Talking Structure. The Shaping of Organizational Reality in Consulting Conversations

Abstract

In organization theory, bridging the gap between "micro" and "macro" has become one of the major theoretical endeavours since the late 1980s. Conversation analysis, sociopragmatics and related approaches in linguistics claim to make contributions to the explanation of social order right from their beginning by investigating how social (e.g. organizational) structure is (re-)established through the members' everyday activities. But since interaction is either conceptualized as autonomous systems (machinery, apparatus) or as human action (members' methods) there is a terminological shortcoming due to the unsolved problem of action and structure as well. – As we will argue in this paper, based on empirical data from a study on systemic consultation, a combination of recent developments in organization theory, namely referring to the works of Anthony Giddens, with suitable linguistic approaches provides a basis for linking aspects of "micro" and "macro" analysis in organization studies.
1. Introduction

The theoretical gap between "micro" and "macro" is still regarded as one of the major problems in social sciences. By these terms sociologists describe two perspectives or aspects of the social world which require different methods of collecting and analysing data and which can hardly be connected within one theoretical framework (Helle 1989; Treibel 2000). In the treatment of "macro"-topics – e.g. systems of cultural knowledge and values, institutions, classes, milieus, etc. – the individual's scope of action and decision-making, his or her consciousness and responsibility disappear behind social "structures" or functional "systems". In the depiction of "micro"-phenomena like social situations, individuals or small groups the (apparent) independence and autonomy of social structures and social change cannot be explained. With regard to empirical studies, the phenomena of microsociological investigation can be documented by observation (in connection with audio or video recordings), whereas in macrosociological approaches the data is achieved on the basis of special methodological instruments providing an indirect access to objects withdrawn from observation.

Since, for example, the family can be described either in terms of "micro" (as a small group) or "macro" (as an institution), these terms do not refer to separated "spheres" or "levels" of society, but to complementary views or aspects of "one" social world. Thus, we should ask whether the insights of both perspectives can be related to one another within a consistent theoretical framework. Conversation analysis, sociopragmatics and related approaches in linguistics claim to make contributions to the explanation and description of social order right from their beginnings and should therefore (once again) be more concerned about the "micro-macro-problem", especially when they deal with topics in the field of organizational communication (section 2.1). In organization theory, bridging the gap between "micro" and "macro" has become one of the major theoretical endeavours since the late 1980s (section 2.2).

Unfortunately, the differences between "micro-" and "macro"-approaches do not only concern the selection of topics and methods but also the "models" of society itself. While supporters of the "micro"-approach believe in social order being de-
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rived from the "aggregation" of innumerable actions carried out by individuals, those in favour of "macro"-theories see social structure (beginning with the level of interaction) as an order *sui generis* underviable from the individual's behaviour.

With these apparently incompatible perspectives, the constitution of the subject of study becomes a problem in itself. We want to discuss this problem theoretically and methodologically (section 2) before presenting the empirical data gathered (section 3). A specific challenge arises here from the combination not only of two perspectives ("micro" and "macro"), but also of two disciplines with different traditions, viz. conversation analysis with its strong emphasis on empirics, and organization theory with its focus on theoretical perspectives and discussion. Our aim is not only to combine both disciplines for the sake of interdisciplinary research but use their respective strengths to tackle the problem. Thus, our approach is twofold: firstly, a theoretical and methodological discussion of the problems and possible solutions on the topic of change with regard to the "micro-macro"-dualism, and secondly a presentation and discussion of empirical material to address shortcomings of or questions left open by the theory. In this way, we want to create a more intimate connection between theory and empirics, in which theory not only guides empirics, but in which empirics feeds back on theory.

As we will argue in this paper, certain developments in organization theory, namely referring to the works of Anthony Giddens (section 2.3), coupled with suitable approaches from the linguistic fields of sociopragmatics and conversation analysis provide a basis for linking aspects of "micro" and "macro" analysis in organization studies (section 3). In his discussion of change, Giddens (1984) names locality and contingency indispensable elements of a theory of change. Consequently, a theory of change, in his opinion, can never be complete without a closer (empirical) look on settings, actions and circumstances.
2. **The Connection between "Micro" and "Macro"**

2.1. **Developments in Conversation Analysis and Sociopragmatics**

As a rule, linguistic studies on conversation do neither deal with societal or organizational structures as a whole nor are they primarily interested in the individual's behaviour. They rather treat the intersection of micro- and macrosociology by investigating how, for example, organizational structure is (re-)established through the members' activities from "moment to moment, interaction to interaction, day to day" (Boden 1994:1). Ideas derived from phenomenological sociology (Schütz 1981; Schütz/ Luckmann 1979, 1984), sociology of knowledge (Berger/ Luckmann 1966) and ethnomet hodology (Garfinkel 1967) form the theoretical background for this programme. The main idea of these approaches is that through everyday interaction, people "locally" make sense of what they perceive by speaking and acting, thereby recurring to former experience, habitual knowledge and semantic categories in a more or less creative and flexible manner. The aim of conversation analysis (and related approaches) is to 'reconstruct' the members' actions empirically, close to their own perspective, on the basis of authentic data obtained by participatory observation and technical documentation.

A major problem of this 'reconstructive' approach is the paradox that people, though actively (re-)producing social order, perceive these structures as externally given conditions and restrictions of their actions (Schütz/ Luckmann 1994:38ff.). In other words: The social world, e.g. departments, positions, relations etc. of an organization, is "concrete" and "objective" to our experience, although it is no ontological fact independent from our everyday interpretation (Berger/ Luckmann 196:65). Metaphorically spoken, people (re-)produce social structure "behind their own back".

How can this be? – A main point of the explanation given by Berger and Luckmann is the idea that linguistic structure is a kind of reservoir for symbolically 'objectified' social knowledge. Therefore, social structure can be seen as semantic structure. This concerns both lexical and phrasological systems (e.g. the words *Verkäufer/ seller* and *Kunde/ customer* as typifications of certain interactive roles
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in an institutional context) as well as grammaticalized concepts (e.g. the case system with categories like 'agens', 'instrument', etc.).

Why and how is this knowledge 'objectified'? – According to the model of Berger and Luckmann at least three partial processes can be distinguished:

a) 'Intersubjectivity': In interactive sense-making, each actor, aggregating recurring experiences into 'types' or 'categories' of perception (e.g. 'costs', 'profits'), tries to act reasonably by considering his/her partner's perspective which (s)he assumes is reciprocal to his/her own. Thus, step by step, behaviour and knowledge become intersubjective; since the interactive production of sense cannot be controlled by one individual on his/her own, social sense seems to emerge autonomously, independently of the individuals' intentions.

b) 'Habitualization': If the categories, usually combined with others in complex 'schemes' of knowledge, are then used again and again, they become part of the habitual linguistic knowledge as routines or even automatisms of language use.

c) 'Institutionalization': Through countless interactions, according to the principle of reciprocity, these categories become common social knowledge, which is, as a rule, taken for granted as it is passed on from generation to generation.

As John Gumperz (1986) and Hellmuth Feilke (1994) have argued, semantic and social structure is not only passed on by lexicon and grammar but also by patterns of indirect 'cues', like prosody, selection of linguistic varieties and styles, etc., by which people display aspects of context. For example, engineers can display their status as 'experts' indirectly by using a certain technical terminology.

Since semantic structures have an effect on what people do and expect others to do, symbolic interaction is not only a matter of interpretation but also of legitimation. Moreover, according to Berger and Luckmann, when institutions depart from their origins in the course of time, they have to be secondarily justified by expressions of evaluation (e.g. efficient, useless), theories (e.g. in business management), proverbs, legends, fairy tales, patterns of giving or withdrawing respect like accusation, indignation, praise, sympathy, etc. They are also supported by secondary
sanctions like constitutions, laws, regulations governing industrial relations, etc. Thus, the concept that social structure is reproduced "behind the actors' back" has to be supplemented with aspects of:

d) 'Legitimation' and 'force': The symbolic constitution of social reality is interdependent with moral, economic and political structures.

These characteristics of interaction (a-d) make people perceive the social reality dynamically produced by themselves as constantly and objectively given.

But do people really construct social reality if we consider that they already "find" semantic and social order in their language and that they perceive social order as emerging autonomously out of interaction, independently from their individual intentions (Habscheid 2000)? – In other words: Does interaction really consist of individual action through which people "make" reality, or is interaction a "social system" underivable from people's consciousness and connected to other social systems like, for example, the economy (Hausendorf 1992; Luhmann 1984)?

Since, in conversation analysis and sociopragmatics, interaction is either conceptualized as autonomous systems (*machinery, apparatus*) or as human action (*members' methods*) (Eberle 1997:257) we have to realize that there is a terminological shortcoming due to the unsolved problem of action and structure. We suggest that linguists should (once again) be more concerned about that. We believe that recent developments in organization theory provide a suitable basis for further discussion and can, on their part, capitalise on contributions of the linguistic approach.

### 2.2. Developments in Organization theory

As above mentioned, in organization theory the connection between "micro" and "macro" level has been a major subject of debate since the late 1980s. For Anglo-American theory, Anthony Giddens' book "The Constitution of Society" of 1984 sparked (or re-ignited) major interest in the topic, while works of Pierre Bourdieu
(1992) and Jürgen Habermas (1984) established a parallel discussion in Europe (Treibel 2000). Up to date, these three authors have remained the most influential proponents of "micro-macro-theory". For reasons given below, we have opted for Giddens’ theory and will thus only provide a short abstract of the other two authors.

Habermas (1984), like Berger and Luckmann, pays attention to the resources of habitual knowledge that shape everyday experience and interaction, largely without being reflected by the agents ('Lebenswelt'). In present societies, however, understanding can often only be achieved through 'meta-communication', reflecting on the resources of communication themselves. Habermas believes this 'discursive' communication to be, in principal, rational and free of egocentric calculations: Each actor assumes his/her partner's statements to be true, correct, understandable etc. and acts according to these universal rules. Habermas calls this kind of behaviour 'communicative action'. He defines it as intersubjective and orientated towards understanding instead of towards the individual's success. In contrast to Berger and Luckmann, Habermas assumes that there is a second ("macro"-)level of society beside this ("micro"-)sphere of interaction, which he calls 'system'. Systems (e.g. economy or administration) are those parts of society where action is not only co-ordinated by rational language use but mainly by other 'media', like money or power. At the same time, the systems' activities are not orientated towards intersubjective understanding but towards success. According to Habermas, in contemporary societies the logics of economy and administration find their way into everyday life, with money and power taking the place of discursive communication. Thus, everyday practices become pathological. The restoration of communicative rationality is assumed to be the only way out. In our view, it has to be scrutinized empirically, if a consensus amongst (organizational) agents with different interests can be achieved by rational communication rather than by levelling out the egoistic interests. Nevertheless, a critical analysis of interaction could help to reduce power assymetry in organizational communication.

Bourdieu (1992), coming from a structuralist tradition, still maintains the ubiquituousness and force of societal structures on the agent, but reconceptualises them as statistical (i.e. methodological), not ontological features. In his theory, agents
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act out of their free will and are thus free to do anything. They will, however, choose certain actions with a higher probability than others. This probability can be explained by socialisation. Socialisation shapes not only people's wishes, preferences and intentions, but also their perceptions and norms – Bourdieu calls this "habitus" – so that their "free will" is already a product of the society and class they live in. Thus, as a rule, they will rather reproduce the milieu they come from than change it. For example, lower class people will feel more at ease with other people from the same social class because they share similar linguistic and social habits. For the same reason, they will, as a rule, not mix with people from higher classes and may even feel hostile towards them. In consequence, their search for a job, a partner etc. will be guided by their desire to feel at ease or to do the things they like and do best, which means they will search within their own class (and not move to a higher one). To stress the point once again, Bourdieu believes this to be true for the statistical majority; he does not deny that single individuals may choose differently. As structures are thus only aggregated observational data (namely a tendency for recurring patterns), they are not on the same ontological (and observational) level as agents. The structure-agent-opposition is dissolved.

2.3. Structuration theory

In his "structuration theory" Giddens (1984) conceptualises the micro-macro problem along two dualisms (see table 1):

a) Structures at the same time enable and limit actions.

b) Since actions (re-)produce structure, Structures are not only basis ('medium') but also outcome of actions.
Thus, for example, it would be impossible to purchase stocks without the legal and institutional infrastructure provided by a market society. The same infrastructure limits the purchasing activity by forbidding certain actions, like fraud or theft. Laws and institutions, on the other hand, can only be established and maintained effectively if people refer to them in their actions. An institution which is not "used" in this way quickly becomes obsolete. In consequence, structure can never be properly (i.e. completely) conceptualised without action, and vice versa. In the course of scientific enquiry, however, it is possible to neglect either one and solely look at the other.

Action, in Giddens’ theory, is not a given item, but something isolated retrospectively from the agent’s stream of consciousness. Hence it comprises rational-intentional as well as habitual actions (see table 1). Giddens is mainly interested in habitual actions which are repeated by a larger number of people. He calls them "institutionalised practices" and takes them as mediating feature between the levels of structure and action. Accordingly, the agent not only commands a "classi-
cal" consciousness with intentions and wishes, but also a pre-reflexive consciousness. Giddens calls the former "discursive consciousness" and the latter "practical consciousness" implying that in the former the agent is able to communicate about his or her actions, reasons etc., while in the latter most contents are non-discursive. Still, even in the non-discursive form, actions are permanently monitored in order, for example, to check their compliance with rules. The agent thus permanently applies knowledge even if he or she cannot verbalise it. Therefore, apart from conscious rule-following, there is a second, very important source of structures, since structures can be unintended consequences of people’s actions. This means that by performing a certain action the structures enabling that action are confirmed, although the agent is not aware of the fact or may not even want it. For example, in pronouncing a correct sentence, the rules of the language are (unwittingly) reproduced and thus maintained.

Structures become effective only insofar as they govern the agents' actions. In a short definition, Giddens refers to them as "rules and resources" stressing once again their dual character. Structures have both a syntagmatic and a paradigmatic quality. Insofar as they are "present" in the "here and now" of an action, they are syntagmatic. Insofar as they can be referred to over larger spans of space and time, they are paradigmatic. Their paradigmatic nature in turn explains the stability of institutions and practices as opposed to single actions: they can "bind" time and space, as Giddens puts it.

Putting both aspects of the duality, action and structure, together, Giddens develops what he calls "structuration", i.e. the processual perspective on their interdependence. It rests on three pillars which portray the three elemental aspects of action, namely signification, power, and normativity. These aspects are then again divided into an "action pole", a "structure pole", and one in between called "modality" which represents individual appropriations of shared knowledge and practices. The following grid results (see table 2):
The grid can be read as follows: In order to perform, for example, a communicative act, the agent refers to his or her individual stock of schemes which are in turn a subset of the complete semiotic rules and resources the agent’s culture offers. Societal or cultural structures are thus always mediated through the agent’s knowledge and choice; there is no automatism in applying them.

We have chosen Giddens’ theory of structuration as a theoretical starting point for two reasons. First, we believe his theory of action to be widely in line with sociopragmatic approaches in the field (e.g. Holly 1992), which are partially rooted in the same traditions (i.e. ordinary language philosophy; ethnomethodology; Conversation analysis; Goffman). In this view, structure is conceptualised as pattern of (inter-)action observed and thus (re-)produced by knowledgeable actors. Hence, social order is grounded in everyday practice. Furthermore, with regard to the elements of 'locality' and 'contingency' (section 1), there is a correspondence with the theory of "invisible-hand-processes" which has been recently recalled in the linguistic debate about language change (Keller 1994).

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This convergence makes it easier for us to develop our theoretical line as the theories from both disciplines seem to share a number of basic assumptions and problems. Secondly, Giddens’ theory explicitly includes communication at its theoretical core which opens up a formidable entrance for elaborating or enlarging the theory from a linguistic point of view.

On the other hand, structuration theory has a number of problems (see, for example, Craib 1992 or Clark u.a. 1990), two of which we would like to mention: one is the linguistic processes on the micro level that lead to the establishment and maintenance of structures, and the other is the question of rupture or change (as opposed to reproduction) of structures through verbal interaction.

As to the first problem, Giddens does not give a detailed account of how structures are established and maintained through "micro" actions, but rests his case largely with the statement that this happens. The concepts he uses to link structure and action – namely actor knowledge, unintended consequences – are already on a level beyond (face-to-face) interaction in a given empirical situation. By taking a closer look at such empirical situations, we want to find out whether it is possible to detect additional elements on the micro level which support and elaborate Giddens’ thesis.

The second question is aimed at clarifying the "how" even further by asking: when and why does action lead to change, i.e. the non-reproduction of given structures? The idea here is to look for parts in the conversations where organizational structures are modified or even abandoned, and to ask for which reasons this happens.

3. **Empirical analysis**

3.1. **Setting**

The following analysis is based on data from a study on talk in an organization which offers the service of 'systemic consulting' to members of other organizations, e.g. in the range of human resources. The theoretical background for 'sys-
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temic consulting' is formed by ideas derived from different, but historically inter-
woven disciplines and approaches like, among others, cybernetics, 'radical con-
structionism', biological and sociological systems theory and family therapy.

In accordance with the constructionist theories discussed above, systemic consultants believe 'reality' to be a product of interpretation. Interpretation is metaphorically conceptualized as 'observation'. Referring to neurobiological findings, they stress that each psychological system is autonomous and operationally self-
contained, so that communication cannot be seen as a kind of 'interchange' but as a 'perturbation' of individual psychological systems caused by turbulences in the interactive area of this system. Thus, communication can lead to a re-organization of subjective experience. (By the way, this individualistic view seems to be rather different from the theories mentioned above; it can, however, be connected with them (Roderburg 1998) if we assume, according to S.J. Schmidt (1994), that the coupling of cognition and communication is made possible through a third kind of system, namely shared knowledge – corresponding to the rules and semantic structures observed by Berger/ Luckmann or Giddens.)

A main idea of systemic consulting is that – since observations are always differ-
ent and variable – consulting communication provides a chance for 're-
constructing' the reality of the clients' system. The aim is the communicative cre-
tion of a new reality within the 'consulting system' which is different from both the consultant's and the clients' former system. With regard to our topic, we would therefore assume that the setting of systemic consulting provides relevant material for surveying the problem of how semantic structures are not only maintained but also modified or abandoned. As we have explained with reference to Berger/ Luckmann and Giddens, a modification of semantic structure can be the starting point for social change. In our view, this possibility can concern the clients' system as well as the consulting organization itself. Of course, the client's organization normally is the one regarded as being in trouble, and thus changing it is the aim of consulting communication.
3.2. Analysis

One of the most interesting findings of linguistic studies on conversation in consulting and therapy (e.g. Nothdurft 1984; Roderburg 1998) is the observation that consultants, as a rule, do not simply deal with 'the problem' as it is defined by their clients. Consultants and clients rather have to come to an understanding about the problem through interaction, thereby often changing (or even denying) the initial problem as conceptualized in the clients' view.

In the perspective of the systemic consultants, the reduction and adequate representation of complexity is assumed to be a crucial point for organizations in general. Thus, the task of systemic consulting is to find with each client a construction of reality that is both comprehensible and – from a higher point of view – coordinated with the other perspectives, so that they are, altogether, adequate to complexity (Schmid/ Hipp 1997). Therefore, the solutions suggested by systemic consultants cannot be of a merely 'technical' kind but have to include the 'theoretical' concept of a 'second order observation' which has to be established on the level of organization itself (Luhmann 1989).

One step in the changing of the clients' reality through consulting communication is the examination of their perspective. A typical method for this are questions about previous attempts to solve the problem. In the following part of a consulting conversation the client (K1) answers this question; he presents the problem as the task to place topics and projects of several departments concerned with human ressources within a 'logical chain':

Datum 1: 'logical chain'

01  K1  <<all> also wir stehn denk ich schon n
02       bisschen am anfang an der stelle - was wer bis
03            jetzt gemacht habm is folgendes> - (.) wir habm
04           (.) in dem / dem kreis äh ich sach mal de:r
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05 [(.]) human ressourceführungskräfte <<all>>

06 [Be] hhm

07 K1 regelmäßig zusammgesessen - wir habm ne

08 sammlung von: (.i) ich sach mal >

unendlichen

09 themen und projektn - wobei wir jetzt den

10 nächsten schritt machen wolln die überhaupt

11 mal zu ranken und zu sagn was glauben wer
denn

12 (.i) <<all>> is die logische <<h>> kette>
dieser

13 K1 ganzen dinge - [...] das is’n schritt der

noch

14 noch vor uns steht -

Rough translation:

K1: “Well, I think we are at this point at the beginning...What we’ve done up to now is...We’ve debated regularly among the, um, let’s call them human resource managers...We have a set of, let’s say endless topics and projects...and we now want to take the next step ranking them and find the logical chain of all these things...that’s a step we have to take...”

The consultant then (in a 'second order observation') re-formulates the client's depiction of previous attempts to solve the problem, replacing the client's 'conceptual metaphor' (Lakoff/Johnson 1980) of a 'chain' by the linguistic picture of a 'puzzle':

Datum 2: 'puzzle'

01 Be wenn ich’s recht sehe is (.i) das n

verfahren

02 wo sozusagen die puzzlestücke die da sind

(.i)
Be: “If I’m not mistaken, this is a process where, so to speak, the pieces of the puzzle are there...are all laid down on the table, and now you look...”

K1: (laughs) “yes, yes...”

Be: “...to find out if you can rearrange them in order to...in order to make it look better...”

K1: (laughing) “...I have to add for my part I’m still not sure if all the pieces have been laid down...”

Be: “Yes, and if the pieces of the puzzle can add up to a picture the way they are cut, or if one had to develop a new logic for the puzzle...”

In this segment, the consultant analyses the client's presentation of the problem, drawing an analogy between seeing organizational phenomena and shaping the pieces of a puzzle. By this model, he links the manifold, possibly *incompatible* perspectives of individual agents in an organization with the meta-perspective of
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those (like his clients) who try to 'organize' the agents activities from a higher point of view. He argues that, since different organizational agents produce different kinds of puzzle pieces (i.e. construct different aspects of organizational reality), their contributions to a certain plan cannot simply be added up, as suggested by the 'chain'-metaphor. While the client temporarily expands the 'puzzle'-model in accordance with his former view, adding the aspect that not all pieces may be on the table (i.e. some relevant topics may not have been mentioned), the consultant re-evaluates the attempt of adding up the topics as possibly inadequate. Through the modality of possibility he indicates this evaluation to be a (non-directive) assumption: The client, on the basis of his/her experience and responsibility, has to decide whether this new description would be feasible.

As Weingarten (1990) and Roderburg (1998) have pointed out, the way in which problems are formulated by the consultants indicates the kind of solution chosen by them. In the following segment, the consultant re-formulates the problem once again, recurring to a thought pattern (Denkmodell), which is narratively introduced and thereby argumentatively backed up:

Datum 3: "events"

01 dies / <<all> also was sie da geschildert
02 han das problem hatten wer jetzt bei XY auch
03 ... und (.) äh deswegen ham wer uns drangemacht auch
04 hh äh überhaupt n neues denkmodell (.) ne neue
05 Kl art (.) des aufzuarbeiten und neue perspektiven
06 zu entwickeln also ich sag / (.) ich mach mal n
08 kleines Beispiel wozu wir gekommen sind; (-) ähm
09 (-) wir ham gesagt äh wir unterscheiden mal ereig-
10 nisse - (4) äh also für den klassischen personaler
11 für die Führungskraft um die’s geht für die ge-
12 so schäftsführung was sind eigentlich in deren (-)
13 hm K1
14 Leben (.) ereignisse an denen sie denken da müsste
15 jetzt eigentlich integrierte (.) personalarbeit
16 etwas leisten; (.) oder sollten sein aus sicht der
17 hm K1
18 fachleute;

Rough translation:
Be: “What you’ve described, well, we had the same problem at XY’s, and that’s why we’ve started developing a new frame of thinking...a new way of handling it and developing new perspectives...Well, let me give you a small example what we’ve found...We said, um, let’s discern events...well, for the typical human resource manager involved, for the management...which are the events in their lives that make them think: at this point integrated personnel management should make a difference...or which events should that be from the point of view of the experts...”

Like in the reformulation before, organizational phenomena (here events) are not conceptualized as data bruta but related to certain professional participants (10f.). This (constructionist) concept of 'observation' is then depicted on the basis of another metaphor, the picture of objects and lights (Schmid/ Hipp 1997):
Datum 4: "perspectives"

Be: “Um, the event is... if you imagine an object... um, that can be illuminated from different perspectives, and we... well, like lights which sometimes illuminate separately and sometimes combined... and which make the event appear in a different light every time...”

In the following passages (not quoted here), a possible solution is discussed on the basis of this model, striving for a coordination of organizational events as seen by different agents. In the consultation process, the model itself becomes modified by including the perspective of gradual change.
4. Conclusion

As the analysis has shown with regard to our questions, there are certain linguistic procedures of establishing and modifying organizational reality in consulting conversations, like re-formulation and re-evaluation, e.g. on the basis of conceptual metaphors. While, in the passages quoted, the consulting organization is reproduced by such approved patterns of consultation (including a certain model of organizations), the client's construction of the problem becomes modified. Thus, a perspective of organizational change appears. This result is based on a circumstance which is constitutive for consultation: the difference of observation and its accessibility to communication. This difference can become effective and eventually lead to change because, on the organizational level, several circumstances facilitate its appearance: Firstly, the client organization is in trouble and seeks professional help. It is ready to accept change in order to solve its problems. Secondly, the expected role of the consultant is to suggest changes, whether on the "hard" level of structures or on the "soft" level of images and assumptions. These – more or less institutionalised – patterns of action establish an asymmetry in the conversation itself, which can be used to create change.

How far this momentum of change carries into the client organization in the end, is certainly a viable question, which, however, cannot be answered from our data. There are theoretical models (e.g. March/Olsen 1990) trying to capture the trajectory and problems of individual knowledge becoming organizational practice, but they can only (and should) be regarded as a starting point for subsequent studies.

5. Transcription conventions

- \[K1\] simultaneously spoken
- \[Be\] 
- \([-\)\] pause of less than 1 second
- \[(1)\] pause of 1 second
- \[(\ )\] not understood
- \[(da noch)\] good guess
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((stöhnt))  naming an activity
machn  stress
von:  lengthened
<...>...>  features of prosody, e.g. all (fast), h (high-pitched)
?  sentence final rising intonation
;  sentence final falling intonation
-  sentence final level intonation
/  repair
6. Bibliography


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