Opening a Strategic Conversation: Creating Resources within a Virtual Environment

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Our Motivating Question

- How does identity work within conversations create resources (discursive, social, relational, etc.) that enable contributions to the conversation?

- Toward answering this question, we are collecting conference calls about organizational strategy, giving particular attention to the openings.
Question #1: Why Openings?

- The openings of social episodes and events are rich with identity work as people quickly negotiate who they are relative to one another and their activity at hand.

- Goffman’s theories about “frames”
- Studies of openings within organizations
- CA studies of telephone openings (but no studies of conference call openings)
Question #2: Why Openings of Conference Calls?

- Increasingly, conference calls are a means of accomplishing interdependent work within organizations. They are theoretically important as they involve …

- Disembodied voices shaped by the constraints & affordances of mediating technology
- Complex identity work
- Complex coordination demands
Question #3: Why Openings of Conference Calls about Strategy?

• We examine identity work at the opening of strategic conversations because ...

• Consequential for individuals & organizations

• Literature tends to explore:
  – Big Actions vs. Micro-moves
  – Content vs. Process
  – Conclusions vs. Openings
Our Method

• Micro-ethnographic methods are a convergence of competencies …

• CA attends to empirical details of recorded interaction—*what* people do and *how*

• Interviews (e.g., stimulated recall) provide rich accounts of organizational strategy—*why*
Conference Call Context

- A subsidiary of a Fortune 100 company has created a national promotion for its products
- Several states are performing poorly
- The VP of Sales (Bruce) invites key players (distributors, retailers, etc.) to join him in a conference call to discuss their promotion strategy
Presentation of Data

(Please listen to the recording while following along with the transcript)
Four Interrelated Moves

- Inviting
- Acknowledging
- Affirming
- Engaging

- These subtle moves create resources that unavoidably shape strategic conversations (hence decisions)
Inviting

• Through summons-response sequences, leaders *draw people into a strategic conversation* by showing their own readiness to participate.
Inviting

• Example 1: Open-ended invitation (lines 8-10)

• Example 2: Specific invitation (lines 44-45)
Inviting

- Consequences …
- Facilitates entrance into the conversation and co-presence
- Signals to participants, "I hear you"
- Grants humanity to participants
Acknowledging

- Through identification sequences, leaders publicly recognize other participants. Acknowledging goes beyond a recognition that someone is there to a recognition of who is there.
Acknowledging

• Example 1: Using Names (lines 32-34)

• Example 2: Showing History (lines 36-38)
Acknowledging

- Consequences …
- Facilitates character and differentiation
- Signals to participants, "I recognize you"
- Grants individuality to participants
Affirming

• Through greeting sequences, a leader shows familiarity with and/or appreciation for others. Affirming goes beyond an acknowledgment of who is there to an appreciation of who is there.
Affirming

• Example 1: Showing interest (lines 26-28)

• Example 2: Sounding enthusiastic (lines 14-15)
Affirming

Consequences …

• Facilitates relationship and trust
• Signals to participants "I value you"
• Grants dignity to participants
Engaging

• Through sequences of "small talk", leaders engage participants more deeply. Engaging goes beyond appreciating who is there to demonstrate an ability and willingness to exchange with who is there.
Engaging

• Example 1: Catching Up (lines 16-19)

• Example 2: Playing (lines 44-53)
Engaging

Consequences …

• Facilitates a climate of safety and creation
• Signals to participants "I can work with you"
• Grants reciprocity to participants.
## Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Work</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Move</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inviting</td>
<td>I hear you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging</td>
<td>I recognize you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affirming</td>
<td>I value you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>I can work with you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Through these "moves" call participants create resources that increase their capacity for contribution in the conversation about strategy.
Supplemental Data

- Through a “stimulated recall” interview with Brent …

- Our analytic findings were confirmed (e.g., Cramer’s role)

- Our understanding of the relationship between identity work and strategic work was enhanced.
Our Motivating Question

• How does identity work within conversations create resources (discursive, social, relational, etc.) that enable contributions to the conversation?

• Through this conversational opening, the participants create resources that unavoidably shape decisions which emerge from subsequent interaction.