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Talking Organization[1]

by

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Talking organisation

Jonathan Clifton's paper, *Being in the know: socio-epistemics and the communicative constitution of a management team,* takes as a given the notion that 'organization' is a lived, in situ achievement, brought into being through, *inter alia*, talk. Drawing on Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological tradition and Sack's (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) innovative ideas on conversation analysis, he explores how individuals use talk to 'do' knowledge displays and through doing so legitimate and enact authority. Talk, as they say, is cheap, but it is certainly not simple, as Clifton's careful exposition of the impact of the linguistic turn in organisation studies makes clear. Institutions, group and individual identities, power relationships, rights and obligations are, in large part, evoked through what might at first appear to be trivial, uninteresting chatter. Moreover, at the proximal level identities like speaker and listener are enacted through talk, which, in turn, allows more distal institutional identities – like manager, employee, etc. – to be reflexively constituted, also through talk. Turn taking is important within this tradition because it shows that participants know and can communicate their mutual understanding of 'what is going on', which then becomes the focus for the researcher's analysis and contribution. Through turn taking, participants display what they are allowed to know, what others are expected to know and the relative rights to knowing. Such displays of knowledge are conceptually distinct from actual states of knowledge, but are crucial in the emergent construction of organization and hierarchy.

The methodological implication of this theoretical orientation is an intense focus on the micro processes and details of talk within teams and groups. In line with this tradition, Clifton makes a

[1] Editorial introduction to Jonathan Clifton's paper 'Being in the know: socio-epistemics and the communicative constitution of a management'.

detailed analysis of a monthly staff meeting of a British cultural organization which shows, among other things, how a team of two is 'talked into being' united by a shared right to know about what is going on in head office and configured through a joint authorship of the action in the here and now that also creates hierarchy, in-group and out-group as a lived experience. A particular value in this approach is that it highlights the unseen or unnoticed way in which authority, legitimacy and organization are accomplished.

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