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# The 7 forms of Interaction Model-

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Introducing an OD  
Interaction Model  
and 4 case studies.

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# **The 7 forms of Interaction Model -**

## **Introducing an OD Interaction Model and 4 case studies.**

### **Introduction**

This article seeks to introduce the '7 forms of Interaction model', and shows, how to eliminate dysfunctional forms of interactions and create synergy in 4 different situations.

The Model aims to diagnose, understand and improve interaction between individuals, units or cultures in organisations and communities, within the framework of postmodern approach to organization. The model suggests a graphical tool, which describes and improves interactions in and between organizations

The model has been successfully implemented for 15 years in the private sector, in the public sector, and in NGOs.

### **Literature Review**

Systems Approach (SA) is the conceptual framework for most middle-range theories that deal with organizations (Pinder & Moore, 1980). Main criticisms of this paradigm claim that although SA looks at the whole and its parts simultaneously, insufficient tools were provided on the methodological level.

The weakness of the SA, together with the changes occurring in organizations, necessitated a second generation of SA (Bahlmann, 1990).

The "Autopoietic Approach" is an example of this second generation SA. According to this approach, hierarchy within the organization should be replaced by ever-changing relationships between the components of the organization (Buhl, 1987; Esposito, 1984).

The complexity approach is another example of second generation SA, emphasizing differences and encouraging continuously changing interactions and networks. The complexity approach use the term "self - organizing" to describe changes in the organizational structure, which occurs on the basis of interactions and help the organization to evolve (Olson, 2006).

In recent years, the postmodern approach to organization was introduced and began replacing bureaucratic control with market control (Jones, 2000). Stephens (2001) expanded the term of *trust* and Hirschhorn (1997) the terms of *leading* and *following* in the postmodern organization.

Postmodern organization may be defined as a networked set of diverse, self-managed, self-controlled teams with many centers of coordination that fold and unfold according to the requirements of the tasks (Boje & Prieto, 2000; Boje 2000). The postmodern organization's characteristics include (among others), labor-management cooperation, many-voices, and diversity as a decentralized asset and self control, networked organizations (Galbraith, et. al., 1993). We can consider that hierarchies as well as bureaucracy are breaking down with the appearance of flat, flexible, empowered postmodern organizational forms (Clegg, 1990).

This characteristics requires special attention to communication and to boundaries inside and between organization (Ben-Yshai and Zwikael, 2007) – this is the focus of the 7 forms of the Interaction Model.

### **The 7 forms of the Interaction Model**

Interaction in organizations consists of Borders, on one hand and Communication on the other.

#### **Borders (differentiation):**

Some readers might feel more comfortable with the term "boundaries". According to Gestalt theory "contact boundaries is where organism and environment meet and exchange influence on each other" (Gaffney, 2006). I prefer the term borders because

I wish to emphasize differences between the organisms (person, team, department, organization, nations). Borders (boundaries) might be:

- Role
- Responsibilities
- Authority
- Qualities and Expertise
- Hierarchy - Status Symbols
- Culture
- Physical - Territorial

One can identify three different forms of borders:

- Rigid
- Flexible/ permeable
- Blurred (When some of the borders definitions do not exist or are not agreed upon).

### **Communication (Integration)**

One can identify three different forms of communication:

- Hierarchical
- Interdependency
- Melting - Synergy

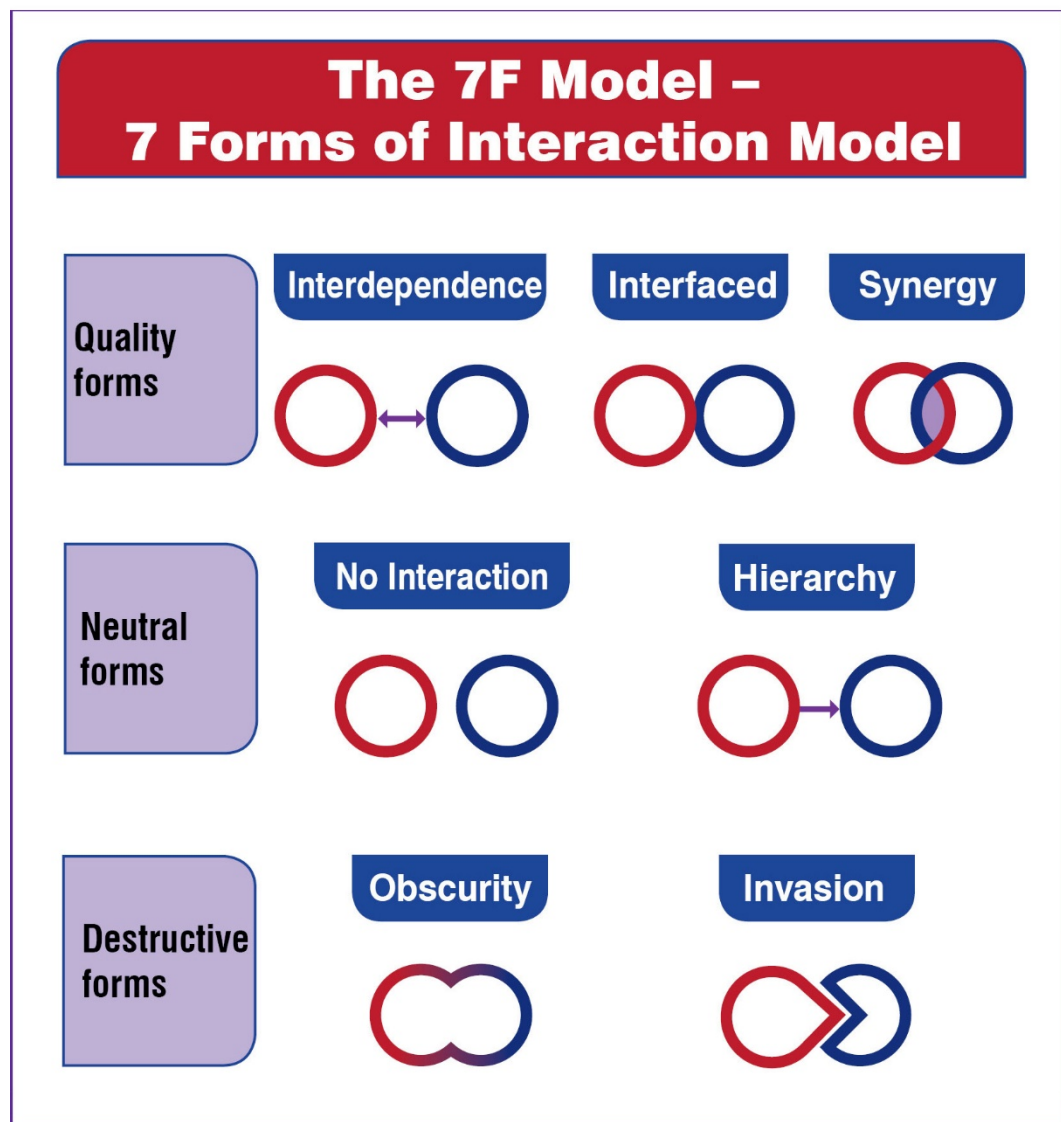


*Chart 1: 7F Model – The 7 Forms of Interaction*

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The first three forms are well known. The fourth, Interfaced, is the form used in most successful teamwork, the 5th and the 6th are organizational diseases: Blurred occurs when part of the borders are not defined or when at least one party does not agree on the border. Invasion occurs when one party invades the borders (role) of another party, even so the borders are well defined. Synergy/overlapping describes the only form when something new is created by partners, each of them has a part of the new creation, but nobody has them all.

Good interaction depends first upon borders. Therefore one has to establish well defined, agreed upon borders before tackling communication issues.

### Stages using the Model:

1. Decide upon the synergy needed to be created. This should be described in terms of real goals, such as improving market share.
2. Analyze the existing forms of borders, communication, and Interaction.
3. Eliminate cases of Blurred (by defining borders) and of Invasion.
4. Help create synergy using tools of team-building.

### How Communication Patterns and Boundaries Shape the 7 Forms of Interactions

The 3 forms of Borders+ the 3 forms of communication create 6 ways of interaction (Chart 2):

| How Communication Patterns and Boundaries Shape the 7 Forms of Interaction |                      |                 |                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Communication Pattern →                                                    | One-Way              | Two-Way         | Fusion                   |
| Boundary ↓                                                                 |                      |                 |                          |
| Rigid                                                                      | Hierarchy / Invasion | Interdependence | Interfacing              |
| Flexible                                                                   | Obscurity            | Interfacing     | <b>Synergy / Overlap</b> |
| Blurred                                                                    | Obscurity            | Obscurity       | Obscurity                |

*Chart 2: Creating forms of interaction from the types of boundaries and communication*

When we add the possibility of "No Interaction" we get the "7 forms of Interaction Model"

## **Applications**

### **Case study A: Merger between 2 accounting offices.**

One year after the merger of two accountant offices, there was a feeling that the merged office does not fulfill the potential synergy of the two different offices. That was when the OD consultant was asked in. At the beginning of the intervention, there were 5 partners and a year and a half later when the OD intervention was over there were 7 partners, 40 employees, and new branches.

On the first stage of the OD process the work was carried out by 5 partners using questionnaires (see appendix A). They showed different cases of blurred and invasion situations and fairly little synergy.

In a workshop, a new vision for the organization was elaborated and 5-year goals were established. The strengths of each partner were reviewed vis-a-vis the established goals. This enabled the partners to sharpen the blurred borders between them.

A more difficult issue to tackle was the invasion issue. The partner who was elected CEO, was perceived as invading the other partners. Such expressions as "I feel like an employee in my own firm" were common. However, it was difficult to discuss it in an open and assertive way. A workshop using the method of Council Circle helped to alleviate those feelings

On the second stage, a 2 day workshop was carried out with all the employees. Again the questionnaires were used, identifying examples of all the 7 different patterns. On the third stage, teams were established that included partners as well as employees.

The teams tackled issues concerning the creation of synergy between the two firms. For example organizational structure - eliminating issues of blurred roles,

responsibilities, authorities; processes – deciding which processes to use in the new firm; human resources; Information Systems; etc.

After a year of work the atmosphere improved and employees and partners saw themselves as a synergetic firm and were able to start working on new projects.

To finalize the OD processes, 2 workshops were carried out related to issues of customers' relationship: mainly how to give the customers the feeling of intimate service by a fairly big firm.

The next two cases look at cross-cultural interactions.

## **CASE STUDY B: Working together in a conflict situation** **Creating a Jewish – Arab employment Zone.**

### **Interaction between nations**

Sometimes it takes a fantasy – to create a new reality. The second case study is about such a case.

### **The story**

In 2006, A group of 6 students (3 Arabs 3 Jews), at the Haifa University in Israel, were looking for an M.A. project in a special Jewish- Arab – coexistence MA programme. One of them had the idea of including an Arab employment Zone in an existing Jewish industrial zone. The group managed to overcome prejudice and hostility, first amongst themselves, then with the different partners on local and national levels. Today, after less than 4 years, the first stage of the program is on its way to change the reality of the region. The Israeli president, Shimon Peres, declared it a model project for many more to come.

### **The role of the model:**

The 6 students group (as well as other students groups in the program) found it hard to become an organic team. They had two roles: facilitators (supervised by the author) and citizens in their different (Arab and Jewish) communities (sometimes part

of, or influenced by the related projects). As Gaffney (2006) says, The consultant in such cases needs to "constantly question, explore, and honestly acknowledge any evidence of" his impact on the situation. Starting with a lot of "good will", the students' different national background prevented them from working well together. In a workshop on borders, trying to minimize examples of blurred and invasion situations, the students managed to respect each other's culture and situation (majority – minority relationship in a conflict zone). Using the model enabled them to create a micro – cosmos (regardless of political opinions and the "outside world"), where they were able to work as a synergic team. This experience enabled them to go into their different communities, and help to create the conditions for collaboration that is not common for this region.

## **CASE STUDY C : HADASSAH – ISRAEL (H-I) INTER - CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP**

### **Interaction between cultures**

H-I is a women's, Zionist, volunteer organization connected to Hadassah International and the Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization of America. Areas of special involvement and activity are: health promotion, Immigrants Absorption, education, women status, environmental issues, and the quality of life. H-I support Hadassah's projects and institutions in Israel (Hospitals, Medical and Nursing schools, Colleges, Youth Villages, Research Institutions).

One of the "big issues" in Hadassah Israel is that there are two different local cultures (English speakers - mostly ex-American Jewish women that came to live in Israel and Hebrew speakers). Each group has its own chapter and their activities are different. This 'division' was treated as a "Pandora Box" - better not to be touched.

**Stage 1-** In the first stage, a letter was sent to all the members. The aim of the letter was to 'open the Pandora's Box' in a challenging but safe way in order to encourage members from the two different cultures within Hadassah to value the contribution of

each other. The message in the letter was that the contributions were different but all equally valuable.

**Stage 2-** A workshop was built using the 7 Forms of Interaction Model. The aim of this workshop was to learn to appreciate the differences between the two cultures and the strength that combining forces could bring to the organization. In each workshop, a more or less even number of Hebrew and English speakers participated. The workshops were carried out in both Hebrew and English, and included the following parts:

1. A play describing a joint project carried out by an English and a Hebrew speaking chapter. The play was acted by two volunteers, one from each culture.
2. Working separately (English - Hebrew) with two facilitators on issues such as: strengths and weaknesses of my group/ the other group, projects I want to volunteer for etc.
3. Working together on the same issues.

**Stage 3-** The workshops were a big success on the emotional level. On the practical level (working together) some more work had to be carried out to put systems in place, e.g. mentoring chapter presidents and facilitating actual common projects.

## **CASE STUDY D: ANALYSING THE MOVE TOWARDS SELF-MANAGING NURSING TEAMS (SMNT) in SCOTLAND.**

### **Interaction between rolls**

In 1998, there was a move, in Scotland to develop the individual clinic and community nurses into SMNT with (eventually) direct responsibility for their staffing issues (recruitment absence and holidays), appraisal, training, and all budgets. This program aimed to:

1. Save money

2. Redirect these services from the control of a 'distant' manager to the nurses who actually deliver the service, making the service more responsive to local needs.
3. Raise the professional level of nursing by allowing nurses to organize themselves and the services they deliver.
4. Enhance their professional status.

The program was not without its difficulties. Before the change there was a culture of distrust of Management and the program could be seen as cost cutting by giving extra work (previously done by better paid managers) to the already busy nurses.

The SMNT moved the nurses from a culture and way of working characterized by no communication, one-way communication or at best two-way communication within a bureaucratic hierarchical structure, to a position of self-direction and the use of overlapping and interface.

The model highlighted:

1. The opportunities given to the nurses: greater autonomy and control over their professional service and the possibility of the new ways of working creating an 'overlapping' position.
2. Using the model, we examined critically whether covert women status resistance might lead to the appearance of the team working but really only to an 'interface' situation (working side-by-side, but still independently). The model highlights other potential pitfalls that may befall the nursing team namely: invasion by the hierarchy or other professionals (politicking and distrust), and blurring and ambiguity between the new roles and areas of responsibility (confusion, uncertainty and fear).

## **Conclusion**

This article describes the seven forms of interaction model, showing in four different cases how to eradicate unhelpful expressions of interaction and create

synergy helping organizations achieving their goals. In this respect this model fits post modern organizations emphasizing the importance of team and collaboration.

Working with the model might prove itself fruitful especially in:

- Organizations with relatively autonomous units such as profit centers.
- Two (or more) organizational cultures.
- Mergers and Acquisitions.

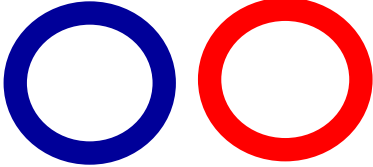
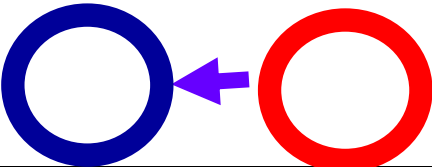
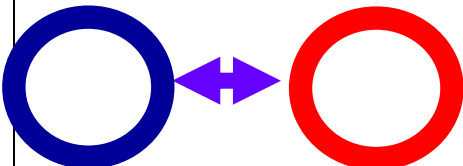
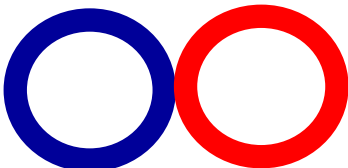
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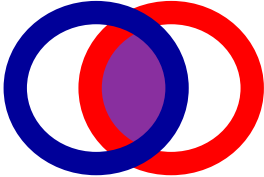
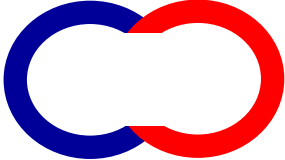
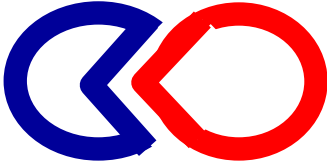
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**Appendix A****7 Forms of Interaction model – questionnaire**

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|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |  | <b><u>No Interaction</u></b> even though some is needed     |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
| intensity of the form                                                               |  |                                                             |
|   |  | <b><u>One Way</u></b> – instruction given – no feedback.    |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                          |  |                                                             |
|  |  | <b><u>Two Way</u></b> – dialog.                             |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                          |  |                                                             |
|  |  | <b><u>Interface</u></b> - very good interaction (team-work) |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
|                                                                                     |  |                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                          |  |                                                             |

|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |  | <p><b><u>Synergy</u></b> - very good interaction – concerning creating of something new.</p>                                |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                         |  |                                                                                                                             |
|   |  | <p><b><u>Blur</u></b> – Parts of the borders (e.g. job description) are missing. Responsibilities are not well defined.</p> |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                         |  |                                                                                                                             |
|  |  | <p><b><u>Invasion</u></b> - though borders are well defined - one of you is invading the role of the other.</p>             |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                    |  |                                                                                                                             |
| intensity of the form in %                                                         |  |                                                                                                                             |

5. Divide 100 percents between the 7 forms. The percents demonstrate the intensity of the form. For example if you feel that blur occurs often, and disturbs you a lot, while Invasion is fairly rare you may give 30% to blur and only 5% to Invasion. Please give 100% altogether.

**Ben-Yshai, Rami, Ph.D. - CURRICULUM VITAE**

**Consultant** of Organizational processes and structures.

**Lecturer:** O.D. & HRM.

**33** years in the profession.

**Main Areas of Consulting:**

1. Interactions in and between teams and organizations. Mostly with the "7 F model".
2. Creating organizational synergy in M&A.
3. Implementing structural & HR aspects of strategic changes.
4. Team building.
5. Job analysis, evaluation, and design.

**Professional Qualifications**

Ph.D. in Labor Studies. Dissertation: "Macro, Midro, Micro: The 'Triple-M' Model for Analyzing Complex Organizations". The Model emphasizes the role of the MIDRO – the middle level (quasi-independent – middle – level units which enable the organization to operate in different environments).