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# *Organizational decision-making, discourse, and power: integrating across contexts and scales*

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ABSTRACT Research has downplayed the complex discursive processes and practices through which decisions are constructed and blurs the relationship between macro- and micro-levels. The article argues for a critical and ecologically valid approach that articulates how discursive practices are influenced by, and in turn shape, the organizational settings in which they occur. It makes a methodological contribution using decision-making episodes of a senior management team meeting of a multinational company to demonstrate the insights that can be obtained from embedding the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) within a longitudinal ethnography. The approach illuminates the latent and intricate power dynamics and range of potentials of agents, triangulating micro-level discursive strategies with macro-level historical sources and background knowledge on the social and political fields. The article also makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating the dependency of decision outcomes on often unpredictable and subtle changes in the power–context relationship.

KEY WORDS: *decision-making, discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach, ethnography, macro-micro, power*

> . . . both the agreements made between respective parties and the situations involving seemingly absolute limits are open to being changed under certain kinds of conditions. The change can be the product of mutual agreement if it is not coerced, manipulated, and so forth but requires working through via negotiation. Both the limits and the agreements are potentially contingent. In the most general sense, there are no final agreements and no ultimate limits . . .
>
> (Strauss, 1978: 259–60)

Bradley: [frustrated] We've got to have that fucking debate again then – I mean is that why we've been stalling fucking Building B?

(Extract from a senior management team meeting)

## *Introduction*

Thirty years ago Strauss's (1978) seminal text *Negotiations* drew attention to the contested nature of decision-making, highlighting the effect of social settings, local, larger-scale, and historical forces, and the impact of power on decision processes. In the period since, there have been a number of major studies of management decision-making (e.g. Allison and Zelikow, 1999; Brunsson, 1982, 1990; Hickson et al., 1986; Pettigrew, 1973). It is therefore surprising that until relatively recently, little attention has been given to the discursive practices of senior management in decision-making practice (see Samra-Fredericks, 2000). Arguably this can be explained due to the tendency to play down the relations and interactions involved (Chia, 1994), resulting in a portrayal of the discursive aspect of decision-making as either: a) locally autonomous and transient (see Alvesson and Karreman, 2000), such that they are 'talked and texted into existence' (Reed, 2000: 525); or b) the outcome of deterministic influences of macro-institutional structures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) that are 'relatively immune to resistance and transformation' (Mumby, 2004: 241). In an attempt to reconcile these relatively polarized views of organizational discourse, a growing body of scholarship situates the analysis of naturally occurring interactions related to strategic decision-making within broader organizational and sociopolitical contexts.

Within this expanding stream of research on the discursive practices of decision-making however, a number of methodological challenges remain. First, the need to find better ways of systematically connecting analysis across levels of scale and context (Johnson et al., 2003; Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Whittington, 2006). Second, the need for more balanced appraisals of the relative influence of agency and context (Archer, 1982, 1995; Cicourel, 1996, 2007; Van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 1996) to sharpen understanding of how discourse affects the capacity of social agents to use resources innovatively (Fairclough, 2005). Third, the need to develop nuanced understanding of the interplay between structure and agency affecting discursive interactions at the macro- and micro-levels via ethnographic study (Knorr-Cetina, 2007; Oberhuber and Krzyzanowski, 2007; Sarangi, 2007). Finally, a need for a better way to articulate how power is exercised through social action in the decision-making process (Wodak, 2000a, 2000b).

We confront these challenges by advocating the integration of the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA) to *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) and longitudinal ethnography. The principal contribution of our article is therefore methodological, demonstrating how the four imperatives outlined above can be addressed by focusing on two research questions: a) what discursive strategies are used to create and contest decisions? and b) how are they affected by different orders of scale? The article uses the text of discursive 'episodes' (Hendry and Seidl, 2003) from senior management team meetings to demonstrate a richer understanding of how discursive strategies are employed in context, thereby strengthening the 'ecological validity' (Cicourel, 2007) of discourse analysis. In demonstrating the dependency of decision outcomes on changes in the power–context relationship,

the paper also makes an important *theoretical* contribution, showing how power is exercised dynamically.

The article is set out in four parts. First, we provide a critical overview of the organizational discourse literature to articulate the type of approach that is required. Second, we introduce a sequence of three episodes from senior management meetings and provide a detailed commentary to show how, within the textual genre of a meeting, particular discursive strategies and linguistic realizations are used to reach a decision on the building of a new facility and, in subsequent episodes, how the decision was challenged. Finally, we discuss the contribution of the approach and identify priorities for future research.

## *Using discourse analysis to understand power and influence in decision-making*

While we know that decisions are made by individuals interacting in collective settings through the medium of language, they can neither be reduced to the dialectic of argumentation alone, nor solely explained by the persuasiveness of rhetoric or the pragmatics of the micro-context within which they occur. A powerful individual might stymie the most cogent of arguments and, conversely, a logical and well-timed argument might mobilize sufficient support to overcome the resistance of seemingly powerful individuals. We address this issue by following Hendry (2000: 973) and others (Brunsson, 1982, 1990) in conceptualizing decision-making as an organizational process, 'taking its meaning from the social practice and discourse within which it is located'. We start out from the widely accepted premise that discursive events are simultaneously pieces of text, instances of discursive practice, and instances of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). This broader contextualization requires us to go beyond simple descriptions of interactions to make sense of 'who uses language, how, why and when' (Van Dijk, 1997: 2).

As a starting point, we utilize Alvesson and Karreman's (2000) distinction between 'discourses' and 'Discourses' with the former being used for studies of organizational discourse that focus on micro-scale discursive activities and macro-scale Foucauldian-style studies of societal discourses, such as debates over global capitalism. Crucially, the key question is how to relate these two levels of discourse in empirical work. At one extreme, micro-level approaches (e.g. Boden, 1994; Samra-Fredericks, 2000; Schwartzman, 1987, 1989) are strongly influenced by the paradigms of conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) as modes of enquiry that produce detailed, real-time, empirical data gathered through longitudinal participant observation. A strength of this fine-grained approach is that it provides insight into discursive interaction in which agents use language in a practical fashion within the scene of action, and within which discourses are constructed through a series of 'laminated' conversations (Boden, 1994), rather than through static rules (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). At the other extreme, macro-level approaches adopt a Foucauldian perspective of discourse. Knights and Morgan (1995), for

example, used a 'genealogical' approach to examine the impact of changing discourses surrounding information technology within the insurance industry on a particular firm. Between these extremes are approaches that focus on the role of narratives in communication that mediate the relationship between individuals and groups (Heracleous, 2006; Laine and Vaara, 2007), how they evolve over time in response to change (Fairhurst et al., 2002), how they are used to bring about political change (Maguire et al., 2004), and the centrality of discourse to institutionalization (Phillips et al., 2004).

Problems arise from these different levels of analysis, concepts, and definitions of 'discourse'. Without the broader context, 'fine grained' micro-level analyses of discursive interactions in meetings tend to portray strategic conversations as having a life of their own, ignoring the '. . . fact that situated social interaction is always embedded in daily life socio-cultural and cognitive/emotional processes that constrain and shape discourse' (Cicourel, 2007: 735). Macro-level studies, by contrast, tend to 'jump over' the use of language in social context reasoning (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). With occasional exceptions (e.g. Barry and Elmes, 1997), micro-analyses of discursive interaction and macro-analyses of organizational discourse tend to be performed in relative isolation (Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001) resulting in: i) a 'muscular' force in which meaning and discourse are conflated; or ii) a transient and autonomous view in which discourse and meaning are relatively unrelated (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). A consequence of this is that power is understood as either tactical and localized or pervasive and without locus, and studies tend to be confined to situations where relationships are based on formal positions of authority, or where expertise and power gradients are clear, as with doctors and patients or teachers and pupils (Oswick and Richards, 2004). The result is twofold: micro-studies fail to adequately 'contextualize' how organizational actors react to broader structural constraints and resulting Discourses (Reed, 2000); while macro-studies leave little room to explain how the broader contexts actually influence these actors' micro-level discursive interactions.

Fortunately, a handful of organizational discourse studies show the way. Forester's (2003) 'critical ethnography' of life in a New York municipality planning department drew on Habermas's (1984/1987) *Theory of Communicative Action* to explain how the presentation and the content of micro-linguistic actions of speakers and listeners interact within the context of management meetings. The study juxtaposed the outer (macro-) context and (micro-) communication in order to see how they impinge on each other and demonstrated the value of ethnographic research in helping to interpret micro-level phenomenon. More recently, a film documentary of a meeting between a retiring CEO of a family firm and four directors to decide who should succeed was analysed from a number of linguistic perspectives by multiple contributors to an edited book (Cooren, 2007). Taylor and Robichaud (2007), for example, used the concept of the metaconversation – the domain of managerial talk that generates accounts of other communities of practice that constitute the organization – to analyse links between individual conversations and broader organizational concerns and the ways in which argumentation between individuals are framed. Sanders (2007)

used a 'neo-rhetorical approach' to examine the influence of individual actors' competencies in the ability of the directors to reach a 'good' decision. Stohl (2007) analysed the pivotal role of a single participant – who from an identity perspective had both outsider (i.e. a non-family member) and insider (i.e. the same religious background as the founder) status – in the decision-making process. Despite their respective contributions however, these studies stop short of studying discursive practices per se within a systematic treatment of context, with the resulting tendency to delimit the examination of power in communication to issues such as: the competencies of individual actors; the effects of organizational structure on actors;[1] or the concentration of power in authority figures (McPhee et al., 2007).

Some of these problems were overcome by Iedema et al.'s (2003) study of how doctor-managers juxtaposed medical and managerial constructions of organizational reality in a Sydney teaching hospital. Their ethnographic approach highlighted the subtleties and complexities of single actors closing off some discourses and dealing with manifold others across macro- and micro-levels. By focusing on an individual manager, however, they missed the opportunity to explore how discursive interactions unfold within and across managerial teams. In this regard, Menz's (1999) longitudinal study of decision-making in a small team of 'friends' is highly useful, showing the effect of small talk and other seemingly chaotic events on decisions. However, the findings are not readily transferable to commercial contexts, where teams are more commonplace and formal hierarchies clearer. Recent research into European Union organizations, such as the Competitiveness Advisory Group (Wodak, 2000a, 2000b), the European Convention (Oberhuber and Krzyzanowski, 2007), and the European Parliament (Wodak, 2009) have begun to address these deficiencies, albeit in formally structured transnational political units where there is little space left for individual agency or variation in contextual constraints. This handful of studies collectively contains the methodological ingredients required to examine the intersection between macro- and micro-contexts and discursive strategies that will tease out ecologically valid explanations of effects of power, but it is the context in teamwork that requires most attention. We suggest that senior executive teams in commercial organizations can be conceptualized as a number of intersecting *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as well as representing a community in their own right. Each of the overlapping communities (e.g. Finance, Marketing, Engineering) has privileged access to normalized knowledge – in both its explicit and tacit forms (Polanyi, 1966) – that provides a power base for their members. To paraphrase Foucault,[2] we argue that 'organizational power is knowledge'. 'Normalized' knowledge in one social community, however, does not necessarily endow 'normalized' status in another, with the effect that certain boundaries are imposed on an individual's power. From this perspective, a large organization is a multiplicity of institutionally conferred and legitimated knowledges and, crucially, resistances (Knorr-Cetina, 2007). The implication is that powers in a managerial setting are heterogeneously distributed, and open to contestation and negotiation as various communities of practice seek to secure the hegemony of their own strategic agendas.

## THE DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL APPROACH

The particular form of CDA we advocate as a means to bridge levels of analysis can be located within a variety of approaches that examine how issues of power, hegemony, and ideology are shaped through social and linguistic practices central to meaning and organization (Deetz, 1982). CDA has gained ground because it provides researchers with ontological and methodological traction to look at how personal social power develops into the 'habitualizations' and 'typifications' talked about inter alia by Berger and Luckman (1967) as the processes that render semiotic devices 'objective', and therefore provide the basis for logics to be mobilized, challenged, (re)contextualized, and made manifest through hierarchy, values, symbols, and practices within organizations (see Wodak and Meyer, 2009). In the context of meetings, for example, Mumby and Clair (1997) saw power being displayed through the organization's dominant ideologies, norms, and values being reinforced, negotiated, and contested. Moreover, Wright (1994) has suggested that power is achieved through the continuous reassertion of micro-processes in the daily life of organizational interaction.

Language is, however, not intrinsically powerful on its own. Rather it gains power through its deployment within the agendas of powerful people. This power is exercised through three related modes (Wodak, 2009), which we differentiate here: i) the power in discourse; ii) power over discourse; and iii) the power of discourses. In the first mode, we are referring to the struggle of different actors over different interpretations of meaning through practices related to: the selection of specific linguistic codes and rules for access to meaning-making forums (i.e. meetings) and interaction (i.e. turn-taking, decision-making, etc.) (Holzscheiter, 2005). The second mode refers to means through which various groups of actors are denied or granted 'access to the stage' (Holzscheiter, 2005: 57) through processes of inclusion and exclusion. The third and final mode is consistent with Lukes's (2005) third face of power, which is ideological in nature and related to Bourdieu and Thompson's (1991) and Gramsci et al.'s (1971) respective notions of symbolic violence and hegemony. Through our engagement with these three modes, we are able to demystify and systematically deconstruct the tacit and hidden practices through which discursive power is exerted, thereby addressing the dearth of empirical studies which closely analyse the dynamics of discursive processes (Mumby, 2004).

Developed in the field of discourses studies, the DHA (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 2001) provides a vehicle for looking at latent power dynamics and the range of potentials of agents, because it integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded. Four 'levels of context' are used as heuristics to locate discursive practices, strategies, and texts in a specific situational/organizational context. The methodology analyses in a recursive manner a) the immediate, *language or text* internal co-text (e.g. in the context of this article, the transcripts of senior management team meetings); b) the *intertextual and interdiscursive relationship* between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses (e.g. transcripts of individual interviews with team members, other meetings, minutes of meetings etc); c) the *extra-linguistic social/sociological*

*variables and institutional frames* of a specific 'context of situation' (e.g. observer notes and reflections on meetings); and d) the *broader socio-political and historical contexts*, within which the discursive practices are embedded (e.g. knowledge from ethnography of the organization). These context layers enable researchers to deconstruct the meanings related to contextual levels and frames that impinge on the unique realized texts and utterances. Moreover, the DHA distinguishes between three dimensions which constitute textual meanings and structures: the *topics* which are spoken/written about (e.g. the construction of a new building in our example below); the *discursive strategies*[3] employed (both consciously or subconsciously, as illustrated in Figure 1 and explained below) that contain '[P]resupposition[s] [that] can be seen as a way of strategically "packaging" information' (Chilton, 2004: 64); and the *linguistic means* that are drawn upon to realize both topics and strategies (e.g. using certain pronouns and presuppositions either verbally – such as in meetings – or in written form – such as the minutes of meetings, or organizational reports).

The DHA contextualizes utterances in relation to other discourses, social and institutional reference points, as well as socio-political and historical contexts and events. Within this it seeks to identify the effect of particular *discursive strategies* that serve to present the arguments of an individual or a group either positively or negatively. These are: *Referential/nomination* (to mobilize support for an argument through the construction of in-groups and out-groups); *Predication* (labelling actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively so that they are perceived as an 'opportunity' or a 'threat' to the group); *Argumentation* (establishing the logic of the argument by outlining how the issue should be dealt with); *Perspectivation* (reinforcing the speaker's point of view by framing and aligning the issue with them, or a certain field of action, or a certain discourse topic); and *Intensification/Mitigation* (modifying the epistemic status of a proposition in order to position it in the organizational agenda and thus its relative claim on organizational resources) (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2009, for an extensive discussion of these strategies and the related linguistic means). In terms of the argumentation form employed, content-related *warrants* ('conclusion rules') are used to connect the argument(s) with the conclusion (the claim) used in particular utterances, and hence provide justification of the latter. The argumentation warrants centre on 15 possible premises that are explicit or inferable within utterances, known as '*topoi*' that are content-based. A summary of discursive strategies and argumentation topoi for our case are shown in Figure 1 and employed in our commentary on the meeting episodes (see Kienpointner, 1992, for further details).[4]

The DHA's methodology focuses on the discourses and discursive practices that surround and connect events, within which language is used in socially ratified ways or 'genres' (like, for instance, consultation compared with interviewing or meetings), and particular 'habitus' or internalized ways of being (Bourdieu, 1984). This analytic approach has been referred to in the field of management, but not employed to date. It enables the analysis of the many, often conflicting and simultaneous strategies that construct arguments in texts and are *recontextualized* to other genres or even *resemioticized* to other semiotic modes (Fairclough and

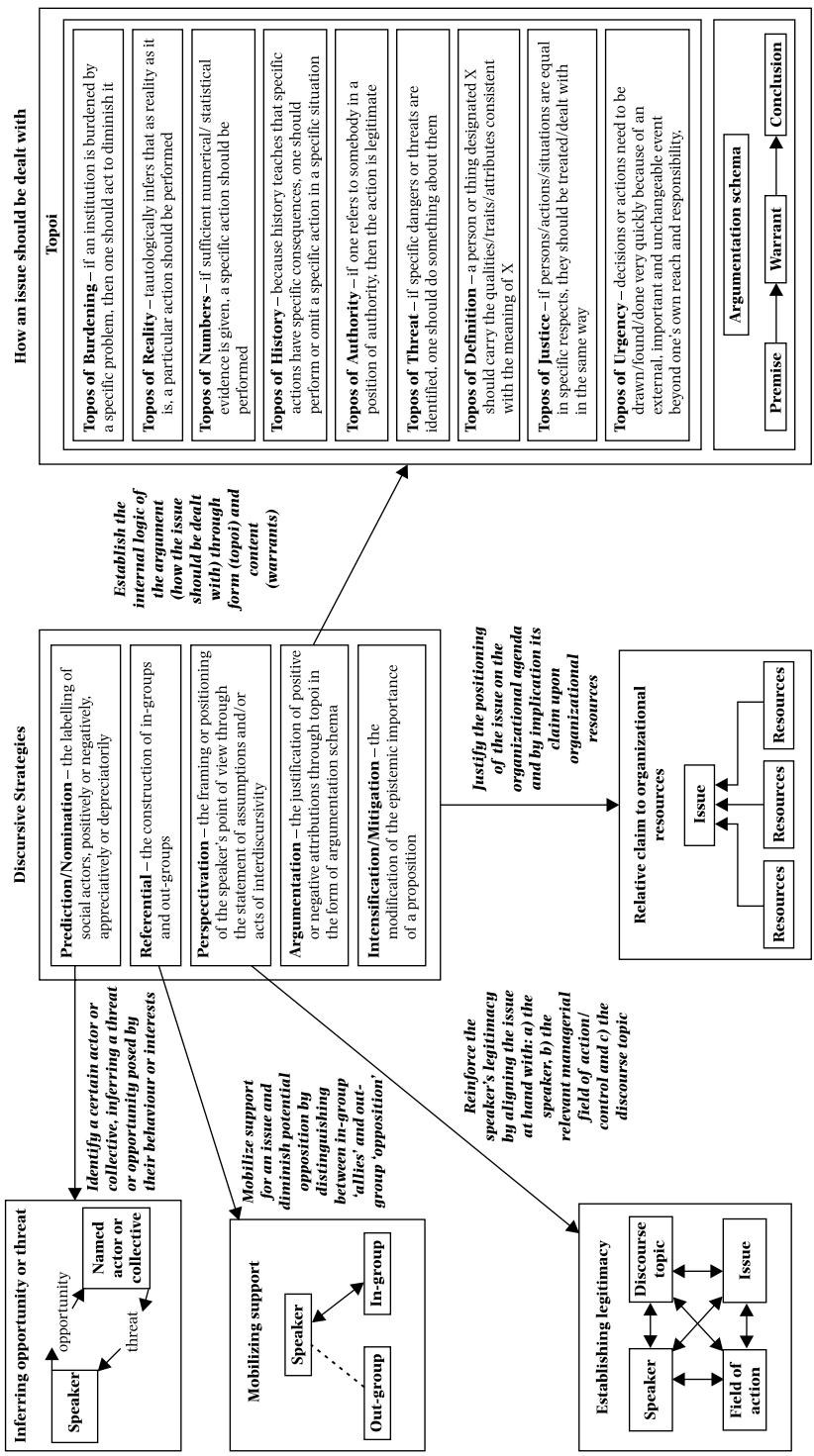


FIGURE 1. *Discursive strategies*

Wodak, 2008; Wodak, 2008). In this way, *intertextual and interdiscursive* relationships to other genres and discourses, both synchronically and diachronically can be made explicit which often manifest latent belief systems, ideologies, and power relations as well as structures of dominance. Moreover, the approach is problem-oriented and thus inherently interdisciplinary, employing a range of methods and tools for the specific object under investigation (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Elaborating upon the DHA, we complement the analysis of naturally occurring speech in meetings with interviews and ethnographic immersion of the researchers in the organization (Knorr-Cetina, 2007; Oberhuber and Krzyzanowski, 2007; Sarangi, 2007) to enable methodological triangulation (see above). Although discourse analysts have rarely attempted ethnography, a few exceptions (see above) illustrate how critical discourse analysis and ethnography can be used in combination to ensure valid interpretations of field data.

## *Analysing discursive episodes using the DHA*

In this section we utilize three episodes from a two-year ethnography of senior management teams in a leading multinational company to demonstrate the contribution it can make to organizational discourse studies. We followed the management teams of UK and Australian business units of Defence Systems International (DSI),[5] a leading corporation operating globally in the defence sector. We interviewed each team member and other stakeholders in-depth before and after a six-month period observing and recording their regular meetings. We amassed a transcribed dataset over 300 hours long, including 90 hours of individual interviews, 180 hours of regular team meetings, and 40 hours of business conferences, review meetings, and strategy workshops. Field notes and other confidential company documents were also accessed to triangulate our interpretations.

The brief episodes we use in this article are drawn from DSI's Australian business unit. Like many large companies in Australia, DSI faces a dilemma over the geographic organization of facilities because of the polarization of labour within a small number of metropolitan areas. This issue provides the backdrop to the first episode from a senior team 'Awayday' in which they discussed whether or not to construct a new building. The second episode comes from a regular meeting some nine months later where they revisited the issue and reach a different decision. The third episode is from an email between a researcher and a member of the team where they clarify the final outcome four months after the second episode.

### EPISODE 1: THE DECISION TO CONSTRUCT 'BUILDING B' (NOVEMBER 2006)

This initial episode occurred midway in a larger discussion in which members of the team had been considering their respective inputs into the 'Integrated Plan' (IP) used within the business for assessing future requirements and providing financial control (Figure 2).

The discussion started with Ted, the Operations Director and Will, the Osprey Director (a particular aircraft project), talking about the implications of a new contract that Will had won the day before in Singapore. Since both directors

Ted: We've taken that view on the IP (Integrated Plan), Falcon Simulator Systems and there's a deterioration across that. The Kestrel Project, from memory, they ramped down that, keeping a full aircraft integration capability, but there is a deep mine in respect to that, so… It's where that training element, what we're forecasting is the decline. So what we're forecasting is…

Will: I think it's… so what we're doing is… we're doing... looking at closing base businesses, and we're forecasting down to project's end, rather than saying well, it's capability-based business heading out there, in a training simulation competency… That's the work that Dave and Sam have been doing for me, I'm going to get Nick in there to start to bring that up...

Mike: I don't mind looking at the capabilities… for the purposes of the IP, you're going to have to deploy that capability on projects, you're going to have to badge it against projects at some point… [Will: That's what we're doing…] to build up your IP, but from a capability point of view, from a business point of view, we've got to be planning your facilities at a higher level you know, than project by project.

Greg: [emphatically] You're never going to… you'll never get at it that way.

Will: Yeah… don't… I'm not disagreeing with that…

Greg: If you follow trends in the workforce, and Harris you correct me… is that the workforce has been growing, take out the contracts like Norwich with about 80 people, take out Flight Simulation with about 100 people that went across. You'll see the trend is the business grows… continually… think about the options we're talking about. That'll have some implications… you think about to get down to the finer detail of what's going to happen with the Training Aids, in and out, what Singapore could look like 'Grey Box'-wise etc., it almost sounds to me like the IP numbers that you've said are fuzzy-like, its not really fixed. I'm in a place that says, have a look at the capabilities side of it, you've got 800 people, you've got the people that you've got today, you plan on that basis but there's… you do a match against the programmes, perhaps label the capability but by and large, you've got what you've got and it's going to change by two or three, four hundred people is what we're saying today.

Mike: There's a burden there behind you guys.

Bradley: I'm at the same place as you, that probably the only difference I'd make to that I'd say, we've got what we've got today at Aberdeen, we'd better cater for that at Aberdeen Hills and we'd better look to grow additional manpower wherever we can in Melbourne and Sydney… [murmurs of assent] … So build the fucking building... [laughter]

Mike: … which is where I've been for the past three or four years…. [more laughter] … Harris keeps trying to talk me out of it… I just keep saying I don't believe them…

Harris: Well we, we obviously need to do some more scenarios around this because this as I say at the moment is showing that even on the probable scenario which includes the 10% of additional labour across all projects, includes Singapore, that we'd still have and let's just take 211 for convenience, 112 surplus space plus the potential for another 107 so that's 220 odd… based on this. Now the scenarios that we've also got in the pack, the cost-based pack, we've looked at MMA, we looked at Brunei… okay and obviously they… they're not in the probable because I think you were…

Will: Well when I said I was dodgy about Singapore…

Harris: … but you're also very dodgy about MMA.

[several people talk at the same time]

Greg: … so you've got $60 million in five years and we're going to drop 300 people in the same time frame. [Will: Very simply.] I just think that that data…

Harris: … well then… $60 million is $50 million and $30 million of that increase is tasking that doesn't actually exist in projects… it's flat there and that's assuming that inflation's going at 3% per annum.

Greg: … so we're going to drop to that… okay say we are at where we are today. The business doesn't change in the next five years, we're going to drop 300 people. I don't believe it.

Bradley: Neither do I. [Greg: I don't believe it.] Which is why this is going to end up being a judgement. It's going to end up…

Mike: What would be the quality of the accommodation if you decided to… the other thing you've got is that Aberdeen Hills site… we've got a whole bunch of people in the Evans Building, we've got a bunch of people in sort of half decent accommodations somewhere else, and then you start to refurbish very old buildings… so we can move the people from the north to the south…

Adam: You've got to consider the infrastructure that comes with that, for example the small cafeteria that's used on the southern side is apparently well utilised, so we're going to have to increase perhaps the size of the cafeteria on the northern side so there's extra cost, and there's potentially additional car parking as well because we can't all park on the road, and the additional car parks we have will not accommodate the 400 or whatever it is on the southern site, so there's additional car parking, cafeteria infrastructure type work as well that has to be accommodated if we go for building B, and then if you to for building B…

Charlie: Yeah but…

Adam: I think and my view is… sorry Charlie… to get out of the leased buildings… the main ones, we've got those until 2008, so if these numbers are anywhere near correct, by the time we get out of that by the end of 2008, according to these plans, we don't have a surplus on the site.

Mike: Well we do, I mean we don't have the surplus.

Charlie: I don't believe it… you make your decision on what it is.

Adam: So here's the debate. You make the call now and say we will, or do you go based on what Harris's doing and what I've been part of which is try to bottom this up and find out what actually… [several people speak at once] and then you make the decision, are you going to build on Aberdeen Hills and/or Outer Bay, or do you build in Melbourne and/or Sydney?

Bradley: I think, we've got what we've got. We've got people spread all over the fucking place in really sub-standard operating environments. We've got a huge challenge around the business in terms of retention. We're not going to assist our cause on retention at all without a half decent working environment that facilitates communication on site, which you could say is dysfunctional at the moment, so if you take the decision that you're a sustainable business, which I don't think any of us doubt, is get onto it and create the environment that's going to attract people and build the building

FIGURE 2. *Episode one*

forecast a headcount decline on site, neither person had tangible support for the new building. Nonetheless, Will emphasized the validity of his data by naming the individuals who produced them. They both used the pronouns 'we' to endorse the forecasts as a warrant for their views, which implied that the assumptions were shared (a Referential discursive strategy constructing a 'we' group). It is also useful to note that Will had just come in a few minutes earlier directly from the airport, jetlagged after a long international flight, a condition that may explain his hesitation and 'hedging'.

We know from interviewing Will beforehand that he felt that 'It's not all in the numbers' in terms of the Osprey programme's support of the new building. He said he had previously told Chief Operating Officer Bradley that the new building was needed to make the Aberdeen Hills site a more inspiring place to work, but told us there was too much uncertainty over Osprey to build the estimates into the plan, which colleagues were pressing him to do (Will, entry interview, pp. 23–4). Despite this frustration with Will, colleagues talked highly of him. HRD Adam said 'We've always thought . . . Will is the person . . . you're always seeing in the potential for the CEO role . . .' (Adam, entry interview, p. 19), and CEO Mike recounted 'I'm really impressed . . . I need to give him something more to do . . . the obvious job is mine . . .' (Mike, entry interview, p. 18). Not surprisingly, therefore, whilst Mike pursued his own *Perspectivation* and questioned Will's bottom-up approach to headcounts – he attempted to *Mitigate* his comments with the statement, 'I don't mind . . .' (15) but intensify the strength of his argument through the directness of his language. Greg, another outspoken team member, reinforced this *frame shift* (a change of topic, perspective, or argument (see Goffman, 1967, 1981) by agreeing with Mike. Using an emphatic tone and addressing Will individually as 'you're' and 'you'll' (23–4), he emphasized (*Intensification strategy*) the epistemic importance of the issue and distanced himself from Will's approach. We know from two interviews with him that he believed the team tended to get bogged down with operational concerns, which perhaps explains his impatience. Criticized by his boss and his peer, Will responded with diffidence, concessions, and hedges, saying that he was not disagreeing with Greg's view (25); then he used *Mitigation* and partial concession to distance himself from his own initial comments.

Greg then made a relatively long statement using facts to support his view that Will's approach would not work, mentioning: 'trends in the workforce' (26) to legitimize his perspective, asking Harris to correct him, by implication, if he is wrong (26–7), and listing areas of the business (as evidence) that showed it was growing 'continually' (28–31). The request by Greg for Harris (the Finance Director) to 'challenge' him is useful to our understanding of the discussion at a number of levels. First, we know from our ethnography within two DSI businesses that Financial Control is a 'strong' practice and discourse within the organization because the Group CEO (Mike's boss, Jack) has a finance background. Second, in regular review meetings with him, we observed the high regard that Jack had for Harris, because of his financial acumen and similar background in the organization. Third, Greg's request to challenge him would mean that Harris would have to argue against the Topos of Numbers that he represented in an organization where 'finance is king'.

Greg proceeded to challenge Will, prodding him to 'think about the options that we're talking about' (31) – and by implication, that he is not – to 'get down to the finer detail of what's going to happen' (32–3). He reinforced the challenge by referring to the numbers that Will was using as 'fuzzy-like' (36) and drawing his counter-argument together by offering a contrasting perspective, saying that 'I'm in a [different] place that says . . .' (37), repeatedly challenging him with requests to 'you've got' to add up the capabilities and look at the gap that is left. Here, he used the *Topos of Reality*, arguing that the numbers 'are what they are', and that Will's numbers did not adequately reflect the future requirements for facilities. In short, he stressed that the winning of the Osprey Project created contradictions in the IP that the team had not reconciled. The intervention prompted the MD to refer to the state of affairs as a 'burden' (44) for the team to think about (*Topos of Burden*), a form of *Perspectivation* in which he reminded them they still had work to do to close the 'gap' between the IP numbers and the revenues that were foreseeable based on conservative estimates of future business – a stretching process known as 'tasking'. In doing so, Mike moderated his earlier critique on the discourse of Financial Control by underlining its continuing relevance to the team.

With Greg's challenge to Will centring on the need for a balanced view bridging both bottom-up and top-down viewpoints, second-in-command Chief Operating Officer (COO) Bradley then interjected using the Topos of Reality form of argumentation to say essentially 'we've got what we've got', implying that the New Building was justified despite additional growth in the two of their other facilities in Melbourne and Sydney. In pointing out the incommensurability of their arguments, he symbolically drew together the arguments but implied the diversity of views meant that they had better get on and 'build the fucking building' (50). In this way, he reinforced the MDs challenge to bring the arguments together to deal with the 'burden' and implied both perspectives had merit and needed to be reconciled; but he also formed a new argument which shifted the frame by broadening the 'pie' and used his authority as COO to do so. His use of expletives diffused tension and at the same time concentrated minds on what he, as COO, felt mattered: a New Building.

The MD – who often used humour in meetings – followed up stating that what the COO was saying was the same understanding he personally had had 'for the past three or four years!' (52–3). He joked that the FD (who he had said he respected personally) kept 'trying to talk me out of it' but that he did not believe them (53–4), and supported Bradley's argument for the *Topos of Reality* to say that the situation had not really changed. This statement diffused things further using *Mitigation* to downplay the emphasis on the *Topos of Numbers* that he expected would come from the FD. He referred to the fact that they had a strong element of shared knowledge or expertise of the problem between them, and used challenging humour to spotlight the key issue and draw things to a head, relying on his powerful role to do so. As we might expect, the FD was almost forced to respond. He reiterated the *Topos of Numbers* to emphasize his commitment to the need for a bottom-up justification of the New Building (55–6), albeit mitigating his own comment by implying the 'hard numbers' of Financial Control will

need to be understood within some broader scenarios regarding future business growth on two contracts. In essence, he asked the team to provide new bottom-up estimates consistent with the emerging consensus, effectively putting Will on the defence, as his project estimates were now the single largest source of the gap between the bottom-up and the top-down views. It is perhaps not surprising then, that Will started to reformulate his previous statement by explaining *why* he was 'dodgy' about the Singapore contract (66). The FD then made quips and employed *Intensification* and *the Topos of History* to cast further doubt on Will's estimates (67).

At this admittance, Greg chose to reinforce his own case using the *Topos of Numbers*, pointing out inconsistencies over the next five years (69–71). The FD then drew attention to the problems with the numbers, explaining they were inflated because they had targets tasked into them (73). Greg proceeded with the numbers, but all his justifications were implicit, and he appeared to be drawing on, and presupposing, a higher level of shared knowledge within the group to make his point, saying 'I don't believe it' (78–9), effectively excluding those who did not know what he was referring to. The result was to create a dialogue between those who are 'in the know'. The COO Bradley then employed vagueness to say that this was why 'judgement' was needed in the absence of adequate headcount projections as warrants for the *Topos of Numbers* (80–1).

To complete this sequence and change the frame of the discussion, the MD Mike then stepped in to latently moderate the whole meeting and move things along by refocusing the discussion on the *quality* of the accommodation they had (83–4), which was only 'half decent' (87). By introducing another discourse topic, he backed the COO's call for a judgement to be made, but took the discussion back to people issues and away from numbers, characterizing them as a 'whole bunch of people' (86). He emphasized broader considerations consistent with what he had said to us prior to the meeting regarding the challenge they had to 'balance the work-force' across their various sites in Melbourne and Sydney because it was easier to recruit than in Adelaide (Mike entry interview, pp. 20–1).

Charged by Mike to Chair the discussion, HRD Adam then talked about what personnel actually *needed* in terms of facilities, drawing on inter-discursive arguments and knowledge (90–1). He broadened the understanding of the New Building problem, picking up on the judgement issue raised by Bradley, and reframing the issue by noting that the current debate was not only about building capacity (e.g. enough desks and workspace), but also about existing facilities being of poor quality. He concluded, saying that over the next few years they would not have surplus space on site (105–7), a conclusion powerfully reinforced by the MD (108) and another director, Charlie, who called for a judgement about what business and facilities they *had* (109–10), rather than fallible projections of what *could* be. Adam then attempted to summarize and bring discussion to a close using *Perspectivation* and *Intensification* by posing as an intermediary between the bottom-up approach to Financial Control (represented by the FD), and the need to 'make the call now' based on top down evaluation (111–17). In doing so, he called for a decision.

The HRD call for a balanced decision was important in terms of the broader constraints the business was operating under in Australia. He had privately raised with us the limited skill base as a major constraint on their ability to grow, especially in engineering. Not only did they face competition from other defence companies in South Australia but also from multinational mining companies, leading to a higher labour attrition rate than in other businesses. Adam noted that 'finding people and keeping them is a key element of our strategy going forward' (entry interview, p. 8). He appeared to use the episode to emphasize the bigger issue about where to expand the business, given the growing concerns in the organization about recruitment and retention – a constraint that was corroborated with some of the middle-level HR managers who worked for him, who emphasized Adelaide as a 'backwater' to attract young people compared to other state capitals (Francyne, entry interview, p. 6), because 'that's where people see their long-term careers being based' (Linda, entry interview, p. 4). Over the next six months of our observations of the team in meetings, this issue became an increasingly significant topic of discussion.

To close the episode, Bradley used his authority as COO by giving a value-driven statement that linked the call for a decision by Adam to other discourses by supplying more evidence (warrants), emphasizing the 'sub-standard' (119–20) nature of accommodation, the need for a new building to improve retention of people (122), and the 'dysfunctional' (125) nature of inter-functional processes due to the current building arrangements on site, which also needed to be addressed to 'attract people' (128).

### EPISODE 2: RECONSIDERING THE DECISION TO BUILD (JULY 2007)

Nine months on, at the end of a team discussion focused on the need to balance an 'enterprise view' (i.e. the good of the business overall) with a 'business unit view' (i.e. different needs for resources in parts of the business), the team again resurrected the issue of the new building (see Figure 3).

HRD Adam began by asking whether or not the enterprise-business unit conflict was confined to their Aberdeen Hills headquarters. The MD Mike, Adam and Ted agreed that it probably was, as other sites were made up of functions or business units (1–32). Adam ended with a seemingly throwaway comment – 'So I think there's something about this site . . .' (31–2), echoing the recurrent debate we had seen in meetings over the intervening months since the first episode. A number of the directors had told us that the tension centred specifically on the Osprey programme and the Engineering function over the allocation of skilled personnel, and we found out that Will was at the centre of this debate, accused of prioritizing the Osprey programme over the needs of the enterprise as a whole. As COO Bradley said:

> the problem . . . lies with a few individuals who operate on a very clear personal premise that their responsibility is purely for their area . . . the solution must involve a degree of compromise and a degree of sharing of resources . . . Will seems unable to do that . . . twelve months ago he was considered to be the heir apparent to Mike . . . today he would not be considered heir apparent at all . . . (Bradley exit interview, pp. 2–9)

Mike corroborated the change in Will's fortunes, saying that the challenge was now to 'fix Osprey'. He told us that the designated succession plan was no longer going to work as some of Will's behaviours made it less likely (Mike, exit interview, p. 7). Adam too, said '. . . Osprey . . . is a reflection on Will. Osprey is not the shining light that we perhaps saw six months ago . . . It is, without a doubt, the most problematic part of the workforce' (Adam exit interview, pp. 6–7). By the second episode, therefore, Will's standing had been weakened and he was being blamed for employees' disgruntled views of DSI in the Hewlett Report – a recent opinion survey across major Australian companies.

In response to Adam's point about Aberdeen Hills being different, Mike then joked provocatively that maybe they should 'close the fucking thing' (33) on account of ongoing conflicts. However, Joe, the newly appointed Director of Air Systems, who had joined a few weeks earlier and had no knowledge of the previous building debate, inadvertently opened up the conversation again by reflecting on issues raised at an employee feedback session held the previous day, expressing surprise over the level of employee discontent towards the site (38–41). This chance remark reminded others of the previous building debate – an issue which was already debated and decided upon – prompting Mike to perspectivize Joe's observations by invoking the proposition that there was no alternative (*Topos of Reality)*, saying 'we can't physically move it' (42–3). Joe intensified the discussion by joking about an employee suggestion that a monorail be built to link Aberdeen Hills to the City Centre. More conscious of the history and implications of the building debate, Mike responded by employing a strategy of *Mitigation* and suggesting a realistic solution: a travel allowance for employees (47–55) given the length of the commute from the city (57–60). He moderated his comments using made-up words such as 'end-buggeration' (60), delivered in a broad Northern Irish accent.

There is less need to analyse this second episode in full detail, since it is now possible for the reader to discern how the discursive strategies were used. Instead, we highlight the principal features of the episode. Adam's frame-shifting intervention in response to Jim's claim that he could not move the building proved crucial: he said that it was possible to move *some* of the functions (72–4). The proposal 'tipped' the discussion and allowed Ted to escalate the issue by saying that the engineering function had the most problematic employees, an issue that could be addressed by moving them closer to the city (90–7). Will re-entered the conversation, arguing he had under-represented the engineers' negative sentiment towards the current site in the original discussion (109). He prompted Adam to admit they had made the first decision because of the powerful mandate given by the Group CEO, Jack, a relationship the MD described as 'playing cards with a bloke who has all the cards' (Mike, exit interview, pp. 11–12). Later, Will referred to the wider cultural discourse around 'Generation Y' employees to reinforce the argument that younger engineers had different lifestyle expectations and did not want the long drive from their city centre apartments. His use of the *Topos of Culture* to explain the Avionics Group engineers' sentiments, provided the warrant to split the site under the *Topos of Advantage*, but Bradley resisted using the *Topos of Justice/Equity* (132–9) arguing it would have a divisive impact.

Adam: Just a bit off on process – we talked about it yesterday and we talked around the need to instill that enterprise view across the business I think is really important, not only for managing talent but also for having people responsible, I think particularly on this site – and I also wonder, and I was thinking about this yesterday – do we have a culture on this site which is different from other sites and really when we talk about these issues, are they really more manifest in this site than others? I don't know. Is there some uniqueness about this site about having different business units and functions, buildings and complexity and different history, which must drive a different culture. I'm not saying it's better or whatever but I wonder sometimes when we talk about these issues, in a sense, are they more around this site and less about Kingston or Melbourne or wherever. Just an open question.

Mike: They're certainly different. There's more people on this site in light of anywhere else. Not in itself – as I say, they're much less self contained – so everyone in Kingston is more or less in Aircraft Services, whereas here you've got a bunch of shared service function people who sort of nobody wants to own, and then you've got some of John's people and some of Will's people. Everybody there owns somebody here sort of thing.

Adam: As I say, the independent kingdom of Alexandra Park as a British stronghold – a very positive sort of culture.

Mike: Although it's quite a distributed business, but it's still – but I can't honestly say I've tested it because I haven't gone to the bloody DSO place and wherever it is.

Ted: You would still find a reasonably strong culture.

Adam: So I think there's something about this site, but anyway I think the enterprise view…

Mike: … that and we'll close the fucking thing.

Joe: You know another issue about this site which is the thing that came out yesterday that was absolutely clear was that your judgement that there was one rabid guy who wanted to move off this site, yesterday there was a very broadly held view that there is a broad level of discontent about the environment here and – and there's nothing you can do about it perhaps, but it's certainly not some isolated radical, it's a broadly held view at that level.

Mike: It's a bugger of a site. We can make the site better, but we can't physically move it.

Joe: One of the radical ideas was a monorail!

Mike: I'll tell you what we could do...

Adam: Is it a project for us to build it?

Mike: ... what we could do is – we could say, okay guys, this is believed to be a long commute in this city, you see it's 30 minutes from the city to here. You could say that we recognise it and that we will pay a travel allowance. We could do something that recognises that, albeit that pretty well the whole defence industry is here and that which isn't in fucking Outer Harbour which is even harder to get to from anywhere so I'm not sure, but there is a level of discontent.

Ian C: So that's the key thing is it?

Mike: The facilities aren't good, but we could fix that. We could build another one of these and that's what we're planning to do, but the bigger end-buggeration for people is that drive…

Adam: I think that we'd be surprised what a strong undercurrent of feeling there is on this site towards this location, coming, and I don't just mean coming this distance. When they see Raytheon, Saab, everybody else at either Outer Bay or down at Oxford Green and when I think one of the bigger challenges coming forward, when you want people on Avionics for example to work shift work, you want to drive out here at unsociable hours and work shift work, it's going to be a challenge.

Mike: Yeah but, it's kind of, one of those, you know, God give me the strength to recognise things that I can do something about. I cannot move this site.

Adam: Yeah, but you can move Avionics to Oxford Green.

Will: I just, you know, just challenging that because, has anyone looked at what would be the impact of moving the site?

Mike: Yeah, we've done a couple of times, we'll go and do it again.

Adam: Will raised once before at this table after one of the off-sites that about, before we decide on Building B, is there an option to move Avionics or to, you know, split up this site. To be fair to Will, I don't think Will properly represented the feeling around, from the Osprey group towards this site.

Mike: I mean if you said, "Can we move a couple of hundred engineers somewhere else?", I think we probably could. Can we get 1,200 people out of manufacturing facilities somewhere else?

Adam: No, but you might make a decision about splitting this site.

Ted: I don't think you're getting a lot of issues from the manufacturing side around this site.

Adam: But if this is the manufacturing side and you put ALR machining on here or whatever, but you might then decide you want to put more people closer to town from an Engineering…

Mike: I'm fine with that, you know if there's a sensible workflow way that you can do it. [Adam: you might...] because, from what I hear from people here is that, you know, it's makes it inefficient to go from one building on this site to another building on this site, and then, but to go for another building 10 kilometres away? So that's what we made our assumptions on…

Bradley: [sighs] But we, we – in this I'm – my memory's failing me – we went through that at some length, and we decided as an EC that that was not a practical option – to split and create another site in city.

Will: Well I don't think I represented it well at all.

Adam: Well to be fair, I'll tell what my view of my synopsis of that discussion was that I don't think Will represented it fair, I don't think I represented it fair. I think we were given a mandate by Jack, which was just go and build Building B, and we just took that as our mantra. You're right, we did do the sums around leasing property around the city centre and you've stack it up against the cost of Building B, and you're right, Building B was a better long term investment and we made that decision. I don't think in all of that, we really thought through Avionics, shift work and some of these other things that are coming up...

Bradley: [frustrated] We've got to have that fucking debate again then – I mean is that why we've been stalling fucking Building B.

Adam: No, no.

Will: I don't think it's a matter of Avionics of shift work either, I think it's you come back to Generation Y, and we mentioned a bit about Generation Y and that sort of thing, but a lot of the workforce that we're getting – the younger guys, they're living in closer to the city, they don't want to have to do the commute and the question for me is – is that going to become more and more of an issue?

Bradley: One of the points that came out of the discussion we had that there are few points, but one major point was splitting sites, managing the logistics of that around the activities, the second point was, if you – if you do split sites and you put the core engineering group in a city site, you'll have an enormous amount of pressure for everybody else out here [Adam: I can agree with that.] to say, why haven't I got the option of going in there?

Mike: That was the major problem.

Will: … and that's why I actually agree with you Bradley on that one, because it does create a bit of an 'us and them'. It creates a matter of, if someone's working in the city, and that project finishes and the next project that they – that we need to work them on is out here, are we running the risk of losing them to the organization. So that 'stickiness' as I keep calling it, the people in business units and projects, that's going to exacerbate that situation. So I think that had merit in it, which is the part which I agree with, but then the other part of the dilemma is well how do we keep people engaged and attract and bring them out here, so you know, the other question in my mind is then, do you then sort of say, but maybe we do get a building in the city or Oxford Green or close to the city and gradually the organization transitions there with enough scope that there's projects that start and stop – maybe more of them end up starting in there. That's a long-term goal that may take ten years to get there, but it's still a way of incrementally the centre of gravity into a closer to the city site, which makes more people accessible – that's an option – I don't know.

Bradley: Well you'd better get on it and make – if we have serious discomfort about a decision we appear to have – I'd thought we'd taken, we'd better hurry up and get that debate back on the table.

Adam: I think the other thing that's come through Harry, over the last six months since we've made that decision is that you know, as we've got out of the southern site, we're still being pressured on location, we don't have Building B, you're right – it's under construction, so it's really driving that force fit, as to – you know, we're running out of room and I think that's driving the debate as well. The other thing is, you know, I've Scott lined up, when he gets back from the UK, to have a meeting with me, with the EC, to go through Building B, and there are plans around that in terms of the footprint and whatever. Um, and I think in that we can have a discussion about, you know do we want to open it up to see whether there's an opportunity to move other people off this site. In the mean time, under Jim's okay, I've had Sam have a look down at Oxford Green to contact the real estate guys down there, so I know, and I've got a pretty about what's happening down there. CSC are moving out of their building, they're going to build a brand new one, Tenix, all that sort of – Motorola, so we've got a feel of the buildings and the opportunities down there, if we want to take it up. It's only very early days, haven't made any commitment, so I can start to paint a picture of what...

Mike: Well as I see, we did go through the exercise, if we think it's worthwhile through it again because we think something had changed or you felt that the case wasn't sufficiently well put that time, we need to get it on the table and get it off again quickly.

Will: When I accepted the decision at that time, because I felt that – and I still believe that if I go and put people on a city location and then I want to move them out here to do something, I run the risk of losing them.

Mike: I agree and you will then – I think you will create an expectation – I mean, I won't go through all of this again, but the people who are left on this site…

Adam: Second class.

Will: That's right.

Mike: … you immediately create a problem.

Will: It's how to deal with that, that's the concern.

Mike: Which is why when you look at what high paid – if you look at for example, the capability green solution at uh, in avionics – you have to move everybody, you've no option. You just have to fucking move everybody. I mean from Milton Keynes to Northampton wasn't much of a bloody choice for people. Or not Milton Keynes – was it…?

Will: It was Milton Keynes…

Charlie: Yeah it was Milton Keynes.

Will: … and there was a big outcry in the beginning, but in the end, most of the people moved.

FIGURE 3. *Episode two*

Crucially, however, Adam pointed out the situation had changed significantly since the earlier discussion, weakening the validity of the warrants used to support the New Building case (166–72). He intensified the counter-argument by saying that Scott had already evaluated possible alternatives so that an assessment could be done quickly to minimize delay (172–6). Mike acknowledged the possibility that the assumptions (warrants) that supported the previous decision may well have changed, thus justifying the re-opening of the debate (188–92). He also added another warrant through the *Topos of Urgency* to the re-evaluation initiative (*Intensification*) by pointing out a similar decision to split a site in the UK ultimately resulted in the need to move the entire group – thereby alluding to another potential frame shift of the issue as one of moving or not moving the entire headquarters (204–9). Adam, Will, and Charlie each acknowledged their recollection of the event, an interchange that served the dual purpose of expressing team solidarity and bringing the episode to a conclusion.

### EPISODE 3: AN EMAIL EPILOGUE TO THE DISCUSSIONS

The third episode consists of two excerpts (1–14 and 15–21) from an email conversation between one of the researchers and Adam (HRD) regarding the outcome of the re-evaluation some four months after Episode 2. In the first part, Adam confirmed the decision to present the Building B proposal to Fred (UK COO and second to Jack in the UK hierarchy) for approval in September had been postponed (2–3) for further consideration (6–7). What is interesting is that this excerpt reveals the interactions captured in the first episode were in part due to the need for Mike to seek further warrants to support the proposition to build Building B, rather than a simple 'bottom-up' justification exercise that would normally be created through the IP process. Seen in this light, it is clear that Mike had been pushing the team to come up with a 'top-down' intuitive case for Building B – a position achieved by the end of the first episode. This suggests that the first decision was something of a fait accompli created by Mike and Jack and, in the email, Adam indicates that the consultation process was now completed and that the capital expenditure case for Building B was of the 'Right Order of Magnitude'.

In the second email excerpt, Adam clarified the outcome of the re-evaluation prompted by Episode 2. Although the decision to build Building B was now back on, it is interesting to note Adam's wording here: in line 16 ('There are those on the EC . . .'), in which he subtly distanced himself from others in the team and ownership over the final decision – implying ongoing resistance by using the word 'those' rather than the more standard 'we' and thus positioning himself as non-belonging or outsider distinct from 'those'. The *Topoi of Justice* and *Advantage* have clearly won out as the dominant warrants supporting the argument to build Building B. In conclusion, if the first episode was significantly orchestrated, the second episode demonstrated Adam's continued resistance within the context of the problems over the Osprey programme. This suggests that Adam and Will had simply seized upon the opportunity inadvertently raised by Joe, as a means of addressing retention and recruitment issues, rather than their argument being

Building B Capex and business case was prepared for the September QBR here in Australia. Outside the QBR Mike decided not to present to Fred. His concern was that the Capex was a ROM (Right Order of Magnitude) rather than an exact actual cost. Since then we have had follow up discussions here in Australia and further consultation with stake-holders in the business. Importantly we have met with Mike and broadly taken him through the Life Cycle Management process for facilities, which has as a step exactly what we were proposing in September. As such we will now represent the business case Capex and other supporting documents at the next QBR later this month. This again will be a ROM price….

We have decided not to move the Avionics to the city. There are those on the EC who believe this would lead to separate cultures and not be economical. Therefore the travel allowance question is resolved. We decided that on balance the childcare provision should be put on hold. The feeling was we have many other initiatives to put in place before this one.

**Offsite EC Meeting (9th November 2006, Adelaide Oval)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Adam | Human Resources Director |
| Bradley | Chief Operating Officer |
| Charlie | Director of Radar Systems |
| Greg | Director of Contracts and Procurement |
| Harris | Finance Director |
| Larry | Director of Engineering |
| Mike | Managing Director of DSI Australia |
| Ted | Director of Manufacturing |
| Will | Director of the Osprey Programme |
| Ian | Observer |
| Winston | Observer |

**Feedback Presentation Meeting to the EC (27th July 2007, Aberdeen Hills)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Adam | |
| Bradley | |
| Charlie | |
| Greg | |
| Joe | Director for Air Systems (new to DSI) |
| Mike | |
| Ted | |
| Will | |
| Ian | Presenter and observer |
| Winston | Presenter and observer |

**Others mentioned but not present**

| | |
|---|---|
| Jack | DSI International Director (responsible for DSI Australia) |
| Sam | Facilities Manager (reporting to the HR Director) |

**Final Follow-up E-mail**

Adam
Winston

FIGURE 4. *Episode three*

pre-meditated. From this perspective, we saw that the three episodes represented an unfolding of a strategic 'decision' to build Building B, in a process that was at one and the same time political, negotiated, and contested, none of which can be explained without reference to the micro-discursive behaviours of those involved and the close understanding of the macro-context, the multi-layered history of the decision-making processes, and pressures within which they occurred.

## *Discussion*

We started this article identifying two methodological challenges: a) the need to bridge discourse analysis across micro and macro-scales and contexts; and b) the need to embed such analyses within longitudinal ethnographies. The organizational discourse literature shows there is room for such an approach to produce more balanced explanations of the relative effects of agency and structures, and we proposed the integration of the Discourse-Historical Approach to CDA and ethnographic study as a means to this end.

In our commentary on the episodes we demonstrated how this integrated methodology enables different scales of reality to be brought together. Figure 5

provides a summary of these arguments and outcomes, and illustrates how a single proposition – whether or not to build Building B – at once drew upon discursive issues that varied in degrees of collective commitment and geographical scope. We showed how inter-discursivity provided the vehicle for local and global concerns to be simultaneously exercised. At the end of Episode 1 for example, the COO of DSI summarized the case for Building B by drawing upon issues ranging from micro-level interactional problems, meso-level organizational challenges, and macro-level labour market competition within the space of a few sentences. The approach demonstrated how discursive mechanisms and contextual factors influenced the development of the two decisions, and how these decisions were reached by the team using a variety of premises to support arguments that made particular claims (see Figure 5).

In the first episode, a single warrant was used to support Argument A, relating to the fact that the capital expenditure case for building was undermined by the 'bottom-up' projections from the business, and led to the conclusion that there was a need to run more scenarios to test the argument. Argument B to construct the new building, on the other hand, was supported by several warrants relating to trends in the workforce, health and safety considerations, improving recruitment and retention, and benefits to communication and coordination in the business. These warrants were used to support the case for the new building in a top-down fashion; this was finally the argument that won-out in the decision-making process. In the second episode, the continued argument to construct Building B was supported with warrants concerning the alternatives being unrealistic, uneconomic, or infeasible, as well as the divisive effect on the culture of the business. A second argument was created, however, to split the parts of the business across two sites, using the special needs of a particular group of employees and logistics to override the authority and mandate of the Group CEO. Compared to the first episode, therefore, the argument to go ahead with Building B lost-out in favour of splitting the site into two. By the third episode, however, the email conversation showed that the argument to build Building B had continued in the team, supported by warrants relating to the economic infeasibility of alternatives, and the divisive impact of splitting it across sites.

These shifts in thinking over approximately 12 months underline the emergent nature of the decision-making process and raise important issues regarding how arguments are influenced through organizational politics over time and power relations. For example, why and how did the successful arguments 'win out' in discursive terms in each episode? Inverting this question, which arguments were 'driven out' by the successful argument's claim to power, and how was this achieved? Were there discernable differences in the discursive strategies employed in successful arguments as opposed to unsuccessful arguments? To what extent was the effect of such discursive interactions mediated by the macro-context in which they were applied? Whereas it is not possible to answer these questions with reference to a few illustrative episodes, some initial insights have been provided by the methodology we proposed. The main impression of the decisions reached in Episodes 1 and 2 is that they appear to be examples of *situationally* negotiated logic. However, when viewed together within the context of additional information, in

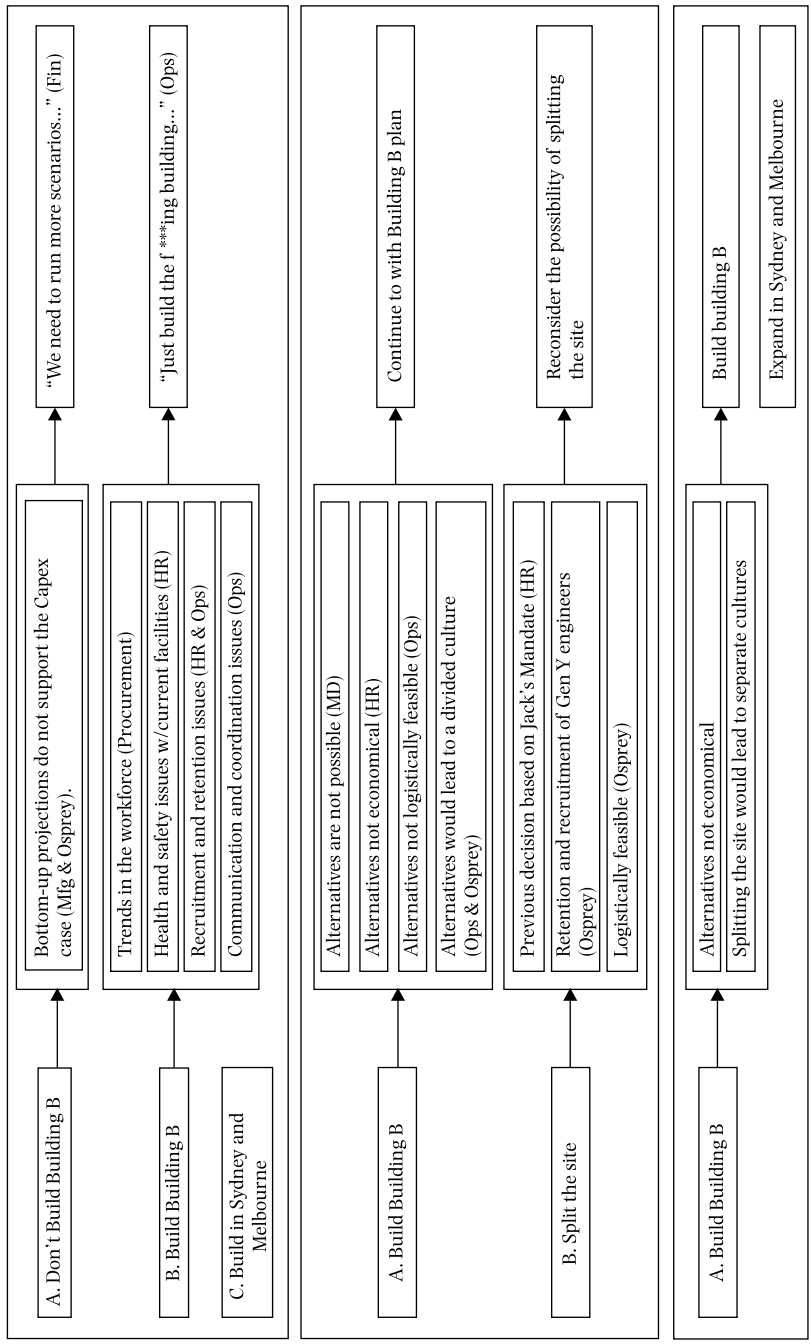


FIGURE 5. *Summary of argumentation and outcomes*

*Source*: Developed from Toulmin, 1958.

Episode 1 we see a decision orchestrated by MD Mike with the backing of Group CEO Jack; whereas Episode 2 is clearly an example of situationally negotiated logic advanced in resistance of the earlier decision. These decisions compare with the final outcome, revealed in Episode 3, by which time it had become evident that there was continued resistance from some members of the team to the decision to relocate certain functions to another site, and that the decision was reverting in favour of constructing Building B.

The methodology serves to illuminate the impact of different scales of influence and contexts on decision outcomes. At one extreme, we saw the effect macro-level structural influences had on the micro-level interactions between agents (such as the impact of labour market competition on recruitment). At the other extreme, we saw the way in which micro-level agents were able to act back on some of these influences through resourceful argumentation and negotiation. In between, we showed the impact of changing contexts on the outcomes of decision-making processes, whether in terms of new knowledge becoming available (e.g. the latent support of the Group CEO for the new building), or in terms of changes in the willingness and/or ability of individual actors (e.g. Will) to construct particular arguments in different circumstances. These insights suggest that power ought to be conceptualized as a duality of structure and process, with individuals being structurally 'empowered' or 'constrained' by their unique configuration of 'knowledges' that play out through processes of discursive interaction, in the way suggested above (see Holzscheiter, 2005). While answers to these questions will only emerge from the analysis of extensive empirical data, what is clear is that structures of power are less dominant and agency is far more capricious than higher-level methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks might seem to suggest.

Seen from a further level of abstraction, our analysis of these three episodes also builds upon Cooren et al.'s (2007) conceptualization of Discourses[6] as a form of *immutable mobiles* (Latour, 1987) that 'maintain its shape across time and space only if a lot of interactive work is done to assure the stability of its associations in the ordinary day-to-day activity of the people who embody it' (Cooren et al., 2007: 153). While this study focused on the work of the members and affiliates of an NGO in maintaining the integrity of its mission statement in its translations across several episodes within an ethnographic study, we extend this notion in several ways. First, the analysis of the three episodes in this article provides access to the actual interactive work of individuals through which the various translations of a nascent Discourse is maintained. Across the episodes, visibly powerful actors such as CEO Mike, COO Bradley – as well as unseen and unheard but extremely powerful actors such as group CEO Jack – invoke a range of discursive strategies (see Figure 1) to deal with multiple challenges from various actors in order to maintain the integrity of the Discourse of the new building. Second, our analytical approach also renders a real time perspective of interdiscursivity in which more established Discourses are appropriated as resources and with which to both contest and support the Discourse of the New Building. Although normally a powerful organizational Discourse, the IP for example is initially employed by Will and Ted, but is then quickly delimited and

discarded by Mike when it becomes clear that it will not serve its intended purpose in this situation. The Discourse of the Workforce in its various translations, is drawn upon to support the New Building by Greg (i.e. 'trends in the workforce') and Bradley (i.e. 'a huge challenge around the business in terms of retention'). In the second episode, the Workforce is unwittingly drawn upon by Joe (i.e. 'broad level of discontent') and is then seized upon by Adam (i.e. 'strong undercurrent of feeling') and Will (i.e. 'Generation Y') to challenge the plan to build the New Building. By the third episode the Workforce is invoked again (i.e. fears of creating 'separate cultures') as part of the justification for continuing with the New Building.[7] Finally, this approach also builds conceptual linkages with Taylor and Robichaud's concept of organizational conversations as an activity that takes place between actors 'who become co-orientated to an object in conversations and thus create a basis for collective action' (2004: 398). In the case of this study, the (macro-) Discourse of the New Building can also be conceptualized as object around which the meeting participants co-orient through actions of contestation and negotiation over the course of three episodes to eventually reach a point where it is now possible to mobilize collective action to actually build the building.

The insights provided by the proposed approach are also important in informing management practice. As Cicourel (2007) reminded us, ecologically valid discourse analysis is aided by ethnography, since the latter helps us to accentuate the relative importance of variable and patterned physical and discursive actions. It also leads us to think carefully about how to *construct* validity – whether or not our data measures what we have undertaken to measure. The methodological integration that we have called for follows Cicourel's suggestion, but goes further. By keeping our theoretical constructs close to practice, we suggest that the approach offers the means for managers to identify the ingredients that create powerful arguments by comparing – as we have done in this article – those which 'win out' and those which 'lose out'. Potentially, this integrated approach offers researchers the scope to 'dimensionalize' power for managers at personal and interactive levels so they can be more aware of the discursive strategies or 'levers' they might deploy in practice to affect discussion. We are, of course, aware that the successful deployment of such strategies is partly dependent on status, roles, and hierarchical effects. Thus, the combination of the spontaneous interaction, the planned strategies, the arguments, and the static as well as negotiated intricate power relations determine losing or winning, as do idiosyncratic events such as the mood of the group on a particular day or the effect of a person with jetlag.

Three immediate priorities can be identified as a result of this discussion:

1. *The need to construct a substantive evidence base.* This can best be achieved by comparing the discursive practices used by managers across a larger number of episodes and over longer periods as part of an 'extended case' method (Burawoy, 1998). In practical terms this will require access to organizations to observe and record discussion and will involve comparison of issues being addressed by management teams within and across organizations and industry sectors.

2. *The need to explain the effects of different discursive strategies and contexts on decision-making outputs.* To avoid the criticism that the DHA simply describes what happens, associating patterns of discussion with certain outcomes that 'win the day', it will be important to look critically at the arguments and counter-arguments inherent in the process of discussions to tease out how, and why, certain arguments 'win' whilst others 'lose' as a result of individual and team-level skills, hierarchies, and organizational contexts; and to gauge the extent to which the context of the discussion facilitates and/or inhibits decision-making.
3. *The need to develop quantitative approaches to analyse large-scale linguistic corpora and integrate them with rich qualitative analyses*. The first two episodes in our article represented less than 10 minutes of conversation drawn from a dataset of nearly 300 hours of transcribed interviews and meetings captured over a two-year period. The ability to amass and digitize such huge amounts of data is encroaching upon the cognitive limitations of researchers to interpret such data using traditional qualitative methods. For example, analysis of high-*n* longitudinal datasets will require researchers to develop ways of objectively isolating issues for analysis, rather than selecting them subjectively. If the memories of research subjects are fallible and their interpretations biased, what about those of researchers? We suggest that memory and intuition need to be augmented with quantitative methods that go beyond inferring causal relations, and echo Baker et al. (2008) in proposing that critical discourse analysis methods such as the DHA can be made far more robust by incorporating methods and concepts from quantitative approaches, such as corpus linguistics (and vice versa). As Latour observed, the '. . . consequences for the social sciences will be enormous: they can finally have access to masses of data that are of the same order of magnitude as that of their older sisters, the natural sciences' (2007: 16–17).

## *Conclusion*

The primary purpose of our article was to demonstrate the potential contribution of an integrated approach to critical discourse analysis that bridges macro- and micro-scales and contexts within a broader ethnographic study. Such an approach provides a sensitive and ecologically valid methodology for studying the discursive practices of managers in real time. Institutional and organizational structures are weaker and the actors that inhabit them more mundane, with the process of emergence being constantly created by, and arising from, ongoing interactions, much more so than the extant literature would suggest. This integrated methodology also allows us to build conceptual bridges with organizational discourse approaches that view language as a form of structural resource that is drawn upon by actors in the course of their discursive activities. By tackling the fundamental issue of how power is negotiated and exercised through discourse within and across scales and contexts, it is our belief that the approach we have outlined will ultimately make as important

a theoretical contribution to the field of organizational discourse studies as a methodological one.

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NOTES

1. Applying Habermas's definition of 'discourse' often neglects Habermas's theory of the 'ideal speech situation' and the related definition of 'discourse' which considers utopian contexts where no power relations would be evident, taking rational scholarly debates as an example (see, for example, Wodak, 1996, for a discussion of Foucault's and Habermas's influences on CDA).
2. A consistent theme through Foucault's work is the idea that belief systems gain momentum and therefore power through their normalization such that they become 'common knowledge' and that certain contradictory thoughts or acts can become 'abnormal' or 'impossible'. Because this form of power covertly works through individuals and has no particular locus, resistance to this power actually serves to define it and in itself is only possible through knowledge (Foucault, 1979; Foucault and Rabinow, 1984).
3. By 'strategy' we generally mean a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic aim (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). This definition relates, on the one hand, to the concept of habitus and internalized dispositions and practices in particular social fields; on the other, it relates to (Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) seminal theoretical approach to the forms of text comprehension and production where they introduced the concept of strategy into discourse studies as cognitive planning procedure.
4. A number of empirical studies (e.g. Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Livesey, 2002; Simpson and Cheney, 2007) have used a rhetorical perspective (see Tompkins et al., 1989) to analyse organizational discourse and change through an integration of argumentation (i.e. topoi and rhetorical structures) and contextual linkages (i.e. intertextuality and interdiscursivity). While overlapping and complementary, the difference between the rhetorical approach and our approach is primarily one of emphasis. The DHA (and other CDA based approaches) begins with the supposition that language is a mechanism for the exercise of power and it thus conceptualizes notions such as argumentation, identity and interdiscursivity as means through which power is tacitly and latently expressed (Wodak, 2009). By contrast, the rhetorical perspective conceptually centres upon the notion that language is primarily a vehicle for persuasion and identification (Cheney et al., 2004), in which power is not a central dimension of analysis.
5. Readers should note that DSI is a pseudonym to protect the identity of our research sites and respondents. In addition, all the names of individuals, places, and projects in the organization have been altered for the same reason.

6. In this section, we adhere to the convention that discursive activities such as specific texts and utterances are referred to as 'discourses' whereas broader macro topics of discourse that span across levels of context are referred to as 'Discourses'.
7. The Discourse of the Workforce in itself is an interesting study in interdiscursivity. The tight employment market for skilled engineers in South Australia, for example, can be directly traced to mining companies struggling to meet orders for Chinese customers who in turn are engaged in the production of consumer products for export to developed markets. Within the space of several brief episodes, we see how global political-economic trends are spontaneously appropriated in multiple ways as resources employed in the discursive strategies of these actors.

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