Chapter VI

Informational and Communicational Explanations of Corporations as Interaction Systems

Richard J. Varey
The Waikato Management School, New Zealand

Abstract

Whilst many proponents of “interactive communication” and “social interaction” do not see the concept as problematic, they focus attention on practices. I choose to re-examine both “interaction” and “communication,” and to relate these concepts to the concepts of society and organisation/corporation. The concept of “interaction” is examined, and social interaction is considered as exchange. The patterning of social interaction in markets, bureaucracies, solidarity groupings, and co-operative collectives, and their respective core values are considered. The “organization” is explained as a complex dynamic interaction system. An alternative sociological analysis of the social is compared with that of the
social psychology tradition. Communication is discussed as a mode of interaction, to reveal monologic and dialogic conceptions of communication. Conclusions are raised around the themes of “interactive communication,” IT, and dialogue and appreciation in a society constituted by interaction. Interaction, it is concluded, requires presence, whereas ICT allows absence.

Introduction

This is a discussion of the nature of human sociality in a society in which most interaction is mediated by personal communication technologies (PCTs) or information and communication technologies (ICTs). My question is, given that electronic tools of interaction are rapidly approaching ubiquity, and the incidence and quantity of interactions is unquestioned, what kind of interaction can we expect, and how does this constitute our society?

What drew me to this project was my curiosity over the apparent effortless move from discussing “interaction” to invoking concern for “communication.” Why do we commonly use two apparently synonymous terms? Do these terms identify a single phenomenon — “communicating”? If so, is communication a particular form of interaction, and what are the other forms? If not, how can we distinguish the two phenomena, and how can we be clearer in the alternate use of these terms?

My purpose in this discussion, then, is to think sociologically (meta-theoretically, reflectively) about the idea of an Interaction Society, and to produce from this inquiry contrasted accounts to explain social interaction (with particular attention to the events that arise when people work in occupational settings and use ICTs and PCTs in support of working together). See Weber (2003) for helpful comments on “speaking theoretically.”

We all experience actions of people in the social world. No one doubts the occurrence of social interaction. The notion, then, of an Interaction Society appears unproblematic, requiring only guidance on effectiveness and efficiency. What does account for differing explanations of this social phenomenon is differing social constructions (theories) drawing upon philosophical differences of understanding and theory (explanation) of knowledge, value, and reality.
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