Discourse of transformation in organizational change management

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Abstract. This study examines the discursive construction of ideological change and identity within the practice of organisational control in organisational change management. The focus of the study was to examine how the organisation through its large-scale reengineering process to implement organisational change initiatives appropriated discourse of transformation to effect change among its organisational members. The organisation's focus is to change mindsets and persuade members to embrace characteristics, traits, attitudes and behaviour that are deemed to be beneficial to the organisation. Discourse of transformation is used as an object of discursive construction of reality in the construction of an 'ideal' member identity and ideological change. The theoretical framework for the study is informed by theories of identity and ideology in discourse, theories of power and language as articulated in the field of critical discourse analysis. The data consist of transcripts of 'Sharing Sessions' which were transcribed verbatim. The analytical framework for the textual analysis of identity and ideology is developed on a basis of a combination of concepts and methods namely, [1] analysis, intertextual analysis, Antaki and Widdicombe's principles for analysing identity in talk and [2] modes of identity regulation.

1 Introduction

This study seeks to investigate how discourse is used by management in the construction of identity and shaping of ideology as a focus for examining organisational control in an institution of higher learning. It does so via a case study of change in an institution of higher learning. It focuses on the various discursive means the organisation employs to exert influence over its members. It investigates the discursive processes by which organisational members are enjoined or influenced to define themselves, to think and to act or to adopt work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives and to make sense of the processes that constitute organisational change. The discursive strategies introduced at the institution during the time of the study appeal to the

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notions of increasing efficiency within the organisation to enable it to be a profitable, sustainable and innovative organisation. This practice of managerial action to unobtrusively develop appropriate identities of organisational members is known as identity regulation by [2]. It is a form of ideological control or social engineering and is a preferred way to mould members as it is subtle and unobtrusive.

1.1 Organisational control

Organisational control is part and parcel of management. Management in seeking to address issues such as productivity, efficiency and survival needs to have control over its employees. Managerial control has not vanished in the postmodern organisation. It is only the means and methods which are employed to manage control processes which have changed. " ... employees develop multiple identities and roles at work, employing multiple sense making perspectives, and occupying positions of authority and subordination simultaneously" (p. 89). Employees do more multitasking and thus assume different roles and identities [3].

Deetz [4] expounds that managerial approach to organisational control is about "managing the 'insides' – the hopes, fears and aspirations of workers, rather than their behaviours directly" (p. 87). The aim is to win over the 'hearts and minds' of employees and direct their roles and activities towards the fulfilment or accomplishment of organisational goals. Definitions of reality as espoused by the management are thus established in an organisation and organisational members are exhorted to adopt this reality.

Flamholtz define organisational control as the process of influencing the behaviour of people as members of a formal organisation [7]. Similarly, [8,9,10] have interpreted control in terms of the influence on the subordinates to seek their compliance with organisational goals . Thus, organisations engage in various discourses to impart the 'reality' or ideology that they want to promote so that organisational members can be allied with it.

This study seeks to examine how control among organisational members is achieved through the discursive construction of ideology and identity in organisational change management initiatives. It specifically looks at the use of imperatives and allusions to pain as a strategy.

2 Discourse of imperatives

Imperatives refer to the use of verbs to instruct or direct someone in order for something to be done. Within the discourse of transformation is evident the discourse of imperatives. It is evident in most of the texts of the 'Sharing Sessions'.

2.1 Directives

Imperatives are used as directives to direct or instruct people to do something. Modals can also be used for the same purpose. Lines 95-140 (Excerpt 1) of Text 1 are extracted to illustrate the use of imperatives and modals. Due to the length of this excerpt, imperatives and modals are extracted and listed in Table 1.1. A directive is a command. By listing directives, the speaker in Text 1 tries to control the behaviour of the marketing personnel as well as the other members of the institution who attended this 'Sharing Session'. It is a top-

down directive to influence members about what they are supposed to do and what not to do. Members are in a subject position as they have to be told what to do and what not to do. Power is used to create and privilege beliefs that serve the interests of the marketing division in the institution.

Table 1.1.1 Excerpt 1:   Text 1: line 95-140 List of directives

line		Imperatives	Modals
95-96	on how to increase our success rate for our walk in customers (.) I think we need to try our very best to satisfy our customers' needs		we need to try our very best to satisfy our customers' needs
96-98	when it comes to waiting time we need to reduce the waiting time (..) yah (.) I mean to provide good service put customer first	<u>put</u> customer first	we need to reduce the waiting time
98	try not to ask customers to come back and ah	<u>try</u> not to ask	
99	(..) they must go back with something at least (.)		must
100	I think and it's a clear cut case, then we should issue it (.)		should
101	so don't let them go without anything (..)	<u>don't</u> let them go	
102	try our very best to tell them about credit exemptions (…)	<u>try</u> our very best	
106-108	I think we need to understand today there are so many institutions around in Malaysia (.) so I think we have no choice but to treat the customer as special (.)	<u>treat</u> the customer as special	we need to understand
108-110	(.) the system must be friendly and staff MUST be friendly enough err (…) when it comes to err (.) err (…) when it comes to customer service (.)		must/MUST
110	(.) information provided must be accurate (.)		must
111-113	if you are not too sure about the information you're providing, always check with the relevant person in charge	<u>check</u> with the relevant person in charge	
122-124	when a phone call is coming in I think we need to observe our phone manners. (…) phone manners must be exercised here to ensure that they can create a good impression to the public.		we need to / must
124-125	*always* take time with customers' interests (...)	<u>take</u> time with customers' interests	
125-126	we must be able to provide general information and refer to relevant officer-in-charge		must
126-129	(...) try not to put the customer on hold because sometimes I also notice that we put customers on hold without any reason (...) when we put customers on hold we can be forgetful that the customer is there waiting for our answer	<u>try</u> not to	
129	also *neve*r ask the customer to call back	<u>never ask</u> the customer to call back	
131	don't ask customers to call back (...)	<u>don't</u> ask	
134-135	I think that we need to increase our turnaround time (..)		we <u>need to</u>

The excerpt serves to show the use of imperatives and modals as commands. There are numerous other examples found in this text.

Imperatives are used to command or instruct members on how to deal correctly with customers (students and parents). They are used as directives to direct correct behaviour or action. Firstly, there is reference to walk in customers and their needs, then there is reference to call-ins by customers requesting for information. The speaker directs the attention of the members on how to deal with customers properly. The use of imperatives is to direct members. Even though it seems commonsense, the speaker nevertheless lists the directives. Members are thus enjoined to appropriate this discourse of imperatives as something they must adhere to or follow.

The use of modals in lines 95, 97, 99, 100, 108, 110, 115 and 134 also emphasise the importance of treating the customer right. The speaker says in line 107-108; "I think we have no choice but to treat the customer as special (.) customer is changing". The obligation to treat the customer right is due to stiff competition among private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The modal "need to" occurs frequently in the excerpt to stress an impassioned plea for members to make the effort to understand their role in marketing. Marketing is the responsibility of everyone, including the academics. It is not entirely dependent on the marketing department as seen in the discourse of marketisation.

The use of "*always*" and "*never*" (italicised in the excerpt) in "*always* take time" and "*never* ask the customer to call back" serve to emphasise that it must be done at all times (one hundred percent of the time) without exception. They are strong commands and the speaker speaks with authority. It therefore does not allow for refute or rebuttal.

The use of directives is also seen in Text 2. The speaker in Text 2 (Excerpt 2) uses the modal "must" in "YOU MUST CHANGE (.) you must change with the times (.) with the circumstances (...)..." (line 52-53) and 'have to' in "you have to change" (line 55). These are strong commands and provide no alternative to members. It is an impassioned plea to change. He goes on further to say "... if you cease to change (...) if you REFUSE to change you will be staying where you are and you won't move on (..) you won't even have the chance to enjoy the fruits of change. (.)..." He uses 'if' twice to emphasise the consequences of not changing – "... you will be staying where you are...", "you won't move on", and "you won't even have the chance to enjoy the fruits of change. (.)...".

The words "cease" and "refuse" are negative connotations implying that if one has stopped to change or rejects change, one would face eventual failure or even death.

55	YOU MUST CHANGE (.) you must change with the times (.) with the circumstances (...) change your business environment in order for you to adapt to the new situations and to survive (..) <u>you have to change</u> (…) if you cease to change (...) if you <u>REFUSE to change</u> you will be staying where you are and <u>you won't move on</u> (..) you won't even have the chance to enjoy the fruits of change. (.) so that's why I believe that I have to initiate this move

Excerpt 2: Text 2: line 53-58

In line 58, "that's why I believe that I have to initiate this move ..." serves to illustrate that members are not positioned to make changes and so may not 'move' or 'enjoy the fruits of change', so the managing director has to set the course of action for the organisation. This shows direct control over members. Members are subjected to changes as the management sees fit. This is in line with definition of ideology, "to study ideology is to study the way in which meaning (symbolic forms) serves to establish and sustain

relations of domination" [5]. Since members are incapable of making changes, management has to step in and bring about changes.

Discourse of imperatives as seen in the excerpts serves to stress not only the urgency of action, but also can be seen as exerting power over members to conform. It sets out to exhort managers and members of the organisation to take concrete action to expedite change initiatives. The directives reflect the use of power or authority to 'direct' actions that are deemed to be beneficial to the organisation. There is therefore an unequal relationship between the speakers and the organisational members. Wodak defines power as; "Power is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures [5]. The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power ..." (p. 11).

Thus, power is wielded through the discourse of imperatives to get organisational members to conform to what is expected of them and as what Wodak says; "Language provides a finely articulated vehicle for differences in power within hierarchical social structures" (p. 11).

3 Discourse of pain

Discourse of pain is also appropriated in the construction of ideology among organisational members. One of the 'Sharing Sessions' in particular, shows evidence of the use of discourse of pain. In Text 3, 'Motivation', the speaker draws upon discourse of pain to emphasise the inevitability and need for change.

3.1 Change as a painful process

Discourse of pain is appropriated in the context of change. Change is a process and is often associated with discomfort or pain. The speaker in Text 3 effectively appropriates discourse of pain in highlighting the need for change. He draws an analogy between the process of change and the painful process of change that eagles go through in order to live longer.

3.1.1 Use of analogy

145	this is really wonderful (...) we've got to learn from the eagles (...) this is VERY VERY incredible (….) ok (…) so just now I was talking about attitude (…) we have to have the right attitude (…) the right mental attitude and we must learn from the eagles (…) the eagle has the longest life span of the bird species (.) they can live up to seventy years (...) they can live up to seventy years (...) incredible, isn't
150	it? (..) but in order for the eagle to reach this age (.) seventy years (..) the eagle must make a very hard decision (...) a very hard decision (.) not an easy decision but a hard decision (.) to reach the age of seventy (...) so what happens? (...) in its forties its nails become very long and flexible (...) its talons become very long and it cannot grab its prey anymore (...) normally how does an eagle catch its prey? (.)
155	they fly and then they go down and grab the prey (...) but when they are in their forties they cannot grab the prey and then their beaks are no longer sharp and it becomes bent (.) no longer sharp but becomes bent (...) this is when it's in its forties (....) even the feathers become thick and become glued to the body (...)

	because of that it becomes difficult to fly (...) so what happens? (...) the eagle is left
160	with two options (.) two choices (...) one is to die (.) or to go through a <u>very painful</u>
	<u>process</u> (...) a process that takes one hundred and fifty days (…) how many months
	is that? (.) five months (…) so the eagle has to decide (...) it has to think (…) do I
	want to die or do I want to live? (…) if it chooses to live it goes through a painful
	process in a hundred and fifty days (…) the process requires that the eagle flies to a
165	mountain top (…) it goes to a mountain top and there it knocks its beak against the
	rock until the beak cracks and breaks (…) the bent beak breaks (….) ok (…) then
	after that the beak grows back in a few months (.) then it will pull out its old nails
	(...) it will pull out the nails with its new beak (...) this is a very painful process
170	(....) after some time the nails grow back (...) that is not the end of the process (...)
	with its new beak and new nails it uses its beak and nails to pull out its feathers
	which have become thick and glued to its body (...) it pulls out the feathers (...) the
	old, aged feathers (.) after five months (..) one hundred and fifty days the eagle
	takes its famous flight of rebirth and lives for another thirty years (...) err (...)
175	another thirty years (.) what can we learn from this? (...) we learn about change (.)
	change is inevitable (.) it is necessary but sometimes we have to go through
	processes of pain (...) sometimes processes of change are painful

Excerpt 3:   Text 3: line 145-176

The eagle has the longest life span among the species of birds. They can live up to seventy years, but in order to live that long, an eagle has to make a very difficult decision as the speaker reiterates, "in order for the eagle to reach this age (.) seventy years (..) the eagle must make a very hard decision (...) a very hard decision (.) not an easy decision but a hard decision (.) to reach the age of seventy (...)...". At the age of forty, an eagle experiences changes such as the talons becoming long, the beak becoming bent so that it cannot catch its prey as the speaker narrates, "(...) in its forties its nails become very long and flexible (...) its talons become very long and it cannot grab its prey anymore (...) normally how does an eagle catch its prey? (.) they fly and then they go down and grab the prey (...) but when they are in their forties they cannot grab the prey and then their beaks are no longer sharp and it becomes bent (.) no longer sharp but becomes bent (...) this is when it's in its forties (....) even the feathers become thick and become glued to the body (...) because of that it becomes difficult to fly (...)".

At this point, an eagle has two options, to die or to go through a "<u>very painful process</u>". The process of change takes approximately one hundred and fifty days. The eagle has to go through a process of rebirth or rejuvenation if it wishes to live. It has to first of all go to a mountain top and isolate itself for one hundred and fifty days (five months). The speaker explains the process of change the eagle undergoes (line 164-172). The eagle in undergoing this painful process lives another thirty years. It is a question of survival.

The speaker equates this process of change that an eagle goes through with that of an organisation, "what can we learn from this? (...) we learn about change (.) change is inevitable (.) it is necessary but sometimes we have to go through processes of pain (...) sometimes processes of change are painful (...)" (line 174-176). The speaker draws a parallelism between the processes of change that an eagle goes through to that of organisational change. Organisational change is often met with resistance, and is likely to give rise to misgivings, and discomfort but is necessary for survival.

Change is inevitable but necessary. It is often accompanied by pain, but the gain that one makes after that is indescribable. Thus, the speaker in using the discourse of pain shows the

necessity and inevitability of change. After the process of pain, comes gain as in the maxim, 'There is no gain without pain."

Besides the use of analogy, the use of the present tense to express facts about eagles presupposes that it is the truth and therefore cannot be disputed. The statements of facts show a high level of speaker commitment. Members are positioned to think that although change is painful, it must be done. The speaker uses existential as well as value assumptions to inform and persuade the organisational members about change.

He draws the conclusion that "change is necessary for survival (.) just as in the case of the eagle (...)". Although the process is painful, it cannot be avoided. He rationalises change as changing "for the better (...) we don't change for bad (...) today is different from tomorrow (.) tomorrow should be better than today (...) so we got to change" (lines 177-178, Excerpt 4). Change is positive and not negative according to the speaker.

175   sometimes we have to go through processes of pain (...) sometimes processes of change are painful (...) we change for the better (...) we don't change for bad (...) today is different from tomorrow (.) tomorrow should be better than today (...) so we got to change(.) <u>change is inevitable</u> (....) change is necessary for survival (.) just as in the case of the   eagle (...)

Excerpt 4:   Text 3: line 175-180

The modal "have to" in "we have to go through processes of change" gives a sense of definiteness – there is no option. The use of the modal 'should' in "tomorrow should be better than today" is a presupposition that change would bring about a better tomorrow. The emphasis of the repetition "<u>change is inevitable</u> (....) change is necessary for survival" also lends weight to what the speaker shares with the audience and the use of present tense makes it factual.

3.2 Discomfort and awkwardness

Discourse of pain also involves feelings of discomfort and awkwardness. The speaker in Text 3 conducts an exercise with the organisational members to illustrate this point. He draws a parallelism as a rhetorical strategy to influence his audience.

<u>Drawing a parallelism</u>
The speaker in Text 3 conducts a simple exercise with the members (Excerpt 5). He requests those wearing watches to remove their watches and wear them on the hand that is not often used to wear a watch, " (…) if you normally wear your watch on your right hand, change it to the left hand (….) if you wear it on your left hand (..) wear it on your right hand". He then asks the members how they feel. Some of the responses are; "awkward, isn't it? don't like it? (…) not used to it".

190   change is not easy (...) I believe we all know that (...) right? (..) last week when I was talking to your colleagues (…) I asked them to do a very simple exercise (...) let's do it now (.) let's see all hands that are wearing watches (…..) ok (..) now I 195   want you to change (…) if you normally wear your watch on your right hand, change it to the left hand (….) if you wear it on your left hand (..) wear it on your right hand (...) do it now (...) tell me how it feels like. awkward, isn't it? don't like

200

205

it? (…) not used to it? (..) these are all the responses (…..) [elicits responses from the audience] you say it's ok? (..) some more? gentleman at the back, how do you feel, sir? (…) do you feel comfortable? how many years have you been wearing your watch on that hand? (…) twenty years? wah! it's very simple (...) you've been wearing your watch on that same hand for twenty years (...) that is your comfort zone (….) suddenly today I asked you to change (.) of course you feel uncomfortable, awkward (…) err (…) all those negative feelings (...) believe me it will only take one or two days to get used to it (...) that's the difficult part, the initial step (...) that's why in life when there's something new, something different people feel so sceptical (..) so negative (….) these are things you hear when something new is introduced (...) why change? (..) we're ok so far (…) that's why some people can't move forward (.) because of that negative feeling, that thinking (…) no need lah! difficult! (..) let's do it like last time (..) we've survived so far etc. etc.

Excerpt 5:   Text 3: line 190-208

He then comments, "that is your comfort zone (….) suddenly today I asked you to change (.) of course you feel uncomfortable, awkward (…) err (…) all those negative feelings (...)" (line 199-202). He assures the audience that the feelings of discomfort will last for just a few days after which it will become comfortable.

The speaker equates change to feelings of discomfort when change is initially implemented (line 203) "that's the difficult part, the initial step". It is natural for people to feel sceptical and have negative feelings about change. He cites questions normally posed by sceptics or cynics "why change? (..) we're ok so far (…) that's why some people can't move forward (.) because of that negative feeling, that thinking (…) no need lah! difficult! (..) let's do it like last time (..) we've survived so far etc. etc.". These examples of misgivings might possibly be what the organisational members are having. By mentioning these he is in a way making members feel ashamed of themselves as being not open to embrace change. It makes them reflect on their own personal responses to change. The speaker's skilful use of language serves to influence members to change their mindsets about change.

By drawing the parallelism between the discomfort of wearing their watches on their wrists which they do not normally wear their watches on and the association with the discomfort of embracing change, the speaker effectively influences members to adopt a more open attitude towards change.

Appropriating the discourse of pain is an effective way to change the mindsets of organisational members. By equating pain to eventual gain or survival helps members to adopt a more positive mindset. The effective use of the analogy about eagles and the use of parallelism of the exercise on the wearing of wristwatches serve to concretise in the minds of members that although change is a painful process, it brings with it tremendous benefits. The feelings of pain or discomfort in the initial phase are transient. Members therefore are positioned to adopt this line of thinking and have to negotiate their negative thoughts and misgivings about change.

4 Conclusion

The appropriation of the discourses of imperatives and pain set out to do ideological work. Discourse of imperatives serves to exert control over organisational members. Lists of 'dos' and 'don'ts' are replete. It is as if members need to be guided or taught to do the right thing in the execution of their responsibilities. This puts the employees in a subject position receiving orders or directives.

Discourse of pain serves to instil the idea that although change brings pain, it is worthwhile. Members are positioned to think that they need to endure pain and discomfort for the sake of the organisation. The analogy of the eagle which undergoes a painful process of change in order to survive is a strong case to persuade members to embrace change.

In conclusion, the discourses of imperatives and pain under the umbrella of the discourse of transformation serve to do ideological work in changing mindsets and work orientations of organisational members. They are used to garner support for the organisational change initiatives and persuade members to look upon them as sense making, rational, and reasonable and therefore commonsensical. The discourses set out to create an ideological commonsense. Fairclough defines ideological common sense as "common sense in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power" (p. 70) and in establishing and consolidating solidarity relations among members of a particular social grouping [6]. Ideologies are embedded in features of discourse which are taken for granted. In this way, the organisation is able to exercise unobtrusive control over its members.

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