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978-0-521-88136-4 - Organisation, Interaction and Practice: Studies in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

Edited by Nick Llewellyn and Jon Hindmarsh

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Organisation, Interaction and Practice

Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have an elusive relationship with organisation studies (OS). They are often used to motivate and inform developments in the field, including for example the ‘linguistic turn’ and the growing interest in ‘practice’. However, empirical contributions informed by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis remain rare within OS. This book provides a significant reference point for scholars interested in this work by showing how research based on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis can contribute to key issues and debates in OS. Drawing on audio/video recordings from a diverse range of work settings, a team of leading scholars present a series of empirical studies that illustrate the importance of the real-time achievement of organisational processes and practices. These studies demonstrate how apparently unremarkable aspects of our daily working lives turn out to be critical in understanding how people accomplish, experience and constitute work and organisation.

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Robert J. Moore is a sociologist and virtual-world designer. While at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), he conducted ethnographic and conversation analytic studies in a variety of workplaces including copy shops, automobile assembly plants, offices and mobile repair services. In addition, he founded the PARC PlayOn project, the first large-scale sociological study of virtual worlds. PlayOn examined player sociability from the micro to the macro levels of analysis. He also worked as a video game designer at the Multiverse Network, where he designed virtual worlds optimised for social interaction, both synchronous and asynchronous.

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such as *Sociology*, *Discourse and Society* and *Journal of Management Inquiry*.

Jonathan Potter is Professor of Discourse Analysis at Loughborough University. He has studied racism, argumentation, fact construction and topics in social science theory and method. His most recent books include *Representing Reality* (1996), which attempted to provide a systematic overview, integration and critique of constructionist research in social psychology, postmodernism, rhetoric and ethnomethodology, and *Conversation and Cognition* (2005, with Hedwig te Molder) in which a range of different researchers consider the implication of studies of interaction for understanding cognition. He is one of the founders of discursive psychology.

Dalvir Samra-Fredericks is Reader in Organisational Behaviour at Nottingham Business School, University of Nottingham. She previously worked at Aston Business School (Aston University) and University of Derby. Earlier, in a different 'life', she worked in private and public sector companies (in sales and marketing, and training and development functions). Her research interests pivot upon a talk-based ethnographic approach – extended to include audio/video recordings – of managerial elites/strategists doing their everyday work over time and space. This research has been published in a number of journals; current writing projects include papers on magic and on process-theorising and a book on *Researching Practice as It Happens* (with F. Bargiela-Chiappini).

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Preface

Soon after our studies began it was evident from the availability of empirical specifics that there exists a locally produced order of work's things; that they make up a massive domain of organisational phenomena; that classic studies of work, without remedy or alternate, depend upon the existence of these phenomena, make use of the domain, and ignore it.

(Garfinkel 1986: vii)

When the term 'organisation' is used in common parlance, it is typically to label this or that place of work. People can say that an 'organisation' has acted in a certain way, that they have joined an 'organisation' or even that an 'organisation' has certain values. The term is clearly shorthand, a neat lexical gloss for something fairly complex and abstract. The minute we try to push the term analytically, things get quite complex. Does the term refer to an entity or a set of processes? Is it possible to say where an 'organisation' begins and ends? Is this a legal question or a matter of economic function? Is it a matter of where particular social and cultural boundaries lie?

These questions, concerning where organisations begin and end and with what material consequences, may seem purely theoretical in character, but they have practical counterparts. In different ways and towards different ends, everyone (at least tacitly) addresses these questions many times each day in the course of engaging with organisational members and settings. This is such a taken-for-granted feature of living in society that we often do not even notice.

For example, when we enter a high street shop we are suddenly in an 'organisation'. We have crossed a boundary. The world has shifted a little – for us anyway. We recognise new constraints and possibilities. We can expect things of shop assistants that we cannot expect of other shoppers or of people passing along the street. Let us say we have to find an assistant and get their attention. They are dealing with someone else, so we wait. As they become available, we ask whether they have an item

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in a particular size and colour. They check and return with the item in question. We are happy and so we locate and join the queue to pay. We purchase the goods and catch the assistant's eye on the way out to thank them.

Theorising this boundary – or these boundaries – raises difficult issues for the analyst, and yet members find no trouble ‘resolving’ them towards practical ends. That is to say, in and through ordinary conduct, people recognise the organisational location of their actions many times over, not abstractly but concretely. We establish how to shape our conduct to being in a shop, how to recognise a staff member as opposed to a fellow customer and how to order the exchange of goods for money. Moreover, these solutions to the many small ‘problems’ faced by the organisational locations of our actions *work*. With respect to the example at hand, it is not just that we bought the right item, but that we competently played our part in the social and moral order of the shop.

The point we are making is that in the first instance ‘organisation’ is a members’ phenomenon and not just a phenomenon for the social scientist. Indeed, ‘organisation’ is not *primarily* a phenomenon for the social scientist. If the social sciences did not exist people would not forget how to shop or how to act during meetings or job interviews. People do not need social scientists to pick their way through the organisational world. They already have methodic ways of doing this. As such, one thing social science might do is recover these methodic practices. We know people can already *do* ‘organisation’; one job of the social scientist should be to find out how. This is the project that the authors pursue in this volume.

We first discussed the idea for this book at a conference on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in Boston. At that conference we heard plenty of work that, we thought, had something to say to organisation studies (OS). We wondered why this work so rarely featured in OS conferences and journals, despite the fact that it appears in many disciplines throughout the social sciences. Of course, there were some connections between these fields. The linguistic turn engages Deirdre Boden's work and is increasingly looking to ‘live’ recordings. The practice turn engages Lucy Suchman's work and debates the studies of Julian Orr. Various established areas of research, such as the sensemaking perspective associated with Karl Weick, clearly owe quite a debt to Harold Garfinkel's early writings and so on. There are numerous other

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points of connection, but few OS researchers actually do ethnomethodological research.

The primary aim of the book is thus to *introduce* a particular way of studying work and organisations. We devote the first two chapters to framing connections between OS and ethnomethodology/conversation analysis, and we highlight key methodological issues and orientations. The volume then presents eight empirical chapters exploring issues, settings and concerns that bear upon contemporary debate in organisation studies. Each chapter shows how resources from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis can be applied to the study of work and organisations, sometimes in subtly different ways. Some chapters direct attention to embodied and material aspects of interaction, whereas others focus more on the organisation of talk. Differences are also apparent in the ways that data are presented, ranging from subtle variations in the notation used in transcripts to the ways that authors represent moving pictures on the printed page.

The first two empirical chapters explore how key features of organisational settings are worked into being through episodes of social interaction. Jonathan Potter and Alexa Hepburn consider the orientation to, use of and engagement with ‘rules’ during organisational meetings. Nick Llewellyn analyses how interviewers and interviewees constitute the distinctive character of the recruitment interview.

The following three chapters explore not only the talk of organisational members, but also the embodied resources that members bring to bear in their work by focusing on aspects of persuasion and sales. David Greatbatch and Timothy Clark pursue their interests in organisational storytelling by demonstrating the ways in which management gurus ‘sell’ their ideas to different audiences through the radically situated delivery of stories. Christian Heath and Paul Luff reveal the ways in which auctioneers order and organise the participation of multiple potential customers through the deployment of a specific turn-taking organisation. They especially highlight the embodied conduct of the auctioneer in accomplishing this work and in making the process ‘visible, transparent, witnessed and witnessable’. Colin Clark and Trevor Pinch then explore the very foundations of the notion of the ‘customer’ by considering the ways in which shoppers order and organise their bodily conduct with regard to the presence or preoccupations of retail sales staff. They are found to engage in quite delicate forms of conduct in the course of initiating or avoiding verbal encounters with staff – and

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it would also seem that salespeople are highly attentive to these variable forms of conduct.

Chapter 8 also considers retail encounters, but the focus comes moments after the previous chapter's analysis finishes. Whereas Clark and Pinch focus on the pre-verbal aspects of sales encounters, Robert Moore, Jack Whalen and Cabell Gathman analyse the sales conversations between copy shop staff and customers. In particular they explore how staff translate customers' vernacular and embodied descriptions of an order to fit within and/or work around the 'standardising' tendencies of the order form.

In Chapter 9, Dalvir Samra-Fredericks also explores the production of documents in organisational conduct, but in her case she considers how two strategists collaborate in producing a strategy document. In doing so she demonstrates the ways in which the 'professional vision' (C. Goodwin 1994) of the strategist is revealed in and through the joint production of the strategic plan. Chapter 10 similarly pursues interests in 'professional vision' but this time in the context of the clinical training undertaken by student dentists. However, rather than focus exclusively on expert and novice, Jon Hindmarsh explores the ways in which the patient engages in a peripheral and yet central role during training conversations.

As this very brief synopsis reveals, there are many cross-cutting themes in this volume relating to issues of rules, exchange, practices, identities, formalisms and knowledge, but at their core all are fundamentally pre-occupied with how 'organisation' becomes manifest in real-time social interaction.

For a volume such as this to work it needs to attract leading scholars in the field, and we are extremely grateful to all those who agreed to participate in this project. The book includes chapters by some of the most significant scholars engaged in ethnomethodological studies of work today, and all have been generous and enthusiastic about the project. We take this opportunity to thank them. We would also like to thank Paula Parish at Cambridge University Press, who has shown significant patience and support throughout the process and Karen Anderson Howes for her thorough, considered and thought-provoking work in copy-editing the draft typescript.