

Philosophy, Narrative and Organisations

Dr Kevin Morrell

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Overview

The overall aim is to show how one might use ideas from Philosophy in writing about work and organisations. I will illustrate this using published work and work in progress that draws on my background in Philosophy.

The first half will look at a technique that is the basis for much of this. I will then briefly introduce four texts that will be used for study in group work. Each group will work with one of these texts, and be asked to present their analysis briefly.

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Overview - Session 2

Session 2 will start with a brief review. There will be an opportunity for groups to feed back on their analysis, and to discuss their experience of using a narrative approach. This session will also introduce some complementary ideas that concentrate specifically on the analysis of rhetoric. Groups will then be asked to choose a different text to analyse, this time concentrating on the use of rhetoric.

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Overview - Session 3

In Session 3 there will be an opportunity for each group to feed back their experiences of working with two different texts, and two different orientations (the broader theme of narrative, the more specific one of rhetoric). There will then be a review of the three sessions.

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Language Discourse and Narrative
Dr Kevin Morrell

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Overview of Session 1

Themes

- Why is language important (in management)?
- What is 'discourse'?
- What counts as text and how can we analyse it?

Examples

- Analysis of natural talk
- Content analysis of a questionnaire
- Narrative analysis of policy literature

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Learning Objectives

1. You will have developed your understanding of the importance of language in organisational life.
2. You will be cautious about the term 'discourse'.
3. You will have a nodding acquaintance with 3 different approaches that could be called 'discourse analysis'.
4. You will be familiar with examples of: a content analysis and a narrative analysis.
5. You will have tried analysing text using these two approaches.

PLEASE ASK QUESTIONS

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Why is language important (in management)?

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Language (and management)

- Language is a shared activity (Wittgenstein, 1953)...
- that forms one basis for exercising power (Foucault, 2002; Lyotard, 1984)
- Means by which actions are legitimised and authored (Benjamin and Goclaw, 2005)
- 'discursive practice' (Foucault, 2002) truth is situated / constructed, reflecting the practices and functions of a community, rather than having a transcendental status
- 'Pygmalion effect' – labels shape norms, expectations and actions (Ferraro et al, 2005; Merton, 1948).
- This interplay constitutes a 'double hermeneutic' (Giddens, 1984).

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

What is 'discourse'?

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Discourse and discourse analysis

- 'a smokescreen for an unclear and ambivalent view on language' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p. 1145).
- Lots of things can be 'discourse', most qualitative analysis is not 'discourse analysis'?
- 'unpacking and rendering visible the business of talk' (Potter, 2002)
- Useful terms: 'situated', 'occasioned', 'action-oriented', 'constructed' [2 senses discourse is put together and it constructs social objects]
- Natural talk – the dead social science researcher test

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

3 different approaches that could be called 'discourse analysis'

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

'Producing Possible Hannahs' (Honan et al, 2000).

Researchers using three different qualitative approaches construct different interpretations of the same 'data' set - recordings of Hannah, a 12 year old girl at school. Hannah can be seen as a model student, but she also takes part in playful sketches that are highly amusing and provocative, seemingly at odds with her 'nice girl' image.

"Each framework generates a different way of reading the data, a sense of what can be found in it." P10

Framework 1: D/discourse Theory

[D/discourse primary (D) and secondary (d) discourses]

"...displays of social identity and Discourse membership are multiple and always under negotiation in the contexts, practices and politics of everyday life." P11

[Discourse membership can come 'free' e.g. if you're born into it, or by default e.g. when dealing with institutions]

"... each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities." P12

[This approach struggles to reconcile Hannah's membership of the 'nice girl' discourse with her participation in comic sketches]

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

'Producing Possible Hannahs' 2

Framework 2: Post-structuralist Reading

"... subjects are contradictory because they are constituted through contradictory discourses..." P17

[So there is no anomaly between the 'nice-girl' and 'raucous' Hannah]

" [Hannah is] successfully drawing on different discursive practices to position herself in ways that others recognize as legitimate and even laudable..." P17

"... situations [are] excerpts from Hannah's life in process [this] is fundamental to poststructuralist theory..." P18

"... poststructuralist discourse entails a move away from the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process..." Davies B. (1997) 'The Subject of Poststructuralism', *Gender and Education*, 9, 271-283

[Hannah moves through different positions - teacher, model student, part of unruly class. She is not subjected to discourses, but actually takes them up for her own benefit]

Framework 3: Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

This involves "Reading Hannah as a character in the classroom scene..." P24

It aims to "... situate Hannah within and against the classroom as a social and moral space..." P23

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

'Producing Possible Hannahs' 3

Conclusion

"Each analytic approach works with a different vocabulary and each vocabulary signals the different ways in which individual and social practice are characterized within that approach." P30

Different views of the social world: "... [1] a world full of D/discourses... [2] a world full of positionings [3] a world full of talk in interaction..." P30

Different possible Hannahs: "... [1] Hannah as a practitioner and negotiator of Discourses that also coordinate her activities and identities and subjectivities in and out of school [2] Hannah as a subject of power who through her positioning and recognizability, is able to surpass the limits of power assigned to her [3] Hannah as a participating member of interactive research scenes (transcriptions of classroom events and interviews) who engages in the production of who she could possibly be taken to be..." P30

"Studies of method of inquiry are at least as informative as studies of documentary materials for showing the constitutive force of theory in qualitative data analysis." P31

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

Running into trouble with 'discourse' - 1

Simply stating that the paper employs discursive psychology is not enough detail about methods or epistemology. The author(s) should be aware that a label like this is by no means self-explanatory, particularly when subsequent analysis is focused exclusively on content. Though they may be clear about epistemological issues themselves, readers require this to be spelled out in more depth. Discourse is often used rather vaguely. Also, discursive psychology usually refers to naturally occurring speech - you don't have that here. The way the 'data' are treated suggests a realist / correspondence account that is not in keeping with some tenets of what is loosely called discourse analysis; namely the view that talk is occasioned, action-oriented and cannot simply be read in the same way as text. There is no indication that the author(s) examined clues as to the way in which these accounts were constructed, e.g. signs of pauses, qualifications, repairs; or produced: what moments/interventions preceded these excerpts; what influence the interviewee and design of the study / sampling / questions might have had.

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

Running into trouble with 'discourse' - 2

(cont.) Can you say more about these interviewees and the interviewers (gender, age etc.)? Also some more basic stuff: why did people agree to take part, how long did interviews last, were they recorded & transcribed (presumably yes from the detailed excerpts), how was this negotiated, who translated them how was the translation checked, did you check transcripts with participants, how were they coded and analysed ('discursive psychology' is not enough)? The paper claims to identify, "examples where the respondent themselves uses explicit Christian discourse" using an "approach of discerning explicit references to a particular discourse". Since you select Christian SME owners and then ask them how they bring faith into their work how can you claim that you are "discerning" something... would it not be fairer to say that you are creating something? It's not sufficient to substantiate these claims by saying this is 'coupled with consideration of the discursive context' because I don't think you pay enough attention to the 'discursive context'. There is insufficient acknowledgement of the artificial nature of these accounts. I don't think you should use terms like 'fact', or 'answer' if you want to demonstrate critical awareness about method. Even 'findings' is tricky if you accept that these accounts are produced or engineered, which even a loose 'discourse' analytic stance should imply.

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

What counts as text and how can we analyse it?

www.kevinmorrill.org.uk

Examples... all or part of...

- Annual reports
- Letters
- Company forms
- Accounts / HR data
- Flow charts
- Policy literature
- Legislation
- Cartoons
- Photographs
- Response to surveys
- Minutes
- Memos
- Procedures and policies
- Speeches
- Time sheets
- Newspapers
- Magazine articles
- Film and other media
- Graffiti
- Exit interviews

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Advantages Disadvantages

- Unobtrusive and non-reactive (RWR:349)
- 'Given' data
- Basis for triangulation
- Basis for comparison/contrast
- Encourage ingenuity
- Longitudinal aspect
- No influence on methods/methodology
- Difficult to identify author(s)
- Selection
- Access/ethics considerations

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Business historian or organizational theorist?

- Business historian: an extensive trawl of a mass of documentation, less preoccupied with methodology
- Organizational theorist: more intensive analysis with reference to a focused theme, topic or context, more concerned with methodological issues

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

2 approaches

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Content analysis (from Robson RWR: 352-5)

“content analysis is *codified common sense* a refinement of ways that might be used by laypersons to describe and explain aspects of the world about them” (352)

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Steps in content analysis

- *Start with a research question* ‘why are nurses saying they quit their jobs?’
- *Decide on a sampling strategy* ‘voluntary leavers at 8 NHS Trusts year 2000-2001’
- *Define the recording unit* ‘what key themes crop up... “training”, “promotion” etc.’
- *Construct additional categories for analysis: exhaustive, mutually exclusive*, ‘promotion and training and development’
- *Meta-categories* ‘work and non-work related reasons’

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Narrative theory

- Documents are authored and created.
- They have an audience in mind.
- In that sense they can be treated as stories, or narratives.
- Effective narratives establish: (i) credibility and (ii) defamiliarisation, or novelty (Barry and Elmes, 1997).
- How do documents establish credibility and novelty?
- Role of rhetoric (contrast, emphasis, pairs) and attention to: heroes, villains, endings.

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Steps in narrative analysis

- *Start with a research question* 'how does the white paper *Choosing Health* justify reform in the NHS?'
- *Decide on relevant documents* 'white paper and other policy literature (CHI) 2000-2005'
- *Identify themes and plots* 'heroes, villains, endings'
- *Identify rhetorical devices* 'lists, pairs, contrasts, headlines, entailment, enthymeme etc.' We will look at this next time.
- *Identify alternative potential narratives* 'other heroes, villains, endings etc.'

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

2 examples

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Example content analysis: coding frame

Code	Description of Theme	Code	Description of Theme
1	Spousal or family-related relocation	18	Starting course
2	Clash with subordinates(s) or colleagues(s)	19	Travel problems
3	Management or organisational culture	20	Lack of support
4	Discrimination	21	Qualified for early retirement
5	Bullying	22	Change in financial circumstances
6	Personal family problems or pressures	23	No development / refused opportunity
7	Clash with supervisor or senior manager	24	Mishandled disciplinary procedure
8	Completed a course of training or education	25	Working conditions / safety
9	Promotion or career development	26	Lack of Supervision
10	Clash with patient / MRP / public expect too much	27	Low pay / Concerns over grade
11	Inflexibility of work hours	28	Professional / Personal Development
12	Imposed reorganisation of work	29	Job satisfaction / Morale
13	Health	30	Management Structure / Restructuring
14	Pregnancy	31	Cost of Living or Housing
15	Role-conflict (unable to give care / undervalued)	32	Stress
16	Short staffed or under-awarded	33	Workload
17	Job offer, opportunity or promotion		

Example Extracts

No	Codes	Extract
1023	19, 6	cost of fuel, spend more time with family
1024	29, 3, 28	being provided with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, which were then not able to be put into practice. General dissatisfaction with the management of the directorate
1025	6, 9	personal circumstances changed, advancement opportunities were poor
1026	7, 33, 6, 13	dissatisfied with attitude of my immediate manager and her reluctance to share the workload... pressures of home and family / health

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Over to you...

- "Would have stayed but fed up with training needs not being met in work time. Had to do training on days off unpaid."
- "No clinical supervision, did not feel management were in tune with grass roots nursing problems"
- "A clique on the shop floor, lack of confidence in myself, management and colleagues"
- "wanted a change of speciality"
- "Discrimination"
- "To move to my home town of Plymouth."
- "departments working in isolation, newly qualified staff not adequately trained thus increasing pressure on existing staff, increased expectations of general public, ward staff are in the frontline and are often criticised by all other departments and specialist nurses therefore morale suffers"

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Example narrative

At the start of the twenty-first century England needs a new approach to health of the public, reflecting the rapid and radical transformation of English society in the latter half of the twentieth century, responding to the needs and wishes of its citizens as individuals harnessing the new opportunities open to it (DH 2004, p. 2).

Who authored this? For whom? What is the story? (we'll return to this passage next time)

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Over to you...

At the heart of Building public value is a vision of a BBC that maintains the ideals of its founders, but a BBC renewed to deliver those ideals in a digital world. That world contains the potential for limitless individual consumer choice. But it also contains the possibility of broadcasting reduced to just another commodity, with profitability the sole measure of worth. A renewed BBC, placing the public interest before all else, will counterbalance that market-driven drift towards programme-making as a commodity. Only a secure and adequately funded BBC can ensure that broadcasting retains its cultural (in the broadest sense) aspiration.

What's the story?

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

References / Further Reading

- Alexander, M. and Kuvshinov, D. (2008). 'Varieties of discourse: On the study of organisations through discourse analysis', *Human Relations*, 61, 9, 1175-20.
- Alvesson, M. and Sveningsson, S. (2011). 'Good Values, Bad Micro-management and Ugly Ambiguity: Contradictions of Non-Leadership in a Knowledge-intensive Organisation', *Organization Studies*, 32, 6, 961-88.
- Bary, D. and Elmes, M. (1997). 'Strategy rituals: Toward a narrative view of strategic discourse', *Academy of Management Review*, 22, 2, 429-52.
- Bernardo, D. and Godwin, R. (2005). 'Nurturing the Power of Non-Standard Employment: The Case of the Israeli Public Sector', *Journal of Management Studies*, 42, 4, 717-59.
- Boje, D.M. (1991). 'The Storytelling Organization: A Study of Story Performance', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 1, 106-26.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Ferraz, F., Pfeiffer, J. and Sutton, R. I. (2005). 'Economic Language And Assumptions: How Theories Can Become Self-Fulfilling', *Academy of Management Review*, 30, 1, 8-24.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge Classics.
- Gabriel, Y. and Griffin, D. S. (2004). 'Stories in Organizational Research' in C. Cassell and G. Symon eds. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage, 114-26.
- Ghoshal, S. (2005). 'Bad management: Stories are destroying good management practices', *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4, 1, 75-91.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hansen, E., Kuebel, M., Baker, C. and Davies, B. (2008). 'Predicting Possible Hamlets: Theory and the Subject of Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(1), 9-32, on 11.
- Mauss, M. K. and Phillips, N. (1995). 'Understanding language games', *Organization Science*, 6, 3, 322-334.
- Merton, R. K. (1948). 'The Self-fulfilling Prophecy', *American Review*, 8, 193-210.
- Orlikowski, L., Kramyer, T. W. and Gross, D. (2006). 'Theorizing organizations and organizing: Concepts, objects, and subjects', *Human Relations*, 59, 9, 1115-1124.
- Polner, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Power sets up to
for free articles
- Shibbs, M. (1983). *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Watson, T. (1995). 'Rhetoric, Discourse and Argument in Organisational Sense-Making: A Reflection', *Organization Studies*, 16, 5, 805-21.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- for tips on doing a PhD.

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk