

Re-Contextualizing New Employee Induction: Organizational Entry as a Change Space

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Abstract

The paper contributes to the literature on organizational discourse, metaphors and change by providing an empirical account of how the discursive translation of imposed metaphors that takes place during organizational entry, shapes organization realities for new employees and redefines the concept of organizational entry. A re-contextualised organizational entry can potentially provide the discursive space necessary for organizational change to occur. New employee induction is a process, the paper proposes, during which situated discourses construct an environment that surfaces current organizational assumptions and invites new interpretations to emerge. This environment or space can become a reflexive, interventionist arena for jointly effecting proactive change initiatives and dialogical organizational development.

Keywords: Asymmetries, organizational induction, change, discourse, newcomers.

Introduction

This article explains how new employee induction is discursively constructed and why this can have implications for reframing organizational entry in relation to change management initiatives. Within the field of change management, the discursive aspects of the process have over the last years received increased attention (Oswick, et al., 2005; Marksak and Grant, 2008), with a recent special issue of *Journal of Applied and Behavioral Science* (2010) to reflect upon the main research agendas and propose future directions. These directions mainly focus upon the need for more empirically-informed studies and pragmatic, inclusive and practice-driven approaches that will directly address the ‘so what’ question in the field of organizational discourse (Oswick, et al., 2010). This echoes prior work on organizational metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Pinder and Bourgeois, 1982; Tsoukas, 1991; Marshak, 1993; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Palmer and Dunford, 1996; Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001), which also ‘suffers from’ limited evidence or lack of empirical engagement with the process of ‘metaphorisation’ (Chia, 1996) and its consequences for change management and organizational development (hereafter OD): ‘Broad-based empirical research into metaphor-in-use in organization theory and their antecedent heuristics has been non-existent’ (Cornelissen et al., 2005: 1551).

Addressing this, in this paper, metaphors and discursive activity are not means of theorising organizations - a heuristic devise to understand organizations and change - but through applied empirically driven research, become vehicles for re-conceptualizing organizational entry. Moving further but building upon ‘abstract

treatments' of discourses of organizing (Oswick et al., 2010), the article presents a grounded application of 'metaphorization' and discusses the implications for explorative change interventions in organizations during new employee entry. Therefore, it redefines induction not as a top-down process and rhetorical tool towards new employee assimilation to dominant organizational cultures but as a space where divergent interpretations and meanings are co-implicated and new realities and social understandings can emerge.

After a discussion of discourse and change in the context of organizational induction, I will first present a brief review of the literature on induction and particularly discuss why ethnographic approaches (like the one employed in this study) could enrich our understanding of the induction processes as well as unveil insights about the role of induction participants in framing the induction experience. The methodology of the study is then described, introducing the third part of the paper that refers to two specific induction programmes observed as sample cases from the overall research study. The paper continues with the concept of 'interactional asymmetries' (Drew and Heritage, 1992)¹ and suggests that induction metaphors are relationally translated (exposed) via interactive discourses of the induction process: The role of newcomers and trainers is evidenced and explored in this context. The paper concludes discussing implications of the study for change management and OD. Instead of imposing corporate discourse and assuming compliance and acculturation, organizational induction agents ought to capitalise on the 'discursive openings' (Deerz, 1992;

¹ Every interaction could potentially involve equal participation and symmetrical relationships. Yet, an asymmetry may arise temporarily in conversational contexts when one of the participating groups assumes a more active role (Drew and Heritage, 1992).

Thackaberry, 2004) characterising organizational entry and thus explore creative change management platforms that the process of induction can present.

Discourse, Metaphors and Organizational Change

Back in the early 2000s, organizational discourse studies show a rise driven by the so called 'linguistic turn' (Oswick et al, 2000; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Grant et al., 2001). In their majority, these studies, driven by social constructionist approaches, explored discursive aspects of change moving thus away from modernist accounts of organization and organizing (Oswick et al., 2010). This reflects what Bushe and Marshak (2010) have come to define as a shift to more dialogical forms of OD with change agents embracing and engaging with more discursive paradigms and constructed social realities. Although we agree with Woodman (2008), Oswick (2009) and Oswick et al. (2010) that this does not (and should not) signify a radical departure from positivist (or Diagnostic) OD - but actually encourages an interplay and a dialogue among practices and constructs, we also stress that indeed discursive approaches could contribute to more qualitative methodologies and empirically driven studies to change (at least to inform not all but some of the phases of change).

Recent studies, by focusing on the process but more importantly the practice of change, directly address the call for more applied, micro-analysis and interventionist approaches to change management (Kyryki et al. 2010; Cox and Hassard, 2010; Whittle, et al., 2010; Hernes and Maitlis, 2010). Thus they have been considered to complement and advance earlier 'mythopoetic' and 'framing' studies (Marshak, 1998)

that were not necessarily concerned with methods and were not solidly based upon empirical findings (Oswick et al., 2010). This pragmatic exploration of discourses explicitly addresses the ‘so what’ issue and informs projects that bring about change (or explore how change is brought about) as it provides both the method and the tools to study and effect change in the making.

Discourse/metaphors and change are connected in two distinct ways: first, through discourse/metaphors, participants make sense of change and second, discourse/metaphors are potentially a resource to change agents during the implementation of change providing a tool for shaping shared meaning (Whittle et al., 2010; Kykyri et al. 2010; Marshak, 1993; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Oswick et al. 2004). Certainly, metaphors and stories or other tropes (or what Geiger and Antonacopoulou (2009) call ‘success’ narratives) can also hinder consent by becoming points of departure for resistance ‘movements’ and transformation agents (Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Geiger and Antonacopoulou, 2009; Whittle, et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the study of discursive activity in organizations is essential for understanding change both in terms of diagnosis and evaluation (Woodman, 2008): it is through discursive interactions that new realities are constructed. Either by trying to achieve convergence and mutual understanding (shared meaning; centripetal) or by divergent interpretations (resistance; centrifugal), the study of discursive micro-processes can shed light to the change initiatives and enrich our knowledge on participative (inclusive) and process-oriented OD.

In the present study, I will focus on the deviating or the centrifugal, analyse how resistance discourses emerged in a situated practice (induction) and suggest that

instead of trying to eliminate alternative interpretations and meanings, organizations could explore the opportunities for change brought about by dissonance and divergence experienced during organizational entry. ‘Silencing or choosing to ignore these alternative perspectives would limit the capacity of organizations to engage in fundamental change’ (Geiger and Antonacopoulou, 2009: 431). The findings will demonstrate why induction cannot be a self-reinforcing mechanism for hegemonic organizational images, metaphors or discourses (Morgan, 1980; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Alvesson, 1993; Chia, 1996; Inns, 2002; Cornelissen, 2004; 2005; Cornelissen et al., 2005). Best practice induction recipes have to be dropped in favour of the exploration of ‘chains of associations or the ways that meanings shift and enable the ground to become the figure for another metaphor’ (Oswick et al. 2004: 121) or another ‘embedded’ or ‘embedding of’ a narrative. The latter is ‘a useful construct for attending to and shedding light on the temporal and spatial context of organizational change initiative’ (O’Connor, 2000: 176). This links with practical concerns of discovering, interpreting and acting upon opposing narratives and leads towards frameworks that proactively embed polyvocality into broad aspects of organizational development and change.

Although new (or ‘different’, Oswick, 2009) OD approaches have focused more on dialogical forms of change instead of rational planned changes and thus unequivocally linked the role of power and discourse with change management, there is still limited contribution by discourse theorists with regard to how power and political processes fit into these ‘dialogical’ frameworks of change management (Marshak and Grant, 2008). This study addresses this gap and, taking this one step further, the article attempts to contribute to views that examine transformational change as

‘countercultural’ (Bushe, 2010a) with diverse, negative (and sometimes ‘silenced’ or ‘censored’) voices as vehicles for ‘generative’ organizational interventions (Bushe, 2007; 2009; 2010b). In other words, I account for the countercultural entry processes by focusing upon existence of asymmetrical relationships in induction groups, evidence of the negotiation of power that takes place during the induction experience. Due to this differential positioning within the discourse, we suggest, unplanned outcomes emerge that change meanings and re-shape understandings during organizational entry.

In particular, by focusing on the performative qualities of the practised discourses, a spiral web of meanings emerges once an imposed metaphor becomes part of an asymmetric interactional context: interactional asymmetries and the divergent exchanges that they entail increase awareness of the organizational, taken for granted assumptions and their negation. Based on that, induction process is a space in which participants could, not through harmonious but through divergent discourses, creatively exchange and explore ideas and meanings that may compel new social arrangements, new realities and actions. Thus, building upon the induction literature that places interactional experiences of newcomers and trainers at the centre of the analysis (Louis, 1980; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; Saks and Ashforth, 1997), the paper discusses how sophisticated newcomers and rebellious trainers affect the induction experience and invite re-contextualisation of organizational entry as an opportunity for bottom-up explorative change management initiatives. Change we propose ought to be seen as the result of a creative, dialogical and performative processes, a step away from ‘imposed resonance’ (Oswick et al., 2004) towards subversive discourses of dissonance, plurality and transformation.

The strategies of exposing dissonance can be critically evaluated by focusing on the underlying mechanisms that support or resist the establishment or the substitution of specific forms of metaphoric organizational representations. These mechanisms, the following sections will explain, include the negotiation of the asymmetries that characterise induction groups and situated induction processes. First, I will discuss the constitution of induction groups in relation to these asymmetries and reflect on how they affect the induction process; the web of meanings embedded in imposed metaphors will be unveiled and placed in context. Then the paper concludes by discussing the implications of this study for framing future organizational induction practice linking this to how induction process can become a creative, open space where organizational change initiatives can be explored and effectively introduced. Before that, however, a brief overview of the induction literature and the methodological approach of the study are presented.

Organizational Induction in Context: A Qualitative Approach

In popular management literature, organizational induction does not only introduce new members to the organization and corporate culture, but also constitutes a managerial practice that empowers employees and integrates them into an organizational community, a shared corporate culture (for comprehensive reviews see Anderson et al., 1996; also Chancey, 1968; Hollmann, 1976; Horner, et al., 1979; John, 1980; Davidson, 1986; Nelson and Quick, 1991; Wanous, 1992; Wanous, 1993 Bauer et al., 1998; George and Miller, 1998; Wanous and Reichers, 2000). With few exceptions (Gomersall and Myers, 1966; Horner, et al. 1979; Meglino et al., 1979;

Wanous, 1993; Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg, 2003; Riordan et al., 2001), the new employees are portrayed as a group of absolute beginners experiencing stress, isolation and role confusion. Furthermore, prior accounts of various induction programmes' using predominantly surveys and interview data (Meyer and Allen, 1988; Fowler, 1990; Wanous, 1993; Mignerey et al., 1995; Fullagar et al., 1995; George and Miller, 1996) have focused on the programmes' (in-)effectiveness and the role of newcomers during organizational induction, with the role of the trainers receiving less attention (Louis, 1980; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; Saks and Ashforth, 1997).

Nevertheless, most of the aforementioned studies describe the entry experiences of fresh graduates, army recruits (e.g. Cable and Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2002) or students (Anakwe and Greenhaus, 2000; Garavan and Murphy, 2001) and thus offer accounts of professional rather than organizational socialisation. As a result, findings of these studies cannot be generalized especially with regard to employees with considerable working experience within a specific industry, and quite rightly some authors (such as Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2002) have encouraged future work to focus on different type of recruits as well as organizational settings. Following this, it is interesting to investigate how accumulated induction knowledge and experience affect the translation of induction discourses and reframe the induction experience as a space for change. Employing participant observation and focusing on the meanings that imposed metaphoric discourse evokes when contextualised is thought as a contribution not only to the induction literature but to discourse and change management studies. This is because participative research provides access to these experiences and captures the effects of the interactions that characterise the

induction process as they happen. The content of discursive interactions and the processes of contrasting employee accounts become important particularly in a context of unveiling countercultural discourses and their potential as triggers of change.

The Study

The ideas in this paper originate from a number of company-level case studies within a dynamic labour market in a New Town in the West Midlands economy of the United Kingdom. By focusing on a single labour market I have sought to situate or contextualise induction practices, rather than treat them in a closed system manner; this has allowed to consider the impact of external context and labour market characteristics on organizational induction. In particular, low levels of unemployment in the area during the period of the study and labour circulation between and within sectors have resulted in an employment environment that includes a labour force dissimilar to the green, inexperienced graduates depicted in prior research in organisational induction literature. Yet, despite the fact that the organisations studied clearly operated in different environments to the ones described in prior studies on induction, with newcomers being mostly experienced and rather sophisticated, they still adopted standardised, best practice induction designs hoping to reduce in that way early voluntary exits.

I consider this a problematic manifestation of totalising discourses that have dominated various disciplines (such as applied psychology), failing to put context, newcomers' prior experiences and labour markets in the centre of the analysis of new

employee induction. Approaching induction in a situated and embedded way enables the examination of organizational induction as a broader organizational and labour market phenomenon that reflects actors' interests, identities, knowledge and experience. To achieve this embedded study of induction process, the project included ten case studies in the same labour market during which both observations and interviews were conducted over a period of five years. In this paper, I referred to two of the largest employers in the area and based the analysis on them. This is because PARTSCO and ELECTROCO, the sample companies, can better demonstrate, both in terms of induction delivery and content, the role that asymmetrical interactions and contextual factors play in the constitution and re-constitution of the induction experience.

Methodology

The research employed three data collection methods namely, participant observation, interviews (semi-structured and unstructured) and documentation analysis. In detail, participant observation was overt in all cases and lasted the duration of the planned and formal company induction programme. During this period, the author was sitting in the induction rooms along with the newcomers attending the delivery of the programmes and interacting with the new employees but also with trainers and other employees within as well as outside the training rooms. 'Conversational moments' (Shotter and Cunliff, 2003) between trainers, newcomers, and other organizational members were noted.

In addition to sitting-in through the planned induction session, the author also conducted unstructured interviews (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) with newcomers during lunch and coffee breaks. This gave the opportunity to discuss their views on induction, their prior experiences of organizational induction and also their reactions to the programmes they had just joined. This relatively informal approach facilitated the observer-author to gain a deep understanding of how new employees and trainers interpret induction metaphoric assumptions, and how collective definitions of reality were constructed by subjective past experiences and contextualised interactions during induction delivery.

This method was preferred to a more structured approach because unstructured interviews include open-ended questions that are more like probes, inviting participants in a free-floating conversation. Furthermore, the informal setting achieved via unstructured interviews facilitated an open, free flowing discussion during which newcomers shared past experiences, interacted with each other and made sense of their experience during the time of data gathering. Participating in situated conversations (with minimal observer intervention) gave the opportunity to record the process of reconstruction of the induction experience and metaphorisation as they occurred.

The author also conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the management team including Human Resources Directors and Managing Directors and General Managers. Information regarding the nature and the purpose of the induction programme was requested during these interview sessions and respondents were encouraged to contribute their thoughts as to the effectiveness of their programmes as

well as their views on newcomers' reactions to them. The data gathered from these interviews was later counter-analysed with the data gathered via conversational interviews with newcomers and trainers as well as material gathered during the induction observations including induction documents (such as new employee handbook, mission statements, corporate films and other handouts).

In terms of analytical strategies, I scanned thoroughly observational notes, transcripts of semi-structured interviews and other induction documentation grouping together the expressions with common themes and imagery. I first recorded the superficial metaphors, that is, the linguistic and non-linguistic expressions that collectively were constructing the first-level, imposed metaphoric images of the induction programmes. Then notes and transcripts were re-examined recording any critical incidents that were exposing themes of disagreement, incongruity and ambiguity of the induction messages and process. These incidents were recorded and analysed as stories (Gabriel, 2000; Boje, 2002; Czarniawska, 2004) narrated during the administration of induction designs by newcomers, trainers and other organizational participants. The temporal and structural aspects of the programmes were also addressed. The former category includes elements of continuity and sequence of induction sessions whereas the latter refers to the constitution of the induction groups (choice and training of trainers, newcomers' characteristics, such as previous job and induction experiences) and the significance of other induction networks.

Finally, participative methodologies were adopted in a self-reflexive manner (Alvesoon and Skoldberg, 2000; Alvesson et al., 2008; Tsoukas and Yanow, 2009) maintaining first, the awareness that, as a participant of the induction programmes, I

became part of my observed social environment and second, the realisation that the respondents (interview data) or the participants of the study (observational data) were themselves involved in a meaning-making process.

From Resonance to Dissonance: Practised Discourses

Imposed Assumptions

The stories from the field suggest that management maintains idealised views of organisational induction that correspond largely to the rhetorical framing of newcomers' experience offered by popular management discourse. Accordingly, a typical induction context assumes that trainers are representatives of management, newcomers will become members of a uniform organizational culture and induction recipes of best practice can be unequivocally adopted. These managerial assumptions respectively constitute three prevalent induction metaphors namely, compliance, acculturation and standardisation, that guided the content, delivery and structure of the programmes. The evidence that follows supports this framing, demonstrating that in this study, senior managers have adopted totalising induction discourses and tried to impose them in their organisational contexts.

In particular, a top-down delivery of induction was offered anticipating limited contributions from the inductees:

'...The newcomers were sitting at desks arranged in long rows. A whiteboard, TV and VCR were normally placed next to the trainers' desk. The trainer was sitting at the front facing the newcomers (arrangement that can be compared to traditional classroom arrangements)...The trainer later joked about 'the students who will miss the class today'. Further evidence ... involved trainers asking newcomers to 'complete exercises' and 'come to the board' (Field notes, PARTSCO).

This setting clearly attempts to constitute newcomers as ‘green’ and the knowledgeable trainers as ‘teachers’ willing to lead the programmes. As the General Manager at ELECTROCO stressed:

‘It is all about managing first impressions. They come into work with not much knowledge, our trainer’s job is to show them the ropes, introduce them to the company philosophy and the culture....’ (Interview, General Manager).

Thus senior management assumed that Human Resource departments and their assigned trainers will comply with the standardised delivery of the programmes and promote corporate acculturation messages:

‘Our induction trainers have attended induction courses and Investors in People also provide guidelines for designing a good induction programme. Despite the pressures from Production and the turnover issue, I think that PARTSCO is running a very successful induction programme ... first impressions matter, they say, and at PARTSCO we make sure that our strong culture is passed to all new starters during induction ... the HR team has been very successful, we recently got the Investors in People Award....’ (Interview, General Manager).

Nevertheless, the constitution of the induction groups and particularly, asymmetrical relations of knowledge and familiarity (Drew and Heritage, 1992), lead to the translation of the imposed metaphors into exposed, meaning-making induction experiences. In the following section, I will refer to the role of trainers and their use of (or distancing from) their alleged expert knowledge and the role of newcomers’ interactive activities in exposing this web of meanings. Then I propose that this translation process opens up possibilities for discursive negotiations, dialogical spaces suitable for the exploration of proactive change initiatives.

The Enactment of Induction Assumptions: Induction Interactions

There were two important variation or diversion points in the design and delivery of the programmes namely, the number of trainers involved and the membership of the inducting group, whose impact was ignored when constructing and imposing a consensus induction narrative. In particular, PARTSCO involved a number of trainers during the delivery of the programmes activating therefore a number of trainers' discourses. On the contrary, ELECTROCO limited individual trainers' involvement centralising delivery. Further, the new employees' familiarity with the induction experience and the organization also varied, affecting the discursive interactions within and outside the induction rooms.

Consequently, during organizational entry, different groups come together: 'green' entrants (limited knowledge of the labour market and experience of organizational induction), early newcomers (joined organization before induction and, in their majority, have had several induction experiences in the past), senior trainers (mostly human resource managers) and other trainers (line managers or officers). Finally, organizational incumbents, employees who are already working for the organization but do not officially attend the programmes also meet with newcomers during coffee breaks, tours, lunch breaks and other induction training activities. The co-presence of these discursive communities in search of meaning, I suggest, could potentially construct a dialogical context where change initiatives can be explored. That is, resistance expressed by the interacting induction communities, is evidence of the existence of a plethora of organizational narratives active during entry which in turn construct a rich context for transformation of the dominant yet (at times) ineffective practices. The remaining of this paper shows how this narrative diversity frames the

induction experience for all actors of the programmes in practice and opens up possibilities for organizational change.

The Role of the trainers

The induction trainers' position and the ways that they present or manipulate information become very critical in their attempts to establish their authority as leaders of the induction group and manage newcomers' contributions to the narration of workplace experiences. That is, induction trainers have the necessary knowledge to strategically direct the content and structure of talk formulated during the induction sessions. They can, in other words, determine the topics and the ways in which to address them as well as the answers they give to particular questions so as to prevent interactions regarding unpleasant topics and maintain control over the range of work situations discussed.

In this study, some trainers appear to conform to the imposed induction assumptions and attempt to transmit the managerial ideology. Indicatively, the Training and Induction Officer of ELECTROCO commented:

'Being new can be very stressful that's why we put this induction together...It is for you to feel part of a family...to feel part of ELECTROCO' (Induction Observation).

Furthermore, ELECTROCO programmes are solely delivered by this senior trainer; in addition, he handles all organisational entry processes including job applications, interviews, selection and induction design and implementation: 'We used to employ people through agencies [which were responsible for induction] but we've recently decided to stabilise our workforce and build up employee loyalty' (Interview). Thus, in an attempt to improve commitment, ELECTROCO intends a highly insulated and

confined induction programme. This is their way to secure successful transmission of managerial messages and company rhetoric:

‘I am the one who takes the new starters through their first steps... they have to learn the ropes...Through induction ELECTROCO transmits its culture to all new employees’ (Interview, Training and Induction Officer).

However, in some other cases such as PARTSCO, different trainers deliver each induction session; these are managers, personnel officers, induction designers, training and development officers, supervisors and health and safety or quality officers. This means that newcomers receive information and interact with various organizational members representing different knowledge and interests groups within the organization. These groups may include trainers who, like at ELECTROCO, support managerial ideologies and try to transmit them during induction. Nevertheless, in the majority of the situations, induction will also include trainers who, though they appear to play their part by accepting to deliver the induction sessions, distance themselves from the content of their presentation exposing the rhetorical nature of their messages; or trainers who discursively resist managerial rhetoric and omit it from their part of induction. For example,

‘I’ve told them that I don’t like induction, I don’t know anything about it; I am not a teacher...they said that there was nobody else to do it...’ (Interview, Induction Trainer).

Another trainer commented:

‘I am not quite sure about this [referring to a slide of his presentation]. I did not write it anyway. They gave me these and asked me to present them to you’ (Induction Observation, Trainer).

In another occasion, a PARTSCO trainer undermined the company video in his session stating:

‘It is so boring! I will forward the tape for a bit. You won’t miss anything (laughs) (Induction Observation, Trainer). In other cases, trainers explicitly distance themselves: ‘Don’t ask me to explain what’s in it [presentation]... I didn’t write any of these’ [Induction Observation, line manger/trainer).

Furthermore, trainers’ interactive activities with early newcomers also affect the induction process. In particular, though both PARTSCO and ELECTROCO include at least one early newcomer in their induction groups, the ways through which the trainers utilised their presence differ considerably. As the next section will demonstrate in more detail, the trainers-newcomers interactions at PARTSCO created a context that gave rise to instances of disagreement and conflict whereas at ELECTROCO, the trainer attempted to manipulate the experience and the knowledge of an early newcomer in order legitimise his claims. I quote:

‘An early newcomer joined the group for the presentation of the videos. The trainer commented: “somebody from the shop floor is coming to watch the videos with you. He has been on the line for a week; so if you really want to find out what is going on there, you should ask him when I’m outside the room” (laughs). After the newcomer’s arrival ... the trainer addressed him five times asking him to clarify emerging issues and assure the newcomers that this is how things are done on the shop floor’ (Field notes).

In this occasion, the presence of an early newcomer alongside ‘green’ newcomers was directed for the performance of the idealised induction metaphors *within* the induction setting. Yet, despite this tactical orchestration, eventually these induction messages are challenged once enacted and practised along with other organizational incumbents *outside* the induction room:

‘Regardless how much we try to control the process [they recently put a ‘Training and Induction Officer’ responsible for the whole induction], new starters will go out there and ask...they want to know how things *really* (emphasis) are...You have to be honest about things...it is about finding a balance, I suppose...’ (Interview, Induction Officer).

Therefore the induction experience is clearly influenced not only by trainer-inductees interactions but also by interactions with other newcomers and other organisational members. The impact of these interactions is discussed further in the following section that shows how groups’ differential degrees of knowledge and familiarity with the process of induction and the organisation shape the practised discourses of organisational entry.

The Role of Newcomers and Organizational Incumbents

As previously suggested, through the imposed assumptions of induction, newcomers are expected to encounter an original experience; thus induction designs treat new employees as absolute novices to corporate discourses. Nevertheless, the observation of the programmes and the unstructured interviews with the newcomers did not confirm that. As suggested by the newcomers of the study, induction programmes are ‘all the same’: the fact that they have to participate in one of them when they change jobs makes the experience, apart from familiar, also ‘boring’. Newcomers preferred to utilise their induction time to relate to other members and discuss the reputation of different companies in the district:

Interviewer: ‘Which session did you find more useful during induction?’

Newcomer C: ‘...the coffee breaks and... the lunch (laughs)...no, seriously, it was good to talk to people who have been here for a while and learn about the job...’

Newcomer D: ‘I agree, I found it useful to be with other employees and learn about this company and other companies around the area...I am new here in [town], you see...’ (Unstructured interviews, Newcomers).

Furthermore, though the organization and structure of the programmes did not encourage them, newcomer interaction, communication, exchange of information and knowledge during the days of induction seemed to be inevitable and had important consequences for the overall induction experience. An example from PARTSCO illustrates:

'The word 'restaurant' was questioned by an early newcomer later on during the coffee break: 'It is a canteen....not a *restaurant (with emphasis)*'. People working at the 'General Office' are more flexible to start their lunch break a bit earlier and thus, they avoid the rush and the long queues. However, as the early newcomer explained, for assembly workers, the lunch break is very short allowing them only a quick snack after spending half of the lunch break, standing on 'another line', the 'canteen queue' (Field notes).

In some cases, there were employees who had joined the company in pairs (or already knew somebody working for the organization) or had attended similar programmes in the past. Through close interaction and exchange of information and ideas, newcomers managed to form a solid front utilised to enhance induction knowledge, join workplace networks and question managerial imposed assumptions:

'I already knew a lot about PARTSCO... it is a big employer in the area and I have mates who had worked for them...They tried to tell us how good they [the company] are but... (smiles and then stops)' (Unstructured interviews, Newcomer).

Another newcomer emphasised:

'We know people around the [industrial] estates, you know...you don't need this induction to learn about the company - I have a brother... and a good mate was working here'.

Hence, induction environments facilitate and encourage the development of informal networks and contacts between newcomers and among newcomers and trainers within

and outside the organization. This suggests that newcomers also looked for information about the company outside the induction setting:

Newcomer A: ‘So, how is it?’

Newcomer B: ‘Like anywhere else in this kind of jobs (manufacturing, shopfloor operators)...They want to make us feel good through this induction because they know that working down there is really boring...your mind goes dead’ (Observation, Coffee break).

The discussion around an accident that took place in the shop floor (PARTSCO) unveiled further induction’s rhetorical framing and brought about tension and diverse interpretations:

An accident has happened on the line a few months ago which resulted in the amputation of a female operator’s fingers. The trainer commented: “it was her fault... she shouldn’t have tried to unblock the machine”. An early newcomer though has a different story to tell which he did not hesitate to share with the rest of the group after the programme: “It did not happen like this... the machine had no safety button ... it was not her fault” (Field notes, Induction Observations).

During the second observation of the same programme, though disagreement was not voiced directly, a question by an inductee threatens the truthfulness of the trainer’s argument: ‘The machine that was used during the accident was expected, according to the British health and safety standards, to prevent the accident through safety switches/valves (Induction Observation). The trainer then admitted that this machine had been imported from Japan and authorised by the Japanese management. Through this, he tried to justify the event by blaming the Japanese management yet contradicting the harmonious, family atmosphere portrayed in earlier sessions:

“They want the work done as quickly as possible with sometimes neglecting warnings coming from the British side”. This particular equipment was authorised under different standards that were supposed to be known to the employee... and he concluded: “it was a mistake of both sides...” (Field notes).

Interestingly, another newcomer commented:

‘They are wasting their time and our time with this induction...Discussing the *real* (emphasis) issues that concern us...this is what we want to do: find ways to make things better in our work and for the company...then say ok what do you think? What would you do? Then I will *feel* (emphasis) part of the family, not when they tell me: “you are part of the family”... (he stops)’ (Unstructured interview, newcomer).

Here, the newcomer discusses an improvement that he would like to see in the programme but also the means through which shifts in work practices could be brought about: through direct involvement and participation of the newcomers in the organization of work.

Thus both newcomers and trainers did not hesitate to question induction messages of good employment relations and good employment conditions: newcomers’ knowledge and previous induction experience and trainers’ discursive translations resulted in interactions within and outside the induction rooms that formulated the practised discourses of diversity, sophistication and negotiation. Trainers and newcomers unite to act out the imposed discourses but beyond the formal induction plots, both groups construct the realities that resonate with either previous or present experiences. Therefore the various actors of induction despite the fact that they perform the imposed induction rituals and appear to maintain their assigned roles, they do eventually enact discourses that have shaped and/or will (re)construct their personal and organisational realities.

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These discourses that affect the induction experience extend outside the situated practice of induction to include broader organizational and labour market contexts. They are not simply framed by participation in a formal induction event. Instead, they open up interactions within and outside the situated contexts of induction, within and outside a particular organisational environment. In turn, these interactions constitute induction as a space in which communities express alternative views, negotiate asymmetries and explore ‘discursive openings’ (Deerz, 1992). Subsequently, induction could be re-conceptualised as a process that enhances knowledge sharing, challenges dominant assumptions and allows individuality and creativity to guide organizational change and development. The final section refers to the implications of this approach for collaborative and proactive change management initiatives.

Conclusions and Implications

The paper’s contribution lies in a process-driven analysis of organizational induction which by contextualising asymmetric discourses explored the emergence of alternative organizational realities. That is, it explored the process of *metaphora* (or carrying meaning) from superficial, linguistic constructs (for example the word ‘canteen’ vs. ‘restaurant’) to imposed metaphoric concepts (standardised designs delivered by compliant trainers and aimed to ‘green’ newcomers), to performed, relational and collective understandings (diverse, negotiated and sophisticated practice). Induction translations of corporate discourse construct a negotiated space where managerial corporate metaphors are contextualised, narrated and ‘performed’ (Cornelissen, 2004). That is, induction metaphors should not just be examined as management tools for securing domination and control over the induction process. They are enacted narratives that emerge within organizational communities and

become part of interaction and negotiation; they become revisable conduits of meaning and agents of enactment of change as individual participants translate them in local situations.

High labour mobility, casualisation of work and acquisition of transferable skills have all resulted in highly knowledgeable and sophisticated newcomers. Diversity in employees' backgrounds, histories and perspectives lead to the translation of universalistic, 'best practice' designs into more context-specific, versatile practices. Newcomers bring with them prior experiences of organizational membership but also knowledge of previous induction programmes. Therefore they are not the 'tabula rasa' assumed by management but in cases appear sophisticated participants. Previous experiences, knowledge and inter-subjectivity, as a result, determine the ways in which a particular metaphoric imagery is experienced within induction contexts.

Flexible employment contracts, highly mobile workforce and sophisticated labour markets challenge dominant assumptions and bring about creative solutions through the efficient exploration of discursive openings. This different organizational environment now yields for the re-conceptualisation of organizational entry particularly within a framework of studying induction as a change space. This re-conceptualisation we propose ought to reflect current developments in organization theory which specifically place an emphasis on effective management of discursive change and dialogical forms of OD.

Within this 'vulnerable environment' of entry (Weick, 1990), organizations relentlessly focus on the prevention of failure or mis-representation as well as the

negation of all negative by ‘discursive closure’, the suppression of conflict and difference. Exposing the ‘shadow’ or ‘that which is feared and suppressed, that which is considered inappropriate and shunned, that which is unbearable to hold consciously and denied’ (Kolodziejcki, 2004:64; see also, Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Johnson, 2010; Bushe, 2010a), means actively exploiting the processes of ‘discursive closure’ (Deerz, 1992) that occur in the internal discourses. This can produce openings in communication and allow for micro-level discourses to be constructed (for example the ‘accident’, the ‘canteen’ vs. ‘restaurant’ disparity; the knowledgeable rather the novice newcomer).

Following this, organizational entry becomes a collaborative space that constructs opportunities for discursive variation and broader organizational change to occur. This is because it includes the cultural and the countercultural, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known, and the unknown constructing spaces for engagement and dialogue. Thus, organizational entry can promote organizational learning and change as long as discursive openings are thoroughly embraced and explored. With the present study, we propose examining induction managerial metaphors (and the web of meanings exposed in situated practice) as part of a broader organizational diagnosis that can unveil myopic organizational habits and socially construct change propositions building upon participants’ asymmetric interactions and their emerging intertwined discourses. This is in line with recent studies of change and OD that have called for more discourse driven studies in the field (Woodman, 2008) with power processes and their effective management as central to the creation of a ‘different’ OD tradition (Marshak and Grant, 2008; Oswick, 2009).

We suggest that instead of trying to suppress alternative meanings that arise during organizational entry (due to the open spaces that are created during the delivery of the induction programmes), organization change agents can employ dissonance and diversity embedding them into comprehensive dialogical OD frameworks with induction process being the laboratory for the exploration of possibilities (see also recent work of Tsoukas, 2009, on dialogical approaches, creativity and new knowledge). ‘Organizations that do not question their dominant narratives run the risk of creating blind spots that make them unable to question their dominant knowledge claims and change accordingly (Geiger and Antonacopoulou, 2009: 432). Induction best practice discourses have become ‘success narratives’ for organizations with current induction practice reflecting the stagnation promoted by the idealised induction conceptions namely, compliance, acculturation and standardization.

Recognising and effectively managing power relations and various discourses emerging during entry, organizations can achieve change both in individual and collective consciousness. Naturally, this implies a radical re-conceptualisation of organizational entry and the role that new entrants can play in organizational change and development initiatives. Instead of assuming managerial dominance (compliance) and cultural homogenization (acculturation), customised, new employee-driven and context-dependent induction processes ought to signal an organizational opportunity space where participants can explore change possibilities by feeling free to challenge and change the discourses (that may be responsible for inertia) or shape new ones (that may lead to innovative and creative practice).

Our study of managerial assumptions about new employee induction through the analysis of the imposed metaphors and their translation by both trainers and employees demonstrated that tropes, narrative and discursive activities in general can be used in practice to unveil the multitude of meanings negotiated during organizational entry (or any other form of organizational change). Organizational entry therefore as any other polyvocal change space, we suggest, can be re-designed not to attempt to reinforce but to challenge the guiding assumptions and foster re-evaluation of practice in socially constructed and continually evolving organizational phenomena.

Following this, induction can become a ‘container’ (Bushe and Marshak, 2009) or an ‘open space’ (Owen, 1992) but more importantly an opportunity for a creative exploration of possibilities for different frameworks for action. New discourses and new identities (that new employees bring about) become very useful in enriching and shedding light to ‘blind spots’ or the ‘shadow’ in the organization. Crucially, the induction process can bring forward strategic frameworks of change based on diversity, sophistication and dialogue. To conclude, organizational entry could become a process through which change agents and interventions could begin from, to then build up dialogical forms of dialogic change. In this context, embedding induction into a wider change management culture is undeniably essential.

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Table 1: The Enactment of Induction Assumptions

Metaphors	Imposed Assumptions	Exposed practised discourses
Compliance	Top-down delivery; assume full co-operation of induction trainers	Negotiation
Acculturation	Make new employees feel members of a community/family/team a 'quick fix' (socialization) technique	Sophistication
Standardization	Deliver a 'best practice' induction design that aims to reduce newcomers' anxiety and stress during organizational entry	Diversity