Discourse Analysis: The Approach

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**Key Commitments: Discourse as a Series of “Doings”**

- Disavow yourself of the notions that:
  - The study of words = discourse
  - discourse = (just a) method

- In discourse analysis, the focus is on “the discourse itself: how it is organized and what it is doing. Orderliness in discourse will be viewed as a product of the orderly functions to which discourse is put.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987)

- Asking what discourse is *doing* as opposed to *representing* are very different questions.

- “Doing” questions commit you to social constructionist thought of some kind
**Key Commitments: “Punch”**

- “Punch” is the discursive equivalent of statistical significance; an as yet undefined “something interesting, pattern-like seems to be going on here”
- Hold your theory frameworks “lightly”- *partially* motivated looking
- The general questions that guided the data collection may not be the ones that you ultimately write about
Key Commitments: Play your discursive hunches

Concepts of interest?
- strategy
- sensemaking
- power
- identity/identification
- image
- relationship
- organizing potential
- structuration
- problem setting/solving

Discursive forms:
- categories
- narrative
- argument (habitual?)
- floor dominance
- positioning
- tension/contradiction/paradox
- frames/master frames
- formulations
- breaches and more
Key Commitments: Focused Iteration

In no particular order:

• Return to the literature, data, literature, data, and so on multiple times

• (Re)formulate your theoretical interests

• Choose a discursive approach (e.g., critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, narrative approaches, and so on)
Initial Cut of the Data for Gail

• Change arguments look interesting:
  – “we’ll be one flying company” (stated ironically) (lines 7-8)
  – “we always come back to consumers” (lines 9-10)
  – “We’ve been opportunistic” vs. “We’ve got to go out and command our own destiny” (lines 18, 22)
  – “listening as a venture capital person” “what have you got that’s going to be scalable” (lines 46, 52)
  – “sometimes a new story’s better than an old tired one” “we’re getting resistance to the current story” (lines 69, 74-75)
  – “we’re just going to slog it out in the trenches and …be here two years from now…(having)…the same conversation” (lines 80-81)
Initial Cut of the Data

- Strategically ambiguous positionings by Dirk and Brad after pushing for change
  - “I’m not saying that’s right or wrong, it’s just sort of interesting to me” (Dirk) (line 13-14)
  - “And if we reposition the company which I’m not saying is right or wrong” (Brad) (lines 63-64)

- Weak resistance/assertions shown by Jay, Debi, Aaron, Stan, and Wyn
  - “And would we be...betraying the people who have already...invested...” (lines 60, 62)
Possible Analyses

**Dialectics:** (tension, contradiction, paradox in strategy interaction)
- Individual vs. collective action (argument-hedge pattern)
- Reconstructed pasts vs. possible futures (e.g., Dirk)
- Oftentimes, power from a more critical perspective

**Framing:** (meaning generating structures in strategy interaction)
- Collective action frames (e.g., command own destiny) (line 28)
- Legitimacy frames (e.g., Netguard, betraying the people) (lines 15, 62)
- Master frames (e.g., change)
- Power may be explicit or more implicit as a focus

**Discursive psychology:** (action-institution strategy interaction)
- Little ‘d’ discourse as social interaction (categories, arguments, positionings, etc.)
- big ‘D’ Foucauldian Discourse (‘doings’ as historically anchored; the technologies of the Board Meeting; the body)
- Deep structure power, relational power are primary foci
Possible Analyses

• Dialectics—tensions that operate in the text
  – Overall tensions—relying on the past versus possible future; reflected in other dialectics
    • change and stability
    • high risk and low risk
    • redirection versus reposition
    • old story versus new story
  – Situated in individual versus collective
Framing

- Master frame—naming for what we are doing? What is figure and what is ground?
  - Is the situation an opportunity (Brad #18; Stan #25, Brad #28 “command our own destiny); Brad #61, #63
  - Is it a problem? Brad #56 “we need money,” #66 “nothing we can show, Dirk #77 “they’re not buying”

- Tension over decision is naming what we are going to do—redirect or reposition
  - Little “d”— “old story,” “new story,” “paradigm shift”
  - Big “D”— #15 “NetGuard acquisition,” #19 “brand,” #6,#10 “consumers” #32 “board make-up”—these are issues related to larger organizational and societal discourses