Unmasking Spies in the Corporation: When the police order of discourse erupts into managerial conversations

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On January 3, 2011, three managers from the French car manufacturer Renault were accused of having received large sums of money, allegedly for having sold proprietary data to a foreign company. They were offered the opportunity to quit discreetly, the alternative being a formal complaint and subsequent police investigation. However, the affair quickly went public and gained extensive media coverage. Renault officially filed a complaint and the CEO was forced to go on TV on a major channel. The three managers denied any kind of misbehavior and in return filed a complaint against Renault. The police investigation found no evidence of any kind against the three executives; instead, it revealed that the whole affair was probably a scam designed by a member of the manufacturer's security service. Significant amounts of money had been spent on collecting fake evidence about secret bank accounts allegedly possessed by the three managers in Switzerland and other countries. Renault's CEO reappeared on TV to make public apologies. The three managers were either reintegrated or compensated.

In this research we analyze the interviews of January 3, 2011, when the three managers each had an 'unofficial', face-to-face conversation with a high-ranked executive. These conversations were recorded in their entirety. Later, they were leaked to the press and published as audio files.

As it was the first time that the managers had been confronted with the accusation, these conversations could have been opportunities for company executives[1] to have a free discussion with the managers, to collect information, and to make sense jointly of what happened. The managers and the executives had no direct hierarchical links and the conversations took place outside organizational formal structures, two conditions that previous research on sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Balogun and Johnson, 2004) and conversations (Ford, 1999; Westley, 1990; Jarzabowski and Seidl, 2008) sees as favoring the emergence of new discourses and interpretations.

Unexpectedly, the conversations turned out to be highly dominated by the executives and closely resembled police interrogation, leaving little (if no) room for the managers to suggest alternative interpretations.

How did such an external, police 'order of discourse' erupt into these managerial conversations? And to what extent did this emergent discourse contribute to the asymmetries between the executives and the managers?

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[1] For the purpose of clarity, "managers" will refer to the three accused organization members, while "executives" will refer to their interrogators.

Following recent research adopting a critical and microscopic approach to analysing conversations (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; 2005; Rasmussen, 2010), we contend that conversations always rely on some prior forms of knowledge and discourses, thereby incorporating or reproducing power relationships between participants. From this perspective, the emergence of new discourses in the organization is better conceptualized as 'traces' of (external) structures (Fairclough, 2010) rather than of their suspending or suppressing.

Relying on conversational analysis (Heritage, 2004) and discursive psychology (Potter, 2004; Edwards, 1994; 1995), we analyzed the overall organization of the conversations, as well as the discursive tactics used by the executives to accomplish asymmetries. Two interviews exhibited a highly dominant pattern, while in the third interview an apparently more 'open' pattern was enacted. Although different, these two patterns were oriented towards the same objective: that of dismissing the managers. A turn-by-turn analysis of conversation extracts show that, in both patterns, the executives relied on the sorts of discursive tactics used in police interrogation.

The paper is organized around the following four sections. Firstly, we review previous works on conversations and show how the conceptualization of how new ideas emerge, and discourse in organizational conversations, has evolved in recent research. Secondly, we describe the research context and the methods used to analyze the conversations. Thirdly, we present the overall structure of the conversations, conduct a turn-by-turn analysis of selected sequences, and then identify some of the tactics used by the executives. Finally, we discuss the contribution of discursive tactics to the eruption of external orders of discourse in organizations, as well as a number of circumstances that might favor such an 'emergence'.

Conversations and Organizing in Organizational Analysis

Conversations can be defined as "what is said and listened to between people" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, *in* Ford, 1999: 483), "a complex, information-rich mix of auditory, visual, olfactory and tactile events that may be used in conjunction with, or as substitute for, what is spoken" (Ford, 1999: 484). It refers to those "interpersonal interactions, […] in which people interact with each other through verbal statements but also through glances, gestures and positioning" (Goffman, 1967: 1, *in* Mengis and Eppler, 2008: 1287). Conversations may take place in formal committees such as recurrent meetings, workshops (Hoon, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), and informal encounters between organizational members (Hoon, 2008).

Departing from a functionalist concept[2] of conversations, we consider them as both a means and a medium through which organizing unfolds. Conversations enable people to agree on decisions and actions to undertake – and thus to coordinate – their actions (Weick, 1995: 99). These agreements do not take place in a socio-political vacuum, but rather in a context of meanings, beliefs, status, roles, authority relations, routines, and procedures that are instantiated and reconstituted as participants interact.

From this so-called 'constructivist' perspective, research that adopts a 'mesoscopic' approach to conversations in organizations has developed a dialectical and tensional view of conversations. On the one hand, conversations are seen as a privileged medium through which organizational members develop new meanings and behaviors that may give rise to new systems of roles and rules in the organization (Ford and Ford, 1995; Weick, 1995). On the other hand, research considers that, when interacting, organizational members build on and re-enact existing routines and formal and informal hierarchies, thereby reproducing the organizational structure (Weick, 1990; Giddens, 1991).

Recent studies investigating the micro-discursive activities of participants during conversations mitigate such a tensional or dialectical view of conversation and organizing. In so far as conversations always rely on previous discourses, conversations cannot escape the (discursive) power of 'structures'.

Here, we briefly review past research adopting a 'tensional' approach, before detailing the contributions of microscopic studies on conversations.

A 'tensional' (or dialectical) perspective on conversations: Conversations as a vehicle for both organizational reproduction and change

Following Weick, research on sensemaking processes in organizations underscores that sensemaking takes place mainly through "talk, discourse, and conversation" (Weick, 1995: 41), and through conversation in particular, new language and understandings can be developed. The diversity of experiences and actors' interpretations create a polyphony (Hazen, 1993) that is liable to give way to new understandings, though this does not imply that these understandings will be shared (Langfield-Smith, 1992; Maitlis, 2005; Doise & Moscovici, 1994). As people strive to share their feelings, intentions, and thinking through face-to-face communication, they give rise to "vivid, unique *intersubjective* meanings" (Weick, 1995: 75).

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[2] Where conversations are seen as instruments for transmitting information and making decisions.

While conversations are a privileged medium through which managers may develop new understandings of their experiences and of the world around them (Westley, 1990; Weick, 1995; Balogun & Johnson, 2004), such new understandings cannot develop without first altering or suspending existing prevailing orders of discourse (Ford, 1999: 491).

According to Fairclough (2010: 358), the organization's order of discourse may be defined as a relatively stable and durable configuration of discourses, genres, and styles that might be complementary or conflicting. Whereas discourses are particular ways of representing the world (e.g. the discourse of strategy), styles designate ways of being (e.g. a charismatic leader) and genres ways of interacting with others (e.g. participation). Referring back to Foucault (1969), Fairclough underlines that, although linguistic and semiotic systems can generate an infinite number of texts (i.e. the discoursal elements of social events), "the actual range of variation is socially delimited and structured, i.e. through the ways semiotic systems interact with other social structures and systems" (p. 358). According to Ford (1999: 496), orders of discourse designate underlying social conventions regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse that will structure conversational patterns, e.g. "who gets to speak (voice), on what, and when".

The order of discourse in an organization depends on the type of discourses incorporated, the genres and styles that accompany them[3] (e.g. the manager as 'in control' of his destiny and environment in the orthodox discourse of strategy, see Knights and Morgan, 1991), and on the way organizations progressively appropriate, modify, and connect/disconnect these available discourses, thereby reflecting or reconstituting its particular structures and power relationships (see Taylor & Robichaud, 2004).

Here, previous works underline that organizational roles and statuses should be either "suspended" or "defined dynamically" (Mengis and Eppler, 2008: 1303) for new understandings or behaviors to appear (Ford, 1999: 491).

From this perspective, Balogun and Johnson (2004) show that lateral social interactions (as opposed to vertical interactions) between managers are crucial in the development of equivalent understandings of their roles during planned radical change. Conversations, when prevalent structures are suspended or relaxed, can transform existing structures of power and roles in the organization (Ford, 1999). The creation of new meanings in strategic conversations between a superior and a subordinate occurs only when the superior "allows the

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[3] According to Fairclough (2010), genres and styles include not only discoursal aspects, but also bodily habits and dispositions, which distinguish these notions from those of discourse that only has a discoursal aspect. Following Foucault and Knights and Morgan (1991), we consider that 'discourses' are also distinctive in the genre and style that they instantiate for those who speak.

subordinate considerable degree of freedom" (Westley 1990: 346). Similarly, freer and more creative thought is favored by certain strategic practices (respectively, *awaydays* or strategic episodes and the distancing of the centre/periphery) that suspend the rules and routines of the organization. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) view 'free discussion", i.e. the suspension of authority on both the content and the processes of discussion, as a condition for the emergence of variations in strategic orientations.

However, although informal and seemingly freed from hierarchy, conversations can "potentially enact formal structures of domination" (Westley, 1990: 340) by reflecting, at least in part, the structure of the roles in place in the organization (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) and framing the agenda and the selection of initiatives by subordinates (Hoon, 2008).

Beyond hierarchical aspects, conversations also rely on previous discourses, genres, and styles, so that they are, to a certain extent, always 'pre-structured' (Taylor and Robichaud, 2004; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). The micro-activities of conversations activate and re-enact both the society (e.g. the discourse of 'professional management') and the organization within which the interactions take place.

This leads us to a more nuanced picture of conversations in organizations, where the suspension of existing structures and related 'orders' of discourse appears fragile and transitory, if not illusory.

A complexified approach to conversations: Where conversations cannot escape the power of 'structures'

Without contradicting previous perspectives on conversations, research adopting a microscopic approach to conversations provides a more nuanced and subtle portrayal of what 're-constitution' or 're-enactment'/'emergence' in or through conversation may mean. While adopting a microscopic approach to conversations, these studies demonstrate that social structures and power relationships never completely disappear. Relying on conversational analysis and ethnomethodology in particular, recent empirical research on naturally occurring talks in organization studies sheds light on the discursive devices and 'forms of knowledge' (or discourse) activated by participants as they strive to gain a favorable position vis-à-vis the other during conversations, and how such micro-discursive activities might reconstitute a combination of macro-discourses, styles and genres (i.e. an order of discourse).

Combining ethnography with an ethnomethodological and conversational analysis, Samra-Fredericks (2003) explains how, although all participants are at the same hierarchical level and no one can a priori impose his/her view on the other, a strategist is able to redefine both

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the strategic orientations of a firm and the status and roles of other strategists through 'minor-moves' made during conversations (e.g. mitigating, questioning, use of metaphors and of typified forms of knowledge and related 'moral orders', what Samra-Fredericks (2005) later called "the discourse of strategy"). Such processes among peers can also prevent change, as suggested by Kärreman and Alvesson (2001). Analyzing in depth a meeting held by a Swedish newspaper about news bills and their sales effects, the authors show that, despite the absence of formal authority, participants reconstitute the organization's 'order of discourse' and 'deviant' voices are silenced in one way or another (e.g. jokes, request for 'good news', etc.). Skillful managers can resort to more complex patterns of discourse by mixing partnership, competition, and authority to introduce organizational change, as analyzed by Rasmussen (2010).

To summarize, while initial research on sensemaking and organizational change underlines that organizational structures and orders of discourse have to be 'suspended' for new understandings and behaviors to emerge, recent studies adopting a micro-analytic approach suggest that such a 'suspension' is never fully realized, as one always relies on some prior forms of knowledge and discourses. This means that associating 'free discussion' with 'emergence', and 'hierarchical relations' with 'reproduction', does not adequately reflect the variety and complexity of conversational dynamics taking place in organizations. Conversations do not happen in a discursive vacuum but rely instead on other 'discourses', 'styles', and 'genres', thereby modifying or reproducing the organization's order of discourse. Conversations, as social practices, are the discursive traces of structures, in that emergence "require[s] reference to these structural" aspects (Fairclough, 2010: 368).

Following this perspective, our intention here is to take a step toward a better understanding of the structural dimension of 'emergence' in conversations. Taking Fairclough's warning seriously, how do external discourses erupt into the organization? How do they contribute to symmetrical/asymmetrical relationships between organizational members?

Research setting

The interviews with the three managers, which took place at Renault's headquarters on 3rd January, 2011, offer relevant material through which to explore this question for two reasons. Firstly, the managers were summoned to have an unofficial, informal conversation with a high-ranking executive. Although they knew each other quite well, the managers had no

direct subordinate relationship with the executives. This set of conditions is favorable for a 'free' or symmetrical (Heritage, 2004) discussion. Secondly, the interviews were the first ones conducted with the managers regarding the 'affair', and so they could have been unique opportunities for the participants to share information and jointly make sense of what was happening.

When the managers met the executives, the investigation about possible misbehavior had been developing for approximately four months. It started with an anonymous letter associating one of the three managers with acts of bribery, and alluding to another one. None of the managers had ever been requested to provide information on the matter, either directly or indirectly. The investigation was conducted by the security department, with the approbation and under the monitoring of top management. It appeared later that, at the time of the interviews, the evidence possessed by Renault had been obtained through an unidentified agent, known only by one member of the security department. This agent had previously worked for Renault on similar cases, one of them leading to the resignation of a manager two years previously. No substantial evidence (e.g. documents, files, testimonies) was provided by the agent; instead, available information consisted of the names of banks, account numbers, and origins, destinations, and amounts of money transferred. Nevertheless, it was suspected that the managers had sold proprietary information relating to projects involving electric vehicle technologies for the benefit of Chinese interests.

Two months later, it became clear that first Renault and then the French police had failed to find any substantial evidence against the managers. In the meantime, the interviews had been leaked and published in the press (as well as, later, a meeting between members of the security department, headquarters staff, and a lawyer).

All three managers had operational positions. Two of them, Balthazard and Rochette, had senior management positions (Rochette being the Balthazard's deputy), while the youngest one, Tenenbaum, was considered a highly promising manager. Among the three executives, two of them, Husson and Coudriou, held high-level staff positions as heads of Legal Affairs and Managerial Human Resources, respectively. The third executive, Pelata, was the Director General of the company (ranking second and reporting directly only to the Chairman and CEO, Carlos Ghosn). It has to be noted that the manager who was interviewed by Pelata was not working under his direct command.

Research methods

Following Miller and Fox (2004) and Heritage (2004), we consider that some analytical bridges can be constructed between Foucauldian discourse analysis, such as those elaborated by Fairclough (2010), and conversational analyses. As mentioned earlier, we define an order of discourse as a way of representing the world, of being (i.e. a style), and of interacting with the other (i.e. a genre), a dimension that may be studied more particularly during conversations.

We employed a set of methods inspired by conversational analysis and discursive psychology (also called discourse analysis, see Silverman, 2006: 223). While driven by different analytical focuses and objectives, conversational analysis (CA) and discursive psychology (DP) share a set of assumptions regarding talk-in-interaction.

Firstly, both approaches consider that talk is a medium for social action, so that "the analysis of discourse becomes the analysis of what people do" (Potter, 2004: 201). Rather than explaining people's talk by inferring to their underlying beliefs, values, states of mind, or implicit goals, CA and DP describe what people are actually doing when talking, for it is through these actions that people fabricate the context of their interactions and display mutual understanding (or misunderstanding).

Secondly, CA and DP approaches are reluctant to embrace the classical micro-macro distinction, arguing that social realities and interactions between people are constituted through talk-in-interaction. Institutions (and consequently organizations), exemplified by asymmetrical relationships, prototypical descriptions, or the constraint of people's actions, are envisioned as situated constructions that are made up, attended to, and made relevant by participants during their conversations[4] (Potter, 2004): "'Context' and identity have to be treated as inherently locally produced, incrementally developed and, by extension, as transformable at any moment. […] Analysts who wish to depict the distinctively 'institutional' character of some stretch of talk must […] demonstrate that the participants constructed their conduct over its course – turn by responsive turn – so as progressively to constitute… the occasion of their talk, together with their own roles in it, as having some institutional character" (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 21, in Silverman, 2006: 221). By

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[4] Such a constructionist view of context and institutions does not imply that all aspects of talk-in-interaction are context-dependent. CA insists that social interactions also embody a common set of socially shared and structured procedures (i.e. the needs to listen, to display understanding, to respond to summons, etc.) that allow mutual understandings and for which participants are held accountable (see Silverman, 2006).

extension, CA and DP prefer to analyze naturally occurring talk as the locus of the social construction of institutions and interactions.

We follow these analytical commitments to analyze the three interviews between the managers and executives at Renault. These interviews were audio-recorded and published on two journal websites in April 2011. Their durations range from 25 to 40 minutes. We transcribed the interviews by following a simplified format rather than the detailed prescriptions recommended by CA, firstly because the conversations and subsequent analyses were held in French and it would have made little sense to translate language-specific details such as intonations or voice raising, and secondly, our research objective was not to conduct an analysis as detailed as those conducted in CA.

Rather, our intention was to characterize the discursive tactics used and relationships constructed by participants during their conversations, in that their symmetry or asymmetry may reflect the genres and styles of the orders of discourse during the interactions.

In order to characterize the discursive tactics used and relationships constructed by participants during conversations, we conducted a three-step analysis.

Overall structural organization. Following Heritage's (2004) recommendations for CA, the overall structural organization of the three conversations was first analyzed. We looked for typical phases or sections in terms of the tasks that the participants were doing. Though focused on a single topic and a single objective, the interviews clearly showed similarities and differences.

Identification of sets of similar sequences and variations. With this in mind, the two authors looked independently for sequences that might show similarities and differences in terms of tasks and sub-goals (cf. Edwards, 2006). Only sequences that appear at least twice in the dataset and those that depart from these were retained for subsequent analysis. According to CA and DP, looking for similarities and variations is essential for catching the goals and tasks that participants accomplish through their talk. The two authors converged on six sets of sequences, each set comprising from seventeen to four sequences (or extracts). Two sets of sequences (containing only two sequences each) were identified by the second author, and the two authors agreed to keep these two sets in the final analysis.

This analysis clearly demonstrated that the three conversations were dominated highly by the executives. Each set of sequences was consequently labeled according to the main activity or sub-goals pursued by the executives (e.g. claiming to have information or, on the contrary, recognizing the organization's ignorance regarding what really happened). The analysis also showed that these asymmetries were not accomplished through the same discursive tactics.

Analysis of the discursive tactics used. In order to gain a better understanding on how such authoritative behaviors were accomplished, we analyzed the discursive tactics used in those sequences, defining these tactics[5] as discursive actions oriented towards the accomplishment of a particular sub-goal. Here, we relied on previous studies conducted on police interrogation (Shuy, 1998; Leo, 2008; Proteau, 2009) and interviews (Haworth, 2006; Edwards, 2006). Such a framework was inspired by the data themselves, as one of the executives made reference to a French police series, and the lexicon used in the interviews belonged to those of legal and police institutions (i.e. investigation, criminal court, suspect, confess, etc.). For each set of sequences, one or two extracts were chosen and analyzed in detail, with the aim of characterizing the tactics used by the executives to orient the path taken toward the identified goal.

In the next section, we present an overview of conversational patterns in the three interviews, before then analyzing the main sequences identified and the discursive tactics used by the executives.

Results

Overview of conversational patterns

In this section we try to "build an overall map of the interaction in terms of typical phases or sections" (Heritage, 2004: 227-229) for each interview, and point out some similarities and differences between the three interviews. Table 1 provides a comparative summary of the structure of the interviews.

In the three interviews, we found a similar underlying structure organized around the following phases (in this order, and indicated in italics in Table 1): greetings; incrimination via spying and bribery; suspension procedure; offering a "choice" (complaint and trial versus confession and resignation); leaving; and security procedures. Each interview also exhibits a short sequence of professional camaraderie (even two in the Pelata-Rochette interview).

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[5] These tactics may be accomplished through various discursive devices (see Edwards, 1994; 1995; Potter and Molder, 2005; Whittle and Mueller, 2011). Discursive devices refer to linguistic styles, phrases, tropes, and figures of speech (Whittle and Mueller, 2011: 111) such as rhetorical contrast, identity ascription, the use of modal verbs, etc. For instance, Edwards (2006) shows that in order to negate an accusation during police interrogation – what we call here a discursive tactic – suspects usually use the modal verb 'would' (i.e. Why would I do such a thing?), which helps them refer to their supposedly habitual and 'normal' behavior and reject the accusation.

Table 1 – Overview of the structure of the interviews

Husson (H) – Tenenbaum (T)	Coudriou (C) – Balthazard (B)	Pelata (P) – Rochette (R)
greetings	*greetings*	*greetings*
incrimination + suspension procedure + "choice"	*incrimination*	*incrimination*
denials (T) / rejection of denials (H)	questions (B) / elusive or laconic answers (C)	joint investigation
incrimination + "choice"	*suspension procedure + "choice"*	*suspension procedure + "choice"*
		camaraderie episode
denials (T) / rejection of denials (H)	questions (B) / elusive or laconic answers (C)	joint investigation
suspension procedure (explaining again)	*suspension procedure (explaining again)*	*suspension procedure (explaining, reading, signing)*
denials (T) / rejection of denials + repeated incrimination (H)	questions and denials (B) / elusive or laconic answers (C)	cooperation
"choice"	*"choice"*	*"choice"*
suspension procedure (reading, signing)	*suspension procedure (reading)*	cooperation
	questions and denials (B) / elusive or laconic answers + *"choice"* (C)	
	suspension procedure (signing)	
	questions and denials (B) / elusive or laconic answers + *"choice"* (C)	
camaraderie episode	*camaraderie episode*	*camaraderie episode*
denials (T) / rejection of denials + incrimination (H)	*"choice"*	
leaving and security procedure	*leaving and security procedure*	*leaving and security procedure*

However, these phases are sometimes fragmented and repeated. More importantly, other sections occur in between. Most of these sections revolve around the substance of incrimination (spying and bribery), but they take a different turn in each interview. In the Husson-Tenenbaum interview, they typically involve repetitive sequences of denials versus a rejection of the denials and more accusations (four phases). In the Coudriou-Balthazard interview, they typically show Balthazard asking questions about the incriminating facts and Coudriou answering in an elusive or laconic manner (five phases). In the Pelata-Rochette interview, the sections are more like a joint investigation (two phases) and cooperation (two phases), in that both participants explore different forms of conjecture, evaluate them, and then discuss the conditions of their cooperation.

While displaying similarities and differences, the three conversations culminate in the same result – the suspension of the manager. In the following section we focus primarily on the particular sections of the interviews that exhibit differences between conversations.

Discursive tactics

Focusing our attention on the phases that exhibited differences in the conversations, we looked for similarities and differences in the sequences of these phases and this way identified different sets of sub-goals and activities carried out by the executives, namely claiming to have information while maintaining ambiguity vs. recognizing ignorance while providing details; showing confidence via institutional reference vs. looking for more information; closing off vs. opening up alternatives; and passive, minimal emotion demonstrating vs. active emotion demonstrating.

We now analyze in depth the discursive tactics used in these sequences by the executives.

Claiming to have information while maintaining ambiguity vs. recognizing ignorance while providing details

In a significant number of sequences in Coudriou-Balthazar (ten sequences) and Husson Tennenbaum's (seven sequences) interviews, the executive asserts that Renault holds information incriminating the manager. In these sequences, the executive is careful not to provide any detail about what the organization really knows, so that the accusation remains vague and ambiguous. The following extract is an exemplar of such talk. Husson (H) has just accused Tennenbaum (T) of having committed a 'serious offence', implying bribery and 'foreign interests':

Extract 1

49 T: But I don't see what I…

50 H: Yes you do, Matthieu.

51 T: No, no.

52 H: We know, we know.

53 T: But you know what?

54 H: You're guilty, no use trying.

55 T: But I did not…

56 H: No, you did not (?). Fair enough, you're playing…

57 T: No I'm not playing…

58 H: … you're playing the suspect, the suspect, the suspect in Commissaire Moulin who
59 denies everything, that's, that's fair enough.

60 T: No, I'm not playing er…

61 H: I'm telling you, Matthieu.

62 T: No.

63 H: Matthieu, we know.

64 T: But you know what?

65 H: We know.

Facing such a serious but vague accusation, Tenenbaum expresses surprise (line 49) and denies that he knows what this is all about. Husson's "Yes you do" (l. 50) attacks Tenenbaum's denial (l. 51) and implies that the organization holds evidence against him. The next turn displays a similar pattern. Tenenbaum's denial is followed by Husson's "We know, we know" (l. 52), which again attacks Tenenbaum's denial and conveys the idea that the organization ('we') has evidence against him. A similar pattern occurs at l.62 and l.64. In the next turn (l. 53), Tenenbaum seeks to escape what resembles a dialogue of the deaf and asks what the organization knows about. He gets no answer (l. 54). Husson's next turn ("You're guilty, no use trying") attacks Tenenbaum's indirect denial in the previous turn (when he questions Husson) and implies that they possess overwhelming evidence.

In these turns, a striking feature of Husson's answers is their shortness: The executive gives no information to the manager. All in all, while Tenenbaum denies that he knows what Husson is talking about, Husson's answers consist of attacks on denials and evidence ploys, two tactics that are used widely in police interrogation (Leo, 2008; Proteau, 2009). *Attacking denials* refers to discursive acts that aim to discourage denials, e.g. by interrupting the suspect, accusing him of lying, imploring him to stop denying the accusation. The *evidence*

ploy refers to any attempt to make the suspect believe that the police possess incriminating evidence. While an evidence ploy may imply confronting the suspect with testimonial or material ('scientific') evidence, Husson does not provide a cue about the 'evidence' they hold. In addition, his terse answers ("We know", "You're guilty") convey both confidence and ambiguity.

Although surprising in the organizational context, the eruption of the police order of discourse is confirmed in the next turns (lines 55 to 58). Husson, again, attacks Tenenbaum's denials when asserting that Tenenbaum is playing the suspect in *Commissaire Moulin* (l. 55), a popular French detective series of the 1980s. Husson portrays Tenenbaum's denials as 'playing the suspect who denies everything', a discursive device known as reflexive conceptualization, which refers to "instances when speakers explicitly refer on the meaning of their own (or others') talk […], which enables speakers to 'cancel, substitute or renew prior segments of their talk'" (Auburn, 2005: 701, *in* Whittle and Mueller, 2011: 126). Here, reflexive conceptualization is a powerful device employed to discourage further denials from Tenenbaum ("That's fair enough").

The repeated use of attacks on denials and evidence ploy tactics, together with the vagueness of Husson's answers, are effective means for *putting pressure* on the manager, a third tactic widely used in police interrogation (Leo, 2008; Proteau, 2009). Pressure tactics refer to a set of both physical or material and discursive techniques such as social isolation, sensory deprivation, escalation, or repetition. In the sequences between Husson and Tenenbaum, pressure is accomplished by repeating the 'We know' answers and the evasiveness of his responses, which may convey the feeling of being trapped in a Kafkaesque situation.

In summary, Husson is able both to claim that the organization holds evidence and to remain vague about what they know. These activities are accomplished through the use of three tactics used in police interrogation: evidence ploys, attacks on denials and pressure. These three tactics are accompanied and sustained by a fourth discursive tactic, namely the use of brief answers that offer no opportunity for Tenenbaum to glean more information.

With subtle variations, similar tactics and effects were found in the subsequent parts of the conversation, in Coudriou-Balthazard's interview, and, very marginally, in the Pelata-Rochette conversation (one sequence only). The analysis of the conversation between Pelata (P) and Rochette (R) shows that Pelata gives Rochette much more information about what Renault actually knows. Contrary to Husson, Pelata never states that the organization knows everything about the case. On the contrary, he repeatedly asks Rochette for further

information (eight sequences), thereby recognizing the organization's ignorance. Extract 2 follows Pelata's exposure of the reason for the interview: the organization has discovered that Rochette has committed industrial espionage. The case implies M. Balthazard, and Rochette is Balthazard's deputy manager.

Extract 2.

19 R: I, yes, I, I'm shaken, I, I (?)… Now I'm sorry I'm not er not quite awake this morning,
20 but I don't understand, but well…
21 P: Look, there's, there's er it's a case of bribery, that is that… a er a foreign company er er
22 puts some money for you on an account and er in exchange for er things we would in
23 fact like to know, right, that we can figure out a little, though we don't er, we don't know
24 in all the details and we would like to know.

Rochette expresses surprise (l. 19 "I, I'm shaken") and says he does not understand what Pelata is talking about (l. 19-20), an invitation for further explanation. Contrary to Husson ("Yes you do"), Pelata provides some details about what the organization knows (l. 21 and 22) and, more importantly, what it does not know (l. 23-24). In so doing, he not only asks for Rochette's collaboration ("we would like to know" l.22 and 24), but he also establishes *a give and take relationship* (Proteau, 2009). Consequently, he looks to *establish a rapport and gain the suspect's trust*, a police interrogation tactic that aims at 'softening up the suspect' (Leo, 2008: 121-122). This tactic refers to the interrogator's effort to "create the illusion that he and the suspect will be engaged in a simple information exchange that does not implicate the suspect and is designed to assist police to solve the crime" (p. 122). Pelata's numerous hesitations convey the idea that he feels concerned by Rochette's situation and concurs to portray the conversation as a "joint problem-solving exercise".

Husson and Pelata's different orientations regarding the 'suspects' and what the organization knows are also present in the following sets of sequences.

Showing confidence via institutional reference vs. looking for more information

In these sets of sequences, while Coudriou (two sequences) and Husson (two sequences) show confidence in relying on institutional aspects, Pelata repeatedly asks Rochette for more information (six sequences).

In order to make their point that the organization knows what happened, Husson and Coudriou refer to institutional and legal aspects. Extract 3 is illustrative of such activities.

Facing vague accusations and the announcement of his laying off, Balthazard (B) asks for more information, as he feels "completely lost". Coudriou (C) does not answer his question and instead describes the different steps up to 11 January, when a formal interview will take place. He advises Balthazard to "really think about it" by then.

Extract 3.

142 C: Er, the company will make the decisions. These decisions, I'm sure you realize that
143 Carlos Ghosn, the chairman, is in the loop, the CEO is in the loop, Odile is also in the
144 loop. Of course, I'm not acting er on my own…

145 B: I'm confused.

146 C: Well listen.

147 B: I can't figure out what this is all about.

148 C: Er sure.

149 B: (?)

150 C: I'm telling you, I'm telling you, our people in the law department, all this is perfectly
151 clean legally. So, the consequences er will be, will be our choice, in agreement with the
152 company and the law department and er, actually, this may even go to a criminal court –
153 we can file a complaint, we can take you to court.

In this extract, Coudriou underlines the seriousness of the case via multiple institutional and legal references. He first mentions that the company will make the decision (l. 142). To make his point clearer, he outlines that the CEO and other high-level executives participate in the decision process (l. 143). These references, and consequently the seriousness of the case, are well understood by an already confused Balthazard (l. 146, 148). Coudriou takes this confusion as an opportunity to reaffirm the 'seriousness' of the situation and to show how confident he is by mentioning the law department (l.150) and affirming that "this is perfectly clean legally" (l. 150-151). All of these institutional aspects are summed up when he states that "the consequences will be our choice in agreement with the company and law department" (l. 151-152). Such a repeated *use of legal and institutional references* has been found in police interrogation studies (see Young, 2010; Haworth, 2006). Young (2010) shows that policemen refer to their colleagues through their occupational title as a way to dramatize the situation and put pressure on the suspect. Haworth (2006) demonstrates that such institutional reference is a device used alternatively by the policemen and the suspect, depending on the topic discussed and the relative expertise of the participants on the subject.

Referring to these institutional aspects is also a way for participants to display confidence, to show their expertise, and to gain the upper hand, temporarily at least, on the other protagonist.

By mentioning the CEO and the 'law department', Coudriou also evokes negative consequences for the manager, a point that appears very clearly in lines 152-153 ("criminal court", "complaint", "we can take you to court"). Again, Coudriou uses repetition as a way to dramatize and increase the pressure on the manager (Leo 2008).

Such a dramatization of the consequences for the manager is also known as the 'bad scenario' tactic in police interrogation, a tactic that we will discuss in detail later on.

Pelata does not display such a confident attitude: He asks Rochette precise questions (six sequences) and at the same time provides him with more information. Extract 4a (which quickly follows extract 2) and 4b are significant examples.

Extract 4 a.

32 P: Did Michel Balthazard ever ask you to get him some plans or some er…?

33 R: Are you joking?

34 P: I don't know.

Extract 4b

127 P: You've not been asked by er people from here or there from, inside Renault to er to
128 pass information that looked strange to you (clearing throat)?

129 R: No, wait, really I'm at least a little bit aware er a little bit aware of what I'm doing and
130 of the [stakes?], here. Plus I think I'm rather loyal. No, no, no, no, no, no.

In both extracts (l. 32 and l. 127-128), Pelata asks Rochette precise 'yes-no' questions regarding his past actions. The questions suggest that Rochette could have given away information without any intention of misbehaving, but rather by obeying his superior (l. 32) or inadvertently performing such an act (l. 127). Such a suggestion may be related to the tactic known in police interrogation as good scenarios construction. Constructing good scenarios refers to the suggestion of possible reasons or scenarios that downplay the responsibility of the suspect: attributing blameworthiness to social circumstances, redefining the action in a way that minimizes the suspect's culpability, and displacing the locus of responsibility from the suspect to outside aspects (Leo, 2008: 153-154). Bad scenarios, on the contrary,

exaggerate the seriousness of the act or its consequences (p. 154). Both tactics are aimed at pushing the suspect to confess. In the Pelata-Rochette conversation, however, the tactic is not successful because Rochette is appalled by Pelata's questions (e.g. l. 33 "Are you joking?") and even offended (l. 129 "no wait, really I'm at least aware of what I'm doing"). Rochette interprets the scenarios as so outrageous that Pelata is forced to retreat (l. 34. "I don't know').

The good/bad scenarios tactic is used more particularly in the following sets of sequences.

Closing off vs. opening up alternatives

The contrast between the confident and accusatory attitude of Husson and Coudriou and that of investigator adopted by Pelata is at its strongest when the executives envisage what is going to happen next.

While Husson and Coudriou close off alternative versions of the future (four sequences in the Husson-Tenenbaum conversation; three in Coudriou-Balthazard) and construct the manager as necessarily guilty (six in Husson-Tenenbaum's conversation; one sequence in Coudriou-Balthazard), Pelata progressively evolves from two to three different interpretations and envisages Rochette's innocence (two sequences).

Extract 5a follows extract 3, where Coudriou underlines the seriousness of the case by referring to legal and institutional aspects and possible legal consequences.

Extract 5a

153 C: […]   Er, the decision about all this is not made
154 yet. So it can go very, very far, so you realize that on the private side, I looked at that, I
155 looked again at your er personal situation, your kids, your wife, all this, it's only half fun,
156 hey? You're 56, you're young. You have three kids. You're a big name in the company.

157 B: No, but I just don't get it.

158 C: You're one of the biggest names in the company.

159 B: I don't get it. I don't get it. I don't get it.

160 C: So er you realize the implications of all this on the private side. So there's, there's
161 another option, hey? If you decide to, to resign, this could also be an option. After this
162 letter, you have plenty of time to think about it. For us, today we can er not sue, we can,
163 we can decide to stop here and decide that, well that you think about it, you know what.

While maintaining that the decision has not been taken yet, Coudriou dramatizes the consequences (l. 153-154 "so it can go very far") and then refers to Balthazard's private situation. Although not being very specific, the reference to Balthazard's family frames the consequences as dramatic (l. 155-156 "your kids, your wife, all this, it's only half fun hey?"; l. 156 "You have three kids"). He then goes one step further by referring to Balthazard's reputation (l. 156 "You're a big name in the company", l. 158 "You're one of the biggest names in the company"). In so doing, Coudriou not only increases the pressure on Balthazard, but also flatters him and indirectly calls for his sense of honor because being a 'big name' conveys the idea of notoriety, integrity, and competence (in France, at least).

In constructing such a *bad scenario*, Coudriou is clearly closing off any alternative interpretations of what has happened and of what will happen. Balthazard seems stunned (l. 157 "I just don't get it" repeated over l. 157 and 159). After having developed a very bad scenario (extract 3, l. 153 "take you to the court"), Coudriou suggests what should appear as a 'good' situation (l. 160-161. "So there's, there's another option, hey?"). In both scenarios, however, Balthazard is constructed as 'guilty', yet he vehemently rejects this closed interpretation (extract 5b, l.164).

Extract 5b

164 B: What, no! I don't know!

165 C: Michel…

166 B You make me laugh, I don't know.

167 C: I can understand, I can understand that you deny it. I can understand.

168 B: But I'm not denying! I don't know! This is crazy!

169 C: You think about it, Michel.

170 B: This is crazy!

Coudriou takes Balthazard's denials (l. 164, 1. 166) as evidence of his guilt, as 'normal' behavior for a guilty person (l. 167. "I can understand"). In the same way as Husson in extract 1, Coudriou uses a *reflexive conceptualization* device as a way to reject Balthazard's denials and closes off any alternative interpretation of what could have happened.

Contrasting with the very bad, closed scenarios constructed by Husson and Coudriou, Pelata opens up alternative interpretations and suggests three different scenarios, one of which constructs Rochette as innocent. Just before extract 6, Pelata gives Rochette the letter that informs him of his laying off.

Extract 6

332 P: So, if you like there are three, three options, see? Either you've… all you tell me is
333true, and er it's simply someone who took you in this to, er, who opened an account in
334 your name, and so on, and put money in it to, er. I don't really know what for. Right.
335Either it's, either you, either you lie to me but…

 336 R: Mhmh…

337 P: I can't take this option out.

338 R: Mhmh, sure.

339 P: Er and (clearing throat) then either we get an understanding of what is happening, and
340 you're, well if you're not in this, we're back to the starting point. If you're er if you're in
341 this you have to, you have to leave the company. Either you resign, either it's, it's a
342 dismissal. Er… and, and if you don't, in fact, we go, we go to criminal court, to try and
343 fully understand what happened.

344 R: For me in any case I'll go to court, that's for sure (PP clearing throat). I for sure want
345 to be cleared of all this (?).

From l. 332 to l. 343, Pelata describes three different scenarios ("three options, see?"). In the first one, Rochette has been "taken into" the scheme and is innocent (l. 332-334), but Pelata does not seem to take this option at face value (l. 334 "I don't really know what for. Right"). In the second and third scenarios, Rochette is guilty (l. 334-335 "Either it's, either you, either you lie to me") and so Rochette would have to resign or, if he doesn't, they will go to the criminal court and he will be fired (l. 341-343). In exposing the scenarios, Pelata hesitates significantly (numerous 'er') and seeks to refer to their personal relationship: Instead of mentioning Rochette's guilt, Pelata refers to his lying (or not lying) *to him*. As in extract 2, Pelata seems to want to appeal to their rapport and mutual trust. If Pelata wants Rochette to confess, or at least to resign, his tactics are not successful, as Rochette affirms that "in any case [he]'ll go to court, that's for sure" (l. 344).

The contrasting sets of activities and tactics used by the executives are also accompanied by different 'emotional tactics', a trait also found in previous police interrogation studies (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1991; Leo, 2008).

Passive, minimal emotion demonstrating vs. active emotion demonstrating

During the interviews, the managers express a variety of emotions such as astonishment, confusion, dismay, and indignation. However, although they are colleagues from the same company, some of them long-time acquaintances, the executives conducting the interviews do not engage in a display of emotions in return. Most of the time they ignore the expression of emotion and just carry on or, as analyzed earlier, take the emotion as part of a denial act that is to be expected and rejected. In each interview there are only rare occasions when the executive responds to the manager and engages in a brief sequence involving a common display of emotion. In extract 7 (Husson-Tenenbaum) this occurs with a minimal level of emotion sharing, while in extract 8 (Pelata-Rochette) more empathy is expressed.

Extract 7

272 H: Too bad.

273 T: Well er I, I, I… it's worse than, than too bad.

274 H: Yes it's worse than too bad, yes.

Husson's "too bad" (l. 272) is received as an understatement by Tenenbaum, who is about to lose his job and faces the possibility of a trial. Husson acknowledges this by repeating Tenenbaum's utterance (l. 274). This passive way of acknowledging the dismay expressed by Tenenbaum can be interpreted as a demonstration of coldness that is part of a "bad cop" tactic (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991), aiming at exerting greater pressure (Leo 2008). By contrast, in extract 8, Pelata takes a more active part in the sharing of emotions.

Extract 8

215 R: .hh Look, frankly er I never thought you wanted to see me this morning to tell me this.

216 P: Yeah. Not really a pleasure.

217 R: No, I know, I know.

218 P: As you can imagine…

219 R: I know and I think that it's… It pisses me off because you must also have been
220 disappointed when it happened…

Pelata expresses his own emotion about shocking Rochette in such a way (l. 216) and insists that Rochette should be aware of this point (l. 218), thus demonstrating sympathy and understanding for the suspect (Leo, 2008). Pelata's discomfort is in turn acknowledged by Rochette ("I know", l. 217 and l. 219). The two men therefore agree on the strong emotional loading of the situation and on the mutual understanding of their feelings. Then Rochette makes an even more intimate remark that involves the mutual respect between them, and the high price he takes in this respect (l. 219-220). A striking feature of Rochette's utterance is the symmetry between the feelings he attributes to Pelata ("disappointed", l. 220) and his own feelings ("it pisses me off", l. 219), while the words he uses are at such different language levels.

The findings are summarized in Table 2, which shows that the three executives used a wide variety of police interrogation sub-tactics. Some relate to 'bad cop' interrogation tactics, while others can be labeled as 'good cop' tactics. 'Bad cop' tactics refer to a set of maneuvers used to convey negative and unsupportive emotions (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1991: 758), including accusations, attacks on denials, evidence ploys, pressure, repetition, escalation, and repeated confrontation (Leo, 2008: 148; Yoong, 2010: 695). These devices aim to weaken the suspect's resistance so that he starts confessing. 'Good cop' tactics refer to strategies used to convey positive feelings, including displaying sympathy and understanding for the suspect, suggesting more benign motivations for the suspect's crime, establishing a rapport, and gaining mutual trust (Leo, 2008; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1991).

All in all, the two interviews exhibit a 'bad cop' dominating pattern, while the third one is mostly on the "good cop" side. At first view there is little use of the contrasting strategy ('good cop/bad cop') that is supposed to produce high emotional contrasts for the target individual, and therefore strongly drive him towards compliance (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991). However, the use of different scenarios (bad vs. less bad, bad vs. good) may be interpreted as variation around this 'good/bad cop' strategy.

Table 2. Main activities of the executives and the tactics used for their accomplishment

'bad cop' tactics	*'good cop' tactics*
Claiming to have information while maintaining ambiguity	Recognizing ignorance while providing details
Attacking denials (through reflexive conceptualization device) *Evidence ploys* *Pressure through repetition*	*Establishing a rapport and gaining suspect's trust (through the establishment of a give and take relationship)*
Showing confidence via institutional references	Looking for more information via questioning
Pressure through dramatization, use of legal and institutional references, and repetition *Constructing a bad scenario (that suggests bad consequences for the suspect)*	*Constructing 'good scenarios' (i.e. that downplay the suspects' responsibility)*
Closing off interpretations and enacting guiltiness	Opening up interpretations
Pressure via dramatization *Constructing bad, then less bad scenarios* *Attacking denials (via reflexive conceptualization)*	*Constructing good and bad scenarios* *Appealing to personal relationship*
Passive, minimal emotional demonstrating	Active emotion sharing
Pressure through coldness	*Displaying sympathy and understanding for the suspect*

Discussion

How do external discourses erupt into conversations in organizations? An in-depth analysis of three conversations between executives and managers at Renault shows that, through the use of various police interrogation tactics, the executives were able to accomplish activities that transformed a supposedly 'free', symmetrical conversation oriented towards joint sensemaking into an asymmetrical conversation oriented towards the laying off of the

managers. These results shed light on the 'structural' aspects of 'emergence' in conversations in three respects.

Firstly, they suggest an enlarged conception of the order of discourse. The eruption of the police order of discourse into the conversations is not due solely to the introduction of 'police' lexicons and related views of the world, but relies heavily on the use of good cop/bad cop tactics, that is, specific ways of behaving and relating (i.e. a style and genre)[6]. This enlarged conception of the order of discourse echoes Samra-Fredericks' (2003; 2005) previous studies on managerial conversations, which showed how the incorporation of the discourse of strategy relies heavily on the discursive minor moves (i.e. asking questions, use of metaphors etc.) made by one strategist – a set of discursive acts that could be associated with a strategic 'genre'.

This, of course, does not imply that a discourse is systematically associated with a stable style and genre. Following Foucault (1991), Mantere and Vaara (2008), for instance, showed how the discourse of strategy implies various kinds of interactions moving from a top-down, disciplinary process to participative relationships. From a similar perspective, police discourses may imply a variety of relationships moving from accusatory interrogation to respectful interview (see Hoon, 2010; Shuy, 1998), thereby implying different orders of discourse. The view that an order of discourse implies a specific genre and style increases our sensitivity towards the variety of discourses – and the asymmetries they carry.

Secondly, our analysis supports Fairclough's (2010) critical view of the notion of 'free discussion' and emergence. While new discourses can be introduced in formal meetings (cf. Rasmussen, 2010) via hierarchical relationships, 'free discussions' do not necessarily equate with symmetrical relationships and joint sensemaking. Our research shows that when conversations take place outside the hierarchical structure and the prevailing orders of discourse, the 'emergence' expected to happen by some scholars (Jarzabowski and Seidl, 2008; Wegner, 1990) turns out to be highly structured by another order of discourse. Even more strikingly, this 'emergence' looks more like an 'eruption': Far from being the result of a jointly built, progressive process, it is rather brutally imposed and enacted by a range of discursive tactics – an 'imposition' that greatly contributes to the asymmetries observed.

A third, interesting aspect of our contribution here, we believe, is that it suggests that the substitute order of a discourse can be imported. An intriguing question is, then, how and why does a certain 'order of discourse' happen to penetrate an organization? In the case we

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[6] It is difficult to set a clear difference between genre and style here: behaving like a 'cop' (i.e. the style) implies an accusatory, suspicious attitude towards the managers (i.e. a genre), who in turn are constructed as 'suspects'.

studied, it is not surprising that once a possible case of spying and bribery has been identified, legal issues come into play. What is striking, though, is that the Renault executives (and perhaps also the top management team) incorporated this order of discourse by deciding not to go to the police and instead acted like police interrogators. One could have imagined that, categorizing the managers' behavior as criminal, the executives would have handed the matter to the police and judicial system, while handling the managerial and strategic aspects of the case on their side. Renault's top management later argued that it was for purposes of discretion and confidentiality that they decided not to go to the police. If we admit this, it does not imply, however, that they should have handled the case in the same way as the police would (supposedly) have done.

We suggest two alternative explanations for the eruption of an imported order of discourse, although considerable additional investigation is certainly required. The key question is to what extent the triggering event (i.e. alleged evidence of spying and bribery by managers) constituted a breach in the flow of events (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeldt, 2005). The first explanation is that, when organizational members are confronted with an interruption that cannot be dealt with by employing routine solutions, an imported order of discourse provides organizational members with an alternative repertoire of legitimate ways of acting, relating, and talking. We might hypothesize that the stronger the interruption, the more an imported order of discourse is likely to be adopted. The order of discourse that is likely to be introduced depends on the knowledge and skills of the participants in the conversation (cf. Samra-Fredericks, 2003; 2005) and the various influence processes that take place between alternative 'orders' of discourse introduced. Following Janis' (1972) seminal works on decision processes, one may assume that Renault's security department's influence on the executives, together with the isolation of top management from external influence, contributed both to the absence of alternative discourses or dissenting voices and to the prevalence of the police order of discourse. The popularity of detective series and films might finally explain the ease with which the executives appropriated the police 'order' of discourse and were able to play the good/bad cops (cf. Zimbardo, 1973).

In the case we studied, it is not clear, however, that the trigger was necessarily such a strong event. Partial evidence of prior similar events, and of similar ways of handling the cases, has subsequently been published in the press, although without such an abundance of first-hand, high-quality information. If we admit that our case had precedents, then the adoption of the police discourse appears as the result of an intra-organizational (micro-level) institutionalization process (Elsbach, 2002). The use of a police order of discourse is therefore

part of an integrated, legitimized process for handling crises. Repeated interactions on a variety of cases and among a limited group of members from within the security department, the department of legal affairs, and top management established taken-for-granted beliefs and ways of acting, encompassing specific ways of gaining information (i.e. resorting to external, undercover sources), sharing information (i.e. with selected members the top management team), and making decisions (i.e. taking some liberties with the compliance committee and related official procedures). In addition, preferences for speed and discretion in handling such cases, expectations of submission from the suspects, and prior (apparent) successes also established norms about decisions that should be implemented (i.e. resorting to discursive police sub-tactics and presenting suspects with a choice between legal complaint and discreet resignation early in the process).

While the first explanation portrays organizations as fragile under exceptional circumstances, the second explanation views organizations in a 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' manner.

The case suggests, eventually, that, whatever the correct explanation, the eruption and dominance of only one 'order of discourse' may imply damaging consequences for everybody.

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