

Exploring Project Language Processes through Knowledge Management Processes to Develop a Theory of Project Language Management: An Abductive Grounded Theory Based Research

Ghassan Dabbour¹

*¹ The British University in Dubai, Block 11, Dubai International Academic City, PO Box 345015,
United Arab Emirates*

PURPOSE

The "Linguistic Turn" has taken philosophers of the early 20th century by a storm of clashing ideologies and doctrines, contesting a reinvention of epistemology, ontology, logic and ethics, and inspiring major philosophical movements like postmodernism and poststructuralism. Likewise, its applications were realised on major scientific disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence, neurology, and political sciences, just to name a few. One can therefore excuse the notion of multi-universal definitions of 'language', for each study describe language by deriving functions relevant to their field. Giere (2006) calls this approach of inquisition 'representation models', and explains it by asserting that different approaches to a phenomenon produces different images of it, each with effects applicable to that interpretation.

In management sciences, Drucker (1954) was among the first to point out language relevance. More scholars later followed in this opinion, such as Duncan and Weiss (1979) and Pondy and Mitroff (1979). Today, a search on language (as a management discipline), although rare and fragmented, yields solid arguments on how language use in a certain manner contributes to better management techniques, notably Nonaka (1991), Watson (1995), Scharmer (2001), Linde (2001), Koskinen et al. (2002), Toit (2003), and Mckenna and Metcalfe (2013). Most of these researches, however, while they explain and describe the 'how' and the 'why', seem to lack a background setting of the 'what'. Indeed, this is the question that drives this research - what is project language management?

One can think of project language management as the more holistic, soft approach of communication management, and therefore, exploring language from a communication management eye scope would seem like a rational decision. However, the substantial link of communication management with information management informs us of the inexplicable bond between language management and knowledge management. As such, knowledge management processes provide the foundation of the launch pad for this research. The significance of this research lies in its ultimate application; projects will be managed using a mechanism that incurs no cost, since language use requires none.

¹ 2013132108@buid.ac.ae

DESIGN/ METHODOLOGY/ APPROACH

This research is concerned with discovering theory, and thus, follows abductive reasoning. Consequently, its explorative research philosophy dictates that the research best be conducted through grounded theory. Moreover, knowledge management processes will be defined from literature as themes, and therefore, formulating concepts and themes about language processes will be logical, direct and intelligible using grounded theory.

Data collection will be done qualitatively by interviews and focus groups. As a data triangulation technique, quantitative surveys will also be used later during the study.

The researcher aligns himself with the school of thought that conditions some pre-existing knowledge of the research area when going in on the field, as opposed to being empty minded when conducting grounded theory. Thus, themes of language processes will already be formulated from literature (using knowledge management literature on knowledge management processes). During the research, the researcher will observe how these themes of language occur within topics about projects.

FINDINGS

The philosophical building block of the research is this- language and knowledge are two sides of the same coin. Creating a representation model of language relevant to project management branches out into four main tasks: demonstrate the bond of language and knowledge through studies on the social construction of knowledge, describe and explain how communication/information management vs language/knowledge management as characters of exchange value vs use value respectively, define project language management as a boundary object, and finally, abduct language processes from knowledge management processes identified from literature.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

Since this research aims to open a new field of study in management sciences, its primary objective will be focused on generalising theory as much as possible. This in itself is an arguable limitation; although the study will be targeted at multinational companies across the U.A.E., the generality of the final constructed theory will be in question. Furthermore, this study researches those organisations that depend highly on knowledge management solutions, the limitation here is that companies that function on routine are overlooked. Hence, exploiting language processes within other context is a further research suggestion. Another option the researcher would like to posit as further research is the 'how' of the managing of project language management processes, since this study is only concerned with the 'what' are project language management processes.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications of the research aren't clearly discernible as of yet. However, one can muse, as evident in literature review that managing language use contributes to the development of projects. Creating a language representation model for project management is the first step to a full project language management discipline. Furthermore, since managing language is a study that reads project management socially instead of the classical engineering perspective, it ought to be a substantial addition to rethinking project management (Winter et al. 2006).

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Undoubtedly, this research carries intense social and economic impacts. Kennedy (2011) disputes how language and development are complexly linked. To entertain this notion, he borrows a categorisation by Appleby et al. (2002) who distinguishes between language IN, AS, FOR and OF development. The thesis that describes the socio-economic impact of this study closely is language FOR development. Language FOR is the perspective on language as an essential tool to be structured within various domains such as media, business, science and law in a way that contributes to socio-economic developments.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE

This research attempts to collect all language management strategies evident in literature by constructing a representation model that defines project language management and identify its processes. In broader terms it is taking the first step towards a full project language management theory. The significance of this research rests in its ultimate application; projects will be managed using a mechanism that incurs no cost, since language use requires none.