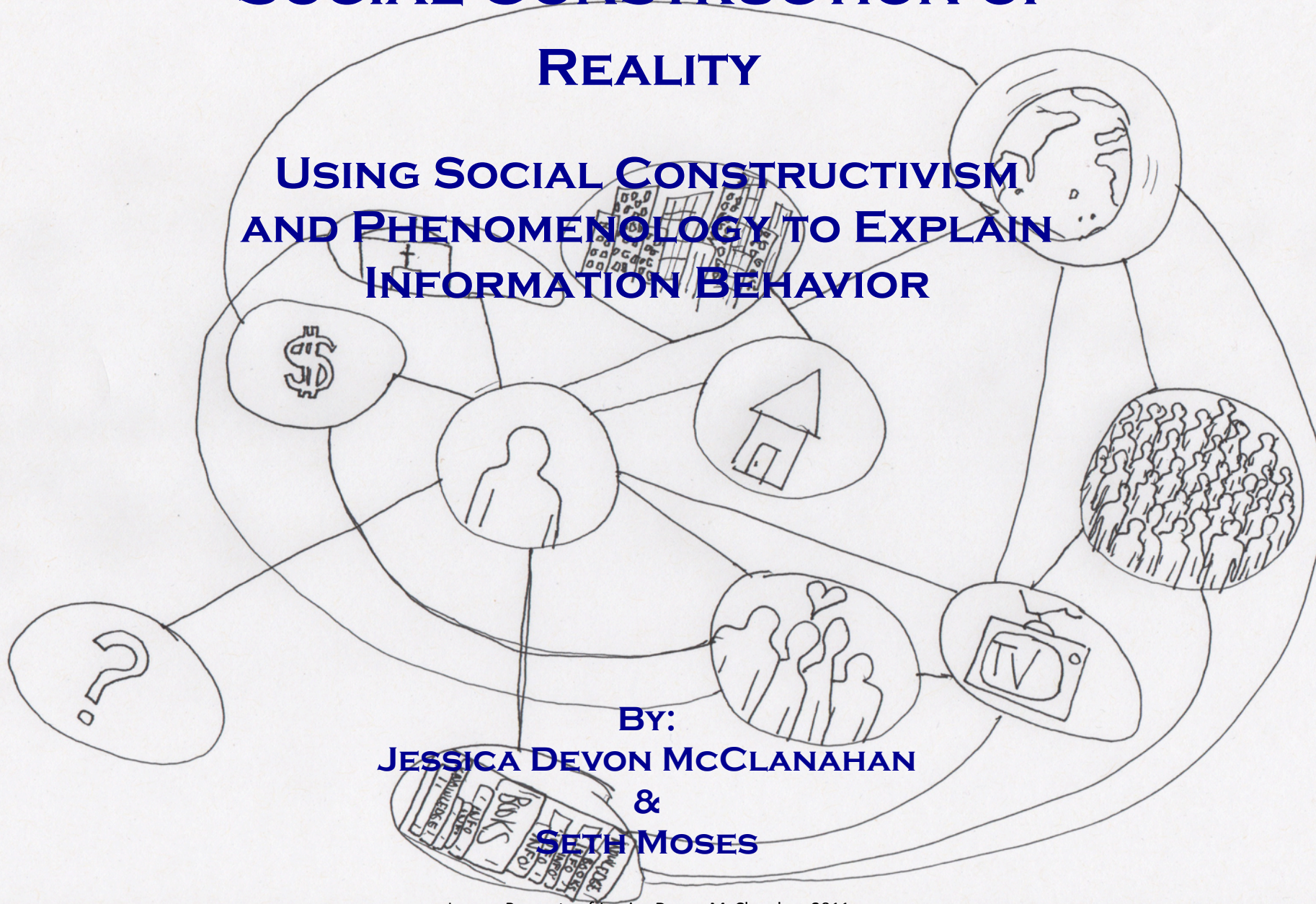


SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

**USING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM
AND PHENOMENOLOGY TO EXPLAIN
INFORMATION BEHAVIOR**



BY:

JESSICA DEVON McCLANAHAN

&

SETH MOSES

SOCIOLOGY & THE STUDY OF INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

- **A SHIFT IN FOCUS FROM STUDYING THE INFORMATION BEHAVIOR OF INDIVIDUALS TO THAT OF SOCIAL GROUPS**
- **A CRITIQUE ON COGNITIVE APPROACH**
- **AN INDUCTIVE APPROACH TOWARDS RESEARCH — STARTING WITH SPECIFIC GROUPS AND BUILDING ON THOSE CONCLUSIONS TO MAKE LARGER GENERALIZATIONS**

PHENOMENOLOGY/LIFE-WORLD

- **A PHILOSOPHY ADOPTED BY ALFRED SCHUTZ, FROM HIS STUDIES OF HUSSERL AND WEBER, THE FOUNDERS OF PHENOMENOLOGY (WILSON, 2002)**
- **INFORMATION AND HOW IT IS USED IS BASED ON ITS RELEVANCE TO THE USER'S SOCIAL SITUATION**
- **PEOPLE MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD; SCIENTISTS MAKING SENSE OF THEIR SENSE-MAKING**

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

- **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY BY BERGER AND LUCKMANN (1966), STUDENTS OF SCHUTZ**
- **INFORMATION USED IS DEPENDENT UPON THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIAL SURROUNDINGS AND HAS LITTLE OR NO MEANING INDEPENDENT OF THIS CONTEXT**
- **PEOPLE CREATE SOCIAL REALITY; SOCIAL SCIENCE TRIES TO UNDERSTAND THIS CREATION**

PHENOMENOLOGY/LIFE-WORLD

- EACH PERSON IS IN A
“BIOGRAPHICALLY DETERMINED
SITUATION” MAKING SENSE OF
THE WORLD ACCORDING TO A
“SYSTEM OF RELEVANCES” FROM
WHICH THEY CAN TAKE THE
INFORMATION NEEDED. (WILSON,
2002)

- PHENOMENOLOGY =
“STUDY OF STRUCTURES OF
CONSCIOUSNESS AS
EXPERIENCED FROM THE
FIRST-PERSON POINT OF
VIEW” (STANFORD
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY,
2008)

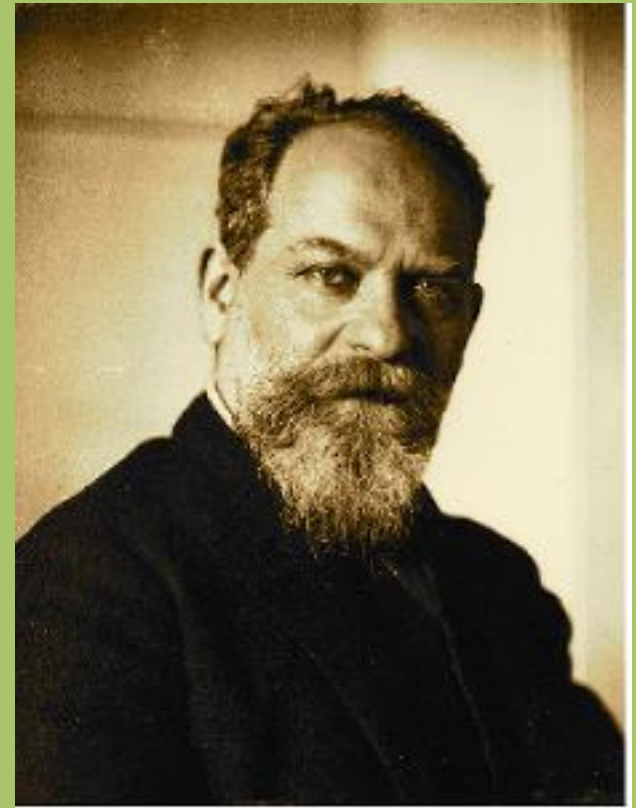
- LIFE-WORLD = “THE WORLD
AS IMMEDIATELY OR DIRECTLY
EXPERIENCED IN THE
SUBJECTIVITY OF EVERYDAY
LIFE” (ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA,
2011)

Image: <http://sathyasaibaba.wordpress.com/2008/09/08/samastha-lokah-sukhino-bhavanthu/>

“A RICH AND COMPLICATED HISTORY”

(BUDD, 2005)

- **HUSSERL — REALITY, TRUTH, AND BEING**
- **HEGEL - APPEARANCES**
- **HEIDEGGER — BEING VS. BEING**
- **SCHOLER - ATTITUDE**
- **MERLEAU — PONTY — PERCEPTIONS**



ALFRED SCHUTZ

- **MEANING IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT**
- **PEOPLE ARE IN A “BIOGRAPHICALLY DETERMINED SITUATION,” MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD ACCORDING TO A “SYSTEM OF RELEVANCES” FROM WHICH THEY TAKE THE INFORMATION NEEDED (WILSON, 2002)**
- **“THE WELL-INFORMED CITIZEN” AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE**
- **FOUR IDEAL TYPES: THE EYEWITNESS, THE INSIDER, THE ANALYST, THE COMMENTATOR**
- **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL RESEARCH AND PHYSICAL RESEARCH**

SYSTEM OF RELEVANCES

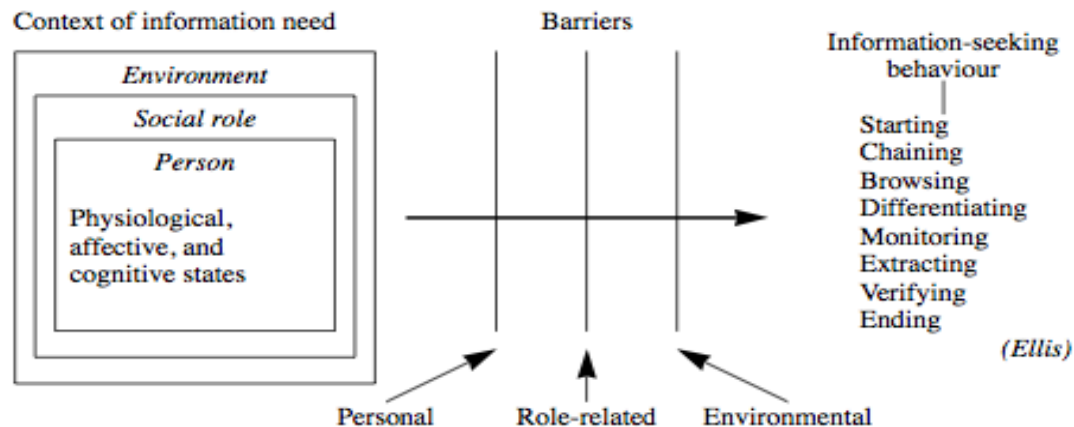
- “ENABLES [PEOPLE] TO SELECT FROM THE ENVIRONMENT, AND FROM INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS, THOSE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE SENSE FOR THE PURPOSE AT HAND” (WILSON, 2002)
- CHATMAN (2000) – INFORMATION POVERTY, LIFE IN THE ROUND, AND NORMATIVE BEHAVIOR
- SAVOLAINEN (1995) – “PEOPLE DEVOTE THEIR MOST INTENSIVE ATTENTION TO THINGS WHICH COME CLOSE TO EVERYDAY AFFAIRS AND WHICH BELONG TO THE WORLD WITHIN ACTUAL REACH... OF THE LIFE-WORLD...”



“BEYOND ‘NEEDY’ INDIVIDUALS”

(OLSSON, 2005)

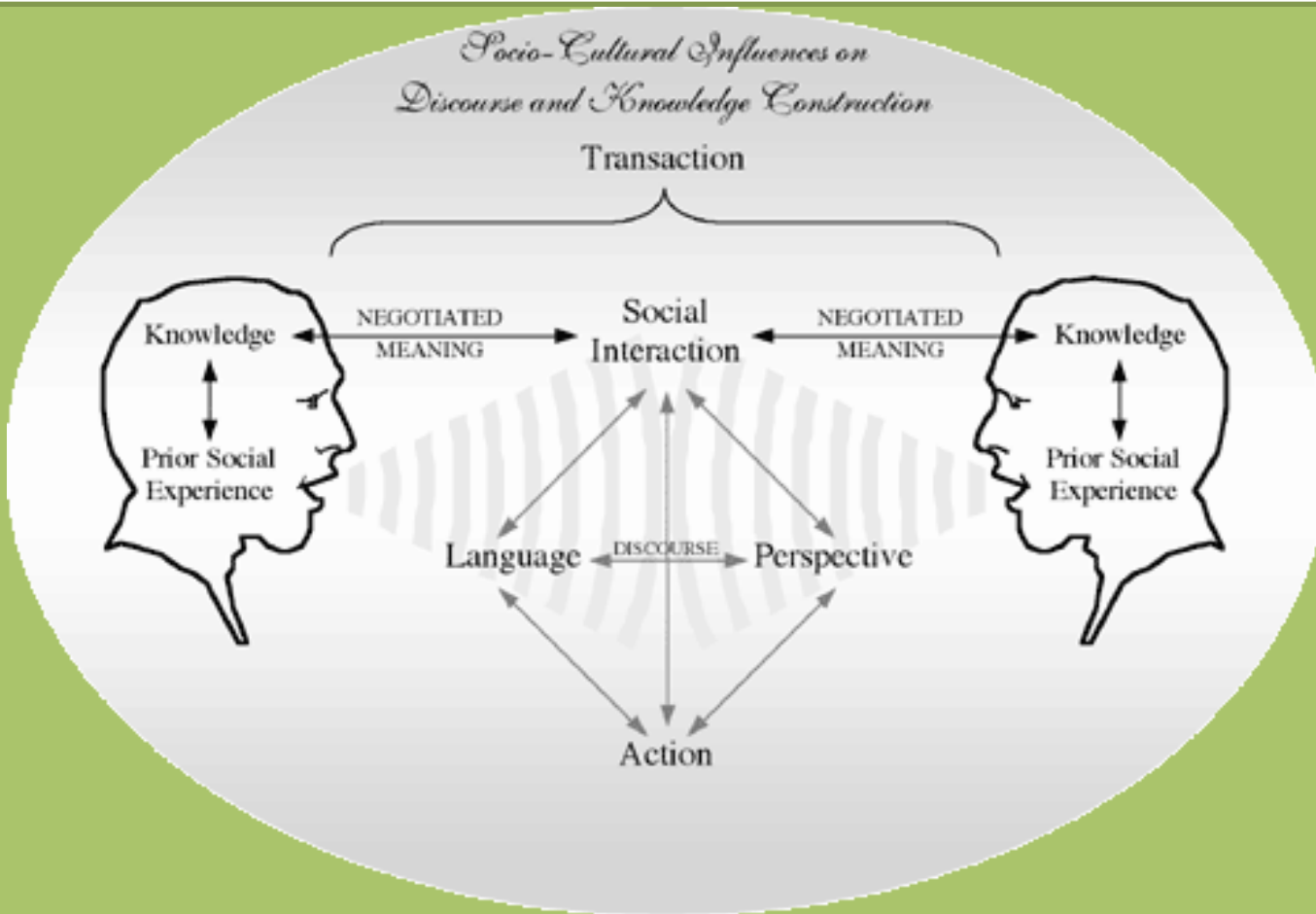
- **WILSON FINDS FAULT IN THE TERM “INFORMATION NEEDS,” AS NEITHER “INFORMATION” NOR “NEED” HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY DEFINED IN INFORMATION SCIENCE (WILSON, 1981)**
- **“A SPRINGBOARD TO RESEARCH BASED UPON A WIDER, HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE INFORMATION USER” (WILSON, 1981)**
- **OLSSON (2005) DESCRIBES RESEARCH BASED ON USER “NEED” AS FAULTY, BECAUSE IT FOCUSES ON THE USER’S WEAKNESS OVER HIS/HER STRENGTH**
- **“EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION” (SAVOLAINEN, 1995)**



WILSON'S MODEL OF INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR (WILSON, 1999)

- INFORMATION NEED IS A SECONDARY NEED THAT STEMS FROM A MORE BASIC NEED
- THE CONTEXT OF THE INFORMATION NEED IS IN THE ROLE OF THE SEEKER AND/OR THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE ROLE IS PLAYED
- THE SEEKER IS LIKELY TO MEET CERTAIN BARRIERS
- INFORMATION SCIENCE = SOCIAL SCIENCE

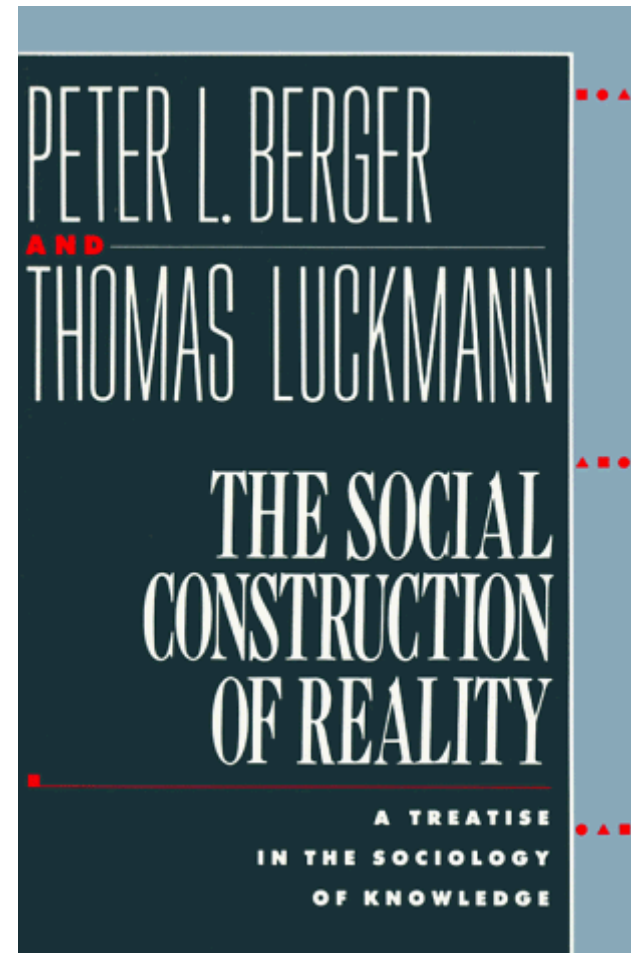
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM



THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

(BERGER AND LUCKMANN, 1966)

- WE SHARE AN OBJECTIVE SOCIAL REALITY, CREATED THROUGH AND MODIFIED BY OUR INTERACTIONS WITH ONE ANOTHER
- ACTIONS ARE INTERPRETED AND THEN EITHER ACCEPTED & “INSTITUTIONALIZED,” OR REJECTED
- ROLES/INSTITUTIONS VIEWED AS EXISTING APART FROM US
- ROLES & INSTITUTIONS MAY BECOME REIFIED (I.E. REGARDED AS CONCRETE THINGS INDEPENDENT OF HUMAN ACTIVITY)
- SOCIAL REALITY IS OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE



CONSTRUCTIVISM & INFORMATION BEHAVIOR

- **WHEN CONTRASTED WITH COGNITIVE APPROACHES, THE BENEFITS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK BECOME CLEAR (OLSSON, 2005)**
- **INDIVIDUALS DON'T CONSTRUCT MEANING IN A VACUUM - APPROACHES FOCUSING ON THE INDIVIDUAL MISS AN IMPORTANT, IF NOT A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF INFORMATION BEHAVIOR**
- **OTHER APPROACHES TEND TO FOCUS ON WHAT THE INDIVIDUAL *DOES NOT* KNOW (THE INFORMATION NEED), WHEN WHAT THE INDIVIDUAL *DOES* KNOW CAN BE JUST AS IMPORTANT**

CONSTRUCTIVISM & INFORMATION USE

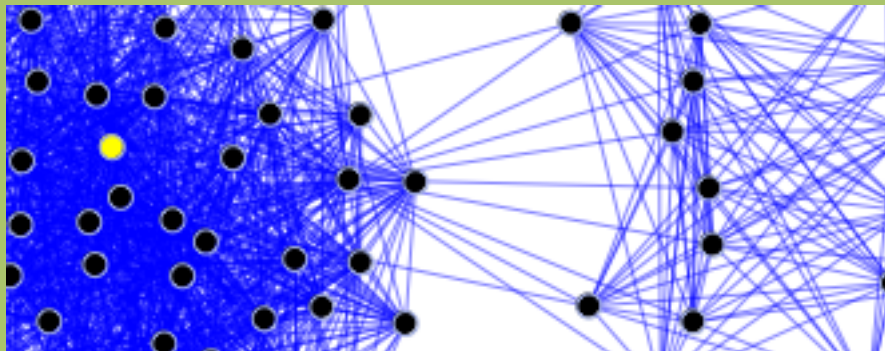
- JUST AS WE DON'T *CONSTRUCT* MEANING APART FROM A SOCIAL CONTEXT, WE DON'T *USE* INFORMATION IN A VACUUM EITHER
- WHEN VIEWED THROUGH A CONSTRUCTIVIST LENS, WE SEE THAT INFORMATION IS NOT ALWAYS USED TO SATISFY SOME PRACTICAL NEED; IT IS OFTEN USED IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATION
- IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE INFORMATION AS AN OBJECTIVE THING WITHIN A CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK BECAUSE INFORMATION (AND HOW IT IS PRESENTED) IS OFTEN AFFECTED BY THE SOCIAL CONTEXT, INCLUDING ONE'S AUDIENCE

CONSTRUCTIVISM IN RESEARCH

- **ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS TO STUDY THE INFORMATION BEHAVIOR OF A RELATIVELY SMALL, WELL-DEFINED GROUP**
 - **WILLIAMSON (2006) ARGUES THAT ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS ARE WELL SUITED TO A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH**
 - **WILLIAMSON STATES THAT SAMPLES SHOULD BE SELECTED BASED ON HOW WELL THEY LEND THEMSELVES TO IN-DEPTH STUDY AND HOW WELL THEY CONFORM TO THE ATTRIBUTES THE RESEARCHER WANTS TO STUDY**
- **DATA IS COLLECTED THROUGH INTERACTION AND OBSERVATION (I.E. INTERVIEWS)**
 - **OBSERVATION IS GUIDED BY A SCHEDULE OR A SET OF WELL-DEFINED QUESTIONS**
 - **DATA IS ANALYZED BY REVIEWING WRITTEN TRANSCRIPTS OF THE INTERVIEWS TO CATEGORIZE KEY ISSUES THAT WERE OBSERVED (THEMES MAY BE FOUND)**
 - **WILLIAMSON POINTS OUT THE WEAKNESSES OF THIS APPROACH (CAN'T BE USED WITH LARGE GROUPS; GENERALIZATION IS DIFFICULT), BUT IT DOES OFTEN GIVE US RICH, IN-DEPTH INSIGHT INTO THE GROUP STUDIED**

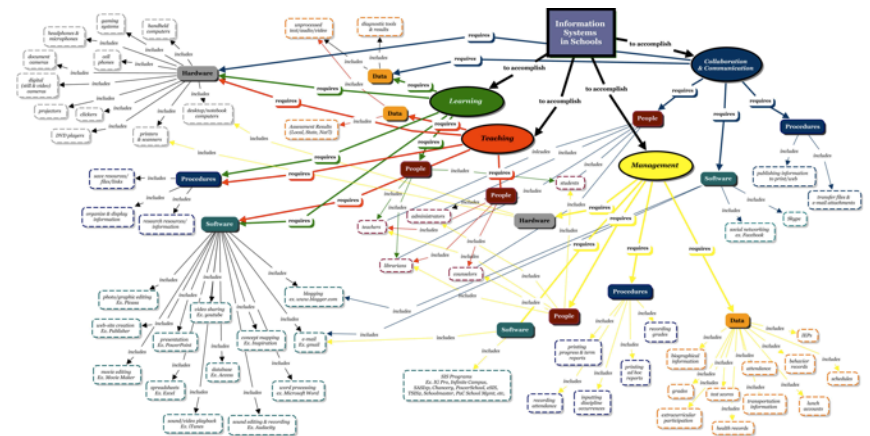
CONSTRUCTIVISM & INFORMATION SYSTEMS/TECHNOLOGY

- **SARKER (2000) USED CONSTRUCTIVISM TO DEVELOP A MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT COULD THEN BE APPLIED DIRECTLY TO SITUATIONS INVOLVING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY WITHIN THAT ORGANIZATION**
- **SARKER GIVES US A HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION WHERE SOME EMPLOYEES IN AN ORGANIZATION DO NOT APPRECIATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW TECHNOLOGY IN THE SAME WAY AS THEIR SUPERIORS**
- **THE CONCLUSION IS THAT WE NEED TO CLEARLY IDENTIFY ALL STAKEHOLDERS BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION SO WE CAN GAUGE PROBABLE REACTIONS IN ORDER TO MITIGATE POSSIBLE NEGATIVE REACTIONS**



CONCLUSION

- **CONSTRUCTIVISM HAS GREATLY INCREASED IN POPULARITY WITHIN THE INFORMATION SCIENCE FIELD WITHIN THE LAST 20 YEARS**
- **BROADLY ADOPTED WITH ARTICLES APPLYING THE THEORY TO INFORMATION BEHAVIOR AND USE, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, INFORMATION SYSTEMS, AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORY**



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