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Power and topic shifts in strategic management argumentation

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Title: Power and topic shifts in strategic management argumentation.
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Introduction.

Our research question is How is power exercised and conflict managed within committees? We shall take an "argumentational" approach to this question by considering the relationship between the argumentation elements (claims, premises, warrants, politeness, topic choice and so on) and power and conflict. Examples of the type of question this approach will stimulate are How is power expressed in how people argue with each other in committees? Is power very obvious, and does it constrain what people say and how they say it? How is conflict managed and how does this relate to the process of argumentation?

The precise relationship between the argumentation of a committee and the generation of commitment and acceptance is not yet known. We still do not know what methods are used in meetings to maintain a cooperative atmosphere (and what constraints this places on what can be argued), what politeness and cooperativeness routines are used to protect individuals from losing face, how much of the argumention is explicit or whether explicitness risks an unacceptable visibility for the loser, and whether there are linguistic or behavioural signs which warn participants when conflict is approaching.

Also, the concept of power within committees is confused. There are several potential definitions of power, but there is no means within the literature of identifying which definition is most appropriate to committees. We will seek to distinguish the various extant definitions of power to committees, to develop a definition of our own which derives from language, and to relate this to the extant definitions.

Research on committees.

This section will introduce several strands of research which come together to make up this field.

Conflict in committees. Conflict is one of the problems of committees (Vroom, 1973), requiring more complex interpersonal relationships than dyadic relationships (Bazerman et al., 1988) and often causing members to feel compelled to comply with majority decisions, or to shift their own positions to be more in line with the group's position (Burnstein, 1983). Conflict is associated with ambiguity in five of McCaskey's (1982) 12 characteristics of ambiguous situations and it is problems of conflict that "encourage ... unwillingness to risk embarrassment by disagreeing with superiors, reluctance to admit that one has no idea what is going on" (Weick, 1995: 186). Moreover, conflict is implicit in Weick's (1995: 92) more specific concept of equivocality – the property of having more than one meaning. When conflict is avoided by means of committees becoming highly cohesive, there is the problem of "groupthink" , which is "a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures" (Janis, 1972: 9). Moreover, the desire to avoid conflict leads members of committees to the view that they agree when they do not, which has been called the "false consensus" bias (Ross et al., 1977). On the other hand, when there is conflict, discussion may result in decisions which are the product of excessive compromise (a problem which is aggravated by a requirement of unanimity), logrolling, and one-person or minority domination (Luthans, 1992: 357). Conflict has been found to take a large part of a manager's role (Mintzberg, 1973) and working time (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). A major task in conflict management is how to transform destructive, competitive conflict into constructive, cooperative conflict by means of integrating both sides' points of view and avoiding sacrifices, blame, and loss of face (Follett, 1924). Although it is known that compromise and smoothing are associated with reduced conflict and that forcing and withdrawal are associated with raised conflict (Thamhain & Wilemon, 1974) it is not known

how this is achieved in committees and how this relates to power. Interactive meetings are highly valued for the reason that subordinates are far more likely to accept a leader's decision following an interactive group process regardless of either the leader's desire to reach consensus or the technical quality of the decision (Ettling & Jago, 1988).

The question of conflict management is therefore closely related to the question of how power is exercised in committees. Disagreements about cause-effect relationships and objectives lead to conflict and to the greater use of power (Pfeffer, 1981). Debate in committees involves an agreement to engage in exchange. The agreement is that although a person has the right to have his argumentation weighed, he must also weigh the arguments of others. This is potentially an uncontrollable process for any leader, who is concerned about the time the process may take (even postponement and delay), at the conflicts that may be generated, and at the possibility that a decision may be taken which he does not favour. Although the social psychology literature suggests that open conflict can be functional and valuable (Barker *et al.,* 1988), these studies often collect their data at some remove from strategic committees of large organisations.

Power in committees. Any consideration of the role of power in, and management control of committees, depends on which of the many different definitions of power one chooses. Therefore we shall develop a typology of power with which to evaluate the role of committees and the relevance of power in them. The five definitions of power each have something to add to our understanding of committee power.

A 'zero sum' definition of power (Clegg, 1989; Fincham, 1992) equates power with winning or losing argumentation within committees. It regards political conflict as a fight between individuals over an object, and the ability to overcome resistance (Krackhardt, 1990; Pfeffer, 1992). Individuals do occasionally become embroiled in dispassionate debate or heated argumention in committees. But such occasions are rare: if the zero sum definition of power were always applicable to committees, then committees would be the focus of intense conflict and would have an organisationally damaging effect.

A 'processual' definition of power regards power as a social relationship (Orlikowski, 1989; Pettigrew, 1973) rather than as an attribute of a person and is defined in positive sum terms as getting the best out of the committee. The relationship involves an exchange of a reward, a punishment, a right, an identity, or expertise (French & Raven, 1968). The exchange is a resource-dependency one where the "dependence of Actor A upon Actor B is (1) directly proportional to A's motivational investment in goals mediated by B and (2) inversely proportional to the availability of these goals to A outside the A-B relations" (Emerson, 1962: 32; see also Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Were the benefits of argumentation to be considered to outweigh the disadvantages, the processual definition would always be relevant in advocating open and exhaustive discussion in committees, and there would be elaborate chains of argumentation of attacking and supporting claims. However, committee leaders have reason to be ambivalent toward argumentation. This is because argumentation, besides having advantages, is also time consuming, conducive to conflict, and uncertain in its effects.

An 'organizational' definition of power is one which ascribes power to committee members who can effectively play their roles to utilise resources and knowledge. Hierarchical status and task interdependence (Crozier, 1964) are two examples of this. The relevance of the organisational definition of power in committees is that each committee member will make contributions determined by her role

within the organisation. Knowledge of how other members' organisational roles influence what they want increases a committee member's power (Krackhardt, 1990). The persuasiveness of argumentation depends upon the values and goals of the audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) which in an organisation become internalised as those of the organisation (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985: 188-189), which requires the individual's identification with the organisation (Cheney, 1983).

A 'structurally constrained' definition of power has concerned itself with how the goals and assumptions of the powerful or the powerless operate at a super-organizational level, including class perceptions and ideologies (Willmott, 1987), and occupational rhetorics (Fine, 1996). Power is the ability to understand, use and become independent of these background factors which constrain one's attitudes and motivations. An application of the structurally constrained definition to committees suggests that power is the ability of committee members to take up goals, concepts and assumptions from the wider society which will help them to solve problems.

A 'social construction' definition takes as its starting point the observation that reality is subjective and therefore able to be created through language (Berger & Luckman, 1971). Because language has both tacit (taken for granted and thus unproblematic) and explicit (chosen as foreground and thus problematic) meanings, the purpose of social and political activity such as committee work is to translate the problematic into the unproblematic and taken for granted (Berger & Luckmann, 1971; Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987). Power is the ability to make things become taken for granted. Organisations achieve this by means of institutionalisation, a process in which an important element is the creation of legitimacy by various means (Weber, 1947). The social construction definition of power is prescriptive about the desirability of decision closure (Berger & Luckmann, 1971), of long term project survival (Law & Callon, 1992), and the undesirability of suppressing criticism (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

Communication in groups. This work has focussed on the inter-personal dynamics and social psychological processes of group interaction, and began with the book "How we think" (Dewey, 1910) which put forward a method of reflective thinking as part of a pedagogical perspective – with objectives such as how to speak effectively to an audience, how to effectively consider issues and how best to solve problems in groups. Another perspective on committee effectiveness was to use the analogy of human personality applied to the group – as in Cattell's (1948) notion of effective synergy of a group, which was the residual when the amount of energy devoted to the group's maintenance is subtracted from the total amount of energy able to be given to a task. Later researchers were to see relational factors of groups in a positive as well as a negative light (Salazar, 1995). These and other concerns formed the background to the start of empirical research on individual and group effectiveness, in particular concentrating on critical thinking ability, the beneficial use of meeting agendas (such as the Standard Agenda – Phillips, 1966), and the effect of members' personalities on group processes. This gave rise to two avenues of research – the functional and the developmental (Gouran, 1998). The functional approach considered the ways in which utterances aid the performance of tasks and found partial evidence for the view that those who exhibit the patterns of thought identified by Dewey contribute to better group outcomes and exert more influence on other group members (Sharp & Milliken, 1964), whereas the developmental approach considered the sequential dependencies of utterances in groups. An example of this latter approach was a study by Bales & Strodtbeck (1951) which suggested that there is a recurrent chronological pattern of interaction in problem-solving groups which they called orientation, evaluation and control. Scheidel & Crowell (1964) however found that discussion does not unfold in a linear fashion but instead is processual and system-like, dependent not only on previous utterances suggested by Bales & Strodtbeck but also upon the elements which constitute the group and those which derive from the external environment. Another criticism of the linear model was provided by Poole (1983) who showed that multiple sequence

models (which posit that there are several parallel and semi-related sequences) are more accurate descriptions of group interaction.

The functional approach was considerably extended by Hirokawa (1980) and Gouran (1985, 1988) who attempted to find communication-based reasons for differences in the performance of decision-making groups. Their basic theory was that groups have a greater likelihood of high performance when they use communication which serves task requirements and which generally conforms to the prescriptions laid down by Dewey's (1910) model of reflective critical thinking. However, although later research partly supported this view, (in particular successfully illuminating failures of decision making groups such as

those deliberating in the Watergate and Challenger cases – Gouran, 1984; Gouran *et al.,* 1986) there was insufficient attention to the question of whether communication supports task requirements or merely appears to do so.

More recently, structuration theory has been very influential in driving a number of important studies of group interaction. For example, structural elements shown to be both modified by and an influence on group discussion have included critical events (Fisher & Stutman, 1987) and discussion formats (Hirokawa, 1985). These structural elements were defined by Poole *et al.,* (1996) as rules and resources.

An original and provocative study by Hewes (1979) questioned the discipline's basic assumptions such as that what is said at one moment influences what is said later (rather than coming as a series of discrete contributions), and that interaction within groups determines outcomes (rather than decisions being made prior to meetings). This led to a theory (Hewes, 1986) that decisions are determined by prediscussion preferences of group members. This was partly vindicated by research by Scheerhorn *et al.,* (1994) who showed that information dissemination is a far more important communicative act in groups than decision making, and by criticisms by Canary *et al.,* (1995) and Zey (1992) (building on earlier criticisms by Simon (1978) and Cohen *et al.,* (1972)) of the rational choice model of groups espoused by the functionalist tradition of research.

Persuasion. In contrast to the literature on group communication which has concentrated upon interaction and effectiveness, the persuasion literature derives from psychology and social psychology and concentrates on the attributes of sender and receiver of messages which effect a change in attitude.

However, a point of overlap between the two literatures has been the issue of inattention to Dewey's prescriptive model of effective committee functioning and the reasons why this model is so seldom followed. Of relevance here is the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion which suggests that receivers will engage in "elaboration" of information relevant to the persuasive issue and that people vary between two extreme behaviours - they may either engage in extensive issue-relevant thinking during argumentation (the so-called "central route" to persuasion – Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), or they may rely on a simple heuristic (e.g. by the credibility of the arguer - Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1986, or the extent to which other people are persuaded - Axsom et al., 1987, or the likeability of the arguer - Petty & Cacoppio 1986) – the so-called "peripheral route" to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). It is known that issue-relevant thinking increases when the topic is relevant to the individual (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) when the individual knows more about the issue (Wood & Kallgren, 1988), and when the individual enjoys thinking (Hangtvedt et al., 1988), all conditions which may be increased when frequent and open debate is encouraged within a committee. Left to their own devices people will be "intuitive, lazy and impulsive, swayed this way and that by their attitudes, prejudices, and pieties", (Willard, 1989a: 183) whereas argumentation "quality can matter, does matter" (O'Keefe, 1995: 9).

Another point of contact between the two fields is the theory (Hewes, 1986) that decisions are determined by prediscussion preferences of group members rather than by the discussion itself. The persuasion literature on social judgement theory (Sherif *et al.,* 1965) suggests that our reaction to a particular persuasive communication will depend on what we think of (how favourable we are toward) the point of view it advocates. More particularly, the theory suggests that a communication advocating a position that falls in the receiver's latitude of acceptance is likely to be assimilated (perceived as closer to the receiver's own view), and a communication advocating a position in the latitude of rejection will probably be contrasted (perceived as even more discrepant from the receiver's own view). The theory explains the political use of ambiguity in terms of an attempt to make political candidates' views seem the same as the voter's and thus to encourage assimilation effects. This may be relevant to voting behaviour but it cannot explain the action of persuading someone to alter his opinion. Moreover, "everything turns simply on what position the message is seen to defend. And surely this is an incomplete account of what underlies

position the message is seen to defend. And surely this is an incomplete account of what underlies persuasive message effects" (O'Keefe, 1990: 43).

Another very relevant area has been the degree of susceptibility and resistance of receivers to different types of persuasion. Marwell & Schmidt (1967) for example, identified 16 compliance-gaining strategies such as promises and threats which capitalise on these susceptibilities, and McLoughlin *et al*., (1980) suggested various ways in which people resist compliance-gaining strategies. As yet no work has been done relating this type of research to committees.

Research which has related persuasion to management has tended to take the organisation rather than the committee as the unit of analysis. One way to relate persuasion to specific contexts within organisations is to explore the inter-relationship between roles and rules. For instance, Reardon-Boynton & Fairhurst (1978) used a socialisation perspective to show that individuals justify their messages by means of rules provided by others when they communicate with superiors or subordinates, but that they create their own rules when dealing with peers. This would suggest that committees of peers will be more creative and less conventional than committees whose members vary widely in organisational status. Also, bosses who provide subordinates with accounts and excuses for refusing a request often mitigate conflict-inducing responses from them (Bies *et al*., 1988).

Argumentation. What is meant by an argumentational approach and what is distinctive about it? In essence argumentation is an umbrella term referring to a range of intellectual developments concerned with understanding the way in which language is employed in the context of justifying a conclusion based on evidence (Toulmin, 1958). It is distinctive because it examines the logical structure of what people say to each other rather than considering attributes of the sender and of the receiver (the persuasion approach), or of the group interaction (the group communication approach). The next section will introduce the argumentation literature, and the following section will illustrate how this approach can be used to understand power and conflict in committees.

Following van Eemeren *et al*., (1994): the aims and objectives of the field of argumentation can be characterized as: (1) At a prescriptive level, to develop principles which inform people how to argue well. (2) At a descriptive level, to model the processes of argumention underpinning such phenomena as setting and shifting a topic, holding the floor in conversation and negotiating social identities. (3) At a normative level, to develop a framework in order to evaluate and improve collective real-world argumentative practices, treating the practices both as phenomena to be explained and as opportunities for intervention, in order to bring about social and organizational change.

How to argue well involves answering the question of what makes argumention strong. Argumention

strength is a composite of many dimensions which tend to operate in a heuristic, satisficing way (Taylor & Fiske, 1991; Dudszak, 1991). These dimensions include relevance, truth and effectiveness (Hample & Dallinger, 1990), acceptability and sufficiency, (Johnson, 1994: 241), logicality, emotionality, and ethicality, (Gass *et al.,* 1990), and precedent, authority, likeliness, plausibility and 'obviousness' (McCloskey, 1983).

However, such dimensions are socially constructed. Investigations of the concepts of 'argument field' (Willard, 1989b) and 'organizational logic' (McPhee, 1988) suggest that rationality will be at best local, dependent on context (Keogh, 1988: 3; Toulmin, 1958: 14; Willihnganz, 1994: 924-6). This means that criteria for judging what is a strong argumention may vary with context and circumstances (McEvoy, 1994: 54). The context may not only be defined by membership but also by intentionality (Habermas, 1987).

Toulmin (1958: 103) has provided the basic model of argumentation, whose elements comprise premise (evidence) e.g. "*Low share price and large assets*", claim (conclusion) e.g. "*the company is ripe for takeover*" and the warrant which justifies using the premise to make the claim e.g. "*this worked in the*

takeover and the warrant which justifies using the premise to make the claim e.g. *this worked in the past*". Claims may be accompanied by a qualifier such as "*usually*". A qualifier may have attached to it some exceptions to the rule.

Everyday argumentation within organisations and committees is socially situated - warrants, claims and premises relevant in one setting are not relevant in another (Toulmin, 1958). This means that formal logic is inappropriate in such settings - attributes such as level of interest, and argumention strength, constantly change according to the group dynamics and goals and discourse norms of that specific interaction. Moreover logic cannot accommodate the problem that there are different modes of argumentation (causal, temporal, conditional, hypothetical), and that argumentation may be aimed at prescription, prediction, explanation, appreciation, description, or classification (Brockriede, 1974).

Informal logic is the modern name given to the field of rhetoric and argumentation which attempts to explain and critically evaluate everyday disputatious, adversarial, dialogical reasoning (Johnson, 1994). Many very readable and useful books employ informal logic to enable their readers to develop more persuasive and defensible reasoning (e.g. Fogelin, 1978; Flew, 1978; Thouless, 1968).

Everyday argumentation is based less on formal than on informal logic. Anderson (1990) has reviewed a large number of studies showing that formal logic plays a small part in human reasoning processes. Instead of using reasoning to manipulate a small number of logic rules (e.g. modus ponens as used in syllogistic reasoning) people seem instead to use memory to retrieve one rhetorical rule from a large number of rhetorical, context-dependent rules. Moreover, people aim for plausibility rather than accuracy in their everyday reasoning (Isenberg, 1986: 241) and in organisations (Weick, 1995: 55-61). Rhetorical rules have been extensively analysed and classified by Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969).

Seibold *et al.,* (1981) compared the two argumentation classification theories of Toulmin (1958) and Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) by using each one to develop coding schemes which were then applied to discourse in decision making groups. The Toulmin classification helped to clarify the formal structural elements, whereas the Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca classification helped to understand the order in which statements were made, the persuasive effects intended, and the likely audiences targeted.

Normative use of argumentation research has included the development of sequential models of argumentation. Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1992) have suggested an idealised process model involving four stages: the confrontation stage, where the dispute is externalised, the opening stage, in which agreement is reached about the rules of discussion and initial common ground, the argumentation stage where argumentation is exchanged and critically scrutinised, and finally the concluding stage where the participants decide whose point of view is more forceful and convincing. Each stage requires a different configuration of argumentation elements to enable the argument's structure (premise, warrant, qualifier, backing, rebuttal and claim) to be expressed and evaluated. Other normatively motivated stage models of policy arguments include those by Scriven (1976), Hambrick (1974) and Gasper (1991). On the other hand Ford & Ford (1995) have put forward a predictive model in the context of intra-organisational conversations about change within organisations: they predict that each stage is characterised by different sets of speech acts such as requests, orders, declarations and questions.

Such models have been heavilly influenced by linguistics research on the pragmatics of conversational episodes. For example, Frentz (1976) suggested there are five episodes: (1) Initiation ("*Hi Jim. How are you*?"), (2) Rule definition ("*I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes"*, (3) Rule confirmation ("*Okay, but make it short. I have to get to a class*"), (4) Strategic development ("*I didn't get the notes from the class yesterday. Do you think I could borrow yours?"*, (5) Termination ("*I guess I should let you get to your class*").

Research has identified various ways in which individuals reduce the threat of loss of "face". A person has

lace to the extent that her presentation of self is accepted by others as a credible dramaturgical performance (Goffman, 1961). Negative politeness behaviour (Brown & Levinson, 1978), is motivated by a desire by those of lower status to deviate from an efficient form of communicating in order to protect the higher status, target person from being imposed on. It includes making elaborate apologies before making requests, and indirect forms of language such as disguising assertions in the form of questions. It gives rise to "powerless language", which is a form which has been found to make court witness' evidence less convincing (Lind & O'Barr, 1979; O'Barr, 1982; Lakoff, 1975). Positive politeness behaviour seeks to reassure the listener that she is being taken seriously in the interaction. One of the contexts of its occurrence is when there is a difference of status. Those of higher status use informal (e.g. "*Hi*" instead of "*Howdo you do*"), unassuming (e.g. "*I do the hiring*" rather than "*I'm Personnel Director*"), self-mocking ("*I get all the blame*" rather than "*I make all the decisions*") or inclusive ("*We*" instead of "*I*") language to reduce social distance and to reduce perceived dominance by leaders (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Although influence attempts use three types of objectives for the speaker, involving instrumental, relational and self-identity goals (Clark & Delia, 1979), the organizational literature has traditionally emphasised instrumental objectives. In contrast, relational and self-identity goals are more relevant to influence attempts which use a semantically indirect language form and style rather than a direct exchange-based inducement as occurs when organisation members follow prescribed procedures in return for salaries and other rewards. Various means are available to use language to sedate targets to overlook any leader-follower or influencer-target inequity (Drake & Moberg, 1986). Semantic indirectness maintains the meaning of the intended influence attempt but makes the fact that the attempt is being made invisible. It is illustrated by transforming the direct "Do X" into "X needs to be done" (Sadock, 1974). Questions can be sequenced to promote indirect influence (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) by planting questions which cause the target to consider a 'pre-indexed' proposition more favourably. Indirectness changes the role of the target from obedient slave to sympathetic helper.

Argumentation provides a series of elements and sequences which may indicate that something is wrong in a committee. Studies of the Challenger and Watergate disasters have shown that committee members failed to question or challenge unwarranted assumptions and poor conclusions (Gouran, 1984, 1985, 1987; Gouran et al., 1986), did not base decisions upon factual evidence (Hirokawa & Pace, 1983), and

overlooked facts for opinions (Hirokawa, 1984). It is often assumed that because groups possess more resources than individuals, they will be better able to make informed and good quality decisions. However, this is often not the case. At the level of the group, argumentation is often not used effectively. Meyers *et al*., reported on observations of group argumentation that

> "group members typically did not reason through arguments beyond offering a claim and providing some evidence...members seldom cited rules of logic or provided a standard whereby the argument could be tested...Additionally, members appear to offer ample reinforcement to others' proposals..but seldom offer objections or challenges .." (Meyers *et al.,* 1991: 59-60).

The following section will now apply this argumentational approach to the study of power and conflict in committees.

An illustration.

A new facility, due to be opened in January 1999, was being designed as a project within a large acute hospital and involved it and several suppliers in a project consortium. The new facility involved an experimental, politically sensitive approach to healthcare and required new working practices by staff. It was to be located within the existing site and would eventually lead to a reduction in the size of the existing hospital operation. It was therefore potentially threatening to existing staff. The project was studied by the author's research team over the three and a half year period January 1995 to July 1998. A committee

meeting was chosen from a large number attended and recorded by the author's research team. The meeting was selected on the basis of not containing sensitive information and not containing complex technical material requiring over-long explanation. The study uses four information sources relevant to the committee meeting.

Pre-committee report. A previously circulated report was analysed to discover its influence on the committee meeting.

Pre-committee meeting. A private preparatory meeting of committee leaders a few hours before the committee meeting was attended and a transcript taken in order to compare private and public reasons and thus to deduce how much reason giving was suppressed in the committee.

Committee agenda. The agenda was compared with the committee meeting to see whether topics in the committee meeting achieved the agenda objectives.

Committee meeting transcript. An extract was chosen from the start of the transcript until a sufficient length for the extract to be able to provide an illustrative example of the concepts raised above. The committee meeting analysed here was held in July 1996, some eighteen months after design work had started.

The case illustrates how committee leaders, with the cooperation of other members, behave in a way which maximises their power and minimises conflict. We formalise this behaviour in the form of a model and illustrate our model by showing the operation of a number of rules which leaders and their followers used. Our analysis of the case explains why committees do not follow the Dewey model of rationalistic argumentation and deliberation and why politeness, passive acceptance, and tactical non-disclosure play such an important part in committee functioning. It provides linguistic measures of power, conflict and accountability. It provides quantitative measures combined with a qualitative, evaluative methodology.

Figure 1. Model of linguistic power and conflict in committees.

Methodology.

The extract was analysed in order to discover the frequency of occurrence and linguistic style of various elements of argumentation such as questions and answers, evidence and proposals, and challenges and rebuttals to discover the level of conflict and the extent to which it is avoided. This also included an analysis of topic shifting. The coding scheme was influenced by the Toulmin (1958) categories of premise and warrant (both contained here as Reasons) and claim (Proposals here), and the Canary *et al.,* (1987) categories of challenges and objections (both contained in Challenges here) and convergent arguments (called Supports here), and responses (here Rebuttals). Questions and Answers as argumentational devices have been influenced by Sillince (1998) and the categories related to topic management are influenced by Sillince (1995).

The coding rules were as follows: Attributions of meaning were limited to the text. If there was more than one occurrence of the same element in any turn then it was treated as separate occurrence of that element. Turn numbers were used to indicate whose turn an element occurred in. Line numbers were used to indicate the associated text.

Reliability was tested in the following way. A second coder and the author coded the transcript. Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) provides an estimate of intercoder agreement beyond what would be expected to happen with chance selections. Two separate formulae were used, one for both coding variables and position in text (line numbers) (k = .65) and one for occurrence of coding variables in each turn (k = .71). These agreements are beyond chance and so they were considered acceptable.

These agreements are beyond chance and so they were considered acceptable.

The argumentation elements are defined in the coding scheme given in Figure 2.

An extract from the transcript and the coding operation are shown in Figure 3.

Rule 1. Select argumentation elements.

Words (W) and Turns (T). Floor time is the amount of time the speaker controls the discourse with her own speech (Hayashi, 1991; Edelsky, 1981; Shultz *et.al.,* 1982). More powerful individuals have been observed to take up more floor time in interactions (Schwartz, 1977). Floor time is indicated by the number of words. Although the chairman of the committee was the Chief Executive, the member with the most floor time was the Director of Contracting. These two members had more floor time than all the others put together.

Questions (Q) and Answers (A). Asking questions is a language use which is more "powerless" than giving answers. There were 4 answers to the 8 questions. The Director of Contracts and the Chief Executive provided answers while the others asked questions – another indicator of the power of these two individuals. The low power of other members was reflected in the fact that 4 questions received no answer, in turns [11], [17], [18], and [26]; they were ignored as other members interrupted – a sign of their lower power and status (West, 1984; Tannen, 1993)

Challenges (C) and Rebuttals (Re). Challenges are utterances which attack a previous turn. Challenges either imply something absurd (e.g. "*does this mean that you build a facility and then fit the purpose into it later*?" in [3]), or two sentences containing a contradiction (e.g. "*these do not find mention*" in [14]) or contain a preposition indicating contradiction ("*but", "although", "except", "unless*").

Challenges are a sign of conflict. Evidence of conflict was rare – there were only 4 challenges. The Clinical Director Imaging was the most critical, with two challenges. The first of these was in turn [3], which attacked turn [2]. In turn [2] the Director of Contracts had suggested postponement of the Master Contract without any previous agreement. Turn [3] challenged this. This was interpreted by the Chief Executive in turn [4] as a blaming inference – that there was no leadership – and so the blame was laid at the door of the Outpatients Department. The second challenge was "*Those figures don't feel right."* in [21], another example of a negative politeness strategy (the challenge is softened, because it could have been "*These figures are wrong*!"). This softened challenge attacked turn [20] and received a direct rebuttal from the Director of Contracting – *(Laughs)* "*It's from you*!" in [22]. The humour is an example of an intention to reduce social distance and is a sign that the initiating individual is of higher power and status (Coser, 1959). Social distance is the similarity of people in terms of social characteristics, and is expressed in language (Drake & Moberg, 1986). For example, similarity or membership of a group are associated with markers, which include familiar address, exaggerated statements, and a casual and colloquial style of speech (Brown & Levinson, 1978). An intention to reduce social distance is usually initiated by the higher status person (Fishman, 1971) – as was the case here ("*It's from you*!" was said by the Director of Contracting).

Supports (S). Supports are in-topic turns which support a previous turn. There were only 2 supporting contributions. [9] supports [8] and [10] supports [9]. These were made by the Chief Executive and the Director of Contracts. The lack of supports may suggest the early stage in the project so that the committee had not yet bonded (Tuckman, 1965). The Chief Executive's "*Only two or three people will*

question the data" was a positive politeness strategy because it created an atmosphere of complicity and in-group solidarity by sharing privileged information about outsiders. The various occurrences of "*we*" and "*our*" had the effect of claiming common views and purposes (Cheney, 1983) - it is significant that of a total of 14 occurrences, 11 were by either the Chief Executive or the Director of Contracting, whereas only 1 of the 5 occurrences of "*I*" and "*you*" were used by them.

Reasons (R) and Proposals (P). A proposal is defined as a claim or a recommendation, whereas a reason is defined as a fact or rule which is used to imply a proposal. A proposal might be descriptive ("*We have 8 weeks*"), predictive ("*two or three people will question the data*"), or prescriptive ("*we should postpone*"). There were much fewer reasons (8 cases) than there were proposals (24 cases) so that the great majority of proposals were made without any reasons to back them up. The majority of proposals (17) were given by the Chief Executive and the Director of Contracting. Reasons were usually offered in those turns where something contentious was being said.

Reasons included evidence or facts which were used to imply a proposition or proposal. For example, in turn [12], the evidence was "*Recovery times will come down*" which justified the proposal "*That's where we need scheduling*". And in turn [4], the evidence was "*Outpatients can't decide how much of outpatients work should go into [the new facility]*" and the proposal this implied was "*So the building should be flexible enough to accommodate our needs*". The adverb "*So*" has a crucial function here and other similar markers are other adverbs (e.g. *"then"*), prepositions (e.g. *"till", "but"*), demonstrative pronouns with relational adverbs (e.g. "*That's where*") and conjunctions ("*because", "if*") (Lauerbach,

1989; Jucker, 1993; Konig, 1991).

Reasons are required when an influence attempt is resisted and the action challenged (Drake & Moberg, 1986). Such reasons are expected whenever people fall below some accepted norm of expectations (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Also, expressive reasons with casual references to common knowledge indicate more social intimacy than ones where all the background information is given explicitly (Scott & Lyman, 1968). The common knowledge in this case was the 10 page report ("*Type and Volume of Activity*") written by the Director of Contracting and circulated 2 days before the committee meeting. It made recommendations using detailed quantitative projections supplied by a consultant. It advised that theatre caseload planning and scheduling (due to be taken out of the hands of doctors and to be given to an administrator using special software) should be based on recovery time. It suggested four key criteria for selecting those main hospital specialties to include in the new facility. Although the report is explicitly referred to only twice in the meeting, it lay behind a number of statements made and thus increased the legitimate power (French & Raven , 1968) of its author, the Director of Contracting. It generated questions (in turns [5] and [15]), was referred to in an answer (in turn [6]: "*We have 8 weeks*" – a deadline), was referred to as relevant to the imminent consultation process (in turn [10]), was used as a reason (in turns [4]: "*Outpatients can't decide*" – an excuse, [12]: "*in terms of savings*" – a common goal, and [25]: "*lots of investigation and intervention*" – a criterion for including specialties), and was criticised (in turns [13] and [14]).

As previously mentioned, there were only 8 reasons and 24 proposals in the committee meeting. Are reasons avoided in forums which are very public? To answer this we analysed two other meetings – the pre-committee private meeting, and a public meeting at which consultants expressed their anger at the proposals. For the first meeting we would expect a higher proportion of reasons, and for the second a lower proportion. For the pre-committee private meeting there was, as expected, a slightly higher proportion of reasons to proposals in the pre-committee meeting - 31 proposals and 14 reasons, which is slight evidence for this. But for the public meeting, contrary to expectation, the proportion (25 proposals and 8 reasons) was the same as in the committee meeting.

New Topics (NT). There were 8 new topics, although some of them were simply repeated attempts to return to an earlier topic. New topics are usually marked pragmatically by topic shift markers or 'frame words' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) which exist for signalling changes in topic. They were either pragmatically marked by interrogative forms (*"What..?"," How..?", "Will the…?"*, in 7 cases) or exceptionally (1 case) by a contradiction to indicate a challenge (*"There's a lot of…But these do not…"*). All new topics were raised by members other than the Chief Executive and the Director of Contracting.

Repeated Efforts to raise a topic (RE). 2 topics were the subject of repeated efforts to raise them. Making repeated efforts to raise a topic was an indication of low power because it showed that someone was failing to get the topic adequately discussed. These repeated efforts were made by members other than the Chief Executive or the Director of Contracts.

Topic Avoidance (TA). When someone avoids a difficult issue which had been previously raised, they are having an important effect on the course of the discussion. So this is an indicator of power. It is commonly assumed that many elements are either accepted as tacitly assumed or jointly created by dialogue participants in order to facilitate dialogue. This assumption of collaboration is problematic in argumentation. In non-argumentational discourse it is assumed that focus and scope shifts are negotiated in good faith, so that surprising or cognitively taxing shifts are less acceptable. To be coherent, discourse needs processes which both 'unfold' (a theme emerges over time) and 'bind' previously unrelated

elements together by means of referential activity (Bamberg & Marchman, 1991) and of categorisation of temporal flow of events (Slobin, 1990). In argumentation, however, partners may find that surprise, deceit, distraction and complexity are useful weapons.

Topic Widening (TW). Topic widening occurs when a previously raised topic is expanded. For example, turn [5] raises the question of what constitutes a consultation for the purposes of the new facility, and turn [6] widens the topic by making the answer dependent upon the utilisation rate of equipment, which depends on diagnosis as well as on consultation. Topic widening influences what is said and so is an indicator of power. Figure 4 shows that the Director of Contracts avoided a topic twice, and that all but one of the topic widening turns were those of the Chief Executive or the Director of Contracting.

Figure 4. Statistics of committee argumentation.

Rule 2. Maximise linguistic power.

This is the power accruing to the speaker from their use of language. It is distinct from positional power - the power that goes with a job title. It is a composite variable. On seven measures – floor time, questions and answers, challenges and rebuttals, proposals and topic shifts, the committee was divided into two camps, which could be loosely termed the leaders – those with positional power - (the Director of Contracting and the Chief Executive) and the followers (the rest). Leaders had more floor time (a potential source of referent power – French & Raven, 1968) than followers despite their being numerically fewer in number.

Leaders gave answers (A) to questions (Q) posed by followers; leaders gave rebuttals (Re) to challenges (C) made by followers; leaders made more proposals (P) than followers; leaders supported (S) each other; – all ways in which leaders could demonstrate their special knowledge and expertise and hence increase their perceived expert power (French & Raven, 1968). New topics were always raised by followers, although their relatively low power was reflected in several repeated attempts to raise the same topic. Sometimes topics were avoided (TA) or widened (TW), and this was done solely by leaders. This source of power is one which cannot easily be fitted into the French & Raven (1968) framework.. This discussion suggests that the linguistic power of individual j can be defined as:

$$Linguistic\ power_j = \frac{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}(P_i + Re_i + TA_i + TW_i + A_i)}{\left(\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}RE_i + Q_i + C_i\right) + 1} \quad (1)$$

We hypothesise that linguistic power as defined above is associated with floor time (W).

Rule 3. Minimise linguistic accountability.

Speakers commit themselves to rhetorical positions and thereby increase their responsibility (for a decision) and liability to blame. Linguistic accountability is increased by making proposals (P), giving answers (A), and giving reasons (R), (they all make one a target for later blaming) and is reduced by avoiding (TA) and widening topics (TW) and asking questions (Q). One way of exerting power without disempowering one's subordinates is to avoid accountability by asking questions (e.g. Jack Welch, the chief executive of General Electric frequently uses this form of influence). This discussion suggests that the linguistic accountability of individual j can be defined as:

$$Linguistic\ accountability_j = \frac{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}(A_i + R_i + P_i)}{\left(\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}TW_i + TA_i + Q_i\right) + 1} \quad (2)$$

We hypothesise that individuals attempt to maximise their Power (influence) and to minimise their Accountability (liability to blame) and hence that these two variables will be negatively associated.

Rule 4. Minimise linguistic conflict.

Conflict is the extent to which interaction focuses on disagreement. Challenges (C) threaten face directly, obliging the challengee to repair or retract ("*That's rubbish - I don't agree*"). Reasons (R) offer a target for later challenge. Rebuttals (Re) continue the disagreement episode. On the other hand, proposals (P) are positive and serve a constructive function, inviting further contributions and creating an atmosphere of agreement. Supports (S) are explicit agreements with previous proposals. This suggests a definition of committee conflict over i instances of argumentation elements for each of j individuals is:

$$Linguistic\ conflict = \frac{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}\sum\limits_{j=1}^{m}(C_{ij} + R_{ij} + Re_{ij})}{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{n}\sum\limits_{j=1}^{m}(S_{ij} + P_{ij}) + 1} \quad (3)$$

Conflict was calculated for the committee meeting (Conflict = $\frac{14}{27}$ from Figure 4) and for the public meeting at which hospital consultants expressed their anger at the proposed new unit (Conflict = $\frac{9}{15}$ from Figure 5). The source transcript for Figure 7 is not included for space reasons.

Figure 5. Statistics of public meeting argumentation.

The similar level of conflict does not adequately reflect the different emotional atmosphere between the two meetings. However, this is not the point – the definition of conflict here is an argumentation one, rather than an emotional one.

Rule 5. Use negative and positive politeness.

Conflict was managed and contained by the use of both positive and negative politeness. Politeness rules are a means of palliating influence attempts (Drake & Moberg, 1986: 574) and hence aim at reducing conflict. An analysis of linguistic forms shows their complex and subtle role in argumentation in determining the way in which argumentation was expressed to take account of relative power. Leaders initiated positive politeness forms of "powerful" language, whereas followers initiated negative politeness forms of "powerless" language.

(a) Negative politeness. Requests were elaborately justified (e.g. [15]: "*I'm curious to know if…*"). Disquiet gave rise to questions rather than to challenges (e.g. [3]: *"you fit the purpose into it later?"*). Assertions were transformed into questions (e.g. [26]: *"we might need a facility for classes and other*

activities?"), or linguistic means were used to neutralise the emotional force of criticism (e.g. [3]: "*But does this mean*.."). When questions were not sufficiently answered and disquiet persisted, as it did over the definition of a clinical consultation, they were asked again and again ([5], [11], [18]) rather than turning them into explicit challenges due either to deference to leaders (Mullen *et al*., 1991), or to evaluation apprehension - the worry about what others think – (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Argumentation was rare - there were much fewer reasons than there were proposals and the great majority of proposals were made without any reasons to back them up. In terms of strategies for exercising power (Falbo, 1977) hinting, persistence and evasion were more frequently used than reason. Because reasons are an invitation to challenge, a conflict avoidance principle is to offer reasons only where necessary – that is - where something potentially contentious was being said. Challenges can operate to neutralize the power of leaders and thus paralyze, destroy or counteract the effectiveness of leader behaviours (Kerr, 1977). It is not surprising therefore that there were few challenges.

(b) Positive politeness. Leaders embedded talk with references to shared objectives and thus reduced social distance between themselves and their followers. Leaders increased followers' sense of complicit membership (reducing the perceived distance between followers and leaders) by embedding references to shared objectives in their talk: "*We need to have discussions..", "We should send details..", "We can get more out of it in terms of savings..",* and "*We need to change peoples' views*". They made 10 such references (in proposals) to followers' 3 references (in questions). Rationality became socially constructed to mean the necessity of having discussions, saving money, and changing peoples' views. This suggests that the purpose of the process was as much about the creation of commitment as it was to ensure a high quality decision outcome. Indeed, it has been found that a low-quality solution that has good group commitment can be more effective than a high-quality solution that lacks such commitment (Maier, 1967). This function of ensuring collective commitment is more important when objectives are more ambiguous, and may explain why higher level managers tend to share more power than lower level managers (Heller & Wilpert, 1981).

The Director of Contracts regarded answers as means of introducing disclaimers. Disclaimers are means whereby an influencer can reduce any dissatisfaction which targets may feel with regard to face-threats associated with compliance (Drake & Moberg, 1986). 2 of his 3 answers were equivocal ("*That depends*" in [6] and in [16]). They were means of adjusting a potentially overbearing identity and instead demonstrating tentativeness rather than dogmatism, and concern for others' opinions.

Also, comparison of the pre-committee meeting and committee transcript reveals other forms of politeness. Firstly the Trust concealed knowledge of the supplier's anxiety as a form of positive politeness (revealing it would have slightly humiliated the supplier, making him appear to be begging). Secondly the supplier asked for commitment indirectly as a form of negative politeness (a direct plea might have led to an embarrassing rejection).

Rule 6. Use Tactical non-disclosure.

All formal meetings such as committees have preparatory talks between smaller groups of insiders or "kitchen cabinet" colleagues. The committee meeting was no exception. A pre-committee meeting (at which the author was able to record and take a transcript) was held between the Director of Contracting and the Chairman of the hospital Trust. The comparison of public argumentation in the committee meeting, with private argumentation in the pre-committee meeting, enables us to compare foreground disclosure with background concealment, and to explore the reasons why a situation is equivocal (has many meanings) (Weick, 1995: 92) .

The public argumentation was presented at the committee meeting. In turn [1], the Manager [Facilities Management Supplier] asked what the new facility meant for the Trust's strategy. Although he did not make this explicit, he was seeking commitment by the Trust to his company's involvement in the Consortium's project. He was answered (in turn [2]) by the Director of Contracting's proposal that the contract signing be postponed until March or April 1997, with the reason that this would give the information systems requirements time to be written. However, this was different from what he had said to the Chairman in a private meeting earlier that day.

The private argumentation was presented at the pre-committee meeting. Besides the uncertainty about the information system, a privately held reason for favouring postponement was to get the latest technology. The Trust concealed its aim to get the latest technology as a negotiating tactic – a form of "keeping its powder dry" or "keeping its cards close to its chest" (disclosure would have given a reason to the supplier to charge a higher price). The committee was not the right place to hold negotiations (Edelman, 1966). It did not accept the levels of conflict required for negotiation. In withholding the ammunition of reasons, the Trust preserved its power.

Rule 7. Ensure Passive Acceptance of Agenda

The passive acceptance and failure to challenge by followers is clearly demonstrated in the relation of the agenda to the committee meeting. The agenda contained three objectives. Each agenda objective will be treated separately.

1. To "*endorse*" the view that the "key driver" (influencing information systems design and working practices design) was the building design work. The discussion on this item is contained in turns [1] to [4], consisting of a question, followed by an answer, followed by a challenge, followed by a rebuttal. The answer and rebuttal were from the Director of Contracting and the Chief Executive. So this endorsement (by others) did not happen explicitly – nobody apart from these two individuals supported the objective. However, because there was no successful, open challenge the agenda objective was achieved.

2. To "identify" key project milestones for the building work. One milestone ("*We have eight weeks to make decisions about how much of each department goes into the facility*" in turn [6]) was introduced without any reasons by the Director of Contracting to back up his point that targets on utilisation rate were needed. This amounted to a "leader" feeding the committee with conclusions he wished it to accept. Another set of milestones is contained in the Director of Contracting's answers in turns [9], [12], and [20]. The agenda objective was for the committee to do the identifying. Instead the Director of Contracting did it, and lack of discussion or challenge constituted a legitimation.

3. To "actively consider" the size and scope of work in the new facility. The key issue here was whether or not consultations should be done in the new facility. Page 6 of the report by the Director of

Contracting circulated before the committee meeting raised doubts on their inclusion. On this very point there were repeated questions in the committee about what was meant by "*consultation*" from followers and deflection by means of avoidance and widening of topic by leaders.

The achievement of the agenda objectives must be accepted because later committee meetings did not question their achievement. The fact that they were achieved throws an interesting light on concepts such as "endorsement", "identification" and "consideration" by committee and its enactment function as a

means of increasing leaders' legitimate power (French & Raven, 1968). The success of this process is due to enactment as a prelude to internalisation (Weick, 1995), and the fact that rationality is socially constructed in daily practical activities so that enactment is used to legitimise what has occurred (Garfinkel, 1967; Neilsen & Rao, 1987). Having been in a committee at which they did not voice their serious criticisms (negative politeness acted as an incentive to them to engage in counter-attitudinal behaviour) meant that followers later sought to reduce cognitive dissonance and reconcile their views with the committee positions they had passively accepted. As far as cognitive dissonance theory is concerned, empirical evidence (O'Keefe, 1990: 61-76) suggests that the size of the incentive is negatively associated with the extent of the attitude change. This implies that when people are aware that they are being forced (by an incentive) to comply, then they remain aloof from changing their beliefs, but when the incentive is imperceptibly small (such as a taken for granted negative politeness convention) they come to look on the adopted beliefs as their own. Followers considered themselves implicated in the committee's work. When new topics arose, members took note of what the "agreed" position was on the previous topic. If a topic's central proposal was not challenged, then this was taken to be the accepted position. This is a form of 'membershipping', whereby argumentational positions come to be "owned" by meeting participants (Sacks, 1972). Silent and perhaps reluctant acceptance is in this way transformed into deliberate choice and is used by leaders to legitimate the committee's work.

Statistical tests.

The source data for the statistical tests is in Figures 4 and 5 above. The two data sources provide 16 observations (individuals who contributed to either meeting). The variables which are significantly associated (using a two-tailed test with Spearman rank correlation scores greater than $r_s = 0.625, N = 16, p \leq 0.01$) are Power and Accountability ($r_s = 0.8213$), floor time (W) and Power ($r_s = 0.7191$), floor time (W) and Accountability ($r_s = 0.8588$), Reasons (R) and Accountability ($r_s = 0.7029$) and Proposals (P) and Power ($r_s = 0.8368$).

However, insignificant or negative associations exist for Questions (Q) and Power ($r_s = -0.2353$), Challenges (C) and Power ($r_s = -0.0228$), Challenges (C) and Accountability ($r_s = 0.3824$) and Reasons (R) and Power ($r_s = 0.3735$).

The association of Power and Accountability was unexpected because it was hypothesised earlier than individuals will seek to maximise Power and minimise Accountability. Otherwise, apart from the associations of floor time (W) with Power and Accountability hypothesised above, these significant associations are determined by the definitions of Power (in which Proposals is numerically the major variable) and Accountability (in which Reasons is numerically the major variable) and so are no surprise. Also, several of the variables for which small numbers of observations exist in the data remain unvalidated.

Defining power.

Our model has implications for the five definitions of power developed earlier. It assumes that the expression of reasons is minimised, and that norms of conflict reduction mean that were zero sum power

to be exercised in committees in open disputes, and were some members to take a zero sum view, then they would find their efforts to be counterproductive. Committee power is not about winning arguments. Also our model assumes that the important argumentation has already been aired so that processual power is used in other forums - in private meetings, negotiations, or in reports. In terms of organisational

power, leaders were able to understand the roles of other members of the committee (e.g. concern at meeting their project responsibilities, concern at representing their specialties' interests, general clinical and ethical worries, and the supplier's concern at promoting his company's profits). In our model, these role-based interests led to power-related language forms of influence attempt (e.g. leaders controlled the hospital and the project and this led to their choice of positive politeness strategies). In terms of the structurally-constrained definition of power, leaders were able to understand the way in which societal actors behave (power relationships within hospitals and within consortiums, between hospitals and their customers, and between government and the healthcare sector). The socially-constructed definition of power has the most relevance to our model. In our model (Figure 1), leaders attempted to reduce linguistic conflict and maximise linguistic power by balancing argumentation variables (equations 1 & 2) and by making use of followers' passive acceptance. The clearest evidence of such power in the case studied was the fact that, although they had only passively accepted the ideas of committee leaders, followers did not question those ideas during the remaining two years of the study. The ideas had been legitimated and thus taken for granted. These various definitions of power suggest a typology as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Type of power and definition of power within committees

Future directions.

We suggest a research agenda along the following lines. Firstly, there is a potential for quantitative testing of the current hypotheses and validation of the coding scheme over larger numbers and types of meetings. The extent of conflict and argumentation in committees will vary, related to the need for wide debate and challenge of decisions. It has been suggested that larger firms in uncertain environments need dissent while smaller firms in certain environments need consensus (Cosier & Schwenk, 1990, 70). There may also be a consistent difference between projects (with their need for commitment to tight budgets and deadlines) and organisations. If committee members fail to agree about objectives and perceived causal relationships, then more political forms of organisation will become appropriate (Thompson & Tuden, 1959) and this will require inclusion of political variables in any analysis.

The definition of conflict in equation 3 was a committee-level definition, whereas power and accountability are defined in equations 1 and 2 at the level of the individual. What is the precise relationship between conflict and power at this aggregate level? Situations of high conflict are encouraged when leaders have little power and are therefore unable to control, avoid and widen topics (equation 2). This suggests the falsifiable hypothesis that large disparities in individual power between committee members are associated with lower levels of conflict. The association between power and accountability, observed above and falsifying our hypothesis that they were negatively related, requires further analysis.

Conclusion.

The model differs widely from the rationalist models of group decision making put forward by the functionalist approach to communication in groups. The model also shows the close relation between power and the ability to minimise conflict. Although studies of persuasion in management has tended to remain unfocussed at the general organisational level, the model is able to relate participants' roles within the committee and the seven rules and so is able to focus upon a specific context – the committee. Another implication of the model is its illuminating relevance for the question of why the various processes of argumentation are not usually followed. The data and the methodology have both been original, bringing

methods and theories from linguistics and philosophy into the management literature. In particular, they successfully relate a qualitative methodology to quantitative data analysis by means of inter-coder reliability checks and non-parametric statistical tests.

The model assumes that leaders (1) aim to create and maintain a cooperative atmosphere; (2) use positive politeness language forms to protect followers (the powerless) from a sense of loss of respect, approval or intimacy; (3) use language which reduces social distance and followers' perceptions of leaders' dominance; (4) avoid challenges and reason-giving; and (5) direct the choice of topic by means of topic avoidance and topic widening.

The model assumes that followers consider themselves implicated in the committee's work even when they have only passively accepted it by failing to raise challenges. Leaders increase this sense of complicity by embedding references to shared objectives in their talk. Followers express their disquiet in weakened form as questions, which is a negative form of politeness aimed at reducing leaders' sense of being imposed upon by their criticisms. A model of the relationship between power and conflict is suggested in which (a) politeness rules that acknowledge power differences reduce conflict; and (b) norms of the unacceptability of conflict lead to the open expression of power being hidden (by reasons not being disclosed).

Answering questions, supporting others, making proposals, rebutting challenges, avoiding and widening topics, and achieving the agenda's objectives are means by which leaders increase their power. This undoubted source of power cannot be accommodated within the French & Raven (1968) typology. It is the power that comes from an ability to handle ambiguous situations and in particular the potential conflicts arising from argumentation, which is an ability to "absorb, or resolve and utilize, conflict for personal and organizational ends" (Dalton, 1959). Our model assumes, and our example illustrates, that conflict is perceived as damaging for individuals and the organisation, so that those who are able to oil the wheels by managing and containing conflict while still achieving important managerial goals are accorded extra legitimation by others.

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Figure 1. Model of linguistic power and conflict in committees. (return)

Rule 2. Maximise Linguistic Power

Proposals

Rule 1. Select Argumentation Elements.

Rule 7. Ensure Passive Acceptance of Agenda

Rule 4. Minimise Linguistic Conflict

Questions
Challenges
Reasons

Rule 5. Use Politeness

Rule 6. Use Tactical Non-Disclosure
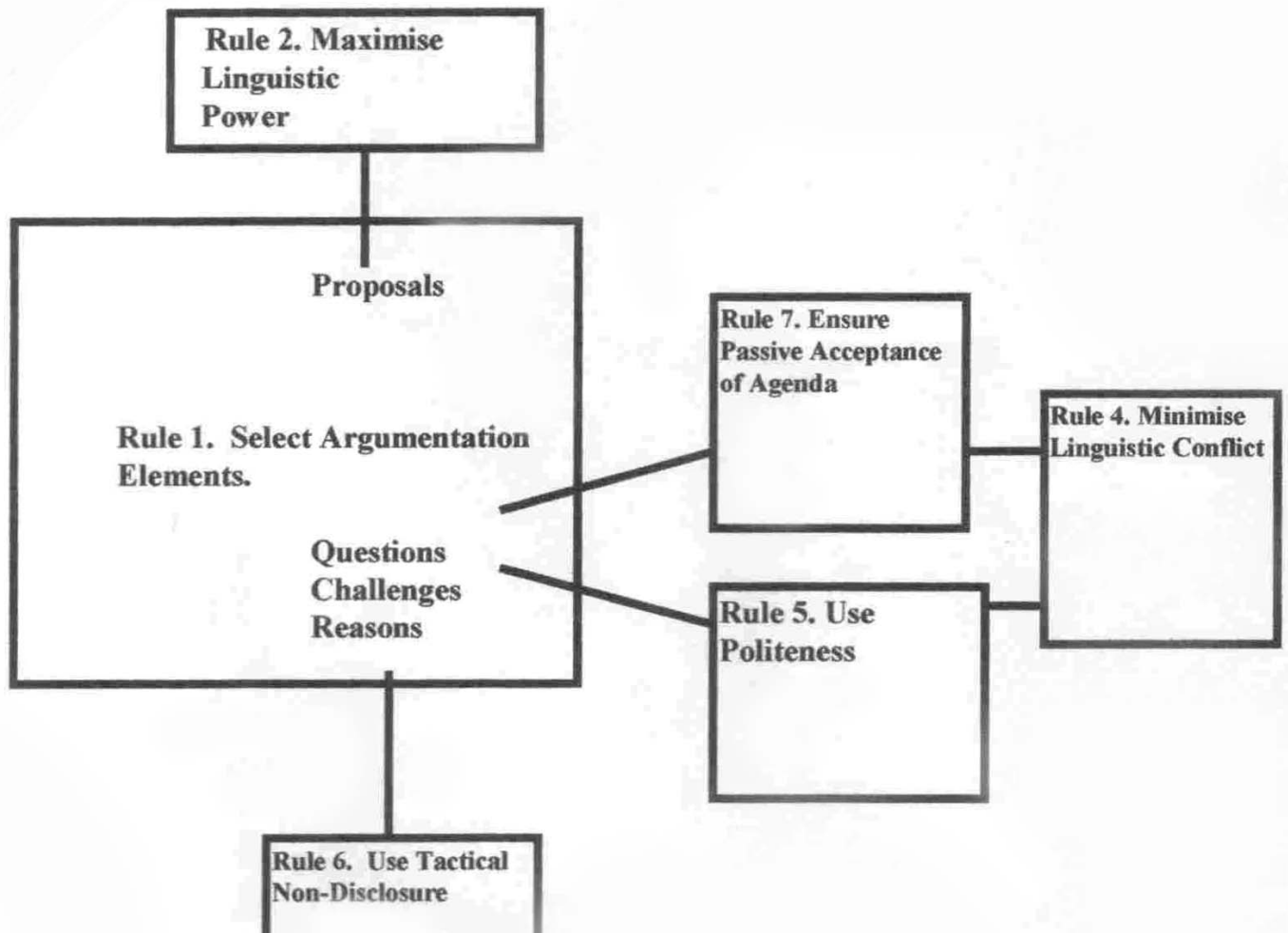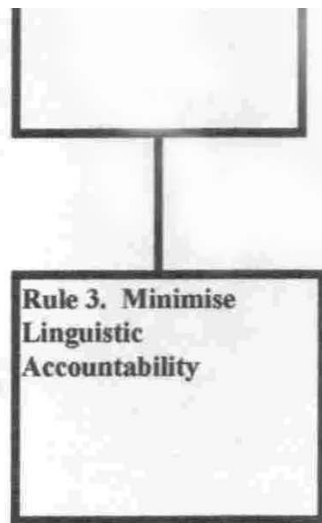
Figure 2. Coding scheme. ()

Floor time (F) Floor time is number of words spoken in a turn.

Reasons (R) A reason is a fact or rule which is used to imply a proposal.

Proposals (P) A proposal is a claim that something is true or recommendation that something should happen.

Questions (Q) Questions are sentences in the interrogative form of verb – subject.

Answers (A) Answers are in-topic turns which follow questions.

Challenges (C) Challenges are sentences which attack a previous turn.

Rebuttals (Re) Rebuttals are in-topic turns which attack previous challenges.

Supports (S) Supports are in-topic turns which support a previous turn.

New topics (NT) New topics are turns in which there is a change of subject.

Repeated efforts to raise same topic (RE) Repetition occurs when the same topic is returned to after an interval of time in which other topics have been raised. A repeated attempt is when the topic is not continued.

Topic avoidance (TA) If a turn raises a new topic but pretends to continue the previous topic this is topic avoidance.

Topic widening (TW) Topic widening occurs when a previously raised topic is expanded.

Figure 3. Coding of extract from committee meeting transcript. ()

Note + For coding scheme see Figure 2.

Turn	Job title	line	Transcript extract	Coding +
[1]	Manager, [Facilities Management Supplier]	1 2 3	*What does [the new facility] mean for* *the strategic direction of [names the NHS* *Trust]?*	(Q lines 1-3) (NT 1-3)
[2]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	*It means we should postpone the Master* *Contract with [Facilities Management Supplier] until* *March or April next year* *Till then all [names the NHS Trust] facilities like information systems will have time to decide what they want* *so that they can plan.*	(P 4-6) (R 7-10) (A 4-6) (TA 4-10)
[3]	Clinical Director (Imaging)	11 12 13 14 15	*This means* *you construct the building and then let the facilities and departments take over later* *But does this mean that you build a facility and then that you fit the purpose into it later?*	(P 11-13) (R 11-13) (C 14-15) (Q 14-15) (TW 11-15)
[4]	Chief Executive	16 17 18 19	*Outpatients can't decide how much of out-patients work should go into [the new facility]* *So the building should be flexible enough to accommodate our needs*	(P 18-19) (R 16-17) (Re 16-19) (A 16-19)
[5]	Executive Director of Nursing	20 21	*What exactly is the nature of a consultation? Do we know?*	(Q 20-21) (NT 20)
[6]	Director of	22	*That depends on the utilisation*	(P 23-25)

	Contracting & Clinical Activity	23	rate	(A 22)
		24	We want a utilisation rate for Radiology of 80 to 90 percent (20 percent would not be economic)	(TW 22-25)
		25		
		26		
		27	We have 8 weeks to make decisions about how much of each department goes into the new facility	
		28		
[7]	Executive Director of Nursing	29	How are we going to sell it to people?	(Q 29) (NT 29)
[8]	Chief Executive	30	We need to consult to have	(P 30-32)
		31	discussions with individuals and then send out a document outlining what and why.	(A 30-32)
		32		
[9]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	33	We should send details of all this now to all clinical leads and consultants	(P 33-34)
		34		(P 35-36)
		35	We should ask for comments in two weeks and then have a big meeting to agree	(P 37-38)
		36		(S 33-38)
		37	All clinical managers should attend that meeting	
		38		
[10]	Chief Executive	39	Only two or three people will question the data used by [name of the Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity]	(P 39-41)
		40		(S 39-41)
		41		
[11]	Clinical Director of Medicine	42	What is the relationship between imaging and consultation?	(Q 42-43)
		43		(NT 42-43)
				(RE 42-43)
[12]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	44	There will be beds in the hotel twenty of them plus ten for elderly and rehabilitation cases	(P 44-45)
		45		(P 46-49)
		46		(P 52-53)

		46	*If we pump in more work into [the new facility] we can get more out of it in terms of savings for example Pediatrics the more the work*	(P 52-53) (R 50-51) (TA 44-53)
		47		
		48		
		49		
		50	*the more the opportunity to save*	
		51	*Recovery times will be coming down from 10-12 hours to 45 minutes*	
		52		
		53	*That's where we need scheduling and there will be big cultural changes*	
[13]	Chief Executive	54	*To schedule certain kinds of activities together may not be a good thing*	(P 54-55) (R 56-57) (C 54-57) (TW 57)
		55		
		56	*Some specialties cannot stand each other we need to change peoples' views I think*	
		57		
[14]	Executive Medical Director	58	*There's a lot of medical intervention work that goes on in several specialties*	(P 62) (R 58-59) (C 58-62) (NT 58-62)
		59		
		60	*But these do not find mention in [names the Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity]'s paper*	
		61		
		62		
[15]	Clinical Director of Medicine	63	*On that point err I'm curious to know if Cardiology is in or out?*	(Q 63-64)
		64		
[16]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	65	*That depends on what the focus is whether it is consultation, or diagnosis or intervention.*	(P 65-66) (A 65-66) (TW 65-66)
		66		
[17]	Director of Finance	67	*Will [the new facility]*	(Q 67-68) (NT 67-68)
		68	*accept patients from anywhere?*	
[18]	Executive	69	*You mentioned consultation*	(Q 70-71)

[18]	Executive Director of Nursing	69 70 71	*You mentioned consultation What is the role of a consultation in [the new facility]?*	(Q 69-71) (NT 70-71) (RE 69-71)
[19]	Executive Medical Director	72 73	*Do screening services go into [the new facility]?*	(Q 72-73) (NT 72-73) (RE 72-73)
[20]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	74 75	*48 percent of CT scanner work of [the NHS Trust] can go into [the new facility]*	(P 74-75) (A 74-75)
[21]	Clinical Director (Imaging)	76	*Those figures don't feel right*	(P 76) (C 76)
[22]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	77	*(Laughs) It's from you!*	(P 77) (Re 77)
[23]	Clinical Director (Imaging)	78	*Well it's from the computer*	(P 78)
[24]	Director of Contracting & Clinical Activity	79 80	*Pathology is either all in or all out 80 percent of routine blood tests could go in*	(P 79) (P 80) (TW 79)
[25]	Executive Medical Director	81 82 83	*Oncology can go in as they need lots of investigation and intervention*	(P 81) (R 82-83)
[26]	Executive Director of Nursing	84 85 86 87	*Pharmacy should be in We should think about education and human resource management*	(P 84) (P 85-86) (R 87-88) (Q 87-88)

| | | 87 | we might need a facility for | (Q 87–88) |
| | | 88 | classes and other activities? | |

Figure 4. Statistics of committee argumentation.

Note: * denotes leaders; others were followers.

Job	NT	TA	TW	W	T	Q	A	C	Re	R	P	RE	S	Power	Acc-ountab-ility
Director of Contract-ing*		2	3	141	6		3		1	2	13		1	22	3
Chief Executive*			1	87	4		2	1	1	2	4		1	4	4
Executive Director Nursing	3			54	4	2				1	2	1		0.6	1
Clinical Director Medicine	1			20	2	2				1				0	0
Clinical Director Imaging			1	44	3	1		2						1	1.3
Director Finance	1			8	1	1								0	0
Executive Medical Director	2			49	3	1		1		2	2	1		0.5	2
Manager FMS	1			14	1	1								0	0

Figure 5. Statistics of public meeting argumentation.

Note: * denotes leaders; others were followers

Job	NT	TA	TW	W	T	Q	A	C	Re	R	P	RE	S	Power	Accountability
Chairman*	1			193	1					1	16			16	17
Director of Contract-ing*				113	4		1			1	6		2	10	2
Consultant A			3	109	4	2		3		2	2			0.3	1.3
Consultant B				56	4	1		3		2	1			0.1	1.5
Consultant C				66	3			2		1	1			0.5	2
Consultant D				13	2	1					1			1	0.5
Consultant E				18	1			1		1				0	1
Consultant F				28	1			1						0	0

Figure 6. Type of power and definition of individual power within committees. ([return](#))

Type of power	Definition of individual power within committees	Evidence of individual power	Individual power of committee member correlated with:
Zero sum power	Winning or losing argumentation	Convincing argument	Warranted judgements; valid inferences; reasoned arguments; standards for testing committee decisions; challenges to others' proposals
Processual power	Getting the best out of the committee	Political influence	Acceptance of responsibility; lack of blame; harnessing range of committee members' experience & expertise; unleashing group

			potential; new knowledge creation; weighing the arguments
Organis-ational power	Effective role playing	Effective representation	Ability to promote the following: lack of delay & sabotage; clear departmental & functional interests; undivided loyalty; clear individual v. committee accountability
Structurally constrained power	Taking up useful goals and assumptions of the wider society	Realistic goals and assumptions	Ability to relate class, cultural, professional & workplace values to solving committee's problems
Socially constructed power	Translating from world-openness to world-closedness	Actions taken for granted	Ability to promote committee agreement about the nature of a problem; existence of socially-recognised boundary marking commitment to committee's decisions