

- **Introduction**

- Housekeeping -- Code of Conduct
- Communication -- Miro and Zoom Chat
- Continuing the discussion

- **Discussion led by Dawn Ahukanna and Shauna Gordon-McKeon**

- Invite - <https://ti.to/bredemeyer/bridgingthegap/>
- Paper - <https://www.rethinkingpower.info/how-interpretive-labor-straddles-the-gap-between-rules-and-reality/>

- **Wrap up**

# What are the Big Ideas in "Interpretive Labor: Bridging the Gap Between Map and Territory"?



Key ideas:

**Map** refers to model or abstraction (simplification)

**Territory** refers to ...

**Imaginative labour** refers to the work of model-building. Synonymous to map/representation/abstraction.

**Interpretive labour** refers to the work of bridging the model and reality (machines don't tend to do this, people do).

Key ideas:

**Models:** "Essentially, all models are wrong but some are useful" - George E.P. Box. Models are perspectives are conclusions informed by perceptions based on how humans process data :

- sensed directly from lived experiences.
- inherited by encoding from other lived experiences.
- shared indirectly by learning from other lived experiences

e.g. Map and territory metaphor - <https://www.rethinkingpower.info/all-models-are-wrong-metaphors-for-the-insufficiency-of-metaphors/>

**Imaginative labour** is designed by people and executed by software, mechanical systems or tools. These are abstracted, tooled interaction interfaces. Where there is no tooling available, **interpretive labour** fills that gap.

**Interpretive labour (decision making based on feedback)** compensates for contextual gap in functionality/specific by people who use the imaginative labour (system). Sometimes, with their lives or disabling injury.

"Imagine a retail employee given two conflicting instructions: '*always get a receipt before refunding an item*' and '*the customer is always right*'. Their handbook has no guide for how to resolve the contradiction. Whatever the employee's solution, the work put into finding it is interpretive labor.

The pedestrian on the street outside, trying to **judge whether it's safe to cross** against the light, is performing interpretive labor too."

Toyota encouraged interpretive labor by creating a [safe learning environment](#).

General Motors adopted the same "**imaginative labour**" abstracted process that includes requesting employees exercise "**interpretive labour**" without autonomy or context resulting in an environment that only rewards compliance with "imaginative labour" i.e. imposed abstractions. So if workers participated in "**interpretive labour**" they were labeled/categorised/blamed/shamed as non-compliant with abstract "**imaginative labour**" expectations e.g. lazy, not motivated.

The result: cars were made and not sold as customers were not willing to pay for a car that did not meet their "**contextual**" expectations.

The less that is known about an unexpected outcome, the more the 1 known unknown is blamed i.e. the individual operator. Any feedback about contextual unknown unknowns becoming known unknowns is ignored.

The gap between the model (map) and the reality (territory) only closes if we act on the feedback to close the gap.

Systems (of formal set of rules) only function when people are willing to perform interpretive labour that bridges the gap between the formal (set of rules) and (what is) the actual (contextual variation of the rule , at a point in time). If contextual variation of a rule is always set to 1, then that rule(map) is only relevant when that is true in reality. But we behave as if it is always true/relevant.

<https://www.rethinkpower.info/all-models-are-wrong-metaphors-for-the-insufficiency-of-metaphors/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Utopia\\_of\\_Rules?ref=rethinkingpower.info](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Utopia_of_Rules?ref=rethinkingpower.info)

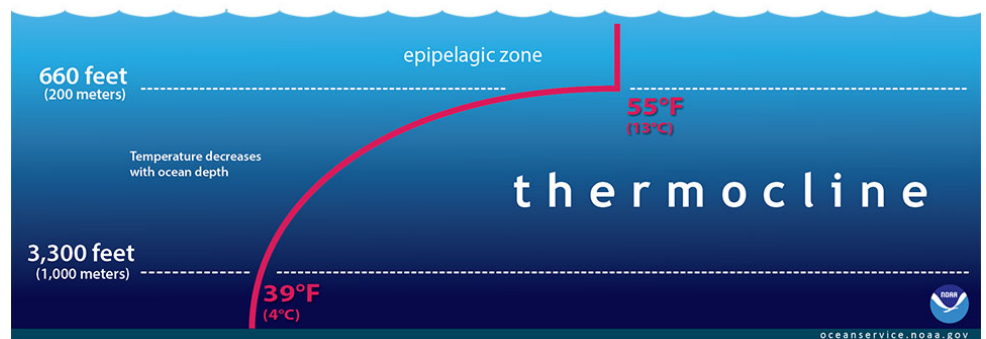
<https://fs.blog/map-and-territory/?ref=rethinkingpower.info>

open  
system

closed  
system

Ephemeral  
systems  
and  
computers

<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/thermocline.html>



Requesting employees exercise "**interpretive labour**" without **autonomy empowerment** results in an environment that only rewards imaginative labour i.e. imposed abstractions.

Any tooling and especially automation tooling that does not account for or cater to a **contextual variety** of possible outcomes for the same request is reducing a territory to one very specific instance/interpretation of a map/model.

Proposing the following equation:

**outcome** = (input request \* contextual variation) where **contextual variation is greater than 0 and less than 1**. This is the a representation of an **open system**. There are known and unknown variables.

instead of

**outcome** = (input request) where **contextual variation only equal to 1 and can be effectively ignored**. This is the a representation of a **closed system**. Tends to be the default context bias - all variables are known, so the only unknowable is the individual.

Interpretive labour requires the contextual variety (capture, communication and consideration of feedback regardless of source)

Holding someone accountable is not the same as blaming and shaming (anti-consideration) either the person responsible or the messenger (providing feedback communication).

Whenever you find yourself saying "They should have known ..." or "How could you not know ...", answer this question "Why would they have known ...?"

Make space to listen to, capture and assess all feedback to build and improve interpretive labour skills, as well as empower others to do the same.

Have feedback loops and channels built into every process you define, to enable and make space for functional "interpretive labour"

Demanding unquestionable "status quo compliance" creates an environment for dysfunctional interpretive labour == unprocessed or ignored feedback e.g. marginalisation, discrimination and bias. Lack of corrective feedback is a feature, not a bug

Got rock some boats, challenge wilful ignorance and 'Get in good trouble, necessary trouble' - Representative. John Lewis (deceased).

What gaps are you stepping into and not building connective bridges by changing the containing system or "Status quo"?

## Code of Conduct

Our participation here reflects our mutual agreement and commitment to each other to follow this code of conduct during our discussion today. It applies equally to all of us (including facilitators).

- We share a commitment to providing a friendly, safe and welcoming meeting experience for all, regardless of level of experience, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, personal appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, or other similar characteristic.
- Please be kind and courteous. Please avoid using terms that might detract from a friendly, safe and welcoming environment for all.
- Respect that people have differences of opinion and that our discussions will reflect different perspectives, trade-offs and impacts. There is seldom a right answer.
- Should anyone insult, demean or harass others in this setting, they will be excluded from interaction (contact the facilitators, if this happens). That is not welcome behavior.
- Likewise any spamming, trolling, flaming, baiting or other attention-stealing behavior is not welcome.

Note: We have adapted this code of conduct from the Ruby Code of Conduct.