play, we have been developing these contexts and enabling people to develop their abilities to work with others, despite their differences, with respect and with trust. I look forward to continuing to develop this work, and I invite you to join us in exploring, building, and playing in these spaces with us at Pluralistic Networks, Inc.

Until now, although these papers are as relevant today as when they were written, I have been reluctant to publish them, as they were written in a different context and time with a particular audience in mind. However, my daughters have convinced me that these papers are not only relevant, but that they would be useful to people in their current form without any need to update them. The existence of this collection of papers results almost entirely from my daughter Maria's discipline as a philosopher and from her love for her father. The selection of this set of papers and the editorial preparation for publication are entirely hers.

Fernando Flores
Berkeley, CA April 2012]

Introduction

By Maria Flores Letelier

Instilling a Culture of Commitment in Our Working Relationships

While the essays in this book were written sixteen to twenty years ago, I see them as more relevant today than ever. That is why I was determined, in the midst of two pregnancies and caring for newly born babies, to find a way to dig up some of the most relevant essays that my father wrote then and make them publicly available for the first time. As I re-read these essays many years later, at first I was a bit taken aback by the awkwardness of some of the writing—the grandeur of the words, the fierceness of many of the claims, and the obvious nature of many of the questions posed. Then it became clear to me that because the thinking was so new at the time, my father had to develop a whole new language to make these points. The idea that we invent reality together in the commitments we make to each other when we speak went against not only current academic thinking then about human behavior, but also our commonsense understanding of that topic at the time. He was not writing for the self-help category of books, a category that did not exist at the time. He was bringing a human dimension to the world of work, organizations, and business.

Today, it is clear to me that much of what my father was anticipating, even as far back as when he was a prisoner of the Pinochet regime in Chile, was the importance of instilling a culture of commitment in what would become a dominantly capitalistic world. His thinking goes to the heart of not only how people transact and negotiate in a capitalistic world, but also how, in coordinating, there is much more than self-interest at stake. Indeed, we are making commitments to

each other, and that entails caring for the concerns of each party. If we only make explicit the self-interested dimension, then we will design organizations, and ultimately our social values, accordingly. Fernando Flores made a brave move forward, proposing that we design our organizations around the networks of commitments being made and that these commitments be made explicit.

The academic thinking behind the networks of commitments framework is the theory of speech acts that describes "networks of directives and commissives," the theory Fernando Flores build upon. Directives, such as requests and offers, are spoken acts that attempt to get the person being spoken to, to perform some action. Commissives are spoken acts in which the person being spoken to commits to some future course of action. He argues that certain speech acts, particularly requests, promises, offers, assessments, and declarations, serve as building blocks for activating and fulfilling commitments in working relationships and, hence, in organizations.

The essays in this book are all about how to effectively make commitments that allow us to create something of value, to generate value for ourselves and for others in the world. In essence, they are about instilling a culture of commitment in our work with others, whether that be in an organization, our own start-up, or even in working together as a family to get ahead or raise children. He was anticipating what would become the greatest challenge of capitalism hence far: unregulated free markets that coexist with value creation for the world at large.

With the recent collapse of our financial system and some of the major corporations that exemplified the best of capitalism, it's becoming clearer to many academics and business leaders that something more is needed. Whether we call it a new form of capitalism or a "kinder capitalism," as Bill Gates has described it, the point is that people work together to produce value, not just for self-interest. The networks of commitments/conversations for action framework for designing organizations makes explicit who is creating value and for whom value is being created, and what are the promises being completed that act as value producers at every step of the way.

The notion of "social responsibility" is taking on a new dimension. Corporations are starting to recognize that social responsibility cannot exist as an afterthought. It cannot be an isolated public relations or charitable contributions organization. The core business has to think about how its products, manufacturing processes, business processes, employee relations, services, and role in the community impact the world. Designing work to produce value is very different from designing work for maximizing the self-interest of each

party involved. As I re-read the essays in this collection, it became clearer that the seeds for this design are here, and that is why so many people have requested these essays over the last twenty years.

Today, many of the former consultants, coaches, students, and clients that practice the methodologies described here discuss this phenomenon as "working relationships" —what makes some effective and others not so. By combining the disciplines of philosophy, linguistics, computer science, and management, Fernando Flores developed a unique theory of work and organizations that has had numerous practical applications. The seeds of these classic works were first developed in his dissertation, "Management and the Office of the Future," which was written in 1980.

"The process of communication should be designed to bring with it a major awareness about the occurrence of commitments. Every member's knowledge about his participation in the network of commitment must be reinforced and developed."

(*Management and Communication In The Office Of The Future* p.70).

In working relationships, each member has a role in making something happen. Each member is accountable for a promise in the commitment network or chain. Today, these tools are starting to enter organizations as they try to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of various functions in the organizations. Those functions are performed by people—human beings—, each with distinct talents and dispositions for taking on various roles. As people changes occur, roles maybe redefined, yet the central promises of the role remain explicit, and if a particular individual will not fulfill, it becomes clear that those value producing promises must be fulfilled by some role in the organization; failure to fulfill those promises will impact negatively the value produced by the organization.

Still, the historical tendency is to describe titles and activities, not promises. Accountabilities get lost as organizational changes are made. In making "promises" explicit, it becomes clear that each person in the commitment network is accountable to other people, as promises are to someone else. In other words, the human dimension of working relationships becomes the focus in designing work and organizations.

The human dimension is also brought forth to the center in my father's theory of communication. He challenges the assertion that when people communicate, we simply pass information back and forth. Instead, he proposes that people get things done—share interpretations and make commitments to each

other that take care of their concerns—thereby shifting their future expectations, possibilities, and, in turn, the direction of their future. In addition to promises, requests, and declarations, which play a central role in "conversations for action," he adds yet a more complex layer of human interaction with assessments and assertions. People evaluate and are evaluated by others, probably the trickiest part of working relationships, in the form of assessments and assertions. And these take place against a background of "moods."

My father sometimes tells the story of how the importance of making assessments and grounding these on assertions came to him as he reflected about what happened with the fall of President Allende's government. He recalls speaking with the president to convey his assessment of Pinochet and report rumors that he heard of a secret coup d'etat that was being planned. He describes a feeling of paralysis that came over him as he stood in front of the president searching for the best way to frame the assessment. Assessments, as he now describes, are tied up with moods; one has to not just make a grounded assessment, but speak to the mood that a person is in. He now sees that the appropriate mood was not there at the time. Organizations can instill particular moods, such as the moods of wonder, ambition, serenity, and conviction, that allow people to make the appropriate assessments at the right time. Preparing background moods lays the groundwork for coordination and invention in organizations and working together. He claims that language owns us; it speaks through us in who we are as cultural, historical beings.

The networks of commitments/conversations for action thought leadership has been cited in more than three thousand books. Fernando Flores is recognized as a leader in the world of business process design, computers, cognition, and education. *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design*, with Dr. Terry Winograd, was named the Best Information Science book of 1987 by the American Society for Information Science, and recognized by *Byte* magazine as one of the all-time twenty most influential books on information technology. His work laid the foundation for much of the current understanding about action workflow and commitment management theory.

For many years, this work was available only in private papers. In this book, I have selected and edited a group of essays and placed them in an effective order for the reader. I made an attempt to leave the essays as close to their original form as possible. I edited with an editor's eye, deleting repetitiveness and elaborating on points that seemed to be central. I often changed a title and reorga-

nized an essay around a central theme, since these were often written assuming the audience already understood the background theme.

Some of the essays are in the public domain, while others remained private. I have included both. When I observed redundancies, I tried to bring out what I perceived as the central claim in each and included more than one version. This is especially the case for the first section of the book, where I included different versions of "Conversations for Action," with a distinct emphasis that I brought to the center in each essay.

I begin with, and give most importance to, the classic essay entitled "Conversations for Action," as this essay has influenced thousands since it was first written in the early '90s. Many consider the essay to be "classic," as it provides simple and effective distinctions for observing how we invent what we do together in conversations through certain basic speech acts. Indeed if one Googles "Conversations for Action" and "Commitment Based Management," there are endless pages that come up with practitioners utilizing this framework in their work, many of them former students. Some are utilizing the work for organizational change, some for life coaching, and others for business process design. These former students and practioners provided inspiration for putting this collection together in one place.

Then there are a few essays that elaborate further on practical applications of the conversations for action framework. The first section ends with another classic, "Assessments and Assertions," an essay that has allowed many to have more effective conversations regarding their observations of each other and the work being produced.

The first essays elaborate more on all that is entailed in making effective assessments of others. The second section of the book introduces a series of essays that I believe are about building commitment. They are about the connection between language, moods, and building trust.

The final section introduces the other side of my father's works: all that is entailed in listening and being attuned to what is in the cultural background. While the title of this collection refers to Fernando Flores' classic structure of conversations for action, I thought it was important to introduce a few distinctions which went on to form much of his later thinking regarding how "language owns us as historical, cultural beings." Some of this thinking is elaborated in *Disclosing New Worlds, Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity* and some is part of ongoing development. As the structure proposed by "Conversations for Action" became implemented in organizations and people's

lives, it became clear that conversations take place against a historical context. When people engage in conversation and invent the future, we must cultivate skills for listening and tuning in to concerns of others and to the background cultural style that influences both parties. The essays on concerns and listening are written in a more theoretical style, as these were written for an internal audience, i.e., for consultant training development. Still, it seemed important to introduce some of these distinctions to further enrich the "conversations for actions" and networks of commitments structure to get the full view of what my father began proposing many years back.

While the book is meant to be a collection of essays rather than one coherent book, the essays all share the same view of language as "expressive" rather than "instrumental," or conveying information. When people engage in conversations, commitments are made, and spaces of possibilities are opened up. Therefore, the theme is of "instilling a culture of commitment" in our working relationships.

Today, people are increasingly stressed by their working relationships. We hear stories of people coming home wanting to simply disconnect, to shut out all the stressful working relationships they must deal with on a daily basis. With our networked technology, e-mail, smartphones, chat, and so forth, disconnecting is becoming increasingly more difficult. If we do not respond right away to an e-mail, for instance, we stress out about appearing irresponsible. We are caught in the game of trying to balance endless individual interests; "If I let him have this win, maybe I will get this next win" type thinking. I hope that this group of essays plants the seeds for another way of thinking about our working relationships, one that instills a commitment culture, allowing us to think about what we are creating of value together rather than the ongoing stress of attempting to calculate tradeoffs of individual interests.

Acknowledgements