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Special Issue "Emerging Scholars, Developing Perspectives, Promising Processes" Editors' Introduction

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Over the past decade, drawing eclectically on the insights of semiotics (Barthes, 1994), speech act theory (Austin, 1962), metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999) social psychology (Billig, 1996; Potter and Wetherall, 1987) ethnography and conversation analysis (Atkinson, 1990), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) as well as a range of social constructionist and post-structuralist scholarship, organizational discourse analysis has developed into a significant field of inquiry (Boje, Oswick, & Ford, 2004; Grant, Keenoy & Oswick, 1998; Grant et al, 2001; Keenoy, Oswick & Grant, 1997; Oswick, Keenoy & Grant, 1997, 2000; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). As Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putnam (2004) have recently noted: "It is now difficult to open a management or organizational journal without finding that it contains some sort of discursive-based study, and there has been a recent flurry of books, edited collections, and journal special issues dedicated to the topic" (p. 1).

The growing popularity of applying discursive approaches to the study of organizations could simply be attributed to fad or fashion. There are certainly a number of studies that use "discourse" in a largely decorative way and it is frequently deployed to refer to any recorded or written data (e.g. field-notes, interview transcripts, and so on). Given that talk and text are integral to most forms of qualitative research, it is unsurprising that researchers see themselves as doing "discursive work." And, following the linguistic turn in management sparked by Peters and Waterman (1982), there is a now a considerable body of work which meaningfully utilizes the concept of discourse by treating it as both a methodology and an epistemology and, as a result, it is "emerging as one of the primary means of analyzing complex organizational phenomena and engaging with the dynamic, and often illusive, features of organizing" (Oswick, Keenoy & Grant, 2000, p. 1115). In our view, the contributions in this themed section epitomize this orientation insofar as they embrace discursive methods—albeit in different ways—to interrogate complex, dynamic, and illusive aspects of organizations and organizing.

Four by Four

The four papers presented here are from scholars at the beginning of their careers. In consequence, the work is not overly refined; on occasion it has a somewhat raw quality but, nevertheless, is characterized by a refreshing directness and some novel insights. In the first paper, Jo Longnecker analyses the use of war metaphors by a top management team located in the defense industry. Unlike previous studies which have focused on the root metaphor in play in organizational settings (e.g. Dunford & Palmer, 1996), Longnecker adds to the extant literature by exploring the motives which underpin the use of war and military metaphors. In particular, her study reveals how these metaphors enabled managers to structure and communicate abstract ideas, reinforce a specific culture, and maintain relationships.

In the second paper, Ray Gordon presents a detailed ethnography of a police organization in Australia. Drawing on Foucauldian insights, he offers a rich account of the power dynamics at play within a reform program. In particular, this work makes a significant contribution to understanding the potentially problematic nature of the concept of empowerment by persuasively illustrating how discourse and the unobtrusive exercise of power perpetuate and legitimate acts of domination.

The discursive construction of identity is the focus of the paper from Steven Sonsino who explores the concept of strategy by drawing upon Ricoeur's work on narrative identity. This persuasive conceptual piece develops a temporally sensitive framework that enables the mutual implication of character, plot, and ethics to be explored. Rather than replicating the more common approach to narrative analysis which tends to focus on the structure of a specific narrative, the major contribution of this work is that it foregrounds the relationship between narrators, their networks, and the context of developing a narrative analysis of lived experience.

The final paper by Gustavo Seijo is ambitious and thought-provoking. In a meta-level discursive study, this contribution explores the social production of social science knowledge in a European research project designed to identify and analyze SME clusters in six countries. The notion of "cluster" proved "undecidable" and Seijo's inventive analysis draws together sensemaking, actor-network theory, the novels of Kafka, and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes in pursuit of this intrinsic ambiguity. His discussion of the construction and reconstruction of social science is rich and provocative. This work demands much of the reader and poses some challenging questions.

Building Contributions or Demolishing Arguments?

We would also like to briefly reflect upon the process of producing this collection. Between us, we have guest edited more than a dozen special issues and themed sections for various management and management-related journals; and are therefore very familiar with the processes typically involved in producing a special issue. But the experience of preparing the current collection was different. In short, we found it to be particularly positive, rewarding, and informative.

Selecting Contributions

The papers chosen for inclusion were all originally presented at the 6th International Conference in Organizational Discourse held in Amsterdam during July 2004 (other papers from the conference were published in a special section of *Time & Society*—see Sabelis, Keenoy, Oswick & Ybema, 2005). Although 130 papers were presented at the conference, we targeted contributors who had recently completed, or were nearing completion of their doctoral theses. The other main criterion for consideration was that the work was seen as having potential.

Although not explicitly aware of it at the time, the combination of "developing scholars" undertaking work with "potential" set the scene for a productive endeavor in two ways. First, because the contributors are inexperienced and still developing their positions and perspectives, their views are generally more provisional and less entrenched than is sometimes the case with more senior academics. Second, soliciting work that had potential—rather than work which was al-

ready more developed or complete—facilitated a constructive process of extending, improving, and refining the work. Some of the reviewers had a sense of crafting a product rather than merely road-testing a new model.

Developing the Work

In keeping with the initial framing of the project, the ten established academics we enlisted during the review process were encouraged to enter into the process in a developmental manner. In particular, we explained that traditional refereeing was somewhat inappropriate in this instance because the contributors were emerging scholars rather than seasoned campaigners; the papers had already been screened and were provisionally accepted for inclusion (i.e. subject to satisfactory revision); and we anticipated a constructive dialogue focusing on development, improvement, and polishing. In almost all cases, the reviewers vigorously embraced this approach and expertly guided and mentored the assigned scholar. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the reviewers for their patience and hard work.

Concluding Remarks

There are two underlying aspects of putting together this collection which warrant additional comment and which might have wider resonance within the academic community. The first has to do with adopting a positive orientation. From the outset, we requested reviewers to concentrate on what was good as opposed to what might be wrong with the papers. Our collective previous experience of the review process is that it is disproportionately loaded towards discussing the weaknesses, limitations, and problems of a submission at the expense of highlighting what works and what could be further improved. This can in turn result in discouragement for less experienced academics and stifle the development of genuinely good and meaningful work at a formative or embryonic stage. We feel this would have almost certainly been the fate of some of the papers published in this themed section for, had original versions gone through the normal review process of a reputable management journal, it is likely that some, if not all, would have been rejected at either the first or second stage of the review process.

The privileging of a problem-based approach to reviewing (i.e. what is wrong with this paper?) means that even when reviewers comments are designed to be constructive they tend to offer advice on overcoming, minimizing, or justifying problems (i.e. dealing with weaknesses) rather than building upon strengths. We attempted to rebalance the focus and actively consider strengths and not just weaknesses.

For us, the second significant aspect to the process was the nature of the interaction between stakeholders (i.e. the guest editors, the contributors, and the reviewers). In addition to discouraging and stifling formative work, a further unintended consequence of some conventional review processes is that they promote a degree of defensiveness (e.g. challenging or rebutting reviewers' comments). On occasion, such an adversarial discursive context can lead to the journal editor acting as an adjudicator between the contrasting positions of the potential contributor and the reviewer. The net effect is that the space for genuine dialogical exchange is closed down.

The review process undertaken in our case was predominantly collaborative rather than combative. This created opportunities for generative dialogue (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Gergen, Gergan & Barrett 2004; Oswick, Anthony, Keenoy, Mangham & Grant, 2000) which promoted a supportive climate for improving the work and extending insights. While an inescapable asymmetrical power relation remained in play—for the reviewer has more leverage than the contributor and the editors ultimately held a right of veto—this was neither as obvious or as resilient as in a conventional review process. And, as has been suggested elsewhere, the "pursuit of collaborative ways of being as an alternative to the more prevalent combative alternatives in academe remains worthy of endeavor even if utopian outcomes cannot be fully realized" (Oswick, 2004, p. 73).

In conclusion, moving beyond combative relations and an overemphasis on problems requires us to actively embrace the positive aspects of a piece of work and to indulge in meaningful dialogue within the academic review process. This is consistent with the appreciative inquiry approach to organizational change advocated by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) which seeks to amplify, build upon, and work with what is good in an organization rather what is wrong with it. According to Hammond (1996), there are four main stages to appreciative inquiry: valuing the current (what is), envisioning (what might be), dialoguing (what should be), and innovating (what will be). We believe that this approach might be effectively superimposed onto the academic review process to, at least in part, counter the dominant paradigm which seems to have more to do with demolition than construction.

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