

CLA DEFINED

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Causal layered analysis (CLA) is offered as a new research theory and method. As a theory it seeks to integrate empiricist, interpretive, critical, and action learning modes of knowing at inner and outer levels.

As a method, its utility is not in predicting the future but in creating transformative spaces for the creation of alternative futures. It is also likely to be useful in developing more effective—deeper, inclusive, longer term—policy.

Causal layered analysis consists of four levels: the litany, social causes, discourse/worldview, and myth/metaphor. The first level is the litany—the official unquestioned view of reality.

The second level is the social causation level, the systemic perspective. The data of the litany is explained and questioned at this second level.

The third level is the discourse/worldview. Deeper, unconsciously held ideological, worldview and discursive assumptions are unpacked at this level.

As well, how different stakeholders construct the litany and system is explored.

The fourth level is the myth/metaphor, the unconscious emotive dimensions of the issue. The challenge is to conduct research that moves up and down these layers of analysis and thus is inclusive of different ways of knowing. Different perspectives (including those of stakeholders, ideologies and epistemes) are in particular brought in the third and fourth levels—at the levels of worldview and myth. This allows for breadth. These differences are then used to reconstruct the more visible levels—social policy and litany.

CLA as well can be applied not just to the external world but to the inner world of meanings—the litany of selfrepresentation, the system of identities, the discourses of the architecture of the mind, and foundational myths and metaphors that define the construction of identity. Conceptual movement through depth and breadth, allows for the creation of authentic alternative futures and integrated transformation. CLA begins and ends by questioning the future.

Embedded in the emerging discourse of futures studies, causal layered analysis (CLA) draws largely from poststructuralism, macrohistory, and postcolonial multicultural theory.

1 It seeks to move beyond the superficiality of conventional social science research and forecasting methods insofar as these methods are often unable to unpack

discourses—worldview and ideologies—not to mention archetypes, myths, and metaphors.

Causal layered analysis is concerned less with predicting a particular future and more with opening up the present and past to create alternative futures. It focuses less on the horizontal spatiality of futures and more on the vertical dimension of futures studies, of layers of analysis. Causal layered analysis opens up space for the articulation of constitutive discourses, which can then be shaped as scenarios. In essence, CLA is a search for integration in methodology, seeking to combine differing research traditions.

These traditions are in flux, in the social sciences generally and futures studies specifically. Futures studies has decisively moved from ontological concerns about the nature of the predictability of the universe to epistemological concerns about the knowledge interests in varied truth claims about the future.

This has led futures studies from being “the bastard child of positivism”,

2. (prediction) to interpretation and ethnography (the meanings we give to data). And the field’s conceptual evolution has not stopped there. More recently, futures methodologies have been influenced by the post structural thrust, with concerns for not what is being forecasted but what is missing from particular forecasts and images of the future. This is the layered approach to reality.