Overview of Naturalistic Research Methods:
Conversational Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Video Ethnography

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Naturalistic Methods

- Naturally occurring talk and action
- Happens “in situ” or in the context of interaction
- Entails all aspects of communication—words, voice tone, facial expressions, body position, gestures, eye contact, and use of physical artifacts
- Involves video and audio recordings or interaction within organizations
Communication and Naturalistic Methods

• What is NOT naturalistic methods
  – Document and archival research
  – Surveys
  – Interviews

• Three approaches for examining communication and naturalistic methods
  – Discourse analysis
  – Conversational analysis
  – Video ethnography
Assumptions about Conversation and Naturalistic Methods

- Conversation and discourse research are not just methods or techniques
  - Areas of study with concepts and theories
- They embody assumptions about the nature of language, reality, and organizations
  - Discourse and conversation as actions, enacting how organizing and strategic planning occurs
  - Discourse and conversation as ways in which organizations are constituted
Analysis of Conversations, Discourse, and Embodied Talk

• **Definition**
  - The study of words, signifiers, language, and meanings, and physical context of talk

• **Characteristics or features of language**
  - **Labels**—naming, codes, jargon, terminology
  - **Structure**—order, syntax, sequence
  - **Meaning**—interpretations, co-developed understandings, sensemaking
  - **Physical features**—space, material objects, expressions and gestures, artifacts
  - **Organizational texts**—patterns of language use that cross time and space
  - **Intertextuality**—interfaces between language use and larger texts, reliance on institutional contexts
Discourse Analysis

- Little “d” discourse—micro analysis
  - How talk and text are used in naturally occurring interactions; language-in-use
  - What organizational actors do and say
  - How strategy is accomplished; the doing of organizing

- Big “D” Discourse—macro analysis
  - How organizations develop texts or fields of discourse and draw on an historical context
  - How organizations use cultural and societal fields of knowledge; intertextual analysis
  - How spokespeople speak on behalf of or represent organizations as texts of knowledge
Types of Discourse Analysis

- Wide array of approaches
  - Speech acts, discursive psychology
  - Literary symbols, rhetorical strategies
  - Critical and postmodern language analysis

- Four types of discourse analysis
  - Facework and accounts — little “d”
    - Use of language to negotiate rights and obligations
    - Providing explanations and justifications
  - Narratives — little “d” and big “D”
    - Stories—themes, characters, plots, and scenes of organizational life
    - Storytelling—process of co-constructing narratives; fragments of stories; functions of stories aimed at different audiences
Types of Discourse Analysis

- Framing — little “d”
  - Naming, defining what is happening, categorizing events
  - Sensegiving and sensemaking—managing meaning
  - Bracketing, foregrounding and backgrounding elements

- Contradictions, dialectics, and paradox —little “d” and big “D”
  - Oppositional terms, tensions in the discourse
  - Inconsistencies and ruptures in deep-seated meanings
  - Ironies, unintended consequences, and double binds
Conversation Analysis

• Focus of research—structure of talk and interaction
  – Examines sequence, order, syntax, implicit rules that guide talk
  – Uses both verbal and nonverbal paralanguage—pauses, talk-overs, voice tones
  – Examines conversation as an accomplishment
    • Dynamic nature of talk, locally produced
    • How interaction accomplishes particular tasks and functions in organizations
    • How organizational features constrain and enable talk
Types of Conversational Analysis

• Wide array of conversational features
  – Examining the flow of interaction—related to accomplishing politeness, power relationships
  – Focusing on topics shifts—control of the floor
  – Sequences—question/answers, demand/response

• Three types of conversational analysis
  – Openings and closings
    • Shape identities and manage impressions
    • Use of spatial position, pronouns, summaries, positive statements
Types of Conversational Analysis

- Turn taking—managing who talks and who listens, control of the floor, length of turns
  - Focuses on interruptions, talk-overs, pauses, volume and voice tones
  - Reveals status and power differences, manages disagreements, uncovers inconsistencies

- Disclaimers and alignments—conversational repairs, aligning topics across sequences
  - Use meta-talk, tag questions, qualifiers
  - Powerful and powerless speech, status and role messages, deflect criticism, facilitate discussion, exert influence
Video Ethnography

- Focus of research—Embodied and materially-situated talk
  - Nonverbal features—body movements, hand gestures, facial expressions, eye contact
  - Physical features—space or location, room arrangement, objects, artifacts, tools
  - Ways that actors use nonverbal and physical features to enable or constrain their interactions
  - Dynamic and changing—not the same as visual ethnography
Types of Video Ethnography

- Array of approaches to video ethnography—temporal organization of behaviors and actions, relationship between verbal and visual behaviors
Types of Video Ethnography

- Two types of video ethnography
  - Microethnography—case studies of particular settings and activities
    - Role of embodied features of human activity in organizing
    - How material objects enable and shape ideas in planning
  - Context analysis
    - Location in the room in terms of distance, orientations, and posture
    - Way the context shapes and is shaped by nonverbal behaviors