UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

RESEARCH COLLABORATION STORIES :COMMUNICTION AS CONSTITUTIVE OF TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

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By

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2004

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To the One who said,

"'Let there be light;'
and there was light"

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

RESEARCH COLLABORATION STORIES: COMMUNICATION AS CONSTITUTIVE OF TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

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June 2004

Chairman: **Associate Professor Ezhar Tamam, Ph.D.**

Faculty: **Modern Languages and Communication**

Seeking a form of knowledge that places communication as constitutive of temporary organization, I explored the temporary organization that is research collaboration as it is structured and restructured in stories people tell. I framed the research problem in terms of a muted voice of a group of people in the research collaboration discourse: What research collaboration stories do researchers tell? And how is the temporary organization that is research collaboration structured and restructured in the stories they tell?

I conversed with 30 forestry researchers in three Southeast Asian universities with which I had access by virtue of my affiliation as student, as staff and as a scholar of a consortium of universities. From the recurring symbols and repeated expressions in their narratives, and the sequencing of repeating or not repeating a collaborative act, I derived two types of stories, "the partner story" and "the not partner story". The partner story tells of a continuing partner relationship, the not partner story of a not

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continuing partner relationship. I retold the partner and the not partner stories through eight stories in various settings.

Drawing from Taylor et al's definition of organization as "a construction of text made out of conversation", I made an interpretation that the temporary organization that is research collaboration is seen in the configuration and reconfiguration of the partner relationship in the partner and the not partner stories: first, at the level of text, as narrative structure and as networked transcendent; and then, at the level of conversation, in the identity and in the indeterminacy of partner relationship. The collaborative structures took shape and continued to take shape in ongoing research collaboration conversations.

By departing from the usual conception of network as information link, the study surfaced existing networks of partner relationship obscured in managerialist stories and in the literatures on research collaboration. The networks are "hidden transcripts" existing but unseen as the researchers' experiences and perspectives are unheard in the centered discourse.

I structured the dissertation also as story to illustrate the constitutive property of communication and to suggest that science as organized knowledge is also communicatively constituted.

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Abtrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KISAH-KISAH KERJASAMA PENYELIDIKAN: KOMUNIKASI SEBAGAI SEBAHAGIAN DARI ORGANISASI SEMENTARA

Oleh

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Jun 2004

Pengerusi: **Profesor Madya Ezhar Tamam, Ph.D.**

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Di dalam pencarian satu bentuk ilmu yang meletakkan komunikasi sebagai sebahagian dari organisasi sementara, saya menjejaki organisasi sementara iaitu kerjasama penyelidikan kerana ianya mempunyai struktur dan diolah semula melalui kisah-kisah yang disampaikan. Saya merangka masalah penyelidikan dari segi suara yang tidak kedengaran oleh sekumpulan manusia di dalam suasana kerjasama penyelidikan: Apakah kisah-kisah kerjasama penyelidikan yang disampaikan oleh para penyelidik? Dan di dalam kisah-kisah yang disampaikan itu, bagaimanakah bentuk struktur organisasi sementara dan bagaimanakah pula ianya diolahkan semula?

Saya berhubung dengan 30 penyelidik perhutanan di tiga universiti-universiti Asia Tenggara di mana saya mempunyai akses di atas kapasiti saya sebagai pelajar, kakitangan dan sarjana di sebuah konsortium universiti. Daripada simbol-simbol yang berlaku dan ekpresi-ekspresi yang berulang-ulang di dalam penyampaian

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mereka, dan urutan pengulangan atau tanpa pengulangan aksi-aksi kerjasama, saya telah menjurus kepada dua jenis kisah, "kisah rakan" dan "bukan kisah rakan". Kisah rakan menceritakan perhubungan rakan yang berterusan, bukan kisah rakan pula ialah perhubungan rakan yang tidak berterusan. Saya telah menukilkan kisah-kisah rakan dan bukan rakan melalui lapan kisah-kisah di dalam pelbagai keadaan.

Diilhamkan daripada takrif organisasi oleh Taylor dll sebagai " satu pembinaan teks yang dihasilkan dari perbualan" ("a construction of text made out of conversation"), saya telah membuat satu interpretasi bahawa organisasi sementara iaitu kerjasama penyelidikan dilihat sebagai suatu konfigurasi dan konfigurasi semula sebuah perhubungan rakan melalui rakan itu sendiri dan bukan kisah-kisah rakan: pertama, pada peringkat teks, sebagai struktur penceritaan dan sebagai jaringan yang berkembang; dan, pada peringkat perbualan, di dalam identiti dan ketidaktentuan perhubungan rakan. Struktur-struktur kerjasama terbentuk dan akan terus membentuk semasa perbualan-perbualan kerjasama penyelidikan.

Dengan memisahkan dari kefahaman biasa bahawa jaringan adalah hubungan informasi, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa jaringan-jaringan perhubungan rakan yang sedia ada masih samar-samar di dalam kisah-kisah pengurusan dan penulisan-penulisan mengenai kerjasama penyelidikan. Jaringan-jaringan tersebut adalah "transkrip tersembunyi" yang wujud tetapi tidak kelihatan kerana pengalaman-pengalaman dan perspektif-perspektif para penyelidik tidak ditimbulkan semasa perbualan.

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Saya juga menstrukturkan disertasi ini sebagai kisah untuk mengilustrasikan bahagian pemilikan komunikasi dan untuk mencadangkan bahawa sains, sebagai ilmu yang terancang, adalah juga sebahagian dari pemilikan komunikasi.

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This dissertation is a story of research collaboration on its own. Elsewhere in the text, I said, the story of research collaboration I told in this doctoral dissertation was created in communication with my conversational communities. This research is a collaboration with them (whose personal names may not appear here for want of space but will always be inscribed in the story of my life):

With my academic community

My supervisory committee and mentors, Associate Professor Dr. Ezhar Tamam (chairman), Dr. Raja Ahmad Tajuddin Shah, Professor Dr. Azimi Hamzah, and Dr. Narimah Ismail (members); and the rest of the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) community;

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My fellow learner and friend, Mr. Primo G. Garcia; and my fellow students and qualitative learners whom I met in Malaysia, back in the Philippines, there in Thailand and in cyberspace;

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With the researched community

Forestry academics/researchers and research administrators/managers at UPM, UPLB, Thailand's Kasetsart University (KU), and at the Asia-Pacific region whom I conversed with about research collaboration; and others who assisted in my fieldwork;

With my other communities

My family (my mom, my two siblings and their families, and some relatives); the former RMC family in UPLB, as well as friends in and out of UPLB; and my spiritual families in the Philippines, Malaysia and elsewhere.

And with the Author of the Scriptures (a text for all time) who said, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you"; as He always does as He says, so, I resigned from my first and only job to complete the writing of this once "a never ending" story.

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CHAPTER I

COMMUNICATION AS CONSTITUTIVE OF TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION: THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

> We say the structures and arrangements of our world into existence. And we have our lives both within and without organizations in the consequences of our saying so...
>
> (Thayer 1986 p. xi)

The Nature of Communication and Organization

The above saying tells of the creative power of communication, it structures and restructures, thus constitutes organizations (Taylor 2001; Mumby and Stohl 1996; Stohl 1995; Pepper 1995; Scheibel 1990; Tompkins 1987; Putnam 1983; Pacanowsky and O'Donnel-Trujillo 1982). And if the environment of organization is other organizations, then organizational environments also become communicationally saturated (Taylor 1993) or constituted.

Communication is often portrayed in many organization studies as a passive variable, only as exchange of information in and out of organization (Mumby and Stohl 1996; Taylor 1993; Kersten 1986; Putnam 1983). In the pages that follow, I tell a different story of communication, one that portrays communication as an active principle, as a social process of interpretation (Taylor et al. 1996) creating and recreating organization (Taylor et al. 1996; Mumby and Stohl 1996; Kersten 1986). In putting emphasis on interpretation rather than information, interpretation being a

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social act and situated in "complexly articulated systems of discourse that precede and exceed us as communicators" (Mumby 1997, p. 21,23), this story calls attention to the agency of and in communication (Taylor 1995; Krippendorf 1989) and to the historicity of organizations (Thatchenkery 2001; Kersten 1986).

In here, I take the position that organization is a temporary phenomenon (Lundin and Steinthorsson, in press) created and continually recreated (Hardy et al. in press; Mumby and Stohl 1996) in communication. Thus, the structures that appear are multiple (Kersten 1986) rather than monolithic (Mumby and Stohl 1997), demonstrated themselves naturally rather than designed, emergent rather than exported (Mumby and Stohl 1996), socially constructed (Taylor 1993, 2001) rather than static (Putnam 1997; Hawes 1974); and fluid, even fragmented, (Boje 1998) rather than fixed.

I adopt the theoretical postulation of Taylor and colleagues that organizations exist in the talking of a collective act (Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 1996) and in the context of pre-existent conversations (Taylor 1993). In their postulation,

> Organization is a construction [of text (Cooren and Taylor 1997, p. 223)] made out of conversation. We support it by our talk, but we do not unilaterally define it; it had to have been there for us to enter into (because we would otherwise not even exist as social beings), and it will continue when we leave it, however much our leaving may shock it and lead to its transformation (Taylor 1995, p.22).

Conversation refers to the activities of creating interpretation (Taylor et al. 1996). Text, meanwhile, is the content of conversation or the interpretation (created in conversation that includes interpretation of the conversation itself) in material form.

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Story as Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

In this study, I assume that story is a text, an interpretation of conversation (Taylor 2001; Taylor et al. 1996; Taylor 1995; Taylor 1993) and that the organization is in the stories people tell. In here I will illustrate that in the talking of a collective act, in the telling of story, organization is structured and, in ongoing conversation or interaction restructured.

I also assume that as an interpretation from one point of view, a story is a voice (Boyce 1996). A voice is "a stance or position from which to speak" (Putnam, Phillips and Chapman 1996 as cited by Putnam 2001) and "embodies who can speak, when and in what ways" (Putnam 2001; Mumby and Stohl 1996; Smircich and Calás 1987). Voices are knowledge claims. Some voices can be heard louder than other voices muting other knowledge claims in the process.

I further assume that story is "created from collectives that are speaking through the individual" and that by focusing on "how accounts are produced" or on how a story is told, it is possible to locate "a person's story within a framework of social and historical discourses" (Hardin 2001, p. 14).

In this study on research collaboration, I use story in these three senses: ontologically (as an explanation of organization as a temporary phenomenon), epistemologically (as a voice, a knowledge claim), and methodologically (as an approach to understanding meaning system or system of discourse). Particularly, I define story as a sequence of events (Ricouer as cited by Boje 2001) moving from an initial state to

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a final state (Greimas 1987 as cited by Cooren and Taylor 1997) implying meaning or interpretation, the meaning being in the narrative sequence (Hardin 2001). The accounts made by the members of the researched community in conversation with me transformed in transcript form constitute the story in this study.

The Dissertation as Story

I also present the dissertation as a story to suggest that science as organized knowledge is also communicatively constituted (Craig 1999; Lindlof 1995; Anderson 1987; Smircich and Calas 1987) and that even "science is storytelling" (Lyotard 1984 as cited by Boje, Fitzgibbons and Steingard 1996, p. 60). As such, science is a site of multiple stories and multiple voices (Putnam 2001; Craig 1999; Taylor et al. 1996) and as story can be told in many ways, so science can be presented in many ways.

This dissertation is just one of the many stories that can be told about research collaboration. Like other stories, this dissertation contains the basic elements such as research problem, review of literature, research methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. But unlike other stories, the dissertation is told unconventionally. As a story, the dissertation tells a sequence of events moving from an initial to a final state and as a story, its meaning is unfolding and its sense understood only in the end.

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CHAPTER II

RESEARCHING RESEARCH COLLABORATION: WHOSE STORY?

Research Collaboration as Site of Multiple Stories: The Setting

Research collaboration is a site where polyphonic (multiple story plots) and polysemous (multiple ways of interpretation) voices (Boje 1999) can be heard. In this chapter, I relate the research problem of the study in terms of a muted voice (of a group of people) in the research collaboration discourse, the epistemological meaning of discourse being "a system of possibilities in the creation of knowledge" (Foucault 1980 as cited by Mumby 1997, p.2).

To suggest that the setting is "saturated communicationally" (Taylor 1993, p. 112) or "linguistically preconstituted" (Thatchenkery 2001, p. 116), I widen the review of knowledge on research collaboration to include views/voices or knowledge claims not only as written in the literatures but also as articulated in practitioners' talk such as conferences on research collaboration making theoretical and practical discourses (Craig 1999) sit side by side at one negotiating table.

The Research Manager's Story: The Dominant Voice

Research collaboration as an organizational phenomenon was a topic of interest to me, or saying it more philosophically, it was a discourse I was in, as a researcher at the former Research Management Center of the University of the Philippines Los

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Baños (UPLB) before I undertook my graduate study beginning December 1995 at the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) through the German Academic Exchange Service (or DAAD) scholarship administered by the SEAMEO Center for Research and Graduate Study in Agriculture (SEARCA).

Sometime in September 1997, while exploring what field could provide an empirical grounding for this study, I received a memo from my scholarship administrator requesting scholars to align our dissertation researches along agriculture and environment related themes. Earlier, reading the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Directory of Products, Services and Expertise, I noticed there were many instances of collaborative research in forestry. Forestry came close to environment so as a situated scholar I bound my study within forestry research.

From the same directory I looked for one completed collaborative research in forestry noting the researchers involved. I then made an appointment with their lead researcher to have an idea of her understanding of collaborative research. While waiting for her on our appointed meeting, I took the opportunity to also arrange a meeting with her co-researcher whose office was in the same building and who happened to be my scholarship coordinator in UPM. The co-researcher suggested that if I want to get sensitized to the issues in forestry research collaboration I could join a three-day international seminar on emerging institutional arrangements for forestry research to be held in Chiang Mai Thailand in December 1997. He indicated his support (as my scholarship coordinator) should I decide to go.

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And so I went to get informed of whom to involve in this study. There in Chiang Mai I listened, observed and occasionally asked some participants (who sat beside me during sessions and meal times) some questions about research collaboration.

To me, the Chiang Mai seminar can be considered a managerial conversation, the 80 or so participants being mostly research administrators and managers of forestry research institutions in the Asia-Pacific region. For forestry research managers/administrators, research collaboration is an environmentally-driven and formally forged partnership based on technical expertise as inscribed in the following story:

> Technological advance and the increasing complexity of sustainable forest management suggest that no single institution would be able to have all the expertise, resources and skills within its walls and collaboration and networking will become imperative. Rapid developments in communication/information technologies will facilitate the process. Strategic alliances of research organizations and clients could become an important arrangement for research.
>
> In this context, it is important to examine the ability of existing organizations to adapt to changes and develop partnerships. (Excerpt from the publication that documented the seminar proceedings, Nair et al. in Enters et al. 1998, pp. 5-6)

The research collaboration story in the Chiang Mai seminar is a reproduction of what is inscribed in a number of research collaboration literature (see for instance Van der Meer et al. 1996; Bonaccorsi and Piccaluga 1994; Bloedon and Stokes 1994; Parker 1992; Dill 1990; Crow 1984; Ruscio 1984).

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If discourse is "a system of possibilities in the creation of knowledge" (Foucault 1980 as cited by Mumby 1997, p. 2), then the research collaboration discourse is dominated by the managerial voice on both practical and theoretical grounds, suggesting that the existing knowledge on research collaboration is anchored on only one claim: that research collaboration is an externally induced and technically defined formal arrangement. As a centered discourse, the research managers' story opened up other discursive possibilities (Deetz and Mumby 1990).

A Space for Researchers' Story: The Research Problem

From the active view of communication, there are other existing collaborative relationships but unheard in the research managers' story. I locate these structures in the muted voice of researchers. Researchers not just research administrators/ managers can speak on behalf of the collectivity (Taylor et al. 1996). If organization is in the stories people tell, the organization in the researchers' story is no less an organization than in the research managers' story.

The silence of the forestry researchers' voice in the Chiang Mai seminar brought me back to where I began-- conversing with the researchers again.

In June 1998, I made a second appointment with the lead researcher with whom I had an initial conversation on her collaborative research understanding and experiences. Since then, until January 1999, I had conversed with 29 other forestry academics/researchers from three Southeast Asian universities, namely, Universiti

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