Edinburgh Research Explorer

'Getting people on board': Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings

'Getting People on Board':

Discursive leadership for
consensus building in team meetings

Ruth Wodak*
Distinguished Professor, Chair in Discourse Studies,
Department of Linguistics and English Language,
Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YT, UK

Winston Kwon
Lecturer, Centre for Strategic Management
Lancaster University Management School
Lancaster, LA1 4YX, UK

Ian Clarke
Professor of Strategic Management & Marketing
Newcastle University Business School
Newcastle, NE1 4JH, UK

*To whom all correspondence should be addressed.

'Getting People on Board':

Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings[i]

Abstract

Meetings are increasingly seen as sites where organizing and strategic change takes place, but the role of specific discursive strategies and related linguistic-pragmatic and argumentative devices, employed by meeting chairs, is little understood. The purpose of this paper is to address the range of behaviours of chairs in business organizations by comparing strategies employed by the same CEO in two key meeting genres: regular management team meetings and 'away-days'. While drawing on research from organization studies on the role of leadership in meetings and studies of language in the workplace from (socio)linguistics and discourse studies, we abductively identified five salient discursive strategies which meeting chairs employ in driving decision-making: (1) Encouraging; (2) Directing; (3) Modulating; (4) Re/committing; and (5) Bonding. We investigate the leadership styles of the CEO in both meeting genres via a multi-level approach using empirical data drawn from meetings of a single management team in a multinational defence corporation. Our key findings are, firstly, that the chair of the meetings (and leading manager) influences the outcome of the meetings in both negative and positive ways, through the choice of discursive strategies. Secondly, it becomes apparent that the specific context and related meeting genre mediate participation and the ability of the chair to control interactions within the team. Thirdly, a more hierarchical authoritarian or a more interpersonal egalitarian leadership style can be identified via specific combinations of these five discursive strategies. The paper concludes that the egalitarian leadership style increases the likelihood of achieving a durable consensus. Several related avenues for research are outlined.

Keywords: Discursive leadership strategies; meetings; critical discourse analysis (CDA); context analysis; ethnography; workplace discourse; regular meetings, awaydays; transformational leadership; transactional leadership.

"It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things"

<div align="right">

Niccolò Machiavelli (1513) *The Prince*, Chapter VI

</div>

Introduction

Developing consensus requires "some shared understanding and common commitment" (Markoczy, 2001, p.1) to be generated around strategic issues, and is central to a management team's ability to develop and implement responses to these issues. However, while it has been demonstrated that leadership is central to the formation of consensus, the influence of leaders' discursive strategies on this process has tended to be under-researched. To address this problem, we adopt an interdisciplinary discourse-oriented approach to leadership in meetings and teams, studying discourse in use. Like Biggart and Hamilton, we see "leadership [as]... a relationship among persons in a social setting at a given historic moment" (1987, p.438). Burns (1978, p.18) elaborates this definition by introducing power into the concept of leadership, in which he stresses "leadership is an aspect of power, but it is also a separate and vital process in itself". Specifically, he underlines the complex relationship between power and leadership, viewing all 'leaders' (in the sense of their formal role) as actual or potential holders of power, but not all power holders as necessarily providing effective leadership (ibid.). In order to be effective, Burns proposes that leadership works by influencing *human beings when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, or other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of the followers"* (ibid, p.18; italic in original). These critical dimensions are important for our study, particularly the emphasis on power relationships, motives and purposes, and resources. What is missing here, however, is an articulation of the important

role that linguistic and communicative resources play in the powerful enactment of leadership as a process. How, precisely, is leadership 'accomplished', discursively speaking?

This neglect of linguistic resources is especially apparent in the socio-psychological literature on leadership styles, such as the 'theory of transformational leadership' (Bass & Avolio, 1994), a framework that has gained significant traction among management practitioners. The theory introduces two ideal types of leadership: *transactional* and *transformational*. In the former, leadership is oriented primarily towards the level of *content* – the exchanges and negotiations that take place amongst leaders and their colleagues and followers – through which the leader specifies goals and conditions, and the followers receive rewards if they achieve goals. In the latter, however, leadership is a transformational *process* because leaders act as role models and influence by stressing ideals; provide inspiration to stimulate corporate identity; contribute intellectual stimulation by questioning assumptions and challenging situations; and give individualized consideration to colleagues' needs (ibid, pp.3-4). Apart from a brief discussion of communication modes (pp. 45-46) in these two complementary dimensions of leadership, however there is no acknowledgement and explication of the *discursive* skills required for effective leadership. Hence, we pose two important questions: (a) what role do the discursive strategies of leaders play in team consensus building; and (b) how and to what extent do the material situations in which they occur affect the discursive strategies they employ and their effectiveness?

We address this gap by analyzing complete episodes of discussion in meetings – using a combination of qualitative macro-analysis (via ethnography) and micro-linguistic critical discourse analysis (CDA) – to examine the impact of leaders' discursive strategies on the consensus building process in a multinational

corporation. Our paper is set out in three parts. First, we distill insights from related studies of meetings and discursive analysis of strategic change in organization studies, together with studies of language use in the workplace from sociolinguistics and CDA, in order to identify the principal ways leaders affect consensus building in meetings. Second, we draw on transcripts of interviews and meetings over six months in a senior management team of a single business unit in a multinational defence company in Australia to abductively identify the main discursive strategies used by a leader to shape consensus[ii]. We do this by focusing on two significant and extensive episodes of discussion – the only ones that occurred where consensus was generated around strategic issues facing the organization. Third, we discuss how leaders use five discursive strategies to facilitate consensus-building: Encouraging, Modulating, Directing, Re/Committing, and Bonding. Most importantly, we show how leaders deploy these strategies using linguistic and pragmatic devices in such a way that influences the development of a durable consensus. This we believe is achieved via a more egalitarian interpersonal style, which enables the leadership to 'get people on board'.

Discursive leadership and consensus-building in meetings

Without consensus, issues of strategic importance facing organizations either receive insufficient attention or resource, or both (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Ocasio, 1997). Consensus is important because sufficient accord is required so that a team can proceed to a course of action to address that issue. So, what is critical is that a team *believes* they have reached a best 'possible decision' (Dess & Origer, 1987; Holder, 1976; Priem et al., 1995). In this sense, leaders play a key part in consensus formation in three main ways. First, when they are overly zealous to a course of action early on

in a discussion, they can prevent consensus from forming (Dess & Priem, 1995). Second, where leaders exclude certain stakeholder groups from the process, this can result in ill-conceived strategies (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000), making them difficult to implement (Mintzberg, 1994) because of internal resistance (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Third, leaders who positively facilitate participation in strategic discussion can encourage a sense of autonomy within the team (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Despite these piecemeal insights, however, we still know very little about how leadership is linguistically 'performed' (Holmes & Marra, 2004).

The shortage of research on the linguistic enactment of leadership has been attributed to scholars focusing too much on the psychological traits of leaders. Grint (2000) argues that the primary concern has been with the cognitive and social origins of leader perceptions, rather than how these are generated through linguistic behavior at the micro-level, influenced by socio-political factors and constraints in the organization and society (Burns, 1978). This position has become increasingly less tenable because of the growing realization that leaders are the primary 'managers of meaning' in organizations (Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy, 1978; Shotter & Cunliffe, 2003; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Thus, how leaders communicate their visions and messages in different contexts has attracted growing scrutiny (Conger, 1991; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Scholars such as Fairhurst (2007) have began to explore the role of leaders as 'practical authors' (Shotter, 1993) and the role they play in working with others to enact relations and construct meaning (Holmes, 2003, p.2)

The various ways in which leaders practically influence meaning in organizations by chairing interactions in meetings has been likened to a 'switchboard' (Asmuss & Svennevig, 2009; Boden, 1994), in terms of how they (a) open and close meetings; (b) enable participants to take turns; and (c) ensure progression of the topic. Such

involvement can lead to 'interactional asymmetries' in conversation, with some participants, including leaders themselves, having the greatest influence on the sense-making process (Asmuss & Svennevig, 2009, p.16). We therefore focus on the role played by leaders in enabling consensus-building, following scholars such as Samra-Fredericks (2009, p.109) who situate and explain people's actions in terms of "how power is exercised and asymmetric relations accomplished".

To date only a small number of studies have sought to explore leadership through the lens of discourse analysis. Some studies have shed light on the impact of leaders on consensus building in teams. Wodak (2000) focused on the influence of the chairperson to illustrate how consensus was created between two opposing parties (representatives of employers' organizations and employees [via trade union delegates]) in the European Commission by re/formulating and recontextualizing ideas and proposals in the process of drafting a policy paper through successive meetings. Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris' (1997) cross-cultural sociolinguistic study of meetings demonstrated the effect of participants deploying certain linguistic devices (e.g. pronominalisation, metaphors, discourse markers, professional terminology) and highlighted the impact of the chairperson in exerting control over discussion in meetings by 'weaving' together the voices of the respective parties to achieve agreement. Samra-Fredericks (2003) observed how a managing director employed a range of rhetorical and pragmatic devices across a variety of organizational settings to influence the overall strategic direction of his firm. Holmes and Marra (2004, p.459) showed how certain leaders manage conflict using a particular repertoire of strategies to affect 'good leadership'. Furthermore, Angouri and Marra (2010) examined how a leaders' style of chairing adapted to different meeting genres. Recent research as part of the EU 'DYLAN' project shed light on the multilingual practices of leaders in the workplace (Lüdi, 2007; Mondada, 2009).

Finally, Hartz and Habsheid (2008) demonstrated the importance of leaders 'staging' discussions to the success of consensus building attempts in a publishing organization.

Useful though these studies are in providing insights into how discursive leadership is construed and performed, they provide only partial insights into the discursive strategies deployed by leaders and the linguistic and pragmatic devices through which they are realized in the process of consensus building. Part of the reason for this is that insights have not been derived from systematic analysis of complete episodes of discursive interaction around strategic issues. As a result, several important questions remain. For instance, what discursive and argumentative strategies do leaders routinely employ? And is the ability of leaders to generate consensus affected by the context in which the discussion occurs and the composition and history of previous discussions amongst the same group of participants (Janis, 1972; Kwon et al., 2009; Menz, 1999; van Dijk, 2008, 2009; Wodak, 2000, 2009a)? We highlight two problems with previous research on discursive leadership: (1) it fails to differentiate between the overall discursive process and the effects of the specific context within which it occurs, and (2) it tends to conflate the role of discursive strategies with the linguistic and pragmatic devices through which they are realized. In addressing this shortfall, we rise to the challenge posed by Rouleau and Balogun (Forthcoming) that there is a need to explore how leaders perform discursive strategies competently, in specific and clearly defined contexts. The next section outlines how we designed our study to explore this issue.

Methodology

We chose the aerospace firm *Defence Systems International* (DSI)[iii] to study the agenda and related discursive strategies employed by the chair/CEO because it was an organization dealing with major strategic change and we had obtained access to observe and record how participants came to terms with, and addressed, the strategic issues that this generated. Our data collection occurred in 2007-08 and relates to DSI's Australian business unit over a six month period, during which we interviewed each member of the senior management team before and after we observed and recorded all their regular monthly meetings and a bi-annual strategy away-day meeting, in which they engaged in discussion about issues relating to the development and implementation of strategy. Overall, our transcribed dataset is over 150 hours long, and includes 45 hours of individual interviews and over 100 hours of regular team meetings, workshops and a strategy away-day. Detailed notes accompany the verbatim field data from field researchers (both among the authors of this paper) who observed meetings in full and also conducted narrative interviews. We used these insights and confidential company documents to triangulate our interpretations.

Our analysis stems from an approach within CDA – the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) -- that combines qualitative discourse analysis with corpus linguistic techniques and ethnography (Baker et al., 2008; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) while relating the analysis of the structural context of the organization, the respective history of specific communities of practice (such as regular senior management team meetings or committees with the same participants) with the situational context of the meetings and the co-text of each utterance (Wodak, 2009a).

Indeed, we claim that such a multi-level approach is required to enable interpretation of the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of unique turns and utterances in the interactional dynamics within and across the two meetings.

The empirical data was analysed through four stages, oscillating between *micro-* and *macro-levels* of qualitative textual analysis, in which the authors engaged in a continual dialogue to reconcile hypotheses arising from the text with broader contextual understandings derived from direct ethnographic observations of the organization. This is why we also substantiate our interpretations by juxtaposing the analysis of meeting extracts with extracts from our interviews.

In the first stage, we conducted a corpus linguistic analysis using Wordsmith software to identify the relative occurrence of topics related to the broader strategic mandate of DSI. We identified the November 2006 away-day and the monthly April 2007 meeting as the most salient meetings in the corpus. Both displayed the greatest occurrence of topics related to the broader organizational strategic mandate, and were also the most prominent in terms of the statistical values of the keywords (which included many of the terms related to the strategic mandate). November was in fact a strategy away-day in which we were already interested (see Kwon et al., 2009). April was a regular monthly meeting of the team. Each meeting was approximately 8 hours in length, giving a combined downsized dataset of nearly 18,000 words.

In the second stage, we analysed macro-level patterns of topic elaboration, argumentation patterns, turn-taking, and so forth, to be able to understand the overall structure and dynamic of the respective meeting (Krzyżanowski, 2008). Central to this was the identification of the macro-topic and *macro-structure* of each

episode (van Dijk, 1984, p.56)[iv]. We then identified the *primary* and *secondary topics* of each episode to make sense of how the macro topic was elaborated[v].

In the third stage of analysis, we conducted a detailed sequential analysis of specific discursive strategies and related linguistic/pragmatic/rhetorical devices used in both meetings so we could identify the role and performance of the leaders of each episode, by drawing on the literature and proposing new constructs through abduction (see below). Thus, we first developed a provisional classification of salient, reoccurring discursive strategies for the November episode. This classification was then applied to the April episode and revised, leading to a final classification of discursive leadership strategies, which we claim are instrumentally employed by leaders in the course of discussion to shape consensus around strategic issues.

In the fourth stage of analysis, and taking into account the findings of the previous stages, we examined how these discursive strategies and devices were employed sequentially by the CEO in order to achieve consensus on the topics central to each episode. From this synthesis, we were able to distill how two distinct styles of leadership – transformational and transactional - both identified in the literature (see above), are discursively deployed, and their effects on consensus building within the team. We elaborate upon these five discursive leadership strategies and the linguistic and pragmatic realization of these two styles of discursive leadership in the next section of the paper.

Findings

In the following analysis, we refer to two meetings of the DSI senior management team. The first meeting (November) was an away-day held off-site in a conference/entertainment box within an international cricket ground, some 20 miles away from the team's normal working location. The second meeting (April) was a regular all-day 'executive board' meeting in the main office premises. With one exception, all of the team members were present for both meetings, each lasting for about eight hours (see Table 1 for a guide to speakers).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In the away-day in November the agenda was focused on a relatively small number of key issues selected for discussion that affected the business's strategic development. Most significant among these strategic issues was the question of whether or not there was a need to construct a New Building to accommodate the requirements of DSI's rapidly expanding operations. A major impetus for this was the awarding of the first phase of Osprey, a project expected to account for the majority of DSI's revenues over the next two years. While this project had been anticipated for some time and discussed in previous meetings, the awarding of the contract had only just occurred the day before the away-day, and thus was a major influence across all discussions on that day.

By comparison, in the regular meeting in April, the strategic issue was one of several items in a formalized agenda, and concerned avionics systems, an area of specialized expertise required by two of the company's projects: the 'Osprey' and the 'Peregrine' project, both types of military aircraft. The Osprey project was now behind schedule

and not yet completed. Peregrine had just been awarded with resources being mobilized for this project and set for a formal commencement four months later.

Both strategic issues – the New Building and Peregrine/Osprey – were highly important to DSI. With regard to the New Building issue, the management team was considering the need for a new production facility and where best to locate it. This decision had three main dimensions: (a) whether there was a need for the new premises at all; (b) assuming the answer to this was affirmative, then broadly where to locate it (e.g. Melbourne, Sydney, or the current centre in Adelaide); and (c) assuming the answer to this was Adelaide, then where specifically to locate it in the conurbation. This issue concerned the long-term strategic direction of the organization but was not particularly urgent.

By contrast, the Peregrine and Osprey projects were both subject to particularly tight deadlines. Thus, the team was debating whether or not they had sufficient resource or 'capability' (in-house specialist expertise) in terms of skilled avionics systems engineers to both finish Phase One of the Peregrine project while simultaneously 'ramping-up' the Osprey project such that the respective contractual deadlines were met. Failure to deliver on either of these projects would have a major and immediate impact on DSI's reputation and profitability. Two options were considered in this discussion. If DSI was incapable of servicing the avionics requirements of both projects simultaneously, then DSI should forfeit the Osprey project to a competitor. If both projects could be serviced, then the team must find a way to effectively share avionics expertise between both projects.

Thus, while the two meetings differed in terms of urgency and the strategic issue being addressed, both were similar in terms of the revenues and resources required, and were crucial to the long-term success of the business. During the six-month

period of fieldwork all executive meetings were chaired by Mike as CEO. While both meetings were clearly led by Mike who was also strongly supported by Bradley (Chief Operating Officer or COO), it is also important to briefly identify other colleagues who played a key role in each episode. In November, a crucial individual who is neither present nor mentioned in either of the episode texts is the DSI parent group CEO, Jack. In a subsequent meeting in July, the New Building issue was revisited with Adam, the HR director revealing the existence of a separate pre-agreement between Mike, Bradley and Jack, saying:

> Adam: *"I think we were given a mandate by Jack, which was to 'go and build building B' and we took that as our mantra."*

We also know from interview with Mike that Jack monitors DSI Australia very closely:

> Mike: *"when you're playing cards with a bloke who has all the cards, you're pretty limited as to what you can do … Jack drops me a note a couple of times a month just to let you know you're still being watched."*

Thus we infer from this that prior to the November meeting, Mike and Bradley were given an informal go ahead by Jack to proceed with the new Building. Therefore, Mike and Bradley's primary objective for the November episode was – as our ethnography suggests – to 'stage' a discussion and reach a formal decision to build the New Building. Given the recent news of the awarding of the Osprey contract, much of the burden was placed on Will, the Osprey Director, to provide the quantitative justification (i.e. headcount forecasts for Osprey) for the new building. Harris and Adam, the Finance and Human Resources Directors respectively, were charged with planning the New Building based on headcount forecasts from DSI's various projects and central functions. Much of the tension arising in the meeting and visible in the excerpts analysed below concerns Mike and Bradley's attempt to

get Will, Harris and Adam in particular, 'on board', i.e. to provide reasons why the project should go ahead rather than challenging the project itself.

The catalyst for the discussion in the April episode was the refusal of Will, the Osprey Director, to release several avionics engineers to Charlie, the Peregrine Director. This impasse drew in Larry, the Engineer Director, who proposed a potential solution in the form of a system to centrally manage the allocation of avionics engineers between projects, rather than the current system where allocation was determined through negotiation between the Project Directors. In this episode, Mike and Bradley take a more passive role by allowing Lincoln to become the 'nominal' leader in the presentation of his proposal (see Appendix A and Appendix B for transcripts of both episodes).

Also crucial to understanding the dynamic of these two episodes is the changing status of Will. We know from interview with Mike shortly before the November episode that Will was highly regarded within DSI and thought of as his likely successor for the position of CEO of DSI Australia:

> Mike: *"Will's running what's the most difficult programme in the place, the Peregrine programme… He's 40 years old, engineer, came from GSK … brought him in from outside to run this programme, which is a sub-contract of AeroCon – it's hugely complex, $500 million: (I'd) like it to be much more – at least another $500 million in exports coming up, along with it on the back of AeroCon. And I'm really impressed… But not quite ready yet… but I need to give him something more to do than just that, or he's going… good grief, I'd jump off the building sometime! … He would like to stay in Australia, and therefore the obvious job is mine, which is fine".*

By the April meeting, perceptions of Will had waned considerably because of problems with the Peregrine project that were attributed to his personal leadership style, as noted by Bradley in interview:

> Bradley: *"Now I attend his reviews and have quite a close engagement on what goes on in Osprey, and I don't like it. I don't like the leadership style, I don't like the control, the application of control, the lack of empowerment. I don't like those things and I think they're dysfunctional. I can see that some of the great problems we've got in Osprey – primarily we've got our two biggest problems in this business are Avionics and ECM. The two major projects within Osprey, and I don't see any route to solution".*

In contrast with the November episode, where Will was regarded by the entire team as potentially the 'heir apparent', by April Will had come to be seen as a problematic member of the team. Thus Mike and Bradley's primary objective for the April episode was to manage the conflict between Will and Charlie to mitigate the growing crisis.

In terms of overall structure, we highlight three key differences between the two meetings. First, from a topic analysis perspective, the 'breadth' and 'depth' of the two discussions were very different (see Figures 1a and 1b), despite being of similar length: November had 10 primary topics averaging 4.5 secondary topics each; and April had 4 primary topics averaging 15.0 secondary topics each. This suggests that the scope of the discussion in November (topic breadth) was wider ranging but that the exploration of each primary topic (topic depth) was more limited than April, where fewer topics were discussed in greater depth.

[INSERT FIGURE 1a and 1b ABOUT HERE]

Strategies for discursive leadership

Through the abductive four-step analysis described earlier, we identified five discursive strategies that were used by the leaders Mike (CEO) and Bradley (COO) of DSI Australia for the purpose of managing the process of achieving consensus building:

Bonding – serves the discursive construction of group identity that supports motivation to reach consensus and a decision. The distribution of use of personal pronouns among the different participants in each meeting is of importance, as well as the transitivity of their respective collocates, for this strategy. For example, the

selection of the singular 'I' versus the plural 'we' in discussion has considerable sociological and rhetorical implications (Mulderrig, 2011; Petersoo, 2007; Wodak, 2009b): while the singular form claims personal responsibility for the remainder of the sentence, the plural form collectivizes it, such that they can be used to claim authority, avoid or accept responsibility, and minimize or expand claims made by the speaker. In respect to the bonding strategy, the so-called 'theory of groupthink' argues that too much accommodation and internalization of group norms prevent successful decision-making because no arguments or deliberations take place. In this way, quasi-decisions that are reached fast rarely tend to hold over time (Janis, 1972). People who tend to disagree are usually marginalized in groupthink and cohesive bonding processes.

A good example for the latter role is Will who was 'pronominally' the second most prominent speaker in both meetings, but the *only* participant to favour an individualized form of self-representation (55% of 'I' expressions). This pattern may be understood in relation to Will's generally and increasingly defensive position in both meetings, as discussed above. The majority (56%) of his personal pronouns collocated with verbs representing mental processes (*think, believe*), and was frequently accompanied by heavily hedged statements expressing concerns about the proposal in relation to his own project's need for resources. In this way, Will deviated from the group. The following two extracts from April illustrate this strategy:

384	*I think it is a different way of doing things. The thing that worries me about it, I'm*
385	*just putting the concerns on the table, I'm not saying they're insurmountable, but we*
386	*just need to be aware of them."*

Text 1 – Lines 384-386, April

465	*To go back to – I think, Mike's comment before, I believe we've got enough*
466	*people, OK, in the playing. I believe that we've got the right people in terms of the*
467	*capability across the top. The key risk to the plan is the ability for the ones that we're*

468	*seeding in there to come up to speed within the four to six month timeframe that*
469	*we're looking at. Couple that with the 'gotcha' factors, which we're more likely to*
470	*find on OSPREY at the moment, rather than FALCON – what does that do? Where's*
471	*the extra bit of capability if we need it, now I think to me the mitigator around that is*
472	*the Nashua, trying to actually see if we can tap into some other source if we need.*

Text 2 – Lines 465-472, April

In both these extracts Will is offering a rebuttal to a preceding claim[vi]. He mitigates the face threat this incurs through disclaimers ("*I'm not saying*", Line 385, April), concessions ("*I believe we've got enough people*", Line 466, April), hedges ("*I'm just…we just*", Lines 385-386, April), and by representing his comments as a reiteration of the chair's previous comment ('reformulation'), and in so doing shields himself – though unsuccessfully - with the chair's authority; in contrast, Mike usually employs the pronoun 'we in his attempts to construct the team's cooperate identity and to further consensus. We will come back to this strategy below, in the in-depth analysis of extracts of the two meetings.

Encouraging – stimulates the participation of other speakers to explore new ideas and/or develop synthesis with existing ideas related to current topic of discourse. The purpose of this leadership strategy is to enhance other speakers' sense of participation and therefore their 'buy-in' to the eventual outcome by encouraging them to contribute to the discussion through various linguistic-pragmatic means such as soliciting opinions via open questions, agreement cues, and requests for expert reports, advice and knowledge; the questioning/supporting of existing propositions, via repetition, positive back-channeling, explicit praise; frequent use of indirect speech-acts instead of direct speech-acts (for example, questions instead of orders; appeals instead of accusations) or even silence by the leader(s) to start or maintain the forward momentum of the conversation. A hallmark of this strategy is the apparent relaxation of the leader(s) use of power, which provides other speakers the space to talk and elaborate. This strategy relates well to Burns' (1978) characteristics of 'transformational leadership' (see above).

An example of this strategy can be found at the beginning of the April episode when the MD Mike prompts the beginning of a discussion by inviting the involvement of others by asking, *"Alright then. Can we have a – can we just – Avionics. Can we talk about Avionics?"* (Line 1, April). By contrast, later in the episode, Mike invites the participation of two individuals at odds in this discussion, by asking, *"What do you think, Will and Charlie?"* (Line 192, April). This strategy can also be manifested by the silence of leaders, as was the case in April, where long stretches of the discussion were characterised by the absence of speaking turns by Mike and Bradley.

Directing – this can be conceptualised as the opposite of the above Encouraging. While the intent of the latter is to stimulate the opening up of the discussion by increasing the requisite variety of ideas and information, the purpose of Directing is to bring the discussion toward closure and resolution by reducing the equivocality of ideas. This is accomplished through a variety of means, including the explicit and direct, frequently challenging or critically interrogating the propositions of others via closed questions, interruptions, direct speech-acts of request; the declarative utterance of disagreement and proposal of alternatives; the persuasive and direct promotion of the chair(s)' own perspectives without inviting more discussion or dialogue; and the closure/simplification of the discussion by blocking the participation of others linguistic devices such as summaries, reformulations or frame shifts via topic shift. An example of this strategy can be seen in the November episode when Mike summarises the preceding discussion by privileging his own view:

462	*So in my head is, is, the default position is 2 buildings, then if we need to do*
463	*anything else around some of this other stuff to refurbish, we'll do that, but let's get*
464	*The second building.*

Text 3 – Lines 462-464, November

A more complex example occurs later in the episode where Mike and Bradley work together using a frame shift coupled with humour. Initially, Bradley shifts the frame of discussion by pointing to the architectural drawings and says emphatically, *"Look at this building"* (Line 656, November), thus bringing the previous discussion on whether or not headcount projections justified the construction of a new building to an abrupt halt. Several turns later, when Will asks – rhetorically -, *"Are we allowing for things like childcare facilities and things like that? Should we be thinking about things like that as optional?"* (Lines 660-661, November), Mike sees an opportunity to further support his perspective that the New Building is required because existing facilities are inadequate by quipping, *"You're not going to have us all – put our children in there – [points at the WWII buildings – followed by laughter] – put them in that asbestos roofed building with a – [more laughter]"* (Lines 656, 662-663, 666, November). These two illustrations provide examples of how leaders can realise their authority by 'paring away' the perspectives of others and privileging their own view.

Modulating - is a strategy used by leaders to regulate the perception of external environmental threats, or institutional imperatives to act, linked to the strategic issue under discussion. This is most commonly done via argumentative appeals to common knowledge; for example, by invoking the *topos* of threat in order to intensify or mitigate the perception of danger and, therefore, of action/inaction[vii]. The role of this strategy is to provide adequate room for a requisite balance to be achieved between Encouraging and Directing strategies to be played out within the discussion. The implication is that the 'right' amount of urgency is required to make 'strong' consensus that is actionable, because if there is too little urgency, discussions will tend to be protracted with little commitment to act, whereas if there is too much urgency, discussions can move to closure too quickly without adequate consideration of important information.

In the April episode for example, when Larry the Director of Engineering expresses his concern that the customer may refuse to sign the Osprey contract, saying *"I think if anything was to stop us, stop us from signing the contract now, it would be…the perception of losing capability through the resource transition planning process"* (Lines 45-48, April), Bradley responds by mitigating the perception of this threat, saying: *"My read would be that he would be very unlikely to do that. They would be very likely to test our resource level on the program"* (Lines 53-54, April). Conversely, Mike emphasises threat of inaction (i.e. a concrete plan of action), by saying *"… and what's more here is we've got a very finite – we've got a burning platform, if you like – which we need to put out, maybe before we can reach a level of maturity that – is that going to work?"* (Lines 189-192, April). Here, the underlying warrant reads as follows: if we do not put out the burning platform (i.e. act quickly) and wait until we reach maturity (i.e. wait too long), we will never reach a decision/solve the problem. In this case, the persuasive character of the *topos of urgency* is emphasized by the use of a natural disaster metaphor, which evokes the association with a fire, which might burn everything down.

Re/Committing – is the moving from a consensual understanding developed around the issue at hand towards a commitment to action to address it, thus taking the decision-making a step further by shifting the frame. This is achieved by leaders making speech-acts of promises or by reminding others of their formal organizational or personal obligations, i.e. a shift to a value-laden discourse. The role of commitment in this strategy is key to discursively leading consensus building, because it promotes a consistency of behaviour by creating links between their commitment to action and their organizational/professional/personal identities, and, therefore, internalises the motivation to act. Conceptually, Re/committing is complementary to Modulating as a motivation to act. Whereas Modulating uses

threat and urgency to 'push' participants to act, Re/committing tends to use internal obligations and appeals to organizational values to encourage actors to autonomously 'pull' the plan of action forward. Typically, a shift in tense occurs, to the future. Moreover, specific actions have to be implemented which comply with overall structures, plans, and visions. An example of this occurs when Mike reminded the other directors of the implications of their financial targets in the annual budget (IBP):

343	*I don't mind looking at the capabilities – for the purposes of the IBP, you're*
344	*going to have to deploy that capability on projects, you're going to have to badge it*
345	*against projects at some point – / Will: That's what we're doing – / to build up your*
346	*IBP, but from a capability point of view, from a business point of view, we've got to*
347	*be planning your facilities at a higher level you know, than project by project.*

Text 4 – Lines 343-347, November

In another example, Bradley allays the reservations of Will over the plan to centralise operations in Adelaide, by providing assurances that: *"...our position as a business is we don't expect the numbers to diminish in our / Will: yep / But where we can grow, our manpower in Melbourne and Sydney, we will do that"* (Lines 531-33, November).

Discursively enacting transformational and transactional leadership: egalitarian versus authoritarian styles

In the following, we analyze a few salient sequences of each meeting in detail, to illustrate the range of discursive strategies employed by the CEO and meeting chair Mike. The selected extracts provide insight into the discursive enactment of the two main leadership styles. The in-depth discourse analysis of strategies and related linguistic/pragmatic/argumentative and rhetorical means also accounts for the different outcomes in the two meetings discussed in this paper: in the case of the November meeting, the achieved consensus was not durable; in the second case, the

22

April meeting, the achieved consensus was adequate and made perfect sense to all participants. We will come back to this important aspect below, in our conclusions.

Enforcing consent –authoritarian leadership

462	*Mike: So in my head is, is, the default position is 2 buildings, then if we need to do*
463	*anything else around some of this other stuff to refurbish, we'll do that, but let's get*
464	*the second building.*
465	*Adam: So what would you say for the size of the Adelaide site 800, 600*
466	*people?*
467	*Mike: Say, it's going to be somewhere over 800 and less than 1100.*
468	*Will: and a 150 after these numbers were ready.*
469	*Adam: Why don't we, sort of, suggest making this unmade, and giving growth in*
470	*[unclear]?*
471	*Mike: Because the capability's there, you can't just make it smaller!*
472	*Bradley: It's just not sensible to do that.*
473	*Mike: You just can't make this smaller by wanting to put it somewhere else*
474	*because it's sensible. Thing is we should be growing there – his design*
475	*capability, the design capability around the FALCON training aids business,*
476	*is all in Adelaide*
477	*Adam: Hang on, we've started this – OK, fine. We've started this conversation by all*
478	*of us, I think, recognizing attrition and retention issues we've got in Adelaide. And*
479	*what we need to do is address that. We're now saying 'Well, too bad, we have the*
480	*projects in Adelaide –*
481	*Mike: No, no, what I'm saying is – Realistically if you're going to grow the business*
482	*you need more people in Sydney, more people in – but a minimum of 800 or so*
483	*/ Bradley: Core capability / in Adelaide.*

Text 5 – Lines 462-483, November

In this extract, we find five turns by Mike, all of which are very direct, either summarizing and reformulating former opinions, or strongly emphasizing his view. Bradley, forms an alliance with the leader Mike, taking the floor twice after Mike's turns (Lines 472, 483) and supporting Mike's opinion by paraphrasing Mike's utterance or even finishing it off (Line 483). Hence, this extract conveys an impression of two participants who know exactly what they want, have discussed this prior to the meeting and formulated a strategy to get all members on board; they explicitly also formulate their purpose while supporting each other. In line 462, Mike starts his turn by interjecting the discourse marker 'so', which indicates a frame-shift to a meta-level. Thus, he no longer contributes to the discussion of details between Harris and Will, and instead summarizes and states his wish 'let's get the second

building'. He then continues in the next turns (Lines 467, 471) by giving reasons for his opinion, in very declarative ways, which discourage further debate; for example, by using explicit value statements such as 'sensible, realistically' and so forth; the *topoi of reality* and *authority* serve as warrants for unsubstantiated conclusions. Adam attempts to slow the rush towards pre-mature closure by stating 'Hang-on' and repeating some important details in line 477-480, but is ignored by Mike.

484	*Harris: Now, Mike, just on the 800 that is the space we have now, in the north site.*
485	*806 –*
486	*Mike: Yeah, but they're all crappy, shitty buildings!*
487	*Will: Yes, agreed, I agree with what Bradley said. Maybe on the north-west*
488	*environment.*
489	*Mike: Yes.*
490	*Bradley: Create the environment, which will –*
491	*Mike: Look at building 70. Is it 'OK'?*
492	*Will: Inside it's not bad –*
493	*Mike: In 5 years' time will 70 be OK?*

Text 6 – Lines 484-493, November

In this extract, we encounter an abrupt frame shift by Mike who switches to an emotionalized casual style. In response to Harris the Finance Director (line 486), Mike refers to the existing buildings as 'crappy, shitty buildings' without either justifying this kind of attribution or apologizing for his choice of words. This turn evokes agreement by Will and the other participants, but only superficially. It is obvious that Mike will no longer accept any disagreement or counter-arguments and has already decided to build a second building, no matter what. His turns in lines 491 and 493 consist of rhetorical questions, which can also be interpreted as sarcastic, thus coming across as negative and patronizing towards the other participants. Will and Harris subsequently attempt a rational debate which fails due to the emotional and escalating dynamic of the discussion. Again, Bradley supports Mike and gives his view (Line 490).

Both Text 5 and Text 6 illustrate the dynamic of the November episode well: Given that Mike has decided – as noted earlier in this paper – that the decision to build needs to be discussed by the Executive Board. He stages an open decision-making process, together with Bradley. However, at a specific point during the long meeting (Line 471), he begins to lose his patience, and his purpose becomes clear for all participants. Most of his turns throughout this episode are Directing and summarizing strategies with very few Encouraging turns – all of which are indicative of a predominantly 'transactional' leadership style.

Encouraging consent – interpersonal egalitarian leadership

While arguing for and against taking on another project (Peregrine; see above), Mike finally decides to intervene and to justify the urgency of reaching a consensus:

272	Mike: *So are we talking about Hobson's choice here, really? Do we have any other*
273	*option what to do, this way, other than saying we're not going to take the PEREGRINE*
274	*contract? That's the two options.*
275	Will: *I believe what Larry's saying about sharing the resources across the projects*
276	*is fundamental. If we don't do that, we will fail.*
277	Mike: *Right, and then at some level of abstraction I agree with that, and absolutely.*
278	*But now we've got this [bangs table for emphasis] cast-iron, concrete case that we*
279	*have to do something about.*
280	Harris: *Do we know today what the resources overlay is between the new Avionics re*
281	*baseline and the globalization –*
282	Will: *No, my issue was that we don't have / Harris: [indistinct] a baseline for Avionics, and*
283	*unlikely to have a formed baseline until the end of May, but I will have one that's*
284	*90% accurate at the end of April.*
285	Harris: *So you don't really know what sort of demands or tensions there's going to be*
286	*in terms of this resource.*
287	Larry: *Except that the people are not likely to – the key people are not going to*
288	*change.*
289	Mike: *Well, what I thought I was hearing last week was that we will build sufficient*
290	*and backfilled and shadow in order to have – if you take a very prudent view of this,*
291	*we will have enough people to cover to that. / Larry: Well /*
292	*/ Harris: Right, to mobilize PEREGRINE and to run with OSPREY.*
293	Mike: *That was the plan. That was the plan.*

Text 7 – Lines 272-292, April

In this extract, Mike employs four different discursive strategies all of which are aimed at emphasizing that there are enough specialists available so that the second

project could be taken on. However, he gives fewer directives at the outset than in the November meeting and listens to other opinions, without disagreeing with them or rejecting them immediately (Line 276). Simultaneously, he creates a sense of urgency via his non-verbal behavior (Line 278, banging on the table) and his choice of metaphors (*'Hobson's choice'*, Line 272; *'cast-iron concrete case'*, Line 278). The latter metaphor serves as contrast to his superficial agreement with Will (*'at some level of abstraction I agree with that'*, Line 277). The metaphor of Hobson's choice implies that there are options to consider, but in reality there is only one. In this way, the strategy of Modulation serves to reduce complexity and redefine the problem as a choice between two distinct alternatives. After the display of urgency, three team members take the floor: Will, Harris, and Larry all expose Will's missing knowledge of certain details which could have justified his opposing view. This allows Mike to reenter the discussion in line 289 and to carefully state his beliefs, formulated in an impersonal way: *"if you take a prudent view of this, we will have enough people to cover that"* (Lines 290-291). Formulating the statement as a warrant (in an argument) (if…then) and not as a declarative makes it possible for Harris to agree with the leader Mike in the next turn (Line 292). In this way, Mike has succeeded in committing the team.

323	*Mike: If you take someone like Jameson, for example, I mean in a relatively short*
324	*period of time he's able to bring that expertise to bear, whereas he's probably been*
325	*spending quite a bit of time sorting out his Amex expenses or something like that*
326	*[laughter].*
327	*Will: The thing is that Jameson really knows the product, so – / Charlie: He knows*
328	*the product history / and he did a great job for us. But he wasn't clear on the OSPREY*
329	*specific stuff. But what he knew about FALCON was enough to get over the line last*
330	*week. Now, he only had a week so give him two weeks or three weeks, he'd probably*
331	*be full throttle on that. I think that's the critical nature of the guy, because it's a*
332	*product. They tend to know the product and then understand the variance from the*
333	*product.*
334	*Mike: But my point being, is that you know, he – the way we've traditionally run the*
335	*business, he should be spending 100% of his time doing something else and nothing*
336	*on this while it's on fire / Charlie: Mmm, hmm / so we'll have to do it different – so*
337	*we'll clearly have to do it differently. Can we do it efficiently and quickly? [pause] In*
338	*order to meet our –*
339	*Bradley: That would depend on the people, and the leadership. Because if you just – in*
340	*the chaotic world you could call it a group, throw them together, and hope for the*
341	*best. Might work, might not work. But the chances of it working are much better if*
342	*you can give them some means to resolve issues around priority and still take*
343	*accountability for their outcomes, and that's going to take some strong leadership.*
344	*So I would say it could work if that group is led with – if it's not –*

Text 8 – Lines 322- 344, April

In Line 323, Mike encourages Larry who has made several suggestions about available and good specialists. He gives an example of a potential expert – Jameson, in a humorous way, with a joke, which makes everybody laugh. Will and Charlie then both provide more anecdotal evidence about Jameson and his skills, thus substantiating Mike's suggestion. Mike seems to have achieved getting both Will and Charlie on board. Mike then continues encouraging the team with more positive feedback and details about how to use Jameson's skills best. After another brief intervention by Charlie who would like to know how to make 100% of Jameson's time available for the new project by asking a very open question, Bradley replies, aligning again with Mike: Bradley calls for strong leadership when working on the new project and thus supports Mike as leader - both in the actual meeting, but also in the future. This intervention can also be simultaneously interpreted as critique towards Will who, as noted earlier, has not proved to be the required strong leader as illustrated in the following excerpt:

339	*Bradley: That would depend on the people, and the leadership. Because if you just – in*
340	*the chaotic world you could call it a group, throw them together, and hope for the*
341	*best. Might work, might not work. But the chances of it working are much better if*
342	*you can give them some means to resolve issues around priority and still take*
343	*accountability for their outcomes, and that's going to take some strong leadership.*
344	*So I would say it could work if that group is led with – if it's not.*

Text 9 – Lines 341 – 344, April

The characterization of good leadership as spelt out in this turn summarises the ideal-type transformational leader; somebody who allows for autonomy and space, on the one hand, via Encouraging and Modulating strategies; but takes responsibility and leadership seriously, thus being simultaneously directive and also committed. The April meeting is characterized by more urgency and a clearly defined topic: a decision, which has to be taken quickly. Mike's discursive strategies

oscillate between encouragement, bonding and support; and directing and recommitting. He achieves a good balance between a more egalitarian and a more authoritative leadership style, and actually succeeds to persuade the team firstly, to take on the second project; secondly, to select the people who should work on it, and thirdly, to describe the form of leadership which would be needed to fulfill all the requirements of the project.

As illustrated in Figures 1a and 1b above, the two meetings are characterised by significantly different amounts of topics and by the extent and depth of discussion of each topic. We suggest that the recursive cycling through topics and sub-topics, as shown in the April meeting, encourages understanding of the issue so that durable consensus can be formed. In addition, this enables participants to feel as though they are being involved, and progress is being made, so that accord is reached. In contrast, the November meeting displays a plethora of topics, which are only superficially addressed. It is thus not surprising that the consensus did not hold in the long term (see Kwon et al., 2009). Moreover, as our analysis has demonstrated, the egalitarian transformational leadership style encourages an in-depth discussion of issues, whereas the more authoritarian transactional leadership style may lead to the making of hasty decisions, which have not been adequately considered in all their mid-term and long-term consequences.

Conclusion

In this paper, we highlighted the rather limited attention given to the discursive aspects of how leadership is realized. In particular, we focused on the role that leaders play in the process of consensus building, which underlies important activities such as organizational sensemaking and decision-making. We isolated two

28

research questions to address this specific gap in understanding: (a) what role do the discursive strategies of leaders play in team consensus building; and (b) how and to what extent do the material situations in which they occur affect the discursive strategies they employ, and their effectiveness?

We moved between extant theory and our empirical data drawn from meetings in a multinational company to show how two key leadership styles already isolated by other scholars – transactional and transformational leadership – are discursively deployed, and the important role discursive leadership plays in the formation of a durable consensus at a team level. Our analysis identified five discursive strategies leaders use to stimulate and shape the formation of consensus at the team level: Encouraging; Directing; Modulating; Re/committing; and Bonding; and illustrated how these are realized, linguistically, argumentatively, and pragmatically. We have demonstrated how the chair of the meetings (and leading manager) can influence the outcome of the meetings in salient ways, either negatively by hindering the process of consensus formation at the team-level, or positively by facilitating its occurrence, through a balanced deployment of these five discursive leadership strategies. In turn, we also showed how aspects of the context of discussion – such as a shift of standing of an individual in the team – and the meeting genre, might mediate the leaders' participation and their ability to control interactions within the team. Above all, what our analysis has shown is precisely how, linguistically speaking, a leaders' style – whether authoritarian and 'hierarchical' or more egalitarian and interpersonal is constructed through the five discursive strategies we have identified. We have clearly illustrated how an egalitarian leadership style positively influences the formation of consensus within a team and, importantly, increases the likelihood of a durable consensus being achieved.

To close, we would like to identify four avenues for research that would complement the focus of our paper. First, we have identified an apparent mediating effect of meeting genre on the potential for forming consensus around strategic issues. In order to explore this issue further, a study comparing the discursive strategies individual leaders use in different types of meetings, would potentially be useful. Does their discursive style vary between types of meetings in terms of the variation in the mix of the five strategies we have identified? Second, there is scope to undertake comparative work within organizations of the type undertaken by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), in order to examine the effects of national cultural context on discursive leadership style. Do, for example, leaders of different national business units in multinational corporations vary in their discursive style, and what impact does this have on consensus building in their respective teams in the same organization? Third, what effect do changes in an individual leader's context have on their discursive leadership skills? At one level (as shown in this paper with Will), the standing of individuals in the organization can wax and wane over time in terms of their credibility within their teams. A study focused on individual leaders over time in a single team, as well as working in different team contexts over longer periods, would likely shed important light on how individuals' discursive abilities develop over time, and how this affects their perceived professional standing in a team environment. Movement of executive leaders between different businesses as they are promoted, for instance, is a regular feature of everyday life in large multinational businesses, so is their discursive style influenced by these changes in the context of operation? Finally, we have concentrated in this paper on the linguistic and pragmatic enactment of discursive leadership strategies, largely bracketing-off interactions with the physical context in which the consensus building takes place. We have suggested that meeting genre, such as an away-day compared to a regular team meeting, can have a mediating

30

effect on the 'traction' of leaders discursive strategies, and a key assumption embedded in research on away-days is that the physical ambience of the venue influences the decision-outcomes of meetings. Other things being equal then, are there any discernible effects of the venue type on the discursive strategies used by leaders? Research along these four avenues would, we feel, make novel theoretical contributions, while also providing important new evidence and insights for practitioners.

References

Angouri, J. & Marra, M. (2010) Corporate meetings as genre, and the role of the chair in corporate meeting talk. *Text & Talk,* 30**,** 615-636.

Asmuss, B. & Svennevig, J. (2009) Meeting Talk. *Journal of Business Communication,* 46**,** 3-22.

Baker, P., Wodak, R., Gabrielatos, C., Khrosravinik, M., Krzyżanowski, M. & Mcenery, T. (2008) A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. *Discourse & Society,* 19**,** 273-306.

Balogun, J. & Johnson, G. (2004) Organizational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal,* 47**,** 523-549.

Bargiela-Chiappini, F. & Harris, S. (1997) *Managing Language: the discourse of corporate meetings,* Amsterdam, John Benjamins.

Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J. (1994) *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership.,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Bell, A. (Forthcoming) Re-constructing Babel: Discourse Analysis, Hermeneutics and the Interpretative Arc. *Discourse Studies,* 13.

Biggart, N. W. & Hamilton, G. G. (1987) An Institutional Theory of Leadership. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences,* 23**,** 429-441.

Boden, D. (1994) *The business of talk: Organizations in Action,* Cambridge, Polity Press.

Burns, J. M. (1978) *Leadership,* New York, Harper & Row.

Conger, J. A. (1991) Inspiring others: the language of leadership. *Academy of Management Executive,* 5**,** 31-45.

Dess, G. & Origer, N. K. (1987) Environment, structure and consensus in strategy formulation: A conceptual integration. *Academy of Management Review,* 12**,** 313-330.

Dess, G. & Priem, R. L. (1995) Consensus performance research: Theoretical and empirical extensions. *Journal of Management Studies,* 32**,** 401-418.

Dutton, J. E. & Jackson, S. E. (1987) Categorizing Strategic Issues: Links to Organizational Action. *Academy of Management Review,* 12**,** 76-90.

Fairhurst, G. T. (2007) *Discursive Leadership: in conversation with leadership psychology,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Floyd, S. W. & Wooldridge, J. B. (2000) *Building strategy from the middle: Reconceptualizing the strategy process,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Gardner, W. L. & Avolio, B. J. (1998) The charismatic relationship: A dramaturgical perspective. *Academy of Management Review,* 23**,** 32-58.

Grint, K. (2000) *The Arts of Leadership,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hartz, R. & Habeschied, S. (2008) Die Konstruction von Konsens und Einigkeit in Organisationen – am Beispiel der Mitarbeiterzeitung. IN Menz, F. & Müller, A. P. (Eds.) *Organisations-kommunikation.* Munich, Hampp Verlag, pp. 119-139.

Holder, J. J. (Ed.) (1976) *Decision making by consensus,* Plano, TX, Business Publications.

Holmes, J. (2003) Leadership and communication: the crucial role of context. *Paper presented at the Leadership Communication and Culture Forum.* Wellington Turnbull House, NZ.

Holmes, J. & Marra, M. (2004) Leadership and managing conflict in meetings. *Pragmatics,* 14**,** 439-462.

Janis, I. L. (1972) *Victims of Groupthink,* New York, Houghton Mifflin.

Kienpointner, R. (1992) *Alltagslogik. Struktur und Funcktion von Argumentationsmustern,* Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog.

Krzyżanowski, M. (2008) Analysing Focus Groups. IN Wodak, R. & Krzyżanowski, M. (Eds.) *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences.* Basingstoke, Palgrave, pp. 162-181.

Kwon, W., Clarke, I. & Wodak, R. (2009) Organizational Decision-making, Discourse, and Power: Integrating across contexts and scales. *Discourse & Communication,* 3**,** 273-302.

Lüdi, G. (2007) The Swiss model of plurilingual communication. IN Zeevaert, L. & Thije, J. D. T. (Eds.) *Receptive Multilingualism.* Amsterdam, John Benjamins, pp. 159-178.

Mantere, S. & Vaara, E. (2008) On the Problem of Participation in Strategy: A Critical Discursive Perspective. *Organization Science,* 19**,** 341-358.

Markoczy, L. (2001) Consensus formation during strategic change. *Strategic Management Journal,* 22**,** 1013-1031.

Menz, F. (1999) 'Who am I gonna do this with?': Self-organization, ambiguity and decision-making in a business enterprise. *Discourse & Society,* 10**,** 101-128.

Mintzberg, H. (1994) *The rise and fall of strategic planning,* New York ; London, Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Mondada, L. (2009) Emergent focused interactions in public places: A systematic analysis of the multimodal achievement of a common interactional space. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 41**,** 1977-1997.

Mulderrig, J. (2011) The Grammar of Governance. *Critical Discourse Studies,* Forthcoming.

Ocasio, W. (1997) Towards an attention-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal,* 18**,** 187-206.

Petersoo, P. (2007) National deixis in the media. *Journal of Language and Politics,* 6**,** 419-436.

Pfeffer, J. (1981) Management as Symbolic Action: The Creation and Maintenance of Organizational Paradigms. IN Cummings, L. L. & Staw, B. M. (Eds.) *Research in Organizational Behavior.* Greenwich, CT, JAI Press, pp. 1-52.

Pondy, L. R. (1978) Leadership is a Language Game. IN Mccall, M. W. & Lombardo, M. M. (Eds.) *Leadership: Where else can we go?* Durham, NC, Duke University Press, pp. 87-99.

Priem, R. L., Harrison, D. A. & Muir, N. K. (1995) Structured conflict and consensus outcomes in group decision making. *Journal of Management,* 21**,** 691-710.

Reichertz, J. (2004) Objective Hermeneutics and Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge. IN Flick, U. E. A. (Ed.) *Companion to Qualitative Research.* London, Sage Publications, pp. 570-582.

Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2001) *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism,* London, Routledge.

Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2009) The discourse-historical approach. IN Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.) *Methods of CDA, 2nd revised edition.* London, Sage, pp. 87-121.

Rouleau, L. & Balogun, J. (Forthcoming) Middle Managers, Strategic Sensemaking, and Discursive Competence. *Journal of Management Studies.*

Samra-Fredericks, D. (2003) Strategizing as Lived Experience and Strategists' Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Direction. *Journal of Management Studies,* 40**,** 141-174.

Samra-Fredericks, D. (2009) Ethnomethodology. IN Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (Ed.) *The Handbook of Business Discourse.* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 92-104.

Shamir, B. & Eilam, G. (2005) "What's your story?" A life-stories approach to authentic leadership development. *The Leadership Quarterly,* 16**,** 395-417.

Shotter, J. (1993) *Conversational Realities: Constructing Live through Language,* London, Sage.

Shotter, J. & Cunliffe, A. L. (2003) The manager as practical author: everyday conversations for action. IN Holman, D. & Thorpe, R. (Eds.) *Management and Language.* London, Sage Publications, pp. 15-37.

Smircich, L. & Morgan, G. (1982) Leadership: The Management of Meaning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* 18**,** 257-273.

Titscher, S., Meyer, M., Wodak, R. & Fetter, E. (2000) *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis,* London, Sage.

Toulmin, S. E. (1958) *The Uses of Argument,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1984) *Prejudice in Discourse,* Amsterdam, John Benjamins.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2008) *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2009) *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Walton, D., Reed, C. & Macagno, F. (2004) *Argumentation Schemes,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wodak, R. (2000) From Conflict to Consensus? The co-construction of a policy paper. IN Muntigl, P., Weiss, G. & Wodak, R. (Eds.) *European Union Discourses on Unemployment. An Interdisciplinary Approach to Employment Policy-Making and Organisational Change.* Amsterdam, John Benjamins, pp. 73-114.

Wodak, R. (2009a) *The Discourse of Politics in Action: 'Politics as Usual',* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Wodak, R. (2009b) The Semiotics of Racism – A Critical Discourse-Historical Analysis. IN Renkema, J. (Ed.) *Discourse of Course.* Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing, pp. 311-326.

Notes

[i] We would like to thank Florian Menz, Michael Meyer, Teun van Dijk and our anonymous reviewers for their important comments and suggestions. Of course, we take sole responsibility for the final version of this paper.

[ii] In recent years, a range of critical hermeneutic approaches have introduced intersubjective, abductive procedures of analysis which make the step by step analysis and interpretation of texts – always in dialogue with theoretical concepts - transparent. We draw on some aspects of 'Objective Hermeneutics' and the 'Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge' (Reichertz, 2004; Titscher et al., 2000) as well as on debates related to the status of hermeneutics in discourse analysis and the interpretation of text and discourse (Bell, Forthcoming).

iii In order to ensure confidentiality, the company name DSI is a pseudonym and using fictitious names has concealed the identities of the places and individuals in the research.

iv By macro-structure we mean the pattern of activity through which the discussion of a topic is advanced and brought about to attempt to reach a consensual conclusion. We use the term discourse topic or macro-topic as a main unit of analysis, defined as "the most 'important' or 'summarizing' idea that underlies the meanings of a sequence of sentences… a 'gist' or an 'upshot' of such an episode" (van Dijk, 1984, p.56). Following Krzyżanowski (2008) we differentiate between the macro-topic, which is the agenda item around which an entire episode revolves; primary topics, which are major explicitly defined aspects from which the macro topic is discussed; and secondary topics through which the primary topics are explored in further detail without being set explicitly at the start of the discussion. Thus an episode of discussion can be understood as a series of segments, each defined by a primary topic and further subdivided by a series of secondary topics.

v Apart from the quantitative keyword and collocation analysis, which allows identifying semantic fields, we also employed – as mentioned above – an abductive and retroductive methodology: one researcher (who observed the meetings) identified the primary or 'macro' topics within each episode. A second researcher (also present in the fieldwork stage) then independently conducted the same analysis. Only two minor discrepancies were found, and, following discussion as to why this was the case, the topics were amended and agreed. We repeated the process to identify secondary or sub-topics within each primary topic and clarify the subject 'building blocks' for the development of the discussion. The third

author/researcher (who was not involved in the fieldwork stage) analysed the text extracts from an outside perspective and arrived at a similar classification of topics.

[vi] Here, we draw on Toulmin's argumentation theory and on his famous argumentation scheme (Toulmin, 1958; Walton et al., 2004). Due to space limitations, we cannot elaborate on details of Toulmin's argumentation theory, which has been applied to various genres while investigating strategies of justification and legitimation with much benefit (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009).

[vii] Topoi serve as warrants in arguments where the evidence is not explicitly provided or where appeals to presupposed common sense knowledge are made. See Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and Kienpointner (1992) for more details.