Chapter X

Eliciting Organizational Discourse

_A single mind can not study itself, but a collective of minds can certainly study the collective mind._

(Edoardo Boncinelli, 2005)

Abstract

Beginning with this chapter we will describe a methodological approach to identify, represent and model explanatory discourses. In the first part of this chapter we will present the overall methodological framework while in the second part we will focus on the first step of the methodology, that is, the identification and acquisition of explanatory discourses. An interview technique is presented to elicit explanations followed by a detailed example and practical advice.
It is time to proceed from theory to practice.

Before confronting the methodological aspects relative to the analysis of explanatory discourses, it is appropriate to sum up the theoretical considerations that have caused us to consider analyzing explanations in organizations from a privileged point of view in order to study the processes of organizational learning. The conceptual pathway followed up to this point can be summarized in the following steps:

a. Organizational memory is made up of a group of *artifacts*, which form the skeleton of the apparatus of persistence, through which organizations make an effort to insure the necessary coordination of individual actions and the achievement of shared objectives. The processes of organizational learning come about when organizations are able to question and to effectively modify organizational memory (Chapters III, IV, and V).

b. By following a constructionist approach, we have analyzed the processes involved in building organizational memory. We have examined the role of organizational actors and explanatory discourse in the *building of collective memory* using the MEP model (Chapters VI, VII, VIII, and IX).

c. We have characterized the “verbal” knowledge contained in explanatory discourse as *grey knowledge*. Individuals construct explanations when they illustrate their discoveries, or, more modestly, justify the outcomes of their actions, both to themselves and to the organizational customers for whom they have acted. The logic of grey knowledge is the logic of argumentation and persuasive discourse (Chapter VIII).

Artifacts, resources, and individual capabilities are the means through which organizational members construct “solutions” for their organizational customers. The rationality of the organizational actors inevitably refer to the constructs of collective memory and to the artifacts, and is consequently reflected in the discourses that organizational actors make in order to justify to themselves and their organizational customers the reasons behind their behavior and that of others.

Therefore, in this and later chapters, we intend to show how the analysis of explanatory discourse can be carried out in practice and used as a tool for observation, analysis, monitoring and management or organizational learning.
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