

# 1 The world of the senior manager

This book is about one of the things that make large-scale organisations possible, namely the ability of senior managers to influence the actions of others when both are separated in time or physical and organisational space. Note the phrasing. Action at a distance is *one* of the things required for large-scale organisations – not the only thing and perhaps not even the most important thing. It is necessary but not sufficient. Nor is it only senior managers who have this ability. Everyone else in organisations does too – at least in principle. Bringing about action at a distance is something which anyone can do provided they have the means for it, and a great many do.

So why study senior managers? In part, it is because while organisations and their administrations have been widely studied by ethnomethodologists and sociologists, the routine, daily work of the most senior managers has been somewhat neglected. However, to use a phrase that will crop up time and time again, their work is ‘shop floor work’ too. Second, and this is related, the professional literatures (both academic and other) have tended to obscure the lived reality of all levels of management – but especially those at executive levels. On the one hand, they depict these managers as the dominant force in organisations and are replete with advice, instruction and recipes for how to become a ‘rainmaker’ and use various charms to work managerial magic. On the other, they are held to be hapless vehicles of fiscal, economic and social forces which, by dictating the choices they have and the decisions they make, lead them to impose a uniformity of structure on organisational arrangements. Although we have met some senior managers who do seem ~~to be~~ able to perform miracles and we have seen many twist and turn in the face of demands placed on them by market, financial, or shareholder forces, in our experience, the most senior managers no more control the organisations they ‘lead’ than any other group does, and seeing things through the prism of a struggle for power and control misrepresents what organisational life feels like. This is because, most of the time, daily life for senior managers is no less and no more ordinary than for anyone else. It is that ordinariness we want to examine here.

Action at a distance can sound a bit like one of those feats of magic we just mentioned, so we had better explain what we mean by it. Briefly, it is the ability of social actors to cause others who are not immediately co-present with them to act in certain ways. Executives and senior managers in large organisations try to do

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this all the time, and good ones are pretty effective at it. What they and all the others engaged in action at a distance are doing is creating the organisation as a consociate social structure.<sup>1</sup> As we discuss below, studies of managers generally emphasise the construction of what Alfred Schutz (1967b) called the ‘we-relationship’ of established face to face interaction. This relationship is important but our interest is more turned towards that other dimension of the ‘we-relationship’, the coordination of joint courses of action over organisational distance. Consociate features are those mediated by ties exercised over space and time, where such ties are not (or not always) supported by immediate face to face interaction.

Of course, we are not the first to study consociation in organisations. Nor are we the first to study the role of senior managers in constructing it. Armies of social and management scientists have marched into large organisations determined to discover ~~what~~ management’s part in them ~~is~~ and how it works. Our investigative approach is different though. Or, at least, we think it is. We call it a ‘third person phenomenology’ because it attempts to provide an analytic or observational account of first person experience. Previous examples of third person phenomenology can be found in Anderson et al. (1988), Anderson and Sharrock (2014), Sharrock and Anderson (2011). The studies in this book continue this line of work.

Third person phenomenology is one mode of ethnomethodological investigation. As we set out in Chapter 12, we think of Ethnomethodology as a *First Sociology*, a conception which underpins third person phenomenology. The idea of Ethnomethodology as a First Sociology means a third person phenomenology of executive management must differ from standard sociological and Management Science descriptions. Equally, it is different from the approaches associated with Conversation Analysis and ‘ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography’. Again notice the phrasing. It is different, not better *tout court*. Judgements about which sociological approach is better than which turn on the interests motivating them and the objectives they set themselves. All we are saying is we think a third person phenomenology is better suited for the kinds of studies we want to undertake. It would not, indeed could not, satisfy every set of sociological interests.

Our aim in this introductory chapter is to lay out why we have adopted the approach we have and describe some of its pre-suppositions. We will do this first by using two very standard tropes on what is a familiar theme in the literature; the adoption of external and internal viewpoints on senior management as fragmented activity. We will then introduce third person phenomenology as a mode of Ethnomethodology and what we think it offers. Of course, the real value of the investigative approach will only be cashed out in the studies it facilitates, but by offering some guidance now, we hope we will make it easier for readers unfamiliar with our investigative strategy to see the rationale motivating it and the logic of the descriptive steps we take.

### The external logic of fragmentation

However we arrange the mosaic of conventional wisdom on management, ever since Henry Mintzberg’s classic paper (1975), we have known of the disparity

between that wisdom and what research reveals managers actually do. Whilst what Mintzberg called 'folklore' has managers deciding, supervising and reviewing the activities under their purview, research shows they play a variety of roles which broadly fall into what he calls the interpersonal, the informational and the decisional. Somewhat later, at the beginning of an equally classic discussion, John Kotter (1999) itemised this variety by listing the events in one individual manager's day.<sup>2</sup> Though this description was presented as news for Management Science, anyone who has spent any time with managers knows their days are filled by an endless procession of events, encounters, talk, meetings, document reading and travel; in short, a slew of activities in which, as well as doing what 'folklore' says, they 'chat about hobbies, hold spur-of-the-moment meetings, and seek out people far from their chain of command' (Kotter 1999: 148).

An encyclopaedic summary was provided by Colin Hales (1986) who reviewed a great deal of the management research literature and came to very similar conclusions as Kotter. Here is his precis of the evidence he collated:

(T)he known features of managerial work may be summarised as follows:

- 1 It combines a specialist/professional element and a general, 'managerial' element.
- 2 The substantive elements involve, essentially, liaison, man-management and responsibility for a work process, beneath which are subsumed more detailed work elements.
- 3 The character of work elements varies by duration, time span, recurrence, unexpectedness and source.
- 4 Much time is spent in day-to-day trouble shooting and ad hoc problems of organisation and regulation.
- 5 Much managerial activity consists of asking or persuading others to do things, involving the manager in face-to-face verbal communication of limited duration.
- 6 Patterns of communication vary in terms of what the communication is about and with whom the communication is made.
- 7 Little time is spent on one particular activity and, in particular, on the conscious, systematic formulation of plans. Planning and decision making tend to take place in the course of other activity.
- 8 Managers spend a lot of time accounting for and explaining what they do, in informal relationships and in 'politicking'.
- 9 Managerial activities are riven by contradictions, cross-pressures and conflicts. Much managerial work involves coping with and reconciling social and technical conflict.
- 10 There is considerable choice in terms of what is done and how: part of managerial work is setting the boundaries of and negotiating that work itself.

(Hales 1986: 104)

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To understand what holds all this frenetic work together, Kotter says you have to understand the challenges managers face. Most of the time, managers are engaged in:

- figuring out what to do despite uncertainty and an enormous amount of potentially irrelevant information;
- getting things done through a large and diverse group of people despite having little direct control over most of them.

(Kotter 1999: 148)

These two challenges are resolved through processes he calls ‘agenda setting’ and ‘network building’. The endless procession we mentioned just now is all in the service of getting the manager’s networks to execute his or her agendas. The image this style of analysis presents is one where even though managers might appear to be pushed from pillar to post and live highly uncoordinated lives, in reality what they do is a highly rational response to the organisational context in which they are operating. This rational response is the means through which they exercise the control they are presumed to have. One not so fanciful way of summarising this account of managerial experience might be to suggest it is a constant striving to cope with the consequences of an organisational version of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.<sup>3</sup> Over time, everything tends towards entropy. The threat of progressive disorganisation is the normal state managers are battling. Under this conception, such disorganisation appears as a succession of problems generated by the dissipation of energy and resources as well as the degeneration of processes and the substitution of goals, all of which require ‘fixing’. Agenda setting and network building in the face of a perennial threat of entropy are presented as the only rational strategy.

### The internal logic of fragmentation

The descriptions given by Kotter and Hales are observer depictions. They are third person overviews of what management and decision making looks like. However, as Charles Perrow (1965) among others has suggested, we should not assume that such summaries necessarily catch how those engaged in management see their activities and the conditions they are operating within:

(S)ocial scientists will do well not to neglect a basic, pedestrian characteristic of the organizations they study – the nature of the work performed or, more generally, the techniques available and in current use for achieving organizational goals.

(Perrow 1965: 996)

Ignoring the pedestrian particularities of any example, both the specifics of what is being managed and the context in which it is being managed, risks losing the *in*

*vivo* sense of daily management life (what it looks like on the inside for those on the 'shop floor' of management) as well as the features the general categories of activity just mentioned take when they are actualised.

As we have said, spend any time with any kind of manager and you will very likely compile a list of daily happenings which is not markedly different to the lists offered by Kotter and Hales. However, the way managers describe them is likely to be very different. In that difference is a clue to why we think a new way of describing management life is needed. Here is a set of observations gleaned from executives we have known:

While different activities have different rhythms, all seem 'bursty'. Periods of attention are followed by periods of disattention when the focus shifts to another topic, another problem to be dealt with. Routine maintenance of ongoing tasks is largely an unrealisable ideal. Activity becomes frenzied when an important deadline draws near. Task organisation is driven by deadlines.

There is no sense of a stable set of daily priorities. Activities are constantly having to be shuffled as different tasks or action lines are pushed to the top of the To Do List. One forcing function is a deadline. Another, just as common, is the pressure of someone else's demands. Other people's deadlines – and not just a superior's – can set your work schedule. At other times, unforeseen urgent problems pop up and demand attention.

The only way to get things done is to keep focused and see everything and everyone associated with any particular decision, solution, or objective being worked on as a possible resource for you to achieve the outcome you want. But, of course, everyone else does this too! Recognising this shared attitude not only helps find compromises and ways through problems, it also alerts you to the dangers of being 'mugged' into agreeing to something the implications of which you haven't fully understood. When consulting about a decision, care needs to be taken about where a conversation might lead and what you will or will not want to agree to. An agreement now may later force a decision you would rather not make. These judgement calls are about people and events but more importantly they are also about possible implications and especially their interpretation by others.

You can only get things done by getting others to do what you want. That means you have to engage and enrol them by getting them to fit in with what you want to do and, particularly, doing so (more or less) willingly. Whilst you might want to construct 'win-win' outcomes, plotting in advance how to do this is mostly a waste of time. It is only rarely that you know the range and ordering of other people's problems, and so you can't align your needs with theirs in advance. Win-win outcomes are found, if they are found, as you see what other people's problems are when trying to solve your own.

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No solution, outcome or management decision is ever optimal. The best you can hope for is ‘good enough’ or ‘what we can live with’. Pushing a ‘good enough’ solution so it becomes optimal for you will take at least as much time and effort again as one which you can live with. This is because solutions, decisions and outcomes are always arrived at by trade-offs. The more you push for your best outcome, the more you push others away from theirs. The further they get from their optimal outcome, the more resistance you will encounter.

### Re-thinking management work

The language of the descriptions just given is heavily loaded with terms describing what management looks like, what it feels like and how you have to orient to it. These are, you might say, the subjective complement of Kotter’s and Hales’ objective descriptions. They capture the experience of management life while Kotter and Hales try to represent the observable behaviour exhibited in precisely the same tumult. Inside and outside, subjective and objective, analytic and expressive are all useful enough distinctions. But they force an opposition we might not necessarily want or need and raise the question whether it is possible to construct an analytic account of the manager’s subjective perceptions. In other words, is it possible to construct third person descriptions of first person experience?

### *Ethnomethodology and third person phenomenology*

We have said third person phenomenology is a mode of Ethnomethodology. In what follows, we summarise the central aspects of Ethnomethodology in order to draw out what a third person phenomenology might be. We will not give a detailed introduction nor summarise its intellectual biography. Instead, we will assume some familiarity with the broad background.<sup>4</sup> In particular, we will take as given a number of claims about Harold Garfinkel’s conception of Ethnomethodology and his abiding sociological interests, as well as the ways these were worked through in the development of Ethnomethodology. We will state these baldly. Buttressing arguments for them can be found in most well-informed introductions.

- 1 Sociology’s ambition is to describe how social order is sustained. Its accounts can be framed in many different ways. What creates these differences are differences in the premises used for the framing. ~~*Ab initio*, there is no way to choose between framings since the basis of such choice can only be in the outcomes provided by the accounts themselves.~~
- 2 The descriptions given should be methodologically rigorous. That is, the theoretical structures developed and the investigations undertaken to demonstrate their empirical application should be clear, logical, systematic and consistent. The aim, ultimately, is to have sociological descriptions which bear comparison with those of the natural sciences. Key to this rigour is transparency of assumptions. No assumptions should be utilised in a theoretical construction or in the design of an investigation which have not been explicitly marked.

- 3 Garfinkel's own interests were in proceduralising sociological theories or models to see how effective they were in making social structures empirically visible. His method was to treat theories and models as sets of instructions for making social structures observable and analysable. In large measure, these modes of proceduralising were based on canons of rigour he derived from Felix Kaufmann (1958) and Alfred Schutz (1962). The first of these canons describes what we might call 'the sociological gaze' and was summarised in his notion 'the praxeological rule':

The seen but unnoticed backgrounds of everyday activities are made visible and described from a perspective in which persons live out the lives they do, have the children they do, think the thoughts, enter the relationships they do, all in order to permit the sociologist to solve his theoretical problems.

(Garfinkel 1967: 37)

The person-in-the-sociologist's-society is what Schutz called an 'homunculus', a theoretically constructed puppet, operating in a theoretically defined environment. The homunculus and environment are constructed by systematically applying the second canon, 'conceptual play', in ways provided for by the discipline's standard practices:

By conceptual play is meant that the investigator undertakes the solution to a problem by altering imaginatively the features of the problematic situation and then following through the consequences of this alteration without suspending respect for the basic rules of his discipline.

(Garfinkel 1956: 188)

In empirical investigations, the specification of the actor and the environment are to be clearly stated and consistently applied. Where attempts to use the specifications fail to make social structures sufficiently accessible, the onus is on the sociologist to vary the original premises on which the theory had been built, not to introduce ad hoc adjustments to save the theory. By continually returning to the premises and varying them, over time the rigour of theory should be improved.

- 1 Following Schutz's (1967a and 1967b) interpretation of Weber in the light of the findings of Phenomenology, the central analytic task for any theory of social action is to describe the role of what Husserl (1970 and 1983) called '*noesis and noema*' in configuring the phenomenal fields in which action takes place. Through this structuring, actors resolve the problematic possibilities of appearances and determine the meaning of objects and actions in a setting. Sociology calls this resolution 'The Definition of the Situation'. For Sociology, social order depends upon the *systematic reproduction* of shared definitions of the situation so that actions are mutually intelligible. Each actor can see the fit between what the other is doing and the ends being sought.

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- 2 By far the most sophisticated theory of social action had been provided by Talcott Parsons (1951; Parsons and Shils 1951). Garfinkel set himself the task of proceduralising Parsons by treating his theory as a set of instructions for producing instances of the systematic reproduction of shared definitions of the situation.

### *The 'discovery' of ethno-methods*

In Parsons' conceptual structure, the basic element of social life is the 'unit act'. This has five elements.

- a An actor
- b A situation made up of an environment of conditions
- c Goals or ends to be achieved
- d A standard for the assessment of means
- e A mode of orientation towards the elements in the unit act.

The mode of orientation provides the grounds on which to define the situation and hence the selection of appropriate means to attain desired ends. When means are fitted to ends, provided they are in accord with scientific standards of efficacy, action is rational. Under the conception of the environment in which action takes place as a social system, the most important element is the population of others whom we encounter. These others are assumed to be actors who themselves have modes or orientation and definitions of the situation. Given both parties are rational social actors, each has expectations of what should be done based on their definition of the situation, motivations and so on. This is the double contingency. Garfinkel's question is 'How are these expectations aligned?'

For populations of actors to engage with one another on a continuing basis and so create the patterns of social relationships making up the social system, activities have to be coordinated. Providing a systemic basis for coordination is the nub of the theoretical problem. Two things are critical here. First, the solution must be systematically reproduced and not simply random. Second, that reproducibility must be an outcome of the structural arrangements obtaining within the social system itself. In Parsons' view, relying on actors' ability to coerce each other to coordinate actions would be an unstable solution. It would result in the infamous Hobbesian 'war of all against all'. Orderly social life would become impossible. What was needed was what he called 'motivated compliance'. Actors had to want to coordinate with each other. Motivated compliance with shared requirements would be a stable solution. Parsons provides for motivated compliance by introducing the assumption that actors are socialised into a common culture. This culture is composed of sentiments (norms and values) with regard to what ends are acceptable, expectations about how those ends should be achieved (that is, what means are allowable) and definitions of what roles actors are to play and what situations and actions mean. Equipping actors with a shared culture resolves the double contingency by providing them both with a



common definition of the situation and solves the problem of coordination. They are assumed to see things the same way. In *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Parsons and Shils 1951), the structural process of socialisation ensures the patterns or norms, sentiments and definitions which make up a culture are shared. The unit act is possible because of the way the social system works.

We now have all the pieces. Social action is defined in terms of means/end rationality. Social actors are socialised rational actors sharing a common culture. The sharing of a common culture provides the mutual understanding and shared expectations required for actions to be coordinated because it allows each to understand the other's objectives and choices. This understanding covers expectations, defines roles and identifies the norms or rules of behaviour to be followed.

Coordination of action turns on agreed definitions of the situation. The theory says they are agreed, but, Garfinkel wondered, how is this agreement brought about? Given that all they have to go on is how things appear,<sup>5</sup> how from the myriad of different ways any situation might be defined, do they decide that *this* is the definition they are both using? To try to make this visible, Garfinkel picked out just two of the pieces we listed: means/end rationality and mutual understanding. The trouble is they are conceptually entangled. It is the assumption of the means/end rationality of some action which makes it understandable. To try to untangle them, Garfinkel takes a radical step. By exercising the right of the theorist to conceptual play, he proposes to change the original assumptions and drop the presumptions that both rationality and mutual understanding are intrinsic to social action. This is done in two steps. First, the presumption is set aside for actors. They are no longer assumed to have a shared culture by means of which they see the rationality of action. Next, the assumption of mutual understanding is set aside. Without the assumption of the rationality of action, there can be no prior mutual understanding.

If we construct encounters on the basis of these revised presuppositions, on Parsons' theory, actors should find each other's actions 'specifically senseless'. They will have no cultural resources to make sense of what is going on. On the other hand, if, somehow, they do manage to achieve coordination and sustain their interaction, whatever understandings they arrive at must have been constructed there and then in the encounter and not derived from a ~~shared~~ culture. Garfinkel sought to apply that proposition.

In a series of studies which have become known as the 'breaching experiments', Garfinkel operationalised his revised premises. In a first experiment, as part of a mock-up of a consultation, participants were subjected to what they did not know were random questions and equally random responses to their answers. Given the questions and answers were random, objectively the environment they faced was 'senseless'. Although the resulting encounters were difficult and disturbing, the breaching actions did not cause interaction to fail. Instead, participants put considerable effort in trying to find some grounds where whatever the ~~investigator~~ did or said could be found to be reasonable and meaningful. What under Parsons' theory should have brought the interaction to a halt, turned out not to. For Garfinkel, this

finding had a very profound implication. Although actors were assumed to have a shared culture which provided them with definitions of the situation and associated rules of behaviour, no analysis had been given of how on different occasions actors jointly know which definitions and rules to apply. How did the sharing of the definition of the situation and hence the identification of the appropriate rules come about? The assumption of a shared culture had obviated this question and so had effectively hidden what appeared to be of critical importance.

In subsequent studies, Garfinkel attempted to make visible just what the means and rules for arriving at a definition of the situation were. People were set the task of giving detailed glosses on their conversational utterances. Each proffered gloss was then the subject of demands for more clarification, resulting in yet further detailed glossing which again were challenged. The experiments resulted in an open process of branching questions and answers. In other examples, people were invited to play simple games in which, by flouting what might be thought of as the basic 'rules of the game', the investigator deliberately tried to disrupt the interaction and cause it to be abandoned. The aim was to see if these assumed basic rules really were prescriptive. Did violating them mean the game would collapse?

Once again, difficult though the encounters were, social interaction did not fail. In both sets of studies, definitions of what was going on and interpretations of what role the investigator was playing and what was being done, were adjusted, extended, or even suppressed, and in some cases ignored altogether. Actions were allowed to run unchallenged if they made no material difference to what it was assumed everyone was trying to do.

The conclusion Garfinkel drew from all these studies was both simple and radical. We need to step beyond the assumption of a shared culture and scrutinise the phenomenon which had been hidden by that assumption. Instead of accepting that understandings, meanings and rules are, by definition, shared, we have to study how social actors display what they take to be going on, what their understandings of the particular situation is, and how mutual understanding is arrived at. However the phenomenal field which makes up the gestalt of their experience is structured, the character courses of action in that field have must be the outcome of what actors do to bring about this mutual intelligibility or, to use Garfinkel's term, its 'accountability'. The methods they use for achieving this must be conceptually prior to the assumption of a shared culture because finding a culture is shared depends upon them being successful. Using a term which was fashionable at the time, Garfinkel christened these methods 'ethno-methods' and their study 'Ethnomethodology'.

To summarise. The phenomena which Ethnomethodology investigates are the methods by which social actors routinely, normally, and in the midst of social life, co-produce the accountability of the courses action they are jointly engaged in. On the basis of the findings of the breaching experiments, it is postulated accountability is achieved within the flow of these courses of action. Since the production of shared accountability is an outcome, all social theory needs to equip its social actors (its homunculi) with are methods for producing the displayed or observable

rationality of activities – that is, their ‘accountability’. But to do this, all they have to go on are appearances. The analytic description of how from within the flow of ordinary life, actors jointly resolve the *noesis and noema* of social action to produce mutual intelligibility and the coordination of sustained structures of action is what we mean by third person phenomenology. It aims for an observer’s account of what the orderliness of social action looks like from the inside; what we call its ‘interior configuration’.

### *The ethnomethodological gaze*

To realise the possibilities of a third person phenomenology, we have to stipulate a set of analytic principles on which to base investigations. To the ‘praxeological rule’ and ‘conceptual play’ mentioned earlier, we will add the following:

- 1 The task of co-producing the accountability of action is a universal feature of all social activities. It is as central to science, professional work, leisure, theatre, religion, or wherever else as it is to ordinary life. It is a pervasive and irredeemable part of sociality.
- 2 Seeing and understanding the rational accountability of action is contingent on the circumstances in which it is produced. Accountability is *reflexive* on the settings for which it is produced.
- 3 Settings are self-organised in that the definitions, meanings and norms being made visible by the actions of participants to the setting are constituted in and for that setting as that course of action unfolds.
- 4 The knowledge, understandings, interpretations and meanings contained in the accountability of the setting cannot be formally specified; that is, itemised in a way which abstracts them entirely from their circumstances. Rather, they are indexical on the setting. Among the methods participants use are those for resolving this indexicality.

Harvey Sacks once formulated the investigative outlook which results from adopting the above premises as the following view of social actors:

what I have been proposing could be restated as follows: For Members, activities are observable. They see activities. They see persons doing intimacy, they see persons lying, etc. It has been wrongly proposed they do not see, for example, ‘my mother’, but what they ‘really see’ is light, dark, shadows, an object in the distance, etc. And that poses for us the task of being behaviourists in this sense: Finding how it is that people can produce sets of actions that provide that others can see such things.

(Sacks 1995: 119)

This is what third person phenomenology explores: how do social actors jointly display and recognise the accountability of their activities and so enable the reproduction of the pervasive orderliness social life exhibits?

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The premises set out above shape the sociological approach Ethnomethodology uses to find and analyse its materials. It focuses on how the observability (the accountability) of courses of action is produced, made visible and recognised within courses of action themselves. Demonstrating how this is done can only be through describing how actors constitute and display what they take appearances to be.

Under the general approach just described, investigations are framed first by withdrawing the assumption that 'how things are' is known and shared as the premise for activities. Instead, it is assumed what is known and what is shared is produced as a practical accomplishment in and through courses of action. As a result, we arrive at the following general set of 'study policies' or maxims:

- 1 Treat activities as reflexively accountable;
- 2 Treat settings as self-organising and common sense as an occasioned corpus of knowledge;
- 3 Treat social actors as enquirers into those settings and accounts.

These maxims provide a simple (if not the simplest) set of presuppositions for investigations. In turn, they have their counterparts in how actors are construed. Social actors are defined in terms of their use of methods. That is, social actors are analytic types, 'homunculi' as we called them earlier, constructed in terms of:

- 1 A maxim of self-explication: Unless otherwise required, actors assume meaning of action is discoverable within the action itself. This maxim implies the operation of two further interpretive rules:
  - a A syntactic rule: Actors assume the courses of action being undertaken are normatively oriented.
  - b A semantic rule: Actors assume the meaning of any segment of a trajectory of action can be derived from the meaning of other element(s).
- 2 A maxim of egologicality: This maxim refers to the structure of the pre-predicative world for the perceiving subject. In the flow of experience, the world I perceive is *my* world and its meaning (what it is *for* me) is organised by my interests and relevances. In coming to an understanding of social action, unless otherwise required, actors assume a distribution of knowledge, interests, motivations and relevances such that if they do what they expect others to expect, others will do as they expect; and they assume others assume that too. Egologicality is the rationale that produces the famous 'reciprocity of perspectives' which Schutz identified as the condition for stable social interaction (Schutz 1962).

This approach postulates social actors as enquirers into settings and into the accounts given of them. This is simply a recasting of Sacks' conception of members as oriented to observables. What we are enquiring into are the methods and

procedures, the mechanisms and devices, by which what is experienced in routine social life as the taken-for-granted factuality and reality is constructed as the stable features of social life they are taken to be.

### The interior configuration of management

Garfinkel labelled the *in-situ* co-production of the meaning of action ‘lay sociology’ to contrast it with the provision or renderings of the meaning of courses of action which ‘professional Sociology’ produces as outputs of its disciplinary work. The relationship between lay and professional Sociology is a dependency. Professional Sociology builds its theoretical and explanatory structures on the accountability of action produced by lay sociology. As investigators of social settings, professional sociologists transform common sense accounts provided by participants into sociological conceptualisations. As a consequence, the work of lay sociologising goes largely unnoticed in Sociology. It goes unremarked in common sense too since the competences required to produce such meaning are taken for granted by social actors themselves. Cultural competence is assumed and so attention is directed away from the details of its performance. The following characterisation of this assumption was offered for natural language and conversation, though it is generalisable to all cultural practice:

We understand the mastery of natural language to consist in this. In the particulars of his speech a speaker, in concert with others, is able to gloss those particulars and is thereby meaning differently than he can say in so many words; he is doing so over unknown contingencies in the actual occasions of interaction; and in so the recognition *that* he is speaking and *how* he is speaking are specifically not matters for competent remarks. That is to say, the particulars of his speaking do not provide occasions for stories about his speaking that are worth telling; nor do they elicit questions that are worth asking, and so on.

(Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 344; emphasis in original)

As with talk, so with senior management. In the midst of the flow of management action, the competences practising senior managers acquire are made unremarkable by their routine and effortless deployment. Because they are so routine, because they are so ordinary, they do not need to ~~talk about them~~. But it is precisely ~~because they are~~ taken for granted in this way which makes them sociologically interesting. To bring out that interest, we have to make them visible, observable and analysable.

We propose to do this by treating some of the artefacts senior managers use, for example, documents, charts, reports, models and the like, as devices which reveal the detail of management reasoning. In this way, we will make visible some of the common sense methods managers use to display and share their understandings of situations, settings and actions and thereby co-produce consociate organisation;

methods which they take for granted in the welter of their daily management lives. The gestalt created through these understandings is the interior configuration of management as they experience it.

In the next chapter, we use the notion of ‘management as a common sense construct’ to scope an array of topics for investigation using this approach. In the following chapters, we show how we frame these management objects to bring out the common sense competences on which their use relies. It is our framing which makes third person phenomenology not only different from other social science approaches but from other prominent forms of Ethnomethodology as well. We have said resolving the double contingency is the fundamental problem for any systematic sociological analysis. All sociologies premise their resolution in the presumption of intersubjectivity. We use the maxims set out earlier to define or stipulate an actor’s (a senior manager’s, in our case) analytic orientation to the intersubjective character of the constellation of (management) objects they attend to. The methods used under that analytic orientation resolve the problem of mutual intelligibility and so configure their first person experience. These methods provide a way of ‘sense assembling’ the context for their actions; something we might call ‘common sense management-as-a-mode-of-reasoning’. Our ambition is to provide a third person description of this first person experience – to repeat the phrase, its interior configuration. The objects we examine (i.e. the documents, charts, spreadsheets and so on) are the objects on and through which this reasoning is deployed. Our challenge is to display that reasoning.

It is important to recognise our gaze is not turned to how the objects are used in other ways, especially how they might figure as interactional resources in formal meetings, briefing sessions, planning sessions and the like. These are important questions when considering senior management work, but not the ones we are concerned with. We are focused on the interpretive work which the consociate nature of organisations imposes on executives; the work of making sense, interpreting, finding the accountability of management objects in order to be able to put them to the uses for which they were designed whenever and wherever they are used. Our scrutiny is confined just to the objects themselves. We are not looking at how documents get talked about or used by senior managers and others who work with them. Rather, we want to reveal (in Chapter 11, we refer to this as ‘disclosing’) the presuppositions required for their competent comprehension and use. As Garfinkel and Sacks pointed out, in their routine daily use these presuppositions are not talked about because they are not worth talking about, even though they are heavily traded on in senior management work for the formulation of artefact-related matters. They are central elements of what ‘any executive knows’ (at least in this organisation at this juncture) and so are passed over without comment. Transcripts and ethnographic descriptions offer rich materials for the analysis of managerial life and bring out many interesting features of management work. However, they do not reveal the modes of reasoning we are interested in.

Consociation is the achievement of intersubjectivity over time and distance. Its successful achievement is necessary for stable organisational life. This book looks at some of the ways managers bring off that achievement.

## Notes

- 1 The term is Aron Gurwitsch's (1979). We say more about consociate social relations in Chapter 2.
- 2 Mintzberg and Kotter both talk of 'managers', though their focus is largely on the most senior cadres.
- 3 As Roger Penrose recently put it, what the Second Law seems to be reminding us is 'the familiar and rather depressing fact that, when left to themselves, things simply become more and more manifestly disordered as time progresses!' (2016: 243).
- 4 The literature is large and growing. The key texts are Garfinkel (1967, 2002 and 2006), We have contributed ourselves (Sharrock and Anderson 1986, Sharrock and Lynch 2003) but other general accounts each with their own viewpoint can be found in Heritage (1984) and Livingston (1987). Recently, Lynch (2015) has given a distinctive view of Garfinkel's work and the current state of Ethnomethodology.
- 5 Providing a philosophical basis for constitution of objective experience from appearances was Husserl's life's work (Husserl 1970, 1983). For a clear exposition of the implications of Husserl's philosophy for Sociology, see Schutz (1967b, especially Part II, and 1967a). In line with his strategy of 'misreading' philosophy in the service of mounting sociological investigations, Garfinkel asks about the constitution of social facts (definitions of the situation, norms etc.) from appearances.

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