

UNDERSTANDING SHIFTING POWER RELATIONS WITHIN AND ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS: A CRITICAL GENRE ANALYSIS

NATALIA LEVINA

New York University

WANDA J. ORLIKOWSKI

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Drawing on an in-depth qualitative study of a consulting project, we examine how conditions of novelty and ambiguity on interorganizational engagements produce inconsistent norms and expectations for guiding project interaction. Clients and consultants attempt to resolve the resulting discursive tensions while also increasing their organization's influence on the project. As diverse institutional contexts offer multiple legitimate ways of practicing, agents draw on such alternatives to renegotiate power relations. We develop a theoretical framework and empirical approach for understanding how discursive resources from diverse institutional contexts can be used to transform power relations within and between organizations.

Modern organizational practice involves a large number of multiparty relationships in which members from diverse organizations work together on joint projects (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004). Researchers have highlighted the importance of the power relations that arise in these kinds of interorganizational projects as agents negotiate a variety of interests, identities, and interpretations to engage in shared interactions (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004). When such multiparty relationships involve novelty (e.g., unknown participants, new technologies, or unfamiliar domains), power relations become even more salient because novelty generates ambiguity—that is, multiple interpretations, contradictions, or disagreements about boundaries, principles, or solutions (Alvesson, 1993; Weick, 1987). The inherent ambiguity of novel situations creates openings for the reconfiguration of power relations and status hierarchies, particularly when multiple claims for legitimacy coexist (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Ambiguity is amplified when the agents participating in the multiparty endeavor

encompass varying degrees of experience (e.g., newcomers and old-timers) or diverse expertise.

Research has examined the role of power in institutional change (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991; Seo & Creed, 2002), group interaction (Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Sell, Lovaglia, Mannix, Samuelson, & Wilson, 2004; Tjosvold, Andrews, & Struthers, 1991), and individual identities and reputations (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Krackhardt, 1990). Yet the organizational literature does not offer a deep understanding of power dynamics within and across communities and organizations (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Hardy & Clegg, 1996). Even in the group status literature, where issues involving membership in diverse groups with inconsistent status claims are pronounced, there is no clear articulation of how power relations are negotiated (Berger, Balkwell, Norman, & Smith, 1992).

Our purpose in this study was to address these gaps in the literature. We conducted an in-depth field study of a novel, multiparty consulting engagement involving an Internet professional services firm (Eserve) and one of its clients, a publishing company (Pubco).¹ Consulting engagements typically involve extensive negotiation and considerable tension, and as such, they offer a particularly valuable window into multiparty power dynamics (Clegg, Kornberger, &

We would like to thank the members of Eserve and Pubco who participated in this study. We are grateful for the helpful comments we received on earlier versions of this manuscript from Nils Fonstad, Jennifer Howard-Grenville, Michael O'Leary, Carsten Østerlund, Michael Regnier, and Julie Rennecker. We also acknowledge the valuable guidance provided by the associate editor and reviewers during the revision process.

¹ The names of organizations, their members, titles, products, and technology applications have been disguised.

Rhodes, 2004; Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Elkjaer, Flensburg, Mouritsen, & Willmott, 1991; Sabherwal, 2003). These dynamics are likely to be even more acute in the context of novelty, and the Eserve-Pubco consulting engagement entailed at least two forms of novelty: novel relations (Eserve and Pubco had not collaborated with each other before, and only two out of ten Eserve team members had worked together before), and novel domains (Eserve had no experience in the publishing industry, and Pubco had no experience developing integrated Internet-based systems). We examined two primary research questions in our study: How do the everyday actions of participating agents shape power relations on their novel joint project? and, How do these power dynamics influence agents' power positions within their own organizations?

Clegg et al. noted that "consulting is first and foremost a linguistic activity—a discursive practice through which realities are enacted" (2004: 36). Discourse, as many scholars have suggested (Foucault, 1980; Hardy & Phillips, 2004), is inseparable from power. We thus adopted a discursive lens to address our research questions, focusing specifically on how participants communicated with each other. Researchers of power and status in task groups have observed that alternative power structures may come into conflict in heterogeneous settings—for example, status might be contested by an expert woman and a nonexpert man (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Focusing on discourse helped us shed some light on the long-standing, open question of how agents negotiate power relations in settings with conflicting status claims.

Drawing on our study, we articulate a theoretical framework in which we propose more generally that under conditions of novelty and ambiguity, the production and transformation of discursive practices may shift power positions within organizations, while also renegotiating power relations between the organizations participating in a joint project. Moreover, agents marginalized in their own organizations may have opportunities to try to exercise power discursively even when they do not have the apparent capacity—hierarchical authority, expert credentials, or economic resources—to do so. To the extent that others accept their attempts, power relations may be shifted. Agents' discursive actions in multiparty engagements can thus have significant implications not just for the collective endeavor (e.g., the joint project), but also for the organizations involved and their institutional contexts more broadly.

PERSPECTIVES ON DISCOURSE AND POWER RELATIONS IN PRACTICE

Drawing on a practice perspective, we take as our departure point the idea that power relations are produced, reproduced, and transformed through the everyday practices of agents (Bourdieu, 1977). By *practices*, we mean the recurrent structured activities that people perform to get their work done (Schatzki, 2005). *Discursive practices* refer to those aspects of practices that entail the use of language in interaction. Given our interest in power dynamics and discursive practices, we draw on Bourdieu's theory of practice as well as the literature on organizational discourse.

Power Relations and Fields of Practice

Research in both the organizational and sociological literatures has pointed out the potential for power conflicts to arise when members of multiple groups or communities interact (Clegg, 1989b; Osterlund & Carlile, 2005; Pfeffer, 1983). For example, within professional communities, power tends to be associated with expertise and experience, so that when members of multiple communities interact, multiple status claims coexist. Alternatively, as Weber (1978) argued, in bureaucratic organizations the power of structural authority is an important mechanism for integrating diverse functional groups. When several organizations participate in novel multiparty engagements, a number of status hierarchies are involved, and an overarching power structure is often absent, especially when such engagements are new. Power ambiguities and conflict are thus likely to be significant. Yet little is known about how power dynamics play out under such conditions.

To understand the dynamics of power relations in multiparty engagements, we draw on Bourdieu's practice theory (1977, 1996). Bourdieu (1996) proposed the useful analytic concept of a "field of practice" to point to the diverse and nested systems of structured social relations agents enact in their everyday practices. The social relations constituting fields are power relations, which regulate positions that agents occupy within a particular field. Such positions reflect and reinforce various status distinctions such as organizational affiliation, hierarchical authority, tenure, gender, age, ethnicity, and so on. Besides the distinctions that agents bring to a particular field from other fields, a set of power relations is also associated with the unique status distinctions agents produce within that field (e.g., the distinction between experts and novices in the field). These power relations shape agents' capabil-

ities and the resources they can access, and thus, the possibilities for their action. Bourdieu distinguished four types of resources (or capital) that agents can accumulate: economic, cultural/intellectual, social (as in ties to other agents), and symbolic. Symbolic resources are distinctive in that they signify the capital that the other three types of resources can take on when their influence on a field becomes visible in the form of prestige, status, reputation, titles, etc. Power relations are a form of social structure, produced and reproduced through the everyday practices of field members (Clegg, 1989a; Giddens, 1984). In many cases, these structures become institutionalized within organizations and interorganizational fields, as they guide action without invoking much reflection by the agents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Agents' participation in a particular field both ties them together through their pursuit of a collective endeavor and divides them on the basis of their different attainments of common stakes. Bourdieu (1996) argued that tenure (and an associated interest in sustaining distinctions based on varying lengths of tenure) is a central source of power within a field. This is the source of power most emphasized by scholars studying "communities of practice": these communities strongly differentiate old-timers (masters) from newcomers (apprentices) (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Bourdieu pointed out, however, that there are multiple sources of power within fields and that agents can draw on distinctions and resources from the variety of fields in which they participate. The nested nature of power relations produced by agents' positions within multiple fields is critical to understanding this process. As agents from diverse fields come together, they can draw on their positions in one field in an attempt to shift power relations in another field. Other practice theorists (e.g., Giddens, 1984) have similarly noted that membership in multiple communities gives rise to a capacity to transform power structures within certain communities. Yet, empirical accounts of this transformative process, and its enactment in novel and ambiguous conditions, are still scarce (Hardy & Clegg, 1996).

Power Relations and Discursive Practices

Bourdieu argued that the power to produce discourse constitutes symbolic capital and affords an important means of shaping social reality (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). In organizations, discourse includes a complex array of "texts," such as job titles, policies, procedures, and methodologies (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Adopting the

view that discourse is "situated symbolic action" (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004), one can see how shaping and reshaping such texts through discursive practices constitutes the core of organizational life (Weick, 1987). This is especially the case in management consulting, where discourse is the primary means through which work is performed.

Organizational scholars have illustrated the value of focusing on discursive practices and their transformation as a way of understanding power relations within institutional fields (Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). For example, Hardy and Phillips noted that discourse "constitutes power relations by holding in place meanings associated with concepts, objects, and subject positions, which distribute power and privileges among actors" (2004: 300). Because discourse inevitably involves internal tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictions, it constitutes the discursive space for both the contestation and negotiation of power. Discourse is thus never able to totally determine social reality, as "agents can act self-interestedly and work towards discursive change that privileges their interests and goals" (Hardy & Phillips, 2004: 300).

Although these accounts argue persuasively that power relations can be challenged and transformed through discourse, they do not explain how and why such transformations occur at the nexus of organizations, particularly in situations involving novelty and ambiguity. What is the source of challenges and alternatives to institutionalized discursive practices? How do the power positions of different agents shape their purposes and capabilities in changing an established discourse, in which ways, and with what consequences? We turn now to the concept of genre, which provides a useful tool for understanding and analyzing change in discursive practices within organizations.

Genres

Like the notions of "script" (Barley, 1986), "move" (Pentland, 1992), and "routine" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), genre is a concept used to describe what people do in practice, specifically, in their discursive practices. Orlikowski and Yates defined genres as "socially recognized types of communicative actions—such as memos, meetings, expense forms, training seminars—that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes" (1994: 542). Some of these communicative actions involve a sequence of interrelated genres (e.g., a meeting may involve presentation and discussion genres) referred to as a "genre system" (Bazerman, 1995). The concept of

genre highlights the recurrent and situated nature of discursive practices and provides robust methodological tools for studying the production, reproduction, and change of discourse. For example, in studying the electronic discourse of a group of computer scientists, Orlikowski and Yates (1994) identified the repertoire of genres enacted by the participants over time and showed how these discursive actions reflected their collective purposes as well as the shared norms and relations of their occupational community.

The concept of genre serves our analytic purposes better than other related concepts. In particular, the concept of script (Goffman, 1967) points to the importance of microlevel discursive interaction but does not emphasize the significance of the practice in question being socially recognized by actors. For example, the scripts analyzed in Barley (1986) were not forms of interaction recognized by the participants, but rather patterns identified by the researcher. The notion of a move (Goffman, 1981; Pentland, 1992) emphasizes intentionality and focuses on individuals' actions toward other people or objects. We use it to discuss specific discursive moves initiated by particular actors. However, the concept is not sufficient to describe interaction among actors as it unfolds over time and involves multiple moves and countermoves—a central aspect of multiparty projects and thus our analysis. Finally, the widely used concept of routine is not centered on discursive interaction. It has also been operationalized in various ways and at different levels and does not offer a consistent methodological approach for analyzing discursive practices (Pentland & Feldman, 2005).

In their more recent work, Orlikowski and Yates (2002) argued that genres are recurrently enacted structures that serve as institutionalized templates for social interaction and, as such, are discursive resources that shape expectations about discursive practices. Agents involved in enacting genres such as team meetings or academic reviews have expectations about the roles they and others play in the process, the reasons for engaging in the activity, the forms of the texts to be produced, the timing and location of the communications, as well as the actual sequence of discursive moves (actions taken by a given agent to shape discourse) involved. Genres have implications for power relations in that their enactment reveals who may or may not initiate or receive certain genres, when or where they may or may not be performed, and how. As Yates and Orlikowski noted, "When enacted, genres therefore represent forms of what Schryer (2002) calls symbolic power, serving to both enable and constrain types of interaction and modes of engagement"

(2007: 71). Control over genre enactment is thus an exercise of power.

Prior genre studies have focused on how genres afford collaboration and discursive change (Kryder, 1999; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Yates, Orlikowski, & Okamura, 1999); here we instead examine how the enactment of genres reproduces and transforms power relations. For example, the enactment of an academic review genre system can be seen as a discursive practice coordinating the group of academics engaged in improving the quality of research papers, but it can also be viewed as a structure differentiating them into multiple roles (editors, reviewers, and authors) with distinct interests, discursive resources, and power relations.

In this article we are interested in how agents' competencies in and control over genre enactment shapes power relations on novel multiparty projects, and how these in turn influence the agents' power positions in their distinct organizations. We addressed these questions in the context of a longitudinal and in-depth field study of a consulting engagement.

RESEARCH SETTINGS AND METHODS

The consulting project we studied involved an Internet consulting firm (Eserve) and one of its clients (Pubco), interacting over a number of months to develop a web-based strategy for Pubco, as well as to build the website to support this new initiative. Before describing our research methods, we provide an overview of each setting and its corresponding power relations, formulated on the basis of an intensive nine-month field study.

Eserve

At the time of the study, in late 1999 and early 2000, Eserve was a young, rapidly growing professional services firm engaged in end-to-end production of "business to consumer" ("B2C") applications. It was enjoying what its CEO called "a rising wave" of demand for Internet consulting services and turning away clients because it could not cope with the demand. Historically, Eserve had its roots in technology development. It then added strategic consulting services by hiring MBAs and management consultants (collectively referred to as "strategists" at Eserve) and, in mid 1997, in response to competition from interactive advertising agencies, it further expanded into graphic design and marketing by hiring specialists in these areas (referred to as "designers"). Tenure in the firm was rewarded through quick promotions. Outside industry expe-

rience, unless it was in the “web space,” was largely discounted.

During the first six months of 2000, Eserve grew from 400 to 700 employees. During this period of rapid change, Eserve management promoted the organic growth of the firm and the integration of three professional “disciplines” (technology, strategy, and design) as its key competitive advantage:

Real innovation is at the intersection of disciplines. Culture is the key—collaboration, sharing, mutual respect. This is easy to start, but hard to scale. (Eserve CEO, public speech, March 2000)²

To accommodate this expansion and facilitate integration, Eserve employees (or “Eservers”) were located in an open-space work environment where newcomers could learn from the old-timers through frequent interaction at desks, in the kitchen, and by the pool table.

The primary status distinction producing a unique set of power relations at Eserve was that between *newcomers* (recently hired Eserve employees) and *old-timers* (officially termed “Eserve-experienced” employees), who had typically been with the firm for more than nine months, who knew the web, were fluent in Eserve’s vocabulary and methodology, and understood its history and collaborative ethos. This distinction was further reinforced by professional differences, as many of the technology and strategy consultants had joined Eserve earlier, while most of the graphic designers were relative newcomers. At the same time, many old-timers were what the industry referred to as “Renaissance people,” individuals with varied interests and skills who could do technical development while also understanding the principles of graphic design. Not surprisingly, strategists and old-timer technologists occupied key leadership positions on projects and in the firm.

These distinctions of tenure and profession were first made visible through Eserve’s recruitment practices. Eserve sought young candidates (late twenties, early thirties) who knew the web space, could think on their feet in difficult consulting situations, and had elite educational backgrounds. As the company could not grow by only hiring “Renaissance people” (there were too few of them), newcomers were typically specialized in a particular functional domain. Applicants underwent three rounds of intensive interviews, a process that eliminated most candidates. Only a “select few” were hired.

Once hired, new recruits were enrolled in the three-week New Hire Training Program (NHTP), which was, in the organizers’ words, “an education, training, and enculturation” program where old-timers explained Eserve’s methodology and culture (“the Eserve way”) and shared “war stories” about the early days at Eserve. Newcomers learned that Eserve’s methodology specified three phases: (1) a *planning* phase, in which strategic initiatives and conceptual requirements for a proposed website were detailed, (2) a *prototyping* phase, in which the website’s functional requirements and technical architecture were specified and a prototype developed, and (3) a *development* phase, when code for the website was produced and then implemented in the client organization. At the end of the NHTP, newcomers participated in a “mini-project” to get some practical experience using the Eserve methodology.

Professional distinctions were readily apparent in the NHTP content. Organizational culture and strategy topics dominated the agenda, and only four out of several dozen sessions were devoted to technical and design topics. Most of the company leaders who spoke at the training sessions were strategists. They emphasized that what differentiated Eserve from traditional IT or management consulting firms was its “truly collaborative approach” in working with clients. To this end, Eserve asked each client to nominate a “core team” of relevant business and information technology (IT) managers who would commit 40 percent of their time to the project. Although clients’ business expertise was valued, Eserve’s assumption was that clients knew little about the web space and needed to be guided through Eserve’s website development method.

Pubco

Pubco was the educational book division of a traditional, multidivisional publishing company. It had strong hierarchical and functional distinctions characteristic of this mature industry (Epstein, 2001). Discursive practices, identities, and roles were well-established, standardized, and widely documented (Epstein, 2001; Korda, 1999). Seniority was heavily associated with industry tenure, which was, in turn, associated with age. The primary functional distinction in the publishing field was that between the editorial and production staff and the sales and marketing staff. Authors and illustrators dealt primarily with the former; booksellers and consumers interacted with the latter. The tension between these two groups was well known in the publishing industry (Epstein, 2001), and con-

² All quotations come from observational and interview data collected from December 1999 through September 2000. See details on data collection below.

flicts typically involved opposition between editorial control and marketing deadlines and budgets.

Unlike many of its competitors, Pubco had editorial staff in key managerial positions, and this editorial dominance was also reflected in Pubco's efforts to develop a brand around quality rather than sales volume. Technologists tended to be on the periphery of things at Pubco. In recent years, however, and particularly with the development of educational technology, Pubco's IT and web groups had grown in size and responsibility. The IT group supported the finance, sales, and marketing functions as well as the processes of book production and distribution. The web group supported the editorial development of books, producing individual websites for specific books.

By the late 1990s, Pubco had a website that had been built in an ad hoc fashion over time and consequently lacked an overarching brand strategy as well as navigational and content coherence. In the second half of 1999, Pubco's top executive—under pressure from the sales and marketing staff—concluded that Pubco needed a strategic, well-integrated website that would target a wider audience of consumers and enhance the brand in the marketplace. As a senior Pubco executive noted in an interview,

Basically, we have crashed into the “web wall.” And I think we have been spending a lot of time and money on developing materials for the web, but we understood that our knowledge is limited. (March 2000)

This realization prompted the senior management team at Pubco to start looking for an external partner to help with its strategic web integration project, eventually selecting Eserve. Typically, Pubco hired consultants in technical, marketing, and graphic design areas when needed to supplement its staff. Most such consultants were viewed as “a necessary evil,” and Pubco's senior managers generally complained about arrogant consultants who were paid too much. They insisted that Pubco's business was complex and that consultants needed to respect Pubco's expertise in it. The same viewpoint was extended to Eserve, as one senior Pubco manager observed about her early conversations with Eserve consultants:

I tried to make it clear to Eserve that if they do not get an understanding quickly of who we are and how we do business, they would fail just like other consultants with whom we had worked had failed. (interview, March 2000)

The Eserve-Pubco project officially started in mid January 2000 and involved the articulation of

Pubco's web strategy, development of a fresh design and new functionality for an integrated Pubco website, and implementation of that website. Pubco's senior managers viewed the estimated cost for the project, about 6 percent of Pubco's annual operating income, as a major investment for their firm.

Data Collection and Analysis

Our research study focused on the everyday practices of Eserve and, more specifically, on the Eserve-Pubco project, where participants from diverse organizational and professional backgrounds interacted to develop an integrated website. Data were collected by one of us through a longitudinal, ethnographic field study (Agar, 1980; Schwartzman, 1989; Van Maanen, 1979) involving nonparticipant observation and interviews from December 1999 through September 2000. Participants were told that we were interested in the communication and work practices of people collaborating across boundaries. In January 2000, the field researcher attended the Eserve's NHTP and following that joined the Eserve-Pubco project for six months of intensive observations and interactions. This project seemed most interesting because it involved a hundred-year-old firm in the highly institutionalized environment of publishing working with a young, dynamic firm in the emerging and unsettled environment of web-based consulting. We thus expected collaboration challenges to be particularly salient on this project. In addition to observing the Eserve-Pubco project, the field researcher continued observation of non-project-related activities within Eserve, including hiring, staffing, R&D, knowledge management, formal social activities such as “town hall meetings,” and informal social activities such as meals, breaks, and parties.

Daily observations on the project focused on meetings and meeting preparations (Schwartzman, 1989). During the first (planning) phase, which lasted seven weeks, the field researcher spent four days a week on the project, and in addition to ongoing observation, she conducted formal interviews (lasting from one to three hours) with participants from both Eserve (9 members) and Pubco (10 members). During the second (prototyping) phase, she spent every other week observing the project for four days a week. Upon completion of this phase, in June 2000, she conducted another round of formal interviews with all participants (12 at Eserve and 11 at Pubco). Two follow-up visits to the project were made at the beginning and end of the final (development) phase.

Observations were documented as field notes and typed up daily (an average of 20 typed pages per day). These included various project activities, especially communication events, such as meetings, joint design sessions, and e-mail exchanges. Interviews focused on participants' interactions with others on the project, what they saw as facilitating and constraining their communication and work progress, and how they interpreted and evaluated the outcomes of various project activities. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Additional data were collected from Eserve's personnel archive, its electronic document repository ("E-share"), the project's e-mail archive, and other physical and electronic project documents. Industry reports and books on Internet consulting and the publishing industry were also reviewed to inform our analysis. These data helped us form an understanding of each organization's history, practices, and prominent distinctions. Project documents helped us triangulate interview and observational data about various communicative actions, purposes, and outcomes.

Data analysis was qualitative and involved detailed close reading of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents, which led to the development of rich descriptions of the research sites. These descriptions helped us identify key distinctions that were habitually produced and reproduced within Eserve, Pubco, and the management consulting field more generally.³ Some of these status distinctions were unique to each setting. For example, as noted above, being an old-timer at Eserve was a specific distinction that differentiated these agents from Eserve newcomers and agents outside Eserve. As old-timers, these agents had personal relations with the founders, had typically built the first websites that established Eserve's reputation, and had employee numbers lower than 100 (indicating they had joined Eserve in the first two years of its founding). We determined the key distinctions at Pubco through our archival analysis of the industry's history, structure, and power relations (Epstein, 2001). We also analyzed power relations specific to Pubco, observing, for example, that Pubco's divisional CEO had risen through the editorial rather than sales or marketing ranks, an unusual career path for this industry.

³ In identifying key distinctions at Eserve and Pubco, we used a method resembling cluster analysis and described by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 230). This method involves creating a matrix of agents and properties and then looking for those properties of agents that best explain (1) differences in other properties and (2) differences in the qualitatively observed power relations. A full description of this analysis can be found in Levina (2001).

In addition to assembling rich descriptions of each setting, we used several specific techniques to address our research questions. The first, *genre analysis*, identified and described the written and oral communicative genres and genre systems (which we will refer to generally as "genres") evident in the management consulting field, Eserve, Pubco, and the Eserve-Pubco project. For the more mature field of management consulting, many of the typical forms of communication—such as the client-consultant project status meeting—were documented in industry books (Wickham, 2004) and understood (with some differences) by members of both Eserve and Pubco. In other cases, genre templates were recorded in Eserve's online repositories, and expectations for how to enact them were briefly reviewed during the New Hire Training Program. Genre expectations were also evident in interview transcripts, comments made during project interactions, and observations of repeated genre enactments. Over 50 genres and genre systems were documented in this way (Levina, 2001: 247–268).

We then performed a *critical genre analysis* to untangle and explain how the power relations among participants on the project were being reproduced or challenged. This analysis involved examining how control over genre enactment was exercised (for instance, who set the time and location of a meeting, who was responsible for the agenda, etc.), as well as who had competence in and participated in the various genre enactments, and how. For each of the genres identified in our genre analysis, we specified the status distinctions implicated in its enactment. Tables 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the subset of genres pertinent to our analysis, respectively providing examples of genres particular to the management consulting field, Eserve, and Pubco.

As we analyzed these genres, we observed that on a number of occasions there were significant differences in the way the genres were described in the official documents or talked about among old-timers and how they were enacted in practice. Although it is common to find variations in the enactment of genres (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994) and organizational routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), what was surprising was that agents occasionally drew on quite different (officially unacknowledged) genres to accomplish a formally recognized communicative purpose or, alternatively, followed a well-recognized template to accomplish an unofficial purpose. Many of the differences we observed reflected ambiguities associated with enacting genres in the novel setting of the Eserve-

TABLE 1
Examples of Traditional Management Consulting Genres

Genre and Purpose	Genre Form
<p><i>Directive to consultants</i></p> <p>Provide directions to consultants regarding the purpose and scope of a project.</p>	<p>A genre system that includes such genres as request for proposal, statement of work, contracting, and other documents in which clients articulate their goals for a project. The degree of specificity in the enactment of the genre varies widely, as some consultants are expected to execute a specific task on the basis of precise directions from the client with respect to content, process, or both, and other consultants may be hired to generate recommendations to the client on a wide range of issues by following their own methods.</p>
<p><i>Client consultant status meeting</i></p> <p>Review activities and deliverables, confirm plans for the future, raise and resolve issues, allocate or reallocate resources.</p>	<p>A face-to-face meeting in which consultants report on the work done during the time period, ask clients for input on unresolved issues, and raise new issues. Clients approve work, raise new issues, discuss resource allocation, make final decisions on issues, and set deadlines. Includes two subgenres: The project management status meeting among managers and sponsors, and the working group (or subteam) status meeting among line participants.</p>
<p><i>Client recommendation preparation meeting</i></p> <p>Consultants prepare a presentation to be delivered to clients.</p>	<p>A face-to-face meeting facilitated by senior consultants held to integrate individual pieces of analysis into a unified presentation (usually shortly before delivery of the client recommendation presentation). Involves discussion of agenda and deliverables for the meeting. During the meeting, consultants discuss which recommendations and analysis and in which form to present to clients and how the clients might react to the presentation. This often involves consideration of what clients will like (their interests and internal politics) and what adds credibility to consultants (e.g., tangible deliverables, demonstration of methodological approach, quantitative analysis, etc.). An argument is built to support each recommendation to be presented.</p>
<p><i>Client recommendation presentation</i></p> <p>Consultants present their analytical work to clients and clients learn about and judge consultants' work.</p>	<p>A face-to-face meeting during which senior consultants (often a project manager or a client partner) present results of the consultants' analysis. Clients ask questions and comment on the ideas. The consultants respond to questions and comments.</p>
<p><i>Internal status meeting</i></p> <p>Project participants from either client or consultant organizations meet separately to share their concerns and issues about a project and get updates from a client-consultant status meeting.</p>	<p>A face-to-face meeting involving project managers and participants from the respective consultant and client organizations meeting separately to ask for work status and issues encountered in various processes within their own organizations. During this meeting new tasks are identified and assigned to participants and deadlines are set. The managers also debrief the team about client-consultant status meetings. This meeting often includes discussion of individual perceptions of partners' competence and work attitudes. The respective project managers decide when to hold the meetings (usually in-between client-consultant status meetings), who participates, and what is to be discussed.</p>

Pubco collaboration, or involved new actors (e.g., Eserve newcomers) unfamiliar with official genres. These differences led us to make an analytical distinction between genres that were “espoused” (prescribed or expected) and those that were “enacted” (performed in practice).⁴ Figure 1 indicates institu-

tional sources of espoused genres drawn on to enact genres in an instance of a particular novel multiparty engagement (in this case, the Eserve-Pubco project).

Distinguishing between espoused and enacted genres on the project allowed us to concentrate on examples of significant differences between the two resulting in some discursive conflict. We identified instances of discursive conflict both in observations of interactions in the field and in the interviews. Specifically, we sought evidence of either confusion or disagreement among agents as to what genre to follow or how to do so, as well as evidence of situations in which genres enacted

⁴ This distinction between espoused and enacted genres parallels that between “ostensive” and “performative” routines made by Feldman and Pentland (2003). We use the espoused-enacted distinction because the notion of enactment is central to the genre lens we draw on here, and to Giddens’s (1984) “structuration” theory, on which it is based.

TABLE 2
Examples of Eserve Web System Development Genres

Genre and Purpose	Genre Form
<i>Brainstorming workshop</i> Brainstorm ideas about strategic direction and functionality of the future website ("strategic initiatives").	A facilitated face-to-face workshop including both client and consulting teams. Starts with consultants conducting an "ice-breaker" activity. Consultants then lead the workshop by asking clients to participate in brainstorming activities, which rely on Eserve-specific terminology. This often includes props such as funny hats and play dough to facilitate creativity. Sticky notes, flip charts, and a white board are used to record ideas.
<i>Rationalization workshop preparation</i> Consolidate and further discuss brainstormed initiatives.	Consultants document the brainstormed initiatives and group them into related clusters. Consultants discuss the initiatives more deeply in light of their expertise.
<i>Rationalization workshop</i> "Rationalize" initiatives generated during the brainstorming workshop.	A facilitated face-to-face workshop including both client and consulting teams. Consultants lead the workshop by discussing the brainstormed initiatives with clients, potentially adding new initiatives as a result. Consultants draw on their expertise and analysis conducted to date. Clients draw on their business knowledge. Extensive use of Eserve-specific terms in discussion. Sticky notes, flip charts, white board, and slide presentations are used to facilitate the discussion.
<i>Prioritization workshop preparation</i> "Prioritize" the brainstormed initiatives.	Consultants offer clients a list of 15 prioritization criteria that were used on prior Eserve projects. Clients weigh each criterion offline (in an internal status meeting) and return the list to the consultants. Consultants use the results of their market, competitive, and economic analysis to rank "rationalized" initiatives on the basis of the given criteria. An automated algorithm is used to compare various initiatives and produce the final ranking of initiatives.
<i>Prioritization workshop</i> Present the results of the prioritization analysis to clients and discuss which initiatives to propose to the client's steering committee.	A facilitated face-to-face workshop including both client and consulting teams. Consultants lead the workshop by presenting the results of the prioritization exercise and highlighting the top recommendations. Clients ask questions of clarification and discuss the recommendations. A few initiatives are selected as recommendations to be presented to the client's steering committee for potential implementation in the prototyping phase. Initiatives are then approved by clients and implemented by Eserve.
<i>System requirements definition</i> Refine the functional, graphical, and technical features of the proposed website.	A set of face-to-face meetings conducted separately by requirements and technical subteams. The issues raised in one subteam that depend on input from the other subteam are communicated via status meetings. The technical subteam defines a way for implementing any functionality envisioned by the other subteams.
<i>Technical platform and architecture selection</i> Define the technical platform and architecture required for the new website.	Eserve technologists review client's existing systems and develop a plan for how the new system will function. They create a diagram of this functionality and write a document explaining how the new system will be implemented in the client's technical environment. They recommend their solution to clients, expecting clients to accept their recommendation as is.

by one agent (or group of agents) violated the expectations of another agent (or group of agents). In this way, we identified and analyzed 25 instances of discursive conflict in the first two phases of the project.⁵ Then, drawing on our critical genre analysis, we examined whether and how each instance of discursive conflict led to

the renegotiation of power relations on the project and/or shifts in power positions within each organization. This examination allowed us to explain how discursive practices produced, reproduced, or transformed social distinctions and associated power dynamics within and across fields of practice. In the following, we first discuss those discursive practices that reproduced power relations and then consider those practices that produced shifts in power relations.

⁵ There may of course have been more instances, but these were not observed by us.

TABLE 3
Examples of Pubco IT Request and Approval Genres

Genre and Purpose	Genre Form
<p><i>Cross-functional project meeting</i> Coordinate work to be done across departments at Pubco.</p>	<p>Editorial and production staff sets the agenda, defines and approves time lines and deadlines, and controls the budget. Sales and marketing and IT staff members are expected to provide input and follow the direction set by the editorial and production staff.</p>
<p><i>Editorial and production IT request and approval</i> Request a website for a new book or other editorial product (e.g., CD).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Editorial staff requests a web page for a book in a face-to-face meeting with the web group manager. 2. Editorial staff provides the content and graphics required to create the page. 3. The web group follows the editorial staff's directions to create a web page. In conversations, technical issues brought up by web group members are passed over by the editors as "out of our competency."
<p><i>Sales and marketing IT request and approval</i> Obtain an IT solution to meet sales and marketing business requirements.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sales and marketing managers meet with the IT director to request new IT features and applications. 2. The IT director responds to their request (often stating that it cannot be met fully within the IT budget and current IT architecture). 2. If the IT director accepts the request, she meets one-on-one with the finance VP to prioritize IT projects. 3. The finance VP decides whether to approve the sales and marketing requests based on overall budgets and business priorities. 4. If requests approved, the IT staff works with the sales and marketing managers to specify the new system's functionality. <p>In conversations, technical issues brought up by the IT director are passed over by business unit managers as "out of our competency."</p>
<p><i>System upgrade request and approval</i> Obtain financial resources to upgrade the technology and train the staff.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In a face-to-face meeting, the IT director asks the finance VP to allocate resources for a systems upgrade. 2. The IT director and the finance VP discuss the request. 3. The finance VP typically denies the requests giving preference to business unit requests over technology upgrades. <p>In conversations, technical issues brought up by the IT director are passed over by the finance VP as "out of my competency."</p>
<p><i>Directive to IT consultants</i> Inform consultants what they have been hired by Pubco to do.</p>	<p>A face-to-face meeting with consultants during which the IT director tells consultants what work she wants them to perform. Consultants ask for clarification and provide suggestions on how to perform the work. The IT director clarifies and incorporates suggestions as she sees fit. Consultants are expected to follow directions given by the IT director.</p>

REPRODUCING POWER RELATIONS THROUGH ENACTING GENRES

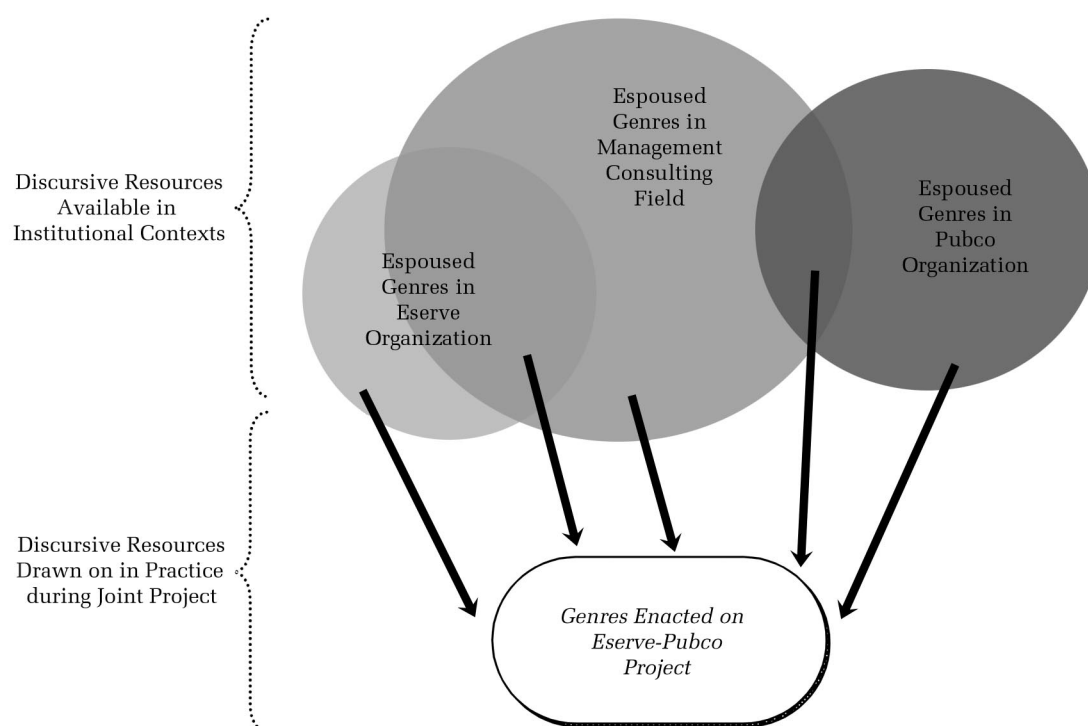
We consider the reproduction of existing power relations through the enactment of genres institutionalized in three settings relevant to the Eserve-Pubco project: the management consulting field and the organizations of Eserve and Pubco.

The Management Consulting Field

The management consulting field is characterized by opposing and complementary roles played by clients and consultants on projects. These roles are institutionalized through standard consulting

practices (Yakura, 2002). Since clients typically hire consultants to obtain access to their expertise, consultants are expected to demonstrate competency in the intellectual content of and methodological approach to the project. They are expected to establish credibility on these matters with the client. Clients, on the other hand, are typically holders of economic resources, because they pay the bills. They are expected to control project costs and outcomes by setting deadlines, instituting penalties, and approving work. At the end of the day, they face the economic consequences of consultants' recommendations (e.g., implementing the proposed initiatives).

FIGURE 1
Discursive Resources in Novel Multiparty Engagements



The genres that are part of discursive practices in the management consulting field include project bid genres, such as proposals, contracts, and statements of work; project planning genres, such as timelines and schedules; and various meeting genres, such as status meetings and client presentation preparation and delivery meetings (Wickham, 2004). By engaging in these various discursive practices, consultants and clients form expectations about each other and the way in which a project will move forward. Table 1 highlights a few prominent genres in the management consulting field and describes expectations associated with their purposes and forms. Enacting these genres helps consultants build credibility with their clients while also helping clients maintain control over economic resources on a project. For example, in a client-consultant status meeting, clients are expected to pose questions about the progress of work, while consultants are expected to respond to these queries in ways that demonstrate their competence. The discourse is often peppered with references to various “tangibles”—deliverables shown to the clients as indicators that consultants are performing as contracted and that clients are controlling consultants’ time (Yakura, 2002). Consultants often propose changes to the work scope, suggest solutions, and ask clients to add resources to the project or extend deadlines (reinforcing cli-

ents’ control over the economic resources). Clients, in turn, may (or may not) extend deadlines, allocate resources, prioritize suggestions, and approve changes.

Through the varying enactment of these genres, space for renegotiating clients’ and consultants’ institutionalized roles may open up. For example, clients may hire consultants to legitimate a strategy that a particular group of stakeholders has already developed (Williams, 2001). In this situation, clients will use their interactions with consultants (e.g., through the client-consultant status meeting) to shape the strategic agenda of a project and exercise control over the project’s intellectual and economic resources. In other situations, consultants may attempt to control both intellectual and economic resources by reporting more work than has been done (e.g., through the billing document genres) (Yakura, 2002).

The Eserve Organization

The key status distinctions within Eserve were those between old-timers and newcomers and those among professional groups (strategists, technologists, and designers). Through their organizational and project leadership positions, Eserve old-timers and strategists exerted considerable influence over projects’ intellectual and economic

resources. This influence is evident in the genres enacted on Eserve projects.

Table 2 highlights a few of these genres and describes the expectations of purpose and form associated with them. Eserve genres used highly specialized vocabulary, or what Eservers referred to as “consultant-speak” (e.g., “perform digital diagnostic” or “build audience architecture”). Most of these genres were described in the firm’s methodology and documented in E-share, its electronic document repository. These genres were repeatedly enacted by old-timers on other Eserve projects⁶ and taught to newcomers during the NHPT. Newcomers were also expected to ask old-timers for guidance in enacting these genres “the Eserve way.”

One of the principal genre systems in the planning phase of a consultancy project involved selecting and recommending strategic initiatives to be implemented in the client organization. This genre system consisted of three key workshops—brainstorming, rationalization, and prioritization—and planning activities to prepare for them. Workshop planning included consultants’ learning about the client’s business through client interviews, competitive assessment, market profiling, and consumer surveys, and then preparing a PowerPoint presentation summarizing their findings.

The prioritization workshop preparation genre is representative of the complexity built into Eserve’s methodology. In enacting this genre, clients rank 15 criteria. Eserve members then use these ranked criteria to evaluate the ideas for initiatives generated in the brainstorming session. The resulting ratings are then run through an automated reduction algorithm that, in “Eserve speak,” “spews out nice reports” indicating which initiatives to pursue.⁷ Clients then provide feedback on these results in the prioritization workshop and choose the top alternative to recommend to their in-house steering committee for the project.

Once a steering committee has approved a recommendation and funded the prototyping phase, Eservers and clients define and refine system requirements. Several subteams are formed, with the

requirements subteams specifying the desired features of the website and the technology subteams designing and building the functional prototype. Toward the end of the prototyping phase, Eserve technologists present their proposed technical architecture to the client. The Eserve methodology indicates that clients typically accept these proposals, as they have little competence in the web space.

Through the recurrent enactment of these kinds of genres, agents reproduced the distinction between old-timers and newcomers and the distinctions among professional groups within Eserve. For example, the specialized language used by old-timers made it difficult for newcomers to play equal roles on projects. Similarly, technical and design professionals were expected to implement strategists’ decisions. The enactment of these genres with clients also helped produce and reproduce the distinction between consultants and clients in the management consulting field. For example, in Eserve’s genre repertoire, it was clear that consultants were expected to play the role of web experts whose superior knowledge, experience, and methods would drive the intellectual agenda on projects.

The Pubco Organization

The key status distinctions at Pubco were between the editorial/production staff and the sales/marketing staff, and between these two staff groups and technologists. Both the web group and the IT group at Pubco were seen as at the bottom of the “food chain,” with the IT group reporting to the vice president (VP) of finance and the web group reporting to editorial and production. In all of these groups, tenure in the publishing industry roughly corresponded to organizational status, with more senior people holding higher organizational positions. On occasion, technology managers worked with outside IT consultants on specific tasks, giving them explicit directions on what to do and how to do it. Pubco engaged in many cross-functional projects, the most important of which centered on producing books. Given the prominence of quality book production in Pubco, the editorial and production staff dominated the cross-functional meetings held to coordinate work on these projects.

The genres around website development enacted within Pubco differed in the two staff groups. Table 3 highlights a few of these genres and describes their purposes and expectations about forms. The editorial and production budget included resources for creating websites for books, which the web group was expected to implement within the

⁶ Several Eserve-Pubco project members were simultaneously participating in other projects part-time, and in their interviews they contrasted how these other projects followed the Eserve genres. Notably, these other projects involved more old-timers and were undertaken for clients with little or no prior web experience or existing websites.

⁷ Although Eserve relied on a proprietary piece of software to implement its prioritization technique, tools for such prioritization are widely available (e.g., <http://www.prioritysystem.com/tools.html>).

bounds of Pubco's existing technical capabilities. In contrast, sales and marketing staff did not have a budget for technology initiatives and were required to negotiate funding for their web initiatives with the finance VP.

The IT director also had to negotiate with the finance VP about upgrades to the IT platform and architecture. Such discussions typically involved the VP insisting that Pubco lacked resources to satisfy all of the IT group's technical requests and that requests from sales and marketing had priority. One of the emblematic features of Pubco meetings about technology was the assumption that businesspeople do not understand or care about the technical details of IT systems and that they trust IT people to make the right technical decisions for them.

Through the recurrent enactment of their genres, Pubco agents habitually reproduced both hierarchical and professional distinctions characterizing their organization. The editorial/production staff had an easier time getting their web requests approved and implemented than did the sales/marketing staff. Requests were communicated hierarchically. Finally, in their relations with external IT consultants, Pubco technologists aimed to control both intellectual and economic resources, issuing numerous directives to consultants and expecting their compliance.

SHIFTING POWER RELATIONS THROUGH ENACTING GENRES

Enactment of the genres discussed above typically reproduced key distinctions and reinforced power relations within and across Eserve and Pubco. On occasion, however, the expectations associated with the espoused genres were not realized in the enacted genres, and the discursive departures afforded a shift in power relations within and across the organizations. These departures from habitual enactment were most apparent during instances of discursive conflict, and they arose when participating agents from the two organizations disagreed or were confused about what genres to enact, when they had insufficient expertise to enact genres as prescribed, or when they could demonstrate to others that alternative genres helped their organization to address a difficult project situation. Tables 4 and 5 summarize our analysis of the 25 discursive conflicts experienced by participants during the Eserve-Pubco project.

We discuss two specific examples of such discursive conflicts to explore more fully how the non-conforming enactment of certain genres shifted power relations in different contexts. The first con-

flict, which concerned *strategic initiative selection*, is from the planning phase of the project, and the second, concerning *technical architecture selection*, occurred in the prototyping phase. We pick these two examples from those described in Tables 4 and 5 because they provide the most vivid illustrations of significant power shifts within Eserve and Pubco. We used these examples, along with the other discursive conflicts described in Tables 4 and 5, to generate the theoretical framework we articulate in the Discussion section.

Discursive Conflict Example 1: Strategic Initiative Selection

History of the conflict. The planning phase of the Eserve-Pubco project was launched in January 2000. Eserve's sales pitch emphasized that it had both the methodology and the experienced consultants (who would constitute at least 60 percent of the project team) to address issues of technology, strategy, and branding. Reviewing Eserve's planning phase methodology gave the Pubco senior managers confidence that Eserve had a systematic and innovative approach to web development and the expertise to deliver. As a result, Pubco's top executive instructed all Pubco team members to follow the Eserve methodology so as to "ensure a creative and collaborative solution." Eserve was thus expected to take an active role in defining Pubco's web strategy and not simply implement Pubco's ideas (as was the norm for Pubco's relations with consultants).

At the time of launching the planning phase, a staff shortage at Eserve (triggered by the firm's rapid growth) led to the Eserve team only including three half-time Eserve old-timers. Table 6 summarizes the Eserve-Pubco team composition for the phases of the project that we studied. When the Eserve team assembled, members quickly realized that although they were expected to follow the Eserve methodology "sold" to clients, most of them had little competence in it outside of a two-hour training session in the NHTP.⁸ This was of particular concern to the three strategy consultants—

⁸ Although the NHTP lasted three weeks, considerable time was spent on techniques used for team building, meeting facilitating, and other "consulting craft" activities. Several days were spent on Eserve values; these days included presentations by human resources and the CEO. This left a week for the Eserve methodology and sessions by designers and technologists. At the end of the program, the new hires only spent two training sessions on strategy genres, one for the planning phase and one for the prototyping phase.

TABLE 4
Discursive Conflicts on Eserve-Pubco Project: Planning Phase

Enacted Genres	Espoused Genres	Discursive Conflict
Interviews with Pubco business stakeholders	<i>Management consulting field:</i> Interviewing client stakeholders	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre purpose (why are interviews being conducted)
Interviews with Pubco customers (the end users)	<i>Pubco:</i> Marketing surveys <i>Eserve:</i> Quick feedback on a website or idea for a website	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre form (who is being interviewed and how many interviews are required)
Internal status meeting at Eserve	<i>Eserve:</i> All-team status meeting <i>Management consulting field:</i> Internal status meeting	Between Eserve technologists and strategists over genre form (who should participate and when is meeting announced)
Brainstorming workshop	<i>Eserve:</i> Eserve brainstorming workshop	Between Eserve and Pubco, and among Eserve old-timers and newcomers over genre form (who contributes ideas and how should they be discussed)
Graphical website audit	<i>Eserve:</i> Eserve website audit <i>Management consulting field:</i> Assessment of client's current practices	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre purpose (why is the audit being conducted)
Rationalization workshop preparation	<i>Eserve:</i> Rationalization workshop preparation	Between Eserve old-timers and newcomers over genre form (how are old-timers explaining things to newcomers)
Rationalization workshop	<i>Eserve:</i> Rationalization workshop	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre purpose and form (why and how are the initiatives being discussed)
Internal status meeting at Pubco	<i>Pubco:</i> Cross-functional Pubco project meeting	Between Pubco editorial and production and sales and marketing managers over genre purpose (whether to guide consultants or recommend what they should do)
Directive to consultants	<i>Pubco:</i> Directive to IT consultants	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre purpose (why is the “must-have” list of initiatives provided)
Prioritization workshop preparation	<i>Eserve:</i> Prioritization workshop preparation <i>Management consulting field:</i> Client recommendation preparation meeting	Between Eserve old-timers and newcomers over genre form (how should they prepare for the prioritization workshop)
Client recommendation presentation	<i>Eserve:</i> Prioritization workshop <i>Management consulting field:</i> Client recommendation meeting	Between Eserve and Pubco over genre purpose (should new initiatives be recommended by consultants or should client requests be emphasized)
Presentation to Pubco executives	<i>Management consulting field:</i> Client recommendation meeting	Between Pubco sales and marketing and editorial and production over genre purpose (whether to obtain honest feedback from executives or focus on what executives want to achieve with the project)
Initiative specification	<i>Eserve:</i> Initiative specification	Between Pubco sales and marketing, editorial and production, and IT over genre form (who should be involved in meetings and how deeply should things be specified)
Graphical presentation preparation	<i>Eserve:</i> Graphical Presentation preparation	Between Eserve strategists and designers over genre form (who prepares the presentation and how)

Adam, Cherry, and Nicole—who had a key role in delivering the planning phase of the project. All three were Eserve newcomers and had virtually no prior web consulting experience.

Eserve's project manager, Bob, was also an Eserve newcomer. With several years of management consulting experience and an MBA degree from a pres-

tigious school, he was expected to “stretch” into the project manager role and quickly learn how to manage projects the Eserve way. Frank, who played the role of the client partner and oversaw the relationship with the client, was the most seasoned Eserver on the team. He was a devoted employee, often mentioning with pride that his employee

TABLE 5
Discursive Conflicts on Eserve-Pubco Project: Prototyping Phase

Enacted Genres	Espoused Genres	Discursive Conflict
Developing use case scenarios	<i>Eserve</i> : Use case scenarios <i>Management consulting field</i> : Functional specifications	Between Eserve and Pubco over form (level of detail and nature of the documents produced)
Conducting subgroup meetings	<i>Eserve</i> : Subgroup meetings divided by function or by site feature <i>Pubco</i> : Meeting with technical consultants	Between Eserve members along with Pubco sales and marketing managers and Pubco technologists over form (who will come to functional requirements' meetings?)
Choosing website fonts/colors	<i>Eserve</i> : Choosing website font/colors	Between Eserve strategists and graphic designers over form (which documents will facilitate designers' understanding of the site, how long will the process take?)
Developing old site map	<i>Eserve</i> : Information architecture design <i>Management consulting</i> : Client's prior work documentation	Between Eserve's old-timers and newcomers over goal (why do we need this document?)
Developing new site map	<i>Eserve</i> : Information architecture design	Between Eserve strategists and designers over goal and form (who should develop the new site map and when?)
Developing mock-up webpages	<i>Eserve</i> : Webpage mock-up development	Between strategists and designers over the form (which information should be provided to designers and how long should the process take?)
Wire frame development	<i>Eserve</i> : Webpage mock-up development <i>Management consulting</i> : Producing designs based on functional specifications	Between Eserve old-timers and newcomers over the goal (do we need them) and between Eserve strategists and designers over form (who produces them and how much back-and-forth there will be?)
Functional feature determination	<i>Management consulting</i> : Producing designs based on functional specifications	Between Eserve strategists and technologists over the form (who takes part in functional feature determination?)
Technical platform and architecture selection	<i>Eserve</i> : Technical platform and architecture selection <i>Pubco</i> : System upgrade request and approval <i>Pubco</i> : Directive to IT consultants	Between Eserve and Pubco technologists over the form (timing of sharing proposals, whose technical opinion counts) and between Pubco technologists and sales and marketing managers over goal (why hire consultants?)
Joint technical subteam meetings	<i>Eserve</i> : Joint technical subteam meeting <i>Pubco</i> : Directive to IT consultants	Between Eserve and Pubco over the goal (why conduct a joint meeting?) and form (degree of client's participation in the technical solution formulation)
Internal technical subteam meetings	<i>Eserve</i> : Internal technical subteam meeting <i>Management consulting industry</i> : Internal technical subteam meeting	Between Eserve newcomer strategists and old-timer technologists over the form (how much strategists are participating in the discussion as opposed to ignoring technical issues due to the lack of understanding)

number was below 50. Frank insisted that it was important for others on the team to learn and follow Eserve's methodology. At the same time, like many experienced Eservers during this period of firm growth, Frank had multiple obligations; he had only a half-time commitment to the Pubco project. Yet he believed that if everybody focused on performing the Eserve way, the project would be a success.

Within the first few weeks of the project, clients

started expressing disappointment with the consultants. They complained that the consultants were not sure about what they were doing, yet were trying to act like experts. At one point, clients discussed among themselves, and then with Frank's superiors, the possibility of stopping the project altogether, complaining about the lack of a clear process and the inexperience of the Eserve team ("We did not get an 'A' team").

TABLE 6
Eserve-Pubco Project Team Composition^a

Phases	Planning	Prototyping
Duration	January–March 2000 (7 weeks)	March–June 2000 (13 weeks)
Eserve team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ client partner (Frank) - project manager (Bob) - 3 junior strategists (Adam, Cherry, Nicole) - 1 junior technologist (Boris) - ½ senior technologist (Matt) - ½ brand specialist (Henry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ client partner (Frank) - project manager (Wendy) - 2 ½ junior strategists (Adam, Cherry, ½ Nicole) - 1 junior technologist (Boris) - 1 senior technologist (Kirk) - 2 junior graphic designers (Dolly, Jason) - 1 junior information architect (Dick) - ½ brand specialist (Henry)
Pubco core team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finance VP (John) - project manager (Maya) - 2 sales and marketing managers (Keri, Lily) - 1 editorial manager (Joan) - 1 production manager (Sarah) - IT director (Sally) - 2 web group managers (Tim, Natalie) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finance VP (John) - project manager (Maya) - 2 sales and marketing managers (Keri, Lily) - 1 editorial manager (Joan) - 1 production manager (Sarah) - 2 IT managers, including the director (Sally, Brian) - 2 web group managers (Alice, Natalie)

^a Bold type designates participants who were Eserve old-timers (more than nine months of Eserve experience).

Toward the middle of the third week, when Eserve's planning phase methodology specified that Eserve members would be up to speed on the client's business, Eservers were scheduled to conduct a brainstorming workshop. In conversations among themselves, Eservers struggled to define the purpose of the workshop. There was much debate about how to interpret the description of this genre in the E-share repository and NHTP handouts. Among many other things, the terms "needs," "intentions," "activities," and "opportunities" used in the handouts confused the Eserve newcomers, as did issues of who was supposed to do what. By this time, Eserve's team leadership (Bob and Frank) had formed the opinion that the clients as a group were "culturally stubborn" and "process obsessed," and that the consultants needed to show something resembling a systematic approach to gain credibility with Pubco. Adam and Cherry cautioned fellow Eserve members that "we should not stereotype" the clients and that the clients "will question our methodology," but this message did not resonate with the rest of the team. Drawing on their experiences of prior non-Eserve consulting work, the Eserve newcomers concluded that the main objective of the brainstorming workshop was to make the clients feel "that they had contributed." In a discussion with other Eservers before the brainstorming workshop, Bob noted,

There is the [Pubco] way, the [Eserve] way, and the right way. One way we can do it is—we probably can do it all in a vacuum and show them what we have done. They probably will agree with the prod-

uct, but will not like the process. We came out of today's [project status] meeting with them saying, "We really like what you have done here and the conclusions, but we have concerns with your process." For me, I am outcome focused. If the outcome is good, why be concerned with the process? They want to be part of the process, let them be part of the process. (field notes, February 2000)

In the joint enactment of the brainstorming workshop genre, the clients generated more than a hundred ideas about the strategic direction and functionality of the future website, or "strategic initiatives." Most initiatives involved putting novel editorial content online as opposed to developing online sales or marketing elements—the intended focus of the project. Following the workshop, the next question Eservers discussed was what to do with all the ideas generated. According to Eserve's planning phase genre system, strategic initiatives had to be "rationalized" in a workshop before "prioritization." However, nobody on the team, except for Frank, who was busy with other tasks at Eserve, had any idea what "rationalized" meant. After considerable deliberation, the Eserve newcomers, led by Nicole, decided to draw on their prior consulting experiences and enact their own "improvised" version of a rationalization workshop. This improvised version involved mapping clusters of initiatives generated during the brainstorming (termed "themes") to market trends and the competitive landscape. At the same time, clients were also struggling to understand what rationalization en-

tailed, with most expecting more brainstorming, especially of the sales and marketing ideas.

After a grueling half-day improvisation, both clients and consultants were disappointed. The clients did not get to brainstorm further (even though they had additional ideas they wished to contribute), and the consultants did not know what to do with a large matrix that mapped 17 initiative themes to ten market trends and had been generated in a process that nobody fully understood. Reflecting later on this phase of the project, several consultants noted that they had simply abandoned the “giant matrix” following the workshop. Even Nicole, who had led the rationalization effort and who was interviewed three weeks after the workshop (in March 2000), could not remember much about it:

Nicole: I do not remember which meeting that was.

Interviewer: The one that you ran.

Nicole: The big board! Right!

Interviewer: What was it supposed to accomplish? Do you have a clear understanding of what that activity, rationalization, is?

Nicole: I think it was mapping the opportunities to trends to, sort of, rationalize whether they were good opportunities or not.

Interviewer: Do you feel that it was a good activity to do to move the project along?

Nicole: The thing that I did?

Interviewer: Not necessarily the way you did it. I just mean the actual process.

Nicole: Yeah. But I do not think it was leveraged to the degree it could have been.

The third major step of the planning phase was preparing and conducting a prioritization workshop, and the whole fourth week of the project was allocated to getting ready for this. There were, however, only a few things the Eserve consultants could use to guide them in this process: a deliverable binder from a previous project given to them by Frank, and a computer-based tool that was supposed to support the prioritization process. Frank attempted to explain this genre to his team, but team members complained that he used so much “consultant-speak” that it was impossible to understand him. Meanwhile, Pubco members were confused and worried about Eserve’s approach, as one noted:

They criticized us that we are too process-oriented, you know. They give you this spiel, we call it, this “selling pitch.” And guess what, they show you their process. I have seen it three or four times

already. I have all of their slides. And then, when we started really getting on their case, they tell us we are too process-oriented. I have no idea what to talk about [to them], you know—communication not working. “Well, why are you giving me this process?” I mean, I thought that that is what their big pitch is. This is what we [clients and consultants together] do. We have these phases and we go through these steps. Well yes, I thought we understood, but we obviously had not. . . . Our expectations were over here [gestures to the left]. And they were over here somewhere [gestures to the right]. . . . I do not think Eserve is correct in thinking we are rigid in our thinking and that we are slaves to an agenda. We want to do well! (Pubco manager, interview, March 2000)

Frustrated Pubco participants used Pubco’s internal core team status meeting to voice concerns about the brainstorming and rationalization workshops. Maya, who was acting as Pubco’s project manager, led the status meeting. She was an experienced facilitator, having come to Pubco with an extensive background in marketing consulting. The people who were most vocal at this meeting were Keri and Lily, two middle-level managers from sales and marketing. As the Eserve-Pubco project had been initiated largely by those departments, Keri and Lily had clear ideas about what they wanted the project to achieve—“something we have been thinking about for years.” They proposed to give the consultants a list of initiatives that Eserve should add to their prioritization exercise.⁹ Maya, for her part, had been told explicitly by Pubco’s top executive to follow Eserve’s process, so as to foster creativity and innovation on this “strategic project.” But, given the confusion, frustration, and lack of credibility surrounding Eserve’s process thus far, Maya took the list of initiatives provided by Keri and Lily and handed these over to the Eserve team, explaining that this was a “must-have” list. In doing so, she enacted the “directive to consultants” genre (Table 3). The editorial and production staff was not aware of the strong language Maya used to frame this list.

A few days before the prioritization workshop, Adam wrote an e-mail memo to the Eserve team expressing his concerns with Eserve’s prioritization methodology, which he and the other Eserve newcomers found overly cumbersome. He pro-

⁹ These initiatives were not recorded after the brainstorming workshop because they appeared “trivial” and not creative enough (e.g., a search function for the product catalogue). Keri and Lily, however, knew that a lot of internal organizational change was needed to implement such seemingly trivial initiatives.

posed an alternative approach that relied on building cases for those initiatives that made “the most sense.” Bob reinforced Adam’s critique by sending an e-mail noting that “rating exercises never work” and that decisions should be based on intuition. When the Eserve team members convened the day before the client prioritization workshop, they created a list of problems (recorded in the February 2000 field notes for this study):

1. The automated prioritization tool that generated “nice reports” was not working properly.
2. Different team members rated initiatives in incompatible ways.
3. The prioritization algorithm did not always produce reasonable results. For example, a feature ranked as unnecessary by prospective website users in interviews could get selected on the basis of high ratings on another criterion.
4. There were no urgent or strategically important initiatives in the final ranking.
5. Frank, who could have guided them, was on vacation.
6. The clients were suspicious of Eserve’s process and had already expressed strong support for a few “must-have” initiatives.

Ultimately, the Eservers gave up trying to enact their firm’s prioritization genre. Adam, who had been on the project since its initial business development and had gotten to know the client members fairly well, proposed five top ideas for initiatives and a justification for each (referred to as “a case”). A primary criterion for his choice was whether key client stakeholders (Keri and Lily), who supported Eserve’s project, were likely to back a given initiative and invest resources into implementing it (translation: fund the project’s prototyping phase). Adam’s five initiatives did not rank highly, according to the research that Eserve had done to date, in part because they did not respond directly to competitive pressures, nor did they address the concerns of Pubco’s customers. Nevertheless, two of the Eserve newcomers—Bob and Cherry—supported Adam’s move, seeing it as politically savvy and arguing that this was how things were done in the “Big Five” consulting firms where they had worked before joining Eserve. The remaining issue was how to present these five choices to the clients, who had “invested time into determining prioritization factors” and who were concerned about the project’s process.

In the prioritization workshop led by Bob, clients were quickly shown one (of four) reports that the prioritization algorithm had produced, which, although not fudged for the presentation, was chosen to show the data in a light that favored the consult-

ants’ recommendation. The consultants argued that the “ratings were approximate” and justified the cases with various arguments. Some clients expressed surprise that Eserve’s algorithms ranked Pubco’s must-have initiatives as the highest. In interviews, clients reiterated their disappointment that no new ideas had emerged from the process, but they still assumed that Eserve team members had arrived at their conclusions through a sophisticated and well-grounded methodology and by drawing on their research and considerable digital business expertise. Pubco’s senior management approved the proposed initiatives for development in the prototyping phase.

In the postproject review conducted by Eserve’s knowledge management group during the one-week break between planning and prototyping, Adam, Cherry, and Nicole continued to ask questions about Eserve’s methodology and the meaning and value of various workshops and documents. They argued that a two-hour session at NHTP was inadequate to learn the approach and that Frank’s explanations were confusing. Frank did not agree, as evident in this exchange during the review:

Cherry: We understood we need to prioritize, brainstorm, etc. What we didn’t get is how to do it. As hard as we were trying to listen, we didn’t get that.

Frank: People have to learn to listen. I taught that NHTP class on this. I went through many explanations. Maybe not in the right time. Sorry, but people have to learn to listen. . . . We do some market analysis, then drop opportunities in experience architecture, etc. (field notes, March 2000)

In trying to explain his perspective, Frank continued to use the specialized language that newcomers had trouble following. Later in the meeting, he conceded: “It is impossible to teach the methodology; you have to experience it to understand it.”

Upon the completion of the planning phase, Adam and Cherry, who had taken a lead in preparing the recommendations and following Pubco’s guidance in detailing the initiative specifications, began to be seen by the client as the “understanding consultants,” and Pubco members started to express a preference for interacting with them rather than the other consultants. As a result, Adam and Cherry got a lot of credit for mending the relationship with the client and were quickly promoted to more senior positions at Eserve, promotions not commensurate with their professional background, expertise, or tenure within Eserve (they had been with Eserve for less than six months at the time). Another newcomer, Nicole, who had led the rationalization workshop without much guidance and competence, and who held a higher official posi-

tion within Eserve because of her prior experience and education, had her participation on the project reduced to half-time, in response to the client's insistence that she "lacked consulting craft." Finally, Frank received considerable criticism for failing to guide the project "the Eserve way." His role in the prototyping phase of the project was consequently minimized.

At the same time, Keri and Lily emerged as subject matter experts within Pubco on the subsequent phases of the project, an unusual situation for staff from the sales and marketing side of the company. Even the editorial and production managers started following Keri and Lily's lead on the project.

Example summary. Table 7 summarizes the key discursive actions taken in the course of the strategic initiative selection conflict in the Pubco-Eserve project. Three types of discursive struggle were evident in this example of conflict: (1) between the old-timers and newcomers at Eserve, (2) between Eserve and Pubco project members, and (3) between the editorial/production and sales/marketing staffs at Pubco. The Eserve planning phase genres relied on specialized terminology and complex processes that helped to reproduce the Eserve old-timers' dominant positions within their company as well as Eserve's claim of intellectual leadership vis-à-vis clients. The assumption underlying these genres was that clients had little competence in the web space and needed to be guided in their selection of web initiatives through a set of workshops. However, with poor guidance from Frank, it was very difficult for the Eserve newcomers to understand the genres they were expected to enact on the project, and the more time they invested in learning the Eserve methodology, the less time they had to learn their client's business and establish credibility with them (worsening their position vis-à-vis Pubco on the joint project). Moreover, the Eserve assumption was that clients did not have any prior web expertise and were thus happy to fund all phases of the project so as to get access to consultants' valuable expertise. This assumption was violated in the case of Pubco, and continuing to enact various workshop genres based on this assumption further damaged Eserve's credibility.

Pubco members were also confused about which genres to follow. They were frustrated with Frank's consulting jargon and the content of the first two workshops, sensing that Eservers themselves did not know what they were doing. This hurt Eserve's credibility. In response, Pubco's sales and marketing staff—with Maya's help—made a discursive move to enact the directive to consultants genre, which Pubco had used many times in dealing with IT consultants, but which was new to Eserve. Oth-

ers at Pubco, including the editorial and production staff, accepted this move because of the general concern that the analysis performed by the apparently incompetent consultants could miss something important to Pubco. Eserve accepted Pubco's directive, largely because the consultants were still confused about how to enact the prioritization genre, and funding for the project was at stake. This interaction helped Pubco gain control over the project's intellectual direction and economic outcomes. It also helped its sales and marketing staff advance their agenda within Pubco, a discursive move that violated traditional expectations of cross-functional project meetings at Pubco.

Wanting to ensure that the engagement with Pubco continued, Eserve newcomers made a discursive move that drew on resources from outside Eserve's genre repertoire, specifically, traditional consulting practice, to enact client presentation and delivery genres. This move enabled Eserve to win funding for the next phase of the project and helped the newcomers advance their positions at Eserve vis-à-vis the old-timers. Table 8 highlights the shifts in power relations that occurred in the course of this conflict through the enactment of various genres over time.

Discursive Conflict Example 2: Technical Architecture Selection

From the onset of the project, Pubco's technology managers, Sally and Alice, expressed concern about how things were going. Neither had formal IT training. Sally, the IT director, had spent many years in the publishing industry and gradually learned technical and project management skills before moving into an IT management role. Alice, the head of the web development group, had a background in visual arts and sought to build on that knowledge in the emerging web space. Both were only peripherally involved in the choice of Eserve and disapproved of the choice of what they saw as an expensive and "high-brow" consultancy. As one of them commented in a February 2000 interview:

When the project was presented to me as a part of the [Pubco's] core team, the decision about the scope of the project and the goal for the project had been established already. . . . My bias [in working with consultants] is a very different bias than [Pubco's top executive's] bias. [The top executive] wanted it to be very open-ended, very "let's think outside of the box, let's—you know—anything goes in terms of ideas."

The planning phase of the project stipulated the involvement of all Eserve and Pubco people as-

TABLE 7
Genres Enacted During Eserve-Pubco Strategic Initiative Selection Example

Timeline	Genre	Genre Purpose	Genre Form
Day 17 (of the planning phase)	Brainstorming workshop	<i>For Eserve:</i> To make the clients feel that they have contributed <i>For Pubco:</i> To brainstorm website initiatives for possible implementation	A workshop led by consultants, in which clients contribute ideas about web initiatives. Most ideas are related to editorial and production, not sales and marketing work. Consultants do not contribute or discuss ideas, only record them.
Day 18	Rationalization workshop preparation	<i>For Eserve newcomers:</i> To understand Eserve's rationalization genre and plan for the rationalization workshop <i>For Eserve old-timers:</i> To teach newcomers about the rationalization process	A meeting in which Eserve newcomers try to make sense of the "rationalization" workshop. Frank explains it to newcomers using "consultant speak." Newcomers do not understand. Drawing on various Eserve documents, they come up with an exercise for discussing initiatives and keeping the clients involved.
Day 19	Rationalization workshop	<i>For Eserve:</i> To make the clients feel that they have contributed <i>For Pubco:</i> To further discuss brainstormed initiatives	A workshop led by consultants in which consultants present consolidated "themes" of initiatives and ask clients to map them to market trends in a "giant matrix."
Day 25	Internal status meeting among clients	<i>For Pubco sales and marketing managers:</i> To decide what to tell consultants about the initiatives they are most interested in pursuing	A workshop at Pubco facilitated by Maya. Includes much discussion of frustrations felt about the Eserve project and the Eserve team's incompetence and arrogance. Sales and marketing managers put forward their most critical web initiatives, and Maya records them.
Day 26	Directive to consultants	<i>For Pubco:</i> To tell IT consultants what to do	Maya passes the "must-have" initiatives to Bob and Frank during the client-consultant management status meeting, explaining that these are "top priority" for Pubco.
Days 20–31	Prioritization workshop preparation	<i>For Eserve newcomers:</i> To understand the prioritization process and to use it to rank initiatives	Eserve consultants ask client members to provide prioritization criteria. They seek documents and ask old-timers questions about the prioritization exercise. They obtain a computer program that automates the rankings, but it does not work. Consultants rank the items individually but soon discover that they never discussed the meaning of scales (1–4) and subjectively assigned different meaning to scales. Thus, the resulting combined rankings do not make sense. Consultants decide to abandon this genre.
Day 30	Client recommendation preparation	<i>For Eserve newcomers:</i> To choose a politically savvy strategy for representing their analysis and recommendation so as to appear competent to clients	After performing multiple rankings of initiatives, consultants reject the prescribed prioritization methodology and build "qualitative" arguments (cases) to support the initiatives most favored by the Pubco sales and marketing managers.
Day 31	Client recommendation presentation	<i>For Eserve:</i> To put forward a recommendation that clients can approve and thus fund the next phase of the project <i>For Pubco:</i> To learn the results of Eserve's systematic analysis and recommendation	Eservers present their analysis and recommendation in a form that supports the sales and marketing managers' must-have list. Pubco participants are surprised, saying that they had also expected to see new initiatives being recommended.

signed by their firms to the respective core teams in the project. All Pubco core team members were asked to clear 40 percent of their work schedules to

participate in the workshops of the project. However, as Sally was in the middle of launching a new system, she was told she could skip some of the

TABLE 8
Genre Enactments and Power Relations during the Strategic Initiative Selection Conflict^a

Timeline	Days 1–29	Days 26–29	Days 30–51 (End of Planning Phase)
Genres enacted	Brainstorming and rationalization preparation and workshop genres	Pubco core team internal status meeting and directive to consultants genres	Eserve consultants abandon the prioritization workshop Preparation genre and enact client recommendation preparation and presentation genres
Eserve	Old-timers over newcomers	Old-timers over newcomers	Newcomers over old-timers
Pubco	Editorial and production over sales and marketing managers	Sales and marketing over editorial and production managers	Sales and marketing over editorial and production managers
Management consulting field	Consultants have greater control over intellectual resources Clients have greater control over economic resources	Consultants have greater control over intellectual resources Clients have greater control over economic resources	Clients have greater control over both intellectual and economic resources

^a Highlighted cells represent a change in the social order with respect to the prior time period (in the same row).

workshops if need be. Although she interpreted this as indicating that others at Pubco did not perceive her contribution as central to this technology project, she decided not to miss any of the announced workshops.

Before starting the prototyping phase, Eservers discussed two options for enacting the requirements definition genre: one that divided the work among several Eserve-staffed strategy, technology, and design subteams, which would then report to the client core team in a joint meeting; and another that divided the work among integrated client-consultant subteams split along functional lines, with the work being coordinated through Eserve's and Pubco's respective project managers, who would participate in all meetings. Wendy, the Eserve project manager assigned to the prototyping phase, was brand new to Eserve, but she had several years of experience as a project manager with one of Eserve's competitors. On the basis of the stories she had heard about the Eserve planning phase (namely, that some client team members, especially the technologists, were hard to deal with) and her prior experience working in functional subteams, she opted for the latter division of requirements definition work. Her sense was that it would be easier to build relations with client team members while working with them on small subteams. To enact this genre, Eserve strategists worked with Pubco's core team members from sales/marketing and editorial/production on the functional requirements subteam; Eserve designers worked with Pubco's web developers and marketing managers on the design requirements subteam; and Eserve technologists worked with Pubco technologists on the technology subteam. Each subteam

met separately in weekly meetings or facilitated workshops.

Pubco's technology managers disliked the three-subteam structure, arguing that it excluded them from the important decisions on functionality that were made during the requirements subteam meetings. They fought unsuccessfully with Maya to be included in the requirements subteam, arguing that they were key to discussions about Pubco's system functionality. They saw their exclusion as a significant handicap:

I think a lot of things [that the requirements] group [was doing], they were off in the corner, creating what they thought they needed with no regard to [the technical group]. . . . When we broke up for the [prototyping phase] . . . we no longer worked as one group. We started to work in these individual packets: the technology group, the requirements group, the [design] group. And I saw at the outset that as a disadvantage. (technology manager, interview, June 2000)

One of the critical issues in this phase was defining the technical platform and architecture for the new website. This responsibility fell on the shoulders of two Eservers, Kirk and Boris. Kirk, the new technical lead, and Boris, who had participated in the planning phase, were very able technical developers. As someone who had gotten into the web space early and had constantly updated his system development skills with the latest methods and tools, Kirk exemplified the old-timer Eserve technologist. Boris, a newcomer to Eserve, had several years of web development experience, a bachelor's degree in computer science from a prestigious foreign school, and a master's degree in computer science from an elite U.S. university.

In the third week of the prototyping phase, Kirk and Boris began receiving functional specifications from the requirements subteam weekly. Following the Eserve methodology, they developed a technical architecture that supported all the requirements. Enacting Eserve's technical platform and architecture definition genre, Kirk and Boris presented the architecture diagram and supporting documents to Pubco two weeks before the conclusion of the prototyping phase. They proposed a platform-independent solution using advanced technical capabilities to build a layer of software code on top of Pubco's current systems (which ran on an older technology). This solution did not require any software upgrades. After learning about this proposed solution, Pubco's technology managers deliberated for a week, and then toward the end of the prototyping phase informed Eservers in a technology subteam meeting that their solution was unacceptable. They argued that Pubco would be better off upgrading its existing platform and implementing the new website on the enhanced system than it would be adding a new layer to an outdated system. Upgrading the software platform was something the technology managers had wanted to do for a while, but it was expensive and time-consuming, and had not been approved by Pubco's senior managers. An IT manager at Pubco commented on Eserve's proposal:

I see the upside from Eserve's perspective. From our perspective, I see none when they can get in and out, and they are done with the project [implying that Pubco would have to pick up the pieces later]. (interview, June 2000)

Eserve technologists disagreed. They believed that Pubco would spend a lot of money on an upgrade that they might not need, while also delaying the launch of the website. Fast launch was of key importance to the sales/marketing people, and the solution proposed by Eserve was relatively independent of the technologies that were currently used at Pubco and those that would be used in the future. Eservers argued that in the six months that it would take to perform the upgrade requested by Pubco's IT manager, the vendor of the platform technology could go out of business.¹⁰ Finally, they noted that the upgrade would stop the project for many months. Current Eserve team members

would have to be reassigned to other projects, and new Eservers would need to get up to speed when the project resumed, wasting both time and effort.

Although the two project managers, Maya and Wendy, were expected to participate in all subteam meetings, including the technical ones, neither contributed much to the technical subteam meetings. Wendy had attended some early technical subteam meetings, but then stopped doing so, arguing that she could talk to Kirk and Boris offline. She thus missed the crucial technical architecture selection meeting. Maya continued to attend technical subteam meetings but tuned out as soon as technical terms started being used. During the crucial technical architecture selection meeting, Maya came in 30 minutes late, a conspicuous act given that she was rarely late to meetings. As the technologists started explaining the issue under discussion to her, she replied:

I am not a tech person. Are we talking about make vs. buy? [referring to the system, whereas the issue at hand concerned platform selection]. (field notes, April 2000)

Thus, neither Maya nor Wendy understood or participated in negotiating a solution to the technical architecture issue.

A few days before the deadline for the final deliverable of the prototyping phase, the IT director, Sally, called a face-to-face meeting with John, the finance VP, enacting her customary genre of communicating about resource commitments at Pubco. She argued that the project had to be interrupted to allow for a large-scale upgrade of Pubco's current platform. Although this upgrade was expensive and had been previously denied by John, he was now inclined to accept Sally's argument that the consultants' proposed solution was not in Pubco's best interests. He was particularly influenced by the fact that Eserve's credibility had been undermined in the planning phase, and that he (and other Pubco participants) lacked understanding of the technical issues. As a result, Boris, Kirk, Sally, and Brian (a Pubco IT manager) were invited to the weekly client-consultant status meeting to explain their differing views. Sally and Brian's position prevailed, with no time left to debate the decision before the scheduled conclusion of the prototyping phase. As one of Pubco's nontechnical team members explained:

When Eserve suggested [their solution], there was a lot of disagreement. And part of it was that the lack of credibility that somebody like Frank had. It was sort of like, "Well, Frank is just pushing because he wants the money [for the development phase]. He does not want to stop." So what do we really want to

¹⁰ As it turns out, the vendor was taken over by a large software firm in October 2000 (five months after Pubco made its decision to upgrade), and support of the technology was discontinued in December 2002. Eserve's proposed architecture has become an industry standard and is widely used today.

do? . . . At the same time, Sally had a lot of credibility within the organization. So if she said we should wait, then people would listen whether or not she was right. I would believe Kirk over Sally. I do not know if she was necessarily right, but I am alone in that realization. (interview, June 2000)

The project was consequently put on hold for three of the nine months originally scheduled. This delay had substantial social and financial implications for the two companies and for their relationship:

[The] decision to migrate [to the newer platform] was driven by Sally's interest to become more savvy with current technology, not based on business goals. . . . One or two [people at Pubco] really got it [the proposed technical solution], and the rest were relying on others who got it—a typical dysfunctional corporate environment to me. (Eserve technologist, interview, June 2000)

The delay also meant that Eserve's team had to be reassigned to work on other projects and that only one Eserve person, Cherry, eventually returned to the Pubco project when it resumed.

After the Pubco technology managers had prevailed in the technical architecture decision, they became involved in the enactment of all meetings (including the functional requirements subteam and status meetings) for the remainder of the prototyping phase (which was extended by one month) and during the development phase:

If I weigh what is important, I think that [having a new website up sooner] is far less important because we have a viable site. . . . I consider many of these things [proposed by Eserve] "nice to haves." I know if Keri and Lily were sitting here, they would not consider them "nice to haves." (technology manager, interview, June 2000)

Pubco's technology managers succeeded in using part of the budget allocated to the Eserve-Pubco project to achieve an expensive system upgrade, an outcome they had long requested but had been unable to obtain for years. As a result, the sales/marketing priority of website delivery in time for the fall 2000 sales cycle was compromised. The site was eventually launched in April 2001.

The sales/marketing and editorial/production managers at Pubco had stated that they did not have an opinion about the technical issues (which they did not understand), yet they were disappointed with the stoppage of the project. All of them complained about the loss of momentum for change at Pubco. Pubco's technologists, on the other hand, believed that the others understood their reasoning:

Oh, they [other Pubco team members] understood why we had to do it, and they accepted that we needed to do it. . . . They were not happy about it, but . . . (technology manager, interview, June 2000)

Example summary. Table 9 summarizes the key discursive actions taken in the course of the technical architecture selection conflict. Two types of discursive struggles were evident in this example: (1) among Pubco's technology staff and its sales and marketing staff and (2) among Eserve and Pubco project members. The enactment of the system requirements definition genre system split the work among various functional subteams, inadvertently reproducing power relations between Pubco's technologists and the other business units. Part of the Eservers' rationale for enacting this genre system was to isolate the negatively oriented Pubco technologists who were used to controlling consultants at Pubco and to build relationships with the more powerful business representatives. Pubco's technology managers, however, quickly perceived what they recognized as their familiar disadvantaged position and resisted it. They made strategic use of Eserve's diminished credibility from the project's planning phase and played up the fear that Eserve would compromise Pubco's long-term interests. They also relied on the nontechnical participants' habitual lack of attention to technical issues in their discursive move to get a system upgrade approved by the VP of finance, something not typically done at Pubco. As a result, Pubco's technology managers were able to advance their power positions vis-à-vis the sales and marketing staff.

These discursive moves also shaped the Eserve-Pubco relationship. Eserve tried to establish credibility in the technical area on the basis of their web space competency. In Eserve's genre repertoire, the key technical decisions were in Eserve's domain of expertise and did not have to be reported to clients until later in the prototyping phase, leaving little room for negotiation of the final decision. Pubco technologists, however, were accustomed to enacting genres in which they directed consultants. Eventually, Pubco achieved control of not only the economic resources but also the intellectual content of the project. Table 10 highlights the shifts in power relations evident in this example of conflict over technical architecture selection.

DISCUSSION

Our study posed two research questions: How do the everyday actions of participants shape power

TABLE 9
Genres Enacted during the Eserve-Pubco Technical Architecture Selection Conflict

Timeline	Genre	Genre Purpose	Genre Form
Days 1–91 (throughout prototyping phase)	System requirements definition	<i>For Eserve and Pubco:</i> To collaboratively determine requirements for the website and build a prototype	Eserve strategically breaks the team into functional requirements, design, and technology subteams to isolate difficult clients. Wendy attends most requirements and design meetings and talks to Eserve technologists in offline meetings. Maya attends all three subteam meetings but often tunes out during technology discussions.
Days 1–76	Technical platform and architecture selection	<i>For Eserve technologists:</i> To obtain functional requirements from the Eserve team and design a technical solution to satisfy them	Eserve technologists get functional requirements from the requirements subteam in the form of documents and explanations. They also collect information about Pubco's current IT platform and then recommend a solution.
Day 77	Client-consultant status meeting	<i>For Eserve technologists:</i> To present a technical architecture proposal to Pubco <i>For Pubco IT managers:</i> To scrutinize the proposed solution so as to assess its impact on Pubco's IT interests	Consultants deliver their documents and explanations about the proposed technical architecture to Pubco IT managers. Pubco IT managers argue that this solution is poor and will leave Pubco with systems they cannot support when consultants leave.
Day 79	System upgrade request and approval	<i>For Pubco IT managers:</i> To obtain financial resources necessary to upgrade technology and train the staff	In a face-to-face meeting, the IT director (Sally) asks the finance VP (John) to allocate resources for a platform upgrade, arguing that without it, Eserve will leave Pubco with an architecture that Pubco cannot support. The IT director and the finance VP discuss the request. Sally argues that Eservers don't care about Pubco and are "arrogant." In conversations, technical issues brought up by the IT director are passed over by the finance VP as "out of my competency."
Day 80	Client-consultant status meeting	<i>For Eserve:</i> To convince Pubco that their technical solution is superior <i>For Pubco IT managers:</i> To convince project participants that Pubco needs to upgrade its existing platform	A face-to-face meeting that includes Wendy, Frank, Kirk, and Boris as well as Maya, John, Sally, and Brian. Technologists on both sides explain their points of view. Nontechnical people say they do not get the technical issues, but eventually John agrees with the points made by Sally.
During development phase (after three-month hiatus)	Directive to IT consultants	<i>For Pubco IT managers:</i> To tell consultants what they want done	Pubco's IT managers direct Eserve technologists on how to implement the site on the technical platform that they have chosen (now in an upgraded version).

relations on their novel joint project? and How do these power dynamics influence participants' power positions within their own organizations? With respect to the first question, we found that a novel multiparty engagement was a site for ambiguous and contested interactions. The resulting discursive difficulties created opportunities and incentives for agents to draw on discursive resources

from other institutional contexts in attempts to resolve the difficulties, help their party (their organization), and keep the joint project moving. If such discursive moves succeeded in resolving the project's interactive difficulties, they favorably shifted these agents' power positions, affording them increased influence within the joint project. With respect to the second question, we found that

TABLE 10
Genre Enactments and Power Relations during the Technical Architecture Selection Conflict^a

Timeline	Days 1–77	Day 79 onward
Genres enacted	System requirements definition, technical platform and architecture selection genres	System upgrade request approval, client-consultant status meetings, directive to IT consultants genres
Eserve	Strategists over technologists	Strategists over technologists
Pubco	Sales and marketing over IT managers	IT over sales and marketing managers
Management consulting field	Consultants have greater control over intellectual resources Clients have greater control over economic resources	Clients have greater control over both intellectual and economic resources

^a Highlighted cells represent a change in the social order with respect to the prior time period (in the same row).

agents' increased discursive influence within the joint project could then afford them greater visibility and authority in their own organizations, thus shifting power relations there as well. Importantly, we found that these boundary-crossing discursive moves were often invoked by agents with lower status positions within their organizations.

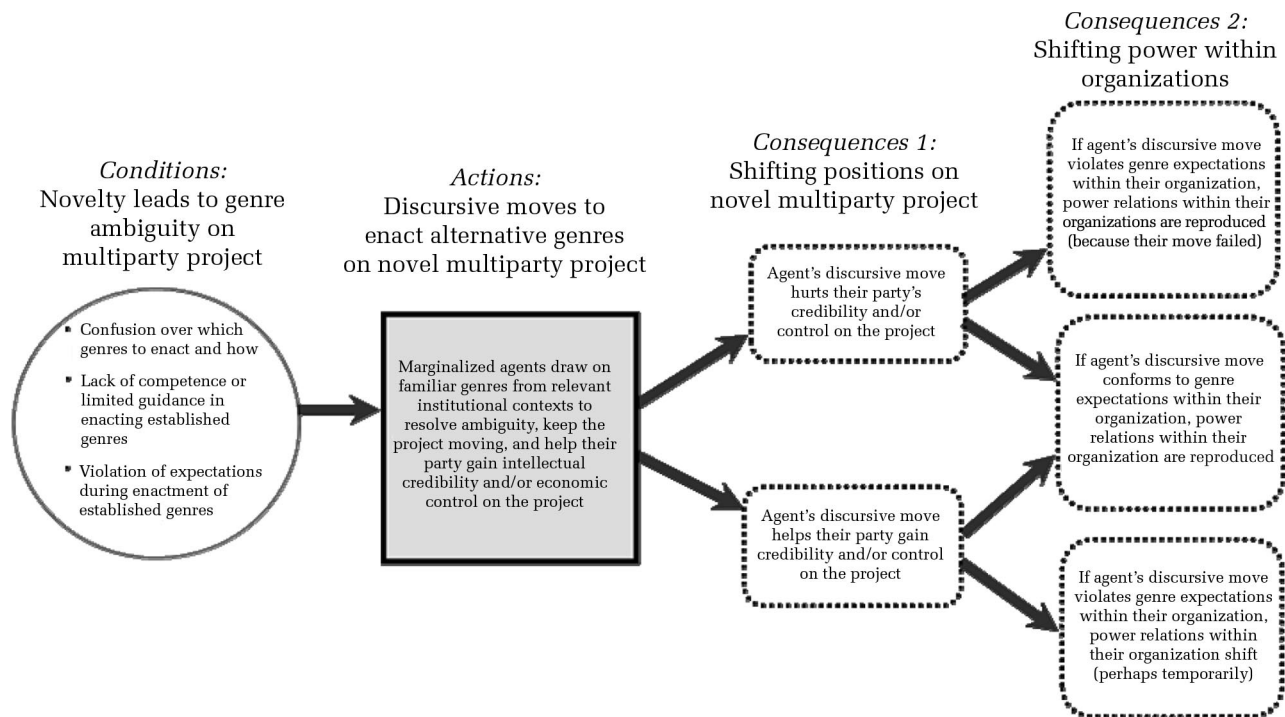
Three key observations about how genre enactments influence power positions helped us reach these conclusions. The first observation is that multiparty projects are situated within nested and overlapping fields of practice (institutional contexts) and that agents' actions on these projects are both shaped by and shape power positions in several of these fields at the same time. The second observation is that these institutional contexts may not provide clear guidelines or expectations for interaction, and as a result of this ambiguity, diverse interpretations of the multiple institutional discursive norms may arise and be in conflict on novel multiparty engagements. Third, we observed that conditions of ambiguity can create opportunities for marginalized agents to deviate from established practices in their organizations, as they may realize that conforming to established discursive norms and expectations tends to reinforce their disadvantaged positions.

The distinction between espoused and enacted genres helped us analyze differences between institutionalized templates for interaction (espoused genres) and their actual instantiation in practice (enacted genres). Espoused genres are discursive resources that reflect the norms and expectations of a given institutional context and thus reflect certain power relations within that context. In attempting to deal with the discursive ambiguity that may arise on novel multiparty projects, agents can draw on genres from a variety of institutional contexts with which they are familiar so as to influence the action on the multiparty project.

In the context of consulting practice, clients and consultants use the discursive resources drawn on and produced on a project to accumulate credibility on intellectual issues and control over the process and outcomes of work. In general, the field of management consulting, through its espoused genres, sets some expectations regarding the roles that clients and consultants are to play on joint projects. Generally, clients control economic resources, and consultants establish authority with respect to intellectual resources. However, the genre repertoires at Eserve and Pubco entailed different and inconsistent expectations of each other, even though both organizations drew broadly on the standard espoused genres in management consulting. Pubco was used to exerting considerable control over both intellectual and economic resources on projects, and Eserve expected its clients to provide little intellectual input on projects and to cede intellectual authority to Eserve by hiring and paying for its services (recall that Eserve, in high demand, was turning down clients). At the same time, some Eserve newcomers were more familiar with other forms of management consulting, those in which clients were accorded more voice and credibility on intellectual issues. Thus, in their ongoing attempts to negotiate control over intellectual and economic resources on the joint project, Eserve and Pubco participants enacted genres that shifted power relations on the project as well as within their own organizations.

To elaborate these social dynamics in more detail, we look at the following: (1) what conditions produced discursive ambiguity on the joint project; (2) how agents tried to resolve these ambiguities through their discursive practices; and (3) what were the consequences of different types of discursive moves for power relations in nested and overlapping fields. Figure 2 depicts the discursive conditions created by a novel multiparty engagement

FIGURE 2
Shifting Power Relations on Novel Multiparty Projects



and indicates how discursive moves may or may not lead to power shifts within each of the nested settings.

As agents interact on novel multiparty projects and try to establish and maintain their party's position (control over economic resources and authority over intellectual resources), they are likely to encounter genre ambiguity in one of the following forms: (1) *confusion over which genres to enact*, as the interacting agents have diverse, often conflicting, interests, knowledge, and experience; (2) *lack of competence to enact established genres*, as newcomers have limited knowledge of and/or receive limited guidance in the established genres from the old-timers; (3) *violation of genre expectations*, as agents encounter unforeseen contingencies during their enactment of the established genres.

In attempting to resolve the genre ambiguity, marginalized agents may draw on alternative genres from a variety of institutional contexts with which they are familiar. Their enactment of these alternative genres may either (a) conform to the norms and expectations of the espoused genres within their organizations, or (b) violate those espoused norms and expectations. If the enacted genres conform to established discursive norms (situation a), no power shifts will occur within their organization (at least immediately), albeit

such actions may produce further genre ambiguity or inadvertently hurt their party's position on the joint project. For example, even though they were confused about the brainstorming workshop genre and enacted a variant that drew on their expertise from other consulting contexts, Eserve newcomers enacted it in a way that was consistent with Eserve's norms. As a result, this enactment did not lead to a power shift within Eserve, but as the process was confusing to the clients, it hurt Eserve's credibility and power position on the project.

If agents draw on alternative genres that end up violating espoused norms and expectations within their organization (situation b), their action will lead to power shifts within their organizations if others accept the enacted genres and help advance the position on the project of the agents and their party. The power shift may be temporary, but it may open up the opportunity for a longer-term power reconfiguration in multiple settings. For example, the discursive move of Eserve newcomers Adam and Cherry to draw on the traditional consulting genre of client presentation preparation—in violation of Eserve's espoused genres—was accepted by Pubco, and thus the newcomers' move helped to secure funding for the next phase of the project, a condition that helped Eserve gain eco-

conomic resources. Moving the project forward in this way helped Adam and Cherry advance their status within Eserve, while it also served to diminish that of the putative project leader, Frank. On the Pubco side, a similar discursive breach occurred when the sales and marketing staff issued a directive to the consultants. This discursive move violated the genre expectations of Pubco's cross-functional project meetings and ended up shifting the power positions of the sales/marketing within their organization. Others at Pubco accepted these agents' enactment of the directive to consultants genre because it helped advance Pubco's intellectual and economic control over the project at a time when others feared that the Eserve consultants were incompetent and would not deliver value to Pubco.

Finally, if discursive breaches do not help advance agents' or their party's position on a multi-party joint project, then the agents' position within their organization may suffer as a consequence, especially if the agents were not in a position of power to start with. For example, Nicole's inadequate improvisation of the rationalization workshop hurt her own reputation and position within Eserve, and Eserve's credibility with Pubco (reinforcing Pubco's view that the Eserve team was inexperienced and inadequate).

Genre ambiguity creates an opening, in the sense of a "liminal space" (Turner, 1984), a space where boundaries and norms become blurred and indeterminate, and transitions and transformations become possible. Agents who are initially marginalized in their existing fields owing to their tenure, hierarchical status, or professional background may be able to use the emerging liminal conditions to draw on their more privileged positions in other contexts so as to initiate change. At Pubco, it was very clear to the sales/marketing and IT managers that established ways of doing things afforded them little influence, and they saw the joint project as an opportunity for renegotiation. At Eserve, most newcomers aspired to the status of old-timers as they personally identified with Eserve's old-timers' values and interests. Their discursive moves were often inadvertent, but nonetheless had the same consequences for shifts in power relations. It is also possible for agents who are not marginalized in their existing fields to attempt discursive moves that violate espoused genres. Although these may result in shifts in power positions on the joint project, they are less likely to lead to shifts in power relations in their own organizations (where these agents already hold privileged status positions).

Limitations

Our methodological choices led to certain specificities about our data, yet we believe that our theoretical insights are not limited to the particular organizations and project that we observed. Indeed, the role of discourse in shifting power relations has been described in multiple studies of consulting engagements (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004) as well as in such contexts as health care and nonprofit organizing (Hardy & Phillips, 1998; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000). Furthermore, the specific conflicts that we observed between consultants and clients are well known in the general management consulting literature (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Yakura, 2002). Researchers studying discursive practices within organizations have also argued that transformations in discourse may lead to power shifts inside organizations (Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Future studies of other project organizations will help to extend and amend the theoretical ideas presented here.

The insights gained through our study are necessarily conditioned by the theoretical lenses we adopted to conduct our analysis. We drew on Bourdieu's notions of power relations in fields of practice and engaged a critical genre analysis to focus on agents' differential access to discursive resources. We found genre analysis to be a useful lens for this purpose because consulting practice is based so heavily in discourse; other contexts may benefit from using other analytical lenses (e.g., routines) to understand power dynamics and change. Our findings suggest that changes in symbolic power may have implications for economic and intellectual forms of power, but further research is required to examine the complex interplay among the multiple forms of power enacted in novel multiparty engagements.

A number of competing explanations for what occurred in the engagement studied here could be raised, yet we believe our discursive analysis retains distinctive value. For example, a "threat rigidity" argument applied to this case would suggest that Eserve consultants, when faced with limited resources and looming deadlines, reverted to a few old ways of doing things (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). This explanation, however, does not adequately address what we observed, as there are multiple, competing "old ways of doing things" when diverse groups work together for the first time. Indeed, in this case, Eserve old-timers' way of doing things yielded under stress to Eserve newcomers' way of doing things.

Another rival explanation could be that Eserve's espoused genres were simply evolving as Eserve

grew and absorbed newcomers. Just as organizational routines evolve in practice (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), genre enactment also shifts over time, with even slight perturbations possibly leading to significant changes (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). However, the changes that we observed were not adaptations of existing Eserve genres, but rather enactments of non-Eserve genres brought into the project from other fields (e.g., management consulting and Pubco). These alternative discursive practices were engaged in as deliberate attempts to resolve discursive tensions. In doing so, agents renegotiated the social order, helping to transform rather than preserve preexisting power relations.

Implications

Our study has important implications for research in a number of areas. First, although the literature on multiparty engagements has highlighted the central role of discourse in such engagements (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004), it has not analyzed *how power relations play out in the discursive interactions of project participants*. Our critical genre analysis afforded a way of interrogating discursive processes through which power shifts occur on multiparty projects. It provided the means for identifying when, how, and why institutionalized norms and practices of discourse change. Specifically, genre ambiguity can create the opportunity and motivation for marginalized agents to draw on discursive alternatives from other contexts; enacting such alternative genres may then lead to changes in power relations within and across organizations.

Second, we have identified *how power plays on novel joint projects lead to shifts in power positions within participating organizations and the agents most likely to initiate such shifts*. Agents who are disadvantaged with respect to tenure, hierarchical status, or professional background may renegotiate power dynamics within their own organizations while attempting to further their interests on a multiparty project. This empirical account reinforces the finding that even agents who do not occupy dominant positions in a given institutional field (a nested system of structured social relations) can nevertheless draw on critical resources and discursive legitimacy to influence changes within that field (Maguire et al., 2004). Maguire and his colleagues (2004) say little, however, about the consequences of such power plays for other, more established institutional fields, but our findings suggest that agents' discursive moves have significant implications not just for the emerging field (in this case, the consulting project), but for multiple re-

lated fields of practice as well (in this case, the client and consultant organizations).

A third implication concerns the exercise of power on consulting engagements. In their study of consulting, Clegg et al. (2004) argued that a consulting project team occupies an interstitial role between the consultant and client firms involved in the project: that is, the project team belongs to neither but is connected to both. In this role, Clegg and coauthors argued, the consulting project team can disrupt and disturb the client organization, potentially transforming it. They did not, however, discuss *how the consulting project team can also disrupt and disturb the social order in the consulting organization*. Yet this is what we found on the consulting project we studied. We thus propose a view of consulting as having the potential to shift meanings, interests, genres, and practices—and thus power dynamics—on both sides of the relationship: that is, in the consulting firm as well as in the client organization. Moreover, the shifts in consulting practice stemming from client engagements may lead to new practice areas within a consulting firm, as described by Anand et al. (2007), and at the same time may yield new power relations.

A fourth implication concerns understanding power in communities of practice. The literature on communities of practice has come under increased criticism for not offering adequate theoretical consideration or empirical investigation of issues concerning power and conflict and for “overlooking the significance of the wider institutional contexts” (Contu & Willmott, 2003: 292). Scholars using this lens have tended to ignore conflicts among the multiple communities of practice typically present in contemporary organizations (Levina & Vaast, 2005). They have either examined one community at a time or paid little attention to the role and influence of intercommunity relations or networks of practice (Duguid, 2005; Osterlund & Carlile, 2005). Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of a field of practice, we *conceptualized the traditional tenure-based distinction within communities as well as other distinctions within and across communities* (e.g., professional, cultural, educational). The well-established expert/novice distinction (Wenger, 1998) that was critical to reproducing Eserve's strong identity also served to inhibit effective collaboration among Eserve members, creating additional barriers against outsiders collaborating with Eservers. As such, these power struggles point to some of the potentially negative consequences of communities of practice (Hilsop, 2003; Levina & Vaast, 2006).

Fifth, our work contributes to the literature on power and status formation in task groups. Project

teams working within and across organizations can be understood as small task groups with inconsistent claims for establishing power and prestige orders (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mundell, 1993). This literature, drawing primarily on social psychological theories and methods, has shown contradictory findings as a consequence of measurement problems in lab experiments (Berger et al., 1992; Berger, Ridgeway, Fisek, & Norman, 1998; Brown, Cretser, & Lasswell, 1988). In response, multiple variance theories of status negotiation in groups have been proposed over the years (Berger et al., 1992). By examining the dynamics of a project team over time, our field work has identified some *ways in which power relations—and by implication—status claims, get renegotiated in such groups*. The theoretical framework we have proposed can thus shed some light on this unsettled line of research, highlighting the discursive conditions and actions that may lead to reconfigurations of status and power in task groups.

A sixth implication of our study entails the use of *genre analysis as a method for studying power relations*. Prior genre studies have shown how members of a community may import familiar genres from other communities (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Yates et al., 1999), yet these imported genres have tended to reproduce existing power relations rather than shift them, as in our study. The critical genre analysis used here focuses specifically on the divergence between formal espoused practices and the actual enacted practices of a community. This explicit comparison of espoused with enacted genres draws attention to areas of discursive ambiguity, tension, and conflict, thus offering valuable analytical insights into the occasions and performances of power dynamics within multiple and intersecting fields of practice.

Seventh, our work on espoused and enacted genres contributes to the literature on organizational routines by elaborating the conditions and actions that can produce differences between ostensive and performative routines and how these can shape power relations in organizations. Feldman and Pentland (2003) focused on endogenous change as a result of improvisation during routine performance. However, they did not specify the mechanisms through which such endogenous change occurs. Our findings indicate that *change in routines may occur through agents drawing on exogenous resources (from familiar institutional contexts) to enact local departures from established practice*. Moreover, our analysis suggests that in order to distinguish what is exogenous or endogenous, one needs to first identify the relevant institutional contexts in which ostensive and performative

routines are situated, and then recognize that as these contexts are nested and overlapping, changes in one context may or may not produce changes in another.

Finally, our study has implications for the use of discursive strategies as means for achieving institutional change. Our findings highlight *how the enactment of genres on new projects is central to issues of power and legitimacy*. Thus, who enacts which genres in which circumstances becomes a key question for understanding and initiating change in groups, communities, organizations, and fields. Prior work in institutional change (Clemens, 1993; Leblebici et al., 1991) has shown that players on the peripheries or interstices of interorganizational fields are more likely to borrow or introduce new practices from multiple fields than those agents who are more centrally invested in the institutionalized norms and forms of working. Leblebici et al. (1991) suggested that experimenting with alternative practices is less costly for such fringe players. Our findings resonate with this research and point additionally to the importance of marginalized agents' prior knowledge and experience of alternative discursive resources drawn from their participation in multiple other fields of practice. It is these agents' deliberate or inadvertent action to resolve discursive difficulties that may shift power relations within and across organizations, and possibly lead to institutional change.

REFERENCES

- Agar, M. 1980. *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. New York: Academic Press.
- Alvesson, M. 1993. Organizations as rhetoric: Knowledge-intensive firms and the struggle with ambiguity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 30: 997–1015.
- Anand, N., Gardner, H. K., & Morris, T. 2007. Knowledge-based innovation: Emergence and embedding of new practice areas in management consulting firms. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50: 406–428.
- Bacharach, S. B., Bamberger, P., & Mundell, B. 1993. Status-inconsistency in organizations: From social hierarchy to stress. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14: 21–36.
- Barley, S. R. 1986. Technology as an occasion for structuring: Evidence from observations of CT scanners and the social-order of radiology departments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31: 78–108.
- Bazerman, C. 1995. System of genres and the enactment of social intentions. In A. Freedman & P. Medway (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric*: 79–104. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Berger, J., Balkwell, J. W., Norman, R. Z., & Smith, R. F.

1992. Status-inconsistency in task situations: A test of 4 status processing principles. *American Sociological Review*, 57: 843–855.
- Berger, J., Ridgeway, C., Fisek, M. H., & Norman, R. Z. 1998. The legitimation and delegitimation of power and prestige orders. *American Sociological Review*, 63: 379–405.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice* [R. Nice, trans.]. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1996. *The state nobility: Elite schools in the field of power* [L. C. Clough, trans.]. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. & Thompson, J. B. 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, W. C., Cretser, G. A., & Lasswell, T. E. 1988. Measuring status-inconsistency: More trouble than its worth. *Sociological Perspectives*, 31(2): 213–237.
- Clegg, S. 1989a. Radical revisions: Power, discipline, and organizations. *Organization Studies*, 10: 97–115.
- Clegg, S. R. 1989b. *Frameworks of power*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Clegg, S., & Courpasson, D. 2004. Political hybrids: Tocquevillean views on project organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41: 525–547.
- Clegg, S. R., Kornberger, M., & Rhodes, C. 2004. Noise, parasites and translation: Theory and practice in management consulting. *Management Learning*, 35(1): 31–44.
- Clemens, E. S. 1993. Organizational repertoires and institutional change: Women's groups and the transformation of United States politics, 1890–1920. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98: 755–798.
- Contu, A., & Willmott, H. 2003. Re-embedding situatedness: The importance of power relations in learning theory. *Organization Science*, 14: 283–296.
- Czarniawska, B., & Mazza, C. 2003. Consulting as a liminal space. *Human Relations*, 56: 267–290.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. 1983. The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48: 147–160.
- Duguid, P. 2005. The art of knowing: Social and tacit dimensions of knowledge and the limits of the community of practice. *Information Society*, 21(2): 109–118.
- Elkjaer, B., Flensburg, P., Mouritsen, J., & Willmott, H. 1991. The commodification of expertise: The case of systems development consulting. *Accounting, Management and Information Technologies*, 1(2): 139–156.
- Epstein, J. 2001. *Book business: Publishing past, present, and future*. New York: Norton.
- Feldman, M., & Pentland, B. T. 2003. Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48: 94–118.
- Foucault, M. 1980. *Power/knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction ritual; essays in face-to-face behavior*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goffman, E. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hardy, C., & Clegg, S. R. 1996. Some dare call it power. In S. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies*: 622–642. London: Sage.
- Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Grant, D. 2005. Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 30: 58–77.
- Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. 1998. Strategies of engagement: Lessons from the critical examination of collaboration and conflict in an interorganizational domain. *Organization Science*, 9: 217–230.
- Hardy, C., & Phillips, N. 2004. Discourse and power. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, N. Phillips, & L. Putnam (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational discourse*: 299–316. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Heracleous, L., & Marshak, R. J. 2004. Conceptualizing organizational discourse as situated symbolic action. *Human Relations*, 57: 1285–1312.
- Hilso, D. 2003. The complex relations between communities of practice and the implementation of technological innovations. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 7(2): 163–188.
- Knights, D., & Willmott, H. 1989. Power and subjectivity at work: From degradation to subjugation in social relations. *Sociology—The Journal of the British Sociological Association*, 23: 535–558.
- Korda, M. 1999. *Another life: A memoir of other people*. New York: Random House.
- Krackhardt, D. 1990. Assessing the political landscape: Structure, cognition, and power in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 35: 342–369.
- Kryder, L. G. 1999. Mentors, models, and clients: Using the professional engineering community to identify and teach engineering genres. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 42(1): 3–11.
- Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. 2005. Interactions within groups and subgroups: The effects of demographic faultlines. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48: 645–659.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. 1991. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

- Leblebici, H., Salancik, G. R., Copay, A., & King, T. 1991. Institutional change and the transformation of interorganizational fields: An organizational history of the United States radio broadcasting industry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36: 333–363.
- Levina, N. 2001. *Multi-party information systems development: The challenge of cross-boundary collaboration*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.
- Levina, N. 2005. Collaborating on multiparty information systems development projects: A collective reflection-in-action view. *Information Systems Research*, 16(2): 109–130.
- Levina, N., & Vaast, E. 2005. The emergence of boundary spanning competence in practice: Implications for implementation and use of information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 29: 335–363.
- Levina, N., & Vaast, E. 2006. Turning a community into a market: A practice perspective on IT use in boundary-spanning. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 22(4): 13–38.
- Maguire, S., & Hardy, C. 2009. Discourse and deinstitutionalization: The decline of DDT. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52: 148–178.
- Maguire, S., Hardy, C., & Lawrence, T. B. 2004. Institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields: HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy in Canada. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47: 657–679.
- Orlikowski, W. J., & Yates, J. 1994. Genre repertoire: The structuring of communicative practices in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39: 541–574.
- Orlikowski, W. J., & Yates, J. 2002. It's about time: Temporal structuring in organizations. *Organization Science*, 13: 684–700.
- Osterlund, C., & Carlile, P. 2005. Relations in practice: Sorting through practice theories on knowledge sharing in complex organizations. *Information Society*, 21(2): 91–107.
- Pentland, B. T. 1992. Organizing moves in software support hot lines. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37: 527–548.
- Pentland, B. T., & Feldman, M. S. 2005. Organizational routines as a unit of analysis. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 14: 793–815.
- Pfeffer, J. 1983. Organizational demography: Implications for management. *California Management Review*, 28(1): 67–81.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. 2000. Inter-organizational collaboration and the dynamics of institutional fields. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37: 23–43.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. 2004. Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review*, 29: 635–652.
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Berger, J. 1986. Expectations, legitimation, and dominance behavior in task groups. *American Sociological Review*, 51: 603–617.
- Sabherwal, R. 2003. The evolution of coordination in outsourced software development projects: A comparison of client and vendor perspectives. *Information and Organization*, 13: 153–202.
- Schatzki, T. R. 2005. The sites of organizations. *Organization Studies*, 26: 465–484.
- Schryer, C. F. 2002. Genre and power: A chronotopic analysis. In R. Coe, L. Lingard & T. Teslenko (Eds.), *The rhetoric and ideology of genre: Strategies for stability and change*: 73–102. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Schwartzman, H. B. 1989. *The meeting: Gatherings in organizations and communities*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Sell, J., Lovaglia, M. J., Mannix, E. A., Samuelson, C. D., & Wilson, R. K. 2004. Investigating conflict, power, and status within and among groups. *Small Group Research*, 35(1): 44–72.
- Seo, M. G., & Creed, W. E. D. 2002. Institutional contradictions, praxis, and institutional change: A dialectical perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 27: 222–247.
- Staw, B. M., Sandelands, L. E., & Dutton, J. E. 1981. Threat-rigidity effects in organizational behavior: A multilevel analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26: 501–524.
- Tjosvold, D., Andrews, I. R., & Struthers, J. T. 1991. Power and interdependence in workgroups. *Group and Organization Studies*, 16: 285–299.
- Turner, V. W. 1984. Liminality and the performative genres. In J. J. MacAloon (Ed.), *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle: Rehearsals toward a theory of cultural performance*: 19–41. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Van Maanen, J. 1979. The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24: 539–550.
- Weber, M. 1978. *Economy and society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weick, K. 1987. Theorizing about organizational communication. In F. Jablin, L. Putnam, K. Roberts, & L. Porter (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication*: 97–122. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wickham, P. 2004. *Management consulting: Delivering an effective project* (2nd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Williams, R. 2001. The client's role in the consulting relationship: is there "con" in consulting? *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 16: 519–522.

- Yakura, E. K. 2002. Charting time: Timelines as temporal boundary objects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45: 956–970.
- Yates, J., & Orlikowski, W. J. 2007. The power point presentation and its corollaries: How genres shape communicative action in organizations. In M. Zachry & C. Thralls (Eds.), *The cultural turn: Communicative practices in workplaces and the professions*: 67–92. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing.
- Yates, J., Orlikowski, W. J., & Okamura, K. 1999. Explicit and implicit structuring of genres in electronic communication: Reinforcement and change of social interaction. *Organizational Science*, 10: 83–103.



Natalia Levina (nlevina@stern.nyu.edu) is an associate professor in the Information, Operations, and Management Sciences Department at the New York University Stern School of Business. Her research is focused on understanding the nature of boundaries and the emergence of boundary-spanning practices that enable effective collaboration on projects involving multiple organizations, countries, and professional groups. She also studies strategic aspects of global outsourcing and offshoring. She earned her Ph.D. in Information Technology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Wanda J. Orlikowski (wanda@mit.edu) is the Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Information Technologies and Organization Studies at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Her research focuses on the organizational implications of new information technologies, with particular emphasis on changes in organizational structure, culture, communication, and work practices. She earned her Ph.D. from New York University.



Copyright of *Academy of Management Journal* is the property of Academy of Management and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.