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## **Translating Management Ideas: A Discursive Devices Analysis**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper puts forward a Discursive Devices approach to analyzing the linguistic practices involved in the translation of management ideas. The paper draws on empirical data from a study of a quality improvement initiative in a UK public-private partnership. To illustrate our argument we examine the discursive devices skilfully employed by two 'change champions' during a training session to introduce staff to the new quality regime. Drawing insights from the field of Discursive Psychology, we analyze how a variety of discursive devices, such as footing, are employed to translate the idea during the dialogue between sellers and recipients. We suggest that skilful variation can play a relevant role in the translation of management ideas.

## **Introduction**

How do new ideas get translated to (or in) organizations? The ‘translating’ of (supposedly) new management ideas and techniques, such as business process reengineering, organizational culture, lean production or total quality management, is a key concern for management and organization studies (eg Sturdy 2002). For us, translation occurs in the ‘space’ and ‘time’ between when an idea is first constructed (imagined) and when the idea becomes taken-for-granted (institutionalised). Although translating is just one part of the diffusion process, it is an important part because it is where and when the idea ‘comes alive’. An idea written into a mission statement or strategic plan is meaningless without the *work* involved in translating the idea into practice. TQM, for example, would simply not have gained its popularity if it was not translated to (and within) large numbers of organizations around the world. In this paper we contribute to our understanding of the translating process by analysing how a Discursive Devices Analysis (DDA) (Whittle et. al. 2008) can help us in analyzing the fine-grained speech acts employed in translating management ideas. We draw on insights from the field of Discursive Psychology (DP), in particular the work of Potter, Edwards, Antaki and others associated with the Discourse and Rhetoric Group based at Loughborough University in the U.K.

DP has been described as “one of the major contemporary theories of human action” (Harré and Stearns 1995: 1). We use the term ‘discursive device’ (Whittle et. al. 2008), rather than ‘rhetorical device’, as the latter term is grounded in the classical Greek notions of rhetoric, such as ‘metonymy’ or ‘synecdoche’. For us, DDs are language-based tools that are employed as part of interactional business. It is a summative concept that covers a range of ‘conversational devices’ (Antaki et al. 2007: 170) analysed by scholars associated with Discursive Psychology and Conversation Analysis. Our analysis is predicated on the assumption that it is the skilled use of such devices that allow “social life”, including the translation of management ideas, “to proceed” (Goffman 1972: 26). Our paper therefore addresses Greatbach and Clark’s (2005: 12) call for more “systematic and empirically rigorous” research into the role of management talk.

In the case of our study, we analyse the discursive devices used by trainers to facilitate the translation of a quality management initiative in a U.K. public-private partnership organisation. These discursive devices, we suggest, comprise a key

element of the *skilled and creative social practice* that is a crucial, but also poorly understood, ‘behind the scenes’ element of the translation of ideas within organizations. Our approach rejects the distinction between talk and action in line with Sturdy and Fleming’s (2003: 753) argument that talk is a form of implementation in its own right. We agree that the distinction between talk and action is both overdrawn and analytically unhelpful. For us, talking about a new idea is a central part of making the new idea ‘come to life’.

We substantiate our central theoretical perspective in the section that follows. In the Methodology section, we justify the type and nature of our data-set. The paper then moves on to illustrate our argument through analysis of three interactional episodes from an observation conducted during the study. This is followed by a Discussion and Conclusion that outlines the wider theoretical implications of our approach.

### **The Movement of Ideas**

How and why do ideas move between and within organizations? For proponents of the ‘innovation diffusion’ school of thought, ideas travel because they offer rational solutions for organizational problems. In contrast, others view the movement of ideas as based on the more ‘irrational’ popularity of management ‘fads and fashions’ (Abrahamson 1996). Another important body of work on ‘translation’<sup>1</sup> (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 1996) has helped us to understand the way in which ideas are altered as they travel across space and time, as opposed to simply being ‘diffused’ in a linear process.

Existing research on the transfer of ideas has already highlighted how ‘translators’ (such as management gurus, senior managers, management consultants) shape the ideas they sell (eg. Huczynski 1993; Thomas 2003; Crucini and Kipping 2001). The success of ideas, it seems, depends not on remaining stable and invariant but instead having “interpretive viability” (Benders and Van Veen 2001: 36), that is, leaving room for interpretation in different contexts. Indeed, the translation literature rejects the notion that recipients adopt “the same thing for the same reason” and instead focuses on how actors modify ideas to “fit their unique needs in time and

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<sup>1</sup> We focus solely on linguistic aspects in this paper, notwithstanding the focus of much of the literature inspired by the sociology of translation on material and non-human aspects (eg. Latour, 1986).

space”, being themselves transformed in the process (Abrahamson 2006: 512-513). Based on the work of Bruno Latour, translation implies that actors do not simply accept and enact an idea, they act by “modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (Latour 1986, p.267). For example, Lofgren (2005: 25) found that some ideas originating from the U.S., like “cluster” or “valleyfication”, were ridiculed and discredited in Scandinavia. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argue that ideas do not travel because of how their inherent attributes ‘match’ an organizational problem, but rather because of how those attributes and problems are “created, negotiated or imposed during the collective translation process” (p.25). Therefore, for ideas to travel they need to be edited, not simply recited (Sahlin-Andersson 1996).

What is missing from the literature is a sophisticated set of concepts to understand the detailed, micro-level interactions through which ideas are translated. Existing work has highlighted the importance of things like “narrative” (Clark and Salaman 1998), “storytelling” (Clark and Salaman 1996; Greatbach and Clark 2005) and “rhetoric” (Clark 1995), without offering detailed analysis of how these narratives and rhetoric are deployed in the moment-by-moment interactions between ‘seller’ and ‘recipient’. According to Sturdy (2002: 134), “very little research explores knowledge diffusion *in action*, through observation”. This is a significant omission, Sturdy (2002: 130) suggests, because “the *immediate* responses of knowledge recipients ... shape the nature of the message itself”. Hence we adopt a view of translation as a “dialogical activity” (Cunliffe 2001: 351). Ideas, then, get translated during the ‘back and forth’ of everyday conversations, debates and stories told at work. We agree with Drew and Heritage (1992: 8-9) that research should focus on the “moment-by-moment reassessments and realignments which participants may make” in the course of interaction (see also Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 18). This level of detail is important because it is precisely *everyday conversations* that comprise a major part of the very “stuff” involved in translating ideas. Managers, gurus and consultants spend the vast majority of their working day *using language*, in the form of speeches, reports, telephone calls, emails and so on. In this paper, we aim to contribute to this body of work on the movement of ideas by developing a perspective that we have called ‘Discursive Devices Analysis’ (DDA) for analysing the micro-interactional work involved in the translation of ideas.

## **Discursive Devices Analysis**

What do we mean by ‘discursive devices’? And how is this approach different to other methods of analyzing discourse? We use the term ‘discursive devices’ to refer to the micro-linguistic tools that people use in interaction in order to construct a particular version of the world and their relationship to it. To take an example, callers to a child protection helpline use language in a particular way to present the situation they are reporting as sufficiently worrying to warrant the call (a version of the world), but not of such severity that they are guilty of neglect by not calling the police (a version of themselves) (Potter and Hepburn 2003). We draw our insights specifically from a field known as Discursive Psychology (DP) (Edwards and Potter 1992). While the early work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) developed the term “interpretative repertoires”, more recent work in DP has moved away from this concept because it tended to reduce the complexity and variability of language-use to a few distinct repertoires. The process of allocating segments of talk and text to these repertoires was also a relatively vague and poorly-defined process (Wiggins and Potter 2008: 75). Hence our concept of ‘discursive devices’ follows the more recent work in DP.

DP is founded on three core principles (see Potter and Hepburn 2008: 277; Wiggins and Potter 2008: 77-78). Firstly, discourse is *constructed* because it assembles linguistic building blocks (i.e. words) and *constructive* because these assemblages construct a particular version of the world. To state that an unemployed person is a “victim of the recession”, or a “benefit scrounger”, makes a difference. Even if the audience does not accept a particular construction, that construction has still been made and therefore still matters. Let us consider this point in more detail. A compliment, for example, can be delivered (illocutionary) even if the recipient did not feel better as a result (perlocutionary). Similarly, an insult can take place (illocutionary) irrespective of whether it led to a feeling of hurt within its target (perlocutionary). The perlocutionary dimension is not the focus of DP because it rejects the correspondence model of language, which views language as a straightforward reflection of underlying meanings, thoughts, feelings, or attitudes – a ‘mirror’ on reality (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Marshak et al 2000). DP therefore rejects strong statements such as Fairhurst’s (1993: 333) claim that “representations or ‘frames’ directly impact behavior”. DP also rejects the notion that we need to measure

the impact of language by looking at the effects it had. Applause following a political speech, for example, may be indicative of nothing more than an interactional ritual, and therefore cannot be used to ‘measure’ the ‘impact’ of a speech (Atkinson 1984; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986).

The second core principle of DP is that discourse is *action-oriented*: it is *the* primary means through which we accomplish social actions. For example, talk is used to blame, excuse, justify, insult, compliment, and so on. Third and finally, DP views discourse as situated both in relation to the local sequential organization of talk (i.e. what was said immediately before), the particular institutional setting (i.e. a school classroom or a job interview) and its wider rhetorical framework (i.e. how it counters actual or potential counter-arguments).

DP draws on many of the methods and concepts of conversational analysis, particularly the focus on the sequential organization of language within naturally-occurring talk. This level of detail is needed to study “the moment-by-moment unfolding of relationally responsive events” (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003: 18). However, DP is distinct from CA in that it foregrounds the process of social construction through language-use (Potter and Hepburn, 2008: 276). While DP also draws on many of the insights of work on rhetoric (eg. Billig 1996), it tends to focus more on the analysis of naturally-occurring talk. Whilst other related terms have been used, including “discursive strategies” (Abell and Stokoe 1999: 297), “discursive resources” (Watson 1995: 806; Middleton 1996: 238) , “linguistic resources” (Cunliffe 2001: 352; Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 22), “linguistic devices” (Watson 1995: 812) and “rhetorical device(s)” (Atkinson 1984: 121; Watson 1995: 810; Middleton 1996: 238; Abell and Stokoe 1999: 298; Grant and Hardy 2004: 7; Greatbatch and Clark 2005: 47), we use the term ‘discursive devices’ for two main reasons.

First, we wish to avoid the dualistic assumption that ‘rhetoric’ is something distinct from (and opposed to) ‘reality’ (Watson, 1995: 807), similar to the distinction between ‘talk’ and ‘action’ (Sturdy and Fleming 2003). DP views these as false dichotomies because discourse is actually a primary medium through which *social actions* are performed and *social reality* is constructed (Wiggins and Potter 2008: 77). Questions like ‘we can see the talk but was it actually implemented?’ are misplaced in our approach. Second, the term ‘rhetoric’ is also associated with assumptions about the intentions of the speaker, particularly the idea that speakers deliberately design an

argument to persuade an audience. For example, Michael Billig (1996) – a key proponent of the rhetorical perspective – states that “(t)he orator’s business was not to prettify debates, but to win them” (p. 81). DP strongly rejects the imputation of mental states in this way. Discursive devices, then, do not refer to cognitive entities (attitudes, intentions, emotions, interests) that are simply *expressed* in discourse. Rather, discursive devices refer to the things that people observably *do* with discourse (i.e. ‘what did they actually say?’), without making speculative assumptions about a person’s state of mind and without formulating propositions about the causal impact of the talk or text.

### **Discursive Devices and the Translation of Ideas**

In the field of organization studies, DP has been drawn on by a small number of authors to analyze some key topics, including technological change (Symon 2008), leadership (Fairhurst 2007; Larsson and Lundholm 2008) and identity (Sheep 2006). In this paper, our aim is to offer a systematic statement of the value of DP for understanding the translation of management ideas. Table 1 offers an overview and summary of the discussion that follows. Our list is by no means exhaustive, but it does cover many of the major themes developed in DP and associated fields such as linguistics.

#### *Dealing with Feelings*

Existing research has found that projecting empathy is a device that can be used to make arguments and ideas appear more balanced, justified and sensitive (Edwards 1997). Fairclough (1992: 148) has examined how empathy has been used in patient-doctor interactions in order to facilitate interaction. Maynard’s (1992) analysis of scenarios where clinicians have to deliver ‘bad news’ to parents offers a good example of how empathy devices such as showing “sensitivity” (p.341) and “identifying” with the parents’ feelings are used to establish “a hospitable environment for delivering a diagnosis” (p.340). Similarly, Ruusuvuori (2007: 618) analysed the micro aspects of how patients and doctors adapted their “emotional displays” to the institutional constraints of the situation in order to facilitate ‘the institutional task at hand’. Thus, empathy devices are not just about expressing ones feelings but also about *doing* something. For example, Samra-Fredericks (2004)

shows how change agents establish their sincerity and invoke the sympathy of their audience when ‘translating’ visions of change by seeking to “convey their feelings on matters” (ibid. p. 1135).

### *Dealing with Stake and Interest*

Another key feature of translating ideas, in our view, involves dealing with issues of the stake and interest of the ‘idea-seller’. As Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001: 21) argue: “Questions of stake are key concerns of participants in an interaction. People treat each other as having vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances (as having a stake in some position or another)”. As Potter (1996: 124-132) noted, speakers may want to emphasize that they are *not disinterested* to bolster the credibility of their position: stating that they ‘care’ about the idea in question, for instance. Alternatively, speakers may attempt to deny or downplay stake in order to “head off the imputation of stake or interest” (ibid, p.125). Potter and Puchta (2007) show how a moderator of a focus group handled her perceived stake by talking about her independence from the company that manufactured the product in question. Stake inoculation is therefore a key device in making a speaker appear more objective, unbiased and trustworthy. Whether a speaker chooses to confess a stake or, on the contrary, inoculate themselves against stake imputation seems to matter a great deal for whether ideas are subsequently accepted or rejected.

### *Dealing with Footing*

The concept of ‘footing’ refers to the relationship we portray between ourselves and what we say. As Goffman (1981: 128) argues: “A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance”. Goffman (1981: 144) distinguishes between the concepts of ‘principal’, ‘author’ and ‘animator’ within the somewhat simplistic category of ‘speaker’. The author is the one who has selected the specific words used. The principal, who is sometimes identical with the author, is the one on whose behalf the words are spoken, “someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say” (Goffman 1981: 144). The animator is the one who actually speaks. Footing is a more micro concept than frame

because it addresses the reflexive and fluctuating character of frames, the moment-by-moment reassessments made by participants in order to move from one situation to another (Drew and Heritage 1992: 8-9). In the face of disruptions to the translating process, for example, protagonists may employ changes in footing (Goffman 1981: 124-159) to display a change in their relationship to what they are translating. Clayman (1992), for example, examined how news interviewers used footing to maintain a “formally neutral or ‘neutralistic’ posture for news interviewers” (p.164). When adopting the animator position of “‘just passing something on’” (Potter 1996: 143), speakers may deflect responsibility “away from themselves onto some other party” (Clayman 1992: 165). Clayman (1992) discusses shifts in footings in hostile environments and their role in helping to defend the speaker “against critical attacks” (p. 178). In a famous exchange between Pat Buchanan and a radio interviewer, Buchanan distances himself from the attribution of ‘authorship’ of the ‘founding fathers’ line in a President Reagan speech (ibid, 178-9) in order to emphasize the *author* role of the president and thus defend the president’s reputation. In the case of translating management ideas, we suggest, footing may be a key device through which a change agent might emphasise, or downplay, their own role in crafting the ideas being translated.

### *Dealing with Accounts as Facts*

Accounts are often carefully worked up to present what they describe as “out there”, lying outside the account itself (Potter 1996: Ch 6). Certain “facts” are presumed to hold and therefore not opened up for discussion (Edwards 2005: 6), just “the way things are”. The key argument of DP is that ‘what is happening out there’ is not something that pre-exists the account, but rather is achieved by the account itself. Just as scientists may present their research findings in a way that deletes their role and presents them as mere vessels for the discovery of the world “out there”, so too might change agents use similar “externalizing devices” (Potter 1996: 150) to justify the ideas they are translating. For example, presenting an idea as a rational solution to external circumstances that exist “out there” - such as changes in customer preferences, competitor behaviour or technological advances - can help to present the idea as both inevitable and desirable.

### *Dealing with Categories of Persons*

Categorisation devices refer to the way in which a speaker chooses to describe themselves and others, which carry with them social and moral implications - i.e. who is a member of what social group and what responsibilities, expectations, rights and obligations does their membership involve (Edwards 1995: 581-2). Pro-nouns are one way of achieving these categorisations: to refer to management as “them”, for example, also implicitly constructs another category of “us”, suggesting a different group with different needs, goals and values. Alternatively, if the term “we” is used this implies a sense of ‘commonality’ with the audience – a common identity and set of goals that seeks to unite those categorised – thereby creating an “affiliative atmosphere” (Greatbach and Clark 2005: 35). Categories can also be used to justify our entitlement and qualification for making a claim. For example, when a person states “the CEO told me that lean production is the only way forward”, they are presenting the CEO as part of a category of person with knowledge and authority that should be respected. The careful management of categorization devices, we suggest, is therefore crucial for the translation of an idea.

### *Dealing with Counter-Arguments using Concession*

To concede a counter-argument or critical comment is not always to admit the failure of an idea or argument. Concession is an example of a ‘reflexive comment’ that can enable the speaker to present him- or her-self as critical of themselves and their own arguments, and therefore to be trusted as a fair judge (Mulholland 1994: 82). A show concession makes “a show of conceding and, in making such a show, fortifies the speaker’s position against misunderstanding or attack” (Antaki and Wetherell 1999: 23). Conceding a point can act to strengthen a speaker’s account and undermine a counter-argument by displaying that the speaker is aware of all sides of the argument before making a judgement (Antaki and Wetherell 1999) – in addition to displaying empathy for the counter-position. Concession may therefore be a crucial discursive device for the purposes of smoothing the ground for an idea to spread, especially in the face of resistance.

### *Dealing with Authenticity*

The authenticity of a narrative is a crucial concern for speaker and recipient alike. Recipients are understandably wary and cynical about so-called ‘scripted’ or rehearsed speech. By presenting one’s views as *authentic* rather than ‘scripted’ a speaker can appear more genuine and sincere (Potter 1996: 197-199). Confessions of emotions, for instance, might be treated as ‘fake’ or insincere, and ‘inner feelings’ may therefore have to be ‘vouched for’ to achieve an authentic narrative (Edwards 1999: 283). In terms of the translation of ideas, displaying authenticity can be used to indicate *personal conviction* in the idea, to avoid the impression that the seller is just ‘someone doing their job’. For instance, authenticity devices are crucial for the display of “absolute certainty and conviction” involved in the “evangelist” style speeches of management gurus (Greatbach and Clark 2005: 22).

### *Dealing with the Appearance of Spontaneity*

Making oneself appear to be acting spontaneously can be one way of achieving, among other things, a compelling and credible account. For example, a change agent may appear to suddenly break from a ‘script’ and offer a more spontaneous, personal narrative. Spontaneity can be marked via routine indicators: for example a singer’s chatter between songs is typically seen as spontaneous. However, as Goffman (1974: 132-3) observed, this effect of spontaneity can itself be planned-for and scripted. Those tasked with translating an idea might use spontaneity devices to avoid the appearance of being an ‘automaton’ or ‘dupe’ of management.

### *Dealing with Others’ Talk using Formulation*

Formulation refers to what happens when one speaker acts to summarise what those present (or a certain section thereof) seem to agree on. Formulation seeks to “‘package’ the previous interaction” (Potter 1996: 48) and offer “a public display of agreed intersubjectivity” (Antaki et al. 2007: 168). According to Potter (1996: 48), “such formulations are not neutral, abstract summaries ... [but] have specific upshots relevant to future actions”. Formulations allow interactional business to proceed by establishing what can (for now) be taken for granted. This interactional business can include institutional task fulfilment – including, we suggest, the task of translating an

idea. In fact, Shotter and Cunliffe (2003: 20) argue that a central task of managers is to create “intelligible formulations” of “where we are now and where we might go next”. These formulations, developed in dialogue with others, work to give “shape and direction to the actions of other participants in the organization” (ibid).

### *Dealing with Responsibility using Nominalisation*

Nominalisation, the changing of nouns to verbs or vice versa, is an important discursive device because it enables the speaker to obscure patterns of agency and responsibility (Potter 1996: 182). For example, the phrase “The police killed the protestors” can be transformed into “The killing of the protestors” to obscure the role of those involved. In the case of the translating of ideas, nominalisation may be used to obscure issues of power and control, for instance. To state “It has been decided that we need to implement TQM” presents the situation very differently to “Management have decided that we need to implement TQM” – with consequences for how the idea is received by the audience.

The table below offers an overview and summary of our discussion of the discursive devices relevant to the translation of ideas.

	<b>Discursive Device</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Key sources</b>
<b>1</b>	Empathy/Sympathy	Displaying an understanding of another’s situation, particularly with regard to their feelings.	Fairclough (1992: 148), Ruusuvuori (2007: 618), Samra-Fredericks (2004)
<b>2</b>	Stake Attribution	Appealing to the vested interest or stake of another, particularly with regard to discounting or doubting the position of another.	Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001: 21), Potter (1996: 125)
<b>3</b>	Stake Inoculation	Denying or downplaying the stake or vested interest the speaker has in a situation.	Potter (1996: 125-132)
<b>4</b>	Footing	Positioning ourselves in relation to what we say: distinction between author, animator and principal. Pronoun selection (eg. “we”, “us”, “them”) is one way of doing this.	Goffman (1981), Clayman (1992), Potter (1996: Ch.5), Potter and Puchta (2007)
<b>5</b>	Externalisation (‘out-there-ness’)	Presenting a description as independent of the speaker doing the construction.	Edwards (2005: 6), Potter (1996: Ch 6), Edwards and Potter (1992: 105)

6	Categorisation	The social categories used to describe yourself and others, including what responsibilities, expectations, rights and obligations are involved. Pronoun selection (eg. “we”, “us”, “them”) is one way of doing this.	Edwards (1995: 581)
7	Concession	Explicit acknowledgement of actual or potential counter-arguments, to appear more balanced, informed and thoughtful.	Antaki and Wetherell (1999: 23)
8	Authenticity	Describing one’s self and one’s beliefs as authentic and based on personal conviction, as opposed to simply following orders or peer pressure, for example.	Potter (1996: 197-199)
9	Spontaneity	Presenting one’s self as acting in a natural, unplanned manner.	Goffman (1974: 132-3)
10	Formulation	A statement of what has just happened in an interaction, summarizing what is taken to be already known or agreed.	Antaki, Barnes and Leudar (2007)
11	Nominalisation	Replacing nouns with verbs, adjectives or adverbs to avoid mentioning those who performed the action, particularly to avoid attribution of blame or responsibility.	Potter (1996: 182), Potter (1996: 155-157)

**Table 1 Overview of (selected) Discursive Devices**

## **Methodology**

In this paper we draw on data from a study of organizational change in a UK public-private partnership called Back2Work (all names are pseudonyms). Back2Work was founded in 2000 and offered unemployment services contracted from the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help jobseekers to find work. The study focused on the implementation of a new IT system called Quality Framework (QF), designed to comply with new contractual requirements introduced by the DWP about the quality of data held about the jobseekers. The study involved a range of methods, including semi-structured interviews, field visits, observations, documentary analysis and telephone and email exchanges. The focus of this paper is a fine-grained analysis of one training event that was observed as part of the study. We focus here on explaining how and why we chose to analyze this one event, rather than discussing the findings of the study as a whole.

Discursive Psychology (DP) – the field upon which our Discursive Devices Analysis (DDA) draws - has a strong preference for naturally-occurring observational data because it seeks to analyse discourse in the context of the turn-by-turn sequences in which they occur (Wiggins and Potter 2008). Moreover, in terms of our interest in translation, detailed analysis of observational data, we suggest, enables us to understand the actual practice of “idea translating”, as compared to the reported experience that is gathered using the interview or questionnaire method (Samra-Fredericks 2003). Real-time recordings allow a more complete and accurate analysis that can also be checked by other readers (Silverman 1993). Analysing a single social event or conversation (or extracts from it) is a common-place and accepted method within the fields of linguistics, discursive psychology, discourse studies, ethnomethodology and conversational analysis (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998).

Why did we choose to analyze DDs within specific episodes of a training session? We chose to analyze a training session because of our interest in the translation of management ideas: training events are often the first place that recipients come to hear about and make sense of a new idea. We chose to focus our analysis on three interactional ‘episodes’ within the training session for several reasons. Doing DDA requires focussing the ‘research microscope’ onto a series of interactional episodes because this enables us to understand the “development of a piece of social action as it accumulates over the length of an episode ... which can build over many turns” (Antaki and Horowitz 2000: 157). Analyzing DDs across the whole five-hour tape-recording is therefore neither possible nor desirable from a DDA perspective. We use the term ‘episode’ to indicate a relatively distinct series of conversational turns organized around a particular theme, such as an ‘opening sales spiel’, ‘dealing with resistance’, ‘coffee break chatter’ etc. However, there are no ‘hard and fast’ rules for establishing what an ‘episode’ is, when a new ‘episode’ starts, or indeed, which ‘episodes’ are worthy of further analysis. While we could have chosen other episodes to analyse, we chose the three in this paper because they show distinct *shifts* in the DDs being used to sell the new quality idea in our case.

How did we decide what constituted a DD? And which DDs to focus on? Again, while there are no “hard and fast rules” (Wiggins and Potter 2008: 81), we follow the theoretical principles of DP by viewing DDs as collections of words (whether a single phrase or much longer set of related utterances) that indicate “the categories, constructions and orientations through which a moment of understanding

are displayed in a piece of interaction in a particular setting” (Wiggins and Potter 2008: 73). DDA is best understood as a particular theoretical lens on studying social interaction, rather than a method for identifying and classifying entities that exist “out there”. All forms of talk within both ‘ordinary’ and ‘institutional’ settings (formal organizations, dinner party conversation, courtrooms, classrooms etc) can fall within this remit of analysis: DDA is not reserved for unusual or unique events and places. The DDs we have listed in Table 1 are based on our literature review of the field of DP, but many more types of DD will undoubtedly be developed, as DP continues to advance knowledge in this field. We have chosen to discuss those DDs that were (a) core, well-developed themes within DP, and (b) relevant to the study of the translation of management ideas.

How does DDA approach the process of data analysis? In our analysis, we locate our interpretation as much as possible in the data themselves, i.e. features of the talk itself, in line with principles shared by both Conversation Analysis (Drew and Heritage 1992) and DP. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that other interpretations are possible of ‘what is going on here’. We base our interpretation on both our experience from the field of being present at the training event (one author was present as researcher), our knowledge of the organization and its context from our wider study, and, of course, our theoretical ‘lens’ shaped by DP. For DP, talk and text are treated as “interactional objects” (Potter and Hepburn 2005: 281) as opposed to “windows” on the reality lying behind the use of language. DP therefore rejects the “mirror-image” assumption that lies behind both positivistic views of language as a source of facts about the world, and so-called ‘emotionalist’ approaches that view language as reflective of inner emotional experience (ibid: 284). As such, “utterances are necessarily context-dependant” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000: 202) and therefore should not be seen as “unambiguous entry points to the understanding of actions, ideas or events” (ibid). DP deliberately rejects the quest for a direct causal link between what is said and other ‘entities’, such as attitudes, meanings, or emotions (Potter 2003).

According to Potter and Edwards (2001: 107), DP firmly rejects the idea that social life should be viewed as “the consequence of an interplay of factors which have more or less regular patterns and determinate outcomes”. The idea of ‘measuring’ the impact of DDs falls foul of this realist ‘factors and outcomes’ approach. For example, if recipients were asked to complete a questionnaire, or be interviewed, about how

DDs affected their ‘attitudes’ towards an idea, or their propensity to ‘adopt’ an idea, this would provide no firm evidence for making conclusions about their so-called ‘attitudes’ or ‘dispositions’ beyond providing more examples of situated language-use (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Questions such as ‘were the attitudes of the audience actually changed as a result of the DDs?’ are both unproductive and analytically incompatible with DP. The very foundation of DP is built upon rejecting the view of language as a mirror that reflects cognitive or affective psychological states, such as memories, attitudes or emotions (Edwards and Potter 1992). The search for a causal relationship between a particular discursive device and an organizational outcome, such as ‘successful’ implementation of an idea, is characteristic of a realist or positivist framework that DP firmly rejects (Potter 1996). We adopt Potter and Edwards’ (2001: 107) argument that a particular discursive device is not treated as “guaranteeing persuasion; rather it is oriented to persuasion”. Any discursive device can be always be countered or contested (ibid). Therefore, our claim is not that the use of a device, such as empathy, had a direct causal impact on recipients’ willingness or receptiveness towards an idea. Rather, our claim is that empathy-talk is one of the many discursive devices that form an important part of the social practice of translating an idea. Recipients may well reject an empathy device as a ‘sham’ or ‘spin’, perhaps even making them *more* resistant to change, but empathy-talk was still employed nonetheless.

Finally, the DDA approach does of course mean trading-off some breadth of analysis (i.e. analysing the findings of the whole study, including the institutional context) in order to gain depth of analysis (i.e. analysing in detail a single conversational event). However, DP is not simply about studying supposedly trivial features of mundane interactions. It is through these micro-interactions, we argue, that the translation of an idea occurs. To dismiss DDs as “surface babble” is to miss the fact that DDs comprise a key method through which ideas are translated, whether ‘successfully’ or not.

### **The Dynamics of a Training Event**

Training comprises an important component in the movement of ideas because “training typically plays a crucial role in order for ideas, values and practices to be produced and diffused” (Sturdy 2002: 131). According to Huczynski (1993: 220),

training is one of the primary “means through which management ideas penetrate behaviour in organizations and company processes”. In what follows, we analyse the discursive devices employed by two ‘change agents’ during a training event at Back2Work by distinguishing between three episodes: firstly, the start of the training event, secondly an episode where the session goes into ‘rough waters’ and, thirdly, an informal conversation during a coffee break.

### **Episode 1: The Training Session Begins**

When the two researchers arrived at the Midlands office, they were directed to a small open-plan area because the small city-centre office had no dedicated training room. As the participants started to arrive, the two trainers Shirley and Catherine tried to make a projection screen for their presentation by sticking white flipchart sheets onto the wall. Fourteen participants, including two trainers, ten administrative staff and two researchers – one of the authors and a research assistant employed on the project, were sat in a room designed to fit four workstations. The session was scheduled to last one day, with an introduction to the new system led by the trainers in the morning, followed by a practical ‘hands-on’ session using the new system in the afternoon. Shirley began by introducing herself and Catherine and apologising for the cramped conditions. After pointing out the toilets, coffee machine and fire escape exits, Shirley began the training session by offering an opening ‘spiel’ about the new quality framework system:

- 1 Shirley: Right, ok. So, if I was to say to you Quality Framework is here.
- 2 It’s a new way of working – forgive that phrase – ...
- 3 When it comes to audit time, we know as a business, don’t we, that
- 4 We’re running around, dotting I’s, crossing Ts. Some of us work on
- 5 Saturdays. *You* guys, *I* know, when it comes to audit time, it’s manic,
- 6 isn’t it? Because you’re having to check everything. *We know* that as
- 7 A business and we know as a business that we’ve made errors. Ok?
- 8 We’re over 5 years old now and unfortunately as a business we’ve
- 9 also lost money because our audit has not been 100%. But the Quality
- 10 Framework has been introduced to try and eliminate all of that and it
- 11 will be an ongoing audit process, ok, to coin a phrase from what
- 12 somebody said last week. It’s a continual audit process, so that when
- 13 you know audit comes up, we’re *not* manically running around, we’re
- 14 *not* sitting in on a Saturday filing away all our paperwork. It’s an
- 15 ongoing audit process, ok? *You* guys, *I’m* pretty confident, are going
- 16 to buy into this today because it’s going to make your job a little bit

17 easier, ok? .... It's going to make you guys, your job, a lot easier  
18 with your communication with our consultants. And clearly what  
19 Catherine and I will do is demonstrate that to you today. I want you to  
20 feel comfortable to ask any questions. Am, if we don't have the  
21 answer, we'll log them and endeavour to get the answer by the end of  
22 the day. Clearly, we've gone around the business and delivered this.  
23 We've had so many questions thrown at us that, if we don't have the  
24 answer we'll find it out for you. So, what we're going to do is show  
25 you the new process maps, the new Employment Zone process maps.

While there are undoubtedly many things happening here, we will focus on some discursive devices in greater detail. One of the first discursive devices employed by Shirley is an *empathetic* stance [lines 5-6] that demonstrates her awareness of the feelings and situation of the recipients [DD 1 in Table 1]. Empathy is displayed using a form of sympathy, seemingly oriented to establish a bond with the audience. In lines 5-6 and 15-18, Shirley's empathy-talk signals some degree of understanding of the difficulties her audience face (eg. "it's manic isn't it?" [lines 5-6]) and thereby invites the audience to reach a certain conclusion *jointly*, namely that the recipients will benefit from the change ("it's going to make... your job a lot easier" [line 17]). This discursive device enables her to portray the change process as a positive, instrumentally useful initiative. While the 'needs of the business' [lines 6-11] are indeed invoked, this notably comes *after* the display of empathy for the audience in question. Given our inspiration from DP, our focus here is on the *display* of feelings of sympathy and empathy, without speculating about whether the feeling (sympathy) was 'genuine' on the part of the speaker, or whether reciprocal feelings were generated among the audience. The empathy device illustrates the *dialogical* aspects of the interaction, in spite of the apparently monological "speech" given by the trainer. Empathy talk displays a kind of dialogue *built into* the speech: the trainer makes explicit reference to how the audience might feel ("manically running around", working "on a Saturday") in a kind of *dialogue with the other* within her talk.

In lines 4-6 and 15-17, Shirley constructs and naturalizes a set of interests for her audience, by framing the new quality regime as something that will make their jobs "a little bit easier". This interest attribution [DD 2 in Table 1] sets up an alluring way of making sense of the change, implying 'it is legitimate to be motivated by selfish reasons'. It is a device that seeks to appeal to instrumental motives to get others 'on board', if they are not already. The phrase 'Quality Framework has been

introduced' [line 9-10] is an impersonal construction which leaves agency and responsibility fuzzy – an example of *nominalization* [DD 11 in Table 1]. It also presents the change in the past tense, as something that has “already happened” and therefore beyond debate. Further, the repeated use of the term ‘we’ [lines 6-8] is a common-place device known as a *membership categorisation device* [DD 6 in Table 1], which invokes a form of identification and solidarity with the ‘we’ group. On this occasion, the term ‘we’ seems to infer a set of shared interests and objectives between the trainers, the audience and the rest of the organization (i.e. ‘we are all in this together’) – tackling the ‘problem’ of having “lost money” because of failed audits [line 9]. ‘Having made errors’ and ‘lost money’ [lines 7 and 9] is presented as a description of things “out there” that are held as facts: an example of *externalisation* or “out-there-ness” [DD 5 in Table 1]. This account also invokes a *collective* interest-attribution [DD 2 in Table 1], i.e. we are all motivated by the needs of the business. Interestingly, this differs from the *sectional* interest-attribution discussed above, i.e. you are motivated by making your jobs easier.

In lines 15-16, Shirley displays the *authenticity* of her belief in the new idea by emphasising her personal conviction in the benefits the changes will bring for the recipients: “I’m pretty confident...” [DD 8 in Table 1]. This presents her as someone with an authentic and genuine passion for the idea, as opposed to someone just ‘going through the motions’ and doing their job. In terms of footing [DD 4 in Table 1], then, Shirley presents herself as not simply an animator (I am voicing the idea of another) but also a principal and author (I think and believe these ideas). This bolsters the aforementioned sense of authenticity and personal conviction [DD 8 in Table 1]. Overall, this analysis of the ‘opening spiel’ is significant for revealing how discursive devices can be used to find different (and possibly conflicting) ‘angles’ through which to (attempt to) facilitate the translation of management ideas. However, this talk is relatively *monological*, given that the audience have not yet responded to what has been said. The next extract looks at what happens when the back-and-forth *dialogue* begins.

## **Episode 2: The Session Goes into Rough Waters**

Following the initial opening ‘spiel’ by Shirley analysed above, Catherine loaded onto the screen a document outlining the new ‘quality process’. Shirley then began to explain the work process required by the new IT system. However, within just twenty

minutes, the audience had begun to express doubts, concerns and complaints about the new process. Sarah, an Administrator, and Ali, the Performance Manager, seemed keen to highlight a potential problem with getting the required paperwork from the local government-run jobcentres. The researchers noted that Shirley began to look dispirited – her voice became decidedly less ‘chirpy’ and she slumped back in her chair.

- 1 Sarah ...so that’s gonna be a little bit of a problem for us.  
2 Ali Is this taken from the DWP?  
3 Catherine Yes.  
4 [inaudible overlapping talk]  
5 Shirley This little niggle, while we’ve started off, is not exclusive to  
6 Birmingham. Clearly what we’ve been able to do is, we’ve  
7 been allowed to follow it up a couple of weeks later, or maybe,  
8 you know, more than a couple of weeks clearly in your case. This  
9 is part of audit requirements as well, which is why it’s here - it’s  
10 not just a rule that we stick in for *fun*. Erm, and what we’ve been  
11 advised is that, locally, you’re gonna have to speak to your local  
12 district [inaudible].  
13 Catherine What will help is - and when you, you’ll see the [new] system -  
14 ... we’ll get the stats to run reports up to say which jobcentres are  
15 good at sending the paperwork in on time and which are bad. And  
16 you can use that then to negotiate with the jobcentres that aren’t  
17 Getting it in on time. And it helps keep track of what’s where and  
18 how long it’s taking.  
19 [After further discussion, Shirley continues reading out new  
‘process map’]  
20 Shirley [reading from screen] “Performance Manager interrogates”. We  
21 have an issue with that word, Catherine and I.  
22 Catherine Yeah, we don’t like ‘interrogates’. We didn’t put these together.  
23 Shirley We’re just delivering this. We don’t like it.

The optimistic ethos displayed by Shirley in her earlier ‘sales pitch’ appears to have been disrupted by her audience. Her earlier framing of the situation as “this is in your interests” appears to have broken down. What was earlier cast as a positive change that would help the audience in accomplishing their jobs is re-cast, by Sarah, as a problematic process which does not correlate with their lived experience. Sarah provides a formulation [line 1] [DD 10 in Table 1] which provides a summary of (partial) intersubjectivity, namely, the worries expressed by the audience just before (Note: the lengthy exchange that preceded Sarah’s turn has not been included due to space limitations).

The *dialogical* aspects of the translation process are most striking in this extract. According to Shotter and Cunliffe (2003: 17), dialogue occurs “when a listener perceives and understands the meaning of another’s voiced utterance”. The two trainers, Shirley and Catherine, have clearly *listened* to the concerns of the audience because they do not simply repeat what they said before in their opening spiel. Rather, they change their discursive devices (or place more emphasis on some used earlier) to respond to what has been said. Crucially, this response is crafted to *re-formulate* (i.e. re-interpret) the audience’s previous formulation, without necessarily *agreeing* with it: to agree would be to ‘admit defeat’ and concede that the new idea is a “bad idea”, undermining the very process of change.

In response to Sarah’s formulation, Shirley attempts to downplay the criticisms voiced by the audience and reassure them that they will be supported throughout the implementation process. The externalization device [DD 5 in Table 1] enables Shirley to present the situation as a necessary response to the external reality “out there” dictated by “audit requirements” [line 9]. This device is then followed by stake inoculation [DD 3 in Table 1], where she emphasises the absence of any vested interest or ulterior motive on her part: “not just a rule we stick in for fun” [line 10]. Catherine then bolsters Shirley’s position by suggesting some practical solutions to the audience’s concerns [lines 13-18], which displays that the audience’s concerns have been listened to and taken onboard. This display of ‘listening’ is a crucial element of dialogue, where a speaker *verbalises* that they have understood the meaning of another’s talk (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 17).

A complex shift in *footing* [DD 4 in Table 1] is achieved within this extract. The trainers seem to sense the growing unease amongst the audience and present themselves as merely ‘animators’, because this was (a) an externally-enforced change [lines 9-10], and (b) they are themselves critical of (some parts of) the new idea [lines 20-23]. This reflexive change in stance suggests an attempt to *identify* with the audience and place themselves in the same *category* [DD 6 in Table 1]: akin to “we are also ‘victims’ of external forces, just like you”. By distancing themselves from the idea (“We’re just delivering this. We don’t like it.”), they create an opposition between “us” and “them”: those who designed the new system and enforced the change. Shirley and Catherine thereby present themselves as just the animators, not the principals or authors. This footing shift [DD 4 in Table 1] can be read as an attempt to recognize and deal with a potentially awkward situation, that is, the threat

to the smooth running of the training session and the position of the trainers as competent, and to some degree *independent*, change agents.

### Episode 3: Coffee Break Chatter

Throughout the morning session the audience continued to voice further concerns. Shirley and Catherine seemed to be facing a difficult task in ‘converting’ their audience. After an hour and a half, Shirley decided to pause the training session for a ‘coffee and comfort’ break. Shirley perched on the edge of the desk for an informal conversation with Ali, Sarah and Kelly, as they waited for the others to return.

- 1 Shirley: It’s not going to happen overnight, it’s not, particularly with  
2 how you guys work there’s going to be some teething issues.  
3 It’s a new process, Kelly, and people just don’t like that change,  
4 do they? I think – Catherine and I are delivering a process that  
5 the business has agreed to do. It ain’t – it’s never gonna be  
6 popular to *your* team, because actually you’re sitting there  
7 thinking actually I’ve got more [inaudible]. Over time however  
8 it *won’t* be because things will be more *defined*. But initially,  
9 initially you’re going to have that kickback where it’s a little too  
10 much. And you’re right [inaudible] But eventually, come audit  
11 time, you guys aren’t gonna have to do the running around that  
12 you normally have to do because this is ongoing audit. Now I  
13 haven’t got that scripted that’s just from me. You know, that’s  
14 just something *I* thought.
- 15 Sarah: I think it’s good because it will prevent a lot of lost paperwork.  
[inaudible talk – noise and chatter as people filter back into the  
room from the coffee break]
- 16 Shirley: I think as well – [participants now all seated again after break]  
17 - oh, by the way, welcome back, you’ve all come back now,  
18 thankyou – the overall aim of this game I suppose is to get  
19 quality right. ‘Quality equals audit equals get paid’. At the end  
20 of the day that’s what it’s all about, isn’t it, that we pass the  
21 audit. ....

In this episode we observed yet again an important series of changes in footing [DD 4 in Table 1]. The phrase “a process that the business has agreed to do ...” (line 4-5), places “the business” [line 5] in the role of principal – making the trainers only the animators. This means that the trainers’ responsibility is (again) reduced. Moreover, Shirley’s reference to “the business” [line 5] can be seen as a form of nominalisation [DD 11 in Table 1] that obscures agency. This is immediately followed by two ‘show concessions’ in lines 5-6 and line 9 [DD 7 in Table 1]. Shirley concedes that the

change may well be a difficult process and agrees with the earlier complaint that it could involve more work. The concession device also acts to display a reasoned and reflective position that may help to win the sympathy of the audience. Note how this concession represents a *shift* from her original framing in Extract 1 ('this will make your jobs easier'). Hence, the concession device shows the *dialogical* nature of translating ideas: Shirley shows that she has *listened to, seemingly understood and incorporated* the thoughts, feeling and anxieties of others. These shifts in discourse are how actors "show themselves to have understood the previous turn(s) at talk" (Fairhurst 2009: 1612). What the quality idea *means* – in this case, whether it means more work or less work - has been *translated* in the process of dialogue with the audience.

Another noticeable shift in this extract is towards a *personalisation* of the narrative, as Shirley stresses the *authenticity* of her views [DD 8 in Table 1] on lines 13-14. This stands in contrast to the earlier footing position of 'animator', implied in the distancing and de-personalisation that accompany nominalisation [see lines 4-5]. In contrast, in lines 13-14 Shirley displays herself as the 'principal' and 'author' by describing the strength of her *personal conviction* in the belief that the change is a positive force that should be embraced. Shirley does this by presenting her passion for the new idea as spontaneous and un-scripted [DD 9 in Table 1]: "I haven't got that scripted that's just from me". The combination of footing, authenticity and sponetneity help to present Shirley as a genuine 'evangelist' rather than just someone 'doing their job'. By explicitly framing her talk as spontaneous and non-scripted, the audience are invited to think that their colleague has a genuine conviction rather than simply repeating a 'script'.

To bring together our analysis, a summary of the discursive devices we have analysed is given in Table 2 below:

	<b>Event</b>	<b>Discursive Devices</b>	<b>Table 1 reference</b>
<b>Episode 1</b>	Opening a training session	Empathy/Sympathy, Interest Attribution, Footing, Externalization, Categorisation, Authenticity, Nominalisation.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11
<b>Episode 2</b>	Dealing with audience resistance	Stake inoculation, Footing Shift, Externalization, Categorization, Formulation.	3, 4, 5, 6, 10
<b>Episode 3</b>	Informal talk	Footing Shift, Show Concession,	4, 7, 8, 9, 11

	during a coffee break	Authenticity, Spontaneity, Nominalisation.	
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**Table 2 Summary of Discursive Devices across Three Episodes**

### **Conclusion and Theoretical Implications**

Our theoretical point of departure was the issue of how ideas are translated through a process of “co-creation” with audiences in organizations. We suggest that the understanding of how ideas are translated within and between organizations can be enriched by drawing on the extensive research programme that exists in the field of Discursive Psychology. We have sought to demonstrate the value of understanding the role of micro-linguistic practices, or ‘discursive devices’ as we call them, involved in the translation of ‘quality’ ideas in a UK public-private partnership. Our study has shown how the ‘change champions’, responsible for training employees about a new ‘quality’ idea, were creative in employing discursive devices during their dialogue with the audience. Discursive devices were used to translate the quality idea, by finding new angles with which to position themselves, appeal to the interests of the audience, ‘sell’ the new idea, deal with resistance and identify and empathise with the audience. But what is the contribution of a DDA for the field of Organization Studies? What can DDA offer that existing discourse approaches do not? What are the limitations of DDA? How does DDA go beyond existing studies of the movement of ideas and micro-workplace studies? We will address these questions in turn.

#### *DDA and Discourse Analysis*

How, then, does DDA differ from other methods of analysing discourse? Existing approaches have been heavily influenced by two main sources: the work of Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough and colleagues. Work inspired by Foucault has tended to understand discourse as the “general and prevalent systems for the formation and articulation of ideas in a particular period of time ... functioning as a powerful ordering force” (Alvesson and Karreman 2000: 1126-7). Thus, instead of defining discourse through its authors, Foucauldian perspectives suggest that “the power of discourse becomes evaluated through the kinds of authors or subjects it creates” (Wetherell and Potter 1992: 80). Perhaps not surprisingly, Foucauldian work has been criticized for adopting an overly muscular view of the power of discourse,

for reducing the plurality of social practice to one or two Discourse categories and for viewing agents as fragile puppets of Discourse (Newton 1998; Fournier and Grey 1999; Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). We do not want to adjudicate as to whether this critique is correct. Clearly, the *primary* focus of DDA is on what agents do *with* discourse (hence why it is often referred to as a performative or action-oriented approach) as opposed to focussing on what Discourses do *to* agents (following the Foucauldian approach). This defines both its strengths but also its limitations. Indeed, work that is inspired by CA in particular has been criticized for “focussing too heavily on the immediate context of previous utterances to the neglect of broader cultural concerns” (Fairhurst 2009: 1612). However, some strands of DP (particularly the work of Wetherell and colleagues) have made attempts to overcome this rigid separation and have emphasized DP’s compatibility with a Foucauldian interest in issues such as power and subjectivity (eg Wetherell and Potter 1992: 62, 67, 79-87; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003; Dixon and Wetherell 2004).

As Potter and Hepburn (2008: 3) argue, DP embraces research that seeks to “draw on some of Foucault’s insights about institutions, practice and the nature of subjectivity.” Whether or not this project of synthesis is possible or desirable is beyond the scope of this paper: we cannot adjudicate with regard to its promise or prospects. For our present purposes, it suffices to say that while DDA is not well-suited to tracing the power of Grand Discourses at the scale of broad historical shifts in power/knowledge, what it can do is help us to re-conceptualize our understanding of the relationship between discourse and subjects at the scale of daily social encounters. In our study, for example, the change agents were not simply dictated by Grand Discourse (such as the discourse of New Public Management enforced by the Government contractor in our case). Rather, they were creative and reflexive agents capable of using discourse to achieve social action – in this case the action of translating an idea and running a training session.

DDA has equally subtle but important differences with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach advanced by Fairclough and colleagues. Fairclough’s work examines the “wider hegemonic struggles to establish, maintain, undermine and restructure hegemonies on the part of alliances of social forces” (Fairclough 1995: 128). For Fairclough, these elements are part of “the real”, to which he attributes “causal powers” (2005: 922). This is a key distinction between DDA and Fairclough. For DDA, language is not simply a vessel through which actors “express or signal”

(van Dijk 1995: 18) their opinions, positions or interests. These things do not simply *pre-exist* discourse and *drive* what people do with discourse. For instance, Fairclough claims to examine “non-discoursal elements” (2005: 924) such as social structures, which are presented as lying outside the realm of discourse. In contrast, for DDA, language is the primary medium through which these so-called “extra-discursive” things are accounted for, constructed and managed (Potter and Hepburn 2008). For example, DDA enables us to examine the devices used to make things appear “out there” [DD 5 in Table 1] and independent of the person producing the description. These ‘externalising devices’ are crucial for the translation of ideas, we suggest, because they help to present an idea as inevitable, an objective response to external conditions.

### *The Movement of Ideas*

The discursive devices we have analyzed are not reserved for training sessions only – the focus of our analysis – but are relevant for the movement of ideas more generally (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005). DDA is context-sensitive but not context-bound (Fairhurst 1993: 337): we have studied ‘quality’ but our analysis can equally be applied to other management ideas. We propose that DDs comprise a key component of the micro-interactional work of other ‘idea-translators’, such as managers, consultants and management gurus. Moreover, we propose that DDs are not reserved for special individuals with a certain “special skill” (Greatbach and Clark 2005: 4) in persuasion or leadership. We do not claim, like Greatbach and Clark (2005), that our research subjects were uniquely successful, influential and gifted individuals. Rather, DDs are part of the “ordinary social competence” (Sturdy 2002: 134) that we all use in negotiating social life, albeit with varying degrees of success. Just as politicians make skilful use of language to persuade and inspire audiences in their public speeches and media interviews (Atkinson 1984; Heritage and Greatbach 1986), so too the translation of management ideas relies upon the skilful use of language. DDA therefore provides us with a rigorous set of analytical tools for analyzing this language-use. If we accept Clark’s (2004: 302) argument about the “‘malleability’ and ‘plasticity’” of popular management ideas, then we need to understand the role of language in moulding and shaping those ideas. DDA offers just this framework.

DDA is a thoroughly *dialogical* approach, attuned to “the moment-by-moment unfolding of relationally responsive events” (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 18). Bakhtin (1986: 68-9) says that “the speaker talks with an expectation of a response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth” (cited in Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 17). Indeed, our analysis shows how the footing [DD 4 in Table 1], for instance, adopted by change agents in relation to the ideas they were translating shifted subtly in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the conversation. In this sense, our extracts are not inane “hawking in the market” rituals: in a number of occasions it is clear that actors were responding, after *listening*, to others. Following Shotter and Cunliffe (2003), we suggest that the translation of ideas relies on actors being “sensitive and subtle listeners, as well as sensitive and subtle talkers” (p. 22).

DDA adopts a process philosophy that focuses on organizing (as a verb) rather than organization (as a noun). Questions such as “was the idea actually diffused/implemented?” are replaced with a focus on the process of how meanings are continually constructed during the “complex, back and forth, unfolding process of mutual construction” (Cunliffe 2001: 353). As our study shows, what the quality idea “was” and could “do” changed continually throughout this dialogical process. Drawing on Bakhtin and Foucault, Cunliffe (2001, p.357) argues that “managers may be seen as co-authors and products of discourse”. As we have shown, DDA is one avenue for advancing this theory.

Our study supports Sturdy’s (2002) view of the movement of ideas through “interaction and negotiation/contestation” (p. 131). What we add is a set of conceptual tools from DP through which to analyse the interactional devices involved in this negotiation/contestation. The value of DDA is apparent when looking at Sturdy’s own work, particularly his observation of a trainer who was translating customer service ideas. The trainer in Sturdy’s study recites the phrase “sexy words make happy customers”, then gestures sticking her fingers down her throat, as if to make herself sick (Sturdy 2002: 144), to indicate she thought the idea was “sickening”. Sturdy views this “sick gesture” example as potentially “undermining and weakening” the translation of an idea (ibid, p. 144). This is only one interpretation however. From a DDA perspective, this could be seen as a footing shift [DD 4 in Table 1]: “I may be saying these words (animator), but I do not agree with them (principal)”. We view DDs, such as footing shifts in this case, as part of the skilled social practice of

translation. Any gesture or phrase does not receive its meaning from a presumed intention, sitting behind it. The trainer in Sturdy's case could feasibly have been responding to the general "instrumentality" (ibid, p. 145) amongst recipients, and hence framed it as something they have to do, even if they (like her) do not believe in it. We suggest that distancing oneself from the "company line" using a footing shift might even be effective if, as Knights and McCabe (2000b) found, managers can be discredited if they are deemed to be "brainwashed" (p. 1503) or "careerist" (p. 1503) when they regurgitate "management speak" (p. 1496) and tow "the corporate line" (p. 1503). DDA is valuable because it draws our attention to the subtle but important linguistic elements involved in achieving a footing shift, signalled by the "sick gesture" in Sturdy's case. We agree with Dewulf et al. (2009: 174) that "(c)hanges in footing are resources for participants to achieve particular goals, for example, handling disagreements indirectly ...". Without DDA, these important linguistic moves might be missed, or dismissed as unimportant.

While the literature has already documented how ideas become altered and edited as they move across time and space (eg. Sahlin-Andersson 1996), our DDA approach contributes further by revealing how the *relationship between the translator and the idea* can also change in the process of diffusion. Changes in footing, for instance, are not only "a persistent feature of natural talk" (Goffman 1981: 128), but may also have a specific role in the translation of managerial ideas. We established a number of circumstances where footing in particular was managed such as to emphasize the absence of authorship/principal-ship, but accept the more limited animator role and responsibility: "footing provides a set of distinctions that guide the assignment of blame, compliments, scepticism" (Potter 1996: 122). The change agents in our study presented their actions as unrelated to their own personal desires, i.e. 'this is not something we designed'.

We suggest that footing shifts play an important role in "the achievement of neutrality" (Potter 1996: 143). Neutrality is itself vital for constructing the credibility of the 'translator' that can help to establish the validity and viability of a new idea. Moreover, in changing their footing, we argue, the trainers externalised responsibility for the *broader* aspects of the change and allocate 'blame' to another, third party (those who designed or imposed the new system) – thereby implying "this is not our fault" and "we are in the same boat as you". Stake in the situation is confessed to, but

only for a *limited remit*: responsibility is both accepted (for a narrow part, as someone who is expected to advocate the change) and denied (for the larger context, responsibility is externalised) (Sillince and Mueller 2007). We propose that these DDs, such as footing shifts and stake inoculation, can facilitate the translation of an idea by displaying empathy (“I understand your situation”) and identification (“I am one of you”) with the audience. Flexibility in approach and variance from the ‘official company line’ appears to be a more “responsive” and “relational” (Cunliffe 2001: 354) approach than rigid adherence to a managerial ‘script’.

### *Micro-studies of Organizing and Organizations*

The DDA approach we have outlined goes beyond existing efforts in micro workplace studies in two ways. First, DDA provides a more fine-grained analysis of the detailed discursive mechanisms involved in the translation of ideas. This is an important move if we accept that the very *meaning* and *content* of management ideas such as TQM are “accomplished through dialogue and negotiation” (Sturdy and Fleming 2003: 768). For example, in the case of organizational culture change, “getting people to talk about the culture ... is a form of implementation in and of itself” (ibid. 766). We agree with Fairhurst’s (1993) argument that “microlevel exchanges become a watershed for determining how a vision becomes reality” (p. 331). Indeed, whilst it is commonly acknowledged that there can be scepticism and resistance among *recipients* of organizational change (Mueller and Carter 2005; Knights and McCabe 2000a), there is much less understanding of the *variegated discursive micro-tools* used by so-called ‘change agents’ to respond to such scepticism or resistance and keep the idea ‘alive’. For example, Knights and McCabe’s (2000a: 428) study of TQM implementation examines how branch quality sponsors put forward their ‘hassles’ and ‘snags’ at cluster meetings. What their study, like others in the workplace sociology mode, lacks is an investigation of the discursive devices employed at such cluster meetings *in dialogical response* to such ‘hassles’ and ‘snags’ being raised.

Second, the DDA approach helps to move beyond the assumption often made in studies of diffusion and implementation that agents do (or should) fully identify in their speech acts with the idea in question. Whilst some work has pointed to evidence of ambivalence, instrumentality, superficiality, scepticism and cynicism amongst those expected to implement managerial ideas (eg. Watson 1994; McCabe 2000;

Ogbonna and Wilkinson 2003, Whittle 2005), what has not yet been fully appreciated is the subtle deployment of discursive devices, including skilful changes in footing - for example from principal to animator - that allows for a reflexive and changing stance vis-a-vis the change process. For example, identifying oneself as an animator is situational and does not indicate a stable or permanent attitude of resistance. Indeed, our analysis shows how footing positions shifted even within a single turn at talk (see Episode 3 above, for instance). DDA is therefore sensitive to the “*momentary* nature of experience”, which “requires us to be responsive as we negotiate with others the emerging meaning of our actions” (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 22, emphasis added). Footing is a “temporary writing of self in relation to others” (Deetz 2003: 125), not a fixed or stable subject position.

In terms of a future research agenda, an important next step that is beyond the remit of this paper would be to trace the connections between the micro (eg a specific footing change within a conversational episode) with the meso (eg. attempts to ‘win over’ an audience during a period of change) and the macro (eg. the overall diffusion process of a managerial idea across an organizational field). However, following a DDA approach means always being attuned to “what actors occasion, that is, orient to in the context that make them the best arbiters of a potentially wide range of micro-, meso-, or macro-contextual features and their interrelations” (Fairhurst 2009: 3). Indeed, other research (eg Cunliffe 2001) has shown how the “traces of past conversation” (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003: 24) can be continued elsewhere, over time ‘sedimenting’ to become the taken-for-granted ways of speaking about and imagining the situation. For example, the respondent in Cunliffe’s (2001) study was shaped by the ways of talking picked up from corporate training programmes. However, it would be simplistic to think that this could easily constitute a form of *measuring* the effectiveness of training programmes, or other such moments in the translation process. A simple approach using an attitude survey of participants following the training sessions, for example, which asks questions such as ‘did you actually implement these ideas?’ would fall short of such a programme. Our DDA approach follows those approaches in organization studies that deal with process rather than outcomes (eg Tsoukas and Chia 2002). DDA contributes to the broader project of developing a “dialogic model of meaning management” (Fairhurst 2009: 1613). What DDA helps us understand better is the processes through which these ideas “come to

life” in the unfolding dialogue of interaction, in ways that “create possibilities for action” (Cunliffe 2001: 358).

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