

Dyrlund Wählin-Jacobsen, Christian

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COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
SOLBJERG PLADS 3
DK-2000 FREDERIKSBERG
DANMARK

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Christian Dyrland Wåhlin-Jacobsen

CONSTRUCTING CHANGE INITIATIVES IN WORKPLACE VOICE ACTIVITIES

STUDIES FROM A SOCIAL INTERACTION PERSPECTIVE

Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies

PhD Series 40-2018

CBS  COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

Constructing change initiatives in workplace voice activities

Studies from a social interaction perspective

Christian Dyrland Wählin-Jacobsen

Supervisors:

Associate Professor Magnus Larsson, Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School

Assistant Professor Mette Mogensen, Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School

Professor Andreas Holtermann, National Research Center for the Working Environment

*Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies
Copenhagen Business School*



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Summary

In recent years, a growing number of workplaces have implemented activities where employees are invited to voice problems and suggest initiatives directly to their managers in a group setting. Such direct group-based voice activities (DGVAs) are typically inspired by human resource management and production improvement techniques, and they are claimed to have a number of positive effects for both the organizations which host these activities and for their employees. However, others have questioned whether they provide employees with a reasonable opportunity to influence their working conditions, or if they instead mostly assign new responsibilities to the employees and promote overcommitted employee identities. This ambivalence regarding the activities is reflected in how the circumstances regarding voice in the workplace are sometimes described as messy and paradoxical.

The aim of this dissertation is to understand an important aspect of how employees can influence their workplace through DGVAs, specifically how the participants construct change initiatives which can improve the employees' working conditions. To this end, the dissertation presents an interaction-focused perspective on voice based on ethnomethodological conversation analysis, a perspective which addresses various shortcomings of the dominant research perspectives on voice. For example, substantial attention has been paid in the voice literature to how individual employees make choices about what messages to convey through voice and whom to address, especially in studies which have applied a psychological lens. However, in DGVAs, voicing a problem or a suggestion to the other participants is only the first step of a longer process towards potential consensus about which initiatives to implement, and the social and interactional mechanisms which underlie this process are not well understood.

The dissertation contains four articles. In the first article, it is argued that an important aspect of developing initiatives in DGVAs is the interactional work performed by participants whereby they negotiate different candidate problem formulations in order to develop a coordinated understanding of the current situation – a process that is termed “problem work”. In addition to this “problem work”, the participants also engage in a related process of formulating and negotiating potential solutions which can be termed “solution work”. The employees orient to whether their problem and solution formulations are taken as credible, such as by basing their formulations on claims for which they hold epistemic authority, that is, the degree of access held by the employee to the topic at hand and thus their right to claim and present knowledge about

it. Thus, the limits to the employees' epistemic authority also potentially limit the scope of issues they are likely to raise in DGVAs. Furthermore, even when they are presented in relation to topics where employees hold epistemic authority, the employees' inferences can still be challenged by the management.

The process of constructing initiatives in DGVAs is also shaped by how the participating employees construct their capacity to shape their own working conditions, a capacity which has been referred to within the literature as job control. Article two demonstrates that if employees construct their job control as being too limited to change their working conditions, they are unlikely to engage in developing new initiatives in the DGVAs, meaning that little or no action is taken on the basis of the participants' discussions. The way the employees construct their job control is shaped by the accounts of the employees' working conditions that are presented within the activities by various participants, as well as how these accounts are negotiated.

Article three demonstrates how participants in DGVAs orient to various interactional threats, threats which may compromise the process of developing change initiatives. Specifically, supporting certain initiatives as an employee might lead to undesired identity ascriptions from the other participants, and as a result, employees are likely to refuse to assume responsibility for implementing these initiatives. Thus, engaging in DGVAs as an employee can involve trade-offs between potentially gaining influence over one's working conditions on the one hand and the risk of losing one's grip on how one's identity is constructed in the interaction on the other.

Relatedly, article four focuses on the perspective of first line managers and the interactional threats they face in DGVAs. Line managers' reactions to voice have in the literature been attributed to their leadership style or personal disposition, for example their "openness" towards voice or lack thereof. Article four demonstrates how openness is also negotiated in interaction, and that managers employ various strategies to avoid attributions of being "closed" in situations where they challenge employees' suggestions. Challenges from managers are likely to be justified through the line managers' responsibility to support the meeting of organizational goals, even if they are also expected to encourage employees to use voice. Article four also demonstrates the importance that DGVA participants assign to maintaining moral accountability while engaging in discussions about proposed initiatives.

Besides the findings of the four papers, the dissertation offers three overall contributions to voice theory: a description of key mechanisms whereby voiced suggestions for initiatives are

negotiated in interaction, rather than simply transmitted from employees to the management; a more developed understanding of the moral-related interactional threats that the participants face and which might compromise the process of constructing change initiatives; and a multi-faceted perspective on power and influence which more adequately captures how employees' and managers interests are negotiated within DGVAs than current models which primarily focus on formal decision-making rights. As a methodological contribution, the dissertation introduces conversation analysis as a method to studying voice interactions in the workplace, and argues that conversation analysis might also shed new light on how concern for the working environment is topicalized and negotiated in organization members' interactions outside of DGVAs. As a practical contribution, the dissertation argues that both the way participants negotiate their relative rights and obligations, as well as the setup of the DGVAs, such as the amount of time available, support from process facilitators, and the conceptual tools used, play a substantial role in shaping the employees' opportunities for developing well-considered and relevant initiatives.

Resumé

I de seneste år har et stigende antal arbejdspladser implementeret aktiviteter, hvor medarbejdere inviteres til at rejse problemer og foreslå initiativer til direkte til deres ledere i en gruppesammenhæng. Disse direkte gruppebaserede medarbejderinddragende aktiviteter (i afhandlingen betegnet DGVAer) er typisk inspirerede af human resource management og teknikker til produktionsforbedring, og de hævdes at skabe en række positive effekter for både de organisationer, der iværksætter aktiviteterne, og for deres medarbejdere. Omvendt har andre stillet spørgsmålstegn ved om aktiviteterne tilvejebringer en rimelig mulighed for medarbejderne til at påvirke deres arbejdsforhold, eller om de overvejende medfører nye forpligtelser og fremmer overengagerede medarbejderidentiteter. Denne usikkerhed i forhold til aktiviteterne afspejles i at forholdene for medarbejderinddragelse til tider beskrives som rodede og paradoksale.

Formålet med denne afhandling er at forstå hvordan medarbejdere kan påvirke deres arbejdsplads gennem DGVAer, specifikt hvordan deltagerne konstruerer forandringsinitiativer som kan forbedre medarbejdernes arbejdsforhold. Med dette formål præsenterer afhandlingen et perspektiv på medarbejderinddragelse, der fokuserer på interaktion og som er baseret på etnometodologisk konversationsanalyse, et perspektiv som afhjælper forskellige mangler ved de mest udbredte forskningsperspektiver på medarbejderinddragelse. For eksempel er der i litteraturen om medarbejderinddragelse gennemført en række studier af hvordan medarbejdere træffer valg om hvilke budskaber de rejser og til hvem, specielt studier med et psykologisk perspektiv. Men i DGVAer er det at rejse et problem eller foreslå en løsning til de andre deltagere kun det første skridt i en længere proces frem mod en mulig konsensus om hvilke initiativer, der skal gennemføres, og der mangler viden om de social og interaktionsmæssige mekanismer, der ligger bag denne proces.

Afhandlingen indeholder fire artikler. I den første artikel argumenteres der for at et vigtigt aspekt af hvordan initiativer udvikles i DGVAer er den interaktionsmæssige indsats, som deltagerne lægger for at forhandle forskellige mulige problemformuleringer med henblik på at udvikle en koordineret forståelse af deres nuværende situation – en proces, der her kaldes ”problem work”. I tillæg til ”problem work” indgår deltagerne også i en tilsvarende proces hvor de formulerer og forhandler mulige løsninger, en proces som kaldes ”solution work”. Medarbejderne orienterer sig mod hvorvidt deres formulerede problemer og løsninger ses som

troværdige, for eksempel ved at basere deres formuleringer på påstande, som de har epistemisk autoritet over, forstået som graden af medarbejderens adgang til det pågældende emne og medarbejderens afledte rettighed til at påstå at besidde og præsentere viden om emnet. Som en konsekvens kan grænserne for medarbejdernes epistemisk autoritet medvirke til at begrænse bredden i de emner, som medarbejderne kan tænkes at rejse gennem DGVAer. Dertil kan medarbejdernes slutninger stadig udfordres af ledelsen, selv når de er fremsat i forhold til emner, som medarbejderne har epistemisk autoritet over.

Processen med at konstruere initiativer i DGVAer formes også af hvordan de deltagende medarbejdere konstruerer deres evne til at påvirke deres arbejdsforhold, en evne, som i litteraturen kaldes kontrol over eget arbejde. Artikel to demonstrerer at hvis medarbejderne konstruerer deres kontrol over eget arbejde som værende for begrænset til at påvirke deres arbejdsforhold, er medarbejderne mindre tilbøjelige til at udvikle nye initiativer i DGVAer, hvilket betyder at deltagernes diskussioner fører til få eller ingen tiltag. Måden medarbejderne konstruerer deres kontrol over eget arbejde på påvirkes af de fremstillinger af medarbejdernes arbejdsforhold som præsenteres i aktiviteterne, og hvordan disse fremstillinger forhandles.

Artikel tre demonstrerer hvordan deltagere i DGVAer orienterer sig mod forskellige risici i interaktionen, risici som kan kompromittere arbejdet med at udvikle forandringsinitiativer. Specifikt kan det at støtte bestemte initiativer som medarbejder føre til at man bliver tilskrevet en uønsket identitet af de andre deltagere, hvorfor medarbejderne er tilbøjelige til at afvise ansvaret for at gennemføre sådanne initiativer. Dét at deltage i DGVAer som medarbejder kan således medføre afvejninger mellem muligheden for at opnå øget indflydelse på ens arbejdsforhold på den ene side og risikoen for at miste grebet om hvordan ens identitet konstrueres i interaktionen på den anden side.

Tilsvarende fokuserer artikel fire på førstelinjelederes perspektiv og de interaktionsmæssige risici de møder i DGVAer. Linjeledernes reaktioner på at medarbejderne rejser problemer og løsninger er i litteraturen blevet forklaret ud fra deres ledelsesstil eller deres personlighed, eksempelvis deres åbenhed i forhold til at medarbejderne giver udtryk for synspunkter eller manglen på samme. Artikel fire viser at åbenhed også forhandles i interaktionen, og at ledere benytter forskellige strategier for at undgå at blive set som lukkede i situationer hvor de rejser tvivl om medarbejdernes forslag. Indvendinger fra lederne retfærdiggøres med henvisning til deres ansvar for at ofte fremme organisationens mål, selv om de også forventes at tilskynde

medarbejderne til at rejse problemer og foreslå initiativer. Artikel fire demonstrerer også den vigtighed som deltagere i DGVAer tilskriver dét at opretholde moralsk ansvarlighed mens de indgår i diskussioner om foreslåede initiativer.

Ud over de fire artiklers konklusioner frembyder afhandlingen tre overordnede bidrag til teorien om medarbejderinddragelse: en beskrivelse af hovedmekanismerne hvorigennem foreslåede initiativer forhandles i interaktionen, snarere end blot videregives fra medarbejderne til ledelsen; en mere udfoldet forståelse af de moralrelaterede interaktionsmæssige risici som deltagerne møder og som kan kompromittere arbejdet med at konstruere forandringsinitiativer; og en multifacetteret forståelse af magt og indflydelse som fanger hvordan medarbejdere og ledeses interesser forhandles i DGVAer end nuværende modeller, der primært ser på formelle beslutningsrettigheder. Som et metodologisk bidrag introducerer afhandlingen konversationsanalysen som en metode til at undersøge interaktioner om medarbejderinddragelse og der argumenteres for at konversationsanalyse også kan kaste nyt lys på hvordan hensynet til arbejdsmiljøet italesættes og forhandles i interaktioner på arbejdspladsen generelt. Som et praktisk bidrag argumenteres der i afhandlingen for at såvel måden hvorpå DGVA deltagerne forhandler deres indbyrdes rettigheder som rammen for DGVAerne, såsom den afsatte tid, støtte fra procesfacilitatorer, og de særlige begreber der anvendes i aktiviteterne, spiller en betydelig rolle for medarbejdernes mulighed for at udvikle gennemtænkte og relevante initiativer.

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List of abbreviations

DGVA:	Direct Group-based Voice Activities
EM:	Ethnomethodology
CA:	Conversation Analysis
DP:	Discursive Psychology
IB perspective:	Individual Behavior perspective on voice
MT perspective:	Management Technique perspective on voice
II perspective:	Institutionalized Influence perspective on voice
VMW:	Visual Mapping Workshop
APW:	Action Planning Workshop
FUW:	Follow-Up Workshop

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Christian Dyrland Wählin-Jacobsen

Frederiksberg, June 2018

Preface

Four research articles are included in this dissertation, all of which have been submitted for review to different academic journals. The details regarding place of submission, previous public presentations of the articles and co-authors are presented below.

- The first article (chapter 5) is co-authored with Johan Simonsen Abildgaard. The article has been in review with *Discourse & Communication*, and we have been invited to revise and resubmit. The article is presented here in a version with minor revisions.
- The second article (chapter 6) has been submitted to *Human Relations*. The article is co-authored with Esben Nedergård Olsen and Johan Simonsen Abildgaard.
- The third article (chapter 7) has been submitted to *Scandinavian Journal of Management*. A previous version of the article has been presented at the 33rd EGOS Colloquium in Copenhagen, July 2017.
- The fourth article (chapter 8) has been submitted to *Management Communication Quarterly* and is currently undergoing review.

Due to the requirements of the targeted outlets, the first and second articles are written in UK English, while the remainder of the dissertation is written in US English.

1. Introduction

Many organizations have in place one or more schemes or arrangements with the stated aim of inviting employees to voice problems and suggestions to the management about how to improve working conditions or the functioning of the organization (Busck, Knudsen, & Lind, 2010; Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon, & Wilkinson, 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Heery, 2011; Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010). These constitute *formal voice arrangements*, as they are based on recurrent processes involving some degree of structure regarding what can be voiced, how the employees are to present voice to the management, and what happens after the employees have voiced a problem or suggestion; they represent a setting for voice which is distinctive from how employees might voice problems and suggestions *informally* in their everyday interactions with managers (Marchington & Suter, 2013). Formal voice arrangements can take place via select employee representatives, but a type of formal voice arrangement that is becoming increasingly common in recent years is one in which activities¹ are held where groups of employees can discuss problems and suggestions directly with their managers, for example in “quality circles,” “problem-solving groups,” “focus groups” or “employee–manager meetings²” (Busck et al., 2010; Donaghey et al., 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Heery, 2011; Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010). These activities can be labeled “direct group-based voice activities” (DGVAs).

The purpose of this dissertation is to advance our understanding of how participants in DGVAs come to agree about which actions they will take after the activities in order to address the issues they have discussed. These actions, which may be taken as parts of more or less formalized change initiatives, are important because they typically represent the most tangible outcome of the activities. Although not all initiatives emerging from the activities will end up being implemented, the long-term effects of DGVAs for both the employees and the organization are likely to reflect the number of initiatives developed, their scope, and which working conditions they target. For example, DGVAs might have a limited impact if only a few initiatives are developed within the activities, or if the initiatives have little potential to change employees’ working conditions.

¹ The distinction between voice arrangements and voice activities is used here to discern the overall arrangement as a system or scheme from the actual activities in which voice is exercised. The distinction is relevant because formal voice arrangements might comprise various activities where voice is not necessarily exercised, such as activities for processing employees’ voiced suggestions, for implementing these suggestions, or for following up on their implementation.

² My use of the term “meetings” throughout the dissertation refers to formal meetings.

Unfortunately, it cannot be taken for granted that DGVA's will have positive effects for employees or organizations in a given case. From a positive angle, the benefit of employee participation, more generally, has been broadly recognized as it has been recommended as a strategy for promoting health and well-being in the workplace by influential institutions such as the World Health Organization (Burton, 2010), the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001), and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA, 2010) and has been incorporated into national policies in the UK (Cousins et al., 2004), Belgium (Malchaire, 2004), Germany (Satzler, 2009), and Italy (Persechini et al., 2013), for example. Specifically, formal voice arrangements featuring direct and consultative formal voice activities have been described as an important strategy for improving the health, safety, and well-being of the employees by enabling them effect changes to potentially strenuous or hazardous working conditions (Mikkelsen, Saksvik, & Landsbergis, 2000; Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen, Randall, Holten, & Rial-González, 2010). In addition, formal voice arrangements are claimed to potentially provide various additional benefits such as learning opportunities for the employees, which increases their skill levels and their motivation to perform well at work (Eurofound, 2013; Mikkelsen et al., 2000). When employees feel that formal voice arrangements are effective at helping them improve their working conditions, participating can lead to "fair process effects" (Greenberg, 1990; Greenberg & Folger, 1983) such as increased employee commitment and involvement (Nielsen, 2013; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). In addition, workplace productivity and product quality may increase due to how the employees' suggestions can improve the way work is performed (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

On the other hand, empirical studies show that positive effects do not always materialize from voice activities in practice (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Egan et al., 2007). Within the literature, a number of authors have argued that a key reason why formal voice arrangements sometimes do not lead to substantial changes is that the form and timing of the arrangements are typically determined by senior level management, while the employees' decision authority does not necessarily increase (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; O'Connor, 1995). Therefore, many proposed initiatives cannot be decided on by the employees themselves, as implementation depends on the management's support. This contingency means that employees are likely to consider which initiatives the management would be willing to support, and to only propose initiatives which are believed to hold a chance of being implemented (Morrison, 2011). For issues where the interests of the employees and management are in conflict, there is a risk that

the initiatives developed in DGVA's would be of a nature which is unlikely to significantly influence the employees' working conditions. As a result, employees might experience that they hold relatively little "*de facto* voice" (Krefting & Powers, 1998, p. 263), and current forms of participation have been criticized for tokenism, i.e., that the employees are only claimed to be empowered (Strauss, 2006), or offered sham participation activities (Markey & Knudsen, 2014).

It has been claimed that DGVA's and other types of empowerment practices actually contribute to disempowering the employees by ensuring the employees' commitment to the overall managerial agenda through the language of empowerment and participation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) while forcing extra work tasks on them (Boje & Rosile, 2001). When the organizations are seen by the employees as failing to heed the complaints that are raised through formal voice systems, frustrations are likely to grow (Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979), a phenomenon which has been dubbed the "deaf-ear syndrome" (Cohen, 1985; Harlos, 2001). And in relation to health and well-being issues, some have questioned whether direct voice arrangements provide the employees with sufficient control over their working conditions to avoid their work-related health problems deteriorating in the long term (Busck et al., 2010).

Compared to the focus in the literature on employees' limited decision making authority, practical experiences led me to become aware of another potential challenge to DGVA's having positive outcomes: that considerable intricacies are involved in developing initiatives in DGVA's and negotiating³ consensus around implementing them. As a research assistant in an interdisciplinary group including both academics and professionals, I participated in facilitating workshop meetings for an intervention study which sought to implement a formal voice arrangement to improve the health and well-being of employees in three Danish industrial organizations (Gupta et al., 2015; Wåhlin-Jacobsen, Henriksen, Gupta, Abildgaard, & Holtermann, 2016; Wåhlin-Jacobsen, Henriksen, Abildgaard, Holtermann, & Munch-Hansen, 2017). While the process of developing initiatives is not framed as decisive for the outcomes of formal voice arrangements in the literature, I and my colleagues were surprised to see that there were substantial differences in the number and the scope of the initiatives developed in different workshop meetings. We even observed these differences when comparing workshop meetings

³ In the dissertation, my use of the term "negotiation" is meant to imply both potentially a form of bargaining, i.e. that "the participants relate themselves to each other's goals and interests and to the problems of implementing their goals" (Wagner, 1995, p. 30) and a form of *maneuvering* past various interactional obstacles (Francis, 1995).

within the same organization, and with participants who were part of the same overall work team and performed the same work tasks. These differences were closely related to how discussions among the participants played out in the workshop meetings.

For example, the participants' sensemaking regarding their opportunities for changing their working conditions seemed to be a crucial factor influencing the initiatives developed within the workshops, which, in turn, affected their chances of actually improving their working conditions. While the participants in one workshop meeting considered most of the working conditions they considered problematic as unamenable to change and therefore elected to only develop a few minor initiatives, their colleagues from another shift would sometimes develop seven or eight initiatives regarding the very same problems during their workshop meetings.

We also observed employees disagreeing about what constituted problems and what to do about them, with some employees openly challenging their colleagues' viewpoints, thereby undermining the proposed changes which their colleagues considered worth pursuing. The lack of agreement and the potential for interpersonal conflicts among the participants that follows from it is also rarely acknowledged in the literature, where little attention has been paid to how employees arrive at "voiceable" problems or suggestions.

As a third example, various employees seemed to be working against the agenda for the workshop meetings, an agenda we in the project group had considered sympathetic to the employees. Some employees even chastised the arrangement for not being about increasing their well-being at all. This led us to wonder whether there were other key concerns among the employees besides those we had realized. I and my colleagues came away from the workshop meetings thinking that what went on in the workshop meeting discussions had an importance that had been overlooked in the literature. At the same time, since we were initially quite surprised about what we saw, it was not very clear to us why the discussions progressed as they did.

We were not alone. In the voice literature, various authors have called for more research on the mechanisms by which the outcomes of formal voice arrangements are determined. For example, a recent review described the relationship between opportunities to use voice and the outcomes of voice as "underspecified" because of a lack of research about how voice is reacted to

(Bashshur & Oc, 2015)⁴. Furthermore, while a large number of academic studies have been published on voice in the workplace throughout the years, these tend to rely on a small set of research methods, with surveys being perhaps the most prevalent. As Wilkinson and Dundon argue, “the extrapolation of survey evidence about the use of various involvement and participation schemes in many studies tells us very little about the impact or extensiveness of such techniques within a particular organization” (2010, p. 178). To remedy this, in-depth qualitative studies have been called for to “unravel the dynamics and outcomes of the voice process” (Butler, 2005, p. 273).

Among the studies which do focus on mechanisms determine the effects of voice activities, two overall positions can be identified about how to understand the mechanisms. One position is that these mechanisms are relatively simple and general, as exemplified by how the outcomes of formal voice arrangement are attributed to structural aspects such as the type of arrangement in question, the presence of unions in the organization or the organizational culture (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Krefting & Powers, 1998; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005). The gist of this perspective is formulated in the title of a book chapter by Strauss, “Participation works – if conditions are appropriate” (1998). The other position is that the practical realities of how voice is exercised and responded to within organizations is “messy” (Hirschman, 1970, p. 107), paradoxical (Harley, Hyman, & Thompson, 2005; O’Connor, 1995; Stohl & Cheney, 2001), and ridden with dilemmas (Kanter, 1982). For example, Krefting and Powers have argued that:

[e]mployee voice needs to be understood as a course of ongoing tensions among personalized organizational actors seeking individual as well as organizational advantage in addition to being viewed as a right which, if exercised responsibly, entails positive organizational outcomes. Mechanisms for voice should be recognized as containing antiemancipatory elements, the temptation for reprisal, as well [as] emancipatory potential (Krefting & Powers, 1998, pp. 273–274).

From this perspective, the social organization of voice activities is ambiguous, bordering on chaotic, yet accounts of how these activities *are* ordered are sparse. To better understand the meaning, functioning, and impact of DGVAs, we would thus need to take this complexity into

⁴ One example of this is the report “Work organisation and employee involvement in Europe” published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions under the EU. The report contains chapters about the prevalence of formal voice arrangements in the surveyed workplaces and the typical consequences of these activities, but contains little about how what goes on within the arrangements shape their consequences (Eurofound, 2013).

consideration – to open up the “black box” of the arrangements as arenas for human interaction and explore how that interaction is accomplished and structured.

In this dissertation, I explore the question of *how* DGVAs work. Due to the consultative nature of the setting, initiatives to change the employees’ working conditions are not simply voiced by the employees and then accepted or rejected by the management; instead, they can be seen, in Schegloff’s terms, as interactional achievements (1987), constructed through the employees’ and managers’ discussions. The lack of rules or institutions for how to deal with the many contingencies that might arise within the activities (Harlos, 2001) makes it likely that the trajectories of the participants’ discussions will be characterized by improvisation and continuous situational judgments made by the participants (Garfinkel, 1967a, 1967b; Middleton, 1998). As the decisive dynamics within voice activity discussion have not been properly treated as an object of investigation in the literature, describing some central aspects of how they are socially organized and how they shape the initiatives that are decided for later implementation is the main aim of this dissertation.

A theoretical perspective which is fundamentally concerned with how interactions are organized is ethnomethodology (EM), which inspired the development of Conversation analysis (CA) (Garfinkel, 1967b; Heritage, 1984; Rawls, 2008; Sacks, 1992; Samra-Fredericks, 2010). Since the emergence of ethnomethodology in the late 1950’s and 1960’s, the work of a diverse field of scholars has explored how persons continuously face situations in which they utilize what has been labeled *ethnomethods* along with a body of common sense knowledge as cultural members, in order to render social situations intelligible and act accountably in them. The ethnomethodological perspective is concerned with processes involved in how we make sense of others’ actions, how we design our actions to make sense to others, and how we observe and enact local moral orders in doing so. CA can be glossed as the study of how these processes take place in conversations. In this dissertation, various methods related to CA are applied to analyze interaction in voice activities. By attending to the minute details of conversations, EM/CA is able to recover the “what else” of social life that is lost when viewed through the abstracted lens of traditional social scientific analysis (Lynch, 2016). In the words of Deirdre Boden, an ethnomethodological orientation implies a focus on “the extraordinary organization of the ordinary” (1994, p. 31).

Research question

Based on the ethnomethodological perspective, the dissertation pursues the following research question:

- *How do initiatives to change the employees' working conditions become constructed within direct group-based voice activities?*

A clarification of the central terms used in this research question is in order. First, an initiative is conceived of here as a plan or, in less formalized cases, a decision or agreement committing particular parties to carry out certain future actions. In some cases, initiatives can be implemented by the DGVA participants after the activities, while, in other cases, an initiative might require the approval of higher-level managers or the contributions of technical staff, for example, in order to have an effect.

Working conditions should be understood in the broadest sense, that is, as encompassing all aspects of the organization of work that the employees might choose to topicalize. This includes not only the physical and psychosocial demands of the work, but also other aspects such as the planning and practical carrying out of tasks. Distribution issues (Levie & Sandberg, 1991) such as remuneration and working time should also be seen as working conditions, although these topics are not taken up as commonly in DGVAs as production-related issues (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004; Heery, 2015; Markey & Knudsen, 2014).

The term "constructing" should be regarded as related to "to producing," "bringing into being," or "making available" (Rawls, 2002; Watson & Goulet, 1998). The term references how a number of resources are brought together in the interaction to create initiatives for which the participants have coordinated some understanding about rationales, arguments for and against, and the actions that must be carried out for the initiative to be implemented. The term does not imply that I take an ironic stance towards the initiatives, as it is sometimes the case in social constructionist analyses (e.g. Watson, 1994).

The research question could be understood as focusing on how initiatives are constructed through formal procedures such as the steps of the agenda for the voice activities or the local rules or procedures which are meant to regulate the employees' use of voice. However, considering the diversity of approaches to conducting DGVAs, such an approach is unlikely to

lead to findings of general interest. Furthermore, the presence of certain rules and guidelines does not guarantee their application and structuring of an activity (Garfinkel, 1967b). What the dissertation aims to provide a better understanding of is how the participants construct initiatives, as well as the various problems that they orient to⁵ while doing so.

The research question is investigated through a number of qualitative analyses of interactional data from a health and safety intervention in which a formal voice arrangement was implemented in two Danish industrial organizations. The analyses are presented in four chapters based on the four research articles underpinning this dissertation. The articles have been developed into their present form based on intensive analysis of selected extracts from the data, reading the relevant literatures, and considering how to present relevant findings and in which outlets. Each of the four chapters presents a select perspective on the overall research question, focusing on how the participants negotiate various problem and solution formulations as a part of developing initiatives (article one), how the employees' job control and thus their chances for successfully changing the workplace are negotiated (article two), how the meaning of supporting a suggested initiative as an employee is negotiated in the activities (article three), and how line managers handle situations where they challenge the employees' suggestions (article four). Of course, various other themes also surfaced in the overall analytical work; however, these were not deemed as relevant for the overall research question, not adequately manifested in the data to enable a detailed analysis or not compatible with the methodological approach I eventually chose for the dissertation.

Structure of the dissertation

In chapter 2, various conceptions on voice from the different research fields within voice literature are presented. The proliferation of DGVAs in recent years relative to other types of formal voice arrangements are accounted for while also presenting some of the main concepts and models which have been used to theorize the voice process. The point of chapter 2 is thus to position this dissertation and its focus on DGVAs in relation to the current state of voice research.

⁵ Orientation can be understood as a form of active awareness displayed by the interlocutors and thus available to the analysis (Hutchby, 2017).

Chapter 3 features a presentation of CA, the analytical approach that has been applied in the four articles of the dissertation, as well as its roots in EM. Relatively little space has been given to the philosophical basis of ethnomethodology, focusing instead on the basic concepts of CA and on empirical studies which have utilized this approach, in order to understand phenomena which are relevant for this dissertation, such as participatory decision-making at the workplace. Some of the main criticisms that have previously been raised about the EM/CA perspective are discussed along with how they are dealt with in the dissertation.

Chapter 4 then includes a description of the DGVA in two Danish industrial organizations which functioned as the empirical setting for the dissertation's analyses. In addition to giving an overview of the data used for the underlying analysis and discussing my own role as a participant and observant in some of the recorded workshop meetings, the methodological considerations that informed the analyses are described as well as the progression of my investigation from the initial data collection onwards.

This is followed by the analytical chapters on the investigations in the four articles. The articles are presented in the form in which they were submitted for publication⁶. Chapter 5 contains the first article, which aims to describe how the process of voicing problems and suggestions to the management involves various negotiations of the employees' credibility and claims of knowledge regarding the problems. In this study, I and Johan Simonsen Abildgaard conducted analyses based primarily on socioepistemics and discursive psychology (DP), examining how DGVA participants in two different settings construct initiatives for addressing their work shoe-related problems by engaging in various problem and solution constructions. Chapter 6 contains the second article of the dissertation, in which Esben Nedergård Olsen, Johan Simonsen Abildgaard, and I demonstrate how the outcomes of DGVA are shaped by how the participants construct their chances for successfully changing their working conditions. Relative to the other articles, this article relies less on turn-by-turn analysis of interactions, instead focusing on how various accounts of the employees' job control proliferate during the workshop meetings of three groups from the same overall work team.

Chapter 7 contains the third article of the dissertation. By employing membership categorization analysis, this study identifies an overlooked risk for employees who participate in DGVA: how indicating support or assuming responsibility for initiatives can lead to undesired identity

ascriptions. The article thus relates DGVA's to theories on empowerment and identity regulation. Finally, chapter 8 presents the fourth article of the dissertation, where I analyzed line managers' strategies for maintaining moral accountability in relation to how they handle their potentially conflicting obligations towards promoting employee voice and ensuring high work performance. In the study, an extended episode in which a manager has challenged an employee's suggestion is analyzed primarily using concepts from membership categorization analysis and DP.

After the analytical chapters, the findings of the four articles are reviewed in relation to the dissertation's overall research question in chapter 9. Lastly, the main contributions that the analyses offer to voice theory, research, and practice are discussed along with the limitations of the dissertation and suggestions for future studies.

⁶ The formatting of the four papers has been changed to accord with the rest of the dissertation. All references have been moved to the end of the dissertation.

2. Employee voice and direct group-based voice activities

In this chapter, key concepts and distinctions within the employee voice literature will be presented, as well as data on the prevalence of DGVAs. I will then describe how these key distinctions relate to three research perspectives which focus on different aspects of voice and which have been applied in various subfields of voice research: voice as individual behavior, as a management technique, or as a form of institutionalized influence. I do not claim that only these three perspectives exist, but they each represent a sizable contribution to the voice literature. By structuring my review of the voice literature around these three perspectives, I aim to address various arguable shortcomings of other recent reviews, such as how relatively little attention is paid to the fundamental differences in how voice is conceptualized within the literature (e.g., Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011), the omission of perspectives which represent important aspects of voice (such as the lack of an explicit individual perspective from the model presented by Wilkinson & Fay, 2011), or the grouping together of quite distinct understandings of voice (such as those found within the human resource management and industrial relations literatures in the review by Mowbray et al., 2015).

Due to how a work environment intervention serves as the empirical setting for the dissertation's analysis, this chapter will also provide a description of how the work environment literature on voice relates to the three perspectives. Finally, I will formulate three problems within voice research based on the three main perspectives, problems which warrant a fourth perspective focusing on how voice is exercised and responded to in interactions.

Voice and related concepts

Within the voice literature, the term *voice* is sometimes used interchangeably with other terms, such as *participation*, *involvement*, and *empowerment*, often with no clear distinctions as to their intended meaning. Several researchers have criticized that these terms are used in ways that are “elastic” and which cover an “extremely broad” range of practices (Marchington & Suter, 2013, p. 284; see also Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010), a problem which has been attributed to the fact that the phenomena being referred to by the terms are studied in a range of research areas (Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015). Because voice (or participation, etc.) can refer to a number of different things, it is necessary to assess what the specific phenomenon of interest is

on a study-by-study basis when reviewing the literature, rather than going by keywords, for example.

The terms participation, involvement, and empowerment have been used in the literature to imply that employees are granted some degree of influence over relevant decisions, however the terms have been criticized because this assumption does not always hold (Boje & Rosile, 2001; Krefting & Powers, 1998; Markey & Knudsen, 2014; Strauss, 2006). My choice to instead use the term voice throughout this dissertation is motivated by the term merely implying that employees communicate some point to the management. Because this condition is easily satisfied, the term is arguably less problematic and more inclusive than either participation, involvement or empowerment. My use of the term voice is inspired by Pyman and colleagues (2006), who define employee voice as “how employees raise concerns, express and advance their interests, solve problems, and contribute to and participate in workplace decision making” (p. 543). This definition stands in contrast with those of other authors who take a more restrictive stance. For example, some studies only focus on *pro-social* voice, that is, voice motivated a “desire to help the organization or work unit perform more effectively or to make a positive difference for the collective” (Morrison, 2011, pp. 381–382), or *critical* voice, which is also referred to as *dissent* (e.g., De Ruiter, Schalk, & Blomme, 2016; Garner, 2016; Kassing, 1997).

Key distinctions in the voice literature

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, an important distinction is the one between voice that is expressed informally by employees in their everyday interactions with managers and voice that is expressed in relation to the various forms of formal⁷ voice arrangements which exist. Formal voice arrangements are found in a number of different forms, such as collective bargaining, suggestion schemes, focus groups, quality circles, upward problem-solving or continuous improvement groups, employee–management meetings at the team or workplace level, consultations with a designated ombudsperson, and written grievance procedures (Harlos,

⁷ It should be noted that different definitions exist of what it means for a voice system to be *formal*. Harlos, for example, states that “formal systems are highly standardized with clear protocols that foster consistent implementation and that reduce the discretionary powers of voice managers” (2001, p. 329), meaning that formality is equated with standardization, while others take the presence of a system or arrangement as the defining aspect of formality (e.g. Marchington & Suter, 2013). In this dissertation, my use of the term formal reflects Marchington and Suter’s use.

2001; Mowbray et al., 2015; Stohl, 1986). Formal voice arrangements have been especially prevalent in organizations in Scandinavia, Germany, the UK, and Australia (Busck et al., 2010; EU-OSHA, 2010; Eurofound, 2013; Harley, 1999; Lippert, Huzzard, Jürgens, & Lazonick, 2014; Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004), while they are used somewhat more rarely in the US (Tarras & Kaufman, 2006). A general tendency is that organizations which primarily employ clerical, service, or manual workers are less likely to have formal voice arrangements in place than those which primarily employ more highly skilled staff (Eurofound, 2013).

Another key distinction mentioned previously is that of direct and representative voice, where direct voice is expressed by the employees directly to the managers, while representative voice is exercised through employee or union representatives. Representative voice tends to be exercised in formal voice arrangements such as work councils or through collective bargaining processes (Mowbray et al., 2015), while direct voice can be both formal and informal. The focus of this dissertation, DGVAs, comprise formal voice arrangements, such as quality circles, upward problem-solving groups (also known as *focus groups* or *continuous improvement groups*), and various forms of regular team briefings or staff meetings with an opportunity for voice. DGVAs are common in Western organizations: in a large pan-European survey study, 88% of the participating management representatives reported that their organizations held DGVAs in the form of regular meetings between employees and their immediate manager, and 54% had meetings in various forms of groups or committees (Akkerman, Sluiter, Jansen, & Akkerman, 2015). A survey conducted in the US found that 37% of the participating organizations had committees of employees who met to discuss problems on a regular basis, 36% had employees participating in committees for productivity or quality, and 47% had regular *town meetings* between employees and managers (Freeman, 2007). Furthermore, DGVAs are used in the management of work environment problems. For example, according to Danish work environment laws, every workplace must perform a health and safety risk assessment every three years and revise the risk assessment in intermediary years. The risk assessment process must be participatory (Working Environment Act, 2010) and The Danish Working Environment Authority, which oversees that Danish organizations perform the risk assessment as required, recommends using DGVAs (Hvenegaard & Nielsen, 2009).

A third important distinction is found between voice concerning how work is designed and performed locally, that is, *production issues*, and voice related to *distribution issues*, such as

pay, hours, how the overall operation is run, or regulations at the company and international levels (Levie & Sandberg, 1991). Direct voice tends to focus primarily on production issues, while representative voice tends to focus on distribution issues. Typically, the objectives and demands regarding distribution issues are less of a challenge to clearly define or quantify as compared to those of production issues, where it is more difficult to formulate the employees' interests unambiguously. In some cases this difficulty may be due to the task complexity of work specialization, which leads to the employees experiencing a diversity of problems, or it may be due to various technical considerations which might go beyond the employees' and employers' immediate competencies (Schuler & Namioka, 1993). The scope of the issues discussed in representative voice settings, as would be expected, relates to the organizational level of the meeting, with discussions at the workplace level typically focusing on more specific and local topics than the discussions found at the headquarter level (Poole, 1978).

A final distinction worth mentioning concerns whose interests are promoted by the use of voice. Some scholars approach the interests of employees and managers as being mostly overlapping, a frame of reference which has been labeled *unitarism* (Fox, 1966). Within studies drawing upon a unitarist frame of reference, voice is typically seen as leading to positive outcomes for both employees and managers (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011), with some studies focusing exclusively on prosocial voice as opposed to dissent⁸. Critical voice has instead been a main focus of research which sees the interests of employees and managers as somewhat conflicting, corresponding to a *pluralist* frame of reference in Fox's terminology (Fox, 1966). For example, based on a pluralist frame of reference, formal voice arrangements have been described as potential arenas for power struggles between employees and managers (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

Three main perspectives in voice research

In the following, I will present the individual behavior (IB), management technique (MT) and institutionalized influence (II) perspectives on voice. Because the empirical setting for the dissertation's analysis is a work environment intervention, I will also describe how the work

⁸ The distinction between critical and pro-social voice can be criticized for potentially conflating employees' motivations with the way they choose to express voice; for example, employees might exercise voice out of dissatisfaction with the current states of affairs, but choose to present a constructive voice message to the management (Morrison, 2011; Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015).

environment literature on voice relates to the three perspectives⁹. The way DGVAs and other types of formal voice arrangements are employed in work environment interventions can be said to be inspired by voice research from the MT perspective, and more general discussions of how voice is used by organizations in their management of health, well-being and safety issues hold similarities with II perspective research, while little or no work environment research focusing on voice takes an IB perspective. This section of the chapter is terminated with a table summarizing how the three perspectives relate to the key distinctions described above.

Voice as individual behavior (IB)

IB-perspective research focuses on employees' and managers discretionary behavior in relation to voice (Morrison, 2011), and thus on direct voice. Voice in formal voice arrangements is rarely the specific focus of IB perspective research, which tends instead to revolve around how employees choose whether to exercise voice, keep silent, or exit the organization when they become aware of problematic circumstances in the workplace in general. The IB perspective is especially prevalent in voice research subfields such as those of silence, dissent, whistle-blowing, and issue selling (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009). The focus on choice involves paying substantial attention to those circumstances which are thought to influence the employees' decisions. For example, Morrison (2011) presents a model which depicts the choice as being shaped by a number of factors, such as the organizational context for voice (e.g., the organizational structure and culture, or whether their supervisor is considered receptive to voice) and the employee (e.g., his/her job attitudes, personality, and previous experiences). Among the employee's considerations are to whom the voice should be addressed, through which media, and how the voice message should be constructed (Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015).

IB-perspective voice research has tended to describe the employees' discretionary voice behavior as shaped by two overall concerns: the potential efficacy of exercising voice in order to influence one's working conditions and the risks that one might incur while doing so (Morrison, 2011; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). In relation to the efficacy of using voice, it has been claimed that employees expect that exercising voice should be uncomplicated, that their

⁹ Overall, the work environment literature is broad and multidisciplinary and covers a range of subjects related to employee health, well-being and safety. While a growing number of studies discuss the role of voice in promoting health, well-being and safety, these studies only constitute a minor part of the overall work environment literature.

complaints should undergo credible processing, and that replies and actions in response to the complaints should be timely (Harlos, 2001). Furthermore, as mentioned above, employees might consider access to effective voice systems to be included in their psychological contract with their organization (Rousseau, 1995), in which case, when organizations are seen as exhibiting the *deaf-ear syndrome*, employees might develop negative feelings about their employment relationship and harbor intentions to leave. They also become less likely to exercise voice (Ahlbrandt, Leana, & Murrell, 1992; Donaghey et al., 2011; Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers, & Goodman, 1994; Stohl & Jennings, 1988).

In relation to the risks of using voice, employees desire freedom from retribution (Harlos, 2001; Pohler & Luchak, 2014), as it is well known that using voice can have negative long-term consequences for employees, such as being fired or passed over for promotion or bonuses, especially when their use of voice concerns wrongdoings in the organization (Feuille & Delaney, 1992; Lewin, 1999).

Besides focusing on employees' decisions about whether and how to exercise voice, some studies have taken an IB perspective on how managers respond to employee voice. From the managers' perspective, the proliferation of direct forms of voice has been described as carrying potential threats to managerial authority (Denham, Ackers, & Travers, 1997; Musson & Duberley, 2007) and also as potentially leading to changes in the workplace which go against the managers' wishes (Donaghey et al., 2011). Although line managers are often expected to promote the employees' engagement with voice arrangements (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010), managers are rarely given specific instructions about how to handle situations where heeding an employee's voiced message compromises other managerial responsibilities, such as securing high organizational performance (Harlos, 2001).

Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) found that managers' reactions to voice are shaped by the motives they attribute to the voicing employee. For example, in instances where this attribution is unfavorable to the employee (i.e., that the employee is simply trying to attain undeserved advantages), it is unlikely that actions will be taken by the management to ameliorate the problematic circumstances (Krefting & Powers, 1998). However, some managers also describe that the growth in direct voice arrangements has brought about potential benefits for them, such as opportunities to position themselves as being *open* towards voice, for example by encouraging the employees' use of voice and engaging in discussions about how to develop the employees' ideas (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2005; Musson & Duberley,

2007). Townsend (2014) argues that a line manager's decision to not support employee voice (e.g., by not forwarding employees' complaints or suggestions to other relevant management levels) may sometimes be based on a lack of incentives to do so. For example, managers' performance appraisal criteria rarely pertain to their contributions to formal voice arrangements. In sum, a central aim of much of the research from an IB perspective is to provide a generalized understanding of the many factors that could shape employees' decisions about when and how to exercise voice. Because many factors are potentially taken into consideration, the decision-making process is conceived of as complex and driven by the employees' and managers' cognitive assessments. As a consequence, employees and managers are depicted as acting rationally and strategically, basing their actions on assessments of which alternative will lead to the most desired consequences (Alby & Zuccheromaglio, 2006). However, when it comes specifically to employees' choice to exercise voice or not, little attention has been paid to the social and cognitive processes whereby employees arrive at a certain understanding of the circumstances which inform their assessment, for example whether they expect their managers to respond positively to voice or not. Also, there have been few attempts to establish the relationship between this individual decision-making situation and what can be termed *group voice*, that is, how voice is expressed, responded to, and discussed in DGVA's or other social settings (Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Morrison, 2011; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011).

Voice as a management technique (MT)

MT-perspective voice research has tended to focus on direct, management-led and mostly formal practices which promote voice in the workplace, such as DGVA's and participatory management (Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Perry & Kulik, 2008) and various forms of empowerment systems (Appelbaum, Hébert, & Leroux, 1999; Humborstad, 2013). These practices have also been categorized under the heading of *high performance work systems* (Harley, 2014). As this label implies, voice from a MT perspective is seen as a means towards improving organizational performance, and a number of formal voice arrangements associated with the MT perspective are inspired by practices that originated in systems for implementing continuous improvements in production organizations, such as lean manufacturing and total quality management (Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010). The potential positive outcomes of voice for organizations include improvements to product quality and the efficiency of production which

result from the knowledge sharing it brings with it enabling organizations to recognize, correct, and learn from their mistakes (Brinsfield et al., 2009). Voice has also been described from this perspective as a strategy for increasing employee engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, factors which can reduce employee turnover (Heery, 2015; Purcell & Georgiadis, 2007). The link between engagement and effectiveness is related to the psychologically inspired viewpoint that voice is a basic need for employees (as for humans in general) which must be satisfied in order for the employees to work at their best (Kristensen, 2006; Stohl, 1986, 1987). Indeed, simply having the opportunity to express voice may contribute to a perception among employees that they are treated fairly by the organization (Harlos, 2001).

In MT perspective studies, it has also been argued that the availability of well-functioning voice mechanisms can deflect conflicts or other problems in the organization which might otherwise escalate and increase group coherence among the participants (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen, 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that, when voice mechanisms are available, employees have felt better informed about upcoming changes in the workplace (Millward, Bryson, & Forth, 2000), with some studies reporting that employees experience that their skill level is increased (Eurofound, 2013), and others finding that their capability and motivation to engage in attempts to further modify their working conditions is improved (Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen, 2013).

Of course, the benefits listed here have not been reported only in MT-perspective research; however, it is characteristic of the MT perspective that these benefits are viewed as a key motivation for organizations to adopt formal voice mechanisms. Less attention has been paid to how the practices which are meant to promote voice might fail to do so in practice.

One topic where the work environment literature on voice can be said to be inspired by the MT perspective is in relation to participatory interventions to improve employees' health, well-being and safety (Abildgaard et al., 2018; Egan et al., 2007; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2010). These interventions typically comprise an implementation of direct formal voice arrangements, and many involve DGVA's in the form of various types of problem-solving groups where employee voice is used as the basis for identifying problems (typically mainly production issues) and planning compensatory initiatives (e.g., Bunce & West, 1996; Maes,

Verhoeven, Kittel, & Scholten, 1998; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen et al., 2010; Park et al., 2004; Tsutsumi, Nagami, Yoshikawa, Kogi, & Kawakami, 2009). Besides the positive effects of voice that are typically described in MT-perspective studies, it has been argued that enabling employee participation in health and well-being interventions increases the relevance of the intervention content and facilitates smooth implementation (Nielsen et al., 2010), and that the degree of participation potentially predicts positive health and well-being outcomes (Nielsen, 2013). However, the evidence on whether these interventions improve the employees' health and well-being or their control over their working conditions is not clear-cut, with a significant proportion of studies showing little or no relevant effects regarding these aspects (Aust et al., 2017; Egan et al., 2007).

Voice as institutionalized influence (II)

The II perspective focuses on the institutionalized opportunities that employees have for exercising influence through voice within an organization. II-perspective research thus tends to focus on formal voice arrangements, and both direct and representative forms of voice are covered. Compared to MT-perspective research, research from the II perspective often discusses whether formal voice arrangements merely claim to allow employees to influence decisions within the organization, or if they actually do so in practice (e.g., Donaghey et al., 2011). For example, a commonly held position is that formal voice arrangements in many cases fail to provide the employees with substantial decision-making authority to effectively do so (Krefting & Powers, 1998; Strauss, 2006). Various authors have noted that employees' interests potentially become downplayed in the direct forms of voice arrangements (including DGVA's) that have been on the rise in recent years (Busck et al., 2010; Donaghey et al., 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010), especially if the employees' interests conflict with the management's interests (Gollan, Poutsma, & Veersma, 2006; Heery, 2015; Holland, Pyman, Cooper, & Teicher, 2009; Tarras & Kaufman, 2006).

Within the II perspective, there has been debate about why direct, non-union forms of voice have been on the rise in recent years. On the one hand, some have claimed that the trend is related to a concurrent decrease in forms of voice based on union participation or other forms of representative voice (Harley et al., 2005; Millward et al., 2000). For example, Holland and colleagues argue that:

[I]abour market deregulation, the global decline of organized labour, increased technological sophistication, increased educational levels, widespread industry restructuring and the spread of neoliberal ideologies have created a favourable environment for the weakening of collective voice and the subsequent diffusion of direct and non-union voice (Holland et al., 2009, p. 72).

However, others have found that there is a tendency for unionization and the presence of direct and representative voice arrangements to be positively correlated (Akkerman et al., 2015; J. Benson, 2000; Holland et al., 2009), and in many organizations, a variety of union and non-union formal voice arrangements are in operation at the same time (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). Formal voice arrangements in the workplace can operate both as a substitution for union representation or as a complementary strategy (Gollan, 2001). For example, it has been found that direct voice arrangements may increase the amount of managerial attention given to the specific issues experienced in employees' daily work, issues which are likely to be very heterogeneous and thus challenging to address adequately through representatives engaging at a higher organizational level (Holland et al., 2009; Millward et al., 2000). However, unions have been described as more effective in promoting employees' working conditions in general (Millward et al., 2000).

Among the topics addressed by work environment scholars from an II perspective is whether direct voice arrangements provide the employees with sufficient control to avoid a deterioration of their health and well-being over time (Busck et al., 2010). Systems for occupational health and safety management tend to be more effective when they involve a relatively strong element of employee voice (Hasle, Seim, & Refslund, 2016), but, as was noted above, direct formal voice arrangements do not always increase employees' formal decision authority. At the same time, employees might experience that participating in direct formal voice arrangements leads to them receiving responsibility for managing psychosocial work environment risks (Busck et al., 2010). Direct formal voice arrangements can also lead to work intensification for the employees, which is in itself stressful (Boje & Rosile, 2001; Godard, 2001; M. White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, & Smeaton, 2003). The strongest evidence for a positive impact on employees' health and well-being resulting from voice is seen in cases where employee or union representatives promote the employees' interests, (Markey & Knudsen, 2014). For example, based on data from a European context, the likelihood of organizations taking steps to improve health and well-being, such as through the training of employees and managers, risk assessments, or analyses of

sickness absence, was found to be significantly higher among organizations which had some form of representative formal voice arrangement in place (Irastorza, Milczarek, & Cockburn, 2016).

Table 1 (below) gives an overview of the IB, MT, and II perspectives and their differences.

Introducing a fourth perspective: voice as an interactional phenomenon

As valuable as the perspectives discussed above have been for research on voice, they lack a meaningful focus on the specific social situations where employees exercise voice, and how the consequences of exercising voice in the short and long term are shaped by the way voice is exercised and responded to in interaction. This constitutes an important gap in the literature (Garner, 2013; Stohl, 1993; Stohl & Cheney, 2001) since, as argued by Stohl (1993, pp. 100–101): “[p]articipation is communication; no matter what “meaning” one may give to participation, it implies some form of specialized interaction.” According to Stohl and Cheney, formal voice arrangements and other forms of participation lead to an increased need for interaction, both among the employees and between the employees and their managers (2001). Describing how this “specialized” form of interaction is socially organized seems crucial if we are to reach a richer understanding of how voice occurs in and shapes current organizations.

A recent study by Garner (2013) illustrates how seeing voice as an interactional phenomenon can add to our current understanding of how voice is exercised and responded to in practice. Focusing on the topic of dissent, Garner describes this type of voice as occurring in a continuous stream of communicational action where three stages are especially important: the first, *precipitation*, is where the seed for voice is sown as the employee observes objectionable states of affairs and begins to consider using voice. As IB-perspective research has also found, the employee considers how his or her manager is likely to react, but, in addition, his or her interactions with other organizational members are also thought to influence how the individual employees understand the topics which they consider exercising voice about. The next key stage, *initial conversation*, is where voice is exercised. According to Garner, the audience to the voice act (i.e., managers and colleagues) co-constructs the meaning of the voice message in the setting through their reactions. For instance, providing support for a dissenting colleague’s voiced message would suggest that the use of voice was found to be appropriate, while

Perspective and main focus	Individual behavior (IB) Individual employees' and managers' actions and reactions in relation to voice	Management technique (MT) Management-led practices for encouraging voice in order to achieve derived effects	Institutionalized influence (II) How formal voice arrangements at an organizational, sectorial or societal level countervail managerial control
Key distinctions			
Focus on formal/informal voice	Both (studies are rarely limited to a specific voice setting)	Primarily formal	Formal
Focus on direct/indirect voice	Direct	Primarily direct (individual and group levels)	Primarily indirect (representative voice at the group, organizational, and societal levels)
Focus on issues	Both production and distribution issues (studies rarely distinguish)	Production issues	Production and distribution issues
Frame of reference	Both unitarist (e.g., in relation to pro-social voice) and pluralist (e.g., in relation to dissent)	Unitarist	Pluralist
Key concepts	Silence, exit, voice efficacy and safety, voice climate, supervisor openness	Participation, involvement, empowerment, organizational identification, commitment, continuous improvements	Participation, involvement, unions, democracy
Related areas of research	silence, whistle-blowing, dissent, issue selling, pro-social voice, organizational citizenship behavior	Human resource management, organizational development, high-performance work systems, work environment interventions	Employee relations, industrial democracy, political science, labor economics, occupational health and safety management

Table 1 - A comparison of the three perspectives on key aspects

expressing surprise could suggest that it was not. Finally¹⁰, the voiced message might be revised at a later time by the dissenter, the colleagues or the managers in *residual communication*, such as accounts of the initial conversation or further conversations about the voice message.

Garner's model provides an account of the interactional dynamics surrounding voice in group settings. One contribution of this model is that it takes into account how employees and managers often hold different views on a voice topic, recognizing that the way in which these views are negotiated in subsequent interactions may have long-term consequences, such as determining whether any practical initiatives are implemented in the organization as a result of the voice episode. Second, Garner calls into question the tendency to conceive of voice as a linear process from utterance to effect by showing how reflexive loops exist between the precipitation, initial conversation, and residual communications stages: this can be witnessed, for example, by how employees who have previously engaged in voice approach further voice interactions, as residual communications as well as expectations about how other employees would co-construct the message can be seen to shape their subsequent use of voice. Third, his model demonstrates how voiced views do not represent individual employees' direct "sensing" of a problem, but that the employees' ways of seeing their organization are shaped by how the organization is described in their ongoing interactions.

Three common conceptualizations in the voice literature – a brief critique

Garner's study is unique in how it treats voice as an interactional phenomenon. But as I will return to in chapter 3, various other studies might further our understanding of voice as an interactional phenomenon, although these generally do not address the voice literature. The insights from Garner's study and other interaction studies, it is possible to formulate three criticize three common conceptualizations in the voice literature: (1) that voice is described as a transmission of information from employees to managers, (2) that employees' and managers' concern with avoiding moral criticism has largely been overlooked, and (3) that discussions of how employees' influence on the organization through voice can countervail managerial control have drawn on narrow understandings of influence as formal decision authority and of managerial control as a structural force.

¹⁰ Garner's empirical setting is not a formal voice arrangement. Within formal voice arrangements, significant attention would typically be given to the potential practical implications of the voiced message, such as initiatives for later implementation.

Voice as a transmission of information

Common to research from the IB, MT, and II perspectives is that the act of exercising voice is in itself seen as a relatively uncomplicated transmission of information from the employees to the managers. For example, Dundon and colleagues claim that “[v]oice is thus rooted in a quite objective ontology: it is about making explicit what is already in workers’ hearts and minds. It only needs proper transmission and someone who will in fact listen to its inherent message” (2004, p. 1160). The gist of seeing voice as transmitted is that individuals are cognizant of their ideas, opinions, and concerns regarding problematic working conditions or other targets of change prior to considering expressing voice about them (Brinsfield et al., 2009) and that this information is ideally passed through open channels, such as formal voice arrangements, (e.g., Dundon et al., 2004), leading to initiatives to improve the employees’ working conditions. That the very act of exercising voice is seen as unproblematic is also suggested by how IB-perspective research has paid substantial attention to the considerations preceding the act and to how managers react to voice, while the intervening events, and thus the act of exercising voice itself, are not targeted.

The transmission metaphor of voice is problematic because it trivializes voice as a communicational process. While it is commonplace to think of communication as a transfer of inner ideas, feelings, etc., this understanding is problematic because utterances do not carry meaning in and by themselves (Axley, 1984; Yule, 1996). Rather, utterances are ascribed meaning based on the circumstances of their production and hearing. As a consequence, there is considerable potential for what Axley calls *unintended meaning* to be ascribed to an utterance (or anything that can be taken as a message, including gestures), meaning that speakers cannot expect to be able to fully control the meanings that are ascribed to their use of voice. Instead, speakers can attempt to manage such ascriptions through how they design their gestures and utterances, or by engaging in *repair* when other meanings are apparently ascribed than what they intended (Kitzinger, 2012). It is these processes that underlie Garner’s claim (in his study on the nature of dissent) that voice is co-constructed (2013).

For example, employees and managers might not agree that a certain object of voice represents a problem, or that a proposed suggestion is relevant, and they might reinterpret the voice message or offer competing definitions of the problem or alternative suggestions about initiatives to ameliorate the problem. Because such negotiations of meaning might shape how voiced

problems are understood among the interactants, or which initiatives can be taken to ameliorate the problems, the idea that voice involves a transmission of what is in the “hearts and minds”¹¹ of employees is problematic. Instead, the problem definitions and practical initiatives that the group comes to agree upon are situational accomplishments which represent compromises between the participants’ different ways of framing the topic through their assessments, labels, arguments and counter-arguments.

The moral dimension of voice: an overlooked concern for employees and managers

As mentioned in relation to the IB perspective, an employee’s decision about whether to exercise voice or remain silent is influenced by the expected efficacy of using voice (Ahlbrandt et al., 1992; Donaghey et al., 2011; Marchington et al., 1994; Stohl & Jennings, 1988) and by the potential risks of retaliation from the management they could face for exercising voice (Feuille & Delaney, 1992; Harlos, 2001; Lewin, 1999; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). For managers, their reactions to voice are shaped by the opportunity it provides to position themselves as an open manager (Musson & Duberley, 2007) as well as by the perceived potential threats to their authority (Denham et al., 1997; Musson & Duberley, 2007). However, the topic of how morality as a situated and locally enacted phenomenon shapes voice-related interactions has received little attention in the literature, and (to my knowledge) no clear attempts have been made to theorize the role of morality in relation to voice.

In relation to the concerns described above, Garner’s study (2013) suggests that the moral judgments conveyed in how acts of exercising voice are framed by those present is an important concern for the employees which deserves additional attention. These moral judgments frame the voiced message positively or negatively, thereby potentially contributing to whether the voice message is eventually accepted or rejected in the interaction. But they also potentially threaten the *face*, i.e., the public self-image, of the employees who the labels are applied to

¹¹ In addition, we might question how the ideas for problems and suggestions to voice come to be found in employees’ “hearts and minds” in the first place, although this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation. While Dundon and colleagues simply claim that they are “already” there (2004, p. 1160), Garner’s explanation that that which is considered relevant to voice is shaped by previous interactions suggests that we are socialized to see certain states of affairs as relevant to voice, and others not. In any case, providing an empirically grounded explanation of how potential problems and suggestions are identified by employees is not easy since it can only be accessed through employees’ own accounts which are not likely to adequately represent the conscious and unconscious processes whereby such ideas are formed.

(Goffman, 1967). For example, Garner mentions that voice may be labeled dismissively as “whining” and the voicing employee as “not a team player,” while others who react more positively may label it as “feedback” or “problem solving” (p. 381). A similar point has also been raised by others who have described how voicing certain topics might lead employees to be seen as disloyal by the managers (Butler, 2005; Upchurch, Richardson, Tailby, Danford, & Stewart, 2006), and that the employees’ awareness of this risk might influence their decision about whether to exercise voice (Boroff & Lewin, 1997; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). According to Garner, the process of co-constructing the meaning of voice also extends to how managers respond to voice, meaning that managers may also risk ascription with negative labels when challenging voiced problems or suggestions, for example.

Exercising voice in a way which minimizes the risk of moral criticism from others is not necessarily simple. For the employees, it becomes relevant to consider whether the problems one voices are considered sufficiently important by others to avoid being labeled a “whiner” or a “nitpicker.” If the other employees do not recognize the problem, their response to its voicing may serve to downplay its relevance; for example, employees who voice a problem that others consider to be part of the job might be labeled as demanding. Voiced suggestions are also likely to be subjected to the same framing through other participants’ responses, whereby the suggestions might be described as unrealistic, for example. The theory that normative expectations about how voice should be exercised shape the outcomes of voice is supported by a study by Burris, Detert, and Romney (2013), who found that positive outcomes of employee voice are most common when there is agreement between the employees and their manager about what constitutes appropriate frequency and content regarding voice messages, whereas disagreement about the value or volume of voice messages is likely to lead to negative outcomes.

It is commonly recognized that using categorical descriptions of self or others in social interactions, or labeling, as Garner calls it, often implies moral judgment (Jayyusi, 1984; Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Mueller, & Lenney, 2015). The threat of being categorized in undesired ways is of course not limited to voice interactions, and the fact that this phenomenon is ubiquitous might also account for why it has not received attention as a concern for employees and managers in their voice-related interactions. However, since categorization is a very common interactional phenomenon, there is a substantial body of literature to refer to when exploring how categorization shapes voice interactions, a topic that is returned to in chapter 3.

The conceptualization of employee influence vs. managerial control

Discussions about the balance between employee influence and managerial control in formal voice arrangements has been especially prominent within II-perspective voice research. However, these discussions have tended to focus mainly on how this balance is influenced by structural circumstances, such as the degree of formal decision-making rights held by the employees. For example, the *escalator* model of participation¹² (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010), used as a metaphorical illustration of how various types of employee voice arrangements can be categorized on the basis of how much influence they allow employees to have over management decisions. The original model presented by Marchington and Wilkinson (2005) shows five degrees (or “steps”) of influence, labeled, from low to high, information, communication, consultation, co-determination, and control. According to Marchington and Wilkinson, the degree of influence “indicates the extent to which employees are able to influence decisions about various aspects of management – whether they are simply informed of changes, consulted or actually make decisions” (2005, p. 400).

In later presentations of the model by Wilkinson and Dundon (2010), higher degrees of influence are correlated with an increased range or scope of issues that employees can bring up and influence. Furthermore, Wilkinson and Dundon describe the escalator model of participation as a framework for analyzing whether formal voice arrangements “genuinely allow employees to have a say in matters that affect them at work” (p. 173).

¹² The escalator model of participation seems to have been inspired by a ladder-type model from the field of citizen participation, developed by Arnstein (1969). Arnstein’s model has eight rungs of categories organized into three more general categories of *nonparticipation*, *degrees of tokenism* and *degrees of citizen power*, indicating an increasing degree of influence for the citizens. Arnstein describes the ladder model as “designed to be provocative” (p. 216), while it is not explicated how the model can be used to categorize actual forms of citizen participation in practice.

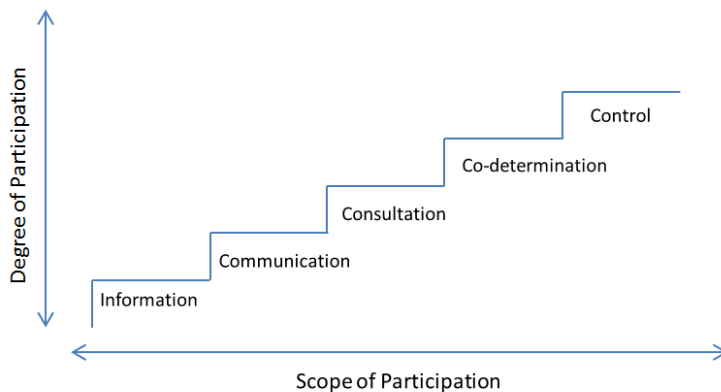


Figure 1 - The escalator of participation (adapted from Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005)

One implication of the escalator model is that influence in formal voice arrangements equals the amount of say that employees' have over decisions in the organization, that is, the decision-making rights that are deferred to the employees within the arrangements. However, power can be understood more broadly not only as the formal capacity to achieve one's aim and potentially impose one's will on others, but also as the ability to control and constrain other people through other means (Wang, 2006). Different expressions of power can be observed within organizations, such as (1) control over the access to important information and settings, (2) ideology, or (3) the management of meaning as it is exercised in interactions and in written texts (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Lukes, 1974), with Garner's description of how the meaning of voice is co-constructed providing an example of the latter especially (2013). Studying voice interactions is likely to reveal how these different dimensions of power are employed in practice (Hutchby, 1999; Jayyusi, 1991), and potentially by both employees and managers.

If the escalator model is viewed as an analytical framework, an additional implication is the degree of influence available to employees within these arrangements can be compared based on their relative positions on the escalator. However, analysts' categorizations of real-life formal voice arrangements might be at odds with how employees in the organizations concerned would describe the degree of influence attainable to them within the formal voice arrangements. In practice, IB perspective research suggests that the employees' assessment of the efficacy of

using voice is more likely to predict how they engage with the formal voice arrangement than the analyst's outsider perspective (Morrison et al., 2011; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). In addition, different employees might make different assessments of the degree of influence available to them within the formal voice arrangement.

Another conceptualization of the relationship between employee influence and managerial control is found in the work of Donaghey and colleagues (2011), who discuss situations where employees choose to remain silent rather than use voice. According to Donaghey and colleagues, various circumstances within the organization shape the employees' opportunities to exert influence, such as whether reasonable and effective formal voice arrangements are in place, how employees choose to use their opportunities to exercise voice, and whether decisions in the organization accommodate the employees' interests relative to those of the management. The interplay of these circumstances is said to shape the *frontier of control* between the employees and managers, that is, a "contested terrain" (Edwards, Bélanger, & Wright, 2006, p. 129) wherein both employees and managers seek to promote their interests. However, similar to the escalator model of participation, Donaghey and colleagues do not explain how organization members assess the nature of the frontier of control at their workplace, or what happens if different views exist between the employees and managers, or within each of these groups, about what the frontier of control means for them and the employees' opportunities to exercise voice. This is problematic because others have shown that there are indeed differences between what has been called the *climate* for exercising voice within different parts of an organization (Morrison et al., 2011).

The emphasis on structural forces in both Marchington and Wilkinson's escalator model and Donaghey and colleagues' frontier-of-control model implies that the interactions in which voice is exercised and responded to are not decisive for how the dynamic between management control and employee influence is negotiated at the workplace. However, as Stohl and Cheney argue, "[p]articipation is not simply a structural phenomenon, although the architecture or design of such systems is very important in shaping attitudes and worldviews, the processes of decision making, and decisional outcomes" (2001, p. 357). In order to understand how employees' assess their opportunities to influence their working conditions, as well as their strategies for exercising this influence, it is relevant to study interactions within formal voice arrangements.

Positioning the dissertation in relation to the voice literature

As the previous sections suggest, an interactional perspective on voice holds considerable promise for developing our understanding of a number of important aspects of the voice process, aspects which are not easily addressed through the mainly individual-level or institutional-level research approaches that have tended to dominate in the voice literature. In relation to the DGVA's which are used in a growing number of organizations specifically, studying the participants' interactions is important because it is in these interactions that the participants negotiate which initiatives to implement at a later time. Since these initiatives are likely to be the primary path for employees participating in DGVA's to improve their working conditions, it is crucial for the employees that the initiatives put forth seek to make relevant and significant changes in the workplace, and that the initiatives have a high likelihood of actually being implemented. By studying voice interactions, it becomes possible to follow how various participants contribute to the development of initiatives, from the initial voicing of problems or suggestions to the decision to endorse them.

But while Garner's study provides various important theoretical contributions which can inform an interactional perspective on voice, the framework proposed by Garner is not easily developed into concrete methodological and analytical strategies. For one, it is likely to be difficult to identify employees who are at the precipitation stage, since these may only be privately entertaining the thought of exercising voice. Second, even if employees at the precipitation stage were successfully identified, it does not seem likely that these employees can account for how their stance in relation to a voice topic is shaped by previous interactions in any degree of detail. Third, Garner acknowledges that it is perhaps not feasible to study residual communications about a previous voice event, since it cannot be predicted when such interactions will occur, if ever. Thus, the researcher must either spend extensive time in the organization, hoping to witness this residual communication, or collect organization members' retrospective accounts about the residual communication after it has occurred (e.g., through interviews), thereby losing a sense of the interactional dynamics within these episodes. The fourth and arguably most considerable shortcoming of Garner's model is that the processes whereby the meaning of voice is co-created are not explicated; instead, a few references are given to narrative and conversation analytic studies (Drew, 1998; Gabriel, 2004; Holmes, 2005; C. E. Taylor, 1995) which represent significantly different understandings of how interaction is organized.

In this dissertation, I address the shortcomings of Garner's approach by presenting and applying an alternative approach to understanding voice as an interactional phenomenon that is based more closely on ethnomethodological CA. CA provides a comprehensive set of analytical concepts for describing different aspects of how interactions are organized in detail, and it focuses on the organization of specific interactions, rather than how different interactions are related over time, as in Garner's framework. In the following chapter, I will present fundamental tenets of CA, various main concepts, as well as a number of findings from CA-inspired research which are likely to also apply to how initiatives are constructed by employees and managers in DGVA interactions.

3. Conversation analysis

The analysis of this dissertation relies strongly on the tenets and central concepts of Conversational analysis (CA), whose relevant aspects to this dissertation as well as some of the criticism it has received are discussed below. This is followed by a review of various studies that are relevant for understanding how initiatives are constructed in DGVA interactions.

The roots of CA

CA is the study of how social interactions are organized so as to be intelligible for the participants (Charles Goodwin & John Heritage, 1990; Maynard & Clayman, 2003; ten Have, 2002b). The approach is typically considered to have been founded by Sacks, who in a series of lectures in the 1960's and 1970's presented CA as a new approach to understanding a number of interactional phenomena (Sacks, 1992). Previous to this, in the 1950's, Goffman, who Sacks later studied with, had been among the first to recognize that the interaction order has its own organization beyond functioning as an arena for structural and psychological forces (Peräkylä, 2004). In his own work, Sacks initially analyzed audio-recorded conversations, such as calls to a suicide helpline. Colleagues and students of Sacks's at the time later built on his initial frameworks, developing CA into a research field encompassing the study of a wide range of conversational phenomena (cf. Stivers & Sidnell, 2012).

Sacks argued that his use of audio-recorded conversations was not motivated by an interest in talk as such but by the fact that the recordings enabled the researcher to listen to conversations as many times as was needed in the analytical process, and it also allowed others to conduct their own analyses on the same data, thereby facilitating discussion of specific analytic inferences (Sacks, 1984). The recordings thus enable sociological analysis that is concerned with the "details of actual events" (p. 26), rather than information which was already filtered by the application of formal sociological methods. Sacks was highly critical of how sociological studies of the time tended to abstract and idealize findings so that the actual circumstances of how the phenomenon of interest is produced in practice are blurred out (Sacks, 1963). In contrast to this kind of "analysis-by-generalisation" (Francis, 1995, p. 37), studying the details of actual events involves paying close attention to what people actually do in interactions and preserving the significant details through the research process (Rawls, 2008). Although the details of actual events are taken as insignificant in many sociological analyses (Samra-

Fredericks & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2008), they can reveal an *informal logic* (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 2) that is essential to how social life is organized. Therefore, within academic analyses of interaction, “no order of detail can be dismissed, *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental or irrelevant” (Heritage, 1984, p. 241; italics as per the original).

Sacks’s original project can be said to closely resemble the project that Garfinkel formulated for ethnomethodology (EM) in the same period (1967b), and Sacks referred to “ethnomethodology/conversation analysis” as being one research domain (1984), while Sacks was described by Garfinkel as writing in the ethnomethodological tradition (2007). However, in recent years, there have been discussions over whether current conversation analytic studies can generally be seen as ethnomethodological studies. Rawls (2002), for example, has described how it is possible to conduct “technical” CA without heeding CA’s ethnomethodological underpinnings, though she warns that such efforts might lead to the type of formal analysis which Garfinkel opposed in cases where it presupposes social order rather than rendering it a product of the member’s actions. Indeed, Pomerantz and Fehr have stated that

[t]he organization of talk or conversation (whether ‘informal’ or ‘formal’) was never the central, defining focus in CA. Rather it is the organization of the meaningful conduct of people in society, that is, how people in society produce their activities and make sense of the world about them. (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997, p. 65; cited in Cooren, 2007, p. 131)

Perhaps as a result of this critique, some scholars have chosen to emphasize that their application of CA is informed by EM (Samra-Fredericks, 2010; Stokoe, 2006; Wowk & Carlin, 2004) or have simply linked the two traditions through the term EM/CA (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh, 2010). In this dissertation, my approach is to apply the analytical concepts of CA in a way that is primarily sociologically, rather than linguistically, oriented.

Basic principles of CA

Both within CA and EM, it is argued that social order cannot be explained by societal structures alone but requires active work from people engaged in social activities (Garfinkel, 1967b; Sacks, 1992). For example, it has been argued that major institutions such as “the economy, the polity, the family, and the reproduction and socialization of the population” function through social interactions (Schegloff, 1991, p. 154). At the heart of interaction is the coordination and

maintenance of intersubjectivity, that is, the occurrence of a coordinated understanding of some ongoing (inter)action, since intersubjectivity is a prerequisite for joint activity, both in relation to discourse and at large (Barnes, 2007).

Achieving and maintaining intersubjectivity involves continuously making sense of others' actions and designing one's own actions to fit these and be understood. Although this is achieved relatively unproblematically in many encounters, considerable skill is required – as it might be apparent, for instance, in interactions with children or others who have not yet mastered these skills. Learning the skills for achieving and maintaining intersubjectivity are part of the process of socialization, a process which, when it is successful, allows people to perform complex joint activities with no prior formal coordination, simply on the basis of sharing culture (Sacks, 1992). This may be witnessed, for example, in the many types of encounters between customers and service personnel that do not depend on the participants knowing each other or having spoken previously to be successful.

The maintenance of intersubjectivity is constant in social settings, necessitated by the fact that universal meaning is not embedded in our actions, including the act of communication; instead, utterances and other social actions are merely *indexical*, meaning that their understandability is always dependent on the context in which they are produced (Garfinkel, 1967b). However, as I will return to later, this indexicality also enables interlocutors to be extremely economical with their words and gestures and still convey complicated points to others when a mutual basis for coordinating understandings exists (ten Have, 2002b; Yule, 1996).

In order to understand more closely how intersubjectivity is coordinated and maintained, it is relevant to first take the perspective of those witnessing a social action. A fundamental question guiding their effort to make sense of the action (or, in a technical term, their process of action recognition; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014) is “why that now?” (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 299). In other words, as witnesses or targets of social actions, we attend to what we can observe or hear (i.e., “that”), how it relates to the given setting at the given time (i.e., “now”) and what the combination of these characteristics suggests as being the acting party's intended meaning (i.e., “why”).

While it is not possible to know what is going on in the mind of the witness (Heritage, 1984), witnesses' sensemaking in response to the question of “why this now?” can still be a resource

for the analyst, since the witnesses' subsequent action is likely to reveal their conclusion, indicating their understanding of the speaker's action. For example, a "hello" uttered by someone else is visibly oriented to by the witness as a greeting if the witness responds with a similar greeting. This way of considering such actions analytically, as indications of how previous actions were interpreted, is sometimes referred to as the *next-turn proof procedure* (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, pp. 728–729; see also Sidnell, 2012), and it prevents the analyst from imposing idiosyncratic interpretations on the utterances and gestures, relying instead on the interlocutors' displayed inferences. The next-turn proof procedure is one example of how, in CA, the "methods of the study of social interaction and theory concerning social interaction are very closely intertwined" (Peräkylä, 2004, p. 166).

In order for interlocutors' actions to be recognizable to other parties to the interaction, the actions have to be designed, or *structured* and *organized* in a way that is recognizable to the recipients. In Garfinkel's words, members of society produce actions which are *accountable* in that they are "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes" (1967b, p. VII). The fact that an accountable production of some action is also one which allows interpretation has been described as the principle of symmetry (Garfinkel, 1967b).

From the perspective of a witness to social action, it is necessary to trust that the action is indeed designed as accountable, since non-accountable actions might not allow relevant sensemaking. It is not hard to see how acting unaccountably in a social situation (in the meaning of not-visibly-rational) is burdensome to the situation's other participants who struggle to find meaning in it, and Garfinkel's own studies where students did not produce accountable actions in situations with their friends and families point to how accountability failures are seen as trust violations which can lead to swift and harsh sanctions from others (Garfinkel, 1967b). Thus, the meaning of actions being accountable in EM/CA reflects both that these actions are understandable for others, and that the person acting is morally responsible for producing the actions so as to be understandable, a point which Jayyusi has eloquently summarized:

(...) it becomes clear, not only that moral reasoning is practical, but that practical reasoning is morally organized; that is to say, whilst we do have moral concepts and procedures of reasoning that are explicitly moral in character, the entirety of our interactional reasoning is morally and normatively constituted. (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 198)

The study of how actions are produced as to be structurally recognizable is referred to as action formation (Levinson, 2012). In a concrete sense, speakers make their actions accountable by engaging in recipient design (Sacks et al., 1974), making choices about their use of words or presentation of topics, for example, on the basis of what is believed to be necessary in order for others to recognize the action as intended. In addition, interlocutors know and use the fact that certain actions go in certain places in conversations to convey and interpret meaning (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984b). For example, a “hello” at the beginning of a telephone conversation is typically taken as a greeting, but if one says “hello” at a later time in the conversation, it is likely to be understood as questioning whether the other party is still on the line, possibly indicating technical problems. Interlocutors also display an awareness of the institutional context of a conversation: doctor’s consultations, for example, are organized differently than informal chats among friends – the actions that are immediately understandable and socially acceptable in these types of conversations differ (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Thus, the social context is a resource which people play off of when designing social actions and also draw on when interpreting actions (Garfinkel, 1967b).

While people’s understanding of the setting informs their interpretation of that which they are observing, it is also true that their reactions inform how the setting is understood by others (Leiter, 1980; Llewellyn & Hindmarsh, 2010). For example, a “hello” from a person who has fallen out of favor might be ignored, thereby framing the “hello” as an attempt to reestablish a relationship (McHoul, Rapley, & Antaki, 2008). Turns of talk in conversations are both “context-sensitive” and “context-renewing” (Heritage, 1984, p. 242). This also means that even interactions which may be viewed commonsensically as more or less following a script, such as doctor’s consultation, depend on the cooperation of the interactants to be produced as such on every occasion, or what Garfinkel refers to as for “each another next first time” (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 182).

Accountability is not only a result of how interactants design their actions, but also of how they verbally account for them (Antaki, 1994; Garfinkel, 1967b; Heritage, 1984)¹³. A verbal account

¹³ The interest in accounts and accounting within EM/CA has also received attention in DP, especially the strategic aspects of accounting, such as the positioning work that accounts might be used to perform. In this line of research, attention has been paid to how differences in actor’s accounts and descriptions construct the phenomenon being described in different ways, or how accounts are constructed in order to appear convincing and “objective” and to pre-empt counterarguments (D. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). EM/CA research is typically sympathetic to the idea of accounting as a strategic endeavour (see for example Heritage, 1984, pp. 150–151), but tends to focus on how intersubjective understanding is coordinated.

“makes plain” some course of events or warrants a proposition or course of action (Antaki, 1994, pp. 2–4). Thereby, accounts often function as arguments. Verbal accounts might take various forms, such as narratives of events that have transpired, descriptions of settings or people, or versions of what might later transpire. Because there is ultimately no way to provide an non-subjective verbal account, accounts are necessarily selective in regard to the pieces of information that are highlighted or overlooked and the narrative logic that is implied. The rhetorical efficacy of verbal accounts depends on how credible they are perceived to be by the recipients, which is why various devices are often employed to present accounts as factual (Potter, 1996).

Related to the topic of verbal accounts is the fact that knowledge is treated within EM/CA as being socially constructed, meaning that facts are “accomplished” (Pollner, 1974, p. 27), rather than given. In making sense of the world, people necessarily draw upon common-sense cultural knowledge. This knowledge holds the form of various idealized or rational constructions of the social world, whose application renders the world “eminently coherent and intelligible” (Maynard & Clayman, 2003, p. 177). However, the relationship between social constructionism as a field and EM/CA is ambivalent, since many types of analysis associated with social constructionism are seen as being too far removed from the participants’ experiences; people do not experience what they are doing as constructing the world, but as relating to a world which is seen as objectively there (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003; Jayyusi, 1991; Rawls, 2002; Watson, 1994). Thus, while conversation analytical studies make the process of social construction and enactment visible, they do not take the skeptical stance towards knowledge that sometimes goes with social constructionism. As Watson and Goulet argue:

To say that people produce the world is not the same as saying that they are solipsists, that they are able to fashion the world according to their whims....The mistake is to think of the process of production as one that is free of constraints when in fact it is a structure of constraints. People produce candidate versions of the way things are, and these may be accepted, shelved, or disputed according to more or less institutionalized criteria. (Watson & Goulet, 1998, p. 97).

In sum, it should be clear that interaction from a CA perspective is not considered a transmission of exact meaning, but a process of reaching “reasonable approximations” of meanings (Heritage,

1984, p. 36) through intersubjective collaboration. Therefore, the collective sensemaking that undergirds intersubjectivity is necessarily “provisional, “loose,” and “subject to revision” (Heritage, 1987, p. 238). What makes intelligible interaction possible is the substantial “interactional work” performed by the interlocutors whereby various conversational resources are mobilized in order to (1) pursue certain goals (e.g., offer an invitation) and (2) to give their talk an appearance of being normal and accountable and thus understandable (Firth, 1995).

In the following three sections of the chapter, I briefly describe key concepts from three research areas: sequence organization, membership categorization, and the role of the epistemic, deontic, and emotional orders in the social organization of interactions.

Sequence organization

Sequence organization describes how each turn of talk¹⁴ in an interaction plays off of previous utterances and informs subsequent utterances. A central concept in relation to sequence organization is that of *adjacency pairs*, which are interrelated utterances produced by different speakers in sequence (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). In brief, many types of utterances and responses can be seen as parts that together form a pair, such as “question–answer,” “greeting–greeting,” and “offer–acceptance/refusal” (p. 74). The following is an example of an offer–acceptance pair¹⁵:

Example 1 (Stivers, 2012)

Mark: [Want s'm more milk?
[((M gazing at glass he's filling))
Kim: Mm mm. ((with small head shake))
(3.0)

The pairwise relationships are treated by interlocutors as normative relationships (ten Have, 2007), meaning that hearers of the first pair part are held accountable if they fail to produce a

¹⁴ Although turn-taking and the construction of turns constitutes an important topic in CA (Drew, 2012; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), I have chosen not to cover this topic since it is not a main analytic theme in the four analytical chapters.

¹⁵ An explanation of the symbols used in these examples can be found in the appendix.

second pair part or an utterance that can take the second pair part's place (such as responding to a question with a clarification-seeking question).

By applying the next-turn proof procedure, it is possible to follow how hearers engage in the active construction of meaning of first pair parts (Heritage, 2013a; Lindwall, Lymer, & Ivarsson, 2016). In the following example, Russ, a young boy, first treats his mother's question as indicating that she is going to tell him who's going to a meeting at his school. However, the mother *repairs* (ten Have, 2007) this understanding by stating that she doesn't know. The repair facilitates her first utterance being re-interpreted and thus recognized by her son as a request for information.

Example 2 (Heritage, 2013a)

Mom: Do you know who's going to that meeting?

Russ: Who.

Mom: I don't know.

(0.2)

Russ: .hh Oh:. Prob'ly .h Missiz Mc Owen ('n Dad said) prob'ly Missiz Cadry and some of the teachers

As described by Heritage, “[l]inked actions, in short, are the building-blocks of intersubjectivity” (1984, p. 256). In practice, however, few conversations are simple strings of adjacency pairs, as various forms of insertion or side sequences can be found which break the sequential link between the first and second pair parts, while still being accountable within the context of the preceding talk (Stivers, 2012).

A resource in maintaining intersubjective understanding is the recipient's stance towards what is being said. Recipients' stances are relevant in relation to two different aspects of the utterance: (1) the structural aspect, through which recipients can indicate alignment or non-alignment with the activity or the sequence that the utterance is a part of, and (2) the affective aspect, through which recipients can indicate affiliation or non-affiliation with the speaker's evaluative stance or preference (Steensig, 2013; Stivers, 2008). Alignment is fundamental to advancing the interaction, since a lack of alignment is likely to lead to confusion or conflict over what the speaker is currently attempting to do. For example, Stivers (2008) has described how

storytelling requires that the speaker holds the conversational floor (i.e. the “acknowledged current-speaking right” Garfinkel, 1967b, p. 9) for a number of turns, and that story recipients can indicate alignment with the storytelling activity through *continuers*, that is, vocal or bodily tokens of alignment with the speaker’s project. Affiliation, on the other hand, is primarily relevant in cases where an evaluative stance is displayed on the speaker’s turn, indicating a preference. Affiliation fundamentally involves the display of empathy or cooperation with the speaker’s preference, for example for an invitation to be met with an acceptance.

Affiliation thereby is related to the topic of preference structure, a structure in which utterances typically have both preferred and dispreferred responses (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984a). Interactants in most cases display a preference for agreement, as it contributes to maintaining social solidarity and rapport among them (Heritage, 1984). A preference for disagreement has been observed in cases where previous utterances set up an interactional environment of dispute (Kangasharju, 2009). Speakers will set up their preference structure based on expected responses: for example, if a speaker expects that an invitation will be turned down by the recipient, they are likely to phrase the invitation in a way that acknowledges the potential for rejection (e.g., “you’re probably very busy these days, but if you’d like to visit, you’re welcome”). Preferred responses are typically produced spontaneously, while dispreferred responses are delayed and are normally coupled with an explanation for the response (Pomerantz, 1984). The use of alignment in a place where affiliation could be relevant, for example, sets up the interactional environment for potential later disagreement (see also Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011).

Membership categorization

Membership categorization analysis (MCA) has often been described as a major branch of conversation analytic studies (Stokoe, 2012). Rather than being “just talk,” Sacks argued that the way interlocutors categorize people, things, and events in social life interactions reveals how knowledge is organized as a social phenomenon (1992). This is in contrast to seeing categories as cognitive phenomena only indirectly accessible to the analyst.

Membership categorization is also highly influential for how interactions proceed. In conversation, categories are used as parts of (typically implicit) sets called *membership categorization devices*. An iconic example of how membership categorization devices are set up

is the following statement from a storybook discussed in depth by Sacks in his lectures: “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up” (1992). Because both “baby” and “mommy” belong to the same membership categorization device of a family, the baby and mother are easily presumed to be related even though this relationship is not indicated linguistically, a phenomenon which Sacks termed the “hearer’s maxim.” Thus, the use of the two membership categories together enables more to be understood than what is said. Although it would be technically correct to categorize the mommy as a woman, for example, exchanging this category for “mommy” could lead recipients to infer that the woman was not the mother of the child. In other words, while a number of categorical descriptions might be accurate, only a few are appropriate given the situation at hand (Sacks, 1992).

Importantly, the meaning that a membership categorization conveys in an interaction is context dependent within the interaction environment. The following example shows how exchanges can be difficult to interpret without knowledge of the interaction environment:

Example 3 (Sacks, 1992)

A: I have a fourteen year old son.

B: Well that’s all right.

A: I also have a dog.

B: Oh, I’m sorry.

It is crucial to know that in the excerpt, B is a landlord and A is a potential tenant. The categories of “son” and “dog” can therefore be seen as members of the situationally suitable membership categorization device of *potential obstacles for getting an apartment*. The landlord’s “Oh, I’m sorry” should thus be seen as a dispreferred response (though one that displays empathy and thus affiliation) to the potential tenant’s implicit question of whether the dog would be allowed. Speakers utilize the indexical and context-dependent aspects of categories to their advantage, and the implicit understandings it can elicit, to not only make communication more economical but also to manage socially delicate matters, such as blame (Watson, 1978) or potential stigmatizing attributions. For example, Rapley (2012) describes how an interviewee claims that he chose to become a drug peer-educator based on enjoying “learning things” and coming from a medical family where drugs were discussed. According to Rapley, this self-description mitigates against the potential inference that the interviewee’s choice to become a peer-educator was based on him having been a drug user himself.

Rapley's example highlights how categories are in practice associated with various predicates: we understand that previous drug users sometimes become peer-educators, similar to how we are unsurprised by accounts of mothers picking up their crying babies, or other types of category-related actions. In the mother's case, the predicate of a category-based obligation is also implied for the mother: had the statement been "the baby cried, and nobody picked it up," most recipients would expect some account to follow for why this was the case. Thus, in relation to obligations, membership categorization and predication can be used to raise the point that an action (or the failure to produce some action) is either morally accountable or the opposite (Jayyusi, 1984, 1991). In actual interactions, explicit categorization is in many cases unnecessary, as the predicates presented in descriptions are often sufficiently *inference-rich* to imply a corresponding categorization by themselves (Schegloff, 2007).

While many researchers in the conversation analytic tradition have tended to focus mainly on either the sequential or categorical aspects of interactions, Watson (1997) argues that both aspects inform how the interlocutors interpret interactions in practice. For actions to be meaningful, it is important that their sequential and categorical aspects are in alignment. For example, it could be suggested that this lack of alignment is the problem for Russ and his mother in example 2: it is likely that the mother's question is taken as a prelude to her presenting the information because Russ himself is not in full possession of the knowledge (as indicated in his last turn by his use of "prob'ly" as a modifier and reporting a statement made by his father), and he perhaps expects his mother to know. Questions are not typically taken as requests for information if the recipient has an intersubjective understanding that the speaker knows more about the matter than the recipient (Heritage, 2012a). Thus, the interlocutor's expectations about who holds what knowledge shapes how they manage local categorical identities such as "questioner" and "answerer" (Zimmerman, 1998).

Three orders in the social organization of interaction

Recently, conversation analytic work has demonstrated how interactions are shaped by the interactants' orientation to three different orders (Landmark, Gulbrandsen, & Svennevig, 2015; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014; Svennevig, 2011; Svennevig & Djordjilovic, 2015). The epistemic order relates to matters such as who has access to various types of knowledge and

how the knowledge is presented in interactions (Heritage, 2012b; Steensig & Heinemann, 2016; Stivers et al., 2011). The misunderstanding between Russ and his mother in example 2 can be seen as related to their relative epistemic *statuses*, that is, their rights and abilities to claim knowledge in relation to the topics of discussion. The study of socio-epistemics has revealed that in many situations, interactants' epistemic statuses are normatively governed, in that speakers are held accountable for whether they have the right to express the knowledge that they have (Heritage, 2012a). Speakers can manage how their epistemic status is projected in the conversation through which epistemic *stance* they choose to take, such as in relation to the degree of certainty with which they make claims. Thereby, differences in the speakers' epistemic stances are one important type of asymmetry among interlocutors. Within the organizational literature, socio-epistemic oriented studies have demonstrated that possession of the status that is demanded to accountably present a type of knowledge in conversation is not granted by one's hierarchical role within the organization, but is acquired through negotiation among the interlocutors (Clifton, 2014; Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

The second, *deontic* order, relates to how the rights and obligations of speakers to make requests or present hearers with orders are regulated (Clayman & Heritage, 2014; Curl & Drew, 2008; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). The term deontic status can be used to describe speakers' *entitlement* to give directives to others, in contrast to their deontic stance which indicates how they publically display their rights and abilities to the other interactants (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014). The deontic stance can be displayed in various ways, such as through how requests from high-entitlement speakers tend to be more direct and brief than those from low-entitlement speakers (Curl & Drew, 2008). Speakers typically strive for congruence between their deontic status and stance (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014).

Svennevig and Djordjilovic also found that the *benefactive stance* associated with requests, a stance concerning how the potential gains of an action are accounted for and who is claimed to receive them, is also important for how the request is responded to (Svennevig & Djordjilovic, 2015). This finding suggests that the power to influence others' actions is only tied to role-based entitlement to a certain degree; instead, people can be called to carry out actions based on their commitment to those who stand to benefit. For example, in a work setting, it can be expected that requests and directives are often framed as benefitting the organization, rather than the specific person making the request or directive.

The third order, the emotional order, can be said to have been inspired by Goffman's studies on the role of face in interactions, which preceded CA (Goffman, 1955), and focuses on the constraints on which emotions can or should be expressed in an interaction (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014). These constraints vary in relation to the intimacy between the interactants and, potentially, what their professional roles are and how these roles are enacted. Emotional status would then refer to the expectations surrounding both the emotions a person is experiencing and those they can share, while their emotional stance is conveyed through which emotions are expressed on a turn-by-turn level.

Research on the three orders has shown how potential ambiguities can arise regarding which of the three orders an interactant is oriented towards when performing a certain action, and that these ambiguities can lead to misunderstandings and other interactional problems (Landmark et al., 2015; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014). In addition, previous studies (especially in the ethnomethodological tradition) have argued that what is morally right or wrong to do is never determined entirely by convention but is negotiated by the participants through interaction (Jayyusi, 1991; Wieder, 1974), a phenomenon that analysis utilizing the three order concepts can elucidate.

Applications of CA

Within the various fields of research employing CA, two areas of applications are particularly relevant for this dissertation, regarding institutional discourse and DP. First, conversation analytic studies typically distinguish between interactions in informal settings, such as an informal chat with a friend, and in institutional settings, such as medical consultations or requesting help from the police over the phone (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage, 2005). Interaction in DGVA's would thus be considered institutional. Institutional discourse is typically organized in specific ways in relation to matters such as who holds speaking rights and which sequences of talk are likely to occur, with a common example being the repeated question-answer pattern between doctors and patients in the diagnostic steps of medical consultations (Peräkylä, 2004).

Within institutional settings, the participants' design their actions and interpret the actions of others based both on the participants' relative roles within the setting (such as being the chair of the meeting vs. being a regular participant) and their expectations surrounding the respective

goal orientations that are tied to these roles (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In relation to coordinating intersubjective understanding, the participants employ inferential frameworks that are specific to the institutional context, and, in terms of the interactions' moral aspect, there are "special constraints on what will be treated as allowable contributions to the business at hand" (Heritage, 2005, p. 106). However, in accordance with Garfinkel's principle of reflexivity, institutions should not be seen as fixed and external to the conversation, but as "talked into being" by the interlocutors on an ongoing basis (Heritage, 1984, p. 290; see also Drew & Sorjonen, 1997).

Similar to CA, DP focuses on how language is used to perform various actions, such as complaining or attributing responsibility (Sneijder & Molder, 2005), and studies in DP also tend to employ methods and analytical concepts from CA. However, compared to CA, DP focuses more directly on the rhetorical aspects of interactions, such as how accounts are constructed so as to avoid their being called into question (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The attention to how moral matters are managed in interactions that is seen within some CA analyses is also central to DP, for example in relation to how speakers position themselves relative to those being spoken to or those described in the discourse (Whittle, Mueller, & Mangan, 2008). Finally, DP is concerned with how psychological phenomena are performed through interaction, including, for example, how speakers construct what they expect others' thoughts and wishes to be, to put it another way, what those described in discourse "might be expected to think, do or feel under the circumstances" (Edwards & Potter, 2005). Techniques from DP are likely to be useful for understanding interactions in DGVAs when the participants construct how middle managers are likely to respond to their proposed initiatives, for example, and I will return to them briefly later in this chapter and in the analysis.

Criticisms of EM/CA

Throughout the years, several particular lines of criticisms have been directed at conversation analytic literature which are relevant for how CA is used in this dissertation. First, some have criticized that the reluctance within EM/CA to take structural factors in society into account, such as power and hegemony, results in an incomplete theory of social life (Reed, 1997; Willmott, 2005). For Willmott, for example, the taken-for-granted understandings of social life that are produced through interaction are evidence of hegemony in operation. The response from

EM/CA scholars to such criticism has tended to stress that since these types of structure are rarely the discernable concern of the interlocutors (though there are exceptions, e.g., Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Mueller, & Lenney, 2014), explaining how the local social order is produced and maintained through structure is problematic. As Watson and Goulet state, (1998, p. 110) “ethnomethodologists refuse, as a methodological imperative, to consider power (and anything else) as existing prior to and independently of any actual episode in which it is exhibited and recognized.” Furthermore, the distinction between “macro” and “micro” levels of social life is seen within the ethnomethodological tradition as an product of academic theories rather than something that can be concluded from how social life is organized (Garfinkel, 1967b; Hilbert, 1990).

While some conversation analysts have been reluctant to attribute the way interactions develop to differentials in power between the interlocutors (Fairclough, 1995; Hutchby, 1999), Hutchby (1996a, p. 114) argues that power, if understood as “a set of potentials which, while always present, may be varyingly exercised, resisted, shifted around, and struggled over by social agents,” can be studied in interactions (see also Jayyusi, 1991). According to Hutchby, CA provides a highly relevant lens for understanding power relationships “if we conceive of power as a discourse phenomenon in terms of participants’ differential potential to enable and constrain one another’s actions” (Hutchby, 1996b, p. 483). As an example, Hutchby demonstrates how the rhetorical advantages held by radio talk show hosts over their listeners can be seen as a result of the talk show format which, in terms of sequence organization, grants the host a privileged position to question the caller’s claims. It has also been claimed that EM/CA is indeed in alignment with, and can elucidate, a Foucauldian understanding of power (Heritage, 1997; Hutchby, 1996b), and Samra-Fredericks (2005) has discussed how EM/CA can provide the analytical tools for empirically studying power in the form of Habermas’ four types of validity claims. Furthermore, it can be argued that Hutchby’s overall point about power could also be demonstrated through how different statuses are negotiated among interlocutors in relation to the epistemic, deontic, and emotional orders in discourse interactions.

Another and more methodologically oriented criticism that targets CA and similar research approaches is that they risk “micro-isolationism” (Seidl & Whittington, 2014). Seidl and Whittington argue that by remaining focused on specific interactions, these research approaches overlook how interactions are shaped by things which are not part of conversations but which may still be intersubjectively understood by the participants (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011;

Billig, 1999; Schegloff, 1997). As a related point, it has been argued that CA is structured around the analyst's terms, and thus cannot be claimed to represent the participants' understandings or concerns directly (Billig, 1999; Latour, 1986; Pollner, 1991). In response to such criticisms, there seems to be a broad recognition that the reason for something occurring the way it does in an interaction may not be available to the analyst, a point which has been dubbed the "analyst's paradox" (Sarangi, 2002). Of course, the interactants might entertain private thoughts or be swayed by emotions, but any inferences to such mental phenomena would make ethnomethodological studies another instance of the formal analysis which Sacks and Garfinkel were highly critical of. Various authors have discussed how aspects of intersubjectively understood context of the interaction is potentially made available to analysis in ways not typically considered: for example, some have argued for taking a more open approach towards inferring shared cultural knowledge than what can be gleaned directly from the interlocutors' statements (McHoul et al., 2008). However, as the academic debates surrounding membership categorization analysis (Rapley, 2012; Schegloff, 2007; Silverman, 2012; Stokoe, 2012) and, more recently, socioepistemics highlight (Heritage, 2018; Lindwall et al., 2016; Steensig & Heinemann, 2016), there is little agreement about which analytical steps are defensible and which would be problematic due to less attention being given to interlocutors' concerns in the process. The discussion also relates to the question of whether CA should be seen as an inductive or abductive research strategy, which I will return to in chapter 4.

Empirical CA studies of relevance for DGVA

Various empirical studies based on or inspired by CA hold relevance for the dissertation's overall research question. In the following, I will highlight some main points from studies which attend to how roles are negotiated in workplace interactions, studies of meeting talk, studies of decision-making in interaction.

Negotiating roles, rights, and obligations in interaction

Utilizing membership categorization analysis, various studies have described how institutional roles, which tend to be viewed as stable in the organizational literature, are subject to continuous negotiation and occasional challenges in workplace interactions, and that participants might

adopt a number of different roles within meetings (Housley, 1999). In their study of meeting interactions, Larsson and Nielsen (2017) utilized membership categorization analysis to examine how institutional roles were negotiated. Among the findings of their study is that because different forms of authority are distributed among the meeting participants (such as managers' superior deontic status in the organization, the rights and obligations that comes with a project manager role, or the epistemic status of experienced organization members), the way participants enact their roles in the setting depends to a certain extent on which of these forms of authority are negotiated as taking precedence in relation to the discussion at hand. In addition, Larsson and Nielsen point to the fact that the meeting participants were seen to orient more strongly to the participants' "task-oriented, practical identities"¹⁶ (p.1), such as being a meeting chairperson, than to overall institutional roles such as being in a leadership or follower position.

The negotiation of task-oriented identities can also be seen in interlocutors' use of personal pronouns, such as "I," "you," and "we," each of which suggest different relationships between the speakers and hearers. For example, in a study of work interaction at a bank, by Larsson and Lundholm (2013), a group manager's use of "we" was seen as indexing a shared overall responsibility for the task at hand with the other party to the conversation, an account manager. Larsson and Lundholm label this collaborative relationship as constituting an *operational unit*. However, the setting up of an operational unit in an interaction also makes the different responsibilities of the two parties in relation to the task relevant to the interaction. Thereby, the use of pronouns to frame work as collaborative does not imply a deontically symmetrical relationship.

The means by which interlocutors negotiate matters such as relative entitlement can be very subtle. For example, Asmuß and Oshima (2012) studied a meeting interaction between a CEO and an HR manager. They found that the when proposals were made, the entitlement of the speaker to make the proposal was negotiated through the recipient's use of aligning responses. Furthermore, the entitlement needed to accept or reject proposals was negotiated through the recipient's use of affiliative or disaffiliative responses.

¹⁶ To be clear, the term identities in this sense refers to contextually determined identities that become relevant to the conversation at hand (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998), rather than to identities that are considered relatively stable personal features in other literatures. Relatedly, my use of the term "role" does not imply that roles are fixed, but that the implications of a role for its holder and the other participants are negotiated in the interaction (Halvorsen & Sarangi, 2015)

Workplace meetings

Although various types of DGVAs exist, they typically involve formal meetings between employees and managers, where discussions take place about problematic working conditions and/or initiatives which the employees have suggested for implementation at the worksite, as mentioned in chapter 2. Meetings play a large role in organizational life, both because of how events in a meeting may shape how work is performed in the organization, and because they constitute a common activity which takes up a significant amount in many people's work schedule. Meetings are generally characterized by their goal-directedness in relation to solving problems and reaching decisions (Barnes, 2007; Wasson, 2016). Characteristic of workplace meetings is also that they are typically held in a certain physical space within a certain timeframe, follow a (more or less clearly stated) agenda, and involve participants holding various designated roles (e.g., the chairperson) (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Boden, 1994; Schwartzman, 1989).

Many meetings are conducted around a table which allows the participants to have face-to-face contact, and meeting chairs or other participants of authority are often seated at one end (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009). The degree to which speakers are allowed to self-select relative to having the conversational floor allocated to them by the meeting chair depends on the formality of the meeting, with informal meetings typically featuring patterns of turn taking that resemble normal conversations (Boden, 1994). At a more general level, it has been argued that in "exploratory" meetings where participants engage in brainstorming or collaborative problem solving, for example, the chair is less likely to control the topical progression of the meeting (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). I will later return to how the chair can influence decision-making in the meeting.

Decision-making in interaction

Decisions project and commit parties to future action, and therefore, participants in decision-making interaction often display a concern with the decisions that are made and their consequences (Boden, 1994; Clifton, 2009). As an interactional phenomenon, decision-making is a complex activity which involves the negotiation of a number of elements, such as "what is the problem?", "who is responsible for it?", "what can be done about it?" and "who will do what about it?" (Francis, 1995). According to Francis, these questions cannot be answered without a consideration of the specific circumstances relevant to the employees' choice, since "[i]t is only the particulars of their discussion that will define what the problem amounts to concretely" (p.

51). The discussions that precede decisions orient the participants towards certain ways of describing the situation rather than others (Boyce, 1995; Cooren, 2004; J. R. Taylor & Robichaud, 2004), and Huisman has described decision-making in organizations as a social endeavor in which “participants jointly construct the formulation of states of affairs, and through further assessment and formulation build commitment to particular states of affairs” (2001, p. 75; see also Barnes, 2007; Boden, 1994).

Interactional decision-making processes do not necessarily follow a sequence of steps or activities reflecting common-sense understandings of how decisions normally progress from defining a problem to identifying possible solutions and then making a choice about which initiatives to back. Instead, it has been argued that the decision-making process might involve rationalizing decisions that are already all but made (Garfinkel, 1967b). For example, in their study of recruitment professionals’ discussions about recruitment choices, Bolander and Sandberg (2013) provide a framework for the decision-making process comprised of four discursive activities: assembling versions of the candidates, establishing the versions of the candidates as factual, reaching selection decisions, and using selection tools as sensemaking devices. The sequence of these activities in practice depends on whether the discussants begin the decision-making process from a point of initial agreement or disagreement regarding the suitability of the candidates for the position: in the cases where the recruiters find themselves in initial agreement about a recruitment decision, they then assemble versions of the candidates which support the decision. As Bolander and Sandberg state (p. 302): “[k]nowing’ whom [the candidates] are, the selectors ‘see’ obvious selection decisions and easily make decision claims.” When the participants’ initial assessments of a candidate are not in agreement, the decision-making processes end up focusing more on reducing ambiguity about how to describe the candidate. During their deliberations, the participants try to establish patterns from individual pieces of information from the recruitment interviews which are framed as especially indicative of candidates’ personalities; the patterns are then used to explain other pieces of information about the candidate, thereby implicitly confirming the validity of the pattern. Thus, the recruiters are highly concerned with building legitimacy around the choices they eventually make and seemingly less concerned with looking for indications which contradict the image of the candidates they are constructing.

An important aspect of decision-making in interaction is that problems are not understood as identified, but as actively constructed (Boden, 1994; Weick, 1995). How problems are defined is important because aspects of problems which are not acknowledged in the decision-making interaction are unlikely to be targeted by the initiatives that are eventually decided (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2004). The interactional process of constructing problems has been studied by Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini (2011) who analyzed discussions in meetings among employees and managers about construction site safety. Their study demonstrated how problem setting can be seen as a discursive negotiation process where the participants attempt to build consensus around a problem definition. The participants' verbal contributions to this process draw on various forms of contextual knowledge, such as references to the organizational hierarchy, intersubjectively shared understandings of what it means to work professionally, or shared experiences¹⁷. A similar point has been made by Boden, who argues that in decision-making settings, the organizational environment is talked-into-being in order to facilitate consensus around how stakeholders who are not present are expected to respond to decisions (Boden, 1994, 1995). According to Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini (2011), because the process of negotiating candidate problem definitions potentially involves discussions about who is responsible for the advent of the problem and who should attempt to solve the problem, reaching consensus around a specific problem definition is potentially delicate. Such discussions might also touch on topics such as blame and obligations, thereby pointing attention to the fact that participants' moral concerns often influence decision-making interactions.

Another aspect of interactional decision making is deciding whether to implement one or more initiatives (or solutions, if a concrete problem has been defined). Concretely, the act of constructing and negotiating initiatives typically involves the proffering of proposals about initiatives that could be taken (Francis, 1995; Wasson, 2000, 2016). Proposals can be presented in various formats, including as suggestions, requests, or musings (Wasson, 2016), and sometimes utterances are framed as proposals after the fact by other participants (Wasson, 2000). Proposals make acceptance or rejection relevant (Asmuß & Oshima, 2012), and, following a proposal, sequences can often be observed in which the interactants discuss information related to the proposal or in which assessments agreeing or disagreeing with the

¹⁷ Samra-Fredericks in her study of decision-making in relation to strategy matters refers to the participants' invocations of past events in the organization in their argumentation as "putting the organizational history to work" (2003, p. 144).

proposal are presented (Wasson, 2016). Counter-proposals from other interactants are also common (Firth, 1995).

Huisman describes how the process of negotiating potential solutions to acknowledged problems can be seen as a form of future-oriented sensemaking, where participants assess the consequences of various proposed initiatives by formulating future scenarios in which the initiatives have been implemented:

In short, a decision evolves around the assessment of a future state of affairs. During this decision-making process, participants form what is tantamount to a "virtual" future reality and shape the future of the organization. (Huisman, 2001, p. 72)

Initiatives which are collaboratively constructed as leading to favorable consequences in "virtual future reality" are more likely to be accepted (Huisman, 2001). For the participants, presenting formulated future states of affairs as being credible involves a good deal of argument.

Huisman's study shows that participants are held to account for their formulations of future states of affairs being viable and presented in a balanced manner. Furthermore, one's formulations of future states of affairs might be challenged by the other participants, a technique that may be used to implicitly promote their own conceptions of potential future states of affairs that are likely to result if an initiative is implemented.

A third overall aspect of the decision-making process is that of decision *announcing* (Clifton, 2009). As described by Wasson:

[d]ecision-making activities end more or less when consensus is reached. The consensus is articulated by someone, often the facilitator. Or the last person to hold a contrasting view may express an altered view that is in alignment with the rest of the meeting participants. The articulation of consensus may be followed by a chorus of agreement tokens, and sometimes by a 'coda', a reiteration of the rationale for the decision. (Wasson, 2016, p. 381).

However, there are important caveats to Wasson's description: first, since it is not always announced when a decision has been made, and the consequences of decisions are not necessarily formulated clearly for the participants, it is not always possible to pinpoint the exact moment when a decision *is* made (Alby & Zucchermaglio, 2006; Huisman, 2001; see also

Mintzberg & Waters, 1990). However, even if a decision is not formally announced, the participants might orient to the interaction as though a decision has been made at some point, for example by moving on to discussing other topics or by not orienting to the decision as still under consideration (such as by asking when the discussion will return to the topic). Second, meetings do not necessarily feature a facilitator, and some meetings might be chaired by a person who holds a superior position in the organizational hierarchy. As discussed more in-depth in the next section, chairpersons can sometimes be seen to formulate decisions which do not necessarily reflect consensus and which only selectively represent the proposals and arguments presented in the discussion.

Meeting chairs' and other participants' influence on the decision making process

The role of the chairperson in meetings has received particular research attention in recent years. For example, according to Halvorsen and Sarangi, the chairperson is a “structuring device for managing interaction” (2015, p. 3), while various others have focused on how the role of the chair is negotiated in practice. For example, it has been found that chairpersons who do not hold the sufficient deontic status needed to make decisions on behalf of the group will typically display a relatively weak stance towards the role of the chair, such as by deferring decisions to the participants (Pomerantz & Denvir, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2010).

Yeung (2004a, 2004b) distinguishes between two types of decision-making interaction and how chairs are likely to act in each of these. First, in what Yeung calls “gatekeeping” decision making, the right to make and announce decisions is considered to be tied to certain formal roles in the organization, such as that of a manager or chairperson in a meeting. According to Yeung, gatekeeping discourse emphasizes the participants’ positions in the formal organizational hierarchy, for example by downplaying or challenging the contributions of subordinates and inviting compliance with whatever has been decided (Yeung, 2004b). As a chair, gatekeeping involves the use of leading questions which are designed to elicit the participants’ compliance with one’s stance (Yeung, 2004b), and Yeung argues that “[a]s a form of single-loop control, the persuasive rhetoric works to rectify any 'misperceptions' or deviations from basic organizational premises and rules, which are detected in subordinates' contributions” (Yeung, 2004a, p. 122).

In comparison, facilitative decision-making discourse is marked by openness towards the contributions of all present and reflexivity towards the decision-making process, for example by

attempting to settle decision-making rules collectively (Yeung, 2004a). Chairpersons facilitate participative decision making through practices such as probing participants' positions through information-eliciting questions, promoting exchanges among the participants themselves (rather than predominantly using chairperson-participant exchanges), and offering advice on how employees' can turn their ideas into initiatives which are likely to be implemented, even if the initiatives go against normal organizational practices treating participants' objections as justified and relevant, rather than as interruptions (Yeung, 2004a; see also Morgenthaler, 1990). Relatedly, Wasson has shown how participants support a consensus-oriented decision-making style within meetings by orienting to protecting each other's interactional face (2000). However, according to Yeung, decision-making interactions which can generally be considered facilitatory also contain elements of gatekeeping discourse:

the use of directive questions, the role of summing up, structuring the overall turn-taking pattern, articulating the final decision indicates the directive frame is present in the facilitative discourse. It is these features that mark the hybrid nature of the [participatory decision making] discourse as not purely egalitarian participation (Yeung, 2004a, p. 143)

Despite this disclaimer, it can be argued that Yeung fails to see a problem in the fact that the chairperson's efforts at guiding the employees' efforts to develop initiatives in accordance with organizational practices can also have the effect of influencing the employees to more closely align their ideas with the chairperson's preferences. Thus, when managers act as chairs, they can potentially position themselves in a power position, controlling the participants' sensemaking in relation to what it takes to change their working conditions while acting in a way that, using Yeung's distinction, can be considered "facilitative."

Baraldi (2013) extends Yeung's work by demonstrating that gatekeeping is not only tied to chairs who hold formal managerial roles, but might also be attempted by other participants who claim to have exclusive access to knowledge which is relevant for the decision at hand, displaying a relevant socioepistemic status (see also Clifton, 2014).

A number of studies have examined the interactional strategies that individual participants use in order to influence decisions. For example, Samra-Fredericks in her study of strategists' decision-making in interactions showed how the participants oriented to displaying appropriate emotions in order to influence other participants to accept their position (2003). Kwon, Clarke,

and Wodak (2014) identify five “systematic strategies of language use” (p. 266), the purpose of which is to guide the process of collective sensemaking among team members in meetings by simplifying or legitimating a previously made point, for example through providing a “gist formulation” which only selectively draws on what was actually said earlier in the conversation (see also Barnes, 2007). Relatedly, Mueller and Whittle (2011) have categorized a number of different practices, such as *stake inoculation* and *externalization*, under the heading of discursive devices, and demonstrated how these devices can be used to frame a change in the organization as being attractive to the employees or, if protests from employees grow in strength, simply as being acceptable (see also Edwards & Potter, 1992).

The moral aspect of decision making

The ascription and negotiation of role-related identities is highly relevant for how the moral aspect of decision making is managed in interaction. For example, in Samra-Fredericks’ study of strategic decision making (2010), she found that one manager criticized another manager because his actions were considered inappropriate in that they failed to observe the managers’ *strategic* responsibilities, a criticism which potentially threatened the face of this manager on moral grounds. A complementary example can be found in a study by Whittle and colleagues (2015), which shows that the predicates used in a description of a category incumbent are important, both for how the moral status of the person is presented and for which decisions are suggested by the description. Specifically, a consultant to the company in which the study was conducted challenged whether the sales manager, who had the overall responsibility for the marketing work of the meeting’s participants, was living up to this responsibility satisfactorily, describing the meeting participants as capable and justified in making a decision which would have normally been made by the manager. Thus, while Clifton states that decision-making parties “orient to what they consider to be allowable contributions according to the identities that they can make available to talk” (2009, p. 60), these identities can also shift over the course of the interaction.

However, the moral order of decision-making settings is not only regulated through the participants’ role-related rights and obligations, but also in relation to what it takes to be accountable. Recent research in relation to brainstorming in co-design processes, for example, suggests that brainstorming activities do not only involve “thinking outside the box” about the

subject matter under discussion but also involve fitting in “the box” of the interaction by acting in a way that is considered acceptable by the other participants (Nielsen, 2014). This could, for example, apply to the character of the proposals one offers or the arguments that one provides for a certain stance towards another’s proposal, both of which are normatively regulated by the participants even though brainstorming is often described as an activity where ideas can be openly discussed and considered.

Summary

In closing, we can expect the process of constructing initiatives in DGVAs to proceed in an unsteady and unpredictable manner. The process is likely to be characterized by negotiations of various proposed initiatives, of the present organizational environment which the initiatives address, and, in Huisman’s terms, of the “virtual futures realities” in which the implemented initiatives would be in effect. These negotiation processes also involve negotiations of the participants’ internal relationships, along with their mutual distribution of rights and obligations and thus which actions are framed as being moral in the setting. Thus, the context of meaning in which the decision-making takes place is provided by the participants through their (inter)actions (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

4. Case description and methodology

In this chapter, the format of the DGVA's which served as the empirical setting for the data collection will be presented. My own participation in the empirical setting and the fact that the DGVA's were conducted in relation to a research project meant that particular diligence was needed when choosing which parts of the data to focus on analytically and how to perform the analyses. I account for the approach that I have taken and how it relates to the methodological criteria typically applied in EM/CA research. Furthermore, I describe how I structured the process of selecting and analyzing stretches of interaction for the type of single-case CA analyses that the dissertation is based on, a description that is made relevant by a lack of formalized and generally accepted guidelines in the literature.

Description of the empirical setting: an employee health and safety intervention among industrial organizations

The data for this dissertation were collected in relation to the research project "Participatory Physical and Psychosocial Intervention for Balancing the Demands and Resources among Industrial Workers" (PIPPI) (Gupta et al., 2018; Wåhlin-Jacobsen et al., 2016). The project involved both intervention and evaluation activities.

The intervention was conducted among three Danish industrial organizations in the pharmaceutical, plastics-packaging, and food-processing sectors, each of which designated a number of participating teams for the study. The teams were then drawn by lot to either participate in the intervention the first year, or participate a year later in a version of the intervention run by the company without the research group intervening. The design of the intervention activities was based on principles described in the literature on participatory health and safety interventions in the workplace (e.g. Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2010). For the participating employees, the intervention involved two intervention activities (see Gupta et al., 2015): (1) being invited for an optional talk with their line manager about which problems they experienced in their work, and (2) participating in a series of three three-hour workshop meetings. The format of these workshop meetings was overall inspired by an MT perspective on voice, and specifically by the DGVA format of continuous improvement groups as well as other concepts from lean manufacturing (Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1991). However, in contrast to DGVA's conducted in relation to lean manufacturing, the focus of the workshop meetings in the

PIPPI project was on improving the employees' working conditions, rather than organizational performance (Wählin-Jacobsen, 2018). The workshops aimed specifically at improving the employees' local work environment, leading to a primary focus on production issues, rather than distribution issues (Levie & Sandberg, 1991). The workshop meetings were also inspired by visual process consultation techniques (Daniels, Johnson, & Chernatony, 2002; Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2002; Schein, 1978). The meetings were chaired by a process facilitator associated with the research group. These meetings constitute the empirical setting for the research in this dissertation, and the format will be described in more detail below.

The evaluation activities of the project involved a quantitative effect evaluation (which is not within the scope of this dissertation; instead, see Gupta et al., 2018; Wählin-Jacobsen et al., 2016) and a qualitative and quantitative process evaluation. Process evaluations aim at describing how various circumstances, such as unforeseen events, specific features of the participating organizations, or the way the intervention activities are conducted, shape the outcomes of an intervention (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013). In recent years, the scope of process evaluations has grown from focusing on a few, primarily quantitative aspects (e.g., Murta, Sanderson, & Oldenburg, 2007) to including elements of a more ethnographic nature, a development stemming from a recognition that many different circumstances potentially contribute to the effects of workplace interventions, and that complementary research methods are needed in order to describe how these circumstances operate (Abildgaard, 2014; Wählin-Jacobsen, 2018). The workshop meetings which constituted the DGVA of the project were audio recorded as part of the PIPPI process evaluation, since it was thought that these recordings were likely to reveal, for example, shortcomings of the workshop meeting format which could be addressed if the intervention were to be recommended for use in other organizations. The use of data originally collected for process evaluation in the studies of this dissertation is based on the position that such data can also be relevant for describing organizational phenomena that are not specific to a given intervention (e.g., Abildgaard & Nickelsen, 2013; Ala-Laurinaho, Kurki, & Abildgaard, 2017; Wählin-Jacobsen, 2018).

The PIPPI workshop meetings as a form of DGVA

The workshop meetings of the intervention were held in meeting rooms at the companies' worksites. The meetings were attended by all employees of a team (where possible), their line

manager, and the process facilitator¹⁸. Furthermore, it was typical for one or two more members of the research group to observe the meetings, though these observers had no formal role and only very rarely participated in discussions.

The three workshop meetings served different but related purposes in the overall intervention:

1. In the “Visual Mapping Workshop” (VMW), the process facilitator presented the overall agenda and principles of the three workshop meetings. The facilitator also introduced the participants to the first of two visual tools developed for the project, a “map” of the work environment of a generalized industrial employee containing various symbols for different topics such as ergonomic aspects of the work task, whether there was a supportive atmosphere among the team members, and the employees’ relationship with their line manager. The map covered psychosocial, physiological and other aspects of the work environment, such as exposure to chemicals, noise, heat or cold, etc. (Wählin-Jacobsen, Henriksen, Abildgaard, Holtermann, & Munch-Hansen, 2017). During the meeting, the facilitator asked the participants to describe which aspects of their work environment they saw as being either conducive or detrimental to their ability and motivation to continue working in the company until the age where they could receive retirement benefits. These aspects were noted on green and red post-it notes, respectively, and positioned on the map according to topic. On average, approximately 30 post-it notes would be produced per VMW, with an equal distribution of green and red notes (Wählin-Jacobsen et al., 2016).
2. Approximately two months after the VMW, the participants met again for an “Action Planning Workshop” (APW). The facilitator would first review the green and red notes on the map from the previous workshop meeting with the employees. Then, the facilitator would solicit suggestions for initiatives which could either mitigate the negative effects of the aspects mentioned on red notes, or maintain the positive effects of those on the green notes. During this exercise, the facilitator would present the employees with the other tool for the intervention, the “Improvement Board” (Wählin-Jacobsen, 2018), which outlines a stepwise approach to discussing the relevance and viability of suggestions for initiatives. The various steps were designed

¹⁸ Health and safety representatives only participated in their own team’s workshop meetings.

to help participants decide which initiatives to pursue and which to discard or assess at a later time. In order for an initiative to be accepted by the group for implementation, the initiative had to list one or more actions to take, the name of one or more participants who would be responsible for taking these actions, and a completion deadline set by those carrying it out. The facilitator also instructed the participants on how to use the Improvement Board for short, biweekly meetings in which the participants were to report to their colleagues on their progress with implementing initiatives.

3. Three to four months after the APW, the participants would meet for a Follow-Up Workshop (FUW), in which participants who were responsible for implementing initiatives would present their progress to the facilitator. If the initiatives had not been implemented as expected, the participants would discuss whether the initiatives needed to be changed or discarded. The remaining time was spent developing more initiatives using the methods from the APW and evaluating the participants' experiences of partaking in the workshop meetings.

The three types of workshop meetings followed more or less the same setup in practice: the facilitator would arrange for the participants to sit together around one table, preferably a square or round table, in such a way that even the participants sitting farther away from the facilitator would feel a part of the discussions (see Figure 2). At one end of the table, the facilitator would sit with the line manager to his or her side. The facilitator was instructed to describe the reason for the manager's position next to the facilitator as being that it allowed the facilitator to "keep a check" on the manager, since the workshop meeting was to revolve primarily around the employees' comments and suggestions.

The facilitators' communication style was to be rather informal, as they were instructed to chair meetings in a way that took the employees' perspective and used their terms and descriptions as much as possible. Furthermore, the facilitator was instructed to use facilitation practices considered effective in participative decision-making settings, such as asking probing questions in order to elicit different aspects of the matter being discussed, providing formulations which summarize what has been said so far, and promoting participation in the interaction from all present (for a more detailed description of how the facilitator were instructed to lead the meetings, see Wåhlin-Jacobsen et al., 2017). The facilitator was able to decide when to progress through the workshop agenda but could not go as far as to make decisions about which

initiatives should be implemented. Instead, decisions about which initiatives should be implemented were made in an informal manner based on whether there was overall support for a proposed initiative and whether any of the participants were willing to assume responsibility for implementing it.

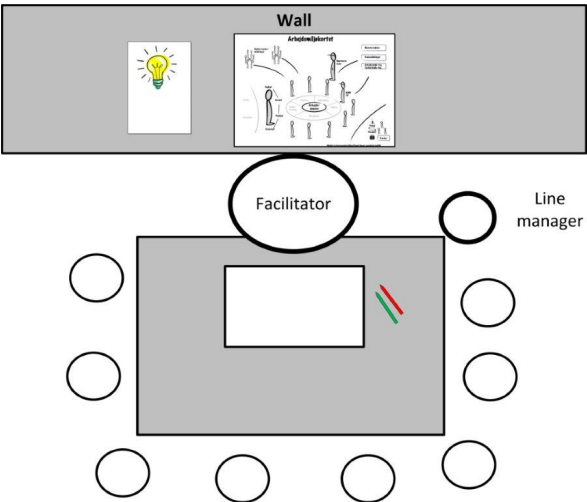


Figure 2. Illustration of the recommended workshop setup, translated from Wåhlin-Jacobsen et al., 2017.

At the end of the APW, the participants were asked by the facilitator to continue meeting at the biweekly board meetings and, if possible, to develop new initiatives during these board meetings, following the procedure outlined by the Improvement Board. It was not communicated to the participants whether or when a new series of workshop meetings was to be held, as this had not yet been decided by the managements of the three companies at the time of the initial series.

It is relevant to consider whether the workshop meetings constituted an unfamiliar setting for the participants. Besides being conducted for a research-based intervention, the workshop meeting concept was used in the organizations for the first time. Although the lack of familiarity among the employees with the workshop concept could suggest that they might have been more confused or hesitant about participating in the meetings than if they had been accustomed to the

concept, this aspect should not be taken to mean that the participants did not have shared common-sense knowledge about how to partake in the activities. For example, lean manufacturing practices were already used by the employees in the participating organizations (see Wählin-Jacobsen, 2018 for a description of these concepts), meaning that those elements of the workshop meetings that were inspired by lean manufacturing were generally easily grasped by the participants. In addition, the employees had experience with discussing health and well-being problems with their line managers in group settings, and employees from both the pharmaceuticals and plastics-packaging companies stated that the workshop program resembled programs that had been in place years prior to the intervention. Also, in both companies, DGVAAs were used to perform the legally required work environment risk assessments (Working Environment Act, 2010), and conducting the workshop meetings of the intervention was thought by the participating companies to be similar to how they normally used DGVAAs to meet their risk assessment responsibilities.

The PIPPI workshop format also required that a brief action plan template be filled out for each accepted initiative stating which specific activities were to be conducted after the workshop, who would be responsible for conducting them, and when they had to be conducted by. Documenting such basic information is also legally required for work environment risk assessments and likely to be a common feature of many DGVAAs in which initiatives are decided on for implementation. Therefore, I do not consider this requirement to have shaped the process of constructing initiatives in a way that preempts application of the study's findings to other DGVAAs.

Audio recording the workshop meetings

At all three companies, the workshop meetings held during the first year were audio recorded by the workshop facilitator on a small digital recorder. The facilitator would ask the participants for recording consent at the beginning of the meetings. The participants were informed that the recordings would only be used for research purposes and would not be made available to their company, and that the data would only be used in research articles or presentations in an anonymized form. The participants were also informed that their recording consent could be withdrawn at any time and were given a document containing detailed information about their consent (see appendix). The participants gave the facilitators consent to begin to record all of the

meetings. Two meetings were not recorded due to a malfunctioning or missing recorder, and a number of recordings were abbreviated due to operator error (e.g., forgetting to turn on the recorder again after a break) or a participants' request. Only a few audio recordings of the second-year workshops were collected, due to the pharmaceutical company deciding to end the intervention after the first year and also to research group members rarely attending the second-year workshops at the plastics packaging company.

In one workshop meeting, the participants asked the facilitator to turn off the recorder during the meeting. On this occasion, the team's line manager was not able to be present at the meeting, but the meeting was conducted as planned anyway as the process facilitator did not find out about the line manager's absence before the start of the meeting. During the meeting, the participants told the facilitator that the line manager sometimes acted with hostility towards employees who voiced problems which had led the employees to moderate their criticisms at the earlier workshop meetings. In order for the participants to feel able to discuss the problems related to the line manager more freely, the audio recorder was turned off until after the topic of discussion had shifted away from the manager.

The situation just described highlights two aspects of the setting that might lead employees to withhold voice: one concerns the well-known fact that study participants react to the presence of a researcher and to their utterances being recorded (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002; Speer & Hutchby, 2003). In such situations, the participants might moderate their language, or, as described above, avoid exercising voice, out of fear that their utterances will entail negative consequences if the contents of the recording should become known to their line manager or other members of the organization. In practice, it does not seem possible to avoid participant reactivity unless one is actually collecting data without the participants' knowledge – clearly an untenable strategy.

The other aspect is that employees are apparently likely to describe the current states of affairs differently in formal voice arrangements depending on whether the line manager is present or not, at least when they are worried about negative reactions from their line manager. This potential reaction is unsurprising, considering that the risk of sanctions when using voice has been described as a key concern for employees (e.g., Morrison, 2011). It is important to point out that from a CA perspective, this influence that line managers' presence may have on discussions involving voice does not constitute a source of bias which could reduce the validity of the data. According to Sacks (1963), social life is not just reflected in language, but locally

produced through language (see also Garfinkel, 1991). Thus, our attention should be turned to *how* the line managers' presence might influence the way employees produce social life through their use of language in DGVA settings.

While the specific situation presented above regarding the recording does not feature in the dissertation's analyses, it was considered in the analytical process in relation to the more general theme of how line managers shape discussions in DGVAs, the result of which is presented in chapter 8.

As mentioned further above, the use of audio recordings was originally championed by Sacks as a method for gathering data that could be utilized to parse out the "rules, techniques, procedures, methods,[and] maxims" that may help explain how the participants would recurrently recognize and produce order in interactions (Sacks, 1984, p. 26). However, audio recordings should not be seen as an unproblematic technique for capturing interactions, as they only preserve only the verbal modality of the interaction while omitting a number of aspects which are used by the interlocutors on an ongoing basis for accomplishing actions through interaction, such as gaze, gestures, and bodily stance (Hazel, Mortensen, & Rasmussen, 2014). The use of these elements during discourse interaction has received increased attention in recent years as their key role in achieving and maintaining intersubjectivity has been recognized (Goodwin, 2000; Hazel et al., 2014; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011). While the availability of video data would have been useful for the analyses, our use of an audio recorder was easier and quicker given that the data were initially meant to be used in the PIPPI process evaluation. Neither the funding for the dissertation nor the choice of using CA had been settled at the time of the data collection. Furthermore, it can be argued that video recording might have been considered more obtrusive by the participants than audio recording audio alone and thus could have led to more participant reactivity.

How to approach the data – a matter of methodological criteria

Overall, being part of the setting for the intervention meant that we were able to gather a nearly comprehensive set of audio recordings from the workshop meetings due to our dedicated presence. Otherwise, without direct involvement, attempts to collect a sufficient amount of recordings from other settings would likely encounter problems negotiating access to the data,

given the many different groups involved and the potentially sensitive subject matter that is typically featured in DGVAs. Moreover, the degree of familiarity and background knowledge would likely have been less from a data collection from a setting with less researcher involvement, which could negatively impact interpretations of, for example, the participants' use of technical terms or references to past events. Finally, since organizations might not hold DGVAs frequently, or hold them at convenient times, the ease of access and logistical advantages provided by associating with a large project such as the PIPPI project can be seen as preferable to attempting to collect a new data corpus.

Still, the data used in this dissertation stand out in comparison to the types of data used in most other CA studies because (1) I personally participated as a process facilitator in some of the workshop meetings, meaning that I have contributed to some of the discussions that I will analyze, and (2) the data were collected in relation to an intervention research project, rather than “naturally occurring” DGVAs that are arranged and conducted by the organizations entirely on their own initiative (Silverman, 2001). The potential implications of these features for the analyses are addressed below in light of the methodological criteria that are typically employed in EM/CA research, including which steps should be taken to ensure that the conclusions drawn on the basis of the data can contribute to our general understanding of how initiatives are constructed in DGVAs.

My role in the empirical settings

As a research assistant in the PIPPI project, I visited both the pharmaceuticals and plastics-packaging companies on a number of occasions between December 2012 and December 2015. During these visits, I (informally) observed the employees' work, participated in meetings related to the intervention project, held presentations about the project for various management and steering groups, and interviewed a large number of participating employees, managers, and HR and work environment professionals for the process evaluation data collection. In addition, I acted as a process facilitator or as an observer for a number of workshops held during the project, a task I shared with another research assistant and an external psychologist who had been in charge of developing the workshop meeting format (see table 3). I did not visit the third company, which was the duty of the other research assistant in the project. My focus during the many visits was on my assignments as a research assistant rather than on acting as an

ethnographer. Nevertheless, being associated with the research project helped me to develop an insight into the terms used by the participants, their core job tasks, the working conditions which they felt were problematic, and the employees’ history in the organizations.

Having an understanding of the field setting can serve as a resource when analyzing interactions within it (Whittle et al., 2015). Knowledge of the institutional or organizational context allows for a wider variety of observations, which can then be further explored in the data (Laurier, 2014). The necessity for the analyst to have particular insight in relation to the situation under study has especially been emphasized within EM, where it has been claimed that the analyst must be highly knowledgeable about how interactions are organized in the setting (e.g., Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992). Because of my familiarity with the pharmaceutical and plastics-packaging settings, I chose to focus on workshop meetings in these two settings. Table 2 presents some overall characteristics of the two settings, and further contextual information is presented in the four analytical chapters where relevant.

	Pharmaceuticals company	Plastics-packaging company
Size of company	Large; participants came from one of multiple national sites	Medium; participants came from the only Danish-based site
Main work tasks for participating employees (intervention groups only)	Production of pharmaceutical agents; preparing equipment or initial substances for the production; maintaining the production equipment	Production of plastic packaging; maintaining the production equipment
Approximate number of employees who participated in workshop meetings	75 in 11 different groups, eight of which shared the same two team leaders	39 in 7 different groups, with five groups sharing one team leader, and two groups sharing another

Table 2. Some overall characteristics of the two companies in which the workshop meetings under study took place.

It is important to stress that within CA research, a researcher's familiarity with the empirical setting is not a resource which allows the analysis to be based on the researcher's intuition. The credibility of CA studies depends on whether the interpretation of the presented examples is grounded in the data, for example by utilizing the next-turn proof procedure. Relatedly, ten Have (2002b) describes that ethnomethodological research tends to avoid "reflexive" discussions displaying the researcher's subjective influence on the analysis, which are commonplace in some areas of qualitative social research, going so far as to label these as expressions of "subjectivistic heroism" (paragraph 53). Ten Have argues that both CA researchers and other researchers who employ qualitative methods are utterly dependent on their knowledge as members of the same culture as the interlocutors for forming hypotheses and making inferences (formally or informally), but what sets CA researchers apart is that they assess these hypotheses and inferences critically in their analytical work by applying the next-turn proof procedure. Turner relatedly expresses that within conversation analytic studies it is the analyst's duty to "explicate the resources he shares with the participants in making sense of utterances in a stretch of talk" (1971, p. 177).

In regard to my own participation in the setting, it is clearly the case that my presence, and that of other members of the research group acting as process facilitators or observers, have shaped the recorded interactions. But similar to the point made about the line manager's presence, the relevant question from a CA perspective is *how* the interaction has been shaped by our presence and also what analytical measures should be taken to avoid inferences becoming misguided because they fail to appreciate the participants' concern over our presence.

In order to assess how the process facilitator might have impacted the interactions, it is important to consider their status in the setting. For one, the process facilitators had little specific knowledge about the issues discussed, such as problems with a given machine. In CA terms, it could be said that the facilitators held a low epistemic status and thus were not in a position to judge the participants' descriptions of the current states of affairs. The facilitators also knew little about the local circumstances that could contribute to shaping the chances of successfully implementing initiatives. As a result, decisions about which initiatives to implement were based on the participants' assessments of which initiatives were feasible or not. Furthermore, the process facilitators were instructed to use the participants' own terms, such as when presenting gist formulations of the preceding discussion. The process facilitator's decision

authority in the setting mainly related to managing the time spent on the different parts of the agenda during the workshop meetings.

A number of situations were identified during the analytical process (described below) where the facilitators' actions shaped the interaction in specific ways. During the analysis, I sought to characterize what was specific to these situations, so that I could draw on these characteristics as *sensitizing concepts*:

A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks [...] A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look. (Blumer, 1954, p. 7)

In the present dissertation analyses, the intention was to not emphasize situations where the facilitator was influential to the interaction but rather to avoid assigning too much importance to these situations. For example, I noticed various examples of the participants seemingly "playing along" with the facilitator's agenda, as indicated by them chuckling at the facilitator's suggestions, delaying their responses, and only providing minimally affiliative responses, suggesting that they were not personally invested in supporting the facilitator's intention. In these cases, contributing to a positive atmosphere in the meeting might have been a more important concern for the participants than whether effective initiatives were arrived at, meaning that the relevance of the situation as an analytical case was uncertain.

Being aware of these interactional features led me to focus the analysis on parts of the interaction where it mainly involved the employees and their line manager, or situations where the process facilitators' actions were of a kind that would likely be performed by any process facilitator, researcher or not, in a similar setting. As the analytical discussion is presented below along with transcriptions of stretches of the recorded interactions, readers can judge for themselves whether they believe this intention was successfully executed. This feature of CA-based studies increases their transparency relative to interview-based studies (likely the most widely used method for qualitative data collection), which typically do not report the

interviewer's contributions to the conversation, such as the questions used or the interviewer's encouraging responses to the interviewee's utterances (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Drawing and generalizing inferences in EM/CA studies

CA has been described as an abductive research approach:

(...) abduction starts with consideration of facts, that is, particular observations. These observations then give rise to a hypothesis which relates them to some other fact or rule which will account for them. This involves correlating and integrating the facts into a more general description, that is, relating them to a wider context (Svennevig, 2001, p. 2)

Peirce, who was the first to formulate abduction as a scientific approach, describes abduction as involving the development of hypotheses, among which the most plausible seeming is then selected for use (1955). In the present studies, the availability of interactional data made it possible to assess the hypotheses in comparison to each other by considering whether the indications supported each of them. This process must draw upon the empirical material as well as the analyst's stock of knowledge, be it his or her knowledge about the setting or analytical concepts. Peirce also claims that even analyses which may normally be considered inductive often perform a kind of *abductory* induction since pure induction must be restricted to something which is easily observable in the data.

That EM/CA is an abductory approach is suggested by how Sacks and Garfinkel were reluctant to formulate hard-and-fast methodological standards for their studies; instead, they argued that rigor in EM/CA analyses rests on whether explications of how social (inter)actions are organized are satisfactory given the concerns of participants that may be observed in the data (Lynch, 1991). Because these concerns change as the interaction unfolds, any sort of ostensible categorization of the setting in which the data were recorded is always secondary to the interlocutors' demonstrable turn-by-turn orientations (Heritage, 1984). The social order is too complex, contingent, and changeable to be ultimately and adequately described by any "standardized units" of analysis, be they roles, norms, or personalities, etc., which is why EM/CA studies display *ethnomethodological indifference* towards such explanations (Rawls, 2008).

Similarly, one of the central tenets of the conversation analytic method is that the context is made available for the analyst through the interaction (McHoul et al., 2008; Schegloff, 1997), rather than being a container or a “bucket” for the interaction whose properties shapes the interaction, as is a typical view in many sociological analyses (Heritage, 1987). With EM/CA analyses, the focus is instead on how order is constituted in the specific setting and there is an assumption that what participants do is correct according to locally established procedure; if we were to see what the participants are doing as a sort of game, how might this game then be described (Garfinkel, 1967b)?

EM/CA research rarely strives for generalizability as it is normally understood (e.g., Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). As social situations are viewed within EM/CA as always locally organized (Garfinkel, 1991), EM/CA findings can instead be viewed as contingently *transferable* across contexts, depending on whether the setting from which the findings derive and the setting to which the findings are applied as an explanation are similar in relevant ways (Rapley, 2017). In contrast to how generalizability is sometimes taken to suggest that findings consistently explain the mechanisms of how some phenomenon occurs (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014), transferability implies that good sense is always required on behalf of the reader in interpreting and generalizing findings. Clear boundaries for when transfer is appropriate cannot be defined a priori (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Instead, transferring findings requires that the analyst provides sufficient details about the setting from which the findings derive so that the reader can make a reasonable assessment of its similarities to the setting where the findings are to be applied (Schwandt, 1997). As mentioned, providing detailed information so that the reader can clearly assess the analyst’s inferences on behalf of the data vis-a-vis other possible explanations is one advantage of conversation analytic studies (Sacks, 1984).

The emphasis on transferability could raise the concern that findings from EM/CA studies are only relevant for understanding social (inter)action in settings that are very closely related to the empirical setting in which the study was conducted, such as in a similar organization, sector, or geographical area. However, the methods interlocutors employ for creating and sustaining social order are used and intersubjectively understood precisely because they are found throughout society, although they might be applied differently (Francis, 1995; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Rawls, 2008; ten Have, 2007). The methods can be said to be both “context-free” and “context-sensitive” at the same time (Sacks et al., 1974). In this regard, focusing on whether one’s data

are naturally occurring says little in the way of how the focal phenomenon of one's analysis may be similarly organized in other situations.

A key point in this regard is that achieving and sustaining order involves the use of many different practices for the interlocutors with varying degrees of site specificity, lending the situation its "just thisness," or *haecceity* (Garfinkel, 1996; ten Have, 2002b). Understanding the intricacies of some locally produced order, or what some have referred to as its "gestalt contexture" (Wieder, 1974; cited in Watson, 2008), requires understanding the interplay of these ethnomethods. When conducting EM/CA analyses, what is crucial is not that one's data reflects "typical" interactions as they occur within the setting which one wishes to study, but that the theoretical principles that the analyst wishes to demonstrate are reflected in the data (Silverman, 1985).

Silverman has argued that CA studies focus on "naturally occurring data," that is, data from situations which would likely have occurred irrespective of the researcher's engagement in the setting, instead of what Silverman calls "researcher-provoked data" (2001). Since the workshop meetings which constituted the empirical setting for this dissertation were conducted in relation to a research project, it could be argued that the data are not "naturally occurring" and thus not suitable for CA. However, the concept of "naturally occurring data" is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it suggests that CA researchers engage in a simple form of inductive generalization which presumes a high degree of similarity between the setting of the data collection and the settings to which the findings are generalized. However, as it was argued above, CA is not an inductive research approach, and CA findings cannot be generalized automatically anyhow due to how social order is always locally constituted. Second, the distinction between "naturally occurring" and "researcher-provoked" data reproduces the "bucket" conceptualization of context by suggesting that the latter are somehow tainted by the circumstances of their collection, when in fact they are likely to display many of the social and interactional phenomena that can be observed in "naturally occurring data" as well. Third, what constitutes "natural" data, more specifically, is debatable; Potter and Hepburn (2005), for example, argue that describing recorded conversations as "naturalistic data" is more adequate than "naturally occurring," since recorded data cannot be fully expected to reflect how interactions would have proceeded in the absence of a recorder due to participant reactivity.

Thus, as a methodological criterion for EM/CA research, the use of “naturally occurring data” is not relevant in itself; what matters are the various choices the analyst makes in selecting instances from within one’s empirical material and making inferences about them, as well as the care and consideration shown by the reader when transferring and applying findings from one setting to another.

Selecting empirical material for the dissertation’s analyses

Central to the DGVA of the present studies are action-planning workshops (APWs) and follow-up workshops (FUWs), since it is in these workshops where the construction of initiatives takes place. In these workshops, the participants are likely to be concerned with the fact that their decisions count, because the act of committing to a decision is witnessed by their manager and their closest colleagues, an act that they are likely to be held accountable for later. For example, for participants who assume responsibility for implementing an initiative, carrying it out will likely attract questions about how the implementation is progressing. Thus, even though the data may be considered researcher-provoked, the captured interactions have tangible consequences for the participants which must be expected to guide their actions.

It is less clear what is at stake for the participants in the first of the three workshop meetings (the VMW), where they “map” their work environment. Taking an EM/CA approach implies attending to what actions are performed through the participants’ descriptions of their work environment (i.e., a “language as topic” approach; Sacks, 1963). In the VMWs, the participants could at times primarily be oriented towards engaging legitimately with the facilitator’s instructions, that is, evaluating their work environment, without necessarily providing descriptions that are representative of their descriptions or actions at another time. For example, the participants in one APW meeting in the pharmaceuticals company complained (with no indication of joking) that had they known they would be asked to develop initiatives to address the work environment problems they had mapped in the VMW, they would have chosen to map simpler problems (see chapter 6). In addition, in comparison to the approximately 30 positive or problematic work environment aspects mapped in the VMW, only around 7 initiatives were negotiated for later implementation on average in the APWs (Wählin-Jacobsen et al., 2016), meaning that many of the issues discussed in VMWs were not taken up again. Because of the weak link between how employees described their work environment in the VMW and the

initiatives which were later decided for implementation, only two VMWs were selected for inclusion in the dissertation data set. This selection was also based on the relevance that these VMWs have for understanding how problems and solutions were constructed in relation to a specific topic that emerged in the interactions within two different workshop groups (see chapter 5).

Focusing my analyses on mainly APWs and FUs within the pharmaceuticals and plastics-packaging organizations reduced the empirical material to approximately 98 hours in total (see table 3 for a list of the workshop recordings analyzed for this dissertation).

Recording number	Workshop type	Company	Date	Length of recording (h:mm:ss)	CDW participated as a facilitator	CDW participated as an observer
1	VMW	Pharmaceuticals	02.10.2013	2:47:18	x	
2	VMW	Plastics	27.02.2014	2:21:52		
3	APW	Pharmaceuticals	30.10.2013	3:34:07		x
4	APW	Pharmaceuticals	01.11.2013	3:01:41	x	
5	APW	Pharmaceuticals	06.11.2013	3:02:14	x	
6	APW	Pharmaceuticals	12.11.2013	2:56:56	x	
7	APW	Pharmaceuticals	13.11.2013	2:38:55		
8	APW	Pharmaceuticals	20.11.2013	2:31:38		
9	APW	Pharmaceuticals	22.11.2013	1:58:22		
10	APW	Pharmaceuticals	27.11.2013	2:45:10	x	
11	APW	Pharmaceuticals	04.12.2013	3:02:15	x	
12	APW	Pharmaceuticals	11.12.2013	3:02:15	x	
13	APW	Plastics	13.05.2014	2:42:24		
14	APW	Plastics	04.06.2014	2:29:00		
15	APW	Plastics	14.05.2014	1:05:37		
16	APW	Plastics	08.05.2014	3:01:48	x	
17	APW	Plastics	07.05.2014	3:06:42	x	
18	APW	Plastics	15.05.2014	2:41:05	x	
19	APW	Plastics	20.05.2014	1:03:00		
20	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	31.01.2014	2:42:14	x	
21	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	03.02.2014	2:48:21	x	
22	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	07.02.2014	2:50:51	x	
23	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	10.02.2014	1:46:44	x	
24	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	12.02.2014	2:27:24	x	

25	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	17.02.2014	2:41:49		
26	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	24.02.2014	1:35:51		
27	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	03.03.2014	2:29:36	x	
28	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	10.03.2014	3:13:47		x
29	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	17.03.2014	2:50:34	x	
30	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	24.03.2014	2:48:55	x	
31	FUW	Pharmaceuticals	31.03.2014	2:47:33	x	
32	FUW	Plastics	15.09.2014	2:41:10	x	
33	FUW	Plastics	08.09.2014	2:24:35		
34	FUW	Plastics	16.09.2014	2:40:57	x	
35	FUW	Plastics	17.09.2014	2:14:27	x	
36	FUW	Plastics	22.09.2014	2:16:12		
37	FUW	Plastics	24.09.2014	2:28:23		
38	FUW	Plastics	25.09.2014	1:41:11		

Table 3. A list of the empirical material selected for analysis in the dissertation.

Developing the analytical approach

Single case and collection-based CA studies

Both ethnomethodological and conversation analytical studies of interaction tend to adopt one of two strategies for analyzing audio (or video) recorded data, either *single cases* are analyzed extensively, or inferences are made by comparing a collection of instances of a phenomenon across a corpus of data (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Rawls, 2008; ten Have, 2004, 2007). While the waters are muddled somewhat by the fact that CA studies in general are likely to draw from some corpus of empirical material of which only a relatively small sample can be made available to the reader, it is a distinguishing feature that collection-based studies tend to focus on one specific phenomenon which is at least somewhat routine (Whittle et al., 2015) and which can be identified and categorized by the researcher with little controversy, for example because it typically occurs in the same structural location within conversations (ten Have, 2007). Furthermore, Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008, p. 114) seem to imply that in the conversation analytic tradition, it is in collection-based studies where theoretical developments tend to be proposed, while single-case analyses are where these developments are tested. However, the reliance on the analyst's categorization of a number of empirical situations as similar in

collection studies is potentially problematic because such categorizations might not capture differences in the participants' concerns across the collected situations (Lynch, 2000).

Within single-case CA studies, "the resources of past work on a *range of phenomena* and organizational domains in talk-in-interaction are brought to bear on the analytic explication of a *single fragment* of talk" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 101; italics as per the original). According to Schegloff, single-case CA studies reflect how interactants must continuously make sense of the interaction (i.e., solve the "why this now" problem) using the various interpretative resources available to them (see also Watson, 1997). This dissertation takes a single-case approach to studying DGVA interactions. Its focus is not to contribute to the conversation analytic literature through theory building, but to contribute to the voice literature through the use of CA as a method. The focus of the analytical work is therefore not on specific interactional practices, but on how these practices together shape the constructed initiatives.

The single-case approach gives considerable latitude to the researcher in regard to selecting and building a case for presentation. The analytical process typically involves reviewing the data, selecting various sequences for in-depth analysis, developing ideas and hypotheses, discussing the data with other researchers, writing tentative analyses, and re-analyzing previous cases, for example. However, although this process is rarely described in CA studies, an account is given below of how I approached the process.

One overall matter is what constitutes a "case." Single-case CA studies rarely make clear whether the data presented in the excerpts constitute the case, or if the case also includes non-provided parts of the discourse that came before or after the excerpt. However, it is typical for single-case CA studies to present information about the context of transcript excerpts that is relevant to understanding the interaction. Furthermore, as intersubjective understandings established at a previous time in the interaction might shape later interactions, the analyst should, in principle, always examine what came before and after the targeted exchanges. I therefore chose to perform my analyses on relatively long excerpts and only shorten these excerpts prior to publication after taking into account how much of the interaction could be showed to readers without violating the length restrictions of the publication outlet.

Transcription in conversation analytic studies

This leads to the question of what constitutes data for single-case CA studies. In their published form, CA analyses are presented with transcript excerpts. Outside of CA studies, many qualitative researchers see the transcription process as methodologically unproblematic, and sometimes the viewpoint can be observed that transcriptions *are* data, rather than the original audio (or video) sources being the data (Davidson, 2009). However, transcribing is a selective process in which choices are made about how to represent the data to the reader (Duranti, 2007; ten Have, 2002a). In other words, transcriptions are inherently translations, and new aspects of the data can be revealed for even very detailed transcriptions, (Jefferson, 2010; Mondada, 2007; Rapley, 2007). As a result, the transcription process involves various compromises, such as weighing whether to include more detail in order to provide a fuller picture of the contents of the recording or to reduce the complexity of the transcription in order to save time and potentially ease comprehension for readers unfamiliar with CA (ten Have, 1990). As a strategy for managing these compromises, it is typical to produce various types of transcripts with some being *working* transcripts used in the analytical phase of the project and others being *edited* transcripts written out for a specific purpose (Mondada, 2007). For this project, I consider the audio recordings to be my data, with the transcription serving as a practical aid for managing the data, supporting the analytical work, and exemplifying findings for the reader (Rapley, 2007).

As a large amount of data was available for the analyses compared to other research projects which study interactional data¹⁹, it has been necessary to carefully consider my approach to the transcription process, rather than simply to transcribe all of the available data. Potter and Hepburn (2005) estimate that even transcribers who are skilled at the Jeffersonian transcription style commonly employed in CA would often need more than 20 hours of transcription per hour of audio, with Rapley estimating 32 hours of transcription per hour of audio (Rapley, 2007). Since the data for the present studies are from multiparty conversations, the process of identifying what is being said by whom when several people are talking at the same time takes much longer, rendering a full transcription all but impossible within the timeframe of the PhD project. Furthermore, if one considers the recordings to be one's data rather than the transcription, it is more relevant to transcribe selectively in relation to the specific analytical or presentational purpose that the transcription is to fulfill (Peräkylä, 2004).

¹⁹ 10–15 hours of audio recordings seems to be a more common range (e.g., S. B. Nielsen, 2007; Telenius, 2016).

In order to make economical use of my time, I first conducted rough transcriptions which did not contain every word, but which indicated most speakers' turns (vocal continuers, such as "mhmm," were not transcribed at this point, for example). The transcriptions focused on relevant parts of the recordings, as the workshop recordings also contained various segments which were not likely to be relevant for the analysis, such as breaks, practical information given by the process facilitator at every meeting, recaps of previous workshops, and discussions of the participants' suggestions for improving the format of the workshop meetings in the FUs. The rough transcriptions were supplemented in the analytical phase with more detailed transcriptions of selected stretches of interaction (Rapley, 2007).

Since the use of notation symbols in the four articles of the dissertation is similar, I have chosen to provide one summary (see appendix).

Developing analytical ideas

In describing his approach to studying stretches of transcribed interaction, Sacks stated that:

[w]hen we start out with a piece of data, the question of what we are going to end up with, what kind of findings it will give, should not be a consideration. We sit down with a piece of data, make a bunch of observations, and see where they will go (Sacks, 1984, p. 27).

Others have made the similar point that one should engage in "unmotivated looking" through one's data (Psathas, 1995, p. 45), since approaching one's data with a clear hypothesis in mind is likely to affect one's decisions on which situations to analyze and the sense one makes of them. Taking Sacks' and Psathas' approach implies that what is reported by the analyst will typically be inspired by observations which are stumbled upon at various points during the analysis of a number of cases, only to be developed in later analyses.

In my case, the time spent transcribing the many hours of audio recordings brought a number of interesting facets and details to my attention concerning what was captured in the data and which situations might be worth looking more closely at in order to explore the use of voice. Thus, on the one hand, the analyses were developed on the basis of a relatively open approach to

the data, similar to the one prescribed by Sacks, while on the other, I did not fully engage in “unmotivated looking” since my ideas focused on the topic of employee voice²⁰.

As previously mentioned, descriptions of how single-case CA studies are developed are sparse in the literature, especially in relation to the matter of why a particular extract is selected for presentation, and, if the presented extract is considered an illustrative example of a broader analysis, how the broader underlying analysis was conducted. This lack led me to draw inspiration from constructionist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). In line with Charmaz’ recommendations, I recorded a number of research memos corresponding to the various observations I had made and which I hoped to be able to develop into fully formed analyses²¹. The memos were not only for keeping track of empirical observations, but were also used for conjecturing about how the different segments of the data might supplement or contradict each other and how the findings relate to the extant literature. The memos thereby provided a means for analytical reflections and exploration (Charmaz, 2006). Writing and revising memos can thereby facilitate the building of an analytical understanding of how a phenomenon is organized throughout ones data through an abductive dialogue between empirical findings and the literature.

Conducting the analyses

Early in my analytical process, I pursued a general overview of how initiatives were typically constructed in the workshop meetings. I knew from previous work that somewhere between 5 and 8 initiatives were typically developed by the participants and formally agreed upon by the participants in APWs (Wählin-Jacobsen et al., 2016). The number of initiatives developed in the FUWs were fewer and more varying, as initiatives could only be developed in the FUWs after all of the existing initiatives had been reviewed, and the time allotted to this part of the meeting agenda varied substantially.

The number and scope of initiatives developed in the workshop meetings seemed to depend on the characteristics of the problems and proposed initiatives that were discussed by the

²⁰ Similar to my approach, a number of “applied” or “critical” conversation analytic approaches have proliferated in recent years in studies which have applied conversation analytic methods and analytical concepts with a clear focus on a certain phenomenon selected by the analyst a priori (Antaki, 2011; Kasper & Wagner, 2014; Talmy, 2009).

²¹ A similar process of analyzing intuitively interesting cases early in the analytical process and more systematically selected cases later is also described by ten Have (2007).

employees. For example, discussions of problems or initiatives which had been previously discussed by the participants often went on for quite some time due to difficulties in reaching a consensus about how to characterize the problem – and did not always result in a viable initiative. These difficulties may also be the reason why the employees had not been able to find a satisfactory solution in their previous discussions.

It was clear from an early stage that the discussion in which initiatives were constructed were only “vaguely orderly” (Jefferson, 1988, p. 419) and thus did not follow a common trajectory. Instead, the discussions seemed to vary in terms of:

- whether the focus of the discussion was on defining the problem or defining the solution
- how much the participants were in agreement about how to characterize a problem or what could be done about it (similar to Bolander and Sandberg’s finding; 2013)
- whether the problems and solutions had seemingly already been discussed on previous occasions (sometimes repeatedly) or whether they were being identified within the workshop for the first time
- whether initiatives in relation to a topic were desired by only a lesser portion of the employees or by most or all of them
- whether a problem and its considered solutions were technical or more social in nature
- whether it fell within the formal decision authority of the participants to make the ultimate decision about implementing an initiative and sometimes and whether they could implement it themselves. Implementations beyond the participants’ authority were sometimes treated as candidates for further processing through some pre-existing organizational means, such as a joint consultation committee or a lean manufacturing suggestion scheme.

Thus, it was not possible to categorize the discussions as an initial analytical step in any reliable manner. Instead, when reviewing the data, I would identify various sequences which seemed potentially interesting in relation to my overall research question, for example because of how the sequences featured the participants’ orientating towards some part of the process of constructing initiatives in the workshop meetings as challenging or problematic.

The present analytical process followed the conversation analytic tenet of focusing on informal logic, which can be seen in the production and organization of the recorded interactions that constitute one's corpus of data (Janyyusi, 1984, p. 2). Focusing on one extract at a time, I developed hypotheses about how intersubjective understanding was coordinated on a turn-by-turn basis, assessing these hypotheses through the next-turn proof procedure (Sacks et al., 1974, pp. 728–729). In the process, different analytical concepts from CA (as presented in chapter 3) were applied, leading to different aspects of the interaction standing out.

In the analytical process, I approached the data on the premise that it reflects both research-based intervention and DGVA aspects to varying degrees, with either one or both of these aspects shaping the participants' concerns at different times. This involved using the above-described sensitizing concepts to identify situations where the research aspect of the meeting workshops was especially salient. For example, the DGVA setup involved various specific conceptual tools, such as describing the scope of employees' influence on their working conditions as represented by an "action radius" (see chapter 6). Identifying situations where this concept played a role was important for the analysis featured in chapter 6, in addition to the technique being used to sort out situations where this research aspect was particularly salient from the other analyses (see chapters 5, 7, and 8).

Inspired by the scheme presented by ten Have (1990), the later stages of my analytical process can be said to resemble a string of back-and-forth movements between (1) listening to and re-transcribing sections of the audio recordings that seemed of particular interest to emerging research facets, (2) analyzing these sections, (3) noting my reflections in research memos, (4) consulting the voice and CA literatures to further develop my understanding of how the selected interactions could be handled, and (5) looking for similar situations within my data corpus which could potentially reveal additional aspects of my overall phenomenon of interest when analyzed. Throughout this process, the overall research question was used as a sensitizing device which focused my attention on certain aspects of the data, rather than others. Because the audio recordings were so rich, many interesting social and interactional phenomena could be observed, however only some of these were relevant for the theme of the dissertation.

When conducting CA studies, whether taking a very open approach to one's data, or a more theoretically guided one as I did, the definition of one's targeted phenomena will be the result of the analysis, rather than its starting point (ten Have, 2007). Thus, once I felt confident that (1) my data were sufficiently rich in relation to a topic to be able to develop my initial ideas into a

more systematic analysis, and (2) that such an analysis would present a relevant contribution to the voice literature, I once again reviewed the preliminary transcriptions in order to find stretches of data which could add to the analysis. Realizing that the roughness of the transcription could lead me to overlook potentially relevant excerpts, I made a point of revisiting sections of the audio recordings where I had been in doubt about what the interaction was about. The described approach is in line with Silverman's suggestion (2013) of letting one's research process be guided by intensively analyzing parts of the data material in order to focus or develop the research question, after which an extensive analysis is done of other relevant parts of the data material, looking for cases that show new nuances in the phenomenon under study.

Through this process, a number of relevant ideas were developed, among which the ideas the ideas represented in articles one, three and four (chapters 5, 7, and 8) were developed into full research articles. Specifically, the idea for the first article came as a result of noticing how many workshop meetings involved discussions of work shoes, how these discussions were often long, and how constructing mitigating initiatives appeared to be relatively difficult for the participants. The idea for article three arose out of a number of observations that the employees would sometimes hesitate to assume responsibility for implementing initiatives, and that their hesitation was often verbally accounted for in terms which suggested that assuming responsibility for the initiative could lead to undesired identity ascriptions. The fourth article was based on a number of observations of the way in which the participating line managers would engage in discussions of proposed initiatives. Especially in situations where the line managers took a critical stance towards a proposed suggestion, they could be seen to spontaneously account for this stance and engage in various other practices that suggested that their challenging of the employees' proposal was considered delicate. The original analysis for the second article was developed by Esben Nedergård Olsen for his Master's thesis and subsequently developed into its current form in collaboration with myself and the third author, Johan Simonsen Abildgaard²². The second article differs from the other articles in its relatively loose application CA concepts and principles in what might elsewhere be described as a micro-discursive analysis (e.g., Larsson & Lundholm, 2010).

In the preceding, I hope to have made clear that the present analytical process involved a number of choices and compromises. While it has been my aim to present analyses which are

²² The dataset used by Esben Nedergård Olsen for his initial analysis was smaller than the one used for the remaining articles, as it is stated in chapter 6.

coherent, nuanced, and relevant, only a small selection of the empirical material can be provided. For example, the four articles in this dissertation mainly feature “what Gail Jefferson in a data session once called some ‘virtuoso moments’, episodes that strike the observer as being carried out in a particularly felicitous manner” (ten Have, 2007, p. 38), as they illustrate points developed within the overall analysis in an economical and captivating way. These cases should, however, not be thought of as unique, since the underlying mechanisms can be seen to be at work throughout the data corpus. However, a substantial proportion of the analyzed data extracts do not serve as clear examples, for example because the language is less clear to those unfamiliar with the setting, because other phenomena in the extract might capture the attention of the reader instead of the one of interest, or because the point can only be illustrated by presenting an interaction sequence that is prohibitively long.

It should also be kept in mind that the four articles presented in the following chapter are not only products of the analytical process I have outlined above, but were also written specifically for four different outlets. The articles target different discussions and draw upon different theories and analytical concepts. The articles have also been influenced by the comments and reviews that I and my co-writers received at presentations and from journals. These factors contribute to giving the four articles somewhat distinctive characters. The combined contributions of the four articles will be discussed in chapter 9.

5. Article one: Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches?

Socioepistemics and the construction of “voiceable” problems and solutions

Abstract

In workplace voice activities, employees are invited to raise problems and suggest improvements to the management. While the voice process has been characterized as a transfer of information, this understanding neglects how the credibility of information and speakers' rights to claim knowledge about it are subjects of continuous negotiations in actual interactions. We analyse voice activity interactions in an industrial setting in relation to the topic of work shoes, showing how problem and solution formulations which project different actions to be taken after the activity are negotiated. This process, which we call “problem-” and “solution work”, is shaped by the participants' orientations to epistemic status, i.e. their differential rights to claim knowledge of various subjects in the discussions. Employees' low epistemic status in relation to various relevant problem and solution aspects constitutes an important but overlooked barrier to achieving improved working conditions through the voice activities.

Introduction

In recent years, a shift has occurred in how employees participate in and influence decision-making processes in the workplace: while representational union-based forms of participation used to be the norm in many countries, an increasing number of organizations have implemented regular activities in which employees are invited to voice problems related to work or suggestions for changing existing work practices directly to the managers (Busck et al., 2010). In the EU, for example, the number of employees frequently involved in improvements of the work organisation or work processes has increased was 50% in 2015 (Akkerman et al., 2015). These activities are often inspired by practices adopted from the field of human resource management (Heery, 2015) and involve meetings or talks among employees and their managers (Freeman, 2007; Kersley et al., 2005). In relation to this shift, a topical shift has also occurred: where issues such as pay, work hours or recruitment practices were previously central to participation, many current employee voice activities typically focus on aspects of local, daily

work, including health and safety issues (Addison, 2005; Busck et al., 2010; Harley, 2014; Levie & Sandberg, 1991; Nielsen et al., 2010).

Academic discussions of how these shifts have influenced the employees' possibilities for influencing their workplace have tended to focus on how information is exchanged within the activity (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Levie & Sandberg, 1991). For example, one model suggests categorizing voice activities on the basis of whether employees are merely *informed* of changes, are able to *communicate* with managers about changes, are *consulted*, or are allowed to *co-determine* or *control* decisions (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005). It is claimed that increasing employees' access to information is empowering by leaving the employees in a "better position to make or influence decisions to maintain or improve performance" (Appelbaum et al., 1999; see also Harley, 1999; Marshall & Stohl, 1993), and similarly voice is sometimes described as "discretionary provision of information intended to improve organizational functioning to someone inside an organization with the perceived authority to act" (Detert & Burris, 2007), implying that information is a resource for decision-making that can be transmitted from managers to employees and vice versa (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998).

However, this understanding of information can be contested on the grounds that information in itself does not carry meaning, but that meaning must be inferred (Axley, 1984). The social processes by which such inferences are made or sought managed are in no way simple: it has been shown that what counts as information in relation to organizational decision-making is not given *a priori*, but often the subject of negotiation within the interaction, for example in relation to what constitutes a problem or a relevant solution (Boden, 1994; Cooren, 2007; Samra-Fredericks, 2010). Furthermore, organization members are held accountable for their socio-moral rights to hold and present information, and violations can entail sanctions. This perspective on how invocations of "knowledge" are organized in interaction has been labelled *socio-epistemics* (Heritage, 2013b; Stivers et al., 2011). When applying a socio-epistemic lens, we come to focus on how participants in employee voice activities engage in and thereby shape voice activities as a practical feat, rather than how static features of the activities or the organization that hosts it shapes its outcomes. Specifically, formal voice activities can be seen as sites of social decision-making where a process takes place which reduces the range of potentially "voiceable" problems and solutions into a subset which is eventually formulated and passed on to managers in the organization.

The present study is motivated by an interest in understanding what characterizes this process as it occurs in interaction within employee voice activities. We show how the differential distribution of epistemic rights among the participants and other parties in and beyond the organisation is invoked to build support around or question candidate problem and solution formulations in the participants' "problem-" and "solution work". In the process, various moral problematics are made relevant to the interaction which the participants strive to manage. Thereby, we aim to shed light on an important aspect of how decision-making interaction in workplace voice activities and other participatory settings is socially organized.

Socioepistemics

The topic of socioepistemics has received increasing attention in recent years (Heritage, 2013b; Stivers et al., 2011), including in analyses of interaction within workplace settings (Clifton, 2014; Landmark et al., 2015). Fundamental to socioepistemic analyses of interaction is the observation that in many situations, interlocutors will have different degrees of access to some epistemic domain, and their rights to claim and present knowledge about this domain in the interaction is oriented to by the interlocutors within the interaction. The interlocutors can thus be said to have each their epistemic *status* as a form of social positioning along a gradient with a more or less deep slope (Heritage, 2013b; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). For example, different ways of presenting information suggests different epistemic status through the stance taken: while initiating a description with "I think" typically is taken to mark a downgraded stance, "certainly" instead typically marks an upgraded stance. If epistemic stance and status are seen as incongruent, the incongruence will often be noted in the interaction and the speaker held accountable (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Mondada, 2013; Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

Holding superior right to knowledge about a matter is described as having epistemic *authority* (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). Through the access that speakers are taken to hold toward their own thoughts, feelings, sensations or experiences, these topics are typically oriented to as areas of epistemic authority (Heritage, 2012a; Landmark et al., 2015). In addition, epistemic authority can also be claimed in relation to various topics on the basis of expertise or other forms of access associated with membership of social categories, such as "doctor" or "grandparent" (Raymond & Heritage, 2006). However, struggles can arise between speakers about their relative epistemic statuses (Mondada, 2013), including when experience- and expertise-based

forms of authority are in conflict (Heritage, 2013b). Furthermore, descriptions, reports and other types of claims about the world are also devices for doing complex socio-moral work such as argumentation (Amer, 2009) and oriented to by the interlocutors as such. As a result, speakers are held accountable not only for the veracity of reports, but also how their reports might influence the immediate interaction and the activity sequence in progress, such as in decision-making. For example, the facticity of accounts can be questioned through attributions of stake to a speaker, including in cases where the speaker played an active role in the accounted events (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Despite the increasing number of studies which apply a socioepistemic lens to various interactional settings, very few studies have focused specifically on decision-making. One example is Landmark, Gulbrandsen & Svennevig's study of interaction between doctors and patients about medical treatment decisions (2015). While a number of countries have implemented policies supporting participation of patients in medical treatment decision-making, participation is sometimes oriented to as problematic by the patients in the interactions due to the large epistemic asymmetry relative to the doctors. In other words, it seems challenging to equalize the "deontic order" of a setting if the members' statuses in the epistemic order differ substantially. The concepts of epistemic status and stance can potentially explicate the interactional dynamics which undergird the finding that organization members which are seen as holding expertise in relation to some subject are often in a privileged position to have their assessments accepted and acted on in decision-making settings (e.g., Angouri & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011).

The data

The data for this paper were collected in connection with a research project in which a voice activity was implemented in Danish manufacturing organizations. Danish occupational health and safety regulation requires all workplaces to perform regular risk assessments with participation from the employees, which is often solicited through meetings or others forms of direct dialogue with managers. The intervention primarily deviated from such meetings through the presence of an external process facilitator, who was required to chair the meetings according to guidelines set out by the research group.

In the workshop meetings studied here, employees were asked to discuss how their various working conditions could be considered problematic or beneficial in relation to their health and well-being. The meetings were typically attended by 6-10 employees who worked together on a daily basis, either semi-skilled machine operators or skilled maintenance staff. Besides the process facilitator, the meetings were also attended by the employees' line manager and one or two members of the research group acting as observers. One of the authors (CDW) participated in some meetings as a workshop facilitator and in others as an observer.

While initially transcribing and reviewing our data, we noticed how the participants' decision-making process often featured a number of different problem formulations or different problem aspects being presented, along with a number of candidate suggested actions to alleviate the problem. The process of negotiating some form of consensus among the participants between the available candidate understandings and action proposals often spanned long stretches of conversation. Among approximately 98 hours of audio from 36 workshop meetings which were considered in the analysis, we here focus on two series of three meetings involving employees from two different worksites (one medium-sized plant producing plastic packaging and a large production site for pharmaceuticals) in order to focus our analysis on discussions in relation to one exemplary topic: work shoes. While the findings we present here could likely be encountered for a number of different problems discussed within workplace voice activities, work shoes was raised as a problem throughout the data and because of its value in exemplifying points from the overall analytical process. Still, the constraints of the journal article format mean that only a few illustrative sequences can be presented here.

Working with both workshop audio and the transcripts in conjunction, we collected excerpts of interaction where participants discussed work shoes. These excerpts were then analysed following an approach based on CA and DP in order to attend to both how understandings are coordinated on a turn-by-turn basis and how turns are designed for strategic purposes. Besides invocations of epistemic authority, status and access, we especially attended to interactional features such as the use of alignment and affiliation in negotiating consensus in relation to problem and solution formulations, and how the issues of stake and interest are managed by the participants. The excerpts were transcribed using a simplified Jefferson style (Jefferson, 2004, see appendix for legend) and are presented here in their translated form. All names have been changed to ensure participant anonymity.

The workshop setting

The formal voice activity included three three-hour workshop meetings per work team, covering risk assessment, action planning and follow-up. The participants were encouraged to raise problems and suggest changes which could improve their health and well-being. Within the meetings, so-called “action plans” were developed describing the actions that the employees wished to take (or suggest other organization members to take) in order to change the existing work practices. There were no pre-set boundaries regarding which initiatives could be taken, but participants had to secure the necessary approvals and funding within the organization; no economic or practical support was provided by the research team.

All workshop meetings were held in meeting rooms at the worksite. The facilitator would chair the meetings, following loosely a pre-set agenda, however a major part of the meeting interaction consisted of discussions among the employees and their manager in relation to health and safety-related aspects of their work or the facilitator interviewing the participants about such topics in order to progress the risk assessment, action planning or follow-up tasks of the meetings. All participants (except the observers) would be seated around the same table in order to facilitate discussions within the group. The names and formal work roles of the interlocutors featured in the excerpts are presented in the table below.

<i>Excerpt 1+2</i>		<i>Excerpt 3+4</i>	
<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>
Amelia	Workshop facilitator	Beth	Health and safety representative
Noah	Employee	Tim	Line manager
Max	Employee	Daniel	Employee
Oliver	Employee	Katie	Employee
Teddy	Employee	Seth	Process facilitator
Finn	Line manager	Emily	Employee
Arthur	Employee		

Table 4. Participants in the excerpts of chapter 5 and their formal work roles.

Analysis

The presentation of analytical examples which follows is structured around the workshop series of two different work teams. As the data are very rich, the analysis will only focus on aspects that are specifically relevant for this paper: the first two excerpts are taken from one meeting in the plastic packaging company and demonstrate some fundamental aspects of how socioepistemics influence the participants' problem and solution work, while the remaining two excerpts focus on more complex aspects of this relationship which can be observed in interactions that took place during two meetings with a team in the pharmaceutical company.

Negotiating problem and solution formulations

The first excerpt shows how voice activity participants engage in interactional work to negotiate what counts as a problem and how it might be solved. In the excerpt, the participants are sitting around the meeting table and have just finished making notes on paper handouts which they now have before them. The handouts contain various symbols representing categories of work environment aspects. Amelia, a process facilitator, is interviewing the employees about which aspects of the work environment they have marked as problematic ("red") or helpful ("green").

Excerpt 1

1 Amelia: °yes° (0.6) other things? (0.6) down here
2 (1.5)
3 Amelia: [socially mentally bodily]
4 Noah: [e::h I ha::ve (.)] [down by]=
5 Max: [pftj.h a- tha:t]
6 Noah: =the bottom there >there I have written footwear<
7 Oliver: [yes]
8 Amelia: [yes]
9 Max: yes footwear I have put that here [over by]=
10 Amelia: [is it red or green?]
11 Max: =by concrete floor
12 Oliver: [it is red]
13 Max: [it is red]
14 Amelia: .h
15 Noah: °very red°
16 Amelia: a:nd why is it that?
17 (1.3)
18 Oliver: they are not good enough the shoes

19 Amelia: [no?]
 20 Max: [°no°]
 21 Teddy: twelve hours on a concrete floor then=
 22 Oliver: =yes so: those
 23 (1.4)
 24 Max: and maybe one could have soles a little more often
 25 [or insoles or]
 26 Oliver: [well well well I] bloody* do not believe those shoes, I
 27 mean you can get some [shoes]
 28 Teddy: [well] if we must keep the shoes
 29 we have now=
 30 Oliver: =yes=
 31 Teddy: =>but< then then we should really have new [soles]=
 32 Oliver: [yes]
 33 Teddy: =more often=
 34 Noah: =yes=
 35 Oliver: =but would it not be better to get some shoes which
 36 really worked out for us?
 37 Teddy: >well< I believe that would also be cheaper in the long
 38 run

The first part of the excerpts showcases how participants might indicate support for other participants' formulations of problems and solutions through affiliation and alignment: Amelia first asks the participants to present their markings, mentioning various categories printed on the handout (1.3). One employee, Noah, reports having written footwear on the handout, to which two other employees, Oliver and Max, affiliate (ll. 7 and 9), with Max adding that he had marked footwear elsewhere on the handout ("by concrete floor"). Affiliations are cooperative responses which endorse the affective stance of the previous speaker (Stivers et al., 2011), here Noah's stance towards the footwear. In comparison, Amelia's "yes" in line 8 merely aligns with Noah's response at the structural level of the interaction, indicating that his report is seen to fit her initial question (Stivers et al., 2011). This distinction becomes clear in the next question, where Amelia assumes a not-knowing position towards Noah's stance: she asks if the employees have marked footwear as being "red" or "green", and Oliver and Max both answer "red" in overlap, with Noah answering "very red" shortly after, indicating that the three employees are aware of the fact that they hold a shared stance towards the shoes.

In line 16, Amelia asks why the shoes were marked as red to which a third employee, Oliver, accounts that the shoes are "not good enough". A fourth employee, Teddy, once again brings up

the concrete floor of the production area as related to the footwear problem, mentioning the employees' long work hours as an additional circumstance which we can infer must increase the employees' strain. We can see the employees' proposals of candidate formulations about what causes the problem as belonging to an activity directed towards achieving consensus which can be called "problem work" (Francis, 1995; Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

Within the very next lines, a related type of work is undertaken which we label "solution work": after a pause, Max self-selects and proposes that the employees could receive new insoles more often (l. 24-25); the proposal is sequentially related to Oliver and Teddy's problem work, yet it does not favour any one of the proposed problem formulations. Rather, it seems oriented towards coordinating agreement about what would constitute a solution for the participants. The work of coordinating agreement about one or more solutions becomes necessary due to the fact that problems and solutions do not correspond one to one: for each candidate problem formulation, a number of different actions might exist that would count for the participants as a solution. Not all proposals should be seen as doing solution work: here, the downgraded epistemic status of Max's proposal marked by his use of terms such as "maybe" and "a little more often" suggests that he orients towards the proposal as being part of an extended sequence of discussing candidate solutions, rather than a common proposal projecting merely acceptance or rejection.

The remainder of the excerpt demonstrates how a lack of consensus around one problem formulation does not inhibit the participants' solution work. Oliver's next turn is abbreviated, but the "well" preface suggests upcoming disaffiliation with Max's proposed solution. Oliver can also be heard as referencing his earlier problem formulation focusing on the quality of the current shoes ("I bloody do not believe those shoes"), and potentially prefacing a suggestion to source new shoes ("I mean you can get some shoes"). Teddy then takes the floor, disaffiliating with Oliver by suggesting that sourcing new shoes might not be viable (ll. 28-29), presenting new insoles as an alternative solution (l. 31), to which both Oliver and Noah answer "yes". However, Oliver's rhetorically phrased question (ll. 35-36) suggests that he finds keeping the current shoes an inferior solution to getting new shoes and thus that his "yes" merely indicated alignment rather than affiliation with Teddy. Teddy offers an assessment that changing shoes would be cheaper than recurrently changing insoles. Although it was not clear on what basis Teddy described it as potentially unviable to source new shoes in lines 28-29, his reference to concerns of cost in line 37 suggests that his claim about the viability of sourcing new shoes was

based on expectations about how much money the company would be willing to spend on a solution.

It should be noted that various aspects of the work environment might be considered relevant in the participants' problem work and still be exempt from their solution work. Here, the hard flooring is mentioned in the problem work, but changing the flooring for something less hard is not entertained by the participants as a candidate solution in the excerpt (or later), and the absence of such a proposal is not marked verbally. The absence suggests that the participants hold somewhat shared expectations about which solutions are likely to be unviable - changing the flooring is a very costly initiative compared to buying new shoes or insoles.

As an additional point, the multiple overlaps indicates a rather fluid way of organizing the conversational floor (Morgenthaler, 1990) where the employees often self-select to answer Amelia's requests and questions at a given time. Such shared access to the floor is characteristic of participative decision-making interactions (Baraldi, 2013; Yeung, 2004a).

Epistemic authority in relation to problem and solution work

The next excerpt follows shortly after the first. Here, we turn to how the participants' differential rights to claim knowledge in relation to different epistemic domains, i.e. their different areas of epistemic authority, shapes the process of proposing and negotiating candidate problem and solution formulations. The employees are discussing how footwear problems might influence the well-being of the employees in a wider sense when the employees' manager, Finn, presents an assessment:

Excerpt 2

1 Noah: =and everything begins from the feet up as you know
2 i:t=
3 Finn: =I just want to [say we]=
4 Amelia: [that's the thing, right]
5 Finn: =say we certainly do not buy cheap shoes
6 Oliver: no: they are [bloody no no]
7 Noah: [nono but I don't] the soles are=
8 Arthur: =but they are in the cheap [end]

9 Finn: [we have] we have gone up in
 10 quality [several] times=
 11 M.E.? ²⁴: [[bunje?]]
 12 Noah: =°yes°
 13 Finn: those shoes they have been selected
 14 Amelia: °yes°
 15 (1.0)
 16 Amelia: but I mean one could say then .h=
 17 Max: =but then perhaps you should rather get soles every
 18 [third] or=
 19 Finn: [yes]

Finn takes the floor (“I just want to say”) to make an assessment about the price of the work shoes currently sourced by the company as being “not cheap”. Finn’s assessment can be seen as a defence of the work shoes currently offered to the employees, thereby countering the candidate problem formulation from excerpt 1 that the quality of the shoes is inadequate and that the company is motivated by keeping costs low. Thus, Finn could be said to address the normativity implied in the employees’ problem and solution work. Oliver and Noah indicate agreement with Finn’s assessment in overlap (ll. 6-7), thereby distancing themselves from such a normative position, while Arthur recycles Finn’s “not cheap shoes” description into shoes from the “cheap end”, which can be seen as a mitigated disaffiliation with Finn’s assessment. In his next turn, Finn describes the company as having “gone up in quality several times”, thereby further defending the company’s actions. Indeed, in line 13, Finn states explicitly that the shoes have been “selected”, implying that the employees’ perspective has been considered in decisions over which work shoes to buy. As a middle manager, and one with a long history in the organization at that, Finn holds privileged knowledge about the price of the work shoes bought by the company compared to those offered previously, thereby lending Finn epistemic authority on the matter. This authority is marked through a strong epistemic stance in the upgrade to his first assessment (“certainly”; l. 5) and in the direct and minimal way his other announcements are presented (ll. 9-10 and 13) (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). Amelia aligns with Finn, however her next turn is cut short by Max (l. 17), who repeats his proposal to change soles more often, to which Finn affiliates. By neither presuming nor precluding that the shoe quality is problematic, Max’s proposal sidesteps the moral criticism of the company that could be inferred from the employees’ negative descriptions of the current shoes.

Challenging epistemic authority

The next excerpt is taken from workshop sessions in the pharmaceutical company and illustrates how arguments which draw on the participants' epistemic authority can be challenged through arguments which explicitly or implicitly call into question the moral status of the other part. In this workshop, the employees had also complained of various problems related to their work shoes, specifically problems that had arisen after a managerial decision that employees could only wear certain models of safety shoes from one specific supplier. The employees' health and safety representative, Beth, is discussing an argument that has been presented outside of the workshop by various line and middle managers that only employees from the present department complain about their work shoes, despite all departments supposedly having the same selection to choose from.

Excerpt 3

- 1 Beth: well I mean I- (.) I personally feel (.) that that I
2 mean hh I certainly can't ignore as a health and safety
3 representative that those shoe problems exist, I simply
4 can't eh because it takes up so much attention e:hm and
5 it doesn't just take up attention in your team, it also
6 takes up attention in many of the other teams ehm ^a:nd
7 a:nd° and what I'd like very much as a health and
8 safety representative that is for the management to (.)
9 like open up and say there IS really a problem here in
10 ((the department)) eh, and it might be that the others
11 don't have the problem (1.0) I'm a little indifferent
12 about that because I can both SEE your feet,
13 [°I just about said<]=
14 F.E.?: [hehe]
15 Beth: =cause I've been shown I don't know how many feet
16 ((others giggle))
17 Beth: plus we've also heard from (.) the foot lady that she
18 has never had as many patients before as she does now
19 >that that that< there IS a problem in ((the
20 department))=
21 F.E.?: =hm=
22 Beth: =and I would very much like that that if that that I
23 mean if the management=
24 Tim: ="yes"=

25 Beth: =acknowledged [[]
 26 Tim: [I still just think] it's thought-
 27 provoking that (l.0) the same thing has been
 28 implemented all over the joint right=
 29 Beth: =yes [you're totally right, you're totally right]
 30 Tim: [why is it then just ((this department))]=
 31 =[it's] just like interesting I think that it=
 32 Daniel: [it]
 33 Daniel: =it isn't
 34 Katie: it really [isn't]
 35 Daniel: [because] when the rest of us are sitting
 36 around chatting around town and we know a lot of people
 37 out in the factories, there's lots who have problems
 38 out there as well, but if you ask then then then people
 39 will say there is not that's what the management will
 40 say, there's no problems, we haven't heard anything (.)
 41 where's the filter then? (.)

In the excerpt, we see Beth self-categorize as a health and safety representative (HSR), mentioning an obligation tied to this role that she cannot ignore “those shoe problems” (Jayyusi, 1984). She next reports that the problem “also takes up attention in many of the other teams”, thereby contradicting the management’s claim and arguing that the problem is independently corroborated (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Beth next reports that she would like management to acknowledge the employees’ problem formulation regarding the shoes, claiming indifference towards the management’s argument based on her own experiences with (and thus direct epistemic access to) employees showing her their feet (ll. 12, 15). Beth’s experience is corroborated by a paraphrased report from the “the foot lady”, seemingly a professional who employees at the worksite can consult about foot problems, but whose position or organizational affiliation is not accounted for in the recordings. Still, the “foot lady” can be heard as an expert whose epistemic authority is invoked by Beth to support the employees’ problem formulation blaming the shoes.

Next, Beth repeats her wish that the management acknowledge the employees’ complaints, to which Tim, the employees’ manager, aligns (l. 24) before starting a disaffiliating turn in overlap with Beth (l. 26). Here, he references the managements’ argument by describing it as “thought-provoking” and “interesting” that the problems are only found in the present department, when the rules have been implemented “all over the joint”. The management’s argument (as presented here by Tim) implies a logic stating that if the work shoes provided by the company were

problematic in themselves, employees in other departments would also complain. The lack of such complaints (according to Tim) is used to question the employees' problem formulation.

In spite of Tim's disaffiliation with Beth's previous turn, Beth expresses strong alignment in overlap with Tim, suggesting that she knows and accepts Tim's argument as relevant. In contrast, Daniel and subsequently Katie disaffiliate with Tim's claim and thus his questioning stance towards the shoe problems, with Daniel accounting for his disaffiliation through a reference to conversations with other employees outside of the workplace. On the basis of this counter-claim, he poses what can be heard as a rhetorical question ("where's the filter then?"), implying that somebody is holding back information about the footwear problems of employees outside the department. This claim is next upgraded by Daniel to accusations of lying "up there", referencing non-specifically the managers that claim that the problem only exists in the present department. Thus, Daniel draws upon his epistemic authority over what colleagues from other departments say in situations where there are no managers present to question the management's argument.

The excerpt thus demonstrates how basing problem formulations on claims for which one holds epistemic authority can be considered a kind of rhetorical strategy. It can be suggested that this strategy is likely to be especially relevant when one does not hold sufficient decision authority to ameliorate the formulated problem, as it is the case for the employees in this study since the management controls the range of shoes that employees can choose between. However, even problem formulations which focus on areas where employees hold epistemic authority can be questioned through argumentation which does not directly question their epistemic authority, but instead the validity of their inferences.

While the employees in the pharmaceutical company did not reach a decision about how to address the shoe problem in their first two workshop meetings, their manager, Tim, described at a later meeting that an agreement had been made with the shoe supplier to provide new and lighter work shoes which the employees could try out for a period of time. Excerpt 4 falls after this "solution" has been described and begins with a process facilitator, Seth, asking the employees about their reasons for problematizing the shoes. The excerpt demonstrates the employees' awareness of how their epistemic authority constitutes an important rhetorical resource in their problem and solution work; however, both the employees and the facilitator

also display an understanding that claims which draw upon one's epistemic authority may be seen by others as motivated by stake or interest, and thus potentially untrustworthy.

Excerpt 4

1 Seth: which which was the most red I mean (.) I mean was it
2 the shoes and the heaviness and the lack of choice a:nd
3 or was it that they didn't listen that a lid was put on
4 or that bad decisions were made, you follow me?
5 Daniel: mhm
6 Katie: mhm=
7 Seth: =you complained about the shoes but was it in reality
8 just as much (.) something organizational, something
9 about the [decision-making process]
10 Emily: [well]
11 Daniel: no, I mean Katie now has foot problems right and and=
12 Katie: and I'm using my seventh pair hehe
13 Seth: the seventh pair
14 Katie: the seventh pair hehe so I've tried many different,
15 right, and they're very heavy
16 James: yes
17 Katie: they are not [like]
18 Seth: [so it's] a proper physical red piece for
19 you
20 Katie: [yes]=
21 Daniel: [ye:s]=
22 Seth =not to have received some [proper]=
23 Katie: [yes]
24 Seth: =shoes yet (.) maybe it's tiresome in itself to have
25 tried so many and (.)
26 Katie: I mean (.) we've been through many shoes, at least
27 among the clogs right
28 James: mm
29 Katie: so:
30 Daniel: mm
31 Katie: I've done a lot certainly
32 Daniel: but then it's also frustrating like hell=
33 Katie: =yes:=-

34 Daniel: =if nothing is done about it (.) when you see the
35 physical consequences of of of that shitty footwear and
36 then I mean (.) >it it< it is surely frustrating, but
37 Tim has also done he can you could say, right, so: but
38 sure it is frustrating that further out in I mean ((the
39 department manager)) she's trying to put a lid on it
40 because she can't cope hearing anymore about it, that
41 won't do
42 James: mm
43 Daniel: so surely one is red about that (.)
44 James: mm
45 ((64 lines omitted))
46 Daniel: but but it is a little annoying
47 James: mhm
48 Daniel: and that's the way it is, it's also what affects
49 affects us about that footwear right why the hell do we
50 have to, we work in a laboratory, why do we have to
51 wear safety shoes
52 James: hm
53 Daniel: sure I see that those flasks are heavy but still in
54 forty years nobody has dropped them on their toes
55 ((sighs)) so I mean in that way
56 Emily: °no° (.) but we can't change that [hehe]
57 Katie: [hehe]
58 Daniel: [no no we can't],
59 instead we'll have to get some safety footwear we can
60 wear
61 Katie: [yes]
62 Emily: [yes] that's the thing

First, Seth raises the question of whether the aspects related to the shoes or to the management's handling of the shoe problem were seen as most "red" by the employees. A prompt for alignment ("you follow me") leads to alignment markers from both Daniel and Katie. In Seth's next turn he asks if the employees' complaints were "in reality" motivated "just as much" by aspects of the decision-making process. The question can be heard as addressing the possibility that the employees' might have overemphasized the shoes' negative aspects in an domain where they held epistemic authority (their bodily sensations) in order to influence decisions in a domain where they had little epistemic authority (the new shoe regulations and the various concerns these addressed). Affiliating from the employees here could thus be taken as admitting dishonesty. Here, Emily overlaps with "well", a typical disaffiliation preface (Heritage, 2015), while Daniel responds more flatly with a "no", providing Katie's foot problems as an account

for why the employees' physical problems were central to their complaint. Over the next lines, Katie then reports having tried many models of shoes.

Seth then proposes formulating Katie's lack of "proper" shoes as a "proper physical red piece", a formulation which Katie and Daniel affiliates with. This formulation can be heard as ratifying Katie and Daniels' responses as support for the veracity of their physical problems, further indicating the relevance of Seth's previous question as addressing potential dishonesty on the employees' part. Seth completes his turn by proposing that what Katie has been through is tiresome in itself, to which Katie repeats the argument that many shoes have been tried. The statement "I've done a lot certainly" can be seen as defending her choice to problematize the shoes by directing attention to her own effort in finding a solution. Thus, the employees can be seen as striving to reaffirm their previous complaints about the shoes while not acknowledging Seth's suggestion that their raising the problem was motivated by frustration with the management's decision.

However, the next part of the excerpt sees a number of the previous arguments being presented again by the employees. Daniel describes it as frustrating that nothing has been done about the footwear problems, suggesting that the department manager has tried to stop the employees' critique of the work shoes. After this, the employee Emily describes her problems with the footwear as being of a physical nature, and this pattern of Katie and Emily emphasizing especially the physical aspects of the problem and Daniel raising the managerial aspects is found throughout the excerpt. When Daniel again invokes non-physical aspects of the problem formulation (the requirement that the employees wear safety shoes when no accidents are claimed to have occurred, ll. 48-51 and 53-55), Emily aligns with Daniel before stating that "we can't change that" and starts to laugh. Katie laughs at the same time, suggesting affiliation, while Daniel also affiliates with Emily before making the upshot formulation that the employees should focus on getting different "safety footwear". Both Katie and Emily affiliate with Daniel. Thus, the non-viability of other solutions than those which focus specifically on sourcing new shoes is seemingly invoked to end the negotiation of Daniels' problem formulation on the one side and that of Katie and Emily on the other.

Conclusion

So far, little research has explored how employees participating in voice activities reach decisions about which working conditions to attempt to change and how. In this article, we have explored this process as one characterised by problem and solution work, work which is shaped by the participants' orientations to the epistemic order in interaction. Our analysis offers various contributions to how participatory decision-making can be understood in the workplace and beyond.

First, we have shown how problems and suggestions are actively constructed in voice interactions. This is in contrast to how much of the literature on voice tends to take the content of voice as set and instead focus on "transmission" problems such as whether this content is actually voiced or how it is received by its targets (Axley, 1984; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). Even in relation to a seemingly mundane topic such as work shoes, examples were provided both of how a number of competing candidate problem and solution formulations were presented and negotiated by the participants.

Second, socioepistemics were shown to play a key role in this negotiation process. This was seen in how patterns of epistemic authority among employees, managers and outside experts (such as "the shoe lady") in relation to different aspects of work shoes contributed to supporting or questioning the facticity of various problem formulations and thus the relevance of their corresponding candidate solutions. In addition, the participants drew upon various argumentative practices rooted in epistemics, such as the management's claim to know that the problem only occurred in one department, or the employees' claim that the problem also existed elsewhere, but that the complaints were not passed on. While relevant and sufficient information has often been named as a prerequisite for employees to effectively engage in voice (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Harley, 1999; Marshall & Stohl, 1993), the excerpts provided here suggest that an adequate epistemic status is also required; specifically, a status which is recognised by those the information is presented to.

Third and more generally, a number of studies have focused on how access to participation in decision-making is limited to those in power, both within the workplace (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Heery, 2015) and in other settings (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Farkas, 2013). In comparison, the present study demonstrates how the employees' chances of influencing their working conditions might be limited at a very minute level through the "micro-political" process

of problem and solution work and the socio-moral order which regulates the participants' claims to various kinds of knowledge (Måseide, 2007). For example, both of the teams studied here chose to pursue a somewhat "minimal" solution (the insoles as opposed to different or additional shoes in the first excerpts and different work shoes as opposed to a rollback to using the previous shoe-supplier in the latter) which was framed as relatively feasible, though potentially only suboptimal by the participants. On the basis of our analysis, it can be suggested that incurring change through participation might prove difficult in cases where the participants' ability to coordinate consensus around one shared problem formulation and/or proposed remedial action problems is challenged, for example for problems which are not widely recognized *as* problems.

Although concern has been expressed over ascriptions of epistemic status that are not specifically grounded in the interlocutors' identifiable orientations (e.g., Lindwall et al., 2016), we believe that a socioepistemic lens makes important aspects of how authority is negotiated among interactants available to analysis. Beyond participatory decision-making, the study also provides various examples of how socioepistemic points can support analyses of argumentation and rhetoric (Amer, 2009), a line of work that we hope will be further developed in the future.

6. Article two: Accounting for job control in participatory organizational-level interventions – collective sensemaking as a missing link

Abstract

In participatory organizational-level interventions, employees are invited to voice suggestions for improving the work environment. It is claimed in the literature that participatory interventions increase employees' job control. However, empirical studies do not provide clear support for this relationship, and the undergirding mechanisms are not well understood. We present and analyse interactions in an intervention with blue-collar employees to demonstrate how the participants enact their job control through a process of collective sensemaking. Specifically, the participants negotiate accounts about their job control and whether they hold sufficient control to relevantly affect the work environment. The negotiation of accounts shapes the participants' engagement in the intervention, leading to differences in the number and the scope of initiatives that participants decide to pursue to improve the working environment, even when the participants come from the same work setting and discuss similar problems. The analytical findings point to shortcomings in how job control is typically conceptualized in the literature as well as highlight a need for future participatory intervention studies that focus on how outcomes are shaped by interactional processes.

Introduction

Participatory organizational-level interventions (POLIs) enable employees to address and potentially solve problems related to the work environment by voicing complaints and suggestions to the management, and participating in POLIs may also enhance the well-being of employees and prevent work-related health issues (Egan et al., 2007; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen et al., 2010). In recent years, POLIs have received increased attention in the work environment literature, and their use is recommended by international bodies such as the World Health Organization and the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (Burton, 2010; European Network for Workplace Health Promotion, 2007). Among the advantages of POLIs

listed in the literature are increased senses of fairness, justice, and social support as well as the focus of this paper, increased job control (Egan et al., 2007; Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2010). Job control has been defined and operationalized in a number of ways (Breugh, 1985), but is generally seen as the social authority over decision-making in relation to work tasks (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Increased job control has been described as a main factor through which participatory interventions improve employee health and well-being (Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2007; Bond & Bunce, 2001; Härtinen, Kinnunen, Pekkonen, & Kalimo, 2007).

However, studies investigating whether POLIs increase job control show mixed results, and many of the studies which do report increases in participants' job control describe that the interventions entailed work reorganizations, which in itself can be expected to increase the participants' job control (Egan et al., 2007). Thus, it is possible that the increased job control in these cases was not a result of the participatory process in particular but a result of the subsequent reorganizations of the workplace and tasks. A link between POLIs and job control therefore seems contingent on concrete change and the mechanisms which determine whether any given POLI will increase the participants' job control are not well understood. At a general level, the potentials and limitations of participation has been the topic of a critical debate and it has been argued that POLIs could be detrimental for the psychosocial work environment if they implicitly transfer responsibility for maintaining a healthy work environment from the management to the employees without simultaneously increasing the employees' decision authority (Busck et al., 2010; Johnstone & Ackers, 2015). Consequentially, it is highly relevant to increase our understanding of the conditions that are necessary in order for POLIs to increase employees' job control.

We argue that POLI research should adopt a conceptualization of job control which highlights the social aspects of how job control is made sense of in practice. Through illustrative examples of POLI interactions in a blue-collar industrial context, this article shows how POLIs serve as arenas for collective sensemaking processes, where the decision-making process is shaped by how the participants construct and enact their job control. We shed light on how this social enactment process is guided by the ways in which participants' negotiate accounts related to job control. These accounts provide a context for the participants' decisions by making different types of information relevant to the interaction, such as previous events in the organization, formal job aspects or design aspects of the POLI. Ultimately, how participants enact their job

control shapes which changes to the work environment they pursue, and thereby the likely long-term outcomes of the intervention. Also discussed is how regarding job control in terms of its enactment carries a number of implications for both POLI theory and practice, as well as for the wider job control literature.

Participatory organizational-level interventions and job control – a critical review

In recent years, researchers have paid increased attention to POLIs as a means for improving employees' health and well-being (Egan et al., 2007; Nielsen, 2013; von Thiele Schwarz, Nielsen, Stenfors-Hayes, & Hasson, 2017). POLIs come in many forms, ranging from performance-focused lean-based interventions (von Thiele Schwarz et al., 2017) to strictly well-being oriented interventions (Maes et al., 1998). In addition to their health effects, POLIs are claimed to improve employees' senses of fairness, justice, and social support, and to potentially lead to better decisions than would have been made by the management or outside experts alone (Nielsen et al., 2010). In addition, the participatory element in POLIs is claimed to increase employees' job control (Egan et al., 2007; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Nielsen et al., 2010), which in turn is described as a key mechanism in improving the employees' health and well-being (Bambra et al., 2007; Bond & Bunce, 2001; Hättinen et al., 2007). In itself, high job control has been associated with high levels of job satisfaction and reduced discomfort (Parker & Price, 1994), as well as with low levels of job stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Within the POLI literature, job control is typically conceptualized as a relatively stable perception held by employees and measured at the individual level through questionnaires (e.g. Hättinen et al., 2007). The idea that job control is perceived suggests that there might be variance in how employees with similar formal job properties view their job control, however such variance is typically treated as statistical error rather than a psychological or social phenomenon of academic interest. This is problematic, since there might be a number of relevant causes for this variance. First, employees might simply assess their job control differently, which is important because employees consider whether and how they are able to influence their jobs on an ongoing basis, considering the feedback they receive from the organization (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and the participants' ideas about what can be gained from participating is likely

to influence how they engage in POLIs (Harlos, 2001; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). Second, since employees typically hold different degrees of job control in relation to different job aspects (Breugh, 1985), they might also think of different job aspects when assessing their job control. Distinguishing between employees' job control in relation to different job aspects is important because only increases in job control that allow employees to mitigate the specific demands they experience are likely to buffer against strain (Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010). Third, when different employee groups participate in POLIs, the groups are likely to have different degrees of success with improving their work environment, yet only few intervention studies discuss the causes of between-group differences in how the participants' job control is affected by the intervention (e.g., Tsutsumi et al., 2009).

Another conceptual weakness which has methodological implications is that job control perceptions are typically taken to reflect both formal and informal aspects of control: for example, Karasek and Theorell mention organizational policies and membership in influential work groups as circumstances which shape the individual's job control (Karasek & Theorell, 1990, p. 60; see also Egan et al., 2007), and the related job content questionnaire, which has been employed in various POLIs (e.g. Bourbonnais, 2006; Landsbergis & Vivona-Vaughan, 1995; Mikkelsen et al., 2000), groups together responses about whether the employee is allowed to make own decisions; has (little) decision freedom, or has a lot of say in its dimension of decision authority (Karasek et al., 1998). Unfortunately, this means that it is typically not possible to assess whether changes to employees' reported job control perceptions in POLI studies is caused by changes in how they perceive their formal or their informal job control. At a more general level, viewing job control as something that is perceived at the individual level does not reflect how POLIs are fundamentally social activities involving employees and managers in shared decision-making, as it is not clear how individual-level perceptions of job control are negotiated towards a shared understanding that allows the group to make consensual decisions.

Another problem with the purported link between POLIs and increased job control is that it is not clearly supported by empirical studies. A number of intervention studies support the claim that participatory interventions increase various measures of job control (e.g. Bond & Bunce, 2001; Maes et al., 1998; Orth-Gomér, Eriksson, Moser, Theorell, & Fredlund, 1994; Wall & Clegg, 1981); however, an equally large number of studies show only very small or no increases in measures related to job control (e.g. Bourbonnais, 2006; Bourbonnais, Brisson, & Vézina,

2011; Landsbergis & Vivona-Vaughan, 1995; Mikkelsen et al., 2000; Uchiyama et al., 2013). A POLI study by Aust and colleagues (2010) even reported a decrease in job control (operationalized as ‘influence’), possibly as a consequence of the participants’ expectations being disappointed, and others have also argued that process factors such as ‘boundary setting,’ and ‘managing local expectations,’ shape the outcomes of POLIs (Dahl-Jørgensen & Saksvik, 2005). Whether the participation component of POLIs specifically increases job control is obscured by the fact that POLIs can involve changes to the organization of work which increase job control in their own right. For example, In a study by Maes and colleagues (1998), a task group of workers was established through a POLI and given authority over the entire production process. And in Wall and Clegg’s classic study of work redesign (1981), a ‘fundamental shift of responsibilities from the supervisory roles to the established teams’ was undertaken in the intervention under study (p. 41). Bond and Bunce (2001) specifically prescribed that the participatory groups in their study should ‘develop and implement work organization changes that might increase people’s job control’ (p.294), such as new ways of assignment distribution. The fact that many POLI studies do not give a detailed account of the tangible changes resulting from the POLI challenges our ability to attribute increases in job control to the participation component of the POLI (see, e.g., Härtinen et al., 2007). Thus, while it remains theoretically likely that employees *may* experience increased job control by participating in organizational decision-making processes, more knowledge is needed about the governing mechanisms to determine under what circumstances this is the case (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017).

In the following, we present a conceptualization of job control based on collective sensemaking theory which is then used to analyse how individual perceptions of job control are negotiated to allow group decisions in POLIs. We argue that employees’ job control perceptions are likely to be influenced in the process.

Job control as enacted through processes of collective sensemaking

Within organizations, employees and managers collectively make sense of the organizational context and negotiate future actions in a number of social settings (Garfinkel, 1967b; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1977; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). From a sensemaking perspective, figuring out what characterizes the current situation (i.e. ‘what is going on here’) involves producing what counts as facts for the members ‘in flight’ (Garfinkel, 1967b, p. 79). Different

understandings of the current situation project certain solutions as adequate, meaning that discussions of ‘what is going on here’ also hold implications for ‘what should we do next.’ What is characteristic of collective sensemaking processes relative to individual sensemaking is that meaning is coordinated among the participants which allows them to subsequently act as a collective (Boyce, 1995). This coordination of meaning does not imply that all participants must agree (J. R. Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). Rather, the point is that meaning becomes socially enacted, in both senses of the term: the enacted meaning is regarded as being ‘in effect’ (similar to how laws are enacted), but it is also played out in the actions that follow (similar to enacting a play). In Weick’s terms, the participants ‘implant that which they later discover and call “knowledge” ’ or ‘understanding of their environment’ (Weick, 1977, p. 267).

Empirically, the process of collective sensemaking can be observed in how organization members negotiate accounts about the organization in their interaction with each other (Antaki, 1994; Maitlis, 2005). Accounts are ‘discursive constructions of reality’ (Maitlis, 2005, p. 21) which can be used to render a situation meaningful and actionable for the recipients. Accounts are structured around cues extracted from the organizational environment which are imbued with meaning by the interlocutors. The cues could stem from a number of sources, such as narratives of past management decisions, numbers on a spreadsheet, or operational occurrences (e.g. unexpected breakdowns of production machinery), which may influence many facets of employee behaviour. Accounts of the same situation may differ among individuals, depending on the information and arguments informing them. These features allow accounts to be presented strategically, for example, to point towards a certain future action, according to how the situation at hand is framed. However, there are also contingencies which must be met for accounts to influence collective decision making: accounts must be produced so as to be understandable and convincing to the listeners in the setting, which involves utilizing information that is familiar or at least taken as credible by the listeners (Garfinkel, 1967b; Watson & Goulet, 1998). Others might choose to challenge the account, for example, through offering competing accounts or modifying the account through their own formulations (Yeung, 2004b), whereby the accounts can become enrolled in agendas which their original authors did not intend (Maitlis, 2005).

Collective sensemaking provides a relevant framework for understanding the link between POLI and job control for three reasons: first, collective sensemaking is especially prominent in situations where interlocutors orient to a changing situation (Weick et al., 2005). The way that

decision making in POLIs differs from the normal chain of command potentially constitutes such a change for the participants. Second, the situation that POLIs set up is not just new, but also ambiguous: POLIs contain an inherent unpredictability for the participants as the fate of the employees' suggestions often rests with non-present organization members, such as members of management, who have the requisite authority to approve or disapprove the suggestions resulting from the decision-making process. Since the participants can only assume how others will react to their suggestions, their decisions are likely to reflect their ongoing assessments about the extent of their control. As a consequence, employees would not necessarily be expected to enact their job control the same way throughout POLI activities. Collective sensemaking theory provides us with a framework for investigating these changing enactments.

Method

The qualitative data in this article was drawn from a POLI conducted among industrial operators working for a Danish pharmaceutical company which produces goods for a highly regulated global market. Generally, industrial operators²³ are considered to have a low degree of control over the job demands imposed on them (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), with working conditions characterized by high-paced, standardized, and repetitive tasks, which have been found to relate to negative health effects (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). The aim of the present POLI was to improve the work environment of industrial operators by implementing a system for continuous participatory improvement, which was hypothesized to help the operators identify especially strenuous work tasks and develop realistic solutions for decreasing job demands or increasing job resources in relation to these (Gupta et al., 2015).

Among other elements, the intervention featured a series of action-planning workshops (APWs) in which groups of 6 to 10 operator participants discussed potential solutions to problematic working conditions that the participants had identified at a previous workshop. The participants were mostly unskilled, but with a high degree of experience for the job. Since the workshop groups consisted of participants who were members of the same work team or shift, they could discuss shared tasks and experiences. A total of 11 APWs were conducted with different employees appearing in each APW.

²³ For the remainder of the paper, the term "operator" is used when discussing the specific employees who are represented in our data, while "employee" is used to refer to employees in POLIs in general.

All APWs were audio recorded, yielding more than 28 hours of interactions, which were subsequently transcribed. Transcripts of all of the workshop recordings were then read to get an overview of the content. The transcript material was supplemented by additional data on non-verbal aspects of the group discussions gathered from the field notes of workshop observers.

In order to investigate the connection between job control and participation, we searched for sequences of interaction where employees attempted to exercise control over decisions regarding their job tasks. Since the workshop programme was designed with the aim of facilitating the creation of action plans, we decided to let the emergence of the action plans guide our focus. Thus collective sensemaking processes (Boyce, 1995) leading to action plans became our unit of analysis. We therefore identified where the theme of each action plan was mentioned for the first time, tracking the emergence of the action plan through to its finalization.

Afterwards, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted of the collective sensemaking processes. This analysis showed that the topic of job control was often present, either explicitly or implicitly, in the discussions about the feasibility of specific action plans. This informed our choice to investigate accounts related to job control as part of action planning sequences as a collective sensemaking process. Finally, repeated readings of the selected transcript sequences were conducted with a focus on how the participants' control-related accounts specifically came to inform decision making within each workshop. Thus, our aim was not to evaluate the adequacy or veracity of the accounts, but to understand the circumstances of their production and their impact. On this basis, three sequences from three different APWs were selected for presentation in this paper based on how these sequences illustrated various relevant aspects of how the accounts were negotiated. The sequences are representative of the ambivalence and, on some occasions, the shifts in dominant accounts and interpretations that occurred in the workshop meetings.

The sequences are presented in a narrative style containing both background information and condensed descriptions of relevant events in the workshop (similar to what has been called a realist tale; Van Maanen, 2011) as well as transcribed excerpts from the workshop recordings along with the analysis of these excerpts.

Sequence number	1	2	3
Operator participants (cited)	8 (Ronny, Frank, Cooper, Jill)	9 (Jesse, Jack, Jimmy, Huey)	4 (Bob, Tony, Roy)
Line manager	Paul (Laura also present)	Laura	Laura
Observers	Two research assistants	Research assistant, middle manager	Research assistant
Number of agreed-upon action plans	2	5	6

Table 5. Analyzed intervention action planning workshops for chapter 6.

In the transcript excerpts presented in this article, all names of participants have been changed and all quotes translated from Danish to English. In the translation process, we aimed to preserve the structure of the participants' utterances in order to show the improvised nature of the interaction. The transcript excerpts presented in this article employ a modified version of the Gail Jefferson transcription system (see appendix).

The workshops

In the POLI workshops, discussions were guided by either an experienced consultant or a member of the research group who acted as a process facilitator. Furthermore, the operators' line managers were also present in order to provide relevant information or participate in parts of the discussions which fell within their managerial discretion.

At the beginning of the APWs, the participants were told that 'the purpose of the workshops is to give the participants an opportunity to address problematic working conditions.' The facilitator presented the group with a chart outlining the issues that had been brought up in a previous work environment screening workshop and encouraged the participants to find areas of improvement. If the group agreed to work on a given issue, the facilitator would ask the participants questions about the issue in order to bring forth a detailed understanding of what the

participants believed to be the cause and how the problem could be mitigated. The participants often took different positions, which led to discussions moderated by the facilitator. Once the participants had developed a more or less shared understanding, the facilitator instructed the team to begin formulating an action plan by writing down the names of those responsible and the titles of the tasks to be performed on a small action plan template. The participants were told that they were to implement the action plans after the workshop, either by themselves or with the assistance of their line managers or other relevant organization members. The action plans therefore had to relate to something within their influence, the scope of which was referred to as their 'action radius' by the facilitator. The participants were also told to monitor progress on the action plans systematically and visually following Kaizen principles from lean management (Imai, 1986), a management system already in use at the company.

Analysis

Sequence 1 - Stuck within the radius

After briefly introducing the purpose with the workshop to the participants, the facilitator of this workshop asked the operators how they felt about working on the challenge of conducting action plans later in the workshop. This led to objections from the operators about why it would be futile for them to engage in changing their working conditions. This first excerpt shows how the action radius was used as a form of conceptual tool in the discussions which offered different ways of making sense of the operators' job control. Here, the action radius concept is presented by the facilitator as a seeming attempt to counter an emerging account developed by various operators in concert:

Ronny: =...but there are some of those things ((i.e. identified work environment problems)) that we are not in charge of at all (.) and no matter what we think and do, we can't change them

Facilitator: That's a good point, that there is something that's beyond your=

Ronny: =Completely beyond our, eh, Paul ((the team leader)) isn't either=

Frank: =No, even Paul isn't qualified to do it

Ronny: (((the department manager)) isn't even, I mean, it's beyond their=

Facilitator: =Action radius, we call it here (.) I kind of see it like=

Ronny: =Well, it's government agencies and so on, who=

Facilitator: =I kind of see it like, how long are your arms, which knobs can you turn, there's something that is beyond your reach=

Ronny: =Yes=

Facilitator: =That's a good point (.) on the other hand you think 'I wonder if there isn't always something that can be done' (.) I mean, I wonder if there's something even though the overall lines are laid down elsewhere, I wonder if there is something within the action radius that can be done anyway (.) in any case, that's what we can look into

Here, two accounts proliferate in the alternating statements made by the operators on the one side and the facilitator on the other side. The operators' account, presented here by Ronny and Frank, expresses that some of the work environment problems pointed out by the operators in the previous workshop are outside of their control and even outside the control of their line and department managers. Specifically, Ronny mentions that it is 'government agencies' that really control these matters, thereby providing an explanation for why the problems cannot be influenced by the operators themselves. From our supplementary data, we know that both Danish and non-Danish government agencies imposed various types of regulation on the production process, and that the requirements imposed by this regulation placed various demands on the operators in relation to which equipment could be used, how closely the production process should be monitored, and how deviations from the production guidelines should be handled. The agencies' influence on the work setting seems to be well-known by the other participants and does not entail requests for elaboration from Ronny.

The facilitator picks up on Ronny's statement that some problems are outside of their control, and uses it as an opportunity to present the action radius. A few turns later in the discussion, the facilitator poses what seems like a rhetorical question suggesting that the operators' action radius allows at least some actions to be taken in regard to the problems, even though the root cause of the problem might not be addressed. He also suggests that this question be explored

further. The implication of forwarding the action radius concept this way is that participants could still benefit from exploring initiatives which they do not consider optimal.

An interesting contradiction can be noted regarding how the action radius frames the operators' job control: through the formulation 'within reach', the facilitator describes the operators' action radius with a spatial metaphor. We are seldom in doubt about whether something is physically within our reach. However, the facilitator's invitation to further explore the opportunities within the operators' action radius suggests that the operators might *not* be aware of, or have critically assessed, their options. The contradiction illustrates how different accounts frame the operators' job control differently. A later account in the same workshop exemplifies how such accounts can be negotiated. The account was given by an operator after further protests, about which the facilitator remarked that the operators seemed to be thinking 'what's the point?' in regard to attempting to change the work environment:

Cooper: It's not about that, "what's the point," because I=

Jill: =No, we know that already=

Cooper: =Because I, well I could very well go take on something with ((an operator not present)), let's say the buckets; I was in the first workshop regarding what was made in ((an in-house ergonomics project)); what you first run into is that if you change the bucket size, then it won't fit the ((emptying tables)) anymore

Facilitator: Mm

Cooper: The next thing is that there's not space in the ((production management system)) to take in that many buckets, and we don't have the freezing capacity for them. This means if you take the buckets, then when you start working on it, you run into all these challenges, so what you originally thought, "oh the buckets, that'll be easy," no, it must also be certified suppliers and the like, so suddenly=

Facilitator: =Yes=

Cooper: =From one thinking, "well, that's a 15-minute job," it is the kind of thing which no one can manage anymore

In this excerpt, Cooper (backed by team leader Jill) first denied that the operators were simply assuming a sceptical stance towards the intervention, producing instead an account of how he experienced a range of problems in a previous project that tried to address one of the subjects the operators had identified as problematic. The account was elaborated by bringing up the limits of the production management system, regulatory constraints, and freezing capacity. Changes to the emptying tables would require lengthy new validation procedures in order to ensure that the quality of the pharmaceutical product would not be harmed. Increasing freezing capacity would also be highly challenging, as changes to the freezing rooms would cause dust and dirt to enter the production process. The reconstruction required for such changes could only take place if production were halted, entailing large profit losses. Both operators and line managers described such complications repeatedly during the workshops. At a general level, Cooper's account positioned himself as ultimately powerless in the face of a problem that had at first seemed actionable and delimited, thereby running counter to the facilitator's account about the possibility of there being 'knobs to turn.'

The negotiation persisted between variations of the facilitator's account of there being possible initiatives within the operators' action radius and the operators' account of not being able to affect their own problems. Several times throughout the workshop, the operators voiced dissatisfaction over having identified work environment problems primarily beyond their action radius. Following this, the team leader urged the operators to go after 'low-hanging fruits.' This referred to action plans that could be implemented through the means already available to the operators, such as arranging for the department manager to visit the production site to talk through various problems the operators were facing. Two action plans were eventually agreed upon among the operators. However, these action plans did not address the problems that were most important to the operators. The workshop ended with the operators expressing their scepticism over the intervention design, arguing that they had not been sufficiently briefed about the fact that they would be held responsible for conducting the subsequent changes. They would have preferred to have been instructed in identifying more actionable problems to begin with. Thus, discussing topics considered by the operators to be beyond their action radius seemed to lead to an accentuation of the operators' account of having low job control in relation to the identified problems. As the operators' action radius was mainly discussed in the context of having little or no influence, it came to symbolize the narrow limits of the operators' control rather than the 'knobs within reach' that the facilitator initially suggested the operators look for.

Sequence 2 - Expanding the radius

In another APW, the participating operators discussed having problems getting in touch with maintenance staff during machine malfunctioning, especially during night shifts. The operators rarely knew what to do during the malfunctioning, which led to them calling staff from other departments in search of help or to improvising their own repairs. The operators seemed jaded about their chances of alleviating this problem since previous complaints about it to management had not resolved the matter. For example, one operator stated:

‘I can note ((the problem)) (.) and I have called attention to ((it)) (.) because attention has been called to this many times (.) you can say that my action radius is no wider’.

Another operator stated that the management would neglect the issue if there was no immediate financial gain, a recurrent account presented by operators in relation to persisting work environment problems. In contrast to the operators’ accounts, line manager Laura described the intervention as providing a new situation:

‘Please, could I persuade you to, all those (.) limitations you’re now imposing because you’ve earlier been told “no” or something, that those, those we can just put aside, and then we start anew, then we go back, if you find it important that we have maintenance on a night roster, then that’s the kind of idea we will go with’

The negotiation between these two overall accounts continued, with various operators protesting and arguing that it could not reasonably be the responsibility of the operators to solve it, while Laura urged the operators to give it another try. One operator suggested simply shutting off the malfunctioning machines for the remainder of the night shift, something that would bring the production to a halt and effectively call the attention of management. However, over the course of the discussion, the operators’ account developed into framing the situation as ‘frustrating’ and ‘a damn shame,’ as their operations were often described as a ‘bottleneck’ step in a production situation where the company could not meet product demand – and thus that any production stop would directly cause lost sales. Seeing as how the management was already characterized as being very concerned with keeping costs down, their refusal to implement a night rostering system for maintenance staff which could reduce costly machine-related breakdowns, was depicted by the operators’ account as irrational.

The facilitator acknowledged that the operators were making a strong point, since the problem affected both the well-being of the operators (due to the stress of dealing with malfunctioning machines) and production efficiency. Laura sided with the facilitator, describing that she felt that the production terms for the department had changed:

Laura: ...Back then, when we got a “no,” perhaps we had gaps in our eh plan, meaning it maybe didn’t matter that much if we had malfunctioning machinery, we could easily reach our performance goals

Jesse: Are you thinking=

Laura: We are under pressure, eh, we are under pressure already this year

Jesse: Mm=

Laura: We will surely be under pressure next year, and the year after that I don’t even think that we will have all the optimizations in place in our department to reach ((the production goal)), and then every (.) gap will come to matter for us

The operators then proposed that maintenance technicians should be available to the operators all hours of the day. Finding only affirmative arguments for performing the organizational change, the operators started to discuss what the actual action plan should look like. Line manager Laura then proposed that the group could strengthen their argument by making their own economic assessment of the costs and potential gains associated with the proposal before presenting it at the department meeting, stating ‘the better prepared we are, the easier it is to get our way so to speak.’ After some discussion the group pursued Laura’s overall plan.

Facilitator: ...so one task on this action plan could be “talk to James” ((head of department))

Laura: “Get data” and, and

Huey: Yes I was just about to say, for example in a quarter, how many calls for maintenance have there been, how many hours is this about

Facilitator: Yes

Huey: It's obvious that we know the answer already, if you get up there and say "well it's one and a half hours ((of breakdown time)), we think it would be damn good to invest 30,000 euro in that", then you would probably get a no

Jimmy: One and a half hours, that's more than 30,000 euro

Laura: Yes, you could calculate it into produced ((goods))

Jimmy: Yes, yes, it doesn't take a whole lot

Huey: That's right, you can make a cost-benefit ((analysis)) of anything

Laura: Wouldn't you be the man to do it along with me?

Similar to the workshop described in Sequence 1, this workshop started with the operators presenting an account of how they would not be able to solve the problems in their work environment. Instead of brainstorming about what they might be able to accomplish, the operators discussed various unproductive coping strategies. However, the trajectory of this workshop took a different turn, a turn which was influenced by how three accounts were presented and came to influence the decision making. First, we had Laura's account pressuring the participants to put aside their scepticism towards changing their work environment, arguing that the intervention presented the operators with a new situation²⁴. Second, when Huey subsequently presented his initial idea for how to change the status quo, Laura described Huey's idea of a night rostering system for maintenance staff as a virtual necessity in light of the increasing production demands. Third and finally, Huey argued that it would not be convincing to refer to the gap in terms of investment cost versus downtime. Jimmy however reframed the business case as profitable for the company. These accounts shaped the participants' sensemaking and thereby revitalized the old issue.

The analysis of the first two sequences illustrates that the ways in which employees enact their job control are highly related to how their accounts frame the circumstances of their situation. This contextualized view of job control will be elaborated further in our analysis of the following sequence.

²⁴ We note here that the facilitator in the first example mainly described the intervention as an intervention to explore opportunities which were already within the reach of the employees. Perhaps this contributes to explaining why the facilitator was less successful than Laura in getting the employees to discuss potential courses of action which could be taken to alleviate the problems.

Sequence 3 - Getting action plans to fit within the radius

Similar to the second sequence, the workshop started with some protests from the operators, who criticized the management's concern with compliance when some easily identifiable issues, such as the leaky cans issue, had not been resolved for a number of years. Laura acknowledged the issue by stating '...I don't disagree, but again it's simply outside my action radius' and reminded the operators that the company had to prioritize what to spend their resources on.

After the discussion, the facilitator drew attention to the work environment issues identified at the mapping workshop. During discussion about an especially strenuous task involving the extraction of sticky material from 'stupid canisters,' the facilitator mentioned an offer from the intervention project group: The operators were given the opportunity to bring in an external occupational therapist to evaluate their physical work environment. Tony, an operator participant, accepted the offer as a potentially useful intervention by suggesting that the occupational therapist could observe the strenuous task. Tony, however, changed his mind when he realized that the therapist primarily gave advice on the operators' work posture, which he considered inadequate. In turn, Tony argued that the company should acquire all new canisters. Another operator, Bob, started describing an idea for a new canister design he had been thinking about. Laura and the facilitator, on the other hand, continued building an account for the original idea of contacting the occupational therapist. This exchange only intensified the conflict arising from these opposing accounts, with the operators on one side and the facilitator and team leader on the other.

Laura: I just want to say that what I experienced with ((the physical therapist; clause is incomplete)), she goes out to companies and looks at their work processes and helps change the work processes so they become less toilsome for the body

Tony: Oh yeah? Well she can't do that here

Laura: Yes, I think she can

Tony: No

Laura: I think she can, I, I have seen some other stuff she is doing, I think she can

While bringing in the occupational therapist was eventually agreed upon as an action plan, Bob was still adamant about developing new equipment. Laura argued that previous improvements developed by the operators themselves had eventually failed to benefit the operators ‘because we don’t have enough knowledge about ergonomics or how the body works.’ Laura thereby added to her account by providing a new argument in support of consulting the occupational therapist, mentioning previous attempts at developing equipment. Laura then suggested that Bob could participate in the assessment conducted by the occupational therapist. After some discussion, the facilitator suggested to Bob that he write down his design idea as a potential future action plan, which Bob did.

When Bob proposed his design later in the workshop, the other participants responded somewhat positively to his suggestion. However, another operator related that upper management had previously rejected a similar suggestion, and the discussion turned to how the participants could influence the management to allow the development of new equipment. In line with the previous sequence, Laura encouraged the operators to calculate how much lost production time solution to the problem could prevent. She did however also encourage the operators to invite the occupational therapist in to get expert knowledge on how a new design of canisters could be done, so that they would avoid making faulty decisions based upon lacking knowledge. After this, Tony, who was originally also sceptical of contacting the occupational therapist, tried to get Bob to join him in contacting the occupational therapist as a way to work towards a solution. Bob’s idea was now opposed by an account articulated by both Tony and Laura:

Tony: We have to get the occupational therapist in first, Bob

Laura: Just get the expert in first, then we can say we’ve got this problem, then she can come up with two proposals

Tony: Yes, then we can take it to the management afterwards

Laura: Then afterwards you can take it to the management, we’ve gotten a new model that solves the red factors that we have in our workflow

Though Bob ended up committing to the action plan, he only did so after being persuaded

mainly by Tony and Laura despite some reluctance. The discussion resulted in an action plan that mainly reflected the facilitator's proposal, which both Laura and several of the other operators had eventually supported, leaving Bob's suggestion to design new equipment as a potential later step. This version of the action plan was supported by the account provided by Laura over the course of the discussion, which asserted that consulting the occupational therapist would both provide the operators with more knowledge about relevant solutions and help in convincing the management to invest in these plans afterwards.

The sequence illustrates how POLIs may create dilemmas regarding their goal of expanding job control and how unpredictability is inherent in the processes. In the sequence, Laura gave an account incorporating the concept of action radius to remind the group of the limits rather than the extent of their job control. She also tapped into the same theme as had been present in the action radius account of sequence 2, as she encouraged the group to pursue a more feasible two-pronged plan.

The combination of the accounts describing how staff designs had failed without the input of experts and those asserting the importance of having expert backing when trying to persuade the management to fund new equipment led to the operators changing their stance and siding with the facilitator and with Laura's suggestion. When it comes to job control, a stronger sense of it appears to have collectively developed as they became convinced of the greater efficacy of engaging in strategic organizational action rather than individual endeavours.

Discussion

The sequences presented above reveal how participants in POLIs enact their job control as a result of collective sensemaking processes. Specifically, we exemplified how the accounts were used by participants to make sense of their situation and promote certain courses of action while downplaying others. Through an exploration of how accounts were negotiated among the participants, it is possible to follow how the trajectory of the interaction shapes how participants make sense of their job control over time, as well as how they dynamically enact this sense in their decisions about which suggested changes to the work environment to pursue and which to disregard.

The three sequences illustrate different ways in which interactions in POLI activities can evolve. In sequence one, the negotiations between the facilitator and the operators regarding the limits of their action radius, can be seen as an example of how sensemaking processes in POLIs can activate employees' accounts of having insufficient job control to change the problems they see, leading to resistance toward the planned activities and the intervention as such.

In sequence two, the team leaders' pressure for collecting data and proffering suggestions upwards through the management system, challenged the operators' account of not being able to influence the organization. This sequence highlights how enactments of job control and the negotiations that precede them were contingent on the provided accounts which described viable and concrete strategies for addressing problems within the organization.

In sequence three, various accounts were presented by the participants about how to change a problematic work process. After extensive discussion, a decision was reached that was in line with some participants' preference to follow established organizational decision-making procedures, but which went against the opinion of the participant who had originally suggested the plan. The sequence illustrates that there are dilemmas and compromises at play in how decisions are made within POLIs, which indicates that job control might only be gained in relation to specific strategies for influencing the work environment.

How are POLIs related to employees' job control?

As mentioned, increased job control is a key mechanism through which POLIs can lead to improvements in employee health and well-being. However, the empirical evidence linking POLIs to changes in participants' job control is mixed: a number of studies show little or no effects, and in many of the cases where increases in quantitative measurements of the participants' job control are found, these changes cannot be attributed to the participatory process alone, as the participants' work has been reorganized in ways which increase their formal job control. This raises the question of how participation is indeed related to job control.

In our analysis, we identified two main facets to participants' understanding and enactment of job control during the POLI. The first facet concerns the employees' job control in general, i.e. as a relatively stable aspect of the participants' job, reminiscent of how job control is typically conceptualised in the POLI literature. This aspect is especially relevant in overall discussions of

the participants' chances of mitigating problems in their work environment, such as those featured in sequence 1. The second facet concerns job control as a dynamic and specific reflection of the participants' possibilities for effecting certain concrete changes. Both of these aspects are made sense of and negotiated within the POLI activities through the accounts that are presented by the participants and the reactions (including contrasting accounts) that follow. Eventually, certain understandings are enacted through the group's deciding to go forth or not to go forth with attempting to improve their work environment. In order for employees to wilfully invest energy into taking control over tasks, it seems that credible strategies need to be provided or emerge in the sensemaking.

The accounts that are the basis for such strategies need not only come from employees, but can also come from managers (see also Yeung, 2004a), as was seen in the second sequence. However, when no such strategies emerge from the interaction, the participants are likely to account for their job control as being low, as the first sequence suggests. Furthermore, accounts can also be used to counter other participants' ideas, implying that the information provided through accounts does not only have constructive properties for the participants, but might also be used to shift decisions towards reflecting the position of some participants over others.

As a result of differences in which accounts are provided in different activities and in the trajectory of the negotiation, participatory processes contain an element of unpredictability and improvisation. What is deemed impossible by the participants in one workshop may be seen as possible by the participants in another workshop. This leads to different outcomes in the form of decisions. It is well known that employees manage their engagement in participatory activities to reflect the expected efficacy of their efforts (Harlos, 2001; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). Our analysis suggests that the employees' engagement is managed on an ongoing basis, and thus subject to changes even in the short term, as suggested by the change from initial scepticism to later commitment in sequences 2 and 3. In addition, it seems important to discuss how POLI outcomes might differ between groups as a result of the POLI activities and the decisions reached within them (e.g., Tsutsumi et al., 2009).

The theme of job control is often introduced implicitly through the ways in which accounts construct the participants' opportunities for affecting the problems they see (such as the account about the troublesome buckets in the first sequence). The analysis also shows that control can be brought up more explicitly, such as when the intervention-specific concept of 'action radius'

was introduced. The action radius concept calls attention to the distinction between what is and what is not within one's control, a distinction that, when introduced into the intervention discussion, may facilitate collective decision making by providing a constructive metaphor for focusing on maximizing their efficacy within their means. However, use of the concept could also lead to potentially problematic consequences in cases where the participants promote relevant but unfeasible courses of action over others; for example, the facilitators' invitation to look for feasible but sub-optimal solutions within the POLI might take focus away from more fundamental challenges to the organizations' work environment problems. Such tensions suggest the relevance of engaging in close evaluations of the tools and concepts employed in participatory interventions (Nielsen, Abildgaard, & Daniels, 2014).

Seeing job control as socially enacted suggests a need to reconsider previous explanations of how POLIs can increase the participants' job control. Mikkelsen and colleagues (2000, p. 157) suggest that POLI participants engage in 'active learning' by identifying and solving problems, which increases their capacity to influence their working conditions – and thus increases their control. In a similar vein, Nielsen (2013) proposed that POLI participants are likely to engage in increased job crafting, whereby they modify their demanding work conditions to better suit their resources, or vice versa. However, it can be argued that these outcomes are not triggered just by taking part in a POLIs, but that participants would also have to have had the kind of background experience that makes one capable of changing one's circumstances (Bandura, 1986). Negative experiences, such as those mentioned by Cooper in sequence 1, might deter employees from engaging in POLIs in the future (Harlos, 2001; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). Furthermore, individuals do not construct or enact their job control in a vacuum; rather, if new practices for how to change or craft one's work environment emerge as a result of the POLI, such practices are likely to spread among the employees and reflect more or less shared ways of constructing and enacting understandings of the situation (Boyce, 1995).

Revisiting the job control concept

As mentioned, the POLI literature has tended to rely on questionnaires to assess 'perceived' job control at the level of the individual employee (cf. Egan et al., 2007; Hätinén et al., 2007; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), a perspective which is in tune with how the psychology-inspired literature has described employee's wish to participate in organizational decision making as a

general human need for feeling in control (Bandura, 1986). In comparison, conceptualizing job control as an aspect of working life that is negotiated and enacted by employees accommodates a number of shortcomings with the dominant conceptualization in the POLI literature. First, as mentioned previously, perceived job control comprises both formal and informal aspects (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), but it is unclear how either of the two aspects contribute to employees' questionnaire responses and how responses are affected by the differences in how employees might assess each of the aspects when responding. In contrast, a collective sensemaking approach allows direct analysis of how formal and informal aspects of job control are taken up by the participants in their interactions and how the two aspects shape the participants' decisions.

Second is how dominant conceptions of job control in the POLI literature suggest that employees hold an overall 'generalized' view of their job control. Instead, our analysis demonstrates that employees experience different degrees of control in relation to different aspects of their working conditions, and that change in control in some areas is more relevant than others, depending on the circumstances. In addition, the analysis presented here suggests that within actual participatory processes, the way job control is enacted is subject to ongoing negotiations, a phenomenon which is overlooked if by research approaches which assume that employees hold some overall level of job control which covers most of their work tasks and which is relatively stable.

Third, measurements of job control based on individuals' perceptions of job control tell us little about the enacted job control and how it increases or decreases; instead, the concept is black-boxed as a product of individual cognitive processes. In comparison, a collective sensemaking approach focuses specifically on how social processes influence the way employees express and enact their job control. For example, though the employees across the three teams initially presented accounts which implied no or low job control, both the second and third sequences demonstrated how for example the introduction of differing accounts with a strategic perspective from the team leader affected the participants' enacted job control in the sense that agreements were made to pursue improvements to the work environment. This was the case even though the participants in the three sequences perform the same work tasks and have the same line managers.

There are several potential limitations in our study. One concerns that we have not been able to account for what happens during the period following the POLI activities. For example, the changes that participants decided to pursue may have been turned down elsewhere in the organization, which could have led to diminished job control. On the other hand, the number and scope of the decisions made by the participants during the intervention indicates the potential long-term changes that could be incurred through a POLI. A follow up study that tracked the action plans after the POLI could have enriched the study. Another limitation is that we have not been able to show how changes in the way participants enact their job control might be reflected in other types of data, such as questionnaire responses. Such investigations pose a number of methodological difficulties, for example, due to differences in whether job control is viewed as an overall concept (as it is typically assumed in the POLI literature) or specific to the problem under discussion, as our analysis suggests. Furthermore, since previous studies of how POLIs affect job control usually measure job control sometime after the intervention activities, the participants' responses could reflect events that occurred during the interim period.

Conclusion

While a link between participation and job control has often been claimed in the literature, this link is not clearly supported empirically, and its theoretical aspects have not been explored in depth. In this article, we argued that the link can be understood through a collective sensemaking lens, and we demonstrated this through an empirical examination of three sequences of group interactions in a manufacturing context. Seeing POLIs as sites of sensemaking may help researchers address the undertheorized relationship of how the participants' decision making in POLIs is influenced by and influences the way they view their job control. We argue that it could be beneficial to investigate POLIs as contextualized social activities whose success in effecting job control depends on how employees make sense of their organizational environment.

Methodologically, studying accounts allows us to see how job control is negotiated among POLI participants on a turn-by-turn basis, rather than relying on self-reports of perceived job control after the POLI. A benefit of this approach is that it sheds light on how both formal and informal aspects of job control shape employees' accounts, and how job control can be enacted as either a stable aspect of the job or as a dynamic property of a situation. In addition, the study responds to

the calls for more qualitative research on participatory interventions (Egan et al., 2007) and investigations into specific intervention components (Nielsen et al., 2010) by showing how intervention-specific conceptual tools such as ‘action radius’ may influence the participants’ decision-making process.

7. Article three: The terms of “becoming empowered”: How ascriptions and negotiations of employee identities shape the outcomes of workplace voice activities

Abstract

While empowerment practices have been the subject of considerable debate, little attention has been paid to how employees shape the outcomes of these practices through their active participation. This study presents membership categorization analysis as an approach to studying identities and identification as interactional phenomena. Through analyses of interactions in workplace voice activities, this study shows how developing initiatives to improve the local organization of work is complicated by the fact that supporting initiatives as an employee can lead to undesired identity ascriptions from other participants, especially in relation to employees' organizational identification or disidentification. Thus, the appeal of voice activities for participating employees depends on how the terms of “becoming empowered” are negotiated in practice.

Introduction

Empowerment practices (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), such as employee voice and participation in organizational decision-making (Busck et al., 2010), self-managing work teams (Kuipers & Witte, 2005) and total quality management (Quist, Skålen, & Clegg, 2007), are highly common in modern organizations. However, there has been considerable debate over the effects of these practices for organizations and employees. From a mainstream perspective, involving employees in workplace decision-making is thought to be beneficial for both the organization, in terms of improved performance, innovation, and quality, and for the employees, in terms of increased self-efficacy, work motivation, and organizational identification (Crowley, Payne, & Kennedy, 2013; Ertürk, 2010; Humborstad, 2013). In contrast, critical theorists have pointed out that since empowerment practices are typically controlled by the management, employees rarely find themselves sufficiently empowered to implement suggestions on their own without the managers' support (Boje & Rosile, 2001; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998), and that empowerment practices might replace more comprehensive efforts to

democratize the workplace (Johnstone & Ackers, 2015; H. Taylor, 2001). Furthermore, the use of empowerment practices to promote organizational identification has been regarded as an attempt to regulate employees' identities, due to how this identification implies disciplining one's work effort and avoiding criticism of the management (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). As a result, empowerment practices might ultimately shift the balance within the employment relationship to the employers' advantage (Thomas & Davies, 2011).

The debate between mainstream and critical empowerment perspectives has been said to be locked in a "dualistic either-or opposition" (Boje & Rosile, 2001, p. 91; see also Humborstad, 2013). However, only limited attention has been paid to how employees shape the outcomes of empowerment practices through their active participation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Greasley et al., 2005; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). This is surprising since empowerment practices cannot function without employees' cooperation. Since most employees are "neither class-conscious revolutionaries nor passive docile automatons" (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994, p. 9), the way they engage in empowerment practices is likely to reflect the perceived benefits, costs and risks for the employees in the situation, rather than the optimism or skepticism espoused by the dominant empowerment perspectives outlined above (Crowley et al., 2013; Johnson, 1994; Pohler & Luchak, 2014). For empowerment practices which contain elements of voice, an important outcome is the concrete initiatives for changing the organization of work which are developed, initiatives which employees shape by choosing which initiatives to suggest and support. If employees do not make such suggestions or are not willing to put in the effort to see them through, it seems doubtful that the benefits of empowerment practices mentioned above will materialize.

One area within the empowerment literature where employees have arguably been viewed as especially "passive" and "docile" is in how the employees' identities are typically either seen as shaped by participating in empowerment practices (within the mainstream perspective) or as a result of managerial identity control (within the critical perspective). However, identities and identifications are also a subject of continuous negotiation in interactions (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007), and the way identities are negotiated can shape the organizational outcomes of the interaction (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Larsson & Lundholm, 2013; Whittle et al., 2015). One important social threat that not just employees, but people in general work to manage is that of avoiding undesired identity ascriptions. Such

ascriptions are made relevant by the actions one takes, motivating us to account for our actions (Jayyusi, 1984) or simply avoid actions which could give “the wrong impression” (when possible). In relation to empowerment practices which involve elements of employee voice, identity ascriptions are likely to be made on the basis of the character of the initiatives which employees openly support. Since managerial approval is typically needed in order to implement suggestions from empowerment activities, employees might increase their chances of attaining improvements to their working conditions by prioritizing initiatives which are likely to be supported by the management, by presenting these to the management in a persuasive manner, and by indicating a willingness to go beyond their formal obligations in order to help the organization (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). When an employee displays such efforts to accommodate the management, the action can be seen as an indication of organizational identification. Among the reasons why employees might wish to avoid such identity ascriptions is the risk of social sanctions from other employees who take a more oppositional stance towards the management, for example because they feel that the problem should be addressed by the management itself.

The present study thus aims to further the overall debate surrounding the empowering or disempowering potential of empowerment practices by exploring how the participants’ attempts to avoid undesired identity ascriptions shape voice activities and their outcomes in the form of initiatives to change the organization of work. In contrast to how identities and identifications are typically understood in the literature, this study presents membership categorization analysis as a novel approach to studying identification (and identities in general) as discursive phenomena negotiated in interaction, an approach that has so far received limited attention in organization studies. An in-depth analysis is presented of audio-recorded interactions from employee voice activities, demonstrating how organizational identification or disidentification is ascribed to the employees based on their actions as well as the strategies that employees use to resist such ascriptions. These ascriptions might be resisted even if it means passing on an opportunity to implement a suggested initiative. However, under certain conditions, voice activities were found to enable the negotiation of strategies for how employees can avoid undesired identity consequences when attempting to influence their working conditions. The study thereby suggests that whether empowerment practices constitute an attractive arrangement for the employees depends on how such trade-offs are managed. In addition, various insights are presented in relation to discussions of identity work in workplace conversations.

Empowerment practices and identity

Empowerment is typically understood as the process of bestowing power to the employees, in many cases for a certain purpose (Humborstad, 2013). Within the mainstream empowerment literature, however, the focus has typically been on the employees' subjective experience of feeling empowered, i.e. feeling able to go beyond their normal obligations in order to take actions that are of value for the organization (Appelbaum et al., 1999). For example, Conger and Kanungo define empowerment as a "process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (1988, p. 474). As a subjective state, empowerment is claimed to decrease the alienation employees feel working in Taylorized and bureaucratic workplaces (Wilkinson, 1998), instead increasing employees' experience of organizational identification (Ertürk, 2010); that is, they perceive themselves as "psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Thereby, the organization's values, norms, and interests become incorporated in the employees' self-concept, leading them to feel intrinsically motivated to contribute to the collective (van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). This process is said to expand the shared interests between the employees and managers within the organization, thereby promoting what has been called a *unitarist* frame of reference for the employment relationship (Fox, 1966). The mainstream perspectives' understanding of empowerment as a subjective state is rooted in an understanding of power as *power to or mastery* (Humborstad, 2013). Besides the employees' motivation and individual capabilities (such as their skills or knowledge), this understanding of power emphasizes aspects such as formal rights and access to information and decision-making settings (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998), aspects which however have been claimed to only change very little within empowerment practices (Humborstad, 2013; Wilkinson, 1998).

Within the critical management studies literature, it has been claimed that formal voice activities and other types of empowerment practices can be thought of as managerial techniques which promote a certain form of managerial control over employees, that of identity regulation, while deemphasizing more traditional disciplinary means of control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Knights & Willmott, 1989). Identity regulation occurs when the management proffers identity constructions comprising a high level of identification with the goals championed by the management, such as increased productivity and profitability (Fleming

& Spicer, 2003; Knights & McCabe, 2000). When such identity constructions are internalized by the employees, it may lead to employees disciplining their own work effort and take on additional tasks as a form of “unobtrusive control” (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Whittle, 2005) whereby empowerment practices become disempowering (Boje & Rosile, 2001). Thus, the dominant conception of power within the critical perspective is that of power *over* others, including ideological power which is used by managers to shape employees’ understanding of the world. Ideological power, it is argued, is rarely resisted by the employees because of the risk of being labelled a “Neanderthal” or “dinosaur” who won’t accept progress (Appelbaum et al., 1999) or the difficulties in formulating alternative understandings to those of the management (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998). While the interests of employees and managers are seen as at least partly opposing within the critical empowerment perspective, corresponding to a pluralist frame of reference in Fox’s framework mentioned above, identity regulation can be seen as an attempt by the management to deliberately blur the lines between their interests and those of the employees, thereby pre-empting conflict.

The emphasis on internalization of identification within both the mainstream and critical empowerment perspectives suggest that employees hold one relatively stable self-concept or identity construction, which is however still susceptible to influence from the organization and the management. However, some have argued that employees are not simply hailed into identities, but rather are actively engaged in taking certain subject positions while avoiding others (Thomas & Davies, 2011); for example, the presence of attempts at identity regulation does not imply that such regulation is successful, since the proffered identities can be resisted through acts which indicate disidentification with the organization and the management, such as loafing, ironicizing, or engaging in *svejkism* (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Thomas & Davies, 2011). Such disidentifying acts might even be designed specifically to avoid detection or mitigation by the management (Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001), and they are key strategies for displaying identification with the employee group (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Furthermore, it is common for employees to experience tensions between their collective identifications relating to the organization, employee collective, or profession, for example (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Pepper & Larson, 2006; Whittle, 2005). Therefore, employees will often seek to strike a balance between identifying with the employee group and with the goals of the organization, depending on the demands of the situation (Bisel, Ford, & Keyton, 2007).

Thus, the ongoing negotiations and struggles over employees' identification with the organization, the employee group, or other collectives is likely to be a key concern for employees in relation to empowerment practices (Thomas & Davies, 2011). Furthermore, the above studies suggest the relevance of developing a more dynamic understanding of identity and identification that is sensitive to how these identifications are negotiated on an ongoing basis within activities related to empowerment practices. In the following, I will first present an interactional perspective on organizational identification which will subsequently be applied in an analysis of how employees negotiate their engagement in employee voice activities.

Identity as an interactional phenomenon

Within interactions, studies have shown how identification talk is "varied from moment to moment depending on the participants' interactional goals" (Wetherell, Stiven, & Potter, 1987, p. 64), with the rhetorical context playing an important role for how people express their attitudes and identifications. A key framework for studying identity and identification as an interactional phenomenon is that of Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1992), whose central idea is that "for a person to 'have an identity' – whether he or she is the person speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about – is to be cast into a *category with associated characteristics or features*" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 3, their italics). Thus, being ascribed to a certain membership category in interaction means that various rights, obligations, actions, and other *predicates* associated with that category are also ascribed to the category incumbent. A classic example of Sacks's demonstrating how categories and predicates work in practice is an utterance from a book of children's stories: "The baby cried, the mommy picked it up" (1992). Most would likely infer that the baby is picked up by the mommy *because* it cries (rather than the events being causally unrelated), and furthermore, that the "mommy" is in fact the mother of the child. As members of a culture, we share expectations about how mothers are to act, meaning that more is understood than is explicitly expressed. As exemplified by the mother's action being accounted for by the baby's crying, examining category attributions in interactions can also shed light on the moral implications interpreted by the (Jayyusi, 1984). However, it is important to stress that the meaning of categories and predicates is always *occasioned*: their meaning at any given moment depends on the discourse context, such as the utterances preceding the categorization, and they should be studied in order to determine their

“consequentiality in the interaction” (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 3), such as how they are used to achieve various interactional goals.

While many studies about collective identification tend to rely on organization members’ self-descriptions, the MCA framework can also be applied in order to understand how descriptions of the collective identifications of organization members who participate in or are the subject of conversations are negotiated. For example, descriptions using categories such as “company (wo)man” suggest that those described identify with the organization and the management, and similarly, shop stewards are expected to identify with the employee collective whom they represent. In interactions, such categorical descriptions can be used to perform a number of actions, such as accounting for one’s own actions or calling into question the actions of another person. However, such accounts are not always taken up by the other participants, suggesting that organizational identification is not simply claimed or ascribed, but negotiated in the interaction through both the speakers’ claims and the hearers’ responses. As a result, the interaction and its outcomes are not shaped so much by the identifications felt by the individual employee with the organization, the employee group, or the management, for example, as by the results of the negotiation, i.e. who the employee is taken as identifying with.

In practice, explicit categorical descriptions are found intermingled with descriptions which are merely “category-resonant” (i.e. which can be heard as referring to some category; Schegloff, 2007) because of the predicates that are used. Furthermore, category incumbents can be framed in various more or less favorable ways depending on the predicates used to describe them. This type of *predicate work* is a powerful device for interlocutors with the potential to influence both the immediate interaction and its long-term consequences, for example by impacting decision-making in the setting (Whittle et al., 2015).

An identity-in-interaction perspective can thus help us understand how negotiations of collective identification shape social situations.

Methodology

As mentioned, the use of formal voice activities has become increasingly common in recent years (Busck et al., 2010). Formal voice activities are pre-arranged and regular events, where employees are invited to influence decisions about the organization of work by problematizing

existing work practices and suggesting potential solutions (Marchington & Suter, 2013). The data for this study was collected in connection with a research project in which such an activity was implemented in various Danish manufacturing organizations between 2013 and 2015. The activity targeted blue-collar employees with tasks related to production or maintenance, some of which were highly physically demanding. The activity consisted of three three-hour workshop sessions for each work team, in which the employees were invited to voice problems and suggestions about how to improve their working conditions with regard to health, safety, and well-being. The analysis for this study builds on approximately 98 hours of audio recordings from 36 meetings within two of the participating organizations that produced pharmaceuticals and plastic packaging. I had become familiar with these organizations through participating in project activities as either a non-participant observer or workshop facilitator (see description below). However, the focus of this paper is not on the facilitator's contribution to the conversation, which in many instances included mainly the employees and their team leader, as displayed in the analysis.

The data were first reviewed and situations where participants discussed how to influence their working conditions through the activity were identified, since these are expected to reveal the employees' orientations towards how their actions signal organizational identification. In these situations, resistance or hesitance was typically most obvious when attempts at influencing their working conditions involved soliciting approval from middle or high-level managers, whereas changes that could be implemented by the employees themselves were rarely oriented to by the employees as having problematic identity consequences. Subsequently, these situations were analyzed based on methods from CA (e.g., Lehtinen & Pälli, 2011) and especially MCA. This research approach enables the study of social action as it happens and through the meanings displayed by the participants (ten Have, 2007). In order to understand how the interlocutors made sense of the situation *in situ*, the selected excerpts were repeatedly analyzed by applying the "next turn proof procedure" (Peräkylä, 2011), a procedure that involves examining how utterances are responded to in order to determine what meanings they are given in the setting. This allows for the basis of analytical inferences to be traced in the transcript, thereby increasing transparency (ten Have, 2007).

Because of the space constraints of a journal article, three episodes among those that were analyzed in-depth were selected for the present discussion, each illustrating an important aspect of how identities were ascribed and negotiated that was observed throughout the overall

analysis. Through the study's detailed analyses, the aim is to contribute to our theoretical understanding of how employees orient to the identity consequences of their actions when engaging in empowerment practices, rather than trying to describe examples which may be generalizable to other settings in a statistical sense (Bryman, 2003). From an ethnomethodological perspective, order is always produced locally in the setting, but the mechanisms and practices by which the order is produced is likely to be found in other situations where the participants' concerns are similar (Sacks, 1992). The excerpts are presented here in a simplified version of the Jefferson transcription system (2004; see appendix for legend). All names presented are pseudonyms, and the transcripts have been translated from Danish.

The setting

The excerpts presented in this paper are all taken from workshop meetings which involved action planning aimed at improving the employees' working conditions. The procedures of the formal voice activity did not increase the employees' formal decision-making authority, but there were no formal limitations regarding which initiatives could be suggested, as long as these could realistically be approved and funded by the organization. The meetings were planned to take three hours and were held in meeting rooms at the worksite. Typically, the meetings were attended by between five and eight employees from the same team, who were joined by their line manager and a workshop facilitator who had the role of guiding the participants through the workshop program. The meetings would typically also be attended by one or two non-participating observers from the research group that was collaborating with the participating organizations in implementing the formal voice activity.

During the meetings, participants would be seated around a table, with the facilitator and the line manager sitting together at one end. Issues which had been identified by the participants at a previous workshop meeting were reviewed, and ideas for how the employees' working conditions could be improved were discussed. Ideas which the participants found feasible were identified as action plans. One or more employees would then be selected to take responsibility for implementing the action plans and were to report back to the other participants on their progress at a later follow-up workshop meeting. Typically, six to eight action plans would be

developed by the group in each workshop meeting. The table below lists the pseudonyms and formal work roles of all participants featured in the three excerpts.

<i>Excerpt 1</i>		<i>Excerpt 2</i>		<i>Excerpts 3 and 4</i>	
<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>
Lee	Line manager	Eliza	Employee	Ann	Line manager
Eric	Employee	Frances	Employee	Mark	Employee
Steve	Employee	Dean	Employee	Dan	Employee
Michael	Employee	Miriam	Employee	Simon	Employee
James	Employee	Tom	Employee	Frank	Employee
Joe	Workshop facilitator	Naomi	Employee (part-time with another team)	Tim	Employee

Table 6. Participants in the excerpts and their formal work roles, chapter 7.

Analysis

In the following, three episodes are presented, of which the last spans two excerpts. While the richness of the data means that a number of themes could be taken up, each episode was chosen for how it illustrates the employees’ orientation to the identity consequences of their actions, and how this orientation shapes their decisions about whether to support or assume responsibilities for suggested initiatives. Thus, it is this theme on which the analysis will focus.

Resisting identification with the management

Excerpt 1 shows different ways in which employee’s identifications can be framed in interactions relating to a change initiative: one depicts the employee as being willing to go beyond formal responsibilities, implying identification with the organization, while the others highlight socializing with other employees or self-interest as the motivation. In the excerpt, the participants discuss whether a proposed initiative should be carried out and by whom. The initiative involves inviting a newly employed middle manager to visit the team’s production area

to hear about various problems whose resolution could potentially reduce the employees' physical strain and speed up the production. Lee, the line manager for the participating employees, argues that the employee Michael, who is currently a trainee in the team, could take responsibility for implementing the initiative.

Excerpt 1

1 Lee Surely he would be proud if eh Michael sent him an
2 email saying now I've been to a ((formal voice
3 activity)) workshop meeting, let me tell you, I would
4 like to invite you down, I have a task, I would like to
5 tell you a little about the department and I want to
6 tell you a little about the things we're currently
7 dealing with
8 Eric I'm entirely sure of that as well=
9 Lee =he would, I promise you, he would become
10 [8 feet tall]((meaning very proud))
11 Steve [he could come around on Sunday afternoon], there'll be
12 both=
13 ((other participants start laughing))
14 ?? =cake
15 Steve there'll be both strawberry cake and apple cake=
16 Lee =rather than it being Edie and me, right, then he would
17 say damn, that's a department and those are employees
18 who=
19 Joe =what do you say about that ()
20 Lee it's only an example, now
21 Michael it's only an example, right=
22 Lee well, I'm saying Michael could very well
23 Michael yeah=
24 Lee =Michael has, we have our ((kaizen board)) out there,
25 he knows the things we're currently dealing with,
26 Michael could very well invite ((the middle manager))
27 down, he could talk to ((the middle manager's
28 secretary)), when does ((the middle manager)) have an
29 hour or two, come down, see who we are, show what's
30 going on
31 James while you're at it, you could tell him when you will be
32 through with your apprenticeship (.) and that you don't
33 have anything after that
34 ((participants start laughing))

We first see Lee make an assessment that the middle manager would be proud to receive an invitation from Michael. The way in which Lee's assessment presents its acceptance or rejection as relevant marks it as an indirect proposal for Michael to assume responsibility for the initiative. Lee's assessment of the middle manager's reaction is backed by Eric (l.8) and restated in other words by Lee himself (ll.9–10); however, it is not made explicit why the middle manager would be proud or how his reaction would be relevant for Michael. An explanation surfaces in the next lines: Steve's turn (ll.11–12) is formulated as another proposition ("he could come around on Sunday afternoon"), which the other participants react to with laughter. The humor in Steve's proposal is revealed in the next lines, where both an unidentified employee and Steve himself describe that the employees will have cake on Sunday (ll.14–15). The described scenario implies a disidentification with the organizational goals of achieving a high work output in favor of enjoying oneself with colleagues, setting up a counterpart to Lee's proposal in the form of a situation which is unlikely to make the middle manager "proud." The fact that the other employees start laughing before cake has even been mentioned highlights the shared understanding of the joke.

Next, Lee takes the floor and again describes how an inquiry from an employee would lead to a positive response from the middle manager (ll.16–18), after which Joe, the workshop facilitator, prompts Michael for a response (l.19). However, Lee mitigates his proposal as targeting Michael specifically ("it's only an example, now"), a description which Michael repeats in line 21 rather than accepting or declining Lee's proposal, thereby resisting assuming responsibility for the initiative. After another response from Michael which does not clearly accept or refuse Lee's proposal (l.23), Lee again describes Michael as being capable of executing the various tasks that the initiative is comprised of (ll.24–30). In response, the employee James makes another mock proposal, suggesting that Michael also notify the middle manager of his precarious job situation. In doing so, James can be seen as ironicizing Lee's proposal by suggesting that Michael's might choose to feign organizational identification in order to get a permanent position. Again the other employees start laughing. Steve and James's ironicizing jokes project that were Michael to commit to Lee's indirect proposal, this would be seen by the other employees as displaying identification with the management, rather than the employee collective, and therefore a potential cause for criticism.

Shortly after the conversation in this excerpt, Joe called a break. After the break, Joe asked Michael whether he had decided to take action on the proposal or not, to which Michael stated

that he and Steve had agreed to instead wait for the middle manager to visit the production area on his own initiative and notify him then of the problematic work practices. By waiting for the middle manager to approach the employees instead, Michael and Steve can be said to opt for a strategy for voicing the problem to the middle manager which does not project strong identification with the management.

As an additional point, the excerpt also shows how the participants distinguish between whether the employees and managers hold shared interests (as implied by Lee) or different interests (as suggested by the employees' jokes). This distinction is similar to the one between unitarist and pluralist frames of reference in the literature (Fox, 1966), but while these frames are normally invoked as references to different theoretical understandings of the employment relationship, here the matter of shared or different interests is central to negotiating the identity consequences of accepting Lee's proposal as an employee.

Resisting disidentification with management

In contrast to excerpt 1, the next excerpt illustrates how employees also orient to the possibility of problematic identity ascriptions if they implement initiatives which project disidentification with the management. The excerpt is taken from another workshop meeting in which a group of employees²⁵ are discussing how to avoid having to rush to finish their tasks. Previously, rushing could be avoided by keeping a normal pace and registering extra worktime through a flexible worktime agreement, but this arrangement had been cancelled. If a team does not finish its tasks on time, it would create a bottleneck for other teams.

Excerpt 2

1 Eliza we can of course do something w- we cannot do anything
2 we won't get our ((flexible worktime agreement)) back
3 again [right now]=
4 Frances ["no"]

²⁵ Both a team leader and a facilitator were present for this workshop meeting, however the team leader was absent for this part of the discussion.

5 Eliza =but we can do something about planning our work [so]=
 6 Frances [yes]
 7 Eliza =we won't have more than we can handle without becoming
 8 stressed
 9 Dean [you mean] we must hit the brakes and make it fit with=
 10 Frances [yes]
 11 Dean =one [workday]
 12 Frances [yes]
 13 ((overlapping talk in the background))
 14 Frances [it's hard for us because we really want to]
 15 Miriam [but then one should select somebody who's] good at it
 16 right because (.)
 17 Eliza [well I know that one gets] carried along every time=
 18 ?? [but eh but one could]
 19 Eliza =right=
 20 Miriam =yes you really do that, you get carried along
 21 Tom [but it is a rebellion]
 22 Frances [we want so much to get] i::t done
 23 Miriam yeheh it is a little, a little like a rebellion=
 24 Tom =it IS=
 25 Miriam =yes=
 26 Tom =I feel it is a bit of a rebellion=
 27 Miriam =yes=
 28 Tom =that we [must work like normal] =
 29 Miriam [you become a little like a teenager hehe]
 30 Tom =instead [and it and it]
 31 Dean [but perhaps we] should just let them try
 32 their own medicine right, we now have an inflexible
 33 management who says you must do such and such and such=
 34 ((Dean knocks on the table three times))
 35 Dean =that's fine then I WILL DO such and such and such and
 36 then we'll do like such and such and such
 37 Miriam [I just feel I get negative doing that]
 38 Tom [well that's what I would like to do] but I don't
 39 feel like it=
 40 Miriam =no it gets me negative and tha:t [tha::t]=
 41 Dean [I also get negative]
 42 Miriam =and then I'll feel bad when I'm going home, when I
 43 have to go home with that kind of (.) [negative]
 44 feeling inside=
 45 Tom [but you]
 46 Miriam =me and I am annoyed over those kinds of stupid things
 47 right so
 48 Naomi I can tell you that I have just talked to ((another
 49 employee)) who I share my office with and they are in
 50 the midst of, both ((in the chemical and
 51 microbiological teams)), looking into some kind of
 52 planning tool, actually ((abbreviated))

After arguing that the flexible worktime agreement is unlikely to return, Eliza proposes changing how the team plans their work (ll.1–3, 5, 7-8), and Dean articulates that Eliza’s proposal means limiting the work pace (ll.9, 11). Frances, who has otherwise expressed agreement for the other’s comments, then describes the employees’ problems as stemming from their identification with their work (“it’s hard for us because we really want to”). Miriam overlaps with Frances with a proposal that regulating the work pace should be done by a member of the team “who’s good at” refusing extra work tasks, thereby implicitly affiliating with Frances’s description that limiting the pace would be challenging to most members; a description which is taken up again by Eliza, Miriam, and Frances over the next few turns (ll.17, 20, 22).

In line 21, Tom describes Dean’s earlier suggestion as a “rebellion,” which Miriam seconds laughingly (“yehes”), describing herself as becoming “a little like a teenager” in the face of the increased workload and the loss of the flexible workhours arrangement (l.29). By self-describing through referencing categories that frame the employees as being oppositional and immature (Sacks, 1992), Tom and Miriam can be heard as distancing themselves from Dean’s suggestion.

Next, Dean further argues for taking an inflexible stance towards the increased work load (ll.31–36), which is described as mirroring the management’s stance towards the employees. Both Miriam and Tom raise the objection that doing so would lead to them becoming negative and annoyed (ll.37–40, 42–44), to which Dean concurs (l.41). By not following Dean’s suggestion, the employees avoid being cast as “rebels” and “teenagers”, along with the moral judgments these categories imply. Furthermore, it can be argued that following Dean’s suggestion could have led others to question whether the employees did in fact identify strongly with their work, given that their focus on keeping a slower pace could lead to problems for other teams. Here, the discussion continues instead with Naomi relating how other teams in the company are considering a planning tool in order to lessen work pressure, a candidate solution which would likely not be seen as taking an oppositional stance towards management.

Negotiating instrumental identification with management

The final two excerpts illustrate yet more subtle ways in which participants in empowerment practices discuss and negotiate which identity ascriptions are made relevant by their actions. The

excerpts feature a third work team discussing how to present a middle manager with a suggested new method for repackaging raw materials used in the production process, as the current method is both time-consuming and physically strenuous. The method was suggested by the employee Mark who further suggested trying to convince the middle manager of the benefits of the new method by confronting him and stating that all of the approximately 50 members of the team support the suggestion. However, the viability of this strategy has been questioned by various other participants.

Excerpt 3

1 Mark: but sometimes one can get a little angry that they
 2 won't (.) won't listen to such a good suggestion when
 3 so many feel it is necessary
 4 Ann: because you don't sp- they he- they don't understand
 5 your language=
 6 Mark: =no=
 7 Ann: =you speak Chinese=
 8 Mark: =yes=
 9 Ann: you must learn to speak (.)
 10 Dan: Russian=
 11 Mark: =yes (.)
 12 Ann: you must learn to speak their=
 13 Mark: =it's because it's in=
 14 Ann: =language with what they need to see and hear then you
 15 will be heard (.) but if you speak Chinese=
 16 Mark: =but I'm not that good at that
 17 Ann: then
 18 Simon: you must see yourself as a director when you talk to
 19 those people ((laughs))
 20 Mark: I can't I'll never be that

The third excerpt demonstrates two perspectives on the management's expected lack of response: Mark first expresses frustration that "they" (i.e., the managers) are not likely to accept his suggestion, which he claims to be supported by many employees, thereby framing the management as being dismissive. This leads Ann to question the way Mark suggests presenting his proposal to the management. Ann's repair (ten Have, 2007) of an aborted 'speak' ("sp-") and 'hear' ("he-") into "understand" (1.4) is noteworthy since a failure to speak on Mark's part or a failure to hear on the management's part could be criticized on moral grounds, while referencing a language gap suggests a problem of a technical nature that does not place blame on either party. In this respect, Ann describes Mark as speaking Chinese; by inference, a language

incomprehensible to management. Dan's suggestion of the management's language being Russian is referring to an equally incomprehensible language for the employees, thus indicating his affiliation with Ann's use of a language metaphor. Despite describing the problem as one of understanding, Ann next claims that it is Mark who must speak in a way that the management can "see and hear" in order to be heard (ll. 12, 14–15). However, Mark states that he is not able to do as Ann suggests. Simon's comment that Mark should "see (him)self as a director" supports Ann's suggestion, but Mark rejects this suggestion as well.

The final excerpt (4) shows how Ann attempts to negotiate the meaning of displaying organizational identification as being merely a strategy for potentially increasing the chances of suggested initiatives being successfully implemented. In the short span of time since the previous excerpt, Ann has offered to help present Mark's proposed solution to the middle manager, and she, Dan, Simon, and Frank have discussed how a business case could be developed on the basis of Mark's suggestion. The excerpt begins with Mark again suggesting confronting the manager.

Excerpt 4

1 Mark: ((abbreviated))...then we serve it to him and we'll be
2 sitting there, the whole gang
3 Ann: I'm just thinking you s- (.) sometimes one has to be a
4 little eh strategic and smart and manipulative in
5 order to ((laughs)) achieve what one wants (.) and
6 then one doesn't say hey buddy, now get the hell over
7 here and listen to us, then it's us who have to like
8 gather all the stuff and then do it, I mean THINK
9 about how he would like to be approached if he's to
10 (.)
11 Frank: act on the project=
12 Ann: =if it's to be a success for us, what we want
13 Tim: mm
14 Mark: if if he was invited up here without knowing
15 beforehand what this is about
16 Ann: I would ask him to (.) no I wouldn't do that
17 Simon: gee that would really make him balk=
18 Ann: =I would never do that

After Mark again suggests confronting the middle manager, Ann argues that this strategy is inferior to her strategy of satisfying the expectations of the middle manager by stating the need

for a contrasting approach of being “strategic and smart and manipulative” (ll.4–5). As in the previous excerpt, the matter of who is to accommodate whom is topicalized. In contrast to how Mark’s strategy for approaching the management is rooted in identification with the employee group, contending that the management should hear the employees out, Ann’s proposal places the obligation on the employees, arguing that it is the employees who need to approach management in a certain way. However, Ann also downplays the potential threats of being ascribed organizational identification as an employee if one follows her strategy, both by describing her strategy as necessary (e.g., through stating what “one doesn’t say” and what they “have to” do, ll. 6–7) and as a display of being “strategic and smart and manipulative” as an employee, whereby assuming responsibility for the initiative is framed as a display of astuteness. In other words, Ann contributes to making the empowerment practice a space where claims to identify with the organization can be employed by the employees on a case-by-case basis where it is considered beneficial, rather than as a requirement imposed by the management. Ann’s use of the deictics “us” (ll.7, 12) and “we” (l.12) implies that Ann herself is ready to help plan out how to approach the middle manager and that she and the employees hold a shared interest. Still, Mark returns to his previous statement by again suggesting that they surprise the middle manager (ll.14–15), with which both Ann and Simon disaffiliate strongly (ll.16–18). In the end, the participants decided to further research the technical aspects of their proposed solution before approaching the management with it.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand how the outcomes of empowerment practices is shaped the employees’ actions within these practices, actions which are themselves shaped by the prospects and risks faced by employees when “becoming empowered” (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Greasley et al., 2005). Specifically, the study attends to how employees manage and negotiate the identity ascriptions that might be made on the basis of which initiatives they support in workplace voice activities. These identity ascriptions are made relevant to the interaction in relation to themes such as the expectations colleagues and team leaders have towards the individual participants (excerpt 1), how employees would be perceived if they were to go against the management (excerpt 2), and who should be responsible for changing problematic work practices (excerpt 3, 4). In all three situations, the employees were not willing

to be responsible for carrying out the proposed initiatives, and instead, alternative strategies for changing work practices which were not expected to carry with them the undesired identification inferences were decided on at a later time. The key category- or predicate-based descriptions used in the excerpts are presented in the table below.

The analysis demonstrates that projecting identification with the organization is oriented to by the participants as a potentially effective strategy for swaying managers, as exemplified by Lee's statements in excerpt 1 and Ann's and Simon's comments in excerpts 3 and 4. Yet, Michael and Mark's resistance in the two situations displays how the strategy of projecting identification is seen by the employees as potentially problematic. On the other hand, signaling strong identification with the employee group and disidentification with the management might evoke negative descriptions from others and go against one's self-descriptions as being committed to one's work, as stated by Miriam and Dean in excerpt 2. Furthermore, some, such as Ann and Simon in excerpts 3 and 4, take the position that such a strategy is unlikely to lead to changes in the existing work practices.

Thus, the study suggests that empowerment practices are not per definition empowering or disempowering, but that engaging in empowerment practices is likely to involve a trade-off for the employees between potentially attaining the power to change their working conditions through the empowerment practice on the one hand and potentially losing power over which identities and identifications they are ascribed by others on the other. The analysis also reveals that the employees seek to manage this trade-off by using discussions with the other participants to explore which identities and identifications one might be ascribed if supporting an initiative to change one's working conditions. Furthermore, by resisting committing to initiatives which are found to potentially have undesired identity consequences, employees can keep the discussion going so that more appealing strategies have a chance to emerge. While it might seem somewhat paradoxical for employees to resist committing to actions that could potentially improve their working conditions, this resistance could be seen as a form of "micro-*emancipation*" (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), where employees protest or subvert an overall managerial agenda of promoting organizational identification.

Membership category and theme	Type	Source
<i>Excerpt 1</i>		
Middle manager: becoming “proud” at receiving email from Michael	Predicate, action: implicitly describes employees who send inquiries about the production as indicating organizational identification	Lee, ll. 1-7
Employees: having “cake” on “Sunday afternoon”	Predicate, action: identifying with the employee collective/disidentifying with team’s performance	Steve (primarily), ll. 11-15
Employee: “being through with one’s apprenticeship” without a job	Predicate, motive: presenting oneself as an engaged employee in order to receive future employment	James, ll. 31-33
<i>Excerpt 2</i>		
Employees: “hard for us because we really want to”	Predicate, motive: unwilling to leave work unfinished due to identification with responsibilities	Frances, l. 14 (see also l. 21)
Employee: choosing someone to plan the team’s work who is “good at” lessening the workload	Predicate, personality: being able to put off work when under pressure to perform it	Miriam, l. 15-16
Employees: “one gets carried along every time”	Predicate, action: trying to perform the work even when time is insufficient	Eliza, l. 17
Employees: “it is a rebellion”	Predicate, action: employees refusing to do extra work	Tom, l. 21
Employees: becoming “like a teenager”	Category: when used in relation to “rebellion” it suggests connotations of being contrary	Miriam, l. 29
Employees: getting “negative doing that”	Predicate, personality: gets emotionally affected by refusing extra work (supports description as identifying with work)	Miriam, Tom, Dean, ll. 37-47

<i>Excerpt 3</i>			
Managers: “won’t listen”	Predicate, personality: being dismissive of the employees’ viewpoints	Mark, ll. 1-3	
Managers: “don’t understand your language”	Predicate, personalities: managers do not understand the employees’ terms viewpoints when presented in the employees’ terms	Ann, ll. 4-5	
Employees: speaking Chinese/Russian/“their language”	Predicate, action: employees should voice problems or suggestions in a way which the management can identify with	Ann/Dan, ll. 7, 9-10	
Employees: seeing oneself “as a director” when talking to managers	Predicate, action: emulating managers’ talk when presenting employee viewpoints	Simon, ll. 18-19	
<i>Excerpt 4</i>			
Employees: “the whole gang”	Category: evokes an image of identification and unanimity between employees	Mark, ll. 1-2	
Employees: being “strategic and smart and manipulative”	Predicate, action: taking the necessary steps in order to gain recognition of viewpoints	Ann, ll. 3-5	
Employees: not saying “hey buddy now get the hell over here and listen to us,” “gather all the stuff” instead, thinking about “how would he like to be approached”	Predicate, action: presenting viewpoints to the middle management in a collected rather than a confrontational style	Ann, ll. 5-9	

Table 7. Key category- or predicate-based descriptions used in identity claims and ascriptions in the excerpts, chapter 7.

Relatedly, the study also contributes to our understanding of power in empowerment practices. In line with the criticisms raised of empowerment practices, the excerpts illustrate how the employees' chances of improving their working conditions depend on whether they can make the case to the management (Boje & Rosile, 2001; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998), and, as evidenced in particular by line manager Lee in excerpt 1, empowerment practices can be seen as a vehicle for diffusing managerial ideology through the proffering of 'committed' employee identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). However, the analysis also shows how voice activities provide employees with an opportunity to delineate and discuss initiatives and strategies for influencing the organization of work and to choose which ones to engage in, considering their potential identity consequences. Here, it seems relevant to consider Alvesson and Willmott's assertion that in order for identities in the workplace to be negotiated in a way that mitigates regulation and control, conditions such as "a space as well as resources, for critical reflection" and "a supportive form of social interaction" must be in place (2002, p. 637). The discussion situations featured in excerpts 3 and 4 seem especially representative of the conditions described by Alvesson and Willmott, with Ann's argument style evidencing the importance of managers facilitating empowerment practices in a way that is supportive of the employees' perspective (see also Greasley et al., 2005).

The influence line managers had on the workshop discussions in excerpts 1, 3, and 4 exemplifies how the outcomes of the voice activities depend to a large extent on circumstances which are local to the specific activities. Additional support for this conclusion is provided by how much can be seen to depend on which specific initiatives are proposed for changing the employees' working conditions and how the employees relate to these initiatives. For example, it was shown how both identification and disidentification with the management was taken as problematic, depending on the situation and the parties in the discussion. In addition, the participants continuously construct the employees' and managers' interests, since the participants see it as crucial that proposed initiatives fall within the interests of both the employees and the management if the initiatives are to be approved for implementation by middle managers. In this respect, suggestions can be strategically constructed as representing the interests of the management, as Ann suggests in excerpts 3 and 4. The very practical and situational consideration of the relationship of between employees' and managers' interests displayed by the participants is lost in the overall discussion of how to understand empowerment practices

from the unitarist and pluralist frames of reference that are adopted in the empowerment debate (Heery, 2015; Humborstad, 2013).

Finally, the analysis offers various contributions to identity research. For one, it heeds the call to consider the role of identities in research related to the employment relationship, where, as argued by Thomas and Davies, struggles over employees' identities have an important although perhaps subtle role in "shifting and transforming meanings and understandings within work organizations" (p. 162). Methodologically, the study complements previous research on identity work in conversations (e.g., Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane, & Greig, 2012; Brown & Coupland, 2015; McInnes & Corlett, 2012) by presenting an MCA approach to studying how identities and identifications are negotiated in conversations (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007). Future identity studies might draw inspiration from how this approach attends to how both speaker's identity claims and identity ascriptions from others are involved in negotiating identities in interaction, as well as how it frames identification as a "functional" form of social positioning that is performed in relation to shifting interactional goals (Ainsworth & Grant, 2012, p. 61). For example, while some have argued that presenting oneself as holding incoherent identifications indicates a lack of reflexivity (Costas & Fleming, 2009; Whittle, 2005), the strategy proposed by Ann in excerpt 4 illustrates a practice of projecting different identifications at different times as a form of roleplay for one's own gain. The availability of such practices can explain why organization members might express quite different patterns of collective identification(s) at different times (Brown, 2015; Hoyer, 2016), and they highlight why it might be problematic to approach people's situated identity work as an indication of long-term transsituational identity constructions. For one, pressure to present a coherent and stable identity construction is not universal (Beech, Gilmore, Hibbert, & Ybema, 2016), and second, in settings where this pressure is in effect, it is still only one concern among the many that organization members must manage (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). In relation to empowerment practices, the participants' identity concerns are balanced with concerns such as improving one's working conditions, avoiding conflicts, and, with Michael from excerpt 1 in mind, simply staying employed.

Conclusion

Empowerment practices cannot function without the active participation of the employees, yet few have explored *how* they participate in practice. Through a microsociological approach

focusing on discourse, this study demonstrates that employees show concern for the identities and identifications they are ascribed on the basis of how they engage in the empowerment practices, and this concern shapes whether and how they attempt to improve their working conditions. In relation to whether formal voice activities that defer little formal decision authority to the employees can still be considered empowering, the study suggests that the answer depends not only on whether the activity provides an opportunity for the employees to negotiate initiatives which are likely to gain the support of the decision makers but also on the employees orienting to collective identifications that can be inferred from their actions as being acceptable. The study suggests that greater attention should be paid to the interactions that take place within formal voice activities and how the conditions of the activity contribute to shaping these interactions. This would include, for example, examining which actions are oriented to as appropriate or inappropriate in the setting, and investigating the degree to which the format of the activities or the participating managers support and facilitate participants' exploration of different options and their associated identification risks.

The study also presents an approach to studying identities and identification as interactional phenomena based on membership categorization analysis. Employees' identities have increasingly become an object of struggle between the forces of managerial control and employee resistance, struggles which are easily identified in workplace interactions. Therefore, the identity-in-interaction approach holds considerable promise for furthering our understanding of how the employment relationship is negotiated in modern organizations. In addition, the article demonstrates the importance of considering the situational concerns that underlie organization members' identity work in conversations.

8. Article four: Open or Closed? Line Managers' Strategies for Handling Conflicts of Interest in relation to Employee Voice

Abstract

Line managers are increasingly made responsible for activities in which employees can voice work-related problems or suggestions. However, line managers' reactions to voice might favor the interests of the organization or themselves at the cost of the employees. While some studies have attributed line managers' ways of handling such conflicts of interest to whether they are fundamentally receptive, or "open," to the use of voice, this study focuses instead on how the managers maintain moral accountability in cases where they challenge employees' voiced suggestions. A detailed analysis of interactions in workplace voice activities demonstrate that line managers seek to pre-empt potential negative assessments of being overly open or "closed" to voiced suggestions through various rhetorical strategies. While managers might invoke their role-based rights to close down suggestions if rhetorical challenges are not successful, managers display awareness that doing so is likely to entail critical judgments from the employees.

Introduction

In recent years, line managers have been given greater responsibility for implementing and facilitating human resource management practices in the workplace (Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Perry & Kulik, 2008). Furthermore, with employee participation in organizational decision-making on the rise, the role of first line managers has shifted from primarily being a supervisor who oversees and controls daily work to more often functioning as a coordinator who arranges work team activities with other parts of the organization (Musson & Duberley, 2007). In connection with these developments, it has become increasingly typical for line managers to be formally responsible for implementing and supporting activities in which employees are invited to voice their work-related problems and suggestions (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Townsend, 2014; Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2013), such as manager–employee meetings or quality circles. Formal voice activities potentially bring about a number of positive outcomes for both employees (such as increased learning, motivation and well-being, and improved working conditions) and the organization (such as improvements to product quality and efficiency, and increased employee engagement) (Purcell & Georgiadis, 2007).

In practice, however, there is considerable variation in how line managers implement voice activities and other HR practices (Townsend, 2014), and a number of factors related to the line manager, such as their openness to voice, their leadership style, and their relationship with the employee expressing voice have been claimed to have a crucial impact on how employees engage in voice activities (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015). In some cases, the employees' concerns and suggestions may be rejected on the basis that they conflict with the obligations tied to the line managers' supervisory role, which is typically focused on reaching organizational goals such as high productivity and profitability (Donaghey et al., 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Mowbray et al., 2015). It has been observed that when employees' voiced problems or suggestions are rejected, future activities in which they are invited to use voice are met with considerable skepticism (Pohler & Luchak, 2014), which may lead to a number of "frustration effects" among the employees, such as an increased sense of injustice and demotivation (Harlos, 2001). When employees become less likely to voice their problems and suggestions, the prospects of positive outcomes for the organization decrease as well.

It thus seems that whether workplace voice activities have predominantly positive or negative effects depends to a large degree on the line manager. However, the perspective in much of the literature on voice has been described as "dissenter-centric" (Garner, 2013, p. 375), in that the line managers' behavior in relation to employee voice has mostly been studied from the point of view of the employee; little attention has been paid to the potential challenges that facilitating employee voice entail for the line manager or how these challenges are dealt with (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Musson & Duberley, 2007; Townsend, 2014; Yeung, 2004b). Furthermore, even though employee voice implies communications that involve both employees and managers, their actual interactions have received little attention in the literature (Garner, 2013). Understanding how line managers handle conflicts of interest within voice activities while maintaining their moral accountability is thus important for both the employees and organizations which stand to benefit from voice, and for the line managers themselves.

The present study contains a review of the literature exploring how line managers handle their responsibilities in relation to employee voice. Following this, I present an alternative approach to investigating how conflicts of interest are managed as a situated interactional activity. This approach, which is rooted in CA and DP, is then applied in a detailed analysis of excerpts from a discussion among managers and employees concerning a voiced suggestion. The analysis

demonstrates how line managers are clearly able to influence the trajectory of the discussion in various more or less directive ways, but also the extensive work that the line managers perform within the interaction in order to maintain accountability. Managers handle potential attacks on their moral accountability by seeking to rhetorically pre-empt descriptions of being closed and unreceptive. Finally, various theoretical and practical implications of the findings for literature on line managers and voice are discussed.

Line Managers' Role in relation to Voice

In association with an overall increase in HR-related responsibilities in recent years, line managers have been described as playing a key role in both implementing structured voice activities in the workplace (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Townsend et al., 2013) and encouraging employees' voice behavior (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010). Furthermore, line managers, rather than top management, are often the targets of employee voice, especially where union-based consultation is missing or weak (Dundon & Gollan, 2007), which presumes a "linking pin" role for line managers in passing information between employees and the upper levels of management (Mowbray et al., 2015, p. 393). However, since the format of voice activities are rarely formalized or described in protocols, employees' complaints and suggestions might be handled differently due to idiosyncrasies in managers' judgment (Harlos, 2001).

According to psychologically inspired voice theory, the success of voice activities is fundamentally dependent on whether the employees perceive "that their boss listens to them, is interested in their ideas, gives fair consideration to the ideas presented, and at least sometimes takes action to address the matter raised", i.e. that the participating managers are seen as "open" (Detert & Burris, 2007, p. 871). Detert and Burris claim that, by being open in this way, managers also reduce the power inequalities between themselves and the employees. In addition, Detert and Treviño (2010) showed that employees' expectations regarding possible backlash from and potential success of speaking up are more closely related to perceptions held about their immediate supervisors and skip-level managers than are their opinions regarding the structured voice activities themselves. Indeed, it has been claimed that if sufficiently competent, managers can "capture employee views and turn them into benefits for both the organization and the employees" (Townsend et al., 2013, p. 350).

However, line managers also occasionally discourage employees' use of voice. Dundon and Gollan (2007) claim that managers tend to downplay the importance of employees' viewpoints in formal voice activities, emphasizing instead the importance of organizational outcomes such as increased efficiency. Morrison and Milliken (2000) have suggested that managers may hold various implicit beliefs, such as regarding employees as self-interested, believing that they know better than employees, and wishing to avoid conflict or dissent in the workplace – which can be seen as representing an unreceptive or “closed” approach to voice. Relatedly, it has been claimed that many line managers do not receive adequate training in relation to people management (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012). Donaghey and colleagues (2011) argue that managers can actively use their prerogative to control the employees' use of voice, thereby avoiding undesired changes that could be brought about if voiced problems or suggestions were made the basis of decisions in the workplace. Indeed, it has been argued that managers are fundamentally reluctant to increase employees' decision latitude and thereby relinquish power (Denham et al., 1997). When line managers respond to voice in an unsupportive manner, increased employee turnover has been observed (McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013)

Various studies call into question whether individual managers are indeed likely to simply either support or oppose employee voice, as research focusing on managerial openness to voice might suggest. For example, it has also been found that line managers are typically more supportive or critical towards certain issues or voice strategies than others (Kassing, 2002). Furthermore, being assigned responsibility over voice activities entails a number of ambiguities for the line managers which might contribute to how they approach voice activities. Musson and Duberley (2007) studied managers' discourse in relation to employee participation in organizational decision-making. They showed that managers drew upon a variety of different understandings when discussing participation, even sometimes seemingly conflicting ones. According to Musson and Duberley, this finding indicates that the managers face various opposing demands, such as being expected to support participation even though it might potentially challenge their authority, suggesting that there is an improvisatory element to how the managers handle participation in practice.

Recently, Garner has argued the relevance of regarding dissent, a phenomenon closely related to voice, as a processual phenomenon rooted in interaction in which the meaning of a voiced problem or suggestion is co-constructed between employees and managers. For example,

employees who engage in voice might be labelled as heroes, villains or victims, depending on the motivations ascribed to their actions (2013). By extension, the motivations ascribed to managers' behavior in relation to voice are also co-constructed. Here we must expect that even managers who are open to voice occasionally face voiced problems and suggestions whose addressal implies compromising their supervisory obligations. If line managers are construed by the employees as supporting outcomes that favor the organization at their own cost, as managers are claimed to sometimes do (Dundon & Gollan, 2007), it might lead the employees to criticize their managers' handling of the conflict of interest, either directly or covertly. Line managers are thus likely to be on guard against this type of criticism and to proactively attempt to avoid it as they engage in voice-related discussions.

Handling Conflicts of Interest in Voice Activity Interactions

Though various definitions of "conflict of interest" exist, according to Davis, the standard view describes a situation where a person (P): *"(1)...is in a relationship with another requiring P to exercise judgment on the other's behalf and (2) P has a (special) interest tending to interfere with the proper exercise of judgment in that relationship"* (2001, p. 8). According to Davis, the term "interests" should be understood quite broadly and include emotions, loyalties, and concerns. Therefore, Davis' specification supports regarding the line managers' dual roles as supervisors and voice activity leaders as a conflict of interest. However, Davis also stresses that what makes a conflict of interest problematic is whether it makes a person's judgment "less reliable than it would normally be" (p. 9), which suggests that the question of whether a conflict of interest has been handled problematically is a matter of assessment.

The focus of this study is situations in which the line managers' voice-related obligations towards the employees are compromised, whereby their "reliable judgment" towards either the employees and with it their handling of their conflict of interest potentially becomes relevant to the interaction. A relevant framework for understanding how the line manager's role(s) and role-based obligations are framed in interaction is membership categorization analysis, or MCA (Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1992). MCA focuses on how interlocutors use categorical descriptions to make not only obligations, but also rights, typical actions and other "conventionally anticipated features" or *predicates* associated with that category relevant to the interaction (Larsson & Lundholm, 2013, p. 1108; see also Whittle et al., 2015). Since it reveals how interlocutors'

membership categorization practices draw upon stocks of cultural knowledge about how category incumbents are expected to act, MCA is fundamentally concerned with the moral aspect of interaction (Jarryusi, 1984). Violations of such norms are generally addressed by either the person doing the action or witnesses to the action (Garfinkel, 1967b), calling it upon the person doing the action to account for their actions or risk threats to their moral status.

In contrast to how work roles are normally thought of as stable, category membership in interaction should be seen as a situated accomplishment that is “recurrently oriented to, renegotiated, and sometimes also challenged” (Asmuß & Oshima, 2012, p. 68). Within voice activities, we can expect the participating employees to assume a right to make proposals and, to some degree, to have their perspective considered by the management and their proposals accommodated (Detert & Burris, 2007), even if they do not hold the right to decide on these proposals themselves (Donaghey et al., 2011). Line managers might at various times act as voice activity organizers, soliciting the employees’ suggestions or descriptions of their problems, or they might engage in discussions within the voice activities, observing the same rights and obligations as the other voice activity participants. However, more traditional, role-based understandings of the line managers’ and employees’ categories (which reflect a more hierarchical relationship in workplace interactions) are likely to be *omni-present* in the voice setting, meaning that they are easily identified by the interlocutors once invoked (Fitzgerald, Housley, & Butler, 2009). For example, line managers might invoke rights based on their supervisory role, such as their entitlement to have their directives followed by the employees, by self-categorizing as a line manager or by performing actions which are resonant with their line manager role and at odds with the category of voice activity organizer.

When line managers invoke their supervisory role rights, rather than their obligations towards the employees within the voice activity, attention is potentially drawn to the line managers’ handling of the conflict of interest. According to Tileagă, speakers hold a strong orientation towards maintaining their own accountability in such situations and they use various strategies in interactions to this end (2010), strategies which have been documented within the tradition of DP (Edwards, 1995; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Snejder & Molder, 2005). For example, in order to avoid such descriptions, people (including line managers) might seek to maintain their moral accountability by engaging in ‘role discourse’, that is, arguing that they are acting in a way that is ‘category appropriate’ (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Another such strategy is “stake inoculation”, that is, pre-emptively arguing against potential claims that one’s stance on an issue

is attributable to holding a stake or a vested interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992). On the other hand, descriptions that categorize persons as belonging to a certain type (such as being an open or closed manager) typically carry moral judgments, and overshadow alternative accounts which frame actions of those being categorized as reasonable given the circumstances (Jayyusi, 1984). When accounting for the actions of others, speakers often employ formulations which suggest that actions have an expectable and ‘scripted’ character given the circumstances (Edwards, 1995). By describing some pattern of action as highly regular, script formulations can be used to bolster the credibility of the formulation. However, script formulations can also be used to point attention to actions which fail to meet other’s expectations, in which case the script formulations are typically used to warrant or imply a dispositional attribution about the person breaking with the script. For example, in Edwards’ study, various examples were presented of how a couple used script formulations in counselling sessions to attribute jealousy or being flirtatious to one another.

Methods

While many studies of employee voice have relied on questionnaire and interview methods to collect data about managers’ and employees’ perceptions and beliefs, there has been a call for studies which focus more directly on “the behavior of voice itself” (Morrison, 2011, p. 379). Interactional data allow analyses which describe “the ways by which things get organized through interactions” (Cooren, 2006, p. 335), in this case voice activities and the initiatives that the participants choose to implement (or not implement) afterwards.

The data for this paper was collected in connection with a larger research project which studied the implementation of employee voice activities in the manufacturing division of a Danish pharmaceutical company and a company producing plastic packaging. The intervention project provided access to a number of structured voice activities which might otherwise have been difficult to gain access to due to the potentially critical perspectives expressed about the organization. The activities also were a source for various ethnographic characteristics, which provided background information on the employees’ daily work tasks, the recent history of the organization, and the terminology and figures of speech used by the organization members. The voice activities specifically targeted circumstances related to the employees’ well-being and safety. For the present study, the analysis focuses on approximately 98 hours of audio

recordings of employee voice workshops of which the author was present for the majority as either a workshop facilitator or a non-participating observer.

First, the conversations from the workshops were transcribed and sequences of workshop conversation in which line managers actively participated in discussions of employees' voiced suggestions were compiled. The sequences are comprised of discussion in which shared assessments of the expected consequences of various voiced suggestions are negotiated along with the possibilities of implementing the suggestions. The compiled sequences were then analyzed through conversation analytic methods, examining how the interlocutors' understandings of each utterance are displayed in their subsequent turns (Sacks, 1992), while also looking at the rhetorical devices that the line managers employed in order to manage the facticity of accounts as well as issues of stake and interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This approach enables the identification of. Findings from these analyses were registered in an ongoing research memo along with reflections about how these findings supported, challenged, or nuanced theoretical descriptions in the literature (Charmaz, 2006). As various points emerged that could extend current voice theory, a number of relevant excerpts providing especially complex and rich discourse material were subjected to repeated analysis utilizing analytical concepts from CA and DP.

Because of the space constraints, one episode was selected for presentation here due to its relevance for exemplifying a number of the strategies that line managers were found to use throughout the data (Silverman, 2005). Since the focus of the present study is on how line managers handle conflicts of interest, the excerpts represent a situation where individual employees and line managers take somewhat oppositional stances. However, many other suggestions received a more positive reception from the line managers, and a large part of these were eventually pursued in some form. The theme of the voiced suggestion in the featured episode (concerning exercising during work hours) was recurrent throughout the data. Various excerpts are presented from this one episode in order to show how the line managers' strategies might change as the discussion of a voiced suggestion proceeds. Within CA and DP, detailed analyses of single episodes as cases is an accepted research approach, as these allow the demonstration of how a phenomenon of interest is socially organized through a range of different practices (Schegloff, 1987). Rigor is ensured through both the analyst's competent understanding of the setting and by presenting the empirical material in a way which allows readers to assess the inferences on which the analysis is based (ten Have, 2002b). The transcript

excerpts are presented in a simplified Jefferson transcription style (Jefferson, 1984, see transcription legend).

The Workshop Setting

The excerpts presented below are taken from an action-planning workshop. The main agenda of the workshop was to discuss various issues related to the employees' health and well-being which the participants had identified at a previous workshop and to develop action plans describing various initiatives that could lead to improving the health and well-being of the employees. The workshop was planned to take three hours and was held in a meeting room at the worksite. Among the participants were 7 employees from a large production team of roughly 50 employees whose daily work consisted of various more or less strenuous physical tasks related to the production of pharmaceuticals as well as cleaning and completing documentation paperwork²⁶. Also present were the team's two line managers and an external workshop facilitator who guided the participants through various tasks according to the voice activity program. Three observers were also present, sitting approximately 6 feet from the other participants, including the author who had been the facilitator for a previous workshop with the group. The observers did not participate in workshop discussions.

For the workshop, the participants were seated around a rectangular table, with the process facilitator (Frank) and the line managers sitting together at one end. The facilitator presented this arrangement to the participants as a method for keeping the line managers somewhat in the background but still available to participate in the discussion.

Analysis

In the following, three excerpts are presented from an extended discussion of a suggestion for an initiative. The pseudonyms and formal organizational roles of the participants are described in a table below. The data are rich, but for this analysis our focus is on how Anita and Nick, the two line managers, engage in the discussion of the suggestion made by the employee Rod, and supported by various other employees. The discussion comes to revolve around the different

²⁶ The other employees participated in separate workshops in groups of six to eight employees.

ways in which the suggestion might eventually lead to problematic situations for the line managers and the employees. Because of how the line managers spontaneously account for their reserved stance towards the suggestion, their handling of their obligations towards the employees and thus the conflict of interest becomes relevant to the interaction.

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Description</i>
Rod	Employee
Frank	Process facilitator, external organizational psychologist
Elvin	Employee
Dennis	Employee, joint consultation committee member
Anita	Line manager
Nick	Line manager
Eve	Employee
Andrew	Employee
Ike	Employee*
Manuel	Employee*

Table 8. Workshop participants, chapter 8.

**: Not cited in the excerpts*

Excerpt 1 – Line managers’ initial positioning towards the suggestion

1 Rod: you know what, we could try to challenge the one that is
2 called eh a walk during work hours
3 Frank: a walk during work hours
4 Rod: yes
5 ((some lines omitted))
6 Dennis: °that has° that has been shelved forever, we’ve
7 discussed that before
8 Frank: we’ve tried that or you won’t be allowed to do that or
9 how
10 Dennis: well you still have to do all of your work, the last
11 time we were told you can use your lunch break for that
12 Frank: mhmm (.) is that like a ((joint consultation committee))
13 thing, eh you were in that right hmmm

14 Nick: Dennis was in [((the joint consultation committee))]
 15 Anita: [well] an
 16 opportunity has arisen in the ((formal voice
 17 activities)), where ((the health and safety coordinator
 18 at the site manager level)) is sitting in her ((steering
 19 group)), that we can't go back and say the whole shift
 20 can now walk or run, but but yes (.) you who are here
 21 around the table, you could make a draft, how can this
 22 work out eh doing this, then we can try it out I mean
 23 for a for a short period, but of course we have to (.)
 24 the ((production)) process has to run
 25 [I mean (.)]=
 26 Nick: [yes I was just about to]
 27 Anita: =we also have to get ((products)) out the door=
 28 Nick: =I was just about to=
 29 Anita: =so because some of you go for a walk=
 30 Rod: =right but but we KNOW that already

First, Rod takes up the suggestion that employees should be able to take a walk during work hours. Referring to the suggestion as a “challenge” suggests that a previous decision has been made against such an initiative and thus that the new suggestion involves challenging that decision. Next, Rod’s suggestion is challenged by another employee, Dennis, who describes the suggestion as “shelved forever” (l.6), relating in his next turn that the last time the topic was raised, the employees “were told” to run or walk during their lunch breaks. Dennis’s use of “were told” implies that the decision has been made by someone with authority over the employees, i.e., a manager. Dennis’s knowledge of the decision is attributed by Frank to Dennis’s membership in the company’s joint consultation committee, and Dennis’ membership is confirmed by line manager Nick, suggesting that the decision might have been made by the manager chairing the committee.

In partial overlap with Nick’s turn, line manager Anita disaffiliates with Dennis’s account through another report, which describes implementing the suggestion as conditionally feasible. Following Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig (2011), affiliation relates to the affective level and refers to indicating empathy or support for a speaker’s stance, while disaffiliation refers to the opposite. Anita then formulates a sequence of action steps for how the suggestion could be realized in compliance with the rules of the voice activities (ll.19–23). Particularly interesting is how Anita manages her own role in implementing the suggestion: she indicates that employees

would be responsible for drafting the suggestion (by the pronoun “you”; 1.20), and indicates her willingness to implement the suggestion with the employees (“we”; 1.22). However, Anita also mentions, in line 24, that the production process has to run, marking this requirement as well known to the participants (“of course we have to”), rather than simply an opinion of hers (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Thus, in terms of Detert and Burris’ definition (2007), Anita could be said to be demonstrating openness to voice here by both listening and showing interest in Rod’s suggestion, giving it fair consideration by mitigating Dennis’s challenge, and offering to take action to address the matter. Still, Anita downplays her own position in relation to the suggestion and avoids affiliating with the suggestion, offering only to try it out for a “short period” in order to evaluate whether the suggested initiative is in fact compatible with the employees’ and line managers’ other obligations.

Nick’s next statement (“yes I was just about to”; 1.26) does several things: for one, it affiliates with the last part of Anita’s turn (“the process has to run”), but it also claims that he would have made a similar point, had Anita not done so. Thereby, Nick claims a stronger affiliation with minding the production than if he had merely seconded Anita’s statement, such as by stating “I agree” (Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Furthermore, Nick’s claim that he would have mentioned the participants’ obligations towards keeping the production running if Anita had not done so frames failures to mention such obligations as noticeable and problematic; in other words, without the last part of Anita’s turn, Nick might have viewed her offer to the employees as being *too* open.

As an additional point, the last lines of the excerpt demonstrate that meeting one’s normal responsibilities towards the organization might be framed as a prerequisite for openly considering new suggestions in voice activities. This is evidenced in how Anita and Nick recycle their utterances about minding the production (11.27–28) with the many overlapping or latching turns (11.25–30) indicating the speakers’ mutual affiliation on this point (Morgenthaler, 1990). Rod also affiliates with Nick and Anita’s stance towards keeping the production running while at the same time disaligning with the hearable implication that the suggestion could lead the employees to not heed this obligation (“but but we KNOW that already”; 1.30). Compared to affiliations and disaffiliations, alignments and disalignments relates to positive and negative stances at the structural level of the utterance, e.g., in relation to the activity that is being conducted and the interactional roles it implies for the interlocutors (Stivers et al., 2011).

The next excerpt demonstrates various strategies which line managers can use to question a suggestion while seeking to avoid ascriptions of being “closed”. The exchange in excerpt 2 occurred after two additional minutes of discussing the suggestion, during which time Anita had again outlined a potential action plan based on Rod’s suggestion, and the participants discussed various scenarios where the action plan could lead to dissatisfaction among the employees.

Excerpt 2 – Nick’s challenge to the suggestion

```
1  Rod:    it doesn’t have to be a run, it could be that we had
2          some exercises for the lumbar region and shoulders and=
3  Frank:  =okay=
4  Nick:   =of course you could put it up there and deliver a
5          decent proposal, but from there to it being enacted
6          generally, because I have to damn well say, if I am a
7          manager of the shift at that time, you will damn well
8          not be running around on the running trail when you have
9          to ((perform a certain physical task)) cause then it’ll
10         be ((inaudible))
11         [but you know that it will take NEXT to nothing]=
12  Elvin:  [no no no no, but it’s not like that no no      ]
13         ((more employees indicate agreement with Elvin))
14  Nick:   =like Eve says it takes NEXT to nothing=
15  Dennis: =no:=
16  Nick:   =you know that you here around [the table]=
17  Eve:                                [hehehehe ]
18  Dennis: =yes
19  Nick:   it takes NOTHING, then it’ll be said, Anita and Nick,
20         Dennis Johnson is scurrying about on the running trail
21         ((participants laugh))
22  Elvin:  okay that was a silly example
23  Nick:   that will damn well be over my dead body, I promise you
24         that
          ((omitted: 5 lines, participants joking about Dennis on
          the running trail))
29  Andrew: it will bring nothing but trouble
30  Nick:   because everything exercise I totally support=
```

Rod first proposes changing the content of the suggestion. However, Nick shortly after begins a turn which does not provide a fitted response to Rod’s suggestion. Nick’s turn occasions a number of observations: Nick first aligns with the possibility of making a “decent proposal” and

going forth with the suggestion (“put it up there” referring to posting on a board for collecting suggestions which the group would try and implement after the workshop), as Anita mentioned in excerpt 1. However, Nick then transitions into disaffiliating with the prospect of “generally enacting” the suggestion (“but from there...”; 1.5). The turn continues as Nick begins a new phrase which disaffiliates with a potential situation where the employees neglect their obligations due to the initiative, with Nick’s use of swearing underscores his strong disaffiliation (“you will damn well not be running around on the running trail when you have to...”; 11.7–8). Formulating the consequences of decisions is common to decision-making processes (Huisman, 2001), and Nick describes this potential situation as having detrimental consequences, however these consequences are not fully verbalized.

Towards the end of his turn, Elvin overlaps with Nick to disalign with the assumption undergirding Nick’s threat, i.e. that the employees would mismanage the suggestion if implemented (“it’s not like that”; 1.12). This overlap occurs as Nick is prefacing another formulation of the consequences of implementing the suggestion, consequences which are marked as highly probable and as having a “scripted” (Edwards, 1995) nature (“but you know that it will take NEXT to nothing”; “you know that you here around the table”). Thereby, Nick presents his formulation as trustworthy, mitigating potential attributions that the upcoming formulation is motivated by him taking a particularly pessimistic stance towards the suggestion. Various important points can be made about the next lines (19–20) where Nick describes the potential consequences. First, after previously arguing that Rod’s suggestion could lead to production being neglected, Nick now tersely presents another argument that focuses on how the suggestion might lead to criticism of the line managers. Specifically, Nick describes a scenario where he and Anita are notified of Dennis’s “scurrying about.” It can be taken that the person who would be delivering this criticism to the line managers is a non-team member, since the person does not know that running would be sanctioned if the suggestion is implemented. Also, since “scurrying about” depreciates Dennis’ running, the critic featured in Nick’s formulation is hypothetically acting on the basis of a “script” (Edwards, 1995) that employees should engage in exercise outside of work hours, and reporting to Nick and Anita implies that line managers should know about the whereabouts of their employees. When scripts are broken, it makes relevant dispositional attributions (Edwards, 1995). Here, because of Nick and Anita’s supervisory obligations to oversee the employees’ work, being open towards the suggestion might entail criticism for the line managers if they are seen as unaware of their employees

apparently engaging in non-work activities during work hours. Using reported speech (in this case hypothetical speech) is a common strategy for conveying such points (Nielsen, 2014).

Second, it can be noted that Dennis's role in the account is taken as humorous by the other employees (11.20–21), perhaps because it would be surprising for Dennis to be out running given his comments in excerpt 1. The use of humor can be seen as a device for managing reactions (Schnurr, 2009); had a supporter of the suggestion, such as Rod, been the "runner" in Nick's account, the account might have been heard as a criticism of that employee's ability to balance his obligations towards the production with his wish to go running – and thereby a threat to the employee's moral status within the interaction, or "face" (Goffman, 1967).

Nick takes the floor again by sternly indicating that he will act to avoid the potential situation he has described ("over my dead body"; 1.23). After some joking remarks about Dennis's running, the employee Andrew affiliates with Nick's implicit characterization of the suggestion as likely leading to problems, and Nick describes himself as being "totally" supportive of exercise. Here, Nick again addresses the possibility that others might attribute Nick's stance towards the suggestion to a personal disposition, or stake of his. Nick's claim to support exercise works as a stake inoculation which pre-empts such attributions (Potter, 1996). Instead, Nick's arguments frame his criticism as being motivated by the probable effects of the suggestion, as he himself formulates them.

The final excerpt specifically exhibits how the line managers' may invoke their supervisory rights to close down suggestions. However, the way in which this is done suggests that the line manager understands this step as being sensitive. In spite of Nick's disaffiliations, the discussion regarding the suggestion went on for another 15 minutes, during which time variations of Rod's original suggestion were discussed. Both supportive and critical comments were voiced by various employees towards the suggestion, with a number of references to Nick's previous disaffiliations. Between the time of the second and third excerpts, Nick had left the meeting table and taken a standing position at the other end of the meeting room. A noise from this end of the room has now directed the participants' attention to Nick.

Excerpt 3 – Nick’s upgraded challenge

1 Frank: did you clear your throat before, Nick? (.) Did you
2 clear your throat before, [was that a kind of-]
3 Nick: ((distant)) [no:::, I’ve done that many]
4 times
5 Frank: yes okay, well you had a kind of=
6 Nick: I’ve sent my signal about that matter=
7 Andrew: =you’ve said you won’t be a part of that
8 ((Nick has now moved closer to the table))
9 Frank: [it it’s]
10 Nick: [I I I] well I I’m not negatively disposed and people
11 know that, I damn well run around too, playing
12 badminton, I’m just saying (.) I can see in our
13 production, that’s my personal opinion and I:: have
14 great respect for the fact that others have a different
15 one, I’m just saying that I will NOT be scurrying about
16 on the running trail picking up people, because I would
17 have to do that=
18 Andrew: =°yes°
19 Nick: there will be days where suddenly one doesn’t manage to
20 coordinate in the break room and then, I’ll use Dennis
21 again, Dennis can take it, then Dennis is scurrying
22 about on the running trail, then Ike McCarthy gets
23 pissed off (.) and the::n Elvin Timmons and Manuel
24 Matthews will suffer for it and Andrew is sitting being
25 negative in ((another section)), I will have none of
26 that, I will do EVERYTHING in my power to see that it
27 does not get carried out
28 Anita: but it has to SOLVE [more problems than it creates]
29 Rod: [then we might as well close the]
30 topic at that

This last excerpt begins with Frank asking Nick from across the room about a noise he made. Frank’s question attends to the possibility that the noise had an interactional relevance, such as drawing attention to Nick. Although Nick disaffiliates with his throat-clearing as being relevant, he shortly after takes the floor, alluding to his previous statements (“I’ve sent my signal”; l. 5). Andrew then reacts to Nick’s “signal” as an unconditional disaffiliation with the suggestion (“you’ve said you won’t be a part of that”).

Next, Nick moves closer to the table while speaking. He first describes himself as “not negatively disposed” (l. 10), arguing that he runs around when playing badminton, suggesting that he is referring to his stance towards exercise in general, rather than running in particular.

This can be seen as another example of stake inoculation. After previously marking his statement as a personal opinion (“I’m just saying,” “I can see”), he later makes the claim that the suggestion is certain to lead to problems (“because I would have to do that”). Thereby, Nick’s conditional disaffiliation from excerpt 2 is upgraded to an unconditional disaffiliation, similar to how it was treated by Andrew. Nick’s labelling of his claim as an opinion may seem puzzling since opinions are offered constantly throughout discussions of voiced suggestions. However, “downgrading” the certainty of claims can help manage the risk of challenges, for example being labelled as “dogmatic” (Sneijder & Molder, 2005). At a more general level, by re-taking the floor and offering an upgraded critical opinion, Nick can be seen as insisting, an action which implies entitlement to having one’s opinion heeded.

After Andrew’s “yes” in line 18, Nick describes another problematic future scenario, which is also marked as certain to occur (“there will be days”). Dennis is once again recruited as the troublemaker, and this time Nick accounts for the choice, marking it as motivated by an intention to mind the employees’ face (“Dennis can take it”). Nick also presents a third argument against the suggestion by characterizing it as an activity that would lead to frustrations and conflicts among various employees who are also present at the workshop (ll.19–25). Mentioning employees who are present by their first and last names is unusual in this setting, but reminiscent of how employees are referenced in staff lists, for example. Nick’s decision to utilize this characterization can thus be seen as another face-saving strategy, in which the mentioned employees are presented as examples, rather than as individuals. Thereby, Nick’s description implies that the reactions from the employees in his scenario also have a scripted, plausible nature (Tileagă, 2010); similar to recruiting Dennis as the hypothetical runner, Nick’s formulation downplays the employees’ individuality and thereby is more likely to avoid the uptake that Nick is making a negative assessment of these specific employees’ propensity to become angry.

Towards the end of his turn, Nick vows to fight the suggestion if pursued further (“I will do EVERYTHING in my power to see that it does not get carried out”). By asserting that he will react in this way if the suggestion is pursued further, this utterance has the force of a threat (Hepburn & Potter, 2011). In this case, it can be inferred that if the employees pursue the suggestion, in spite of Nick’s admonitions, they are likely to end in a conflict with Nick. However, while Nick could have chosen to give an explicit directive to drop the suggestion, based on his supervisory rights, such a strategy would clearly mark his obligation to support the

employees' use of voice as having been overridden. Nick's use of the future tense ("will", 1.24) can be interpreted as his indicating that a different order is in place outside of the present formal voice setting, an order where the conflict of interest is less relevant and in which he is allowed to oppose the suggestion by doing "EVERYTHING in [his] power" (11.26). Still, the indirectness of both Nick's threat and his recurrent accounting of his stance on the basis of the potential negative consequences of implementing the suggestion indicate that he orients to the situation as potentially problematic (Sneijder & Molder, 2005).

In the last lines of the excerpt, we see how Nick indeed manages to influence the participants' decision about whether to proceed with the suggestion. Threats set up compliance or defiance as main response options (Hepburn & Potter, 2011), and with the response "then we might as well close the topic," Rod (who originally presented the suggestion) proposes to end the discussion. The suggestion was not brought up again.

On a final note, Anita's last turn again suggests an unwillingness to affiliate or disaffiliate with the suggestion as long as its consequences are not known ("it has to solve more problems than it creates") as she aligns with the possibility that the suggestion would in fact create problems. The "but" at the start of her turn can be seen as addressing the fact that, relative to Nick's strong disaffiliation, Anita might be seen as more open and potentially more naive in her openness. Thus, Nick's strong disaffiliation makes it relevant for Anita to argue why her alignment with the suggestion is justified.

Discussion

By analyzing three excerpts of discussions about a voiced suggestion, this study has explored how line managers account for their handling of the conflict of interest that can arise within voice activities in relation to their occasionally conflicting obligations. By focusing on the nature of their interaction, the analysis sheds light on aspects of the line managers' situation that are not well described through methods which focus on employees' or managers' retrospective accounts.

First, the analysis highlights various practical strategies that line managers can employ in order to handle the conflict of interest. Such strategies could be identified in how the line managers invoked their different roles through their discourse. For example, Anita's could be said to speak

from a category of voice activity organizer when she argued that Rod's suggestion could be tried out, while her supervisory role was invoked when she took the potential harm to production into consideration, exhibiting a balancing act between her contrasting obligations. By avoiding affiliating or disaffiliating with the suggestion, her own stance, and thus her status as being open or closed towards voice, was downplayed. In regard to Nick, a gradual change could be observed in how his supervisory role was invoked. In excerpts 1 and 2, his obligations towards keeping the production running were expressed as a reason for his regarding the suggestion's potential negative impact to operations as problematic. In excerpt 3 he became insistent with his more unconditionally critical assessment that the suggestion would cause problems and implicitly threatened the employees, behavior that invoked his supervisory right to make decisions on matters related to daily work. It can be argued that by not immediately invoking his supervisory right to direct the employees' actions, Nick allowed the discussion to continue, a discussion which could have resulted in the employees deciding to drop the suggestion primarily on their own accord (considering that critical comments were also made by, e.g., Dennis, Eve, and Andrew). Had they done so, Nick would not have been as accountable for the decision.

The line managers also mitigated potential negative assessments about *how* they handled conflicts of interest through their use of rhetoric. For example, Nick argued that the suggestion could lead to problems by projecting three different negative consequences (production neglect, criticism of the line managers, and conflict among the employees) and also indicated that these consequences had a scripted nature and thus were to be expected. A similar strategy was used in relation to managing potential attributions regarding stake, for example, through stake inoculations, such as when Nick stated "I'm not negatively disposed." Furthermore, even in his critical comments towards the suggestion, Nick took steps to avoid threatening the face of the employees who supported the suggestion. Analyzing these rhetorical strategies thus provides a more detailed picture of how line managers handle conflicts of interest in voice activities than studies which attribute line managers' behavior to general dispositions or interests (Garner, 2013; Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015).

The analysis also potentially adds to our understanding of managerial openness by demonstrating how the concept does not simply reference a certain disposition of the manager (e.g. Detert & Burris, 2007). Instead, from the perspective of DP, describing a manager as open is an assessment made about the line manager by others which normatively frames the manager's behavior (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Jayyusi, 1984). Since being assessed as lacking

openness in relation to voice implies a moral criticism (e.g., if based on not giving fair consideration to the employees' suggestions), such an assessment would threaten the face of line managers if manifested in employee–line manager interactions. This could explain why explicit references to the managers' openness or similar dispositional concepts are not made by the employees in the excerpts, but only by Nick in his stake inoculations in excerpts 2 and 3. Yet even if employees are unlikely to criticize their line managers openly, line managers still strive to prevent such criticism in voice-related interactions. The analysis thus extends the argument that leadership styles can be understood as language games that managers engage in in order to evoke being assessed as a certain type of leader (Marturano, Wood, & Gosling, 2010; Svennevig, 2011). From the line managers' perspective, one practical upshot of taking this perspective could be for organizations to help line managers handle situations where they feel they must turn down employees' suggestions.

As a fourth point, the present findings may serve to nuance how line managers' power in relation to workplace voice activities is understood within the voice literature. According to the concept of openness, employee voice is regarded as a process where voiced problems and suggestions are transmitted to other parts of the organization, with line managers being positioned as a conduit with the power to thwart them (Brinsfield et al., 2009). This conceptualization is confirmed in this study in two ways: for one, line managers (and other participants) are able to influence voice-related discussions through their critical assessments of the employees' suggestions, thereby possibly convincing the employees that a suggestion should be dropped. It can be hypothesized that if line managers display the requisite 'rhetorical competence' (Whittle et al., 2008), this effect might even extend to line managers being able to successfully influence which voice themes the employees choose to pursue, while still giving the impression of being open. Employees' experiences with voice processes are known to be affected in a positive direction when managers explain the background to their decisions to heed or not heed complaints (Bies, 1987). It can also be suggested that the influence of managers could be applied to simply affect how the problem or suggestion is formulated. Second, line managers can also invoke their role-based rights and obligations outside of the voice activity in order to influence the employees' decisions, thereby shifting from a relatively unobtrusive form of control to a more obtrusive one (Yeung, 2004b). Thus, claims that employee voice inverts the hierarchy of the organization (e.g. Krefting & Powers, 1998) overlook how the supposed reconfiguration of rights and obligations within the activities still enables managers to exercise

considerable influence over the employees' suggestions through discourse (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). On the other hand, discursive power also potentially regulates the line manager's behavior, since insinuating against voiced problems and suggestions comes at the cost of potential moral criticism from the employees (though criticism that might not be voiced directly to the line manager). It is precisely because of the voice activity setting that Nick's invocation of his supervisory rights is delicate.

Finally, the analysis also demonstrates a way to describe and understand "the behavior of voice itself" (Morrison, 2011, p. 379). Rather than being 'just talk,' the interaction is a means through which the employees and managers decide which voiced problems and suggestions to pursue, thereby shaping the organizational outcomes of voice activities. An advantage of analyzing such conversational interaction is that the "the analyst can start to recover how real-time work activities are produced in light of distinctive organizational contingencies and accountabilities" (Llewellyn, 2008, p. 763), revealing how employee voice is fundamentally interrelated with other aspects of organizational life. For example, Anita and Nick's different ways of positioning themselves in relation to Rod's suggestion suggest that they hold different understandings of how far line managers must go in order to avoid events which might compromise production, as well as different understandings of whether the employees can be depended upon to administer the suggestion reasonably. In this regard, it might be relevant for organizations which host employee voice activities to discuss such matters on a larger scale, so that the employees' chances of having their voice heard is less likely to depend on the position of their line manager.

Conclusion

Central to the line manager role is an obligation to supervise daily work in the organization (Hales, 2005). However, when line managers are also responsible for employee voice activities, a potential for conflicts of interest arises, and the way line managers handle such conflicts directly influences the employees' use of voice in such activities. The results of this study demonstrate that line managers' handling of conflicts of interest cannot adequately be described through references to manager dispositions, such as openness, but that normative aspects of interactions about voice should be considered as well. By assessing their line managers' degree of openness in regard to employee voice, employees can exercise moral judgment towards the line managers. Due to the face-threatening potential, such assessments are unlikely to be made

explicitly to the line managers. Yet, the line managers can be seen to attend both explicitly and implicitly to how their behavior makes such assessments relevant, taking various steps to avoid negative assessments through how they account for and handle conflicts of interest, for example when invoking their supervisory rights. The present study thereby contributes to voice theory and practice by highlighting not only the challenges facing line managers in relation to voice but also the fundamental role of rhetoric in discussions of voiced problems and suggestions. A more nuanced conception of how line managers are able to regulate which voiced problems and suggestions are heeded through the voice activity is presented in this study, evidenced by the variety of types of strategies utilized by the line managers to influence the employees' decisions to pursue the suggestion and by the moral threats that this can entail.

On a closing note, substantial research attention has been paid to employees' retrospective accounts or responses about their own behavior and that of their line managers in relation to voice (Garner, 2013). While the literature on voice owes much to this approach, a fundamental criticism is that such data do not adequately capture the dynamics of employee-manager interactions in practice, but, rather, represent individuals' commonsense strategies for making events related to voice accountable (Garfinkel, 1967b). By viewing employee voice through an interactional lens, this study aims to inspire future research to focus on the communicative mechanisms through which voice is exercised and responded to, including their moral and rhetorical aspects.

9. Discussion and conclusions

In recent years, a number of authors have questioned whether the direct formal voice arrangements that are currently on the rise constitute a viable way for employees to address problematic working conditions (Busck et al., 2010; Heery, 2015; Strauss, 2006). A main aim of this dissertation has been to contribute to this discussion by furthering our understanding of how participants in direct group-based voice activities (DGVAs) construct initiatives to improve the employees' working conditions. In order to understand this process, it was argued that a new, interactional perspective on voice is needed. A conversation analytic approach to studying interactions was presented and applied in the analyses presented in the four previous chapters.

In this chapter, I will discuss what we can learn from the dissertation's analyses. First, the four articles will be summarized and an answer will be presented for the dissertation's overall research question. Then, I will argue that the study offers three main theoretical contributions, which address the three common understandings within the voice literature critiqued in chapter 2. In addition, the dissertation introduces CA as a method for studying voice interactions and suggests various implications for practice which are especially relevant for DGVAs aimed at improving the work environment.

Summarizing the four articles

The first article showed how the process of constructing initiatives to be implemented after the DGVA involves both problem work and solution work, that is, the presentation and negotiation of various candidate formulations of what has caused the problem under discussion to emerge or of what constitutes an appropriate and possible solution. The participants' problem and solution work is shaped by their relative rights to claim knowledge about the candidate problems and solutions, that is, their *epistemic authority*. Although the employees hold epistemic authority relative to the management within various domains (such as their bodily sensations), this authority, and potentially the credibility of employees' problem formulations, can be challenged rhetorically. The first article thus calls attention to how the initiatives constructed within DGVAs at times primarily reflect which problems or suggestions the employees believe that they can raise without their claims being called into question, thus exercising a form of self-censorship. The fact that employees hold a relatively low epistemic status in relation to many of

the topics that they potentially could wish to exercise voice about may limit the scope of topics which they can influence through DGVAs.

The second article focuses on the purported link between participatory work environment interventions (referred to as POLIs), which often involve DGVAs, and increases in employees' job control. The article demonstrated how the process of constructing initiatives within DGVAs is shaped by how the participants construct their general ability to shape their own working conditions, which has been called their job control within the literature. In discussions about their job control, employees present *accounts* of past events, aspects of the work setting, or expected future scenarios in order to negotiate whether they enjoy enough control to warrant their active participation in the voice activity. If they find they lack this control, they are unlikely to propose and discuss possible initiatives for later implementation. However, the discussions between the DGVA participants at times also revolve around specific proposed initiatives, and here participants may take part in spite of previously having expressed skepticism. Furthermore, it was demonstrated how the concepts or conceptual models used in DGVAs become invoked in the participants' accounts, potentially influencing the discussion and the initiatives that are decided on for later implementation. The second article suggests that whether DGVAs as a type of participatory work environment intervention increase employees' job control and lead to improvements in their working conditions is contingent on the trajectory of the discussions in the activities, and thus that further attention should be paid to how the way the activities are designed and facilitated shape the participants' discussions.

By utilizing membership categorization analysis, article three demonstrated how supporting proposed initiatives in DGVAs can lead to various identity ascriptions for the employees, and how undesired ascriptions of identities and identifications can constitute a social risk for the employees that has not been adequately explored. Specifically, an important aspect of DGVA participants' discussions about whether and how to implement proposed initiatives is how assuming responsibility for the implementation can lead others to ascribe various favorable or unfavorable identities. These identity ascriptions often revolve around whether the employees' actions are seen by the other participants as a display of identification with the organization and/or the management's interests, or with the interests of the employee collective or

themselves, with both being potentially problematic depending on the setting. In cases where assuming responsibility for implementing an initiative were described as potentially leading to undesired identity ascriptions, the employees were found to sometimes resist responsibility for implementing the initiatives, even when no clear alternative suggestions for addressing the problem in question had been discussed. The findings thus suggest that engaging in DGVAs as an employee can involve trade-offs between potentially gaining influence over one's working conditions and potentially losing control over how one's identity is constructed in the interaction. They also point to how the circumstances of a DGVA can potentially facilitate the process of managing such trade-offs to one's advantage.

Finally, article four focused on the perspective of line managers participating in the DGVAs. Line managers participating in DGVAs can be said to have a conflict of interest, as they are responsible not only for meeting organizational goals through how daily work is performed but also for encouraging employees to exercise voice (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Townsend, 2014; Townsend et al., 2013). It has been argued that the way line managers handle this type of conflict of interest is related to their leadership style or to personal dispositions such as their degree of openness towards voice. However, these explanations overlook how line managers' sometimes conflicting obligations can lead to socially delicate situations for the managers if they are seen as neglecting one of their obligations, as well as how managers actively handle these situations. Using analytical concepts from DP and CA, article four demonstrated various strategies that line managers adopt in their reactions to employee voice, strategies which work to maintain accountability in relation to how they handle the conflict of interest. This concern with accountability is especially evident when managers challenge employees' proposals, and in such scenarios, line managers may frame their resistance as being made necessary by the specific circumstances regarding the proposal. In addition, the article demonstrated various rhetorical strategies that line managers can use to influence discussions on proposed initiatives in DGVAs.

Answering the dissertation's research question

In chapter one, the following research question was posed:

- *How do initiatives to change the employees' working conditions become constructed within direct group-based voice activities?*

In what follows, the focus will initially be on the overall practical aspects of how the initiatives are constructed, and the social and interactional mechanisms which undergird the process will be explicated further in the following sections of the chapter. It should be remembered that the way the practical aspects are presented here is based on analytical distinctions which I employ in order to structure the findings. The practical aspects are not chronological “steps” and did not necessarily appear one at a time or in sequence; instead, they sometimes overlapped or appeared in a different order than presented here.

One aspect how DGVA participants construct initiatives to be implemented is building consensus around what constitutes a problematic working condition and what can practically be done about it. Article one describes this process in terms of problem and solution work. In decision-making terms, problem work involves building consensus around an understanding of the current state of affairs (Huisman, 2001), with candidate problem formulations being negotiated through presentations of arguments. Similarly, solution work involves negotiating various formulations of future states of affairs (Huisman, 2001), which describe what consequences would be expected if certain proposed initiatives were to be implemented. Through discussion and negotiation of the various, and sometimes incompatible, problem and solution formulations that have been put forth, compromises may be reached on which viewpoints are most representative of their situation.

As noted previously, participants sometimes discuss potential solutions without having arrived at a shared understanding of the problem. In addition, it is of course not necessarily the case that the participants orient to the current states of affairs as problematic; what seems crucial for building consensus around a formulated initiative is that the initiative is constructed as bringing about attractive future states of affairs. For example, article four demonstrated how the value of a proposed initiative was challenged through descriptions of how the initiative would lead to various problems for the participants if it was implemented. As it was also shown in article four is that line managers may invoke their role-based rights to close down the participants’ discussions of a proposed initiative, for example in the form of indirect threats to fight the implementation of the initiative.

Another aspect of constructing initiatives is negotiating a shared understanding of which initiatives the participants would be able to implement successfully, an understanding which is

likely to shape which of the proposed initiatives the participants end up deciding to implement. This aspect was the focus of article two, where the participants' job control was approached as being constructed and enacted within the DGVA. Early in the DGVAs, the employees sometimes described their job control as insufficient for influencing their working conditions, thereby calling into question the facilitator's agenda of developing initiatives in the workshop meeting.

It has been argued that it cannot be known in advance whether a formal voice arrangement will actually lead to positive changes in employees' working conditions, and thus that the value of a formal voice arrangement must be assessed retrospectively (Allen, 2014). However, article two illustrates how employees in DGVAs can only take relevant action if they construct the efficacy of the arrangement *prospectively*. Will engaging with the formal voice arrangement help them change their working conditions, or will it be a waste of their time? The way the employees position themselves in relation to these questions is likely to shape their strategy for participating in the DGVA, and taking a pessimistic stance towards the DGVA might cut short the discussions which could have led to the development of relevant and realistic initiatives. Thus, the analysis presented in article two reveals an important reflexive loop between how the participants construct the likelihood of influencing their working conditions within DGVAs and the actual outcomes of DGVAs.

However, it was also pointed out in article two that initial descriptions of having a low general job control were not necessarily invoked by the employees later in the DGVAs where their discussions had shifted to more specific matters, such as how to influence managers in authority to approve of a suggestion (see also article three, cases one and three). Indeed, some of the employees who were most verbal in describing their general job control as low early on in workshop meetings were also among those most active in making suggestions or assuming responsibility for initiatives later in the workshop meetings. Thus, the findings suggest that employees potentially position themselves quite fluidly towards the DGVA based on their current interactional goals and how the employees construct their job control in relation to the specific initiatives under discussion.

A third aspect of constructing initiatives is whether any of the participants commit to carrying out the tasks associated with the initiative. Although employees do not necessarily participate in

implementing initiatives from DGVAs, engaging employees in the implementation process is recommended both in the empowerment literature (e.g., Boje & Rosile, 2001) and in the work environment literature (e.g., Busck et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2013). In the DGVAs studied here, the matter of who would implement the initiative was often discussed when there was some consensus around how to understand the current situation, but before it was entirely clear what the initiative consisted of, suggesting that the participant's solution work was potentially influenced by whether any employees were willing to contribute to the implementation. In the data, it was typical for the facilitator or the line manager to suggest one or more employees to assume responsibility for the implementation, targeting employees who had either proposed the initiative or contributed to substantially to the discussion of it (see, for example, the second case of article two or the first case of article three). However, it was not a given that someone would accept responsibility for implementing a proposed initiative, and, as article three demonstrates, employees might, for example, be reluctant to assume responsibility for implementing a proposed initiative when this initiative could lead to undesired identity ascriptions.

In sum, a number of different challenges might surface in the process of constructing change initiatives in DGVAs, and the number and scope of the initiatives that are decided for later implementation on the basis of the activity depends on how the participants handle these challenges.

Implications for theory

Voice as a negotiated rather than a transmitted phenomenon

If voice interactions are viewed through the lens of the transmission metaphor, our attention is turned to potential obstacles to exercising voice and to having one's voice heard as an employee (cf. Dundon et al., 2004), while other aspects, such as the topic of voice or the formulation of the voice message, are framed as less important. However, the transmission metaphor has been criticized for not providing an adequate picture of the communicational processes related to voice: for example, as Garner has argued (2013), the meaning and effectiveness of a voice message is not given, but negotiated among those present. The discussion in the previous section clearly illustrates how negotiations are found throughout the process of constructing initiatives, thus emphasizing the problems with applying the transmission metaphor of voice to DGVA interactions. Thus, the present section is devoted to a discussion of how shifting from a

transmission metaphor of voice to one focusing on negotiation may suggest new ways of understanding well-known concepts within the voice literature as achieved in interaction.

One set of concepts within the voice literature is derived from a psychological vocabulary regarding how employees and managers are understood to act in relation to voice. Scholars working in the tradition of discursive psychology (DP) have argued that many phenomena which are normally thought of as psychological can also be seen as situationally achieved – a view which is likely to reveal new aspects (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992). One example of this was mentioned in the previous section, where it was argued that employees’ ways of positioning themselves in relation to DGVA’s might be quite fluid, meaning that as the interaction develops and the interactants orient themselves towards new interactional goals, the interactants might position themselves differently towards the DGVA’s. This is in contrast to how a number of authors have described employees as taking an overall and relatively stable stance towards the formal voice arrangements available to them (e.g., Ahlbrandt et al., 1992; Donaghey et al., 2011; Hodson, 2002; Marchington et al., 1994; Stohl & Jennings, 1988).

Article four explored the notion of manager *openness* and provided an interactional reframing of the term. From an interactional perspective, being open as a manager is not simply a personal disposition, but an assessment that is made by others or that one makes of oneself. Such assessments involve judgments about the person in question’s moral status, such as whether a manager acts reasonably towards the employees and cooperates with the agenda of the formal voice arrangement. Assessments become especially relevant when persons fail to act as they are expected to, according to relevant cultural scripts (Edwards, 1995). Thus, line managers’ challenges to employees’ suggestions in DGVA’s might elicit explicit or, perhaps more likely, implicit assessments from the employees that the line manager is “closed,” which line managers may attempt to inoculate themselves against through how they account for their challenges. Paraphrasing Sacks (1992), the line managers can be said to be “doing being open.”

Another concept which can be respecified on the basis of the dissertation’s analyses is interests. Drawing on Fox’s frames of references (1966), a number of authors have argued that different types of formal voice arrangements are based on either unitarist or pluralist frames of reference (e.g., Busck et al., 2010; Heery, 2015; Strauss, 2006). For example, Mowbray and colleagues

(2015) claim that many formal voice arrangements in recent years have been management-initiated and to some degree management-controlled and thus in line with a unitarist frame of reference. However, the analysis presented in article three suggests that for the participants, the questions of whether employees and managers hold overlapping or conflicting interests, and of whose interests are promoted within a DGVA have no ultimate resolution but is, instead, negotiated by the participants on an ongoing basis (see also Whittle & Mueller, 2011; Whittle, Suhomlinova, & Mueller, 2010). For one, different participants take different positions in relation to whether they must frame their initiatives as falling within the management's interests, or if the management should instead be accommodating to the employees' interests (e.g., article three, case three). Second, there might not be consensus among the employees about what constitutes their interests, and discussions might arise about whether a proposed initiative promotes certain interests at the cost of others (see, e.g., the discussions between the employees in article four). Third, since gaining the management's support for initiatives is often a crucial step towards their implementation, the participants can be seen to construct what the management's interests are on a case-by-case basis in order to assess how the initiative is likely to be received (see especially article two, case two; and article three, case three). Of course, the management might eventually consider interests other than those expected by the employees when making decisions about whether to accept or reject employee-proposed initiatives. However, the point is that the way the management's interests are constructed in DGVAs is likely to shape the participants' decisions about which initiatives to pursue. Thus, to associate certain formal voice arrangements with either a unitarist or pluralist frame of reference overlooks how the outcomes of the voice arrangements are in practice influenced by the way interests are constructed and negotiated in the participants' interactions.

Relatedly, if one sees interests as constructed and negotiated, it becomes relevant to consider whether the initiatives developed in DGVAs can be taken to represent what is in the "hearts and minds" of the employees (Dundon et al., 2004, p. 1160). As the discussions featured in the four articles demonstrate, employees are rarely in complete agreement about what can be considered a problem, what causes it, and what can be done about it, which leads to most initiatives being based on compromise. Sometimes, the initiatives chosen for implementation will not be in line with some of the viewpoints that had been raised by participants in the discussion, as in third case of article two. It seems possible that the group aspect of DGVAs may put individual employees at a disadvantage if the points they wish to voice are not acknowledged by their

colleagues. Although others have acknowledged this problem before (Mansbridge, 1973), little has been done to address it within the voice literature. It thus seems relevant to pay increased attention to what can be called the “polyphony” (e.g., Belova, 2010; Hazen, 1993; Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006) of employee voice.

The role of morality in voice-related interactions

While the main risk for employees when engaging in voice is described in the literature as concerning retribution (e.g., Morrison, 2011), the dissertation’s analyses demonstrate the existence and importance of a quite different type of risk: the risk of transgressing the moral order of the participants’ work setting as it is enacted in the meeting, and the social sanctions that such transgressions might entail. Heritage has stated that local standards of moral accountability “constrain the range of actions which an actor may be prepared to undertake” (1983, pp. 119–120), and, as Nielsen has shown in relation to “thinking outside the box” in co-creating processes (2014), even institutional settings which are sometimes framed as a contrast to the more typical, hierarchical decision-making settings do not override the moral obligations that employees observe in their everyday work-related interactions. The findings of the analyses suggest that the same holds for DGVAs.

A fundamental concern for the participants regards meeting their various obligations. A very general obligation followed by the participants in the analyses was the social obligation to be honest. For example, in article one, one of the excerpts featured the facilitator asking the employees whether their complaints were rooted mainly in dissatisfaction with their work shoes or with the management. The question could be interpreted as implying that the employees had overstated the problems related to the shoes in order to voice dissatisfaction towards management, and thus, on a moral level, that the employees had acted in a way that was morally problematic by not being straightforward (Heritage, 2015). In their response, the employees mitigated such implications by emphasized the various physical problems the workers had experienced because of the work shoes and their efforts to solve these problems by themselves. Other obligations are related to the DGVA participants’ roles such as their formal roles within the organization. When role categories are made relevant in the interaction, the obligations associated with these roles provide a moral backdrop for judging the role incumbent’s actions

and/or lack thereof (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1992). For example, article three provided a demonstration of how a proposed initiative (to allow the employees to go for a walk or run outside of the production area under certain circumstances) was oriented to by the employees, their line managers, and the process facilitator as potentially being in conflict with the employees' obligation to mind the production. The potential social complications from failing to heed this obligation were manifested in the employees' and line managers' repeated insistence that they knew how important it would be to keep the production running if the suggestion were to be implemented. Also in article four, line manager Nick argued against implementing the initiative based on how other organization members might infer that employees running during work hours constituted a managerial oversight.

By describing how line managers accounted for how they manage the conflict of interest caused by their conflicting obligations towards promoting employee voice and ensuring effective production, article four highlighted how obligations can also be tied to one's role within the DGVA. The fact that the managers sought to account for their actions even in the absence of (verbal) indications that the employees considered their actions problematic suggests that the line managers expected their actions within the DGVA to be judged by the employees.

The obligations that employees follow in DGVAs may also depend on the situation. In article three, it was demonstrated how employees oriented to whether implementing an initiative could be seen as an indication of them identifying with the management (cases one and three). The employees' reluctance suggests that assuming responsibility for the implementation in a way which projected identification with the management was taken as problematic (as was also suggested by the category and predicate work), and that employees' displays of organizational identification are normatively regulated, albeit in a way that is dependent on the setting. Article three thus extends Garner's notion of how voicing employees are labelled by managers and colleagues (2013), by showing how both the use of voice as well as subsequent engagement in implementing initiatives are oriented to as activities which can elicit labelling from others.

In sum, the findings discussed above illustrate how DGVA participants repeatedly face complex choices: employees must consider whether and how they can influence their working conditions,

and managers must consider how to live up to their supervisory obligations, while attempting to avoid negative moral judgments from other participants based on one's actions. The risk of these moral judgments is not necessarily clear, but is rather made sense of and managed in the interaction on an ongoing basis. Thus, even when employees consider the use of voice to be effective and unlikely to lead to formal sanctions, their concern over avoiding moral criticism might compromise their ability to construct relevant initiatives that could influence their working conditions. The dissertation's exploration of how the locally enacted moral order shapes the process of constructing initiatives thus answers the call for studies which address how employees' orientations towards the implications of engaging in voice shape their actual voice behavior (Greasley et al., 2005; Morrison, 2011).

Voice and the balance between employee influence and management control

In chapter two, criticism was aimed at the fact that voice literature has tended to focus on how structural aspects and differences in formal decision authority shape the balance between managerial control and employee influence in relation to formal voice arrangements, as exemplified by the "escalator of participation" and "frontier of control" models. What these models do not take into consideration is that even if the structural conditions are supportive of employee voice, DGVAs are not ideal speech situations (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; S. K. White, 1988), where the participants have equal opportunity to make proposals and question others' positions, for example. By instead taking an interactional perspective on voice, this dissertation is able to shed light on how the balance between employee influence and managerial control in DGVAs is shaped by the use of power as "a set of potentials which, while always present, may be varyingly exercised, resisted, shifted around, and struggled over by social agents" (Hutchby, 1996a, p. 114), potentials which so far have received little attention in the voice literature.

A potential which is related to formal decision authority is how participants enact their roles in the interaction. Whereas voice research rarely attends to how employees and managers act within their respective roles, CA research has demonstrated how role categories are "recurrently oriented to, renegotiated, and sometimes also challenged" in actual interactions (Asmuß & Oshima, 2012, p. 68). Because of how role categories are subject to negotiation, the way interactions develop in the workplace is not so much a product of the interactants' relative

positions in the hierarchical organization structure as it is a display of enacted “structure-in-action” (Zimmerman & Boden, 1991).

An important aspect of the participants’ negotiated role categories is the relative deontic statuses of various role incumbents, such as their respective rights. For example, in article four it was argued that while managers and employees might engage in DGVA discussions under the workshop-level role category of “participants,” the organization-level role categories of managers and employees are omni-relevant and thus easily recognized when invoked, for example when exercising rights that are specifically related to these role categories. This can be observed when line manager Nick states that he will fight the proposed initiative if it is pursued by the employees; Nick’s indirect threat can be seen as orienting both to his right to make the decisions deemed necessary in order to maintain high work performance outside of the DGVA, and his lack of a formal right to close down the employees’ discussions within the DGVA.

The negotiation of deontic status in DGVAs also extends to the employees. In case three of article three, for example, the discussion can be regarded as a negotiation of whether employees have a right to have their initiative proposals acknowledged by the management even when the employees take a confrontational stance (case 3), and especially in cases one and three, negotiation took place over whether employees should feel obliged to present voice messages to the management *on* the managements’ terms. These examples suggest that the participants’ relative rights and obligations are not hard and fast, but negotiated through the way they are enacted and responded to.

Another aspect of how power enters into the process of constructing initiatives in DGVAs is through the use of certain rhetoric, which can be seen as a form of “linguistic shielding” (Cheney, 2000, p. 133) that interactants use to fend off challenges to their positions. In interactions, the credibility of accounts and other descriptions is a practically managed feat (Edwards & Potter, 1992). For example, the analysis in article four shows how speakers seek to gain support for their viewpoints through various discursive devices (e.g., Whittle et al., 2008). Line manager Nick utilized both *script formulations* and *stake inoculation* to frame his account of how a proposed initiative would lead to problems as credible. In other cases, the participants strengthened their rhetorical position through invoking local taken-for-granted knowledge (Boden, 1994; Samra-Fredericks, 2003); for example, in the third case of article two, the line

manager and some of the employees convinced another employee to agree to letting a physical therapist assess a certain ergonomic problem, since designing a solution without consulting an expert was argued to have led to problematic results in the past.

The ability to present different types of knowledge, that is, the participants' relative epistemic statuses (Clifton, 2014; Heritage & Raymond, 2005), was the focus of article one. It was concluded in this article that if employees present problem formulations for which they do not hold the epistemic authority, these formulations might be challenged by others who hold epistemic authority in relation to the topic, such as their managers, thereby potentially limiting the scope of issues that employees are able to address through DGVA's. Furthermore, information to which some participants have exclusive access can be used to challenge other participants' suggestions, as was evidenced by the critical comments made by an employee and joint consultation committee member regarding a proposed initiative in article four. This finding indicates that by invoking their epistemic status strategically, DGVA participants can potentially shape the trajectory of the discussion and, in turn, which initiatives are selected for implementation. However, the ability to do this is not possessed to the same degree by all employees in DGVA's, since there may be a variety of epistemic statuses among the participants due to circumstances such as differences in levels of experience and whether they hold special roles within the organization (see also Clifton, 2009).

As a third aspect of how power is exercised in DGVA interaction, it has been argued that managerial control in formal voice arrangements can also be expressed in the form of ideology. For example, Busck and colleagues (2010) state that some forms of employee participation allow the management to "invad[e] the realm of employees with coercive expectations of self-management by employees on the normative premises of the company" (p. 290). Similarly, Stohl and Cheney have described that participation can lead to organizational identification that paradoxically makes "the workers no longer think like workers" as the employees become increasingly involved in what was previously thought to be the management's problems (2001, p. 382). However, as analytical concepts, it is problematic that neither the intentions of the management nor the employees' subjective experience are available to the analysis, meaning that there is ultimately no certain way to identify whether and when managerial ideology is at

play in the data, at least beyond the participants' own references to ideology (Whittle et al., 2014).

Still, CA may be used more modestly to elucidate how the management's interests are promoted through the line managers' contributions to discussions, and how the line managers' statements frame it as natural and logical that employees should accommodate the management's interests, for example. One example is found in article four, where not compromising production is framed as a necessary prerequisite for proposed initiatives, instead of assessing proposed initiatives on the basis of a wider appreciation of their specific costs and benefits for both the employees and the organization. Here, taking a more balanced approach to promoting both employees' and the management's interests could mean that certain initiatives would be acceptable for implementation though these might reduce production output if the gains for the employees are sufficiently great. Also, as already mentioned, the first and third cases of article three feature line managers advising employees to frame their voice messages in a way that is in line with the middle management's interests rather than their own interests (see also article two).

But whereas ideology is typically understood to lead to employees to accepting the management's perspective in an unconscious or unreflexive way (e.g., Appelbaum et al., 1999; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998), the analyses also demonstrate that the employees sometimes actively resisted the line managers' suggestions; for example, in cases one and three of article three, the employees' resistance and non-compliance with taking responsibility for implementing initiatives on the management's terms could be regarded as a form of "micro-emancipation" (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Furthermore, the finding that employees sometimes consented to implementing initiatives in a way that involved placating the management (such as in article two, case two) could be seen as an attempt to turn managerial rhetoric against the management in order to further their own agendas (see also Rosenthal, Hill, & Peccei, 1997). In this way, DGVA's have the potential to serve as an arena where employees can increase their understanding of how decisions are made in other parts of the organization, and how to potentially sway these decisions, and the employees have the ability to decide within DGVA's whether a proposed strategy for implementing an initiative constitutes an overall reasonable trade-off for them.

Thus, in regard to the escalator model of participation and its implication that the extent of participants' influence in a DGVA is set before they enter into it (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005), the analyses presented here suggest that in DGVAs, employees' influence over their working conditions is not only shaped by formal decision-making rights, but also how the participants' roles are negotiated during the activities, their use of various rhetorical devices, and how managerial interests are promoted, resisted and potentially subverted in the discussions. Of course, the nature of the influence available to the employees within DGVAs is also dependent upon what they make of whatever formal decision authority they have, such as their ability to construct initiatives which actually become implemented and which change their working conditions in relevant ways. Thus, the point is that Marchington and Wilkinson's claim that the influence that employees can attain in formal voice arrangements is directly related to which step on the escalator the arrangement can be seen as occupying overlooks how employees' influence is likely to be highly contingent upon the issues they try to address as well as the initiatives that they wish to implement, and thus the specific circumstances of how these initiatives are constructed.

In relation to the frontier of control model, the analyses presented here suggest that if such a thing as a "frontier of control" exists in the organization, as claimed by Donaghey and colleagues (2011), employees in different workshop meetings do not seem to share a clear idea of where it lies or how to act in relation to it, as evidenced by the different ways in which they enacted their job control, for example. Instead, the status of the relationship between employees and the management within the organization as well as whose interests should be promoted through the DGVA are negotiated continuously within the workshop meetings.

Overall, an interactional view on power, such as that of Hutchby (described above), seems highly compatible with how Wilkinson and Dundon have argued that "we need to avoid a passive view of workers, as the importance of [formal voice arrangements] lies in the context of the translation of their supposed formal properties within the real terrain of the organization and workplace" (Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010, p. 180), as well as with Dundon and colleagues' claim that "management might control the voice agenda but not necessarily the dynamics of how such processes are mediated and translated into actual practice" (Dundon et al., 2005, p. 318). Still, the finding that different forms of power are at play in the process of constructing initiatives suggests that conscious efforts might be needed to promote egalitarian values in voice

interactions. Identifying, and potentially challenging, these forms of power in DGVA's requires detailed knowledge of how they are exercised in interactions.

Implications for research

When it comes to methodology in workplace voice research, the dissertation makes a contribution by introducing CA as a method for shedding light on the process of constructing initiatives in DGVA's, and potentially also on voice-related interactions in general. While Garner (2013) also studied voice-related interactions, his focus was on intertextuality between conversations at different points of time. In contrast, this dissertation has focused on how specific interactions are organized.

Traditionally, voice research has tended to focus on how voice in the workplace is shaped by either psychological or structural factors. But as Benson and Hughes argue, without a detailed analysis of the concerns of the people studied, the expected result would be that "we know little about the properties of the underlying phenomena; only how it looks through the imposition of the format" (1991, p. 121). A CA framework offers a method of examining how voice interactions in the workplace are organized which does not frame employees and managers as "cultural dopes" who mindlessly reproduce the local structure, or as dopes of a psychological kind, whose actions are seen as unreflexive expressions of inner thoughts and emotions (Garfinkel, 1967b, p. 68).

It could be argued that in relation to informal voice, retrospective methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, have various practical advantages over audio-recorded interactions. When studying voice in formal voice interactions from a CA perspective, one is helped by the fact that it is relatively easy to collect relevant data. It is more challenging, however, when targeting informal voice interactions, since it is not generally possible to know when the interactions will take place, and a great deal of time must then be spent in the organization recording situations in which voice could occur in order to capture enough data material. There is also a potential that very few potential informants would be willing to have their work conversations audio recorded to this extent. Furthermore, it is not always clear whether everyday work interactions can be said to count as instances of voice for the participants – for example, if a manager mentions a performance slump being a problem to the employees, and the employees attribute the slump to various problems, does this count as voice or simply a justification? Although some argue that

the wish to improve working conditions or benefit the organization is a defining feature of voice (e.g., Morrison, 2011), employees might not always declare whether they expect the problems they mention to be resolved. When collecting interview or questionnaire data, it is possible to rely on the participants' own determination of whether they are exercising voice. Thus, various precautions are necessary if a CA method is to be applied to informal voice interactions.

The introduction of a CA perspective also offers a methodological contribution to work environment studies on voice by presenting a means of illuminating various aspects of the dynamic between managerial control and employee influence through detailed analysis. In much of work environment literature, organizations are regarded as rational systems, and topics such as power and morality in organizations are rarely discussed. CA, in contrast, provides a strategy for studying how organization members' orientation to acting in a morally accountable way (according to the locally enacted order) may compromise the pursuit of improved health, well-being, and safety. What work environment professionals and academics take to be work environment problems are not necessarily a main concern of employees and managers in their everyday interactions about work, a circumstance which might partly account for why it is difficult to significantly alter the prevalence of many types of work-related illness and injuries. A CA approach can be used to elucidate how concerns for employees' health, well-being, and safety are formulated in interactions and how their importance relative to other concerns in the organization are negotiated, potentially leading to a more nuanced discussion of the challenges that may be faced when trying to improve the work environment through interventions or other means.

Implications for practice

The question of what counts as a contribution to practice depends on how one understands voice and whether one attends mainly to the interests of employees or managers. Here, I focus on how developing a practical awareness of the interactional circumstances surrounding the construction of initiatives in DGVA's can potentially lead to DGVA's which are more effective at helping employees' influence their working conditions. Besides the interactional perspective on voice presented in the thesis, this focus is most in step with the institutionalized influence perspective on voice.

The analyses demonstrate that various practical circumstances potentially influence the process of constructing initiatives in DGVAs, and this knowledge can be employed when planning and conducting DGVAs. In general, since constructing relevant and viable initiatives can be time-consuming due to the extensive problem and solution work that is sometimes involved, and because employees might be reluctant to support or assume responsibility for some of the initiatives that are proposed. Therefore, allotting too little time for DGVA meetings could compromise the number and the scope of initiatives that are decided for later implementation. Furthermore, the conceptual tools that are used in DGVAs can shape the interaction and ultimately the initiatives that are selected for implementation, as was demonstrated in article two. Considering this, careful attention should be paid to how conceptual tools are used in practice and their effects on the activities (see also Wåhlin-Jacobsen, 2018). A third point is that information is a necessary resource for the employees if they are to effectively argue for why their working conditions should be improved (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). This is evident, for example, in article two, case two, where a line manager argued why a night rostering system might be a viable solution for the participants when it had not been previously. The presentation of further accounts on the subject led to more detailed discussions of how the suggestion could be adjusted to become more viable, and a decision to pursue its implementation was eventually made. However, the presentation of such information is subject to normative regulation (cf. socioepistemic literature). This means that closer consideration is needed of how DGVAs can be designed in a way so that relevant information can be sourced and utilized by the employees, for example by making available the technical expertise of colleagues or people outside the organization.

Another important aspect of some DGVAs is the use of process facilitators to guide the participants through the agenda, rather than having a manager chair the activity, for example. Process facilitators can promote a more distributed use of voice among the employees, for example by giving the floor to those employees who might not feel comfortable taking it themselves, or by intervening in the discussion and challenging dominant accounts, especially when they are presented as “factual.” It is of course relevant that facilitators develop an awareness of how individual participants influence the trajectory of the discussion and also of how their own actions might privilege certain understandings which only partially represent the participating employees’ viewpoints. However, studies of collaborative design processes have also concluded that though counterintuitive, a relatively firm approach to the chairing role might

lead to outcomes representing the participants' interests and viewpoints more broadly (Heinemann, Landgrebe, & Matthews, 2012).

At a more general level, the dissertation studies point to there being various constraints within DGVA's which limit the employees' ability to construct relevant initiatives. The presence of these constraints suggest that having a variety of formal voice arrangements in place is likely to lead to better results for the employees since it gives them the option of choosing which arrangement to exercise voice within – a choice that may be utilized in a way that maximizes their chances of influencing working conditions (Wilkinson & Dundon, 2010). In addition, the finding that a number of different types of power are at play simultaneously in DGVA interactions implies that effective voice is not attained as a once-and-for-all achievement but is strived for on an ongoing basis, one activity at a time. Cathcart reached a similar conclusion on the basis of her case study of the John Lewis Partnership, one of Europe's largest partnerships for employee ownership, calling democracy in organizations "a moving target, subject to constant challenge and reinterpretation, which requires vigilance and protection" (Cathcart, 2013, p. 615). Similarly, Cheney has argued that if efforts to expand employees' influence in the workplace are to be successful, it is not enough to implement an occasional voice arrangement if this is done in a mechanistic fashion; instead, such efforts need to be undertaken as "a self-critical, self-regenerating and self-correcting process" (Cheney, 1995, p. 183). Of course, being self-critical is not only the task of managers but also the task of the employees and other participants who contribute to shaping the voice process. It only seems fitting that future voice research take steps towards describing how such self-critical processes can be created and maintained. This dissertation has contributed by highlighting various challenges that DGVA participants face while attempting to change the organization through voice.

Limitations

The studies of course also have limitations. For one, the data were collected in a Danish cultural context where the power distance between employees and managers is argued by some as being relatively small compared to other parts of the world (e.g., Hofstede, 1984), a circumstance which might have influenced how the relative rights and obligations of the participating employees and managers were enacted in the interactions. Furthermore, the setting examined in

the dissertation is somewhat limited, as the analysis focused on one type of DGVA in two settings rather than on a broader array DGVA formats or settings. On the other hand, with limited time to collect the data, sampling from many empirical settings would mean that the analyst has less data from each setting and less time to engage with each of settings in order to form a background understanding. This could lead to overlooking local constitutive aspects of the interaction.

Another limitation of the dissertation is that it only focuses on how initiatives are constructed during the DGVAs. The analysis does not attempt to describe what happens after the meetings, such as whether the initiatives that are presented to middle or senior management are accepted or actually implemented. If evaluating the total effects of DGVAs is the aim, investigating any later developments that have a bearing on the decisions that emerged from the voice activities would be called for. However, the focus of this dissertation was to better understand the process itself of constructing initiatives in DGVAs, a process which of course is not affected by later events.

A third limitation of the analysis is that video data were not available in the analytical process. As voice interactions are not only a verbal phenomenon, it would have added to the strength of the study to have had been able to also consider interactional aspects such as eye contact or gesture or to more securely establish who was speaking at a given time. On the other hand, recording and analyzing video is more labor intensive than focusing on audio alone, and it could be considered more invasive by the participants.

On a closing note, various relevant topics can be suggested for future research. First, it could be relevant to study voice interactions in different types of organizations and with different types of employees. The employees in the dissertation's empirical setting had relatively routinized work and had little experience with implementing initiatives in the workplace on their own. It is possible that employees with more experience with implementing initiatives (e.g., because of having a project leader function in the organization) would approach the process of constructing initiatives in DGVAs differently, and would for example be less reliant on the line managers' suggestions for how to approach middle managers with proposals.

Second, a relevant aspect of DGVAs which concerns the work environment and which has not been a main focus in this dissertation relates to the conceptions that the participants negotiate

about how their working conditions shape their health, well-being, and safety over time (Rasmussen, 2013), that is, the contents of their problem work. Although certain academics and official bodies maintain that participatory interventions can improve employee health, well-being, and safety, these outcomes may not emerge if employees do not target the relevant working conditions out of fear that the management would not acknowledge them (Busck et al., 2010), or simply because the employees themselves do not identify these working conditions as strenuous. Having a better understanding of how work environment problems are constructed in DGVAAs could lead to more qualified discussions on whether DGVAAs should focus on maximizing employees' autonomy, or whether balancing employees' discussions with expert-driven content on certain subjects could lead to better outcomes.

Third, as concluded on the basis of the analyses, it is problematic to assume that all employee participants influence the initiatives which are constructed in DGVAAs equally, and that these initiatives represent all employees' interests. It seems highly relevant for future studies to further explore how voice in group settings can inadvertently lead to certain employee perspectives being promoted and others being downplayed and to look into what can be done to counterbalance such social dynamics.

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Appendix

Transcription symbols

2.5)	A pause of 2.5 seconds
(.)	Very short pause
[]	Overlap, top section
[]	Overlap, bottom section
[]	Inaudible (text in brackets indicates a guess)
°	Utterance is at a low volume
=	Latching speech
><	Enclosed utterances is at a higher pace
:	Sound is elongated
.h	Inhalation (“h” indicates audible exhalation)
-	Speech is cut off
(())	Anonymized, or transcriber’s comment
?	Sharp rise in intonation

Table 9: a list of notation symbols used in the four articles

Throughout the transcriptions, commas are used as punctuation marks which help the reader understand how speakers’ turns are structured. Although this goes against how punctuation marks are typically avoided in Jeffersonian transcriptions, the commas are used here as an aide for the reader because the transcriptions generally reflect the word sequence and lexical choices of the speakers in Danish as closely as possible without losing overall comprehensibility in English, meaning that some utterances might be difficult to understand for readers who are unfamiliar with typical sentence structures or common phrases in spoken Danish.

Co-author declarations

Co-author statement

Title of paper	Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches? Socioepistemics and the construction of "voiceable" problems and solutions
Journal and date (if published)	

1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem to be investigated and its operationalization into an appropriate set of research questions to be answered through empirical research and/or conceptual development

Description of contribution:

- Christian was the main contributor to formulating the problem of the paper, with important comments and suggestions from Johan

2. Planning of the research, including selection of methods and method development

Description of contribution:

- Christian was the main contributor to selecting and developing the methods of the paper, with important comments and suggestions from Johan

3. Involvement in data collection and data analysis

Description of contribution:

- Christian collected the data
- The analysis was performed collaboratively between Christian and Johan

4. Presentation, interpretation and discussion of the analysis in the form of an article or manuscript

Description of contribution:

- Christian wrote the first draft of the article based on discussions with Johan. Johan offered important suggestions and comments which guided the process of revising the paper into its current form.

1. Co-author (PhD student)	Christian Dyrland Wåhlin-Jacobsen
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
8/6 2018	
Date	Signature

2. Co-author	Johan Simonsen Abildgaard
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
8/6 2018	
Date	Signature

3. Co-author	
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
Date	Signature

4. Co-author	
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
Date	Signature

Co-author statement

Title of paper	Accounting for job control in organizational participatory interventions – collective sensemaking as a missing link
Journal and date (if published)	

1. Formulation/identification of the scientific problem to be investigated and its operationalization into an appropriate set of research questions to be answered through empirical research and/or conceptual development

Description of contribution:

- Esben formulated the original problem for his master's thesis with Johan as his supervisor
- Esben, Christian and Johan collaboratively reframed the thesis into the paper in its current form

2. Planning of the research, including selection of methods and method development

Description of contribution:

- Esben selected the methods for his master's thesis with Johan as his supervisor
- The analytical apparatus was later developed primarily through input from Christian, with Esben and Johan offering additional comments and suggestions

3. Involvement in data collection and data analysis

Description of contribution:

- The data were originally collected by Christian
- The initial selection of data for the analysis and the first version of the analysis were done by Esben for his master's thesis with Johan as his supervisor.
- The analysis was later revised by all three authors collaboratively based on the data selected by Esben

4. Presentation, interpretation and discussion of the analysis in the form of an article or manuscript

Description of contribution:

- While Esben's master's thesis served as a draft, the paper in its current form has been completely revised. Christian and Esben have primarily contributed to the writing, and Johan has contributed with important comments and suggestions.

1. Co-author (PhD student)	Christian Dyrland Wåhlin-Jacobsen
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
8/6 2018  Date Signature	

2. Co-author	Esben Nedergård Olsen
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
8/6 2018  Date Signature	

3. Co-author	Johan Simonsen Abildgaard
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
8/6 2018  Date Signature	

4. Co-author	
I hereby declare that the above information is correct	
Date Signature	

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Videnskabelig assistent Louise Nøhr Henriksen:

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