Strategy and interaction: comments and reflections

Paul Luff and Christian Heath
we contend that organization theory's effort to make sense of the postbureaucratic organizing is hampered by the absence of what once served as its empirical foundation: detailed studies of work. The dearth of data on what people actually do - the skills, knowledge, and practices that comprise their routine work - leaves us with increasingly anachronistic theories and outdated images of work and how it is organized.'

*Bringing Work Back In* (Barley, & Kunda 2001, p90)

*turn to discourse*

*focus on interaction*
Bringing the Work Back In

- understanding skills, knowledge, practice
- work is accomplished through interaction
- organisations rest on an interactional order

**turn to discourse**

**focus on talk**

**details of interaction**
Workplace Studies

- interdependencies of talk, visual conduct, material artefacts
  - mundane and complex technologies
- situated action, emergent activities
- methods; naturalistic, video-based ethnographies

- sociological orientations: Chicago School, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis
Contributions

- technologies: fields concerned with design development, deployment
- technologies and change
- previous context: psychological, experimental, cognitive

- substantive: design of technology, policy and practice
- methodological innovations: ethnography and design
- conceptual: re-specification towards the social and collaborative
Strategy and Interaction

- design and development of strategy
  - the emergence and presentation of strategy
    - studies of strategy meetings, negotiations, strategic consultations, away days, presentations...

- implementation and deployment of strategy
  - putting strategy into practice
    - studies of work practices and settings

- assessment and evaluation of strategy
  - transforming organisations and outcomes
    - studies of organisations in transition
Challenges

- access and ethics
  - innovative processes, novel approaches

- technical
  - practical guidelines, corpus of studies

- categorisation, selection and focus
  - analytic demands

- presentation
  - examples of practice, novel forms
Analytic Challenges

- participants’ perspective
  - ethnographic resources - longitudinal studies, variety of resources
- taking interaction seriously
  - neglected details of conduct - repeated and collaborative
- strategy’s relevance
  - transformations and change
Strategies in Action

- substantive implications
- understanding deployment of strategy - why strategies can fail
- methodological innovations
- contingent application of procedures, co-ordinated contribution of participants
- re-specifying key concepts
- clarifying assumptions in strategies, the seen but unnoticed
....it’s the source for the failures of technocratic dreams that if only we introduced some fantastic new communication machine the world will be transformed. Where what happens is that the object is made at home in the world that has whatever organisation it already has.

*Sacks (1972 [1992]: 548)*