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PART I

Orientations

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1 *Work and organisation in real time: an introduction*

NICK LLEWELLYN AND JON HINDMARSH

> No social institution can be treated as a self-subsistent entity which exists independently of the accounting practices of its participants. The reproduction of institutional settings and the accounting practices through which they are constituted is an elementary and fundamental fact of institutional life. And to demand that institutions function in independence from these reproductive processes is, to adapt an earlier observation of Garfinkel's, … 'very much like complaining that if the walls of a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up'.
>
> (Heritage 1984: 229)

Introduction

The studies in this volume are rather distinctive. For one, they all utilise audio and/or video materials. This alone is rare. With few exceptions, organisation studies has tended to rely on empirical materials that are removed from the flow of 'real-time' or 'live' conduct within organisations. Even where researchers have studied work activities up close (see Roy 1960; Burawoy 1979; Casey 1995), they have rarely established permanent records of work activity that can be viewed repeatedly and sustain detailed analysis (but see Gephart 1978; Gronn 1983; Boden 1994).

A second point flows from this. Historically, the discipline of organisation studies has been surprisingly uninterested in 'work itself'. This is not the first time this point has been made. Anselm Strauss (1985), Harold Garfinkel (1986), Lucy Suchman (1987) and Julian Orr (1996) have made this argument with respect to the sociology of work; John van Maanen and Stephen Barley (1984), Barley and Gideon Kunda (2001), Jon Hindmarsh and Christian Heath (2007), Anne Rawls (2008) and Nick Llewellyn (2008) with respect to organisation studies. This argument is explored below, but at this stage it is enough to present the bare bones. Research in organisation studies has

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rarely treated 'what ordinary work consists of' and 'how ordinary work is practically accomplished' as *analytic problems*. Overwhelmingly, ordinary work has been treated descriptively, rather than analytically (Strauss 1985). In research papers, what some domain of work practically entails is normally covered in a section *before* the analysis begins.

The third and final introductory point concerns the subject matter of ethnomethodologically informed studies. The opening quote by John Heritage (1984: 229) is helpful in this regard. In this quote the term accounting practices is used to refer to practical ways in which people display or orient their conduct to matters including the nature of the activity at hand and who they and others are. Consider a basic example. In what practical ways might an actor display that they have joined a queue to purchase some goods and that they are working on the presumption that another party, who is perhaps in front of them, is part of the same queue? The accounting practices through which actors publicly display, recognise and handle such matters are 'elementary facts' of organisational life (Heritage 1984: 229), in the sense they are going on all the time and no organisational scene could be sustained without them. As a basic form of social organisation, the queue is only witnessable, and thus joinable, because people are able to recognise, and orient their conduct to, 'what queues look like' and 'what queuing practically involves'. When we see a queue that we might join, we trade on the products of these continual methodic labours (Garfinkel 1967).

For ethnomethodologically informed studies this point applies grossly. It is only possible to witness, as seemingly objective and concrete phenomena, a business presentation, a recruitment interview or an auction because they are continually being built and reproduced that way by members. Were these interactional practices somehow paused, these apparently concrete settings would stall. In these terms, ethnomethodologically informed studies are interested in how people practically sustain a shared social world consisting of familiar persons, commonplace happenings and definite contexts.

It should be noted that there have been a number of attempts within ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA) to develop a distinctive approach to the study of work. There is a long tradition of ethnomethodological studies that consider the ways in which rules and procedures are deployed in organisational and institutional practice (e.g. Bittner 1967; Zimmerman 1971a; Wieder 1974b; Sacks 1972),

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the production of everyday organisational action in and through talk in interaction (e.g. Drew and Heritage 1992b; Arminen 2005) and the ways in which tools and technologies feature in and are constituted by work practice (e.g. Button 1993; Heath and Luff 2000; Luff, Hindmarsh and Heath 2000). However, as we shall argue, these developments have failed to fully draw in scholars within management and organisation studies. At various points, EM/CA scholars including Deirdre Boden (1994), David Silverman (1997b) and Richard Harper, Dave Randall and Mark Rouncefield (2000) have sought to engage the discipline more explicitly, but only very recently has organisation studies incorporated an emerging body of ethnomethodologically informed studies. These are mostly those studies that analyse recordings of real-time organisational conduct (see Greatbatch and Clark 2002, 2005; Samra-Fredericks 2003b, 2004b; Alby and Zucchermaglio 2006; Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007; Llewellyn 2004, 2008; Llewellyn and Burrow 2007; Suchman 2005). These are some of the most noticeable efforts not simply to review or evaluate EM/CA, but to practically undertake research *within* the field of organisation studies.

The present volume builds on these developments by bringing together some of the most significant scholars driving the study of real-time organisational conduct. Drawing on audio/video recordings from a diverse range of work domains, these authors both explicate the local organising properties inherent to organisational conduct and consider the relevance of these properties for (re-)understanding core concepts in organisational literatures. Rather than 'chasing important events' (Czarniawski 2004: 776) and imagining 'organisation' always to be elsewhere, ethnomethodological studies allow analysts to access thousands of 'small ways' in which people locally recognise and reproduce the organisational location of their actions (Sacks 1984).

Locating the collection: ethnomethodology and conversation analysis

The studies presented in this volume draw heavily on the work of Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, the central figures in the development of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis respectively. Each chapter explores methods through which 'members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs' (Garfinkel 1967: 1), including strategy meetings, auctions and interviews. Each does

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this by examining how people assemble work activities in real time. At the same time, the chapters illustrate only one way of doing ethnomethodology: namely through the sequential analysis of recordings of real-time naturally occurring organisational conduct. There are other ways of doing ethnomethodology, whether through ethnography (see, for example, Button and Sharrock 2002; Garfinkel 1986; Harper, Randall and Rouncefield 2000) or through more theoretical work concerned to 're-specify' conventional categories of social science (see Coulter 1989; Button 1991).

This particular approach to analysing recorded materials is now widespread across the social sciences. Much of this work has been done in organisational settings and yet tends not to feature within organisation studies. It has been influential in psychology (Potter and Weatherell 1987; Edwards and Potter 1992; te Molder and Potter 2005) and sociology (Boden and Zimmerman 1991b; Drew and Heritage 1992b). Furthermore it has contributed to debates in health studies (Heath 1986; Silverman 1997a; Heritage and Maynard 2006; Pilnick, Hindmarsh and Gill 2009) and education (Mehan 1979; McHoul 1978; MacBeth 2000; Hester and Francis 2000; Rendle-Short 2006). It has greatly shaped the development of interdisciplinary fields such as human–computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) (Suchman 1987; Heath and Luff 2000). In more specific ways this type of research has considered work in media and news settings (Greatbatch 1988; Clayman and Reisner 1998; Clayman and Heritage 2002), courtrooms (J. M. Atkinson and Drew 1979), meetings (Boden 1994; Samra-Fredericks 2003b; Llewellyn 2005; Mirivel and Tracy 2005), negotiations (Walker 1995; Greatbatch and Dingwall 1997), call centres (J. Whalen, Zimmerman and Whalen 1988; J. Whalen, Whalen and Henderson 2002; Potter and Hepburn 2003; Greatbatch *et al.* 2005), control centres (Suchman 1997; C. Goodwin and Goodwin 1996; Heath and Luff 2000), sales work (C. Clark and Pinch 1995a; C. Clark, Drew and Pinch 2003; B. Brown 2004; Heath *et al.* 1995; Heath and Luff 2007b) and so on.

Much of this research has addressed topics that are very much central to organisation studies, which makes the separation between these fields all the more surprising. Consider some examples. Christian Heath, Paul Luff and Marcus Sanchez Svensson (2002: 181) examined how '[London Underground] personnel constitute the sense and significance of CCTV images'. Despite considerable interest in *surveillance* within

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organisation studies, few studies have analysed how people practically accomplish overview of some domain, the real-time doing of surveillance. Similarly, emergency situations have become topics of research within organisation studies, mainly as a result of Karl Weick's (1993) work. But Weick only ever analyses post hoc materials. In contrast Jack Whalen, Don Zimmerman and Marilyn Whalen (1988) studied an emergency call that went badly wrong and had direct access to participants' sensemaking as it happened. They did not need to imaginatively reconstruct events; they were densely and concretely apparent in the empirical materials.

As we shall suggest, this kind of argument can be applied to many topics within organisation studies, whether *time* (Clayman 1989), *authority* (Maynard 1991), the *body* (Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007), *exchange* (Heath and Luff 2007b), or whatever. In each case ethnomethodologically informed studies of real-time conduct bring something distinctive to the table. The present volume is interested in demonstrating the nature and value of this distinctive focus.

Ethnomethodology's place within organisation studies

As we have already suggested, there are relatively few people doing ethnomethodological research within the organisation studies community. But at the same time Garfinkel and ethnomethodology do continue to be widely cited; Sacks and conversation analysis less so. These citations are interesting because they are so diverse. Ethnomethodology is invoked by authors working in varied traditions whose problematics differ from one another and from those of ethnomethodology. Scholars have typically interpreted ethnomethodology in the context of their own distinctive intellectual projects – rarely have scholars committed to the project of ethnomethodology as an approach in its own right, which provides a distinctive analytic agenda and methodological orientation (for this see also Burrell and Morgan 1979; Hassard 1993; T. Watson 1995). Consider some of the ways in which ethnomethodology features in management and organisation studies.

First there are some positive 'passing references' to ethnomethodology. In a discussion about the theorisation of 'discourse', Rick Iedema (2007: 936) welcomes Garfinkel's focus on *in situ* interaction and

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'performativity'. By engaging with real-time interaction, Iedema argues, analysts might establish a 'unique position' from which to engage with practice. Ola Bergström and David Knights (2006: 372) draw on Garfinkel in an argument about the position of agency in some Foucauldian studies. Bergström and Knights suggest that in some of these studies social actors are reduced to nothing more than 'cultural dopes' (see Garfinkel 1967: 68). In the context of a practice-based approach, Davide Nicolini (2007: 894) references ethnomethodology in a discussion about the normative character of ordinary work practice. To be involved in a practice, Nicolini argues, is to know how to contribute appropriately to unfolding courses of action.

On the flip side, there are numerous passing 'swipes' at ethnomethodology in the course of wider debates, most often in theoretical considerations of the ontology of organisation, or structure–agency. For Paul Adler and Bryan Borys (1993: 664), ethnomethodology is firmly idealist, an approach that 'reduce[s] society to a cognitive order'. Steve Fleetwood (2005: 209) suggests that ethnomethodology 'confuses' retrospective accounts of events and events *as they really happened*. He suggests that Garfinkel's insights into the work of jurors were 'mistaken'. Ethnomethodology might be a good deal more sympathetic to Fleetwood's position than he seems to realise. It does not understand itself as constructivist, interpretivist or post-modern. Meanwhile, Hugh Willmott takes ethnomethodology to task for lacking 'politico-emancipatory intent' (Willmott 2005: 749), something that we will return to later.

Whether positive or negative, for the most part Garfinkel and ethnomethodology are cited 'in passing'. Scholars draw on the odd concept here and there but typically leave the overall project of ethnomethodology unexplored. That said, there are three key areas of recent research in organisation studies that draw more heavily on Garfinkel. These are the new institutionalism associated with Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1991), the sensemaking approach associated with Weick (1995), and the organisational discourse project (Grant *et al*. 2004). These are deserving of greater attention but, as we shall suggest, they also fall short in embracing ethnomethodology in its own terms, as a distinctive intellectual project.

In writing on the new institutionalism, ethnomethodology is invoked in the context of the enduring structure–agency debate:

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> most [practitioners of new institutionalism] move back and forth among ethnomethodology, phenomenology and conventional resource dependence arguments. Zucker is the most ethnomethodological, suggesting that many typifications are 'built up' from ground level by participants in interaction. (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 25)

When DiMaggio and Powell state that Lynne Zucker is the 'most ethnomethodological', they do not mean that she does ethnomethodological research. In fact, Zucker undertakes historical studies, rather than studies of 'practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments' (Garfinkel 1967: 11). In this literature, Garfinkel is invoked in the construction of a grand theoretical framework that shifts attention from the very subject matter of ethnomethodology: members' *ethnomethods* for the accomplishment of ordinary actions (Garfinkel 1967). Indeed Silverman (1997b) argues that while the new institutionalism project is innovative it does not develop clear guidelines regarding the collection and analysis of data. The resulting problem is that the overarching aims of the project fail to resonate with the quite significant commitments of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to understanding practices and practical reasoning.

Posing a quite different set of problematics, Weick (1995: 24) notes the 'continuing influence of ethnomethodology on the study of organisational sensemaking' (also see Gephart 1978). More specifically, Garfinkel's study of jurors is invoked to support the notion of 'retrospective sensemaking' (see Garfinkel 1967: 41), the idea that clarity and rationality often work in 'reverse'. Weick (1993, 1995) also draws on other terms associated with ethnomethodology, not only 'retrospective sensemaking', but also 'accountability', sensemaking as an 'ongoing accomplishment' (Weick 1993: 635) realised 'in and through interaction' (Weick 1995). Whilst Weick draws on such terminology, quite legitimately he does not *do* ethnomethodologically informed work. Indeed it rather seems that ethnomethodological categories and terms are pulled out of their original context and given new work to do. Despite the frequency with which sensemaking is rhetorically framed as social activity accomplished 'in and through interaction with others' (Maitlis 2005: 21; Balogun and Johnson 2005: 1576), studies in this literature have conspicuously *not* analysed sensemaking in real time.

The burgeoning and wide-ranging field of organisational discourse is where the greatest concern with conversation analysis (as opposed to

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ethnomethodology) arises, most notably through citation to Boden's (1994) text *The Business of Talk*. The linguistic turn in organisation studies is most clearly associated with, even constituted by, the emergence of studies of organisational discourse as a field. Many of the programmatic texts that underpin these developments highlight the prevalence of talk in organisations, and how standard management practices are routinely and massively accomplished through talk; they also consider importance of talk *as*, rather than separate from, action (Grant *et al*. 2004). The foundations of the claims for the importance of organisational discourse rely, in no small measure, on the argument that discourse is, in the first instance, a medium for the accomplishment of social activity. However, when we consider the empirical studies in this literature, the focus shifts quite significantly away from real-time talk-in-interaction (but see Woodilla 1999; Forray and Woodilla 2002; Cooren and Fairhurst 2004). The overwhelming bulk of the studies are *about* talk rather than *of* talk. These studies will routinely abstract from the concrete situations in which language resides to consider the *form* of stories or narratives, metaphors, analogies, rhetoric, dialogues and the like. The concern becomes language use widely conceived, and these studies are often deployed to consider the discourses that are implicit in language. Once more, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis are invoked, rather than actively pursued as a distinctive intellectual project.

Ethnomethodology and the 'practice turn'

Tony Watson (1995: 62) is right to note the contrast between widespread reference to ethnomethodology and the 'limited number of people ... who wholeheartedly [adopt] it'. Ethnomethodology is not 'at home' in the production of historical studies or research that aims to imaginatively reconstruct sensemaking from *post hoc* sources (Weick 1993, 1995). It will not serve those who hope to 'document the systematic "distortions" of communication, and the routinized "reproduction" of historically structured relational asymmetries' (Lynch 1993: 31). Ethnomethodology is at home in the context of studies that give 'to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events', that treat ordinary work activities as 'phenomena in their own right' (Garfinkel 1967: 1). In the context of organisational studies, to pursue ethnomethodological

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research, as an approach in its own right, is to analyse ordinary work practice.

Of all the intersections between ethnomethodology and organisation studies the most relevant is the recent 'turn to practice'. This is because practice-based studies seem to share with ethnomethodology an interest in the fine details and normative character of ordinary work; these studies begin with work (see Gherardi 2001: 134; Gherardi and Nicolini 2002b; Nicolini 2007). In this literature, analysts have long since been attentive to easily missed details, competencies and practices of ordinary work. Such noticings include the ability to *feel* 'the tension of the sling' (Gherardi and Nicolini 2002b) or 'the roof through your feet' (Strati 2003: 60). Practice-based studies have sought to connect notions such as community, knowledge, learning and identity with the practical 'doings' of ordinary work (Gherardi 2001: 136), something that chimes nicely with ethnomethodological commitments to a 'practice-based theory of knowledge and action' (see C. Goodwin 1994: 606).

Of course, the practice literature is theoretically and methodologically pluralistic. When authors say they are analysing 'practices-in-use' (Jarzabkowski 2004) or how 'practices are actually used' (Whittington 2006: 624), they often steer clear of analysing live conduct. But some *have* done this by adopting approaches informed quite clearly by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (e.g. Samra-Fredericks 2003b, 2004b; Alby and Zucchermaglio 2006). As practice-based studies are centrally concerned with the detail of 'ordinary activities' there is no need to bend or twist ethnomethodological terms and categories to the ends of some alternative project. It can be confronted and applied as an approach in its own right. Thus ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have rightly been presented as a distinctive approach to engage the burgeoning interest in 'practice' in organisation studies. This raises questions about the nature of ethnomethodological studies.

Organisation in the details

An initial point is that, broadly in common with many scholars in the field of organisation studies, ethnomethodologically informed studies hold to the idea that organisational settings and various components of organisation (hierarchy, procedure, rules, authority,

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