

Sam Williams

## Theory #8

Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) was developed by M. Scott Poole to talk about the limitations of traditional linear models of communication in groups, which he found overly simplistic and not good enough for capturing the real complexity of group dynamics. AST is based on the idea that social structures, which are composed of rules and resources, both shape and are shaped by group interactions. This concept, known as the “duality of structure,” suggests that group members are influenced by existing norms and rules, but they also have the ability to modify these structures to fit their needs. According to Poole, the theory is “adaptive” because group members intentionally and often creatively adapt rules and resources to accomplish their goals (Poole, Seibold, & McPhee, 1996)(slides 10\_28)(Griffin, Adaptive Struc...).

AST says group members are not passive followers of social structures but are active agents who use and sometimes alter the rules and resources at their disposal. In this framework, rules represent norms that say how things should be done, while resources include the skills, knowledge, and social connections that group members bring to the interaction. Through the process of structuration, members are actively constructing their social reality by using and also reshaping these rules and resources in response to group needs and objectives. This dual influence allows for continuity and change within groups. Poole argues that many conflicts and power dynamics within groups are influenced by this adaptive process, where the rules and resources in play can empower or constrain members in different ways, depending on how they are used or interpreted (Poole, 1985).

An example that shows AST in action is the creation of a game by students in a classroom activity. In this scenario, the students have a task of developing a new game by

building on familiar concepts from other games, like Bingo or Monopoly, but adapting them to create a new experience. According to AST, the students would bring their own preferences, skills, and prior knowledge into the game-making process, which influenced their interactions and decisions about rules, objectives, and gameplay mechanics. As students debate game goals, rules, and incentives, they engage in “appropriation,” where they adapt and personalize rules from pre-existing games to suit their new game. For example, deciding on a game objective, like winning through skill or luck, required negotiation among students, who used both personal preferences and group norms to shape the final structure of the game. This process shows AST’s principle that rules are not rigidly followed but are constantly reinterpreted and adapted to fit current group needs (Poole & DeSanctis, 1992).

A quote that I could use for my zine page that shows AST is: "Members in groups are creating the group as they act within it... structuration theory [helps] them become aware of the rules and resources they're using so they can have more control over what they do in groups" (Poole, 1985). This quote shows AST’s emphasis on awareness and intentionality in group dynamics, where understanding the rules and resources available can empower members to shape outcomes actively rather than follow preset structures passively.

By illustrating how groups can dynamically create and reshape their social reality, AST provides a really good framework for understanding both stability and change within group settings, encouraging members to take an active role in shaping their collective experience.