# Introduction to Organizational Discourse Analysis

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A webinar for the Collective Leadership Network

Session I

# Factors Leading Up to ODA

- Organizational Culture Studies

- Sociolinguistics

- Labour Process and Critical Theory

- Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn

# Definitions

- Fairhurst & Putnam (1998): **"d"**
  - "the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context, and the meanings or interpretations of discursive practices"

- European & Australasian Scholars: Foucault's **"D"**
  - Systems of thought, assumptions, language, etc.

- Grant, Hardy & Putnam (2011):
  - "a broad class of approaches that focuses on the constitutive effects of language; processes of text production, distribution and consumption; and reflexive, interpretive analysis aimed at deciphering the role of discourse in a socially constructed reality"

# Texts

- Written documents to memory traces to verbal routines—all of which may be reconfigured through continued use (Derrida, 1988).

  - How do texts get created, used, and circulated?

- Discourses represent structured collections of texts.

- Discourses exist beyond any given text since they retain a generative capacity to source new texts and thus stand ready to layer and interweave with current practices, as situations demand.

# Questions?

*Do you understand the difference between discourse as 'language in use' and Discourse as a 'system of thought/linguistic tool bag' for communicating actors?*

# Just a method? No!

- ODA operates within a broad social constructionist epistemology
  - A perspective in its own right, one that gained significant momentum with the linguistic turn.

- ODA focuses on the discourse itself; that is, on how it is organized and what it is doing. Asking what discourse is *doing* is a very different theoretical question than focusing on how it *represents* ideas and objects.

- Theory-method pairings are not uncommon in organizational discourse analysis because it incorporates methodological concerns fundamental to its constructionist roots.
  - Types of data (e.g., meaning-centered), theoretical and analytical lens, actor/analyst reflexivity, and so on.

# Putnam & Fairhurst (2001)

- Sociolinguistics

- Conversation analysis

- Cognitive linguistics

- Pragmatics
  - Speech acts
  - Ethnography of speaking
  - Interaction analysis

- Semiotics

- Literary and rhetorical analysis

- Critical discourse analysis

- Postmodern language analysis

# Fairhurst & Putnam (2014)

1. *How* does discourse constitute the features of organizational life?

2. *How* does discourse interact with the material world to privilege certain realities over others in organizational life?

3. *How* do discourse and the material mutually constitute each other in routine practices of organizational life?

# 1. *How* does discourse constitute the features of organizational life?

- Features include identities, relationships, cultures, contexts, leadership, organizational units, and other phenomena

- Informed by social constructionism, ODA problematizes the taken-for-granted, including the very notion of the *organization* itself (CCO approaches)

- Primary issues concern agency, process, and possibility

# 1. *How* does discourse constitute the features of organizational life?

- **The organizing potential of language and texts**

- The social construction of subjectivities

- The new rhetoric and organizations

- Tensions and dialectics in disorganization

- Dialogic experiences of organizing as social poetics

# 2. *How* does discourse interact with the material world to privilege certain realities over others in organizational life?

- Wrought by **economic realities** and the **growing disparities of the market**, this genre of research is also constructionist, but with a bent toward critical realism
  - Marxist dialectical materialism
  - Fairclough's critical discourse analysis
  - Theories of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe)

- Central concerns are issues of power and the ways that the material constrains organizational actors

- Focus in this work is on the economic and institutional influences as they impact discourse and agency in organizational life

# 3. *How* do discourse and the material mutually constitute each other in routine practices of organizational life?

- Concern centers on **physical factors** that interface with discourse and the symbolic.

- It is a posthumanist challenge to social constructionism that stems from the role of technology in society and the difficulty of knowing when technology begins and human beings leave off (think cyborg!)

- Focus on the performative nature of discourse and material practices involving objects, sites, and bodies

# Questions?

*Why is ODA not just a method?*
*What three questions are being asked about discourse in the literature currently?*
*Which one has been the dominant focus?*

# Taped Example

- Please have your transcript readily available

- Please get ready to listen to a 4 minute audio, the beginning of which involves a lot of screaming and non-distinct utterances

- We can play the audio more than once if you are having trouble hearing it

- We can also forward it to anyone; the data are a matter of public record

# The Case of Katie Conway

- Female rookie (age 23) cop patrolling a bad neighborhood at 8:00 pm, Feb., 1998

- Assailant motions for her to pull over

- He shoots her 4 times with a .357 magnum, takes control of the cruiser

- As struggle ensues, she radios for help

- Eventually, she kills him with a bullet wound to the head

- 4 minute call to the dispatcher in the midst of the struggle as police supervisors frantically search for her vehicle (just prior to GPS)

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# Different questions:

## Post-Positivist

- Cause-effect "Why?" questions (e.g., traits or predictors of leaders or followers and successful outcomes)

## Discourse

- *How* is leadership 'brought off'?

- *What* kind of leadership are we talking about?

# Interaction Data:

Discourse Methods

# Interaction Analysis

- How is control shared (or not)? Coding for one-up, one-down, one-across and forming "interacts"

- Three types of interacts: complimentary, symmetrical, transitory (⬆⬇,⬆⬆,➡➡ patterns over many such incidents)

- No one supervisor takes command; multiple supervisors almost in a rolling wave

- Dispatcher is the most frequent communicator, but consistently defers to police

# Conversation Analysis

- How do people use conversational methods and procedures to make sense to one another?

- Turn-taking, category use, accounting practices, and so on

- Effectiveness is gauged at the point Conway chooses HRO Discourse over victim Discourse

- Membership Categorization: 'Distress.' (line 24)

# Speech Act Analysis

- Focuses on the performative function of language (e.g., "I baptize you."

- Examines 5 categories of speech acts (e.g., assertives, declaratives, expressives, directives, commissives)

- Examining their episodic sequencing

- "Command presence" occurs with multi-functional "I'll be there in 5 seconds…" (line 34)

- Episodic closure!

# From Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2005: 410):

- "…the order in organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained…smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences."

# Advantages for Leadership?
# Discursive research is often:

- *Interactional* because it focuses is on leadership-as-it-happens, a relationship made possible only through the sequential flow of social interaction.

- *Relational* in that it sees leadership not as a solitary activity, but as people co-creating a relationship as they interact.

- *Contextual* in that it focuses on:
  - the leadership relationship as deeply rooted in power and culture;
  - demonstrates how leadership actors impact the context as much as they are impacted by it;
  - recognizes the ability of leadership actors to identify those aspects of the context that are most relevant to defining their "situation here and now";
  - strives to bring the task back into the study of leadership.

# Questions?