

Epistemology and the 'Problem' of Organisational Socialisation

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INTRODUCTION

My focus is on different epistemologies in sociological thinking, dealing particularly with the problem of socialisation, both primary socialisation and secondary socialisation or 'local socialisation' in organisations. Throughout, I refer to secondary socialisation in organisations as 'organisational socialisation'. My argument is that the presuppositions of a normative epistemology lead to a conceptualisation of the process of socialisation that is unidirectional in nature (from managers to organisational members) and bypasses the possibility that socialisation is accomplished through the situated, joint, linguistic interpretive processes undertaken by organisational members in social interaction. Taking the 'linguistic turn' in an interpretive epistemology, and following Bittner (1965, 1973) and Manning (1971), I am arguing that organisations are 'worded entities' and that organisational socialisation is 'linguistically constituted' and a 'two-way street'.

PROLEGOMENON

An organisation had hired a trainer for a day-course to enhance the 'team-building' skills of a group of employees. The trainer was an employee of an organisation who specialised in 'teaching the skills necessary for successful team-building'.

The trainer told course attendees that many successful teams had been identified across the UK and these teams had been asked to identify why they thought they were successful. Their responses had been woven together by a firm of consultants who had then devised this training package. Through a variety of experiential exercises, the trainer hoped to provide attendees with a 'guide to an efficient and effective organisation through successful team work'. By the end of the day, the attendees were armed with a comprehensive list of rules. They felt

they had worked hard and had been introduced to many interesting ideas; they knew about strategies to get the best from colleagues, they knew about recognising, respecting and utilising each others' skills, and they knew several ways to be supportive to each other and to be sensitive to each others' needs. Although they remained unclear about what they had been doing wrong before this course, they now felt that they were all going to be successful team leaders and successful team members. They felt inspired and motivated. Managers saw their efficiently organised sets of notes, the hard output of the day and managers were impressed at such value for money. They thought the organisation would now thrive and hurriedly set about the task of organising the next team-building course for another group of employees.

But the new set of rules did not work. Putting the rules into practice turned previously harmonious team members into sworn enemies. Management, however, believed they knew what was wrong. They thought that to build successful teams, employees only had to follow the guide provided by the training course. Clearly, managers thought, employees did not have the ability to follow this set of rules. More training was needed, perhaps something more basic. They pondered on what sort of training might do the trick. It was difficult to decide because they thought the day-course had already addressed the underlying cause of ineffective work teams by providing a set of guidelines on how to 'see events from your colleagues' perspective as well as your own'. They wondered: what more could be needed?

One day, after a dubious attempt to solve a particularly vitriolic dispute over a team deadline, a manager angrily declared that he could not see the point in the organisation wasting time and money on trying to forge a 'happy family'. In his opinion, what the organisation needed to do was to find out how it ever held together in the first place.

In the sociological study of organisations, this familiar organisational scenario presents an interesting case in several respects. First, it brings into sharp relief the idea that organisations, or more specifically, members of the organisation's management, expect employees to behave in a way that managers have deemed appropriate for the organisation to function successfully and with little conflict. In other words, managers expect employees to learn and practice organisational rules, rules that are devised by managers themselves and that are managerially sanctioned as the social norms of the organisation. In conventional sociological terms, managers expect employees to become organisationally socialised. Secondly, managers appear to label breaches of social norms as conflicts and seek to resolve them. Managers also appear to recognise that states of conflict or no conflict are constructed through the behaviour of organisational members. Thirdly, managerially staged events with the aim of socialising employees into

particular ways of behaving in order to reduce conflict and promote success may not succeed as desired.

This poses an interesting question. In this example, managers were concerned about the smooth running of work teams. They had asked how it is possible for teams to work closely together, how was it that teams ever 'held' together? These questions seem to be reasonable ones to ask. In response, managers had sought a tried-and-tested behavioural formula for employees to learn and abide by. The formula focused on sensitivity to the perspectives of others, understanding meanings from the points of view of others, so that should certain eventualities arise team members would know what to do. But teams began to fragment and tensions arose. Why?

Attendees' experience of the team-building course and the organisation's concerns to understand and eliminate conflict were diagnosed and treated within a framework typical of a prescriptive theory of organisational socialisation.

I suggest that the answer to this is embedded in managers' reliance on a normative common sense view of the social world from which managers are both asking and answering their questions. The management desire to obtain a particular set of behavioural outcomes relies on a particular view of human action. This view rests on the belief that human behaviour can be identified as actions that 'cause' or 'govern' subsequent actions or 'effects', and once cause-and-effect behaviours have been identified, they can then be re-packaged into a set of appropriate rules, guidelines and best-practice handbooks to suit the organisation. When this prescription appears to work for some organisations but not for others, practitioners seem to think that something is missing from their training programmes and then set about devising further ways in which managers can show organisational members how to 'behave appropriately'.

In this work-place, as in many workplaces, managers were seeking solutions through the discovery and application of prescriptive rule-governed measures. Many theories of management and organisational behaviour adopt the same approach. That is, they seem to think that to discover how and why teams work successfully, is to discover a set of societal and organisational attitudes, characteristics and expectations which, once rendered visible, can be recorded, marketed and transferred to any organisation.

What is *missing* from this view of human behaviour is the idea that human beings do not merely respond or react to an object, event or situation in the mechanistic fashion assumed by the normative view. Rather, human beings interpret, define and make meaning from actions and events. Their subsequent actions are, therefore, based on their interpretation of objects, events or situations and are not a direct response them as assumed by the scientific stimulus-response model.

In this workplace, managers had viewed the organisation and the behaviour of its members in a way that appeals to causal or mechanical rule-governed explanations. Managers' attempts to solve problems revolved around establishing a set of rules. First, managers identified the presumed cause of the problem, and then they set about establishing an appropriate set of behavioural rules. Once found, managers attempted to teach these rules, in the form of attitudes and expectations, to organisational members; but these did not work. What managers thought of as employees' inability to follow the rules was a naivety in managers' views of how rules relate to actual conduct. Managers had failed to consider that employees interpret managerial action and rules and act on the basis of these interpretations. The rules established by management, designed to produce a managerially-predicted outcome, were understood by employees through their own interpretive, sense-making practices in relation to their own understanding of the organisation and their roles within it. Employees did not, like automata, mechanically follow the rules and produce the desired outcomes. In this workplace the conflict, anger and resistance that arose was employees acting on their interpretations and understanding of the rules in their here-and-now situation.

A NORMATIVE VERSUS AN INTERPRETIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

In sociology, this approach to rule-governed actions is known as the normative paradigm. The fundamental theoretical and methodological approach of the normative paradigm is geared around the ideas characteristic of the natural sciences that seek to formulate laws and rules through which to explain the physical world. The normative paradigm adopts these ideas and applies them in explorations of the social world but fails to recognise that the social world, unlike that of the natural sciences, involves normative, moral elements, thus involving some modification of the natural science model.

However, sociology also provides alternative approaches through which to explore the social world. These approaches are implicated by the interpretive paradigm, which is a theoretical and methodological underpinning of symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. The interpretive paradigm recognises that the social world is made up of subjective meanings and experiences of its members and the interpretive perspective accounts for social actions by exploring the interpretive processes jointly undertaken by human beings in social interaction. Rather than merely searching for the rules governing behaviour as in the normative paradigm, the interpretive approach regards rule using as a human, joint interpretive process since rules can be part of our interpretive definition of the situation.

By careful consideration of both paradigms with respect to the socialisation of employees in organisations, I wish to show that a shift from regarding organisational interactions from the normative perspective to regarding them from an interpretive perspective will shed more light on how organisations function in their various ways.

THE NORMATIVE PARADIGM

The normative approach to sociological study rests upon particular criteria of objectivity that relate to a positivistic philosophy of science in sociology (Bittner 1973) that produces a refined and purified understanding of the methods characteristic of the natural sciences. Kaplan (1964) calls this understanding an idealisation or reconstructed logic of scientific practice. However, reconstructions of the logic of science may produce misleading characterisations of how science is actually done. Reconstructions filter out the human elements of scientific practice abstracting the logic of science to a point where, for example, the intuition, hunches and guesswork of the experienced scientist are removed. The reconstruction then describes only what the practice of science would be if it were refined and purified to an ideal form. Exclusion of the alogical or the formally illogical of scientific practice may render the reconstructed logic useless as an evaluation of how science is practised.

Nevertheless, such idealisations of scientific methods are applied in normative studies of social reality. Blumer calls this application of abstracted scientific method, 'a scheme of sociological analysis which seeks to reduce human group life to variables and their relations' (Blumer 1969: 127). His critical examination of variable analysis clearly maps out how normative studies are formulated and evaluated.

The aim of variable analysis is to identify and specify the relationship between two or more variables. Application of the method aims to show that a change in one variable leads to a change in the other variable. In the natural sciences, the selection of generic variables which represent abstract categories of knowledge are crucial for the advancement of theoretical and analytical schemes. However, Blumer argues, normative sociological research has very few rules or guidelines as to what might be chosen as a variable, indeed anything might be selected. As a result of this great flexibility, the selection of generic variables is rare in sociological research. Instead, selected variables are largely disparate and localised in nature, yielding findings that are temporally, spatially and contextually bound and failing to yield the abstract knowledge that empirical science demands.

Blumer argues that variable analysis in sociology is predominantly undertaken using disparate, non-generic variables that yield disparate, non-generic relations.

Findings can be regarded as 'here and now' in that they can be pinpointed in time and space. But, argues Blumer, to understand a 'here and now' relation, it is necessary to understand the 'here and now' context. Variable analysis does not provide this context because it edits out the human agency element in the relation and does not provide a contextual picture of the 'here and now'. Normative sociological studies of human group life result in findings that shed little light on how human group activity is carried on.

Blumer argues that human group life is a vast interpretive process in which people act singly, collectively or societally on the basis of what things mean to them. Human beings are engaged in a continuous process of interpreting and defining meanings of objects, events and situations that they encounter. Thus, the task of defining an 'objective variable' for study, as an analyst might do, is a continuously interpretive process too. Any scheme designed to analyse human group life has, therefore, to fit this process of interpretation.

Variable analysis ignores the process of interpretation and so ignores that variable analysis itself is a result of such a process of interpretation. Instead, it identifies something to be a presumed operant on human group life and treats it as an independent variable. It then identifies some form of group activity as the dependent variable. The independent variable is put at the beginning of the process, the dependent variable is put at the end of the process and sociological investigation focuses on identifying the relationship between the two variables through studying the effect of changes in the independent variable upon the dependent variable.

This analysis seems content to accept that any changes to the dependent variable are automatically a result of changes in the independent variable. It overlooks the possibility that other factors may have had an influence. The intervening process is ignored as the concern is with the two variables and not what lies between them.

In the organisational example in the prolegomenon, the independent variable may be identified as the attendance of team development courses and the dependent variable may be identified as a stable and harmonious work group. Variable analysis assumes that effects upon a stable, harmonious work group are a direct cause of the team development course. No account is taken of the process of definition intervening between the experiences presupposed by the independent variable and the formed behaviour represented by the dependent variable. The team development course is experienced and interpreted by attendees and this intervening interpretation is integral to the outcome.

A normative study of social interaction would therefore seek to find the characteristics of actors or of social structures that might account for action in any given situation. These characteristics or 'dispositions' are seen to be acquired

by actors and include, for example, attitudes, needs and sentiments. In the normative perspective, these dispositions are regarded as governing the actions of actors. As well as dispositions, actors are also seen as being subject to socially approved expectations and these sanctioned expectations comprise an individual's role and status, which are also regarded as governing actions.

A normative study of interaction seeks to investigate the relations between, on the one hand, actors' dispositions, role and status expectations, and, on the other hand, conflicts, conformities, reinforcement and sanctions towards these dispositions and expectations. To account for interactions in terms of dispositions and expectations, a normative approach develops a framework explaining how dispositions and expectations are acquired and adapted by the actor, and how the actor's dispositions are related to their action. This framework is then used to make cause-and-effect explanations of patterns of action, 'the interaction observed in any particular situation ... is accounted for by identifying structures of expectations and complexes of dispositions such that actors having the properties specified in the theorist's model would act in the observed manner when subject to these dispositions and expectations' (Wilson 1971: 60).

The cause-and-effect feature of a normative perspective happens because the perspective *assumes* a stable connection between the situation the actor is in and the actor's action in that situation. It is assumed that the actor will behave in a certain way in a particular situation. This connection is the 'rule' that governs the action or the conduct of individuals. A normative study would understand and explain interaction by assuming a stable, mechanical and unitary relation between the rules to which an actor is subject and the conduct of an actor in any given social-structural situation.

But, for rules (Sharrock, n.d.) to function as explanations for stable and coherent interaction, theories in the normative paradigm have to assume that actors, on the whole, have a cognitive agreement on the meanings of actions. In other words, actors must be able to standardly distinguish different types of situations in order to enact the appropriate behavioural response. Further, actors must be able to distinguish appropriate or inappropriate responses by other actors in order to respond with reinforcing or sanctioning behaviour. So, if rules are to function as accounts for stable and coherent interaction, and if social interaction is to be stable, then all actors must be able to discriminate between situations and actions in almost the same way.

To explain this cognitive agreement, the typical assumption made by the normative paradigm is that actors have been socialised into a common culture, thereby sharing the same understanding of a system of symbols, language, meaning and values. Any divergence from the common understanding is explained in terms of different definitions by subcultures, different situational factors or

differences in individual biographies, thus maintaining the assumption of cognitive consensus (Wilson 1971). With regard to the organisation in the prolegomenon of this chapter, managers regarded employees' divergence from the 'common understanding' as 'inadequate' socialisation.

In normative, deductive explanations of interaction, descriptions of action must themselves have context-free, stable meanings that are collectively understood as such by participants. Such conditions are presumed to be found in the natural sciences where the validity of deductive explanation rests on supplying a logical deduction derived from assumed theoretical premises and accepted empirical conditions. For this to happen, assertions and descriptions in the deductive argument must have stable meanings independent of circumstances. Once a description is accepted as a perpetual, context-free statement, it can be regarded as a literal description (Wilson 1971). Wilson notes that literal description is taken for granted in the natural sciences because, as Kaplan (1964) suggests, scientific communities account for and describe their research activities from their own cognitive style and logic. Members of that scientific community take-for-granted a shared, common sense knowledge (Wilson 1971) and rely on all competent members of that scientific community sharing the same understandings and meanings when reporting research findings. Literal descriptions, therefore, depend on a body of common-sense knowledge, taken-for-granted by scientific colleagues (Wilson 1971).

Given these assumptions, normative explanations of social interaction follow the deductive model of reasoning found in the natural sciences. Knowing the actor through the assumptions embodied in the normative model of the actor and knowing the dispositions and expectations to which the actor is subject allows a logical deduction to be made that explains the actor's behaviour pattern. This holds not only for the actions of an individual actor, but also for large-scale patterns of social interaction involving many actors.

A defining characteristic of the normative model of sociology is its reliance on the common-sense world as both topic and resource (Zimmerman and Pollner 1971; MacKay 1973), or a 'short-circuiting of social theory' (Bittner 1965). What this means is that the familiar, common sense world shared by both sociologists and their subjects, is used as an unexplicated resource for sociological investigation. Sociological investigations address common-sense phenomena by using the same phenomenon as a resource for its own analysis, thus confounding topic and resource. Using Zimmerman and Pollner's example, although sociologists and policemen may use different criteria and ideas about how a juvenile delinquent came to be delinquent, they are likely to agree that there are people recognisable as juvenile delinquents and there are structured ways in which they came to be delinquent. They will recognise and accept this classification of persons without

question and the phenomenon 'juvenile delinquency' plus the accepted conditions for its creation will be used to explore each other. This makes sociology an integral feature of the very order of affairs that sociology seeks to describe (Bittner 1973; Garfinkel 1967). Treating sociological concerns as both topic and resource fails to consider or explain how it is that actors are able to analyse, account or find facts that provide for their formulation of the distinct phenomenon they call 'juvenile delinquency', in the first place.

THE INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

In contrast to the variable analysis of the normative model of sociology is Blumer's proposal of interaction as an interpretive process. An interpretive model of sociology does not reduce human group activity to dependent variables. It does not assume that the independent variable carries its own meaning thereby predetermining its interpretation. The interpretive paradigm embraces the idea that human beings *impute* or *ascribe* meanings to objects, events or situations. The interpretive perspective assumes that all human activity is a complex of meaning constructions – a vast, but usually routine and taken-for-granted process of interpretation and definition. In instances where there is a fixed interpretation of an object, event or situation in the sense that people have an already constructed meaning that they can immediately apply, the interpretive paradigm recognises the possibility that, at some time, a redefinition may take place and a new meaning may be constructed.

Blumer sees interpretation as a creative process in its own right that cannot be characterised as a variable because the product cannot stand for the process that created it. The process is continually varying and shifting from one instance of interpretation to another.

Explanations of interaction, whether they be direct observations of interaction or reports of interaction such as surveys, historical records or personal accounts, necessarily have to be made from the actor's perception of the context in which the action was performed (Blumer 1969). But to do this, Bittner (1973) insists that the researcher must make it clear that they have captured actors' common-sense knowledge and are not guilty of short-circuiting the process of understanding the actors' perspective by shifting attention to the subject at the expense of the object (Sharrock and Anderson 1991). Bittner argues that the fieldworker:

... tends to experience reality as being of subjective origin to a far greater extent than is typical in the natural attitude. Slipping in and out of points of view, he cannot avoid appreciating meanings of objects as more or less freely conjured. Thus he will read signs of the future from entrails of animals, believe that the distance

objects fall is a function of the square of time, accept money in return for valuables, and do almost anything else along this line; but the perceived reality of it will be that it is so because someone is so seeing it, and it could be and probably is altogether different for someone else, because whatever necessity there is in a thing being what it seems to be is wholly contained in the mind of the perceiving subject. Hence, without it ever becoming entirely clear, the accent of the field worker's interest shifts from the object to the subject.

(Bittner 1973: 122; Sharrock and Anderson 1991: 68–69)

Further, if social interaction is to be explained interpretively rather than deductively, then descriptions cannot be context-free because interaction is never independent of context. Context is identified interpretively too and is not a simple 'objective' phenomenon. Furthermore, interactions are subject to continual revision based on what has gone before and what is interpreted as a future course of action. Therefore,

... in order to establish the meaning of a description of an action, the observer must rely not only on a body of common-sense knowledge shared with his colleagues but also on his grasp of the common-sense understandings shared by the participants in the interaction itself. Consequently, in order to communicate to his colleagues, the observer must evoke in them the context for any given descriptive statement so that they will see it in the same light he does.

(Wilson 1971: 76)

Conceiving of social interaction as an interpretive process opens up the possibility of treating the interpretive process as a phenomenon for investigation. Normative sociological studies merely bypass or presuppose the interpretive process. However normative studies use the interpretive process as an unexplicated common-sense resource in their analytic work, even whilst denying its relevance.

The study of the process of socialisation in organisations is, therefore, treated quite differently by the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the normative and interpretive paradigms.

SOCIALISATION IN ORGANISATIONS

THEORETICAL MODELS OF SOCIALISATION

Traditionally, the study of socialisation has been directed towards the study of children and the process by which children become adults in the culture to which

they belong. Socialisation is conventionally regarded to mean the process by which a child learns to be a participant member of society. Speier (1973) points out that traditional studies of childhood socialisation are rooted in the belief that children are raw material for cultural learning; the child is conceptualised as a *tabula rasa* and must learn how to adapt to its social environment in order to be regarded as a normal member.

Implicit in the normative model of socialisation is that once a child reaches an acceptable level of socialisation and can be called an adult socialisation is complete. Interpretive sociology takes the position that the process of learning through interaction and interpretation of social action not only continues throughout childhood, but also throughout adulthood, therefore, adult socialisation continues in the workplace.

Conventional sociological research on organisations has regarded an organisation as a phenomenon deliberately instituted by people to pursue a set of stated objectives. To do this, organisations are regarded as stable associations of people who are actively engaged in deliberately formulated programmes of activities for the purpose of attaining set objectives. Traceable to Weber's conception of social life within bureaucracies, sociological attempts to understand this pre-programmed, concerted action have differentiated organisations from other types of structures, by labelling them formal or rational structures (Bittner 1965; Manning 1971).

The exploration of organisational socialisation is traditionally assumed to involve at least two aspects of study. First, the social roles of organisational members and second, the organisation as a social structure, that is, the slots into which organisational members are meant to fit (Manning 1971). For example, sociological and managerial investigations have tended to focus on how well the formal structures of organisations describe what is going on in them, and have attempted to measure success through various conceptions of efficiency and effectiveness. They have also sought to identify unintended, unplanned, informal structures operating in the organisation and to assess the impact of these structures on organisational performance.

These studies hold in common the search to harness and understand the forces for cohesion in organisations. Perhaps unknowingly, many of these studies appear to have superimposed the normative model of childhood socialisation on to the organisational form; managers now occupying the role of adults and non-supervisory staff and new members occupying the role of the child. Although pointing to the interactional basis of routine, daily-life in work settings, they have failed to recognise its theoretical significance for the study of organisational socialisation. Formulations of reinforcement and sanctions towards dispositions and attitudes assumes one of the fundamental elements of the normative tradition – that a

stable connection exists between the situation the actor is in and the actor's response to this situation, which, in turn, rests upon the assumption that actors have a cognitive agreement on the meaning of situations, thereby also assuming that actors can be socialised into a common culture.

This normative view of action is another example of Bittner's (1965) 'theoretical short circuiting', and is typical of the way in which normative reasoning treats its research concerns as both 'topic and resource' (Zimmerman and Pollner 1971). That is, theory is short-circuited by *assuming* the social order of organisational socialisation instead of regarding it as what employees have to create as an everyday task and treating it as an analysable phenomenon from which to build theory. Or, in Manning's words, 'theoretical statements are made about X (organisational behaviour) at the same time that knowledge of X (how people behave in organisations) is taken as proof that the theoretical statements made about X are adequate' (Manning 1971: 243).

The concept of organisational interaction as an interpretive process recognises this short-circuiting and seeks to uncover what the normative framework takes for granted. An interpretive model urges the exploration of how organisational members apply a symbolic framework to the objects that make up their daily work environment; how do employees defer to, manage or reject social roles? (Manning 1971).

Bittner (1965) argues that a normative model assumes that if employees are acting in concert with the managerial view of the organisation they are regarded as having met the requirements of rationality. Normative studies do not question the concept of rationality itself. Instead of attending to the requirements of employees in social life that make 'rationality' manifest, investigators make use of the managerial, normative view that regards actions as pointing to the rational grounds for that action, choice or commitment.

The normative model assumes that both rules and actions have context-free, stable meanings that are collectively understood by all members of the organisation. Following Schütz, Bittner urges that the literal meanings of any view or scheme cannot be attained in practice because the meanings of rules resides in the range of their *in situ* interpretations by organisational members, based on the background body of knowledge that competent members of the community take for granted as commonly known.

Using as example the term 'employee', Bittner argues that there is a whole realm of background information behind its use. Insofar as the term is a meaningful reference to some object, it is so only in the context of actors, in an on-going moment-to-moment way, making common sense of it in their particular situation. Bittner argues that this type of information supplies the tacit foundation for all that is explicitly known and provides the framework for considering what is

known without itself being deliberately considered. This framework of knowledge is fundamental, normal and taken-for-granted by actors going about their daily affairs, but has been bypassed by theorists constructing theories of organisations (Manning 1971). However, since the explicit terms of theories are embedded in this common-sense, taken-for-granted orientation, they cannot be understood without explicit reference to what actually is taken-for-granted (Bittner 1965).

Interpretive sociology urges that the meanings of concepts must be discovered by studying their use in action by those who use them and who are intersubjectively-defined as competent and entitled (or 'credentialised') to do so (Bittner 1965), and this may be contested or negotiated. Studying organisational socialisation in interpretive terms would involve sociologists seeking to report the way in which employees manage the problems that face them in their organisations. To become a socially sanctioned member of the organisation, employees are involved in displaying, adhering to and being sanctioned for use of a pre-planned, managerially devised, ordering scheme or sub-scheme (Manning 1971). Studying organisations, therefore, must fundamentally involve studying its use by actors through studying the devices actors use to make sense of the daily objects and activities they encounter in their organisation.

Without studying the concept of organisational socialisation and the conceptual terms 'subsumed' within it, information is lacking on how its terms relate to facts. Without knowing the structure of the terms-facts relationship, the meaning of the concept and its terms cannot be determined (based on Bittner 1965). As Bittner says:

The investigator can ... decide that the meaning of the concept, and all of the terms and determinations that are subsumed under it, must be discovered by studying their real scenes of action by persons whose competence to use them is socially sanctioned ... [I]n order to understand the meaning of the actor's thought and action ... one must study how the terms of his discourse are assigned to real objects and events by normally competent persons in ordinary situations.

(Bittner 1965: 247)

The management of the organisation reported in the prolegomenon appear to assume that employees could be taught a set of behavioural rules that would result in employees behaving as desired by management. When team members failed to behave in the ways managers expected, managers were baffled and looked for more rules.

Managers had regarded these fundamental concerns from a normative framework of interaction. They sought causal explanations and resolutions that could be effected by team members learning and enacting procedural responses to

situations. Such propositions, however, could only work if it were the case that all team members recognised problems and situations in nearly the same way every time they occurred and would always behave in the prescribed way for that situation every time they recognised it.

Had managers in this organisation investigated their concerns from within an interpretive framework of interaction, their images of conflict and resolution, effectiveness and efficiency would be much different. An interpretive perspective opens up the possibility of discovering what the rules mean to employees in the contexts of their daily organisational experience and what effectiveness and efficiency means to team members who are asked to 'do' them. It would facilitate the exploration of how team members interpret and accomplish the actions they understand as necessary to accomplish the rules. An interpretive study retains the contextuality of situations and interactions and does not assume the context-free, stable meanings of actions necessary if team members are to have a collective understanding of events. An interpretive understanding of interaction in this organisation would also make available information regarding team members' interpretations of what it means to be part of a team, to be supportive, and to recognise and understand the perspectives of others.

In terms of research methods, this potentiates a radically naturalistic approach that grasps the perspective and situated meanings of participants in their natural circumstances. Or rather, it grasps social meanings as they are incorporated into situated social actions in natural settings – actions that are naturally-occurring, naturally-organised and naturally-situated. Thus, in an interpretive study of human practices, we develop a thorough-going, praxiological approach within sociology.

THE 'PROCEDURAL' TURN IN AN INTERPRETIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

The interpretive paradigm suggested a new and methodologically radical way to explore social order and social interaction. Recognising that the social world is made up of intersubjective meanings and experiences of its members, the interpretive paradigm's notion of 'society-seen-from-within' constituted the theoretical and methodological underpinning of Blumer's symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

Each of these perspectives rests on the idea that there is a social context of meaning that is patterned and that unifies each appearance of human action. Human beings interpret these social contexts of meanings, the actions and scenes that they encounter in everyday life, through a set of routine, taken-for-granted, common-sense, sense-making 'procedures'. This 'procedural turn' in interpretive sociology recognises that people's knowledge of their world is 'procedurally'

organised, that people make routine sense of their worlds through practical reasoning methods or procedures. Rather than concerning itself with questions typical of the normative approach, such as *why* do people behave in stable, regular ways and *what* keeps people behaving in stable, regular ways, the procedural turn asks different questions, such as *how* it is that 'the stability and regularity of conduct is recognisable and discoverable, and recognisable and discoverable from within its own midst' (Sharrock and Watson 1988: 62) and 'what do people have to do to be (routinely, unremarkably, but recognisably and readily so) doing X?' (Sharrock and Watson 1988: 62). This conception contributes to the theoretical and methodological basis of ethnomethodology.

The analytic focus is on '*how*' is '*knowledge that*' gained and used in a particular situation (Watson and Weinberg 1982; Ryle 1949). Its emphasis is on how actions comprise orderly patterns, how social settings are practically encountered by people and how it is that people discover, recognise, describe and behave in these settings. In other words, the procedural turn is concerned to identify the mundane, ordinary, routine, practical, sense-making procedures or methods used by people going about their daily affairs.

Further, the procedural turn moved to treat peoples' definitions and interpretations as *linguistic*. 'Talk' is the fundamental material of human relations (Scott and Lyman 1968) and social life is comprised of and carried on through linguistic activities; it is only through speech exchange, or talk, that people can participate in many social activities and relationships (Buttny 1993; Sharrock and Watson 1989). The procedural turn recognised social life as a 'worded' matter and was concerned to identify and describe peoples' ordinary, routine procedures in making sense of their everyday social encounters (Sharrock and Watson 1989). We encounter the world as a worded entity that is rendered recognisable through language.

THE 'LINGUISTIC TURN' IN AN INTERPRETIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

This 'linguistic turn' is specifically concerned with the social character of language itself and regards language as a social phenomenon and social practice that is worth studying in its own right rather than regarding language in the conventional sociological sense as merely another topic to which a standard investigative approach is applied. The linguistic turn does not regard explorations of linguistic exchanges, or talk, between people as merely conversations between individuals, rather, they are regarded as typified indications or appearances of the social character of the particular setting in which the conversation is located, as it is encountered and reproduced by the members involved. In other words, the linguistic turn is concerned to discover the rules of natural language-in-use that

people recognise and how people recognise them and employ them. Conceiving the world as *linguistically defined*, *linguistically recognisable* and, therefore, *linguistically constituted* is a basic proposition of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and to a lesser extent, symbolic interactionism.

THE 'LINGUISTIC' TURN AND ORGANISATIONAL SOCIALISATION

How do members of an organisation become socialised into the organisation? How do organisational members become acknowledged as fully-fledged, competent members of the organisational culture? How do people determine the specific details of their organisation's aims and objectives and how do they put them into action? How do people determine the requirements of their organisational roles and how do they put these into action? These organisational phenomena and activities can be conceived of as 'worded matters', as being linguistically constituted, and as such, can be identified and described through sociological inquiry formulated on the fundamental assumptions of ethnomethodology.

Manning (1971) treats organisational socialisation and the acquisition of organisational identities as 'worded matters', as shaped by language in use. For him, the traditional Weberian model of social life in bureaucracies failed to address the procedures used by organisational members to recognise and interpret the formal rules and objects that make up their daily environments. Weber's model assumes that the literal meaning of organisational rules describes the actual behaviour that occurs within the organisation. This model is typical of the mechanical, rule-governed conceptualisation of the relationship between rules and conduct in which deviations from the formal rules are accounted for as 'irrational', 'non-rational', 'informal' behaviour arising out of conflict, ignorance or strains. This conception is the backbone of conventional organisational and management studies, analytically located within the normative paradigm.

Drawing on Bittner (1965), Manning argues that formal rules cannot be attained in practice because that would require all organisational members to define, interpret and understand rules in *exactly* the same way as those who devised them – usually senior management. For Bittner and Manning, to assume this identically shared understanding of management's rules is failing to recognise the practical reasoning and interpretive procedures employed by people in organising their behaviour to accord with a given rule. In the organisational example in the prolegomenon, for example, employees did not understand rules in exactly the same way as the managers who devised them, rather employees interpreted rules through their own sense-making practices in relation to their own understanding of the organisation and their own roles within the organisation.

Following C. Wright Mills (1940), Manning argues that 'situated vocabularies', that is, any and all vocabulary used by organisational actors in their organisational roles, can be regarded as a short-hand means for the imputation of reasons for conduct. Manning maintains that any study of organisations must pay attention to the devices that people conjointly use to make problems, events, activities or objects, consistent, repetitive, normal and natural. He proposes that this can be discovered by focusing on the linguistic devices used by members to discuss their organisational problems and activities, and simultaneously, on the context in which these devices are used and the rules governing their use. Attention to the context in which social action is located is imperative; without context, explanations about the reality of human behaviour are in danger of being causal explanations that do not address what those involved take-for-granted in ordering their behaviour in keeping with their role. In other words, how they learn their role. That is, as ethnomethodology insists, the investigator must look at *situated practice* in organisations.

How the interpretive paradigm and the linguistic turn in the interpretive paradigm pertains in an investigation of organisational socialisation can be seen in the following example which brings into service Bittner's (1965) model of 'stylistic unity' and the concept of 'recipient design' (Sacks and Schegloff 1979; Sacks et al. 1974).

DOING ORGANISATIONAL SOCIALISATION

An organisation was engaged in what its senior managers termed 'a process of cultural change' that had been instigated by the Chief Executive (CE) to cope with what he saw as 'changes in the national and global economy' and 'the continuous introduction through western economies of new technologies'. The CE believed that 'new values had to be learned' for the organisation to successfully change. Through a series of 'self awareness training' devised by the CE, the Training and Development manager and an outside consultancy, the top layer of management were asked to 'look at their own management behaviour' and then to consider some 'alternative styles' of management. They were also asked to consider 'through open discussion' some of the things in the organisation that they would like to see changed and to consider how changes in their 'style of management' might help these changes to come about. Ideas arising from these open discussions were then taken by senior managers to stand formally as 'company values'. Senior managers thought the 'self awareness' training was successful and expanded it to middle managers so that middle managers could 'spread the message'.

A small team was formed from middle managers (we shall call this team 'the cultural change programme' team) with the specific remit of developing and

carrying through ways to spread the new organisational messages. They agreed that a short, organisational film would be the 'most powerful vehicle' to 'capture and describe to others' the new organisational messages, not least because it could be 'viewed by many people simultaneously'. The film was shown during a series of corporate events held on nine consecutive days. During these events, managed by the cultural change programme team, delegates were charged with showing the film to everyone they managed 'ensuring that everyone in the Company is exposed to the new values'.

Managers and non-managerial staff did not regard this short film as 'special' or 'unusual'. Rather, it was regarded as another routine, ordinary, everyday organisational object, and the viewing of the film was regarded as 'business as usual'. This orientation to the film showed itself in their *talk*. Rather than focusing specifically on the film, their talk concerned their ordinary, daily, organisational experiences of which the film was only a part.

SOCIALISATION THROUGH STYLISTIC UNITY

Bittner (1965) argues that organisations can be regarded as models of 'stylistic unity'. By this he means that often in organisations there exist 'coherent maps' or 'schedules' that integrate people and performances in the organisation so that what they do can be seen as part of a general pattern of concerted organisational activity even if those members concerned are remote from each other. This general pattern is not stipulated by the analyst. Rather, it is a pattern that is identifiable to and used by organisational members themselves. An example of this is the way management thinking pervades an organisation. Bittner argues that evidence of a more general pattern of integration may be seen in the outward appearance of 'proper conduct', or on what is taken as 'fitting' behaviour for this organisation. Bittner suggests that to explore stylistic unity, the investigator must explore which behaviours are regarded by those in authority as incongruous with the organisation's 'image' or canons of acceptable behaviour. To do this, investigations should focus on behaviours that are regarded as routine, commonplace or unremarkable and behaviours that attract sanctions from authority figures.

At this organisation a feature of the process of socialisation is 'stylistic unity'. It is through the practices constituting 'stylistic unity' that socialisation takes place. Managers in this organisation want their version of stylistic unity to permeate the whole organisation. Stylistic unity is an important feature of their talk; there is a particular organisational style of doing 'corporate change'; that style is managers' way of doing it and takes definitional privilege over alternative styles.

Managers talk about 'unsocialised' employees thus:

so it [the film] was really to tell people, to show people tangibly what sort of ways of behaving and ways of performing were being praised by the company

and,

So we wanted to get the message across that if you do it this way you'll do it very well, you'll do it more efficiently

and,

[we said to them] this is a good way of doing things, we'd like you to think about doing things that way.

Also,

... so far as is possible we will involve them in the changes ... we will do everything we can to bridge those gaps with them ... There will be opportunities for those who don't fit to be remoulded ... We want to take people with us in the change.

This process of stylistic unity involves managers following a common-sense conception of the normative paradigm in which managers use a common-sense practical version of socialisation. Managers treat socialisation as a 'one-way-street', from 'socialised' managers to 'unsocialised' employees. Further, 'unsocialised' employees are regarded by managers as passive recipients of socialisation.

Managers' view of socialisation takes the form of variable analysis in that the activities management devise to transmit socialisation are assumed to have intrinsic meanings that all employees will understand and act upon in the same way, thus disregarding the interactional work of sense-making and defining that goes on. Further, in assuming employees to be passive recipients rather than active interpreters, managers are assuming employees to be 'judgmental dopes'. By this, I mean that managers assume a simple model of employees as passive receptors who are not able to reason or judge things for themselves and who are governed by forces beyond their control (similar to the variable analysis formulation of dependent and independent variables with a stable, context free relationship between them). This judgmental dope model of conventional sociology disattends any notion of people being competent, creative, active, practical interpreters of their world.

In managers' intersubjective accounts of 'cultural change' in the organisation, a stylistic unity, or general map of social organisation, is discernible that is formu-

lated through managers' lay, common-sense conception of the normative paradigm.

THE PROBLEM OF RECIPIENT DESIGN IN SOCIALISATION

The normative view of the process of socialisation disregards the possibility of social interaction between managers and employees and so fails to explore the interactional reciprocity between employees and managers. Thus, managers fail to address the possibility or actuality that employees are 'active' agents or interpreters of management 'messages' and, constructed in these interactions, have a viable and legitimate daily social world of their own.

In talking about their own management programme in their own management terms, managers demonstrate little evidence of 'recipient design' (Sacks et al. 1974; Sacks and Schegloff 1979). That is, in their attempts to imbue the organisation with their particular stylistic unity, there is little evidence of managers' orientation or sensitivity to employees in the way managers' design or construct their talk. There is an assumption that employees should be able to understand management's programmes. Much of managers' talk is about what managers are looking for with little attempt to look at how this is received. Here, I wish to extend the notion of 'recipient design' (Sacks and Schegloff 1979; Sacks et al. 1974) to encompass not only the construction or design of talk that orientates or is sensitive to the co-participants in that talk, but also the construction or design of events, objects and situations.

For example, a cultural change programme team manager said:

I think what we're looking for is ... commitment to employees, but in return the employees have to be committed to the business ... I think the values are openness and trust as far as relationships to employees are concerned ... a caring sort of attitude, not only internally. We think that if we don't have our act together internally as an organisation in terms of providing levels of service between departments, then I don't see how those same messages can be transmitted externally to the external customers. So there's been key focus on customer care, management competence, we've been looking at the style and expertise of our managers. That's been looked at quite considerably ... you give people an understanding of where the business goes, you give them the skills and knowledge that they need and then slowly, but surely, you release them within a framework to just get on with the job.

Here, again, the one-way-street normative conception of socialisation is shown. Managers think that skills and knowledge are 'given' to employees in a

'framework' and do not address the interpretive, interactional work that goes on between managers and employees in making sense of the situation. The assumption made by managers is that employees will understand things in the same way as managers so that once skills and knowledge have been 'given' by managers and 'received' by employees, then employees will act in the way managers want them to. The notion of 'framework' is important. Having or learning 'the framework' is very much related to the acquisition of a management world-specific perspective.

An example of a perceptible failure in recipient design is shown in the following data extracts:

Interviewer: What do you think people who are managers, what do you think they think of [the cultural change programme]. Do you think they feel any changes, do you think they've had a change of attitude?

Ann: I don't know, I don't know, I mean I can't speak for the whole of them...

Interviewer: What would you hope?

Ann: I would hope they feel much more part of a team ... we say to people that they provide clerical support for this particular team, that person provides clerical support for that team, so that they feel more part of a team ... If you say 'part of a team', it's almost like a circle, isn't it; whereas if you say 'low down in the organisation' you're implying a top and a bottom. At the end of the day it's all down to team work, so feeling part of a team makes people more, feeling relatively secure in their employment, given everything that's going on outside. So that's job security, being more competent in what they are doing because they've got more access to business information and more access to training. I can only give an impression ... in terms of being in the heart of it and knowing what people across the whole of the company would feel, I can't comment on what they actually do feel, but I can probably give a view on what it would be nice to think that they feel...

Also,

Interviewer: So, what about the people who are very low down the organisational hierarchy; do you think it's important for the cultural messages to reach them?

Ann: Absolutely, I mean the whole idea was that we do extend [the cultural change programme]. One of the criticisms of [the cultural change programme] has been that there has been no follow up support in terms of finding out from managers if they're having any problems putting their pledges into action.

Here, Ann, a cultural change programme team manager, openly acknowledges managers' lack of knowledge about what non-managerial employees think. But what is most interesting about this is that she orients towards the questions *only* in terms of the perspective of senior managers, not from the social world orientation of non-senior managers and non-managerial employees themselves. Managers have not constructed their messages with the recipients of these messages in mind. Managers have assumed the normatively conceived 'passive recipient' model of members, therefore, Ann can only 'hope' that management's messages have been understood.

Non-managerial employees are, however, very much aware of the failure of recipient design. For example, immediately following a viewing of the film, when asked what they thought about the film non-managerial employees said:

Bob: [The film had] nothing to do with us at all.

Interviewer: Did that make you lose interest?

Bob: No, no. But there's no interest down at our level. There's no interest at all, see, down at our level, definite, that's for sure. If they had interest, they'd bring in how we do fittings or do pipework; they'd come and ask the guys. Not just us, but people who are experienced in doing fittings or work underground, they'd come and ask us, wouldn't they, about things. But they don't, they just bring things in, you know.

And,

Bill: [I]f it was more local as in Hill Town or nearer, you may be able to comment on that, but because they're away, there's nothing we didn't like. Do you see what I mean? We don't know if everything in there was right and correct and ... whereas if it was local, we'd know more about it.

And,

Tom: We see these videos and it's always somebody else's. We'd like to do that in our area, see.

Len: Well, not just our area, but more what we do. Seventy percent of it was more or less, like, to do with management.

Here, non-managerial employees demonstrate through their talk that they are not passive receptors or judgemental dopes. They are competent, active, practical interpreters. The data demonstrate that employees recognise that the film consists of a management version of how employees' work and what employees do rather than the employees' own perspective of their roles and orientations. Employees recognise the lack of recipient design in the film and they recognise that managers assume that employees will understand things in the same way as managers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I do not intend to prescribe a diagnostic model or framework for organisational socialisation. Rather, I want to demonstrate that organisations are 'worded entities' and that socialisation can be accounted for as 'linguistically constituted'. And I want to demonstrate this proposition – If managers want to understand what is going on in their organisations in terms of whether employees are 'now on side' with the 'values' that management want them to 'share', in other words, what is the state of employee socialisation in the organisation, then whether employees agree or disagree with managers is of secondary relevance. What is of primary relevance is that employees act on the basis of their understandings. If managers want to understand what employees think, then managers must fully understand employees' views and to do this, managers must understand how employees interact. Organisational members' definitions of objects, events and situations within the organisation are jointly and linguistically negotiated, produced and assembled through interactional work between organisational members. Employees are active, competent, interpretive beings and are active participants in their own socialisation. If managers want to understand employees' views about the organisation, then managers must grasp the cultural meanings of how managers themselves and employees define their social worlds, and must attend to the particular interactional forms and devices through which both managers and employees make visible (that is, make accountable) their own perspectives. Managers must select and design their talk so as to address both the identities of employees and employees' world-based understandings of the organisation and this design must visibly/audibly display and exhibit such identity-fashioning and understanding.

The presuppositions of a normative epistemology cannot make available for analysis nor offer a way to analyse the interpretive, interactionally collaborative work that members linguistically undertake. To do this we must look to the interpretive paradigm in sociological thinking and, heeding Bittner's (1973) warnings that without the actors' point of view we risk an 'abortive phenomenol-

ogy', we must strive to produce accurate descriptions of organisational members' sense-making, constitutive practices.

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