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Julia Hormuth*

The Benefits of Discourse Analysis for Human Resource Management**

The objective of this article is to take a closer look at discourse analysis as a qualitative method of data collection, analysis and theory building in Human Resource Management. Working exclusively with audio or video recordings of authentic conversations and following a systematic methodological process, discourse analysis enables researchers to develop theoretical conclusions and models on HR topics. First, basic assumptions and tools of discourse analysis are presented. Special emphasis is put on the applied discourse analytical approach and potential benefits for research on Human Resource Management. Second, drawing on a research project carried out at the University of Bayreuth, an example is presented of how discourse analysis was used to investigate experience management. The project yielded a theoretical model that describes the communicative processes of experience transfer among expatriate managers. It reveals the particular challenges involved as well as strategies interactants use to cope with them. Being strictly action-oriented, the model is advantageous for deducing recommendations for Human Resource Development.

Nutzen der Gesprächsanalyse für das Personalmanagement

Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die Leistungen der Gesprächsanalyse als qualitative Methode der Datenerhebung, Auswertung und Theoriebildung im Personalmanagement aufzuzeigen. Die Gesprächsanalyse arbeitet ausschließlich mit Ton- und Videoaufnahmen authentischer Gespräche und folgt dabei einem systematischen methodischen Vorgehen, das es dem Forscher ermöglicht, theoretische Schlussforderungen und Modelle zu Personalmanagementthemen zu entwickeln. Zunächst werden grundlegende Annahmen und Werkzeuge der Gesprächsanalyse vorgestellt. Ein Schwerpunkt liegt auf der *angewandten* Gesprächsforschung und dem Nutzen für die Forschung im Bereich des Personalmanagements. Anhand eines Projekts an der Universität Bayreuth wird aufgezeigt, wie die Gesprächsanalyse genutzt werden kann, um Strategien des Erfahrungsmanagements zu erforschen. In dem Projekt wurde ein theoretisches Modell der kommunikativen Prozesse der Erfahrungsweitergabe unter Auslandsentsandten entwickelt. Es beschreibt die spezifischen Herausforderungen, die sich für Gesprächspartner ergeben, sowie Strategien, die sie zu ihrer Bewältigung verwenden. Das strikt handlungsorientierte Modell bietet eine gute Grundlage, um Empfehlungen für die Personalentwicklungspraxis abzuleiten.

Key words: **discourse analysis, communication, knowledge management, transfer of experiences, expatriates**

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* Dr. Julia Hormuth, Ph.D. in Intercultural Communication at the University of Bayreuth, partner of 'JHRM Intercultural Training', Olgastraße 134, D – 70180 Stuttgart.
E-mail: hormuth@jhrm.de.

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing appreciation of qualitative methods and analysis in research on Human Resource Management. However, we lack a more sophisticated understanding of the contribution of different frameworks and methods offered within the qualitative paradigm. There is especially a need to assess the potential contributions of less well-known qualitative approaches. One example for this is discourse analysis as a qualitative method of data collection and analysis that focuses on the communicative behaviour of people in everyday and institutional contexts.

Today communication is a key qualification for managers. Not only communication experts but also company representatives argue that 70 to 90% of managers' worktime consists in communication (cf. Brünner 2000, 15; Rosenstiel 1994, 117). Whenever managers delegate certain tasks to subordinates, motivate people, negotiate with partners or attend to clients, effective communication is crucial. Despite the importance of communication and communicative competence for managers, the method of discourse analysis that brings into focus these communicative aspects and that provides a unique methodological process for the qualitative analysis of managers' communicative behaviour is barely heard of in the business context and more precisely in Human Resource Management. This is not only stressed by discourse analysts (e.g. Hartung 2004a, 304; Weber/Antos 2005, 57-58), but we also find that basic handbooks and anthologys on research methods in the social sciences seldom comprise articles on discourse analysis (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari/Welch 2004, Richardson 1996). Neither do business coaches, in HRM practice, use discourse analytical tools and findings. They work instead with psychological concepts of communication (e.g. Schulz von Thun 1981; Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson 1969) that hardly ever focus on the particular way people actually *use* language in their communicative practice.

Applied discourse analysts, for their part, focus more and more on questions of practical relevance for Human Resource Management and try to make their results available to practitioners. They investigate conversation in the business context and identify typical communicative problems and successful strategies for conversation in professional contexts. The focus of discourse analytical research in the business context is on specific communicative genres (e.g. job interviews, meetings, sales conversations) and activities (e.g. negotiating, giving orders). Based on their studies discourse analysts design training concepts for the development of communicative competencies, e.g. for sales conversations or negotiations (cf. section 2.2).

A topic that has not yet been investigated by discourse analysts is the transfer of experiences among managers, a communicative activity that managers need to perform in different professional situations, e.g. transfering experiences from older to younger staff or from mentors to mentees. Its relevance is emphasized in Human Resource Management (e.g. Wegerich 2007a, 138-141; 2007b, 221-222) but it has neither been investigated by HRM researchers nor by communication specialists. In the following article, I will show how we used discourse analysis in a research project at the University of Bayreuth to develop a model of the communicative processes of the experience transfer among managers.

2. Discourse analysis as a qualitative research method for Human Resource Management

2.1 Basic assumptions and tools of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis, as refered to in this article, is a methodology used and developed at the interface of linguistics and sociology. Its origins emerged in the United States in the 1960- 1970s in the context of ethnomethodological sociology. The most prominent initiators of the American *'conversation analysis'* (CA) were Sacks (1992/1964-72), Schegloff (e.g. 1968, 1972) and Jefferson (e.g. 1972, 1988). A core assumption of conversation analysis is that communication is a form of social interaction that has a certain form of organization and is, above all, sequentially organized. The method describes the procedures on which speakers rely to produce utterances, organize communication and make sense of other speakers' talk (for overviews see Hutchby/Wooffitt 2008; Ten Have 2007).

From the 1970s onward, conversation analysis spread to different countries where particular approaches with different focuses were developed. In Germany, besides the *'ethnomethodological conversation analysis'* that adapts the American CA (e.g. Bergmann 2003, 2001; Kallmeyer/Schütze 1976) the *'functional-pragmatic discourse analytical' approach* was developed (cf. Ehlich 1986; Rehbein 2001). This approach focuses on the linguistic means interactants use for certain communicative acts. Based on the assumptions of functional pragmatics, its focus is the social function of certain forms of commincative behaviour or genres (for differences between 'discourse analysis' and 'conversation analysis' cf. Hausendorf 2001; Rehbein 2001).

Although for a long time the different approaches of 'conversation analysis' and functional-pragmatic 'discourse analysis' were kept strictly separate, today common benefits and commonalities are emphasised. The general term 'discourse analysis' (in German 'Gesprächsanalyse', cf. Deppermann 2001) nowadays refers to a huge research context that has achieved academically and practically relevant insights in different forms of conversation in ordinary and institutional settings and has developed several handbooks and anthologys (e.g. Schiffrin 1994; Schiffrin/Tannen/Hamilton 2001; for the German tradition above all Brinker et al. 2001).

Besides the presented socio-linguistic tradition of 'conversation analysis' and 'discourse analysis' there are other approaches in linguistics (e.g. the 'discourse analytical approach' by Coulthard/Montgomery 1981; the 'critical discourse analysis' by Fairclough 1995) and other disciplines that focus on the investigation of conversation and discourse (e.g. the 'discourse analysis' according to Foucault 1971; the 'psychological discourse analysis' by Potter/Wetherell 1987; for an overview of discourse analytical research in different disciplines see e.g. Keller et al. 2006, 2004; Van Dijk 1997a, b). These research traditions work with different concepts of 'discourse' and different methodological tools than we did.

In our project, we combined the methodological assumptions and principles of the US tradition of 'conversation analysis' and the German functional-pragmatic 'discourse analysis'. What are the common methodological tools of the discourse analytical approach in our understanding? The main characteristic in comparison to other qualitative methods is its use of audio or video recordings of authentic conversations.

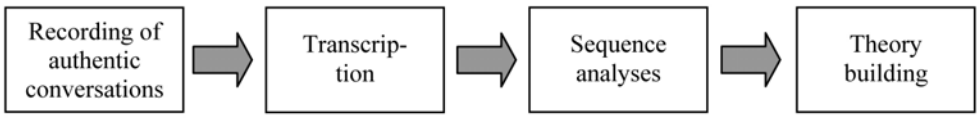
It can be seen, therefore, as a kind of 'participant observation', but it does not rely only on a researcher's notes and memory, but records authentic conversation in everyday and institutional contexts. However, since discourse analysis focuses on individual linguistic means and communicative aspects, this is indeed necessary. Even experienced researchers would not be able to focus on the variety of individuals' communicative behaviour only by listening.

The recorded conversations are transcribed according to elaborate transcription systems (e.g. GAT by Selting et al. 1998). Not only the exact wording but also additional aspects such as length of speaking breaks, particles, intonation, laughter etc. are notated. These are aspects of communication that may have an influence on the function and the effect of an utterance. The detailed transcripts enable researchers to systematically reconstruct communicative behaviours and interaction of speakers at different levels. The most important methodological tool for this is *'sequence analysis'*. Discourse analytical researchers use it to describe, step by step, a singular conversation or part of it with regard to certain communicative and interactional aspects. The principle of 'sequentiality' means that the discourse analyst always follows the conversation and hence never explains earlier utterances based on later peculiarities.

Discourse researchers analyse conversation transcripts in view of the communicative practices that interlocutors use. Based on detailed analyses of the data, the communicative function of certain communicative practices can be determined, and, later on, a model or theory can be developed for specific communicative phenomena, conversational contexts or communicative genres. A possible research question for discourse analysis is, for example, how job interviews are communicatively organised. What kind of communicative behaviour is expected from the different interactants? Which topics are adequate? How are certain communicative acts realised (e.g. requests, excuses) and what do they provoke in conversation? etc.

Summing up, the research process of discourse analysis consists of the following steps (cf. fig. 1):

Figure 1: The research process in discourse analysis



Even though discourse analysis follows a common methodical process and specific tools are used, there is very little methodological reflection on the tools and processes (Deppermann 2001, 7), especially concerning the phase of theory building (Schmitt 2001, 150). The literature is dominated by methodological-theoretical literature on fundamental assumptions of discourse analysis on the one hand (e.g. Hutchby/ Wooffitt 2008; Ten Have 2007) and exemplary studies on the other hand.

However, as with other qualitative research methods, the question should be raised of what criteria for quality can be used to assess discourse analysis (for quality criteria in qualitative research cf. Kirk/Miller 1986; Steinke 2003). In discourse analysis, the quality of the collected data, i.e. the authenticity of the conversations recorded,

is an important aspect (cf. Lalouschek/Menz 1999; Schu 2001). Furthermore, it has to be ensured that exactly the type of conversation is recorded that the researcher aims to investigate. Concerning the analytical process, as with other qualitative research methods, it is a fundamental requirement that the research process be transparent and intersubjectively verifiable (cf. Steinke 2003, 324-326). This goes for all steps of the analytical process. Researchers are supposed to describe in a detailed way how sequence analyses are elaborated, how hypotheses are generated and how generalisation processes and theory building are realised. A specific tool to ensure the validity of hypotheses generated in discourse analysis is the 'data session'. In such 'data sessions' several qualified discourse analysts discuss in depths transcripts of authentic conversations in order to develop shared hypotheses (for discourse analytical 'data sessions' see Ten Have 2007, 123-143; for group discussions as a way to ensure intersubjective verifiability see Steinke 2003, 326; for an overview of quality criteria in discourse analysis see Deppermann 2001, 105-110).

2.2 Applied discourse analysis and benefits for research on HRM

In recent years a lot of research has taken place in applied discourse analysis (for recent publications cf. Arminen 2005; Bowles/Seedhouse 2007; Day/Wagner 2008; Richards/Seedhouse 2007; Ten Have 2007: 173-193, 2001). The focus of this approach is on characteristics of communication in different societal institutions (e.g. communication in a business context, in public administration, at school or doctor-patient communication). It describes the organisation of communicative behaviour in these contexts in general as well as characteristics of specific communicative genres and tasks. The objective of applied discourse analysis is not only to analyse communication in practical contexts but also to generate insights for practical application.

In Germany the increasing importance of applied discourse analysis which aims at transferring research results into practice led to the foundation of a working group for applied discourse analysis in 1987, bringing together researchers from different universities as well as practitioners from different working contexts ("Arbeitskreis Angewandte Gesprächsforschung"). The group's objectives are to discuss the transfer of discourse analytical results into practice, to develop training concepts based on discourse analytical principles, and to discuss theoretical concepts for the training of communicative techniques (cf. Brünner/Fiehler/Kindt 1999).

An important topic of applied discourse analysis is business communication (cf. Boden 1994; Ehlich/Wagner 1995; Firth 1995; for the German speaking context e.g. Becker-Mrotzek/Fiehler 2002; Brünner 2000; Menz/Müller 2008). In this context the use of discourse analysis for Human Resource Management, and especially Human Resource and Organisational Development, is emphasised (cf. Hartung 2004a, 2004b). Given the great importance of communication for managers, it is a need and objective of HR development to develop managers' communicative competencies. Discourse analysts, as experts in communication in use, have developed training concepts and tools – not only for the development of communicative competencies in general but also for specific genres like sales conversations, negotiations, customer complaints or meetings (e.g. Fiehler/Schmitt 2004; Fiehler/Sucharowski 1992; Lepschy 2008; Strong 2003).

When describing conversations and communicative practices in practical contexts (e.g. the business context) applied discourse analysis focuses on communication problems and difficulties. Its objective is to identify, describe and explain these difficulties and to find alternative strategies interactants use to deal with them (cf. Fiehler 2001, 1699-1703; Hartung 2004b, 303-304). Thus, applied discourse analytical studies evaluate communicative means and acts of interactants with regard to their function in conversations in different societal contexts (e.g. business, school, administration, cf. Hartung 2004b, 308). What is particular about this approach is that it does not evaluate communicative behaviour based on *prescriptive* norms of communication (as many communication trainers do) but on *descriptive* norms that are based on empirical discourse analytical studies. 'Descriptive norms' are gained by extensive studies on how interactants *usually* communicate in particular situations and realise certain communicative tasks and actions. The approach works out whether, and to what extent, communicative behaviour differs from how interactants 'normally' behave communicatively in certain situations. Descriptive norms do not *determine* our communicative behaviour in detail, but they *give a framework* for individual behaviour and they especially help to explain communication difficulties (for a detailed discussion of the concept of 'descriptive norms' in applied discourse analysis see Fiehler 2001, 1701-1702; 1999, 32-33).

Summing up, the objective of applied discourse analysis is to identify and explain communication problems in conversation in different societal contexts and to point out alternative forms of communicative behaviour that interactants use for certain communicative genres or tasks. Based on detailed analyses of authentic conversation, it develops communication training concepts. These aim at strengthening the sensibility of interlocutors for communicative challenges in professional contexts and their origins and at discussing and training different ways to cope with them.

2.3 Advantages of discourse analysis

The main advantage of discourse analysis in comparison to other qualitative methods (and, above all, methods that work with interviews) is that *authentic* conversation is recorded and analysed. This enables researchers to reconstruct and describe the *actual* communicative processes. Conclusions are based on analyses of what actually happened. Researchers do not have to rely on research participants' retrospective statements or reflections on their communicative behaviour. Communicative behaviour is largely unconscious and can therefore hardly be correctly described by speakers. Besides, personal statements about individual behaviour tend to be influenced by social expectations and values. Answers to questions like "How do you convince people that your product is the best?" or "What are in your opinion successful strategies for negotiations?" are therefore not bound to yield valid data on what people really do. By contrast, discourse analytical researchers reconstruct how speakers actually realise communicative patterns, what linguistic means they actually use and what actual effects they do achieve by using these linguistic means.

3. Developing a theory on the transfer of experiences among managers

In what follows, I will give an example of how discourse analysis can be used to develop a theoretical model in Human Resource Management. First arguing that experience management is a relevant topic in Human Resource Management, I will then refer to a research project realised at the University of Bayreuth in which we adressed the communicative processes of the experience transfer among managers.

3.1 Experience management as a current topic in HRM

Given the increasing abundance and complexity of knowledge in today's business environments, knowledge management has come to be an important topic for HR departments, if not even a means of establishing a competitive advantage (e.g. Frappaolo 2006, 2; Mertens et al. 2003, 1). Both companies and Human Resource Management researchers deal with the question of how individuals and organisations gain, transfer, organise and conserve knowledge. Experience management is a specific subarea of knowledge management that focuses on the question of how companies can conserve and use the individual experiences of their staff. Whereas *knowledge* is primarily a cognitive achievement or process, *experience* is a form of implicit knowledge or know-how, that includes an emotional component and that is difficult to communicate and to transfer. Already Polanyi (1966) who introduced the term in the 1960's argued that implicit knowledge is very difficult to verbalise and thus to transfer. For the discussion of the question of how experiences can be transferred, we have to distinguish between two specific forms of experience or implicit knowledge: First, individuals can have experience, 'know-how' or 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi 1966) concerning practical skills and technical aspects (e.g. to know how to handle certain machines). This form of practical knowledge or know-how, that can be learnt by instruction, imitation or one's own experience, was not part of the focus of our project. Second, there is a form of experience (or implicit knowledge learnt by experience), that is unconscious but that can be verbalised. For example, managers have experiences concerning the question of how to manage complex projects and how to motivate people. The implicit knowledge gained by these experiences is often unconscious and most often it cannot easily be verbalised. Since in practice, managers actually try to explain and transfer such knowledge, the question of our project was how managers communicatively realise such a transfer of experiences.

Experience management is a topic of growing importance in Human Resource Management, and the exchange and transfer of experiences among managers is increasingly appreciated in Human Resource Development (e.g. Wegerich 2007a, 138-141; 2007b, 221-222). Companies seek to conserve the experiences of their staff or, in other words, to avoid their being lost. They use tools supposed to promote the exchange or transfer of experiences for the training and qualification of 'less-experienced' managers (e.g. mentoring and tutoring). They especially try to organise a systematic transfer of experience from older to younger managers, from predecessors to successors, or from leaving to incoming managers. Experience management is thus advantageous for Human Resource Development.

Although the importance of experience management is often emphasised in HR practice, there is very little research on this topic. The only established approach that focuses on experience management is 'Storytelling' (e.g. Denning 2001; Kleiner/Roth 1997, 1996). This approach focuses on the question of how to preserve experiences within a company but not on the processes of experience transfer between individuals. The lack of research on experience management in general and experience transfer in particular is amazing given the fact that the transfer of experiences among managers is not easy at all. On the other hand, a successful management of experiences is seen as a competitive advantage for companies. The Japanese researchers Nonaka/Takeuchi (1995) argue that a successful transformation of implicit into explicit knowledge is crucial for a successful knowledge management within a company. They explain the success of Japanese companies by their ability to transform implicit into explicit knowledge ('externalisation') and afterwards retransform this explicit knowledge into an implicit resource ('internalisation').

In particular, there is hardly any research on the *communicative processes* of transferring experiences. Even approaches to *knowledge* transfer (which is better explored than *experience* transfer, e.g. Chini 2004; Macharzina/Hakanson 2005) mostly refer to antecedents, conditions and contexts of knowledge transfer (e.g. hierarchical and organisational structures, motivation for knowledge transfer) or on concrete tools (e.g. communities of practice, learning histories) and rarely take a closer look at communicative aspects and the processes of knowledge or experience transfer. However, discourse analysis has been addressing the topic for some time now. Given the increasing complexity of knowledge transfer, linguists have even proposed establishing a separate discipline called 'science of transfer' (Antos/Pfänder 2001). It is intended to investigate principles, ways and strategies for a selective and sustainable access to knowledge in the age of information overload and knowledge explosion and provide insights into how to effectively communicate knowledge (Antos/Pfänder 2001, 5-6). Nickl (2004) explains the advantage of discourse analytical approaches to knowledge management: whereas other approaches mainly focus on the context of knowledge management (organisation) and on tools for knowledge transfer (technique), the discourse analytical approach focuses on the conrete communicative processes (linguistics). Its objective is to identify existing successful processes of knowledge management in organisations and to optimise them. But even in the context of this 'science of transfer', which is dominated by linguists, there is hardly any research on the processes of *experience* transfer.

Thus, there is a demand of research on the communicative processes of experience transfer, and our objective was to be responsive to this demand. How do managers realise the transfer of experiences communicatively? What are the main communicative challenges for interlocutors, and what are successful strategies to cope with them? The application of discourse analysis made it possible to describe communicative means and practices interlocutors actually use to transfer their experiences. Furthermore, it enabled us to analyse what effect certain communicative means and practices have in conversation.

3.2 Data collection and transcription

For our research project, we recorded authentic conversations between 'more experienced' and 'less experienced' expatriate managers in cooperation with the HR department of a leading German multinational company. Since multinational companies regularly send managers as expatriates to subsidiaries in foreign countries, we were interested in the purpose and the benefit of an experience transfer in this context. Expatriates take, for example, the position of a division manager or a team leader or they attend the relocation of a certain product abroad. During their expatriation, managers gain a lot of experience in interacting with local staff. These experiences can be very instructive for newer expatriates. Therefore, companies begin systematically to take use of the transfer of experiences from 'more experienced' to 'newer' expatriates as a tool of intercultural Human Resource Development. They do so either by integrating former expatriates in intercultural preparation training or by organising a 'cultural mentoring program' in the subsidiary.

We have recorded twelve conversations among German expatriates. Most of the conversations took place in the foreign country (in our case Spain) some weeks after the relocation of the newer expatriates (7½ hours of recordings). Three conversations took place in Germany during the intercultural preparation training before the expatriates' leave (10 hours of recordings). We transcribed the recorded conversations using the GAT system (Selting et al. 1998) thereby obtaining approximately 150 pages of conversation transcripts. Afterwards, we analysed them based on discourse analysis principles, focussing on the question of how a transfer of experiences is realised.

3.3 Analysis and development of the theoretical model

Based on our analyses we were able to develop a theoretical model of the transfer of experiences among managers. The model describes the main communicative challenges interlocutors face when passing on their experiences, as well as linguistic strategies and means they use to deal with them. Considering the interrelationship between these challenges and strategies, the model explains how experience transfer among managers is communicatively realised.

According to the methodology outlined above, having finished recording and transcription, the actual analytical process for the development of the theoretical model started with sequence analyses (step-1). With the help of this tool, the discourse analytical researcher describes step by step the utterances of the interlocutors with regard to communicative peculiarities. To illustrate the sequence analytical process, I would like to have a look at two examples from our data. (The recorded conversations were in German. In the following, I cite the English translation of the transcripts as well as the German original. Transcript conventions are listed at the end of this article.)

Example 1:

The following transcript contains the beginning of a conversation between an expatriate that has been working in Spain for two and a half years and another expatriate that has just arrived two or three months before. 'E' stands for the more 'e'xperienced and 'N' for the 'n'ewer expatriate.

```
01 E:  so what were your first exPEriences?
       n=wie war=n so jetzt die ersten erFAHrungen?
02     ((...))
03 N:  well for example (.) everything is (-) erm (1.0) a lot=er
       ja zum beispiel (.) es is (-) ä:hm: (1.0) alles sehr vie:l=äh
04     (1.0) superficially speaking more chaOtic? (--)
       (1.0) oberflächlich gesagt chaOtischer? (--)
05     but that's the CATCHword which is ALways (--) used, (--)
       aber des is des SCHLAGwort was ma=eben IMmer (--) gebraucht, (--)
06     <<all> but I wouldn't want to use it here,>
       <<all> möchte=ich eigentlich jetzt gar nicht gebrauchen,>
07     ((...))
08     <<all> people come to your desk and say okay> (-)
       <<all> die leute kommen an dein schreibtisch und sagen okay> (-)
09     just CHECK this. (-)
       SCHAU mal da kurz was NACH. (-)
10     imMEdiately. (--)
       JETZT sofort. (--)
```

The conversation begins with a question of the more experienced interlocutor (l. 1: *so what were your first experiences)*. With this question the speaker asks the newer expatriate to make an initial statement about his experiences with the foreign culture. In so doing, he attributes his interlocutor a certain degree of competence, whom he takes to have made *some* but only *initial* experiences. As we will see later, this is an important aspect, since E thereby establishes an experience asymmetry between himself and N, which is a precondition for an experience transfer. The newer expatriate reacts by explaining his background (the corresponding utterances are not part of the transcript): he actually has more experience than expected, because his girlfriend is Spanish.

The newer expatriate then comments on his first impressions of Spanish culture. He begins with a stereotyping utterance about the Spanish way of working (l. 3-4: *everything is a lot, superficially speaking, more chaotic*). In his utterance he uses typical linguistic forms for generalisations concerning cultural differences (*everything* is, *a lot*, *more* chaotic). He immediately relativises the stereotyping utterance by an explicit refusal of stereotyping expressions (l. 5-6: *but that's the catchword which is always used, but I wouldn't want to use it here*). He proceeds to a more detailed description of a typical workplace situation (l. 8-10: *people come to your desk and say: okay, just check this immediately*). Such illustrative descriptions are important in experience transfer communication, because they are easier to grasp for the listener than abstract characterisations.

Example 2:

The following transcript is taken from another conversation between an experienced expatriate manager and a newcomer in Spain.

```
01 E:  perhaps er (--) first of all something concerning
       vielleicht ähm (--) zunächst mal zu=was zum thema
02     LEAdership; (--)
       MITarbeiterführung; (--)
03     ((...))
04     well the TYpical SPAnish MAnager,
       äh (-) die KLASsische SPAnische FÜHrungskraft,
05     deals with his subordinates in the (-) TYpical (-) hieRARchical
       geht in der (-) KLASsischen (-) hieRARchischen FORM (-) mit
06     FORM. (--)
       sein=n mitarbeitern um. (--)
```

```
07 N:   mhm, (--)
        mhm, (--)
08 E:   this means (-) when something doesn't WORK they begin to RAISE
        des heißt (-) wenn=s net funktioNIERT wird=s
09      their voice, (-)
        LAUT, (-)
10      ((...))
11      which I think (--) is in fact necessary here when you:: (--)
        was ich glaub (--) dass SCHON notwendig ist hier wenn du:: (-)
12      want to make PROgress at CERtain points (--) you have to
        in beSTIMMten momenten VORwärts kommen willst (--) musst=du=au
13      give them a piece of your MIND. (--)
        ab und zu mal auf=n TISCH hauen. (--)
```

In this example the experienced expatriate begins with some comments on culture-specific attitudes and forms of behaviour of Spanish managers. He first characterized the 'typical Spanish manager' using characteristic linguistic forms for generalizations (*the typical* spanish manager, in *the typical* hierarchical form). He illustrates his first general utterance (l. 1-6) by a description of typically Spanish managerial behaviour (l. 8-9: *when something doesn't work they begin to raise their voice*). Thus, as in the last example, the expatriate shifts from a general characterization of Spanish people or working styles to a more concrete illustration via a specific example.

After a while, he passes on to the question of how the expatriate managers themselves can or should behave in the foreign culture (l. 11-13). He describes a form of behaviour that he considers to be necessary thereby implicitly giving advice to the newer expatriate. What is interesting from a linguistic perspective is that he does not formulate his advice or recommendation explicitly (e.g. "I advise you to give them a piece of your mind from time to time"). In the conversations we recorded, we found various instances where interlocutors clearly avoid explicit recommendations. We explained this by the particular relationship between the interlocutors which does not give the 'more experienced' expatriate the role of an institutionalised consultant and advisor, forcing him to rely on rather implicit forms with which to advise.

Sequence analyses comment in detail on all possibly relevant communicative aspects of a conversation or part of it. By means of the two examples I was able only to give a brief idea of the process of sequence analyses (for further comments on sequence analysis cf. Hutchby/Wooffitt 2008, 113-134; Ten Have 2007, 119-143).

Based on detailed sequence analyses we could put forward hypotheses (step-2) about the *function* of certain communicative practices and phenomena and their *effect in conversation*. We have, for example, developed the hypothesis (which becomes apparent in the cited examples) that, to present culture-specific experiences interlocutors either make generalizing utterances or they tell stories. If they make general statements about the foreign culture, interlocutors often relativise their utterances by phrases like "people *tend to* behave in a certain way", "of course there are also individual differences", or "I have had the experience that…". By contrast, if speakers generalise too much when they talk about the foreign culture, this may cause the interlocutor not to accept the statement and to reject it as a stereotype.

Another hypothesis we developed was the following: in order to realise an experience transfer, interlocutors constantly establish certain degrees of competence for

themselves and their partners (cf. example 1). They do so by presenting explicitly their experiential background (e.g. "I have been living in Spain for five years.") or by indicating it with certain expressions (e.g. "In my experience …"). If one of the managers accentuates too much his level of experience (especially at the beginning of a conversation), then this is prone to imply a 'face threat'; he in turn will, as a consequence ,concentrate on reestablishing his 'face'. This, however, will distract the interlocutors from the task of experience transfer.

The result of the hypotheses building process is a collection of hypotheses that explain certain communicative practices or phenomena at certain points of a conversation and their function within the conversation.

Once we had finished the (first) formulation of hypotheses, we checked and revised our hypotheses by comparative analyses (step-3). To do so, we selected several instances of a communicative phenomenon to which the hypothesis refers in different conversations (e.g. instances of utterances generalizing about the foreign culture or instances of implicit advice). In terms of conversation analysis, we 'built a collection' (Hutchby/Woofitt 2008, 88). We checked whether the developed hypotheses could be confirmed by other instances. If a hypothesis could be confirmed it was retained, otherwise it was revised. The result of the comparative analyses was a set of hypotheses that were qualified to describe our empirical data adequately (for more details on comparative analyses cf. Ten Have 2007: 144-151).

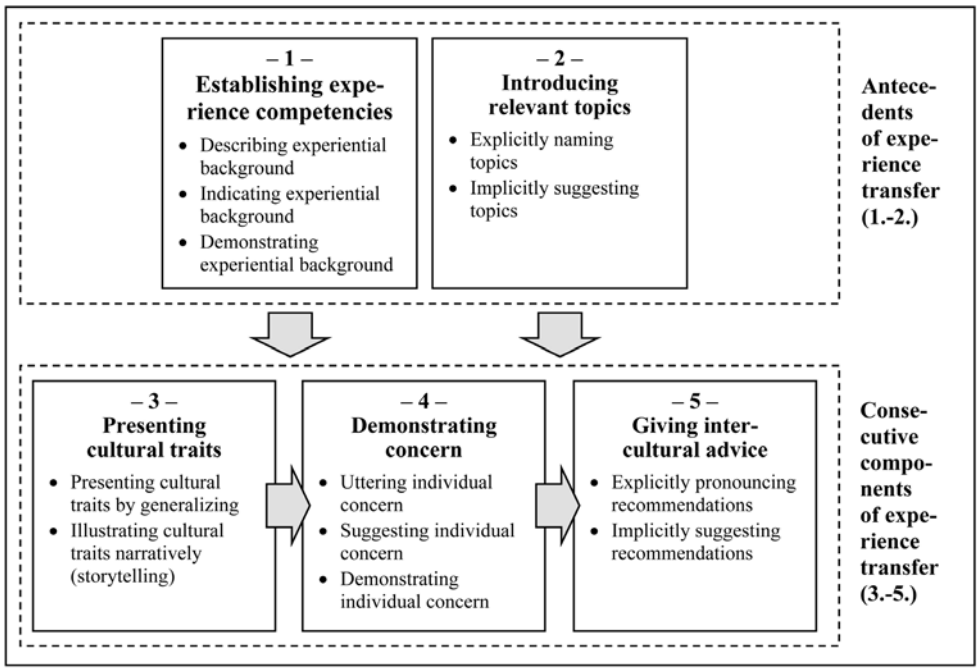
Finally, we integrated the hypotheses into a theoretical model for the description of the communicative processes of experience transfer among expatriates (step-4). Whereas the step of comparative analyses is well described and reflected in conversation analysis, there is very little methodological reflection on theory building in conversation and discourse analysis (Schmitt 2001, 167). The objective of the latter step is to integrate hypotheses developed on the basis of sequence and comparative analyses into a theoretical or descriptive model and to build an abstract theory about certain communicative phenomena or practices. Thereby, discourse analytical researchers take a more global perspective than in the locally oriented sequence analyses – for example developing a model for a certain communicative genre.

Discourse analysis provides several general models that can help to integrate hypotheses about certain communicative phenomena or practices into a theory. In our case, it seemed appropriate to revert to a general model that has been developed by Hausendorf (2000) and that aims at describing the main communicative tasks or challenges interlocutors face when realising a certain communicative genre or activity (in our case the transfer of experiences). Its objective is to describe these tasks as well as linguistic strategies and means interactants use to deal with them. In the examples cited above (step-1) and the developed hypotheses (step-2) some tasks and strategies relevant for experience transfer already became clear. One challenge that is relevant for experience transfer among expatriates is the question of how to present values, attitudes and forms of behaviour that interactants take to be typical of members of a certain foreign culture. We called this challenge 'presenting cultural traits'. The main strategies interactants use to deal with it are 'presentating cultural traits by generalizing' and 'storytelling' (cf. example 1). Another challenge consists in establishing an experience asymmetry which is a precondition for an experience transfer. We called this

challenge 'establishing experience competencies'. Strategies that interactants use to deal with it are 'explicit description of one's experiential background' and 'implicit indication of one's experiential background' (cf. example 1). A challenge that became clear in the second example we called 'giving intercultural advice'. One task of experience transfer among expatriates is that hints are given on how to deal with cultural differences and how to handle people from the foreign culture. To cope with this challenge, interactants either 'pronounce recomendations explicitly' or they 'suggest them implicitly' (cf. example 2).

All in all, we have identified five communicative challenges interlocutors face when passing on their experiences: 1. establishing experience competencies; 2. introducing relevant topics; 3. presenting cultural traits; 4. demonstrating concern; 5. giving intercultural advice. To cope with these challengers managers use several communicative strategies and linguistic means. Through the detailed description of the five communicative challenges, the model shows that the transfer of experiences is a complex task which involves several and quite different challenges. Each single challenge has a certain status within the model, and all together they constitute the transfer of experiences among expatriate managers. The first two challenges help to establish antecedents of experience transfer. The other three are consecutive components of the verbalisation of experiences (What is the situation like? How am I concerned by this? How can I deal with it?). The following chart (cf. fig. 2) gives an overview of the communicative challenges including a selection of corresponding strategies. (The complete model contains a description of communicative strategies and linguistic means at a much more detailed level.)

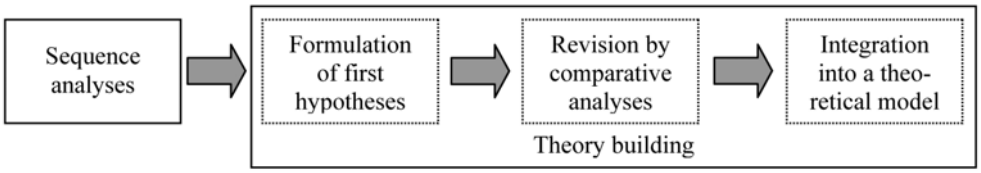
Figure 2: Experience transfer – communicative challenges and sample strategies



Our model makes a theoretical contribution to research in Human Resource Management. In describing the communicative processes of experience transfer among expatriates and revealing the particular challenges involved, our model responds to the demand for research on the communicative processes of experience transfer.

To summarise, the following chart (cf. fig. 3) illustrates the four steps of discourse analytical analysis and theory building that we have performed in our research project:

Figure 3: The analysis and theory building process in discourse analysis



3.4 Recommendations for HR development practice

The structure of our theoretical model, consisting of communicative challenges and strategies of experience transfer, is advantageous for deducing recommendations for Human Resource Development. For HR development practice, it is especially important to find out how to realise a successful transfer of experiences in conversation and how to train employees to do so. Based on our model of the transfer of experiences among managers, several conclusions can be drawn: when certain challenges are not dealt with or dealt with inadequately, problems may occur. For each single challenge there is a certain number of communicative strategies interactants can use to deal with it. Managers can be sensitised to these strategies and train different alternatives to realise them. Since we have shown that certain strategies often provoke communicative problems, we have been able to arrive at recommendations for the selection of strategies.

Thus, the results of our project can be used in special training sessions in order to sensitise interactants to the communicative challenges of experience transfer, and discuss and train alternative strategies they can use to deal with them. A great advantage is that, in the training, it is possible to work with authentic data. This makes sure that we refer to authentic communication processes, it enables a detailed reconstruction of communicative behaviour, and, if their individual conversations have been recorded, it can give participants real feedback.

4. Discussion

The objective of this article was to illustrate the benefits of disourse analysis as a qualitative method for theory building in Human Resource Management. By means of an example, we have shown how, using discourse analysis, we could develop a theoretical model of a current topic in Human Resource Management. The topic we dealt with is the experience transfer among managers which is used in several HR development processes, e.g. mentoring and tutoring. Our theoretical model describes experience transfer as a complex task which consists of different communicative challenges interactants have to cope with. For each challenge it includes linguistic strategies and

actants have to cope with. For each challenge it includes linguistic strategies and means interlocutors use when dealing with them.

Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that gains theoretical insights inductively, based on sequence analyses of authentic data. Contrary to other discourse analytical approaches, the presented approach of discourse analysis (which combines the US tradition of 'conversation analysis' and the German functional-pragmatic 'discourse analysis') works exclusively with authentic audio or video recordings. Its objective is to analyse the organisation and processes of *communication in use* – especially in oral conversations. Sequence analyses of authentic data are used to develop conclusions and models that are adequate to describe communicative processes in certain genres or activities.

In this article we did not present our description model of the experience transfer among managers in detail (for the complete study see Hormuth 2009) but we wanted to show how it was developed using discourse analysis as a qualitative research method. In doing so, we have emphasised several advantages of discourse analysis for research on Human Resource Management:

a. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method that enables one to focus on communicative processes in Human Resource Management and to investigate them professionally and in a detailed way. Communication is a topic which is often either neglected in Human Resource Management or dealt with using inadequate communicative approaches. Even though sequence analysis is a highly time-consuming tool and therefore only a limited number of conversations can be considered, it allows profound insights in professional communication processes, and systematic comparative analyses allow the construction of generalisations concerning the use of linguistic means and strategies.
b. The main characteristic of discourse analysis in comparison to other qualitative research methods is that it works with audio or video recordings of *authentic* conversation. This makes sure that *real* communicative processes are investigated (and not research participants' ideas about communication), and it enables researchers to reconstruct communicative aspects of conversations on different levels.
c. We have shown that, for theory building, discourse analysis follows a systematic, inductive research procedure which consists of the following steps: recording of authentic data, transcription, sequence analyses, formulation of hypotheses, revision by comparative analyses, integration into a theoretical model. This systematic procedure makes the research process transparent and intersubjectively verifiable, which is an important criterion for the quality of studies in qualitative research.
d. Furthermore, applied discourse analysis provides several models and tools that help to directly deduce recommendations for HR practice. In our case, we used a discourse analytical model that reconstructs communicative challenges of the experience transfer among managers as well as strategies they use to deal with them.

As a qualitative method, discourse analysis is especially appropriate for innovative research questions in Human Resource Management. Since the HR context is currently in a state of flux and the importance of HR departments and managers is increasing,

there is potentially a great interest in discourse analytical research projects. There are several under-investigated research topics in Human Resource Management which discourse analysis could address. First of all, similar to the project we undertook, further research is needed on communicative genres and tasks, such as superior-subordinate communication, briefings, or communication in teams. The results of these studies could be used in HR development to improve the communicative competencies of the staff. Furthermore, there are still very few studies on the communicative culture of companies as a whole. Such studies could help to build a theory of the company's communicative culture and thereby improve communicative processes. Finally, companies could take advantage of studies on HR specific communicative processes, such as personnel recruitment, performance appraisal, human resource development and personnel redundancies that would help to improve HR processes and to develop communicative competencies of HR managers within the company. As professionals in communication, discourse analysts should maintain good contact with the discipline and practice of Human Resource Management and contribute to the improvement of HR theory and processes.

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Appendix: Transcript conventions used in the examples

ACcent	speaker emphasis
and=er	'latching' between words
(-), (--), (---)	short, medium lenghth, longer pause (~0.25-0.75 sec.)
(2.0)	time gap in tenths of a second (for pauses longer than a second)
:, ::, :::	sound stretch
?	rising intonation
,	slightly rising intonation
-	continuing intonation
;	slightly falling intonation
.	falling intonation
<<all> >	allegro, speeding up
((...))	omission