The roof represents the common identity, shared values, general policy and agreements that we are all standing under. Everyone living or working under this roof agrees to operate within the same framework. (The Identity group are up there with ladders trying to fix all the leaks!)]
These legal documents and contracts are only the formal side of what is actually happening in real life, which is that we are a bunch of human beings trying to somehow 'Build Sustainable Community'. They give a commonly agreed framework with which to do this, but of course there is much more to it than that. The underlying principles upon which our project is based, and on which those documents and contracts are therefore based, have to be understood and implemented by us all if we are to work together to a common purpose. There is an infinite list of things that we could agree collectively as 'ecovillagers', but in practice we choose a small number of things we wish to make agreements on and otherwise are free as individuals to live our lives as we see fit. We have mandated the Identity group to help us reach common understandings about the things that we want/need to agree upon.
[XOOP's obligation is to make the house a model live-work cohousing unit (!!!) in which people live happily as a community in accordance with shared ecological and sustainable principles, but which also provides a centre of educational and research work in these areas.]
The project is unusual in that it is both an educational charity and a community development scheme. We are building our own homes, and the necessary systems for living in them, but in doing so we are also contributing to a new model of community development. We are obliged by our charitable status to promote education and research into the various aspects of this model.
[The Service Company are contracted by the landlord to provide and maintain services in the house.]
We have incorporated a separate Service Company, which will be responsible for managing the running of the housing development. Anyone who has bought a site is a member of this company, which will be set up so that residents can cooperatively manage the various services they need. XOOP and the Service Company share the same values and principles and the Service Company is currently operating within XOOP's Primary Activity of Building and Maintaining Infrastructure. XOOP will eventually transfer title to the urban land and infrastructure to the Service Company.
[BUILDCO are contracted to oversee the building work that's going on in the house. They live in a mouldy old caravan.] XOOP has also licensed BUILDCO as a construction management company, according to the terms of site sales contracts, to coordinate and oversee the building process. BUILDCO shares the same values and principles as XOOP

and is therefore very closely aligned with it, even though it is a separate company.

[The house has a name written on the front, which is the outward expression of our Identity. This name, and any accompanying logo, can be used by people outside the house too if they subscribe to our values. This is the brand.] A big part of us working together as a collective organization is in how we are represented to those outside of it. Our shared values and principles have to be reflected properly whenever we show our face to the world. People also have to know what they are dealing with when they engage with The Town X Eco-village and what to expect from it. This is our Brand and if we maintain a good reputation, and a clear sense of what our brand means, then we can also sell the use of that brand to others who we feel are operating by the same standards and principles.

[The house sits in a garden (maybe with a little white picket fence round it?). This is the physical boundary of XOOP's legal title and includes all the land. Land Use Group is the gardener and landscape designer. In a nearby house lives the Community ORGFARM, our close neighbors who are also going to come in and grow some potatoes in our garden because we can't cope with it all. The Town X Development Committee are a little bit further down the road, but are still close neighbors and are welcome to call round (if they take their muddy boots off!). There are numerous other houses dotted around forming a local community.]

Outside of the housing development, XOOP also has responsibility for the rest of the land that falls within the boundary defined in the land registry. We have mandated the Land-Use Group to make sure the land is looked after. Some of it is going to be leased to our neighbors, The Town X Community ORGFARM, for a few years while we are too busy building houses to maintain it properly. There are a number of neighboring organizations with whom we have similar relationships, some formal and some informal, such as The Town X Development Committee. We also have relationships with 'strategic partners' who may be further away geographically, but with whom we share some common aims.

[As well as our own little dens and follys we can also erect outhouses in our garden, which we can rent out to other organizations according to our terms. These can either be in a lean-to, where the organization falls partly under our 'roof' and partly not, or stand-alone sheds, where there is a more arms-length relationship.]

In fact we have a range of different kinds of relationships with different people and organizations. Some, like the SERVICE COMPANY, operate as subgroups within our project as a whole, some are completely separate bodies with which we have only arms-length relationship, but many of them fall somewhere in between.

We need to decide the terms with which we engage with people at different levels (whether with suppliers of woodchip, the enterprise centre, the Global Eco-village Network, The Town X Cineclub or whoever else) and how much of our values and principles we expect them to share.

[Our house itself has a ground floor, which has both public spaces/reception and our own functional spaces. This would be where the work of managing the project is done, according to the aims set out by XOOP, and also where visitors can come in for a cuppa and a chat, attend a workshop or to get involved with our activities. There are shared resources here for everyone to use (which Mr. A manages), along with autonomous offices for our various groups to work in.

Upstairs is the more private residential space. There are shared resources here too, but which are for the use of residents only, and each resident also has their own private rooms that they live in, where they are free to do what they like as long as they comply with their contracts. They must work with BUILDCO to build these private spaces.] Because there are several different facets to the project, we have to decide where to draw the boundaries between them too. Between the need for privacy in our homes and our duty to be a centre for education for instance, and also how to divide resources amongst all the different activities we have going on.

We will have areas of public access, offices and workshops for both our own purposes or to rent out, resources that are for the shared use of residents only, and of course our own private spaces.

It's best not to look in the cellar.

Hopefully there will also be room for a little humour!