

26 DISCOURSE AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH

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1 THEME

Organizational discourse, in all its forms and shapes, is a vital element of any organizational environment. It functions simultaneously as an expression and a creation of organizational structures while it enables individuals to create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are (Mumby and Clair 1997). What is said, how it is said, and also what is not said but is implied in the unsaid comprise the language games that are used to signify and promote, as well as to routinize and legitimize, decisions and actions taken within an organization. As the study of textual data, discourse analysis thus offers an

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insightful way to reflect on and unearth the rhetorical arguments of IT-enabled organizational change, and can be used to explore organizational struggles in the use of IT to create, reproduce, and transform organizations.

This panel focuses on how organizational discourse can be used to further illuminate understanding in two important areas of IS research: IT-enabled organizational change and virtual organizing. With respect to the study of IT-enabled change, we start by briefly outlining the functional, interpretive, and critical approaches to discourse and change in organizations and highlight the value of a structurational approach. We suggest that discourse analysis can benefit from a rhetorical-hermeneutic discourse approach and use this analytical approach to explore the role of discourse in shaping IT-enabled organizational change processes through its influence on multiple actors' interpretations and actions.

With respect to the study of virtual organizing, we draw on the theme of communication genres from rhetorical and literary analysis to examine how genres as organizing structures shape the way virtual team members engage in social interaction. Building on this, we develop the notion of genre systems as sequences of interrelated communicative actions that structure the collaboration within virtual project teams. We then argue that the application of a language-based perspective, one that examines both the *said* and the *unsaid*, is particularly important in this area of research in order to gain better insight into the nature of virtual organizing and the role that IT plays in such emergent organizational forms.

The aim of this panel is to provide a forum for debate and discussion about the potential value of different discourse approaches and analyses in enriching our understanding of key IS topics and emerging IS phenomena. It will be argued that, taken together, discourse analysis can provide a framework for the conduct of research, which may have important implications for substantive social inquiry in the future of IS research.

2 FORMAT

The panel chair, Wanda Orlikowski, will frame the issues to be discussed with a short introduction. This will be followed by a 10 minute presentation by each panelist. All panelists will aim to share experiences and generate guidance regarding the use of discourse analysis in IS research. After the presentations, the chair will summarize the key points and the audience will have the opportunity to discuss these and other relevant issues with the panel discussants.

3 PRESENTATIONS

Loizos Heracleous will draw on his current work on the discursive construction of social reality (Heracleous 2003; Heracleous and Tsoukas 2002) to address the constructive role of discourse, and will present an interpretation of how this process takes place. He will then discuss the three main streams of research on organizational discourse (interpretive, managerialist, and critical), the emerging structurational stream, and their relationship with organizational change drawing from Heracleous and Barrett (2001) and Heracleous and Hendry (2000). Finally, he will expand on the role of metaphor as a more tangible illustration of how discourse can both shape organizational reality as well as facilitate organizational change, drawing from Heracleous (2002).

Michael Barrett will draw on his longitudinal field study of electronic trading implementation in the London Insurance Market (Barrett and Walsham 1999; Heracleous and Barrett 2001) to illustrate the role of discourse in shaping organizational change processes through its influence on actors' interpretations and actions. Drawing from rhetorical analysis, he will discuss how the identification and analysis of actors' communication-level and deep structure enthymeme structures can be useful in articulating assumptions embedded in their arguments surrounding the introduction of electronic placing support in this market. As such, the value of discourse analysis in exploring the dynamics of the discourses of various stakeholders that shaped the trajectory of the IS implementation is highlighted.

Wanda Orlikowski will draw on her research studies of technology-mediated work to suggest the value of a genre lens in understanding the structuring of work in distributed settings. In particular, she will suggest that a genre system—a series of interdependent genres that comprises a social activity—serves as an organizing structure for the everyday work of a team or organization (Orlikowski and Yates 1994; Yates and Orlikowski 2002). As such, it is both a condition for and a consequence of ongoing human interaction. She will discuss how genre systems can be seen to provide important expectations about the purpose, content, participants, form, time, and location of the work practices of organizational members in distributed or virtual contexts. She will conclude with some implications of applying a genre lens for studying organizational change.

Niki Panteli will draw on her research on virtual teams to suggest the value of discourse analysis in understanding the social and complex dynamics of virtual organizing. In particular, she will suggest that the study of virtual teams will benefit from an in-depth analysis of the use of language in a computer-mediated environment. Virtual team members, for example, are able to convey images of competencies and trustworthiness, power and status in and through their (computer-mediated) language (Panteli 2002). Such images rely not only

on what is said, but also on what is in the unsaid. Niki will argue that the *silent* and *unspoken* could indeed be powerful means when exploring the nature of interactions among geographically dispersed individuals. To illustrate these points, she will draw on her empirical work into the use of language games on examining the creation of boundaries in the virtual world. The role that IT plays in these language games will also be discussed.

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About the Panelists

Michael Barrett is a member of the faculty of Information Systems and E-Business at the Judge Institute of Management, Cambridge University, where he also earned his Ph.D. Prior to returning to Cambridge, he was an assistant professor at the University of Alberta. His research interests examine the relationship between information technology, globalization, and changes in work, and have focused on the implementation of electronic trading in global financial markets, the development of global outsourcing relationships, IT and global audit work, and the adoption of Web assurance. He is also studying how IT infrastructure and, in particular, business to employee portals and E-Learning

are supporting people in both traditional work environments as well as new work arrangements such as telecommuting.

Michael is on the editorial board of the *Journal Information and Organization* and is a member of the European Group for Organization Studies and the Cambridge Alumni in Management. His work has appeared in such publications as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Information Systems Research*, *The Information Society*, and *European Journal of Information Systems*. Michael can be reached by e-mail at m.barrett@jims.cam.ac.uk.

Loizos Heracleous earned a B.Sc. (First Class Hons) in Marketing and Liberal Studies from Lancaster University (1992), and an M.Phil. (1993) and a Ph.D. in Management Studies (1997) from the Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge. He is currently an associate professor of Corporate Strategy at the Department of Business Policy, National University of Singapore. He conducts research in the areas of organizational discourse, organizational change and development, and a variety of interpretive themes in organization theory. Loizos serves on the editorial board of the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, the journal of the Asian Academy of Management, and also acts as a reviewer for several scholarly journals. He has published over 20 research papers in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, *European Management Journal*, and *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. His coauthored paper on globalization from a structural perspective won the Best Paper Award of the OCIS Division of the Academy of Management in 1999. He is a member of the U.S. Academy of Management, European Group for Organization Studies, Cambridge Alumni in Management, and the Singapore Institute of Directors. Loizos can be reached by e-mail at bizhlt@nus.edu.sg.

Wanda J. Orlikowski is a professor of Information Technologies and Organization Studies at the Sloan School of Management, and the Eaton-Peabody Chair of Communication Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She received a Ph.D. from the Stern School of Business at New York University. Her primary research interests focus on the recurrent interaction of organizations and information technology, with particular emphasis on organizing structures, cultures, work practices, and change. She is currently leading a 5-year National Science Foundation project on the social and economic implications of Internet technologies.

Wanda's work has appeared in such publications as *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, and *Research in the Sociology of Work and Occupations*. She is a member of the Academy of Management, the Association of Computing Machinery, the Institute of Management Science, the

Society of Information Management, and the Society of Organizational Learning. Wanda is a senior editor for *Organization Science*, and serves on the editorial boards of *Information and Organization*, *Information, Technology & People*, *Sloan Management Review*, and *Reflections: The Journal of the Society for Organizational Learning*. She can be reached by e-mail at wanda@mit.edu.

Niki Panteli is a lecturer in Information Systems at the School of Management, University of Bath. She holds a Ph.D. from Warwick Business School, University of Warwick. Broadly defined, her research lies in the field of information and communication technologies and emergent organizational arrangements. She is currently involved in research on virtuality and interactivity within computer-mediated and mobile communication systems. Recently completed research projects include gender divisions in IT, videoconferencing systems in business communication, and the social construction of e-mail text. Her research has appeared in European and international journals such as *Behaviour and Information Technology*, *European Journal of Information Systems*, *Futures*, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Information and Management*. Niki can be reached by e-mail at mnsap@management.bath.ac.uk.