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CYNTHIA HARDY

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Abstract: *In recent years, the body of theory on organizational discourse has grown significantly, helping to form a specific field of study and also contributing to broader organization and management theory. During this time, empirical work using discourse analysis has also increased, as organizational researchers have drawn on methods established in other domains of study to examine organizations. However, the study of organizational discourse is not without difficulties, especially for researchers wishing to conduct empirical studies. This article identifies four particular challenges for empirical researchers and then describes how an ongoing program of organizational research using discourse analysis has attempted to address them. It also highlights some of the important contributions that empirical studies of organizational discourse can offer toward the understanding of organizational processes.*

Scholars are increasingly conceptualizing societies, institutions, and identities as discursively constructed collections of texts and, in so doing, are focusing on language use as the central object of study (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a). Such discursive studies are playing a major role in the study of organizations and in shaping some of the key debates that frame organization and management theory (Keenoy et al., 1997, 2000; Grant et al., 1998). The amount of empirical work using discourse analysis has also increased, as organizational researchers have drawn on methods established in other domains of study to explore organizations. The result is a divergent, and sometimes conflicting, range of approaches, from

Cynthia Hardy is professor of management, Department of Management, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010, Australia (tel: 61-3-8344-5344; fax: 61-3-9349-4292; email: chardy@unimelb.edu.au). The author wishes to acknowledge her coauthors and friends—Nelson Phillips, Tom Lawrence, and Steve Maguire—without whom this research would never have taken place, as well as the financial support of the Australian Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, les Fonds pour la Formation des Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche of Quebec, McGill University, and the University of Melbourne.

speech act theory to ethnomethodological conversation analysis to critical linguistics (Putnam et al., 1996; Woodilla, 1998; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The empirical study of organizational discourse is, however, not without difficulties, which need to be addressed as the field grows and evolves (Grant et al., 1998; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a).

This article identifies four particular challenges facing researchers seeking to carry out empirical studies of organizations. First, there are difficulties in collecting and analyzing data, as well as in incorporating other theoretical bodies of work. Second, studying organizational texts within their broader context can be particularly problematic. Third, there is an ongoing—and unresolved—debate between structure and agency, which has particular implications for discourse analysis. Finally, the demands for more reflexive research can be hard for researchers to meet. These challenges make it difficult to conduct and publish empirical studies of organizational discourse, and it is therefore important for researchers to be aware of them and find ways to address them. Drawing on examples from an ongoing program of research on organizational discourse, this article highlights how these difficulties have manifested themselves in particular studies and discusses some of the ways they can be addressed. In this way, it addresses both the challenges and contributions of empirical studies of organizational discourse as we use it to further our understanding of organizational processes.

Organizational discourse theory

Discourse refers to the practices of talking and writing (Woodilla, 1998), which bring objects into being through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts (Parker, 1992). For example, the discourse of strategy has introduced a series of management practices into organizations over the last fifty years (Knights and Morgan, 1991); the postwar discourse of human rights has brought about the contemporary idea of a refugee with rights to asylum (Phillips and Hardy, 1997); the discourse of AIDS has empowered—in the developed world at least—groups of patient-activists to take control of their treatment in ways rarely seen in the case of traditional patients (Maguire et al., 2001). Accordingly, a *discourse* is defined as a system of texts that brings objects into being (Parker, 1992). Discourses are "concrete" in that they produce a material reality in the practices that they invoke. They are embodied in *texts*, but exist beyond the individual texts that compose them. Consequently, texts can be considered to be a discursive "unit" and a manifestation of discourse (Chalaby, 1996).

Discourse analysis is the systematic study of these texts, which contain the clues to discourses that we can never find in their entirety (Parker, 1992). As noted by Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick (2001) in this issue, texts might include written or spoken language, cultural artifacts, and visual representations (see also Wood and Kroger, 2000, p. 68, for examples of different sources of data). Research on organizational discourse thus centers on the texts that compose, and are composed in

and by, organizations (Putnam et al., 1996). This is in line with Kress's (1995, p. 122) observation that:

> Texts are the sites of the emergence of complexes of social meanings, produced in the particular history of the situation of production, that record in partial ways the histories of both the participants in the production of the text and of the institutions that are "invoked" or brought into play, indeed a partial history of the language and the social system, a partiality due to the structurings of relations of power of the participants.

Discourse analysis explains how discourses are made meaningful (Alvesson, 1998) through discursive *activities* that include the production, distribution, and consumption of texts (Fairclough, 1995; Woodilla, 1998). This approach to discourse also pays attention to *interdiscursity*, which focuses on how an individual text is constituted from diverse discourses (Fairclough, 1995), and *intertextuality*, since "any text is a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in and transforming other texts" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 262). Fairclough (1995) points out that textual analysis is insightful because texts constitute an important form of social action, a source of evidence for claims about social relations, and a sensitive barometer of ongoing social processes. They are also a means by which social control is exercised and resisted.

As the articles in this volume demonstrate, there are a wide variety of methods that can be used to analyze discourse (Grant et al., 1998; Keenoy et al., 1997; van Dijk, 1997a, 1997b). To be considered discourse analysis, however, these methods must share particular assumptions regarding the nature of language. As Wood and Kroger (2000, p. x) note:

> [Discourse analysis] is not only about method; it is also a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social sciences. More specifically, we see discourse analysis as a related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions.

Specifically, discourse analysis is concerned with the constructive effects of texts and, as a result, is necessarily interpretative (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Discourse theorists assume that language does not simply mirror "reality." Rather, it brings into being "situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relations between people and groups of people" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

The idea that discourse is the foundation of the process of social construction upon which social reality depends is nothing new (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). What is less commonly understood is *how* this reality is constructed and sustained (Chia, 2000). Discourse analysis focuses on how social reality is created through historically situated discursive moves (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000b). Rather than trying to interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis endeavors to uncover the way in which social reality is produced (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It does not assume a preexisting social object called an organization: instead it ar-

gues that discourse forms social objects—such as organizations—by fixing their identity so that it becomes possible to talk about them *as if they were* naturally existing social entities. In other words, the "apparent solidity of social phenomena such as 'the organization' derives from the stabilizing *effects* of generic discursive processes rather than from the presence of independently existing concrete entities" (Chia, 2000, p. 514). In this way, discourse analysis is not simply a collection of methods, but a *methodology* based on a constructivist epistemology (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Discourse analysis thus investigates systems of texts and the concepts, objects, and subjects that they constitute (Fairclough, 1992). To understand these constructive effects, researchers must locate discourses historically and socially. They must also acknowledge that discursive activity does not occur in a vacuum nor do discourses "possess" meaning. Instead, their meanings are created, supported, and contested through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts; and emanate from interactions between the social groups and the complex societal structures in which the discourse is embedded. To understand discourses and their effects, therefore, we must also understand the *context* in which they arise (Sherzer, 1987; van Dijk, 1997a). Indeed as Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 277) have pointed out:

> Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration. . . . Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently.

By studying the larger context—how it shapes and is shaped by discursive activity—the study of discourse becomes "three dimensional" as the discourse is located historically (Fairclough, 1992, 1995).

This interest in text and talk in context (van Dijk, 1997a) sees organizations "not simply as social collectives where shared meaning is produced, but rather as sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests" (Mumby and Clair, 1997, p. 182). Discourses make certain behaviors possible and, in so doing, constitute "reality" (Deetz and Mumby, 1990) through the interplay of multiple discourses that pertain to any individual setting (Grant et al., 1998). Some discourses and meanings may become so privileged and taken for granted that they are reified, but there is always a struggle for "closure." Power relations that appear fixed (Clegg, 1989) are really the result of ongoing discursive struggles whereby meaning is negotiated (Mumby and Stohl, 1991; van Dijk, 1997a) in ways that create particular objects of knowledge, identities, and relationships (Parker, 1992; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In other words, organizational discourse theory does not deny that some discourses may dominate, but it maintains that such dominance is an ongoing struggle among competing discourses, continually reproduced or transformed through day-to-day communicative practices.

In summary, organizational discourse theory focuses on the constructive effects of discourse—how discourses bring reality into being by making social relations and material objects meaningful—through the study of texts. Discourse analysts are thus interested in the conditions that shape what may be said, who can speak within socially organized settings, the ways in which reality claims are made, and the social practices that are invoked (Fairclough, 1992; Miller, 1994).

Challenges in conducting empirical research

The literature on organizational discourse, as well as discourse theory more generally, has identified a number of challenges facing researchers. Several are highlighted by Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick in the introductory article to this issue. This section addresses four challenges discussed in the literature which are particularly important for researchers trying to carry out empirical studies because they make conducting and publishing discursive studies of organizations more difficult.

Data and theory

There are a number of difficulties associated with data collection and analysis and the role of theory. First, discourse studies are typically labor-intensive and fraught with sampling problems (Putnam and Fairhurst, 2000). Organizations produce inordinately large numbers of different types of texts, making it difficult to choose *which* texts to analyze (and also to justify that choice). Even when the appropriate texts are selected, the task of analyzing them still remains. When both context and text are studied, the challenge is even greater since different methods may be needed to explore the context compared to the text. For example, some writers argue that textual analyses should be complemented with other forms of analysis, such as ethnographies or interviews (Miller, 1994; Fairclough, 1995). Discourse analysis is designed to identify some of the multiple meanings assigned to texts, which means that more systematic, labor-saving forms of analysis (such as traditional context analysis) are counterproductive. As a result, the workload of researchers is often increased and the defense of their methodology becomes more difficult as they face criticism that either the analysis is too subjective or that systematization has produced reification (see Burman and Parker, 1993).

Second, researchers face the choice of whether to conduct more theoretically informed work or to let the data drive the research. Some writers challenge the very idea that we should connect studies of discourse to broader theoretical frameworks and that we should instead allow the data to "speak for itself"; while others argue that studies in which theory "floats disconnected from any political position" raise problems of relativism (Burman and Parker, 1993, p. 167). For example, Parker (2000, p. 519) argues that research undertaken simply to "understand" a phenomenon—which is not informed by theory—makes it difficult to consider ways in which the phenomenon might be changed, leaving the "So what?" ques-

tion, often asked by reviewers, difficult to answer. Another problem with studies that fail to connect to other bodies of theory is that organizational discourse becomes perceived as being too far removed from the academic mainstream. Many reviewers do not find it interesting unless it contributes to the broader aspects of organization and management theory (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

In summary, researchers face the task of selecting and analyzing texts in ways that allow them to conduct their research (and, given the labor-intensive nature of the research, within sensible time frames) and to defend the methodological choices they have made. They also must choose whether and how to relate discourse studies to other theoretical work in the broader field of organization and management theory.

Text and context

Another challenge facing empirical researchers concerns the extent to which they focus on text or context. Despite calls for three-dimensional studies (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997a), empirical studies tend to concentrate more closely on either the broad social context or on a particular piece of text (Keenoy et al., 1997; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). One reason is undoubtedly the additional demands of collecting and analyzing data on text and context (van Dijk, 1997a). However, researchers who focus on text risk the criticism that they have failed to adequately historicize their data (van Dijk, 1997a) and are ill-equipped to explore the performative aspects of language (Burman and Parker, 1993). On the other hand, in trying to convey context, critics argue that researchers go too far "beyond" the particular text and are at risk of putting words—or meaning—into the mouths of others by privileging their interpretation of the context (Burman and Parker, 1993; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a). In addition, they may be accused of reifying context (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a). As van Dijk (1997b, p. 16) notes, contexts are also discursive. They are not objective, but rather they "are interpreted or constructed and strategically and continually *made* relevant by and for participants."

Trying to balance text and context does not necessarily solve the problem because there are inherent tensions associated with these levels of analysis. For example, Alvesson and Karreman (2000b) identify four different types of study. *Micro-discourse* studies make a detailed study of language in a specific micro-context. *Meso-discourse* studies are relatively sensitive to language use in context, but are interested in finding broader patterns that might be generalized to other contexts. *Grand discourse* studies are interested in an assembly of discourses that are ordered and presented as an integrated frame, such as culture. *Mega discourse* studies typically address more or less standardized ways of referring to certain phenomena such as business reengineering, diversity, or globalization. Alvesson and Karreman argue that there is a tension between these levels: localized studies treat discourse as an emergent and locally constructed phenomenon, while the macro studies tend to start from well-established *a priori* understand-

ings of the phenomenon in question. It is not easy to accurately account for both in the same study.

In summary, organizational discourse researchers are exhorted to explore the linkages between text and context and to locate textual analyses in a broader setting. To accommodate text and context within a single study is, however, relatively difficult to achieve.

Structure and agency

Another challenge stems from the ongoing debate concerning the role of structure and agency (e.g., Giddens, 1984; Whittington, 1992). This longstanding debate is not confined to discourse analysis or even to organization and management theory (e.g., Sewell, 1992). Nonetheless, it has a particularly important impact on discourse theory because of the strong influence of Foucault's work, which has promoted an agent-less conception of discourse (Reed, 1998). This view rejects the idea that discourses, and the practices and structures they constitute, are "the direct expression of strategies of control and domination pursued by identifiable individuals, social groups, classes and movements within a wider historical and institutional context" (Reed, 1998, p. 197). It downplays the scope and limits of individual resistance (Burman and Parker, 1993) and sees power as inescapable (Reed, 1998). Other writers reject this view, arguing that the inherent fluidity of discourse means that discourses are *always* subject to resistance (Fairclough, 1995). While some discourses may appear to dominate and some meanings may be privileged, fixation can only be partial (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Reed (2000) argues that we should reject the prevailing Foucauldian view of discourse, which asserts that there is nothing outside discourse apart from more discourse. Reed argues instead for a critical realist approach that acknowledges that discursive activity occurs within a preexisting structure of material, social, and discursive relations. In this way, researchers are in a position to differentiate between "open doors" (scope for agency) and "brick walls" (the immovability of structure).

However, researchers who privilege either structure or agency face criticism:

> The explicit or implicit identification of intentional agents manipulating discourses or engaging in discursive strategies (because there is an inadequately theorized notion of resistance and discursive position) smacks of a voluntarism that tends also towards cognitivism. On the other hand, the conception of discourses as if they were "tectonic plates" whose clashes constitute subjectivity can present so distributed a notion of power that there is no room for agency, thus also lapsing into mechanistic explanation. (Burman and Parker, 1993, p. 163)

Several writers have argued that the solution is to accommodate elements of both positions. For example, Tsoukas (2000, p. 531) suggests that both realists and constructivists are correct—there is a social world outside our minds, but it is constructed by socially defined, language-based categories. He argues that both sides can be reconciled if we accept that "social reality is causally independent of actors" and,

at the same time, what constitutes social reality "depends on how it has been historically defined" by the "the cultural meanings" that have been applied to it. However, the continuation of the structure-agency debate in the social sciences generally, let alone in organizational discourse theory, suggests that the difficulties in theorizing—let alone empirically studying—the complex recursive nature between structure and agency have yet to be satisfactorily overcome (Burman and Parker, 1993).

In summary, another challenge facing researchers concerns the degree to which they believe material and social constructions are constrained or facilitated through discursive activity. In attempting the difficult task of incorporating recursive relations between structure and agency into their studies, empirical researchers may be in a position to differentiate between the "discourse driven subject" and "the discourse-teflonic subject" (Alvesson, 1998).

Reflexivity and pragmatism

A final challenge relates to the call for "reflexive" research, which involves reflecting on the ways in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Holland, 1999). Given that discourse analysis is concerned with the constructive effects of language, researchers are exhorted to remind themselves that all empirical data is the result of interpretation and that "knowledge" is a collective endeavor involving the researcher and research community (Linstead, 1992; Hardy et al., 2001). There are a number of ways to enhance reflexivity, including: (1) explicitly acknowledging that language constructs, rather than simply reveals, reality; (2) grounding research in historical processes; (3) allowing different voices to pervade the text; (4) acknowledging that not all possible voices are expressed, nor are the voices that are present expressed on equal terms; (5) surfacing multiple meanings; and (6) avoiding rhetoric and convention (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). By adhering to guidelines such as these, empirical work is more likely to be attentive to the power relations between the researcher and the researched, and to remember the fact that analysts are not only readers, but also producers, of discourse (Burman and Parker, 1993). This reflexive approach is evident in Salzar-Morling's work:

> What would the polyphonic text look like? A text where multiple meanings permeate the story? Here, I am the one who is authoritarian in synthesizing the multiple voices into this monology you are reading. It seems as if we cannot avoid what Geertz (1988) refers to as "the burden of authorship." So with the authority of being the author, most of the time it is my own voice which is doing the telling in this text. And when other voices are heard in the text, I of course have used my power to choose quotes, to edit the text, and so on. Even though my construction of this story partly aims at creating a sense of the multiplicity of meanings in organizations, at the same time I am inevitably creating a sense of order. (1998, p. 115)

In summary, reflexivity is an important component of discourse analysis and

researchers should pursue ways of enhancing the reflective nature of their work. At the same time, these guidelines pose researchers with additional burdens as they struggle to write up and publish within traditional academic norms. Most of the work on reflexivity is theoretical in nature and we need to find ways of integrating reflexivity into empirical work on organizational discourse. Unfortunately, our task is made harder by the fact that, while we attempt to interrogate the constructive effects of language, we have only language at our disposal to express our understanding of its organizational character (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a; 2000b; Chia, 2000), and we work within the highly institutionalized discursive practices of our research community (Hardy et al., 2001).

A research program on organizational discourse

A number of colleagues and I have personally encountered the challenges described above in a series of studies of organizational discourse (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Hardy, Lawrence, and Phillips, 1998; Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips, 2000; Hardy, Phillips, and Clegg, 2001; Lawrence, Phillips, and Hardy, 1999a, 1999b; Maguire, Phillips, and Hardy, 2001; Phillips and Hardy, 1997; Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy, 2000). This section presents an overview of the research program (see Table 1) and some of the reasons why we adopted discourse analysis. It then examines our experiences with the challenges associated with this methodology and describes some of the ways in which we tried to address them.

This research program has involved empirical work on organizational discourse in a variety of settings: refugee systems in Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom; a nongovernmental organization (NGO) operating in the West Bank and Gaza; employment service organizations in Western Canada; the whale-watching industry in British Columbia; and the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain. The work originally commenced in 1994 as part of a program involving a critical study of interorganizational collaboration. At that time, we were interested in the role that power played in shaping collaborations and in how the effects of collaboration, often presented in the organizational and management literature as a "good" thing, were often intensely political. We drew on a variety of theoretical frameworks, including institutional theory, trust, and domain theory to explore these processes (e.g., Hardy, 1994; Hardy et al., 1998; Hardy and Phillips, 1998; Lawrence and Hardy, 1999). This work helped to explain the social and political nature of these interorganizational relationships (i.e., how they existed), but it did not help us understand how they came into being or to identify the processes that held them in place. As we considered this second question, we engaged in an explicitly discursive approach.

Data and theory: Our experiences

The problems discussed earlier related to selecting texts, analyzing large amounts of data, and linking data to theory certainly impacted our work. In dealing with

Table 1
Summary of research publications

Publication	Research site	Object of research	Data/ Method	Findings
Phillips and Hardy, 1997	Refugee system in the UK	Refugee identities	Interviews, organizational texts, government texts	Organizations engage in discursive strategies to produce particular refugee identities, and in so doing, construct not only refugee identities but also organizational identities.
Hardy et al., 1998	Employment services in Canada	Collaboration	Interviews, participant observation	Collaboration is constructed discursively through the construction of emotion, identity, and cultural skills.
Hardy and Phillips, 1999	Canadian refugee system	Refugee (and other) identities	Cartoons	Societal-level discourses help to construct identities of different actors, and in so doing provide resources for some actors to use in their discursive strategies.
Lawrence et al., 1999a	Theoretical paper	Collaboration	Not applicable	Collaboration depends on an ongoing process of discursive negotiation regarding the meaning of the issues addressed by the collaboration, the interests relevant to the collaboration, and the actors who will represent these interests.
Lawrence et al., 1999b	Whale-watching industry in Canada	Collaboration	Interviews, organizational texts, cultural texts	The discursive resources that constitute the organizational field form the backdrop to collaboration and play an enabling or a constraining role through the way in which they produce the meaning of issues, interests, and representatives.
Hardy et al., 2000	NGO in the West Bank and Gaza	Discursive strategies	Interviews, organizational texts	Discourse becomes a strategic resource when discursive activities are grounded in the particular context in which they are enacted.
Phillips et al., 2000	Theoretical paper	Collaboration, interorganiz-ational domain, institutional field	not applicable	Institutional fields provide the rules and resources upon which collaborations are con structed, while collaboration provides a context for ongoing processes of structuration which sustain the institutional fields of collaborating participants.
Hardy et al., 2001	Studies of refugee identity	Refugee identity, re-search subjects	Published articles, journal texts	Subjects of academic study are related to, but distinct from, the "social" subject produced in the social setting under study. They are produced not just by researchers conducting the research, but also by the broader research community.
Maguire et al., 2001	Canadian HIV/ AIDS treatment domain	Trust and identity	Interviews observation, archival texts	Identification-based trust can be achieved through the discursive construction of identities that behave predictably with goodwill within the context of a shared myth. To be constructed as a trusted identity thus also means to be subject to a particular set of norma tive controls on behavior.

these issues, we tried to collect multiple forms of data, develop convincing ways of analyzing data, and link data to other bodies of theory.

Data collection

We have collected data from a variety of different types of texts. We have conducted interviews in all our studies—both in order to understand context and as data on discursive activity. In many respects, this part of our research constitutes a traditional qualitative methodology. For example, in the refugee study, the three countries were selected as research sites on the basis of theoretical replication (i.e., the expectation of contrary results that could be explained with reference to predictions found in theoretical work (Yin, 1984). The three countries had very different approaches to refugee determination and settlement and thus represented contrasting contexts in which theoretical issues were relatively transparent (Eisenhardt, 1989). We then conducted eighty-six interviews between 1990 and 1995 with personnel from the key organizations in each country: for example, the refugee council, the government department that was responsible for determination, and refugee activist organizations. Informal contacts also helped to identify interviewees.

We also explored naturally occurring text and talk. For example, in our study of the NGO in the West Bank and Gaza, we are in the process of analyzing a significant amount of organizationally produced texts, including report plans, newsletters, brochures, and memos. In examining a workshop on collaboration for employment service organizations, we used observation to collect data on how the organizations engaged in the workshop. In studying the whale-watching industry, we have referred to films and novels. In another study, we examined 127 cartoons on refugees and immigration which provided a useful source of data for a number of reasons. First, cartoons have been used to explore a variety of concepts and objects, including the economy (Emmison, 1986), bilingualism in Quebec (Morris, 1991), political regimes (Press, 1981), and organizations (Collinson, 1988; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). Second, cartoons are publicly available and relatively easy to gather. Third, political cartoons encompass different perspectives—from democratic checks on the abuse of executive power (Press, 1981) to jesters of the bourgeoisie (Morris, 1989). Similarly, humor has been seen both as a conservative (Mulkay, 1988) and a liberating (Douglas, 1975) force in society; as well as a means of domination (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995) and a form of resistance (Roy, 1958) in organizational settings. As a result, cartoons often bring opposing discourses together and speak from multiple subject positions. Finally, cartoons are relatively self-contained texts that portray concise representations of alternative discursive positions that can be easily coded and interpreted (Morris, 1989, 1991).

Selecting particular texts from the vast array of texts produced by and about even a single organization is always problematic. We have tried to make our choices

based on both pragmatic and theoretical grounds to enable us to make a defensible case to colleagues and reviewers. For example, we chose to study immigration cartoons from 1987 to 1989 because two important pieces of legislation concerning refugee determination and immigration passed through the Canadian Parliament during this period. As a result, we expected to find a relatively large number of editorial cartoons that would reflect not only on whether refugees were accepted and resettled but also on immigration generally. In the case of the West Bank NGO, we were able to access a large but manageable number of texts through our relationship with the manager and because it was a small organization.

Data analysis

Data analysis is a highly labor-intensive task and, because discourse analysts are interested in interpreting multiple meanings, there is no shortcut way of applying systematized content analysis. Consequently, our approach to analysis strongly resembles the idea of "craft" advanced by Richard Daft (1983). For example, in the cartoons study, coding was an iterative process as the two coauthors first ascertained which objects were constructed in each cartoon. We found that each cartoon represented one or more of four objects: the refugee, the government, the immigration system, and the public. In a second step, we examined how each cartoon constituted these objects. Although the identification of the four objects had been relatively straightforward, identifying these themes took more time. First, we jointly took a sample of cartoons and discussed the particular themes that each involved. We then established broad parameters concerning each of these themes and an understanding of how we might identify additional themes. Next, we individually coded all the cartoons, listing the themes we considered to be associated with each. Finally, we compared our listing of themes and revisited each cartoon, talking through any themes about which we disagreed. By the end of this process, we had refined the list to eighteen themes (presented in Table 2).

In the study of the West Bank NGO, we had to develop a similarly customized approach. We had already constructed a chronological narrative of the case study (e.g., Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988; Dougherty and Hardy, 1996) that raised an interesting discursive event related to the strategy of localization being implemented by the NGO's manager. Localization is a process whereby regionally based operations, administered and funded by an international NGO, are transformed into a local NGO. The localized organization typically has a steering committee comprised of representatives from the local community and is responsible for securing its own funding. Having undertaken a number of steps to start the process, in September 1996 the manager called together a number of individuals whom he felt might become members of the prospective steering committee. The following month, he announced the layoff of fifteen employees. Despite the fact that they lacked any formal authority, the members of the steering committee met, in the manager's absence, to discuss the matter and issued a statement saying the em-

Table 2
Definitions of themes analyzed in cartoons

Actor represented in cartoon	Theme	Definition	Occurrences
Refugee	Fraud	Those presenting themselves as refugees are in no danger	22
	Victim	Those presenting themselves as refugees are at risk from persecution and need protection	13
	Both victim and fraud	Those presenting themselves as refugees may be either of the above	11
	Privileged	Those presenting themselves as refugees gain quicker access to Canada than other immigrants	2
Government	Cruel	The government is unwilling to take responsibility for refugees	13
	Corrupt	Individuals in the government allow entry to Canada based on personal reasons	9
	Incompetent	The government is unable to administer the system effectively	8
	Under tension	The government is subject to contradictory and unresolvable tensions regarding its responsibility to refugees and the public	6
Immigration system	Inconsistent	Certain groups, such as illegal immigrants, fraudulent refugees, or individuals with political connections, are treated preferentially	23
	Inadequate	The determination system is unable to prevent large numbers of refugees from entering Canada	17
	Too tough	The determination system keeps out people who should be allowed into Canada	12
	Too lenient	The determination system lets people in who should be kept out of Canada	10
	Too slow	The determination system takes too long to render decisions	7
	Gullible	Officials are unable to distinguish between genuine and fraudulent refugees	7
	Honorable	The determination system carries out its responsibilities toward refugees	1
Public	Requires protections	The public requires protection from large numbers of refugees entering Canada	8
	Opposed	The public is opposed to refugees entering Canada	4
Inversion (concept of refugee constructs another issue)		Native populations of Canada (9); political corruption (9); Quebec separatism (3); environment (1)	22

ployees should be reinstated. The security forces then threatened two Palestinian employees with imprisonment and torture unless they reinstated the employees.

By this stage it was clear that the organization had "become" a local NGO in the eyes of the community, even though it remained under the formal control of the international NGO. As a result, its staff lost the political protection afforded by the status of being employees of an international agency. In order to protect his employees from further harassment, the manager engaged in a number of discursive activities designed to reestablish the status of the organization as an international agency with its political connections and financial clout. He sent out a series of letters invoking the international organization to other NGOs, the Palestinian National Authority, and the security forces. He also disbanded the steering committee. By the end of November, the manager had received reassurances from members of the Palestinian National Authority that employees were safe from further action by the security forces and the organization once again "became" an international NGO.

This moment of crisis (Woodilla, 1998) represented a discursive "event" that we could use as the focus of our analysis. To commence our analysis, we catalogued the texts that we had collected according to their date and genre (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992; Orlikowski and Yates, 1994), and built a "database" of over fifty texts, including organizational reports, letters, faxes, memos, handwritten notes, newsletters, and brochures. We then commenced a more intensive analysis of the texts pertaining to the intervention of the security forces, which consisted primarily of letters sent out by the manager. After noting the recipient of each text, the three coauthors of the study jointly began to code the text line by line, with the idea of incorporating a focus on both text and context. We commenced by classifying the specific speech act reference—whether the text was trying to justify, empathize, correct, explain, or threaten. We matched this microanalysis with broader, institutional references, noting concurrent line-by-line references to such broad discourses as managerialism, industrial relations, progress, and others. As we engaged in this coding process, we realized that the texts also drew upon an intermediate category, namely, the local relations or objects such as the manager, the local organization, the national organization, employees, or particular work teams. We began to incorporate this third level of coding in order to explore how the discursive activities of the manager produced a particular form of NGO.

Theory

As far as theory is concerned, if hypothesis testing is at one end of the continuum and grounded theory is at the other, our approach is somewhere in the middle. We typically enter the field with a framework that points us in the direction of finding the use of power by actors that shows up in discursive activity. Within these broad parameters, we have tried to use our data and findings to yield insights into different theories. Our work has used discourse analysis and theory to build on more

"mainstream" theories such as trust, power, institutional theory, institutional entrepreneurship, identity theory, and structuration theory.

Our reasons are twofold. First, the use of discourse analysis has generated ideas that have helped us gain greater insight into these other bodies of theory. For example, much of our work seems to lend itself to ideas of agency and institutional change, which have been identified as important issues in institutional theory, an area that has been accused of focusing on pressures for conformity. Similarly, in the study on the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain, our data showed very clearly who trusted whom (and who did not), so we pursued this theme in an article explicitly on trust. Second, reviewers and editors are often suspicious of discourse analysis, which is still relatively unfamiliar to many organization and management theorists. It is far easier to persuade them of the value of an empirical study that contributes to and builds on more familiar work than to try to sell a self-referential piece of work on and about discourse.

To conclude, data collection and analysis has been highly labor-intensive—a state of affairs that is largely unavoidable. We have therefore resigned ourselves to collecting numerous texts to try to understand complex discursive processes. Data analysis has also been time-consuming, involving two or three researchers for days at a time in trying to ascertain and refine codes. It has also been a very "slippery" process—rather than applying a rigorous or standardized set of codes to the data, our search for meanings has been a highly subjective and customized process as we have worked out categories through our engagement with the particular data. One important challenge has been to present the reasons behind the selection and analysis of data in ways that are convincing—either in terms of events in the particular case study or in theoretical terms. One way to make that task easier is to relate findings to other literatures and to explain how discourse analysis contributes to other work.

Text and context: Our experiences

Like many researchers, we have also struggled with the tension between text and context. In many respects, our aim has been to include both: that is, to contextualize discursive activity by linking text and context. Because our work started with a study of collaboration in interorganizational domains, we acquired a rich knowledge of the contexts—refugee systems, the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain, the NGO sector in the West Bank and Gaza, the whale-watching industry in British Columbia—as a result of this earlier work. It was inevitable that we would draw on these understandings to enhance our subsequent research on the discursive struggles within these contexts. For example, our earlier work on refugee systems helped us to understand the nature of the three national contexts. We then became interested in the discursive activities that helped to *construct* these contexts and our attention turned more specifically to discourse analysis.

We first wanted to explore how different organizations influenced refugee identities by engaging in discursive activities and how this helped to construct a particular type of refugee system—one in which government determination processes were an "obligatory passage point" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and where NGOs "spoke" for refugees. We decided to focus on the UK refugee system, where there was visible evidence of a struggle between the government and NGO and refugee organizations around these issues, and we selected four organizations that had very different agendas pertaining to refugee issues. We conducted a more intensive analysis to identify the discursive activities of these organizations and related them to different refugee identities and to organizational interests. Our analysis showed that the main actors, or subject positions, in the refugee system had a stake in the struggle and acted discursively to support it. For example, the government, which was in the "business" of determination, juxtaposed deserving refugees against the "economic migrants" that had to be unmasked by the determination system. The NGOs that advocated on behalf of refugees—largely led by whites—were in the "business" of service provision, which involved refugees as needy "clients" to whom they could dispense services. Refugee-run organizations were in the "business" of self-help, which was enhanced by constructing refugees as fully functioning and equal "members" of society (Phillips and Hardy, 1997).

We also wanted to study the effects of broader, societal discourses on these strategies—to "unpack" some of the context that we had perhaps reified, or at least presented in a very matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted way in earlier articles. For this project, we chose to focus on the Canadian refugee system and to use naturally occurring text—cartoons on refugees and immigration—as an indicator of immigration discourse to explore how broader societal discourses constrained and facilitated the discursive activities of the individual actors. This analysis revealed that immigration discourse could be used by the government to justify its role in the determination system, since the cartoons portrayed the refugees primarily as frauds. In addition, the public was often portrayed as being in need of protection. In other words, within the broader immigration discourse were constructions not only of refugees, but also of an immigration system and a public, and these constructions supported and reinforced government control over immigration. Second, NGOs also made recourse to discursive resources that portrayed the government as cruel, corrupt, and incompetent; and an immigration system that was inconsistent and often too tough. If the immigration system and the government could not be relied upon to protect refugees, then the need for NGOs was clear. Third, there was *nothing* that represented refugees as autonomous, empowered, independent human beings, which meant that refugee organizations had difficulty using broader immigration discourses to support their interests (Hardy and Phillips, 1999).

To conclude, we have tried to include both text and context in our studies. We found that our earlier research helped to provide an understanding of the discursive contexts, without which we could not have made sense of the role of particu-

lar texts. For example, in the cartoon study, it would have been impossible to analyze the cartoons or to present an article that was comprehensible to readers without the extensive "background" data collection and analysis. This understanding comes at the risk of reification—as complicated discursive backdrops are compressed into journal articles—but this does not, in our opinion, outweigh the advantages of presenting an interpretation of contexts. In this regard, we subscribe to what Alvesson and Karreman (2000a) call *discursive pragmatism*: where researchers, although needing to be modest in claiming empirical grounding for "reality," are interested in discursively produced outcomes in ways that allow wider interpretations.

Structure and agency: Our experiences

While sensitive to the debate between structure and agency, our interest has been in those approaches within discourse theory that admit some form of agency. Our original interest in critical studies of collaboration and our use of critical discourse theory has led to a view of the constructive effects of discourse as political (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Fairclough, 1995). We see organizations as "sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests" (Mumby and Clair, 1997, p. 182). Discursive activity is thus a form of political activity where actors try to change understandings of a social situation, shape particular experiences, and invoke certain practices within a system of meanings commensurate with their interests (Deetz and Mumby, 1990; Mumby and Stohl, 1991).

> The inherently relational notion of field, *qua* space of struggles, reintroduces the dynamic of the agent into textual analysis. Discourse analysts should never lose sight of this dynamic. Indeed, texts are weapons that agents in struggle use in their discursive strategies. (Chalaby, 1996, p. 694)

At the same time, we are aware of the interplay between structure *and* agency and would encourage researchers to address this complex issue. For a variety of reasons, this is the most difficult aspect of our research. First, the theoretical debate between structure and agency is itself deeply embedded in the field of organization and management theory, is longstanding, and affects every aspect of our work. It is not a matter that is easily resolved if, indeed, it is resolvable at all. Second, the structure-agency debate involves complex theorizing about complex relationships, which become even more complex when trying to design empirical studies to address these issues. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the complexity of this debate, we believe that it is imperative that researchers continue to address issues of agency and structure in their empirical work. In fact, we predict that this will be one of the most important theoretical debates in the field of organizational discourse theory, to which empirical work that is sensitive to these tensions can contribute.

Reflexivity and pragmatism: Our experiences

We are well aware of the importance of reflexivity in studying organizational discourse in particular, as well as in organization and management theory more generally, and try to take opportunities to reflect back on our work by writing specific reflective pieces and revisiting our methodologies (e.g., Hardy et al., 2001; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). We also have a particular perspective on reflexivity and have sought to broaden the focus on the researcher, which is emphasized in much of this literature on reflexivity, to include the broader research community. Aware that our research is discursively constructed through our own participation in it *and* by the larger academic community, we have resisted calls for confessional monologues where researchers present their experience and declare their personality for interpretation by the reader (Jeffcutt, 1994; Linstead, 1992).

The reason we have resisted is that this approach to reflexivity tends to draw attention away from the research subject toward the researcher (Hardy and Clegg, 1997; Hardy et al., 2001). This point is well made by Burman and Parker (1993, p. 168):

> We agree with those who wish to focus on signification, language as productive when it has no "referents" outside, but it is also important to hold onto some notion of representation . . . [otherwise] the emphasis can shift the focus to the account rather than what is being accounted for. Second, wallowing in the researcher's interpretive assumptions and processes can detract from the importance of the topic and possible political interventions. Third, agonizing about subjectivity and power can lead worried researchers to abandon the project of making interpretations that go beyond reflexive concerns because of anxieties about exploitation or the paternalist relations set up in research.

The danger of neglecting the research community means that the researcher is seen as a form of hero (Jeffcutt, 1994)—a free agent, largely disconnected from the professional networks of individuals and institutions in which he or she is embedded. Yet, as Jeffcutt (1994) also acknowledges, the research "quest" is shaped by the need to submit doctoral theses, publish articles, appear at conferences, and so forth (Hardy and Clegg, 1997).

So, while we do, at times, attempt to be reflexive, we might also be described as pragmatists. As Weick (1999, p. 803) has pointed out, we can find ourselves "stuck in reflexive acts and be unable . . . to see anything other than doubt as the core of the human condition." To some theorists, this is undoubtedly a step in the right direction—loosening "the tight coupling between power/knowledge"—but not necessarily for those who are interested in helping "people make sense of an unknowable, unpredictable world" (Weick, 1999, p. 803). In carrying out empirical studies of organizational discourse, our aim has been to write interesting articles that examine individuals' experiences, link them to theoretical ideas, and try to make sense of them. In so doing, we inevitably risk falling into the trap of which Alvesson and Karreman (2000a) warn us: that, even when researchers philosophically question the assumption that language is the medium for conveying meaning

that represents reality, they still write up their research as if language works in this way. We would argue that to some extent this is unavoidable. We would also warn against privileging and idealizing reflexivity—as with anything in this postmodern world, it constructs a particular reality in which some voices are made louder and others are silenced.

Conclusions: Contributions of discourse analysis

This final section presents the contributions that discourse analysis has made to our research and to organization and management theory more generally. The first way in which discourse analysis has contributed to our own work relates to identity—not a traditional conceptualization of identity in which an individual possesses a series of essential characteristics that define his or her identity, but a postmodern view of identity as a series of overlapping, contradictory, and fragmented categories that are used to make sense of an individual and as a result of which certain practices are invoked. For example, in our study of refugees, the "official" story suggested that individuals were determined to be refugees as a result of quasilegal, rational decision-making processes which revealed whether or not they were legitimate asylum-seekers. Our research showed a rather different story—that the identity of a "refugee" was far more tenuous, and existed only insofar as individuals were inserted into organizationally contrived categories as a result of rather arbitrary decision-making processes. In our work on whale watching, we found that the identity of a whale changed significantly over time—from "Moby Dick" to "Free Willy"—and that the latter, rather than the former, was far more conducive to the creation of a whale watching industry. Our study of the Canadian HIV/AIDS treatment domain suggested that the different identities conferred different abilities to influence the domain—those who were volunteers in People with AIDS (PWA) organizations and who were HIV positive wielded more influence than those who were healthy paid employees of AIDS service organizations. Discourse analysis provided a powerful methodology for exploring the construction and implications of these fragmented, fluid, and ambiguous identities.

The second contribution relates to the constructive effects of discourse—not just in terms of individual identities but also in terms of organizations, collaborations, interorganizational domains, and institutional fields. The influence of postmodernist thought on the field of organization and management theory has long emphasized the dangers of reifying phenomena like "organizations" and argued that we need to treat them as fluid, unfinished, fragile relationships that are made meaningful and "real" only though discourse. Accordingly, we found discourse analysis a useful way to explore the way in which the "organizations," "collaborations," interorganizational "domains," and institutional "fields" that we have been studying are, in fact, created and recreated through discursive activities.

The third contribution stems from the critical perspective that lay behind the original research program. We had initially commenced the study of collaboration

in order to subject it to critical interrogation and to explore its political effects. Over time, we began to take a more explicit interest in the strategic and political effects of discourse—how individual actors used discourse in order to bring about particular outcomes. We began to develop a discursive approach to power which complemented the critical framework that we had used in earlier theorizations. Accordingly, we have found discourse analysis useful to explore the ways in which actors engage in discursive activities, the outcomes that result from this activity, and the ways in which other actors attempt to resist these activities.

To conclude, discourse analysis has been immensely useful in conducting our own empirical work. In a broader sense, empirical research on organizational discourse is also important for the future of organization and management theory (see Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Specifically, organizational discourse theory offers a way to explicitly incorporate the "linguistic turn" into the study of organizations through the problematization of language. Second, as has happened with our own research, it offers ways to reinvigorate critical studies of organizations through the melding of critical and poststructural insights. Third, it provides a way to study such topics as the natural environment, globalization, identity, and postbureaucratic organizational forms, which are seen as fluid, contradictory, and ambiguous in their meaning. Finally, it complements existing theories, thereby increasing theoretical plurality and diversity in the study of organizations. As a less-formalized, less-institutionalized methodology, it affords researchers considerable creativity in how they apply it and enables them to generate new insights into and understanding of the organizational phenomena they study.

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