

THE ROLE OF CONVERSATION IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHANGE

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the growing body of research and theory development built around the premise that communication, in the form of ordinary talk or conversation, is the primary agency for the formation and ongoing function of organizational life and in particular how ordinary talk or utterances contribute to processual change. The objective of this thesis is twofold: 1) to examine how ordinary and naturally occurring talk or utterances contribute to the process of change, and 2) to examine how change is legitimized in utterances or talk, to either support and embrace change, or to ignore or marginalize the potential or case for change. The study's focus is on the role of conversation within and between groups in a business context and in particular it extends and further develops Tuckman's work on developmental sequence in small groups and Berger and Luckmann's four levels of legitimation in the social construction of knowledge situating both in a conversational framework.

The site for observing the role of conversation in the social construction of change is based on a twenty eight month ethnographical study in an Asia Pacific property service company. The field work is presented as a case built around nine vignettes that give voice to various groups and individuals that participated in the region wide change initiative over the twenty eight month period.

The original work this thesis offers is a model that demonstrates the non-linear, messy, emergent and polyphonic nature of this change process along with a synthesis that situates Tuckman's stages of group development model and Berger and Luckmann's four levels of legitimation within a conversational framework. This conversational framework accounts for how change potentials evolve from initial ideas to full assimilation as a result of participants inhabiting four recognizable types of conversation space (commencing, confronting, conforming, and coalescing conversations). The processual nature of change from potential to assimilation is brought about through active participation with others who are fully involved in inhabiting each of the corresponding conversational spaces that open up the potential for change.

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgments or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a higher degree.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis

Signed,

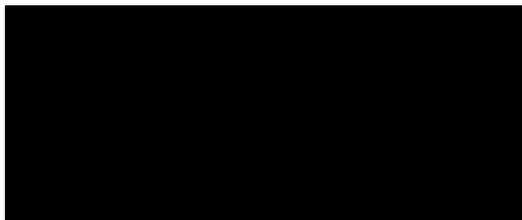


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