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# Being in the Know: Socio-Epistemics and the Communicative Constitution of a Management Team

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**Increasingly, organizational research is taking the linguistic turn in social sciences seriously. Consequently, the central role of communication in the constitution of the organization is also finding greater acceptance. Using conversation analysis as a research methodology and transcripts of naturally occurring talk as data, the purpose of this article is to add to this growing body of research and to explicate how orientation to epistemic rights talks the hierarchy of the organization into being. Findings indicate how the negotiation of rights to have and to display status-based knowledge of head office index the discursive identities of knowing participants, which enacts the situated identities of hierarchic superiors. Therefore, through the sequential properties of talk, status-based epistemic rights and obligations are enacted so that a management team is made relevant, which incarnates the lived hierarchy of the organization and “does” authority. *Organization Management Journal*, 11: 4–14, 2014. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2014.903089**

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**Keywords** meetings; epistemics; conversation analysis; teams; communicative constitution of organization; authority

## INTRODUCTION

The idea that talk is much more than an asocial mechanism for the transfer of messages and that talk is constitutive of organization and the identities of social actors within organizations is becoming widely accepted within organizational research. This increasing interest in discursive approaches to organization has not gone unnoticed by researchers such as Cooren (2010), Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), Boden (1994), and Taylor and van Every (2000), who, in order to study the communicative constitution of organization, use ethnomethodologically inspired research methods to analyze transcripts of naturally occurring talk within organizational contexts. More specifically, conversation analysis' (CA's) interest in institutional interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992) has also encouraged CA-inspired researchers to take an interest in the organizational

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world. However, until fairly recently, most CA research into institutional interaction concentrated on service encounters, and CA-inspired research that looked at the fine-grained analysis of naturally occurring talk in organizational contexts remained relatively rare. Yet, as Svennevig (2012) points out, this body of work has now been expanding to look at phenomena such as leadership (Clifton, 2006), power (Samra-Fredericks, 2005), strategizing (Samra-Fredericks, 2004), authority (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009), and so on. Moreover, within this trend the language of meetings is becoming increasingly of interest (e.g., Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Ford, 2008; Svennevig, 2012). However, despite the flurry of interest in socio-epistemics and its relation to the sequential properties of talk within the wider CA field (e.g., Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011), little of this work has specifically addressed epistemics in business meetings. The purpose of this article is thus to add to research (e.g., Clifton, 2012; Djordjilovic 2012; Markaki & Mondada, 2012) that combines findings of CA's insights into socio-epistemics with the study of business meetings. In so doing the article seeks to provide an analysis of the way in which social actors use the sequential properties of talk to talk into being status-based states of knowing (Enfield, 2011) that index the hierarchy of the organization and so constitute the organization as a lived in situ achievement. More specifically, using audio transcripts of naturally occurring talk recorded during a staff meeting at the national office of a worldwide cultural organization, this article seeks to explicate the discursive resources that organizational players use in order to “do” displays of knowledge. The doing of such displays of knowledge enables the director and the assistant director to act as one party in talk and to enact an interactional team with superior knowledge of “what’s going on” at head office. Being in the know about what is going on at head office thus indexes their superior position on the corporate ladder and their hierarchically superior position vis-à-vis other members of staff. Moreover, because such displays of knowledge are status based, they also enact authority. This is because rights to have and display knowledge are based on legitimate positions and identity-bound rights rather than actual states of knowledge.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the “linguistic turn” in social science (Rorty, 1967), static understandings of organization whereby a social actor’s position in the hierarchy of the organization determines what that actor can and cannot say are increasingly being challenged by the view that organizations are incrementally constructed as the interaction unfolds and that organizations are made discursively available in and by the talk of their members. Yet definitions of discourse are varied. Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2000) seminal article makes the distinction between little-d discourse and big-D Discourse. Little-d discourse refers to the micro-practices of talk and the processes through which organizational actors construct emotions, knowledge, identities, and so on, which accomplish the organization. Big-D Discourse refers to discourses of, for example, management, leadership, the market, and so on, which constitute the subject. The exact nature of the interplay between these discourses is a moot point. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which Van Dijk (2001, p. 352) defines as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context,” seeks to establish the interplay between big-D and little-d discourses by reference to extratextual conceptions of power and so on. For example, taking a CDA perspective, Mantere and Vaara (2008) use interview data with managers in a company to discern which Discourses of participation are at work and how these Discourses construct subject positions and so do hegemony. At the level of discourse little-d, various researchers have attempted to locate the micro-practices of talk through which strategy is achieved. For example, Clifton and Van De Mierop (2010) examine the rhetorical strategies that are used to do persuasion in meetings. Other researchers, such as McClellan and Deetz (2012), analyze transcripts of meeting talk and examine the way organizational Discourses (namely, those of art, education, community, and business) in an art college were enacted at the level of local discourse. McClellan and Deetz are particularly interested in the way in which some Discourses are accepted and others are resisted and how this affects the way in which the organization is talked into being and understood by social actors.

Other researchers, however, remain skeptical of the ability to reveal macro-processes in the micro. As Knorr-Cetina (1981, p. 28) argues, there are “influences which operate behind the back of agents, and which therefore *cannot be found in micro-situations*” (italics in the original). From this perspective, in order to explain “what is going on” the researcher therefore needs to have recourse to extratextual information operating beyond the talk. However, CA argues that participants are aware that they are inhabitants of a particular environment and that their contributions to talk are made in the knowledge of what constitutes an allowable contribution, given the situation (Levinson, 1992). It is in this way that they orient to social structure, which is then reified as external and constraining. Consequently, the researcher does not have to go looking

for exogenous concerns to explicate what is going on and how this is achieved. Indeed, Schegloff (1997) famously, though contentiously (cf. Billig, 1999), demonstrates that researchers drawing on issues that are “behind the backs” of the participants might offer analyses that do not bind with the data and so end up being demonstrably irrelevant to the members’ concerns. In short, as Schegloff (1987a, p. 208) argues, “Although it [the turn-taking system] is not what sociologists ordinarily think of a ‘social organization’, in many ways it is the apotheosis of social organization.” Consequently, this article takes a CA-inspired approach to discourse, which emphasizes that the organization is talked into being by organizational players as they recipient-design (i.e., members design their talk with particular recipients in mind and as appropriate for the recipients) their talk for each other and so manage identities with respective rights and obligations vis-à-vis each other and so establish and sustain the organization as a discursive achievement.

## METHOD—CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation analysis was developed by Harvey Sacks and colleagues during the mid-1960s. It involves the detailed examination of transcriptions of recordings of naturally occurring talk from which researchers describe the sequential organization of everyday language use and the social order that it reveals. In their seminal article, “A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking in Conversation,” Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) set out to reveal the locally managed, party-administered, and interactionally controlled systematic organization of turn taking (i.e., the sequential properties of talk) in conversation. However, CA’s interest is not only restricted to the machinery of talk. CA also considers the sequential organization of talk to be the “bedrock of all sociality” (Schegloff, 1987b, p. 103). From this perspective, social order is incarnated through members’ orientation to the context-sensitive nature of such turn-taking practices and through their orientation to identities-in-talk constituted by the recipient-design of the talk. Thus, as Sacks et al. (1974, p. 729) argue, the sequential properties of talk in interaction are context sensitive, and patterns of turn-taking vary according to the situation (e.g., ceremonies, debates, or meetings). This observation gives rise to the notion of institutional interaction whereby orientation to the institutional nature of talk is made visible in terms of sequence organization, turn design, lexical choice, and epistemological and other forms of asymmetry (Heritage, 1997, p. 164). Orientation to these constraints and resources leads to the notion of members’ own orientation to what they perceive to be allowable contributions to the interaction (Levinson, 1992, p. 97), which thus talks the organization into being. Heritage sums up this fundamental claim of CA when he states that

the details of little, local sequences which at first seemed narrow, insignificant and contextually uninteresting, turn out to be the crucial resources by which larger institutionalized activity frameworks are evoked. Such institutional contexts are created as visible

states of affairs on a turn-by-turn basis. It is ultimately through such means that “institutions” exist as accountable organizations of social actions. (Heritage, 1984, p. 290)

In short, to borrow a term from Boden (1994, p. 14), (organizational) “structure is thus realised in action.” This is because when people talk they are simultaneously and reflexively talking into being both the organization and their identities with commensurate rights and obligations vis-à-vis each other. Following Zimmerman (1998), identities exist both at proximal and distal levels. At a proximal level, discourse identities (e.g., speaker, listener, etc.) are enacted through the sequences of talk. Such discourse identities reflexively make relevant situated identities (e.g., teacher, student, manager, customer, seller, etc.) at a distal level. Consequently, discourse identities, such as knowing and unknowing participants, which are contingent on the proximal turn-by-turn context, reflexively make relevant situated identities, which include inter alia such institutional identities as manager, subordinate, and so on. Moreover, such identities often exist in standard relational pairs (e.g., cop–robber, teacher–student, mother–baby), and these pairs are defined by a series of moral rights and obligations linked to each other (Sacks, 1972) and so inter alia can index asymmetric relations such as superior/subordinate. Furthermore, orientation to such situated identities is necessary for the participants to perform their everyday workplace activities, and it is this that reflexively talks into being the structure of an organization. As Raymond and Heritage (2006, p. 678) put it, “The ways in which identities are relevant for action-in-interaction constitute a basic link between individuals and what social scientists have termed ‘social structure.’”

Furthermore, following Sacks et al. (1974, p. 728), the researcher is able to analyze the members’ turn-by-turn construction of social order through the next turn proof procedure whereby an understanding of what is happening in a turn at talk is displayed by the other participants in the next turn. In this way, participants construct and display to each other a mutual understanding of what they consider is going on. This process is also available to the researcher, who is also able to understand the event through his/her membership knowledge (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). Thus, the researcher using his or her overhearer’s perspective on what is going on and how this is achieved also has access to the participants’ perspectives as displayed in the overheard interaction. Yet while the participants have a naive mastery of what is going on and how this is achieved, the researcher is able to describe this formally. As Lynch and Bogen (1994, p. 80) state, “The member may be competent to instantiate the describable techniques of conversation, but the scientist builds a formal apparatus that subsumes the members local practices.”

### CA and Teams

As Sacks et al. (1974, p. 696) make clear, the sequential properties of talk are party, rather than individually,

administered. Parties in turn-taking are often individuals but they can also be aggregates of persons. Moreover, these aggregates of persons can “coincide with units of social organization which can be claimed to have a persistence and reality quite apart from the interaction” (Schegloff, 1995, p. 33). However, Schegloff also notes that it is not on account of the extra-interactional ties that people act as a party, but rather it is “by virtue of interaction-specific contingencies and conduct” that parties in talk are constituted and it is this which talks into being units of social organization (Schegloff, 1995, p. 33). As Sacks (1992, vol. 1, p. 95) points out, in conversations of more than two people, a two-party format may be a basic configuration so that people divide themselves up into teams so that a whole series of people talking for that team and having co-incumbency of a single identity could become relevant to the interaction. Moreover, Sacks indicates that the creation of such a “single party” is achieved through syntactic possibilities for collaboration. As he says:

We get, then, a kind of extraordinary tie between syntactic possibilities and phenomena like social organization. That is, an extremely strong way that these kids go about demonstrating that, for one, there is a group here, is their getting together to put this sentences together, collaboratively. (Sacks, 1992, vol. 1 p. 145)

Parties-in-talk are thus constructed discursively. That is to say that rather than being a priori facts that are brought to the interaction, they have to be constructed by the participants as they interact (Schegloff, 1995). Furthermore, following Kangasharju (1996, p. 292), teams are characterized by the fact that participants explicitly act as an association by making this association visible to other participants. Such interactional teams are made visible through the way in which turns are co-constructed and speaking rights are managed; participants affiliate at an affective level, and align at a sequential level; and participants realize shared accountability and authorship of the action in progress (Djordjilovic, 2012, p. 113).

### CA and Socio-Epistemics

Significantly, knowledge is neither absolute nor prediscursive. As various researchers (e.g., Drew, 1991; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Lynch & Bogen, 2005) point out, rights to display knowledge are not necessarily reflections of actual states of knowledge. Rather, displays of what one knows and how one comes to know it are played out in the social domain and are recipient-designed according to the identities of the participants in talk. Further, participants hold each other accountable for any display of knowledge, and this accountability is made visible to the researcher and participants alike in the sequential properties of talk. Following Stivers et al. (2011), displays of knowledge are played out in three domains: epistemic access, epistemic primacy, and epistemic responsibility. First, the notion of epistemic access refers to the source of knowledge, which can be presented as either firsthand or secondhand. Firsthand accounts that

directly access the events have more credibility than second-hand accounts, and, as Pomerantz (1984a, p. 609) argues, they are possibly the most important way of presenting knowledge as being known unproblematically and with certainty.

Second, epistemic responsibility relates to the recipient design of the action whereby participants orient to expected levels of knowledge. Goodwin's (1979, 1981, 1987) groundbreaking research, for example, demonstrated how talk is designed according to the speaker's orientation to the recipient's state of knowledge as knowing or unknowing participants. Other research (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992; Lynch & Bogen, 2005; Potter & te Molder, 2005) has shown how expectations of knowledge linked to identity are made interactionally relevant so that, for example, in a court case defendants are held legally accountable for what they should, or should not, know and this affects their displays of knowing.

Third, the notion of epistemic primacy indexes the relation between speakers in terms of epistemic entitlement. Recent research (e.g., Heritage, 2002; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Snejder & te Molder 2006; Stivers, 2005) has argued that relative rights to have and display knowledge are made visible in the sequential properties of talk. Simply put, going first carries with it an inherent claim to epistemic primacy simply because by going second a participant is always open to the inference that he or she is being constrained by the content of the first turn (Heritage, 2002, p. 200). However, as Raymond and Heritage (2006, p. 685) observe, such sequential displays of epistemic rights can be negotiated in a number of ways. For example, they argue that even though first assessments in their unmarked form claim unmitigated rights to assess, they can be upgraded through negative interrogatives, which strongly invite agreement in the next turn. Furthermore, epistemic firsts can be downgraded through the use of modifiers (e.g., looks, seems, thinks) or tag questions that sequentially cede the first slot in the sequence, and so primacy, to the next speaker. Second assessments also come in marked and unmarked forms. While unmarked seconds display an acceptance of the primacy of the first turn, marked seconds, which can be signaled by such phenomena as "oh" prefaces, confirmation followed by agreement token, or tag questions, are designed to contest the primacy inherent in the first position.

In short, each time a turn is taken participants display what they can allowably know; what others are expected to know; and what their relative rights to knowing are. Participants thus design their displays of knowledge and police other participants' displays of knowledge and so render each other accountable. It is, therefore, through the recipient-designed accountability of the sequential properties of talk that rights to have and display knowledge are constructed in talk and thus ultimately the organization's hierarchy is also achieved in talk. This is because, as Mondada (2011, p. 27) indicates, such an allowable distribution of knowledge is not only consequential for the achievement of tasks but it also achieves social affiliation that ultimately talks the hierarchy of the organization

into being. Organization and hierarchy thus emerge, *inter alia*, out of recipient-designed orientation to rights to have and display knowledge, which are essential resources for conducting everyday workplace activities and which are reflexively reproduced as external and constraining social facts through that same social interaction.

## DATA

The data were audio-recorded during a monthly staff meeting in a national office of a worldwide British cultural organization which has its head office in the United Kingdom. The meeting was held around a large rectangular table in the staff common room, and it took the form of the director of the center (Andy) dealing with the points on the agenda one by one and then asking specific participants for information about projects that they were working on. Eighteen members of staff were present. However, in the extract presented in this article only four people spoke. These speakers have been given the following pseudonyms: Andy (the director), Betty (the assistant director), Chris (the projects officer), and Debbie (the information and communications manager). The particular exchange analyzed concerns the second point on the agenda, the Assistant Director General's visit to the national office. The topic of the visit leads to a co-authored description of the key players and their responsibilities at the UK head office. The talk has been transcribed following Jeffersonian conventions (see appendix for a list of transcription symbols used).

As Sacks (1984, p. 27) famously pointed out, data are selected for analysis because the researcher just happens to have them and becomes interested in them. Similarly, I used these data simply because I had access to them. Moreover, the underlying methodological concern of CA is not to find data that fit with any a priori assumptions. Rather, from a position of "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1995, p. 45) whereby a priori hypotheses are distanced from the analysis, CA takes any data and sees what they reveal. Consequently, when I started to analyze these data, I had no a priori conception of what I was going to find. To attempt to prove any a priori hypothesis would lead to a theory-driven approach, which because of the danger of trying to fit the analysis to prove a particular hypothesis might make the researcher blind to what was happening. To paraphrase Sacks's (1984, p. 27) methodological dictum: I simply sat down with some data and made some observations to see where they would lead me.

## ANALYSIS

The following analysis explicates how the situated identity of superior is talked into being through orientation to discursive identities of knowing and unknowing participant, which display knowledge of "what is going on in head office." It can be seen that the director and assistant director affiliate and align in their displays or knowledge and so are co-incumbents

of the discursive identity “knowing participants” and situated identities superiors, which make relevant the interactional achievement of team identity. In this way, the hierarchy of an organization is achieved as a lived in situ members’ accomplishment. Moreover, displays of knowledge are based on the claim of proximity to head office. This reflexively makes status-based rights to knowledge relevant to the interaction and gives them the right to know in accordance with their hierarchical position, rather than actual states of knowledge. Consequently, this enacts their authority to know about head office based on their legitimate position in the organization. It therefore “does” authority, which as Barley (1996, p. 434) notes can only be enacted in an ideal bureaucracy when a superior’s knowledge encompasses, or is perceived to encompass, that of his/her subordinates.

In line 1, Andy introduces the topic that is the second point on the agenda: *just a quick word on Jim=Jim Pryde’s visit*.

1. Andy just a quick word on Jim=Jim Pryde’s visit (.) er Jim is the assistant director
2. general (.) he’s part of the senior executive team which consists of er Tom
3. Black as Director General and David Duffield Deputy Director General and (.)
4. Jim as Assistant Director General (.) er Jim is the head of the corporate affairs
5. group which erm (.) can’t = I’m not sure how best to describe its function it’s
6. essentially doing the kind of work that’s sort of non-operational work it’s
7. communications it’s er: the legal affairs department it’s the diversity (.) er
8. person er Anita Swabe’s LS what=how could you describe it function it’s a kind
9. of °er°
10. (.2)

By introducing the next topic on the agenda, Andy makes relevant his omni-relevant identity (i.e., an identity that is not relevant at all times but that, in certain contexts, can become relevant under pretty much any circumstances; Sacks, 1992, vol. 1, p. 312) of chairperson who has the right to introduce items on the agenda. After introducing the topic, Andy continues his turn by describing the key players and their roles in head office. As he takes his turn, he downgrades (line 5: *I’m not sure*) and hedges (line 6: *sort of*) his knowledge, which limits his claims to epistemic primacy (Raymond & Heritage, 2006, p. 687). In line 8, he then states: *how could you describe it function it’s a kind of °er° which is followed by a slight pause* (line 10).

10. (.2)
11. Betty it’s the sort of cross cutting policy strategy [thing] >apparently< I discovered
12. Andy [yeah]
13. Betty last week he’s also taking on human resources

Unfortunately, since the recording is an audio recording it cannot be seen whether eye gaze or another gesture attributes

the next turn to Betty. However, she takes the next turn regardless of whether eye gaze or any other gesture has handed her the turn. Significant here is the fact that nobody else asserts, or attempts to assert, a right to take the turn. Betty thus considers that the turn is designed for her as a knowing recipient and she exercises her right to answer the request for information. She thus both affiliates and aligns with Andy’s prior turn and she co-authors the account of “what is going on at head office.” Consequently, she talks into being a team with Andy—both of them being knowing participants who have the right to know about what is going on in head office (Goodwin, 1981) and who co-author this display of knowledge (cf. Djordjilovic, 2012, p. 113). They thus begin to align and affiliate as an interactional team. This sets them apart from the other staff members and so creates a team based on joint authorship of the action in progress and on rights to have and display knowledge, rights that interactionally (at least at present) are unavailable to other participants.

As Betty’s turn is in progress, Andy backchannels “*yeah*,” which, as Stivers (2005, p. 133) argues, is neutral. However, since it is in a second position the speaker is “vulnerable to the inference that their response is fabricated on the instance to achieve agreement or disagreement, and is thus a dependent or even coerced action within a field of constraint that is established by the first” (Heritage, 2002, p. 200). Thus, simply by virtue of being in a second position and not seeking to upgrade, Andy is ceding primacy to his assistant, Betty. This secondness is further reinforced by Betty who speeds up to ensure that she retains the floor and she adds more information, which through the use of “discovered” signals it as newsworthy (line 11: *>apparently< I discovered last week he’s also taking on human resources*). Receipt of this news becomes a conditionally relevant next action.

14. (.2)
15. Andy oh↑ the whole of HR will go

After a pause, Andy (line 15) replies: *oh↑ the whole of HR will go*. Following Raymond and Heritage (2006, p. 691), the “oh” prefacing functions as an epistemic upgraded, which marks a change of state in his knowledge. Further, since he continues his turn by adding more information (*the whole of HR will go*) it is also hearable as indexing his own independent access to “what is going on in head office.” Andy thus now displays his epistemic primacy in the co-authoring of what is going on at head office.

So far, Andy and Betty have dominated the floor to display their rights to knowledge, but in line 16 Chris takes a turn, which disaligns and disaffiliates with the emerging interactional team Andy/Betty and thus interactionally marks himself out as not being part of this emerging team. Following Stivers et al. (2011), Chris’s turn disaligns with the talk-in-progress because sequentially it sets up a trajectory that displays no knowledge of what is going on in head office, and by changing to a humorous footing it also disaffiliates with the emerging

team of Betty–Andy at an affective level. Consequently, a hierarchy of participants with rights to know about head office and others who have lesser rights to display knowledge about head office begins to emerge in talk. This makes relevant an in-group and an out-group based on epistemic states, and these groups are interactionally positioned in a relative hierarchy of knowing that instantiates the organization as an in situ and lived accomplishment.

16. Chris °£↓taking them on↑£°  
 17. All ((collective [laughter]) )  
 18. Betty [taking them on] £probably needs to£ ah ha  
 ha >from the  
 19. discussion everybody had with him last week < er I  
 think when the current head  
 20. of erm HR leaves in (.) July is it↑  
 21. Andy uhum  
 22. Debbie °I think that° [ as ]

On account of the collective laughter (line 17), Chris’s turn (line 16: °£↓taking them on↑£°) is oriented as a pun. This is because the phrasal verb “to take on” can either be in the sense of assuming responsibility for something or somebody, or challenging or fighting them. After affiliating with the pun by repeating it and laughing (line 19: *taking them on* £probably needs to£ ah ha ha >from the discussion everybody had with him last week), Betty retrospectively treats the prior sequence as a side-sequence (i.e., “a break in contrast to a termination; that is, the on-going activity will resume”; Jefferson, 1972, p. 29) that has (temporarily) disaligned with the main action in progress—namely, displaying knowledge of what is going on in head office—and that has been disaffiliative of the interactional team Andy/Betty. In line 18, Betty then speaks more rapidly to retain the floor and returns to the action in progress—a description of head office—so orienting to the pun as a side-sequence. In line 19, Betty states: *er I think when the current head of erm HR leaves in (.) July is it↑*. On the one hand, as Kärkkäinen (2003, p. 130) points out, “I think” projects backward to a prior turn and marks it out as troublesome, yet at the same time “I think” projects that more talk on the matter in hand (i.e., what’s going on at head office) is forthcoming. “I think” also functions as an epistemic downgrade (Stivers 2005, p. 136), which combined with the request for confirmation (*July is it↑*) displays that Betty considers that she has secondary rights in the issue. As previously stated, without access to video recording it is impossible to say whether the turn is specifically designed for Andy through eye gaze or gesture. Nevertheless, Andy fills the slot and so orients to his epistemic responsibility to confirm the information, and despite the fact that he doesn’t know, he still orients to the need to provide a second. He thus treats himself as the addressee and displays orientation to the interactional team as a knowing participant who should have this knowledge. Debbie then takes a next turn, which projects knowledge and so projects affiliation and alignment with the ongoing authoring of the topic “what is going on in head office.” She claims a discursive identity of a knowing participant who has the right

to add to the co-authored description of head office and so she claims the situated identity of being part of the management team.

22. Debbie °I think that° [ as ]  
 23. Betty [Jane ] Jane Rycraft moves over and  
 she will essentially report  
 24. to him (.) he’s got also cultur:al relations unit Martin’s  
 unit [for ] example  
 25. Andy [ yeah ]  
 26. Betty works there but I guess it’s all the sort  
 27. (.)  
 28. Andy marketing [communications]  
 29. Betty [underpinning] communicat [ions]  
 30. Andy [ the ] Chris  
 Whitehouse stuff  
 31. Betty yeah

Debbie’s turn (line 22) projects giving an opinion, albeit epistemically downgraded (*I think*), on the topic of head office and she thus projects a display of knowledge. However, as the turn is in progress, it is overlapped and Betty continues her description of events at head office. In this way, Betty orients to Debbie’s turn as potentially competitive and to Debbie as not being a knowing participant and not having the right to co-author the description in progress. She thus excludes Debbie from the emerging interactional management team. This, therefore, reinforces the in- and out-group and so maintains the achieved hierarchy of the organization, which is based on states of knowing and rights to display this knowledge that are linked to claims of proximity to head office.

Betty, having competitively taken the floor, continues her turn, which continues the topic of “what is going on in head office” (line 23: *[Jane] Jane Rycraft moves over and she will essentially report to him (.) he’s got also cultur:al relations unit Martin’s unit [for ] example works there but I guess it’s all the sort*). As the turn is in progress, she is overlapped by Andy’s agreement token (*yeah*), which, as explicated before, displays alignment and affiliation. However, by virtue of its sequential placement after Betty’s turn, the “*yeah*” displays epistemic secondness. As Betty continues her turn, she pauses (line 27) and Andy (line 28: *marketing [communications]*) collaboratively completes the turn in progress with an increment that allows two different participants to co-author a turn (Vorreiter, 2003). Further, this is hearable as doing being a team (Kangasharju, 1996; Sacks, 1992). This is because, as Sacks states, there is no better way of doing being a team than putting together an utterance collectively (Sacks, 1992, vol. 1, p. 145). Further, it also displays that the members of the team know what is on each other’s minds so that what the initial speaker of the turn knows, the completer of the turn also knows (Sacks, 1992, vol. 1, p. 147). Thus, the interactionally occasioned team (Betty–Andy) is again realized in talk through displays of epistemic alignment and affiliation, which does co-authoring of the action in progress (i.e., describing what is going on in head office). However, in terms of epistemics, Andy’s co-authoring usurps

the primacy in Betty's turn. This is because he makes himself the primary spokesperson and so "owner" of the stance that Betty initiated and so claims primacy (Mazeland, 2009). Thus, even though Betty and Andy are aligning and affiliating with each other and so talk into being a team, they are simultaneously disputing epistemic primacy within the team and they are jockeying for position in the organizational hierarchy. Further, in the next turn (line 29: [*underpinning*] *communicat[ions]*), Betty as the initiator of the completed turn has the right to confirm or disconfirm the completion (Diaz et al, 1996), and in this case Betty modifies the turn by changing marketing communications to underpinning communications. This modification, as Diaz et al. (1996, p. 538) point out, displays agreement and understanding and so aligns and affiliates. So, again, affiliation and alignment between Andy and Betty is maintained in talk and a co-authored version of what is going on in head office emerges.

In line 30, Andy then gives the gist "*the Chris Whitehouse stuff*;" which adds to the co-authored description of what is going on in head office. Since confirmation is not explicitly sought, Andy's addition to the description in progress "can be seen as a competitive move because it asserts epistemic authority over the claim and so undercuts the primary rights of the first speaker" (Stivers, 2005, p. 137). Thus, even though Betty and Andy are working in an interactional team, as shown by the co-authoring of the description of head office, the terms of displaying knowledge are disputed through the repeated moves to claim epistemic primacy. In line 31, Betty responds to this with an agreement token (yeah), which is now in a second position and so acquiesces to Andy's primacy within the team Andy/Betty. Debbie then takes a turn, which adds to this co-constructed display of knowledge.

In line 32, Debbie adds knowledge management to Betty's and Andy's co-authored description of head office.

32. Debbie     knowledge management =  
33. Andy       = knowledge management Jenny Smithson is there

This turn therefore claims the discursive identity of a knowing participant with a discursive right to co-author the ongoing description of head office and she therefore claims a situated identity of being part of the emerging management team. This time, Debbie's turn is retrospectively treated as alignment with the emerging interactional team Andy and Betty. This is because, in line 33, Andy repeats the turn, thus confirming it as an aligning move. However, by adding new information (line 31: = *knowledge management Jenny Smithson is there*) he also claims primacy by "underscoring his assertion of greater epistemic authority" (Stivers, 2005, p. 148). Thus, while Debbie's contribution is seen as an allowable contribution to the unfolding talk and she has been allowed to co-author what is going on at head office, nevertheless her knowledge is treated as secondary to Andy's. Betty then takes a turn, which does a formulation and which sums up the gist of the talk-so-far (Heritage and Watson, 1979).

34. Betty     it is really anything to do with communication because  
              partly his skills are  
35.           very much in the communicating field >whereas<  
              Robin Baker is the political  
36.           strategic person=

In terms of epistemics, this formulation fixes the meaning of the talk-so-far that it (i.e., the corporate affairs group cf. line 4) "*is really anything to do with communications his [i.e., Jim's] skills are very much in the communicating field.*" As Clifton (2006) notes, the ability to sum up fixes the sense of the talk-so-far and thus it can be seen as having the last word in the jostling for epistemic primacy in the prior turns. Further, a formulation can act as closure (Heritage & Watson, 1979), and once the topic of Jim Pryde's role in the company is closed a move to a new topic can be initiated. In this case, Betty speeds up to hold the floor (line 35: >*whereas*<) and shifts topic to Robin Baker, whom she describes as "*the political strategic person*" (line 35).

34. Betty     it is really anything to do with communication because  
              partly his skills are  
35.           very much in the communicating field >whereas<  
              Robin Baker is the political  
36.           strategic person=  
37. Andy     = the £Machiavelli£  
38. Betty     £ I refrained from saying that £  
39. Debbie   °this is being recorded remember Andy°  
40. Andy     ..hh don't worry I've got a copy of this er letter erm SO  
              Jim Jim is  
41.           going to come you know he specifically asked me when  
              we met at  
42.           the Europe regional team meeting if he could have some  
              time in the  
43.           erm to talk to people find out a bit more what things  
              doing erm .hh

Betty's turn (line 35) describing Robin Baker as the "*political strategic person*" is an evaluation that thus requires a second (Pomerantz, 1984b), which Andy does (line 37: = *the £Machiavelli£*). This turn aligns with Betty's prior turn, since it continues the progressivity of talk, and it also affiliates with Betty because it displays the same stance (i.e., using Machiavelli as a synonym for a political strategic person). Consequently, through co-authoring the turn Betty and Andy display that they have access to the same knowledge and that they have the same rights to display this knowledge. However, £*Machiavelli£* is uttered in a smile voice (i.e., "a markedly higher pitch and an intonational contour comparable to laughing during speaking but without any laughter tokens"; Buttney, 2001, p. 317), and so despite aligning and affiliating, thus sustaining the interactional team, it changes footing by presenting it as a candidate laughable. In the next turn, also using a smile voice, Betty states £ *I refrained from saying that* £. This utterance thus displays an orientation to Andy's prior turn as improper talk (Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987, p. 160), which indexes a move toward intimate interaction and so seeks to build social solidarity and affiliation. Sequentially, orientation to a prior

turn as an impropriety invites participants to reciprocate in the next turn as a conditionally relevant next action (Jefferson, 1979, p. 83). Significantly, it is Betty who aligns with Andy's candidate laughable and so shares the in-joke, which builds solidarity (Richards, 2006, p.109). This displays access to the same knowledge as Andy, and it also displays affiliation and alignment. Consequently, the turn sustains the interactional relevance of the team Andy–Betty. Significantly, no other member of staff seeks to respond to the candidate laughable or align in the co-construction of knowledge by “sharing the joke.” Conversely, citing the fact that the meeting is being recorded, Debbie orients to Andy's turn as a breach of normative behavior and chides him (line 39: °*this is being recorded remember Andy*°) for doing an impropriety that is explicitly “on record.” In this way, she both disaligns and disaffiliates with the humorous co-construction of knowledge, thus making the interactional team of Andy and Betty even more distinct. Andy responds to this criticism by stating that he has a letter from the researcher guaranteeing anonymity (line 40: *..hh don't worry I've got a copy of this er letter erm*). He then closes topic by formulating the gist of talk so far (*SO Jim Jim is going to come*) and carries out a stepwise topic shift to the visit itself (lines 41 ff: *you know he specifically asked me when we met at the Europe regional team meeting if he could have some time in the erm to talk to people find out a bit more what things doing erm .hh*).

## OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As various researchers contest, organizations do not exist as prediscursive entities. Rather, they are talked into being as members go about their everyday workplace activities. Consequently, from such an ethnomethodologically inspired perspective, the only point to study them is, to borrow a term from Cooren (2006), the terra firma of interaction as they emerge in talk. CA provides one way of doing this because as the participants police their discursive rights to have and display knowledge they also reflexively make relevant institutional identities that have rights and obligations in relation to each other. It is orientation to these rights and obligations that reflexively instantiates the hierarchy of the organization. In sum, this article establishes how orientation to rights to have and display knowledge indexes institutional identities, their proximity to head office, and thus their relative positions on the corporate ladder, and it is through this process that the hierarchy of the organization is talked into being. Moreover, these rights are policed, and when on one occasion Debbie seeks to become part of this interactional team with access to head office, she is oriented to as not having the right to do so and is not allowed to co-author a display of knowledge. However, the borders of the management team are porous, and in another instance Debbie does succeed in co-authoring the description of head office and so becomes part of the management team. But notwithstanding this co-incumbency of the identity of knowing participant, this identity is restricted to one turn in talk and even then it is immediately downgraded by Andy's following turn.

Significantly, even within the interactionally realized management team Betty and Andy jockey for epistemic primacy through the use of completions, upgrades, and downgrades. This indicates that rather than being a fixed and prediscursive phenomenon, the hierarchy of an organization is always open to negotiation. Moreover, in certain instances in the analysis it is clear that Betty, who on paper is the subordinate of Andy, actually displays more knowledge and makes stronger claims to primacy and so makes a stronger claim for knowing what is going on in head office. Consequently, through displaying a closer link with the organization's headquarters she claims a higher position in the hierarchy, which is not commensurate with her a priori identity as Andy's deputy. It is also significant that of the other participants in the meeting, few seek to co-author the description of “what's going on in head office.” Indeed, Chris changes footing and displays no knowledge of head office and thus no affiliation or alignment with the interactional team Andy/Betty. This makes interactionally relevant in- and out-groups based on rights to have and display knowledge. Further, this in-group/out-group formation can also be seen when Debbie sanctions Andy for an impropriety with which Betty has aligned and affiliated.

This article therefore shows the way in which the policing of epistemic rights reflexively sets up an in-group with knowledge (superiors) and an out-group (subordinates), and it is through this display of knowledge of head office that the interactionally achieved management team claims proximity to head office. This claim talks into being a vertical organizational hierarchy. The article therefore adds to our knowledge of socio-epistemics within an organizational context and demonstrates one way in which the organization is communicatively constituted in talk: namely through the negotiation of epistemic rights. Further, since these claims to knowledge reflexively make relative positions in the hierarchy (as indexed by proximity to head office) relevant to the interaction, “being in the know” enacts status, as defined by Enfield (2011, p. 291) as a collection of entitlements (or rights) and responsibilities (duties) vis-à-vis other members of a social group. Thus, “when speakers orient to their asymmetrical position as regards some knowledge, they orient to the normatively organised social distribution of authoritative access to bodies or types of knowledge” (Drew, 1991, p. 45). In other words they reflexively talk into being legitimate organizational identities that incarnate hierarchical (organizational) structure and so do authority. This is because authoritative access to knowledge of head office is linked to position rather than to actual states of knowledge. Consequently, epistemic authority, in this case at least, is commensurate with wider concepts of authority that define it as legitimate power vested in particular people or positions (Weber, 1947, quoted in Kahn and Kram, 1994, p. 17). In this case, power to author an account of what is going on at head office is limited to the interactional management team, who simultaneously claim a privileged link with head office, unavailable to other participants, and offer this link as an authoritative basis of their knowledge. Thus, knowledge is displayed not from firsthand

experience but by virtue of identity, which enacts legitimate status-based rights to know and so “does” authority. However, it is not enough merely to possess such entitlements to knowledge; these must be exercised as a way of demonstrating that one has the necessary status to have and display such knowledge. Furthermore, each time authority to know is enacted it is also put at risk, and as Debbie’s attempts to display knowledge of head office demonstrate, such status-based authority is not the property of somebody by virtue of their position alone. Rather, identities have to be actively constructed in talk so that authority, as with any other organizational phenomena, can be seen as a negotiated process that is “distributed among organizational members, negotiated between superiors and subordinates, and distributed between co-workers” (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, CA-inspired research into the micro-practices of a meeting can reveal the seen but unnoticed way in which authority is accomplished through differential turn-taking rights that are used to display knowledge. The fact that, as this article reveals, these rights are based on status rather than actual states of knowledge demonstrates how authority based on hierarchical position is talked into being. In short, such a micro-approach to organization can reveal the mechanisms by which authority as a process is achieved as members’ practice. Furthermore, fine-grained analysis of meeting talk can illustrate that status-based authority is not the working out of an a priori hierarchy by judgemental dopes (Garfinkel, 1967); it is actually negotiated and achieved as members go about their everyday workplace activities.

Finally, while the communicative constitution of organization has been amply described elsewhere (as already discussed), this article does so from an epistemic perspective that so far has been relatively lacking in organizational research (though see Clifton, 2012; Djordjilovic, 2012; Markaki & Mondada, 2012). This is because at a proximal level the sequential properties of talk make relevant the identities of knowing and unknowing participants, which reflexively make the situated identities of “management team” and thus superior/subordinate relevant to the interaction. It is the achievement of these situated or institutional identities together with their epistemic rights and obligations relative to other organizational players that talks into being organizational structure. As Samra-Fredericks (2010, p. 212) notes, “For ‘organization’ to take shape or form, a complex mesh of historical and culturally furnished *role-based rights* and obligations need to be observed” (my italics). Thus, one way in which the organization is communicatively constituted in talk is through orientation to institutional identities and the epistemic role-based rights and obligations that are enacted as they emerge in talk. Furthermore, by a process of lamination (Boden, 1994, p. 151), selections from past practices are enacted in the present and they laminate, layer upon layer, upon prior interaction. Such laminated and shared understandings of how to act perform particular practices, such as displaying rights to knowledge, that then become routine so that the structure of the

organization collapses into the immediacy of action (structure-in-action). As a result of this process, organization emerges simultaneously as an essential resource for going about everyday workplace activities and as an external and constraining social fact.

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**APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS USED**

(2.5)	approximate length of pause in seconds
(.)	micro pause
[word]	overlapping utterances
:	sound stretching
=	latched utterances
↑word, ↓word	marked movement in pitch
<u>Excellent</u>	stressed syllable
< word >	slower than surrounding talk
> word <	faster than surrounding talk
.hh	inbreath
°word°	spoken more softly than surrounding talk

**WORD**

£word£

((action))

spoken more loudly than surrounding text

spoken with smile voice

description of action

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