The Sense of the Sub-Theme

Agenda

What did we learn in the sub-theme about the performative role of communication in constituting organizational realities?

Minute

Participants of the EGOS 31st Colloquium Sub-Theme 16 “Organization as Communication: The Performative Power of Talk” met at Deree main building at The American College of Greece, 2-4 July 15.

The stream convenors (François Cooren, Lars Thøger Christensen, Dennis Schoeneborn) welcomed participants to a packed room. We heard the sound of air-conditioning and distant bird song. We eagerly anticipated three days of talking amongst existing and new friends. Dennis introduced the stream, the schedule and announced that there would be a Standing Working Group on “Organization as Communication” until 2018. Participants were reminded of the “EGOS stream spirit”. Participants were also pointed to the (www.orgcom.org) blog.

Over three warm and sunny days 36 papers were presented and discussed. There were three sessions each made up of three parallel streams. Philippe Lorino provided the opening stream keynote on the first morning of the stream.

This sub-theme has been concerned with the fundamental, constitutive, and formative role of communication for organizations and organizing. Through theoretical and empirical presentations, inquiry and discussion the stream has focused on theoretical, conceptual and methodological implications for understanding organization as communication—what communication does to the phenomenon of organization, organizing and the field of Organization Studies—when communication not only reflects, but also reflexively participates in the constitution of reality. We believe this to be a significant contribution to Organization Studies in the twenty-first century.

The stream’s papers demonstrated several common threads but also a diversity of research topics, theoretical and conceptual commitments. Communication has been discerned as performative, as an action, as a human and non-human actor, as a difference making process, connected to talking, texts, socio-material assemblages, boundaries, activities and meanings, and practices.

We have heard a range of theoretical, conceptual and methodological stances. Organizational communication studies is still developing but there is an emerging body of literature to refer to for inspiration. It is clear that organizational communication scholars can contribute to understanding and problematising talk and action, agency, legitimacy, intentionality, interaction,
narratives, listening, to name a few. We might all look forward to contributing to the development of this field in various ways, though the sense is that the CCO community is grasping for a coherent sense of its own identity.

The focus on the gaps between talk and action should not obscure the idea that gaps are productive, and that as well as talk and action, we have chalk (representing texts), listening and silence. The group also recognises some of the anxieties associated with these various positions.

Thank you to all presenters and discussants for their academic work, conviviality and keeping to allotted time schedules. Thank you to the stream conveners for their intellectual hospitality and first-class stream organization. The convenors will be circulating decisions about stream Best Paper awards in due course.

This EGOS conference took place in the midst of the Greece debt crisis. As the majority of us leave Athens, we want to wish our Greek friends well for the hurly burly of the coming days, weeks and months. You have helped us reflect upon our own research work and foster an open organizational communication studies community. We have witnessed Greece’s lived experience these past three days and you have communicated an important reminder to many of us—to hold others in our hearts and minds with tenderness and compassion. Words are deeds.

Martin Brigham and Donncha Kavanagh
Acting Clerk and Co-Clerk
EGOS Sub-Theme 16

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