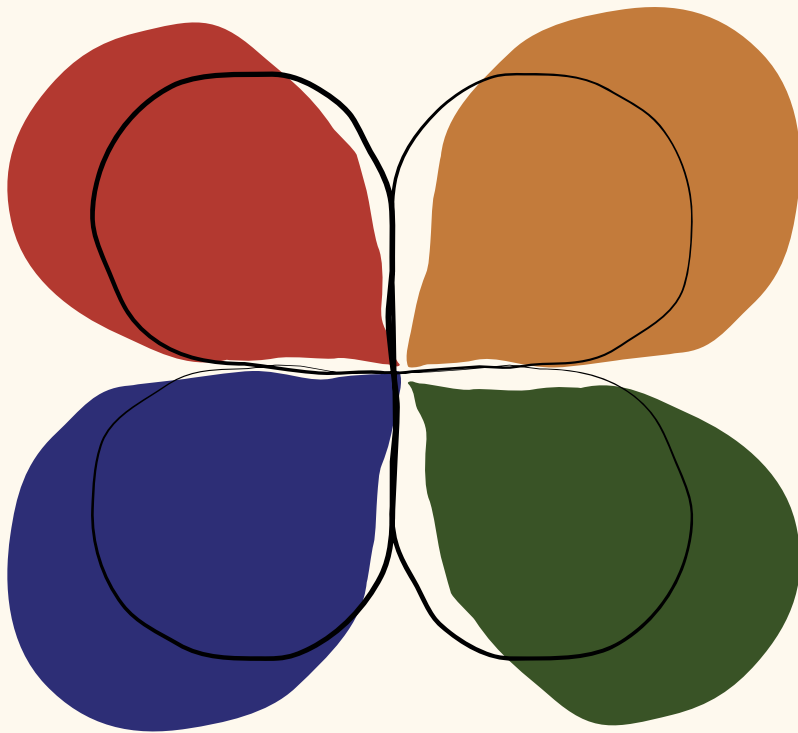


Design Thinking & Social Construction

A practical guide to innovation in research



Celiane Camargo-Borges
Sheila McNamee

“When adopting a design attitude within the social construction framework, we create a powerful mix for creativity and innovation in research”

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B/S

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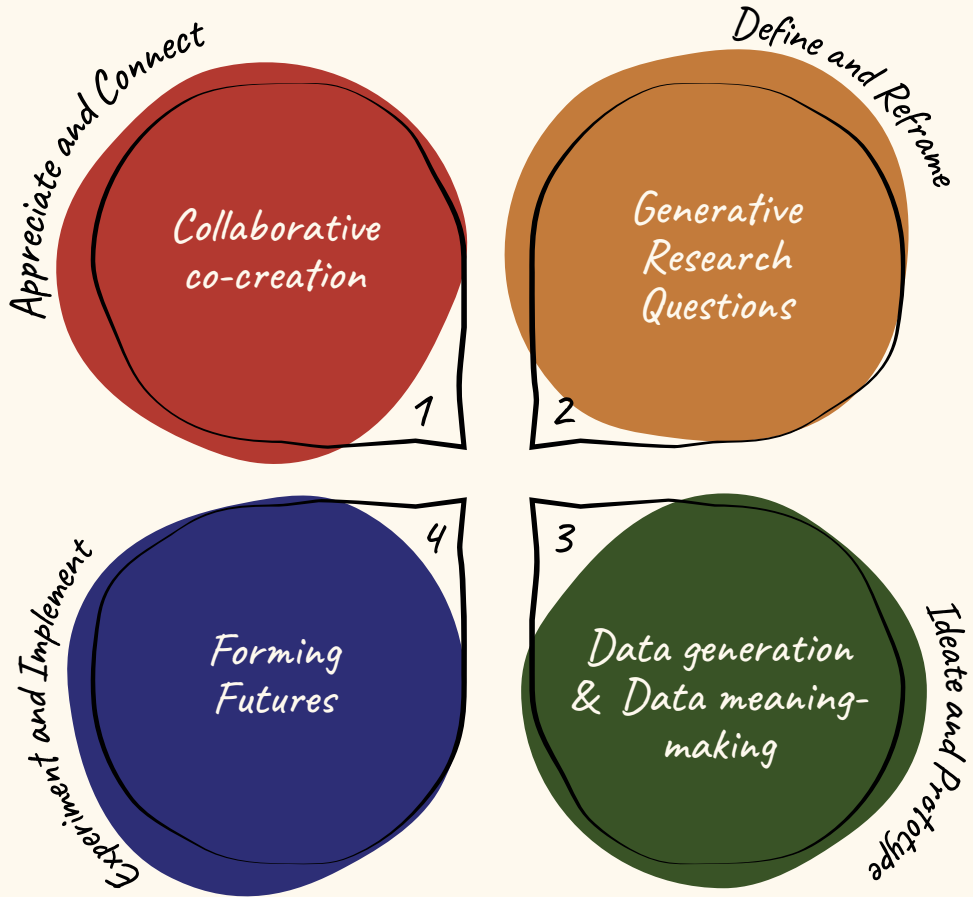
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The Constructionist-Design Research Framework



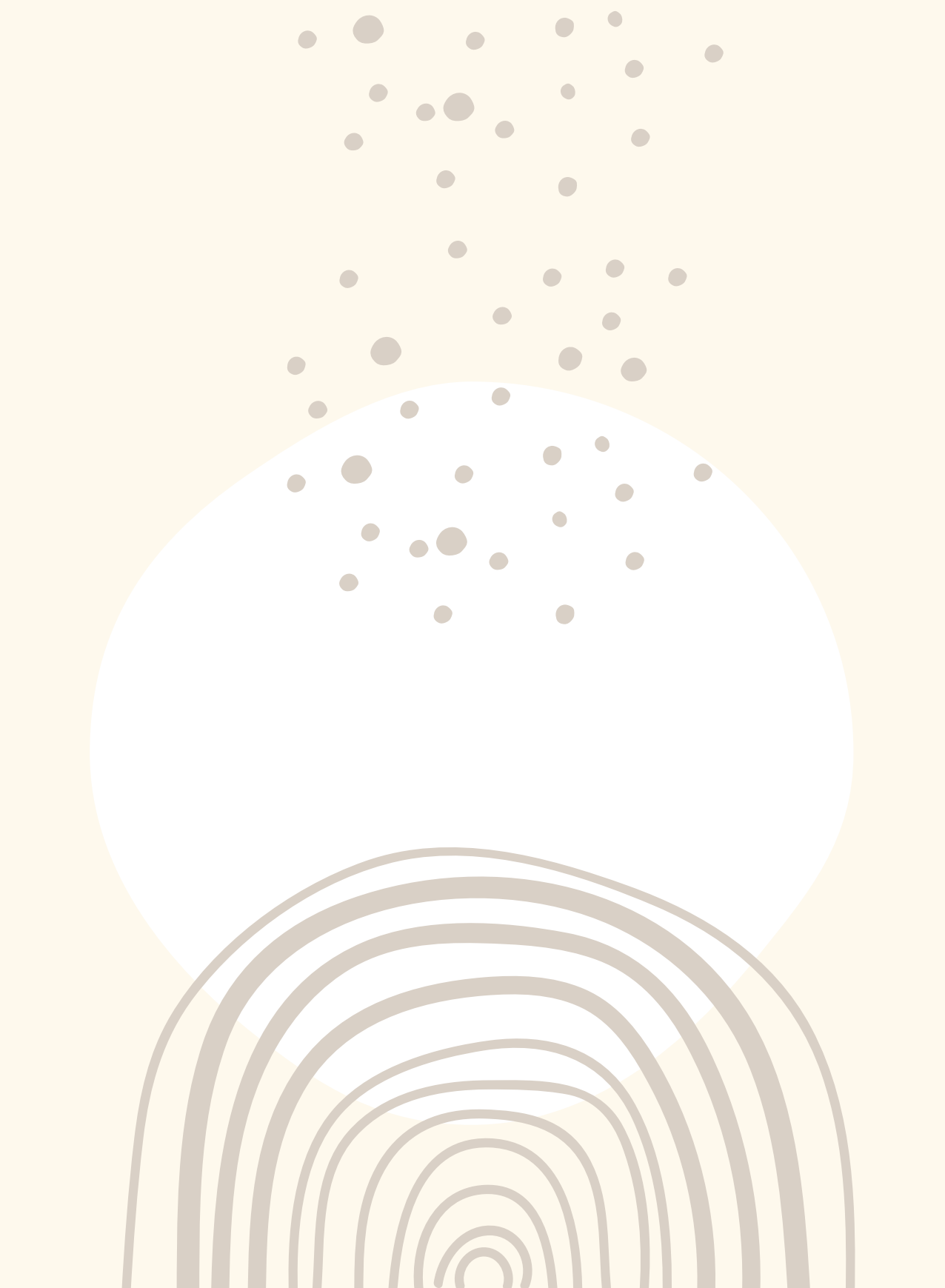
Unfolding new worlds





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Preface

Silva Jardim is one of my favorite places in Brasil, a location where I made friends over the past several years while bringing my Dutch students to work on their innovation projects. The broad fronds of banana leaves and the lush vegetation bring cool shade to the farm of friends in this one area of the Atlantic rain forest in Brasil's state of Rio de Janeiro. This area is not only filled with wild beauty and mystery but also hosts social movements for the restoration of the rain forest as well as community projects to produce organic food and cultural movements in an ongoing search for greater social equality. This is not only an idyllic place but an ideal space to bring this book to a close as well as my own sabbatical year traveling around South America, my home continent.

Throughout this year I have been immersed in multiple places and cultures and have been especially moved by – and have learned from – the traditional knowledge of local and indigenous peoples living in South America. I spent time with the Tupi-Guaranis and Quilombolas in Brasil, the Quechuas and Aymaras in Peru, and the Tayrona, Kogi and Wiwa in Colombia. My travel and exposure to the diversity of peoples, cultures, and landscapes has made me appreciate the richness that we have around us and the great variety of ways of seeing and doing things. And this inspires — or should inspire — the need to celebrate diversity, embracing it for the new knowledge it brings to us all.



How can research tap into this diversity of knowledge and wisdom?

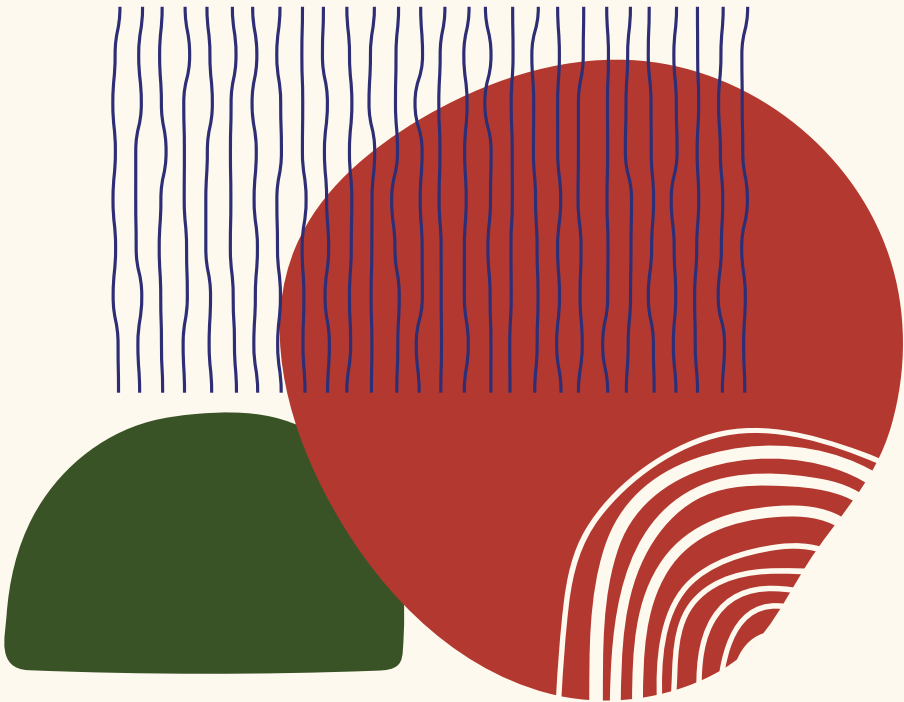
Along with my co-author, **Sheila McNamee**, we are committed to the movement of decolonizing research, embracing knowledge as a co-construction of all sorts of people in their interactions and not just belonging to an elite of academics. We want to inspire professionals to see that knowledge is not something only produced in laboratories or academic institutions. For those of us committed to a world that can be more just and inclusive, we must create space not merely to exploit it but to learn from it, to create with and to combine this plurality of wisdom into new possibilities for people and the world.

As I learned how the indigenous peoples often look at humanity and the natural world as one united whole instead of as separate and opposing dichotomies (nature versus civilization), I was inspired to incorporate those systemic and integral ideas in this book. The central theme of **Design Thinking and Social Construction: A Practical Guide to Innovation in Research** is to highlight the interconnectedness of ourselves and the ecosystem as we create knowledge. We show how nature, people, and our environments are related and shape our reality. And through the Constructionist-Design Research Framework, we explore how we can forge a new vision of what is possible as we participate together in the research process. We encourage researchers to become change agents, celebrating diversity, transcending dichotomies, and producing knowledge while also changing the system. We encourage researchers to embrace an ethic of constant learning and evolving, through a spirit of open-mindedness and by establishing mutually beneficial partnerships.

I

Social Construction and Design Thinking

A Philosophical and a Practical Perspective on Research



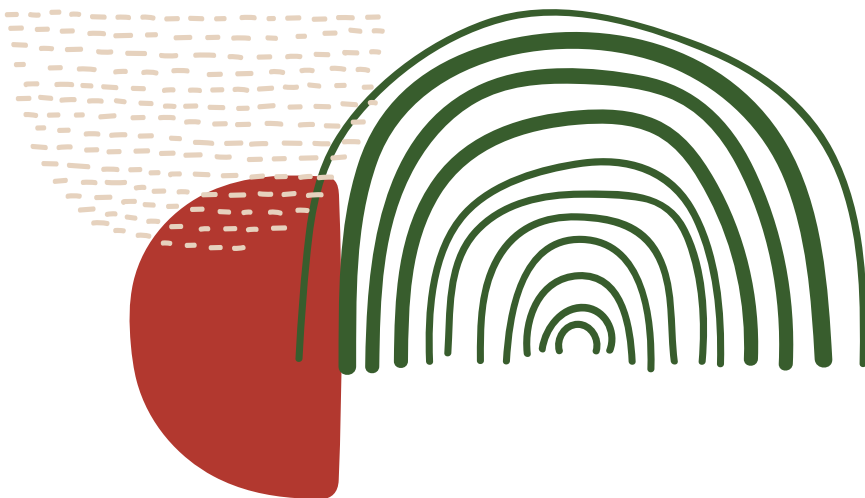
This chapter will introduce:

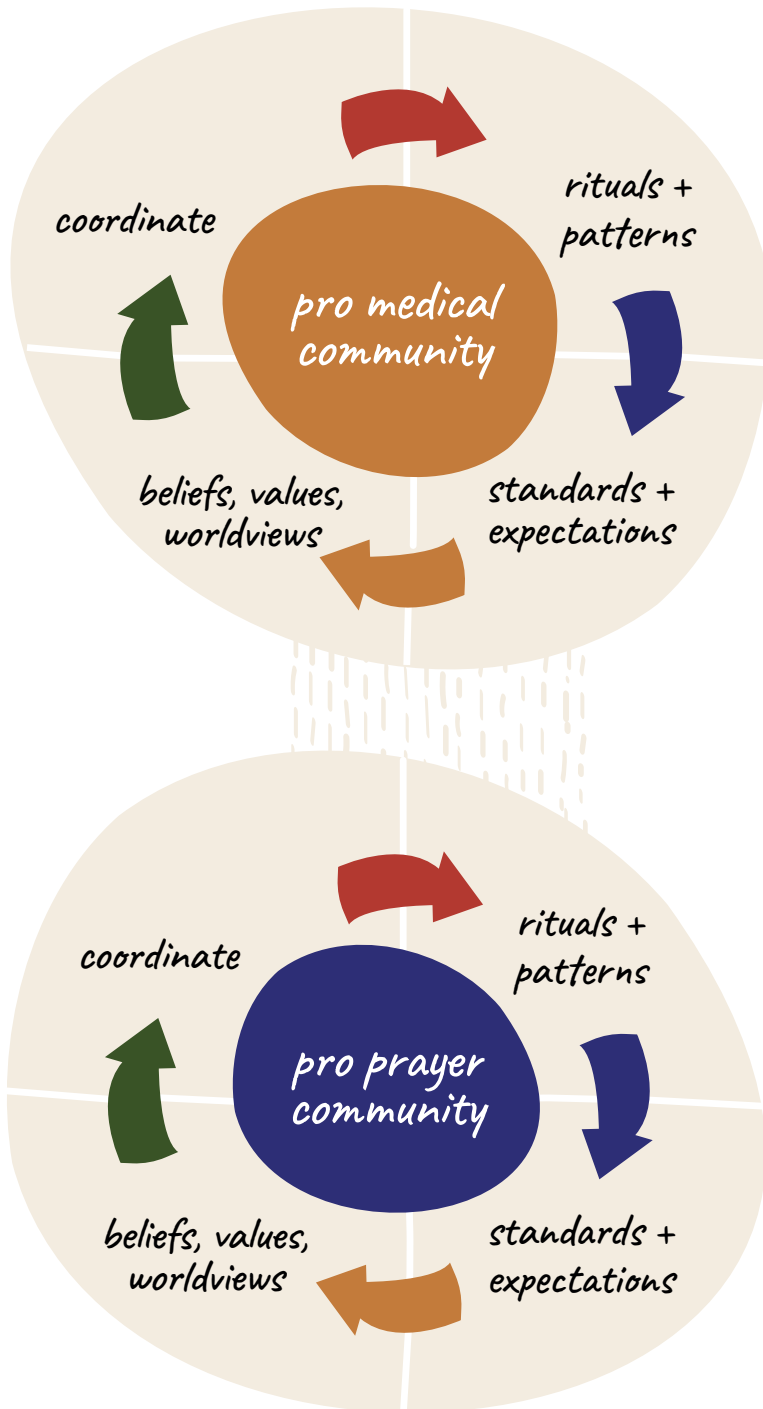
- Social construction and its central features
- Design thinking and its principles and attributes
- An integration of design thinking and social construction as a powerful mix for research

The Philosophical Perspective

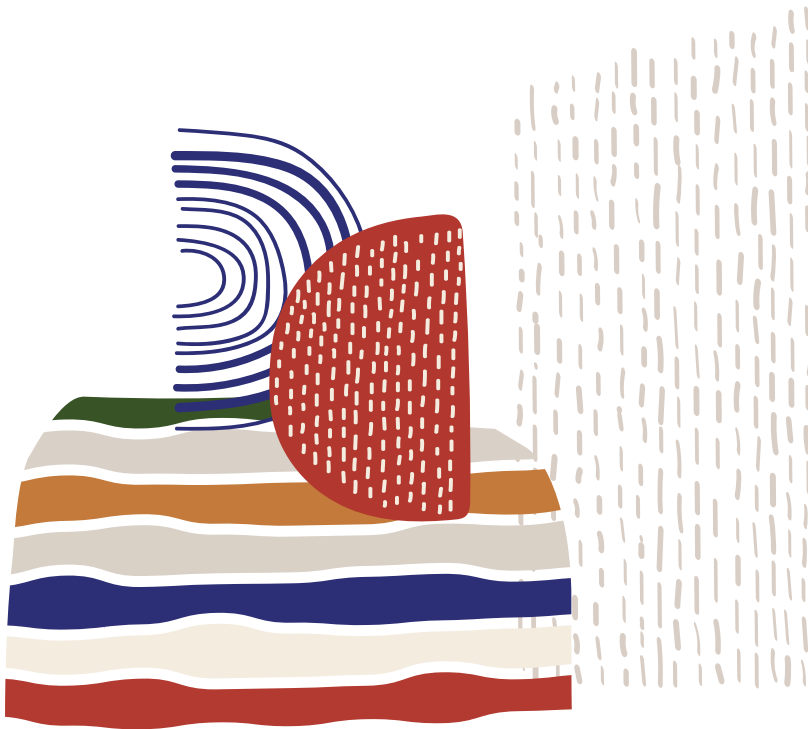
– Social Construction

Social construction is a movement within the social sciences that has developed over the past several decades as one of the most important and innovative paradigms of contemporary psychology (Burr, 2015). The focus of social construction is on meaning-making. Constructionists assume that meaning is created when people interact. Social construction also acknowledges that the meaning is never stable; it is constantly changing and is responsive to culture, history, and local situatedness. Social construction invites us to take a closer look at what people do together in local contexts since this is where knowledge (meaning) is produced. This means that, instead of searching for unified answers to the challenges of living, we start with an assumption that there are always diverse beliefs and values circulating in a culture, community, organization, or family. And, instead of attempting (through research) to discern which beliefs and values are the “right” ones, we engage in “curious inquiry” in an attempt to understand how diverse meanings are coherent for those who hold them. We center our interest on exploring the polyphony of voices and perspectives that play a role in shaping and framing the meaning of issues we confront in our families, our communities, our organizations, and our cultural institutions.

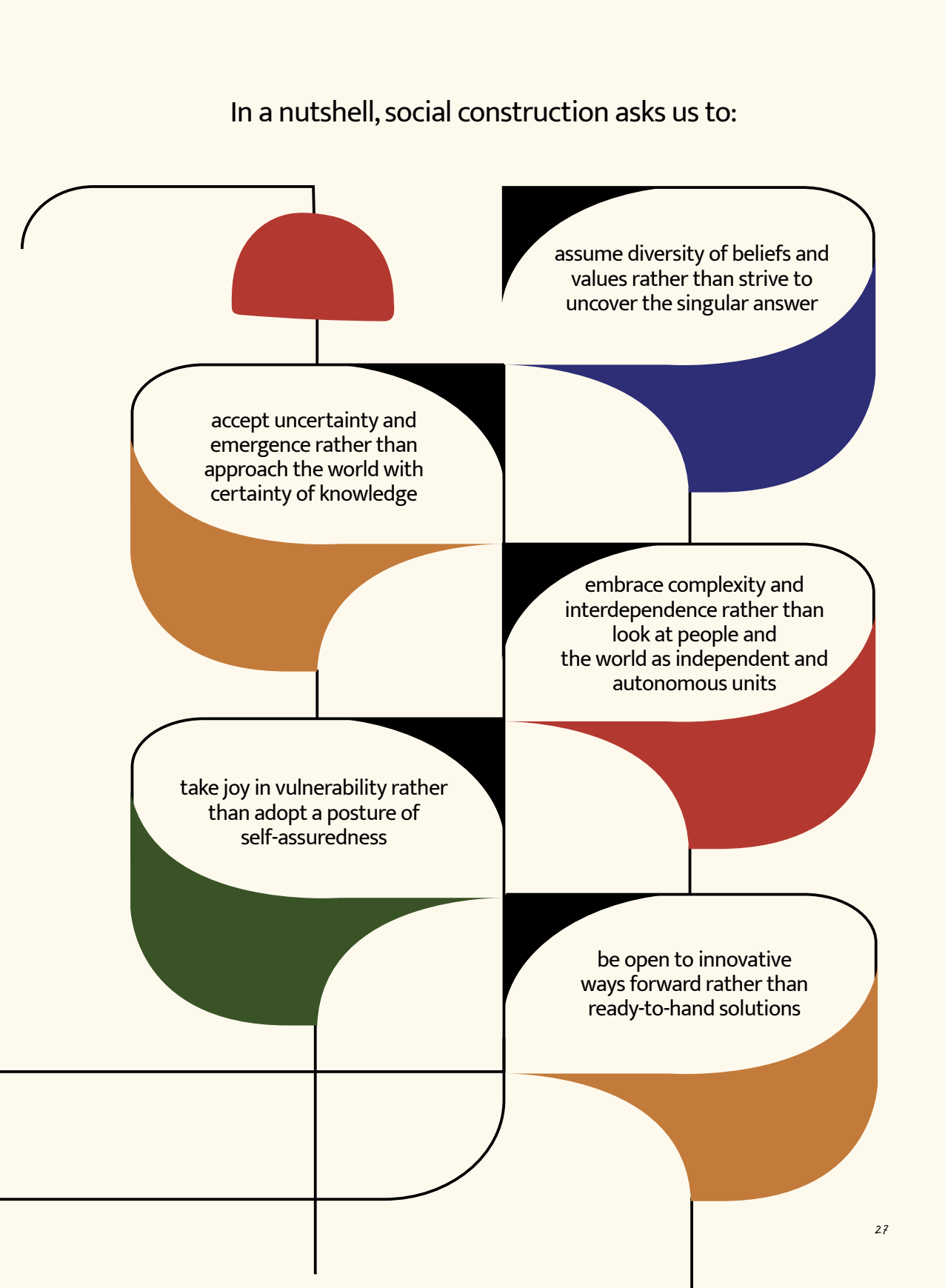




While these differences are most often treated as a threat to one's own beliefs and values, understanding how a constructed belief emerges as coherent within a community, helps us to approach difference and diversity with curiosity and respect. Rather than attempting to judge which community is right and which is wrong, which is good and which is evil, we can attempt to understand how each community has come to construct their realities as they have. To do so requires that we put aside a desire for agreement or for a singular answer and, instead, adopt a desire to deepen our understanding of difference. In doing so, difference becomes less of a threat. It is no longer something to eliminate, but something to understand. Difference is the starting point – it invites our appreciation of the complexity of the social world.



In a nutshell, social construction asks us to:



assume diversity of beliefs and values rather than strive to uncover the singular answer

accept uncertainty and emergence rather than approach the world with certainty of knowledge

embrace complexity and interdependence rather than look at people and the world as independent and autonomous units

take joy in vulnerability rather than adopt a posture of self-assuredness

be open to innovative ways forward rather than ready-to-hand solutions



*Authors
and
Illustrator*



Celiane Camargo-Borges, Ph.D.

Lecturer and Researcher at Breda University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands; Faculty and member of the Taos Institute Board of Directors. Working with constructionist theory and the design thinking approach, she is also the founder of Designing Conversations (designingconversations.us) where she consults on dialogue processes and Constructionist - Design research. She is author of several articles and contributor to a variety of Handbooks such as *The Sage Handbook of Social Constructionist Practice* (Sage Publications); *The Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (Guilford Press); and *The handbook for creative futures* (Taylor & Francis/Routledge).



Sheila McNamee, Ph.D.

Professor Emerita of Communication at the University of New Hampshire and co-founder and Vice President of the Taos Institute (taosinstitute.net). Her work is focused on dialogic transformation within a variety of social and institutional contexts including psychotherapy, education, healthcare, organizations, and communities. She is author of several books and articles, including *Practicing Therapy as Social Construction* (with E. Rasera & P. Martins, Sage Publications), *Research and Social Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach* (with D. M. Hosking, Routledge), *Relational Responsibility: Resources for Sustainable Dialogue* (with K. Gergen, Sage), and *Education as Social Construction: Contributions to Theory, Research, and Practice* (co-edited with T. Dragonas, K. Gergen, E. Tseliou, Taos WorldShare). Professor McNamee has written extensively about alternative visions of social research.



Lara Krenzinger

Graduated in Visual Design at Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing, Porto Alegre, Brazil. A London-based independent designer focused on branding, motion graphics and illustration, she has more than 7 years in the creative industry, being involved in projects such as the branding and packaging of the Creative Content Kit (by Ana Bender), also published by Bis Publishers. She has been working alongside large companies such as British Airways, Marionnaud, Lelo UK and much more! (larakrenzinger.co.uk).

