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## **Internal Politics and the Interactive Elaboration of Information in Workgroups: An Exploratory Study<sup>1</sup>**

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*This exploratory research is concerned with the elaboration of appropriate information by workgroup members. Our theoretical approach centers on the interactive dimension of appropriateness judgments in work relationships; special attention is given to the way members use internal boundaries in their group in order to formulate these judgments. The study describes and grounds a typology of the processes of elaborating information and examines the link between these processes and the structure of the workgroup. Workgroup structure is defined in terms of authority relationships, taking into account different attitudes toward authority. The methodology is qualitative but builds upon a comparative approach applied in a social service unit and an administrative service unit.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Workgroups have long been considered by the literature as an indispensable element in promoting motivation at work, innovation, projects creation, and participation. From an organizational point of view, they have been one of the most powerful anti-taylorist devices.

Theories which stress the importance of autonomous or semi-autonomous workgroups embedded in larger organized settings tend to renew

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a general interest in the functioning of workgroups (Fiorelli, 1988; Manz & Sims, 1982, 1987). In particular, the extent of their contribution is questioned, since the functioning of workgroups can handicap as well as improve the organization's ability to achieve its goals. From this perspective, the issue of their internal politics is important for at least two reasons. First, members' allegiance to their workgroup often competes with their allegiance to the organization as a whole, in the same way that the objectives and interests of a unit can seem incompatible with the objectives and interests of other units within the organization. Second, these groups are often supposed to self-regulate, develop their own capacity for adaptation and self-reorganization; such tasks presuppose that the group is able to observe itself, especially to deal with information in a complex way.

The link between information and internal politics is central to the study of members' decision making in uncertainty situations. An important body of literature (Crozier, 1964; Goffman, 1959; O'Reilley, 1980; Paisley, 1980; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Simmel, 1908; Wilensky, 1967, among many others) deals with this relationship. However, most of these studies usually stress the strategic dimension of information and give prominence to situations in which individuals attribute their uncertainty to a lack of or to an overload of information. This line of research focuses on means used by actors to try and control (reduce, maintain, or increase) this uncertainty. The study of this link is taken a step further by the examination of manipulation, distortion, concealment, or invention of information in organizational contexts (Feldman, 1988), and by more indirect conceptions of power and decision making (Lukes, 1974). This behavior attracts attention because of its secret, deceptive, and illicit character. The main limitation of this approach is, however, its reliance on a "technical" conception of communication which does not question what is informative for the actors themselves, what it means for them to "know well" (Boisot, 1987; Dervin, 1980). A pre-established definition of information takes for granted the informative value of a message exchanged between interlocutors.

Our research questions this assumption. It is concerned with actors in situations of uncertainty confronted with their rights or duties to know, with questions such as: "What has to be known and taken into consideration, in order to make this decision and orientate one's behavior accordingly?," "Is this message appropriate, i.e., does it have an informative value, a bearing on the choices that must be made, and how it is possible to judge this," "How can one develop enough confidence in the assertion of a proposition and legitimately claim to know?" From our point of view, to be considered as informative, a proposition must be certified, evaluated by a *judgment of appropriateness*. The term "appropriateness" refers to social criteria linked to identity and authority. When the members of a group must agree on the facts needed to make a decision, they use social as well as technical criteria: the

information must be socially appropriate as well as technically satisfactory, these two dimensions being wholly interdependent (Feldman & March, 1981; Heimer, 1985; March & Sevón, 1982; Smithson, 1985; Swanson, 1978; Vaughan, 1983). This is especially true of workgroups, where activities are partially finalized by a common goal. Our work focuses on the social aspect of this judgment of appropriateness, particularly the way it is linked to the actors' relationships toward authority and social control. This relationship is an indicator of the actors' involvement in the group's internal politics.

This article explores the way members of workgroups elaborate information while involved in the internal politics of their workgroup. It seems to us that trying to link socially-constructed appropriateness judgments to internal politics extends previous research on members' strategies in uncertainty situations, as well as our understanding of these internal politics in organizations. Our approach was to observe differing conceptions of what constitutes real or worthwhile information for members of workgroups, and how they elaborate this information. It enabled us to build a typology of modes of interactive elaboration of information in workgroups, and to formulate hypotheses on how members can indirectly influence and control each other's decisions at the level of everyday-life communication.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A model of the judgment of appropriateness applied to a message was designed in order to propose a theory of the interactive elaboration of information. A detailed presentation of this theory can be found elsewhere (Lazega, 1988). Briefly, it identifies the criteria actors, as members of a group, invoke to judge the appropriateness of a message. The symbolic interactionist theory of the "definition of the situation" was the starting point of this theoretical construction which was designed specifically to apply to communication behavior. Our theory assumes that actors perform three operations in order to evaluate or negotiate the appropriateness of their own behavior: first, the actors' mode of identification, second, the mode of legitimation of this behavior, and third, the definition of their accountability for this behavior.

These operations, and the sense of social control underlying them, provide answers to the following "generic" questions. First, for a given or contemplated act, what is the instance of social control recognized by the actor? The answer lies in the modalities of identification of the actor, in the recognition of himself as the source of different acts. The actor negotiates his identity by choosing between several possible instances of social control, thereby establishing the interactive dimension of his behavior. This act of allegiance is of particular importance as it establishes the actor's position in the social

structure. Second, how is this act legitimized on the behalf of this instance of social control? By referring to this instance, the actor is able to problematize his own behavior, in order for example to anticipate (and perhaps prevent) induced consequences. The form taken by the legitimation of an act can be seen as an answer to this problematization; it indicates the way an actor can introduce social control in the orientation of his behavior. Third, who of all the members of the group to which the actor belongs may represent the instance of social control for this particular act? In a social setting, the actor can vary what we shall call the “extension” of his accountability (in a praxeological sense, not a moral one); the choice of an authority inside the group to whom the actor is accountable for his behavior, from whom he can seek validation or assent, indicates the way in which social control is considered to be represented in the interactive setting.

The empirical research was designed to develop this conceptual framework inductively in two ways: to identify the forms taken by each variable in the negotiation of the appropriateness of the message, and to build a typology of modes of interactive elaboration of information. The conceptual framework also included a definition of the structure of workgroups which can be linked to the process examined and provide a typology of workgroups for comparative analysis. This enables us to offer grounded hypotheses concerning the relationship between the structure of workgroups and the different modes previously identified.

The structural dimensions of a group which we consider as relevant are its authority relationships. This is based on the classical and Weberian conception of authority and its foundation or legitimacy. Our approach focuses on the way an organized setting distributes among its members the right to invoke an institutional authority argument in a discussion. Given the regulation of access to this argument, members can develop different relationships toward authority which tend to be expressed through identity choices. We shall distinguish between two types of relationships toward authority, based on the choice of either an institutional or a non-institutional identity. These relationships are either “tactical,” where one tries to gain compliance or to resist institutional authority without using an authority argument, or “strategic,” where one does invoke an authority argument.

This conception of structure provides a criterion for the classification of workgroups which allows us, with the help of a comparative analysis, to consider the relationship between process and structure. Our classification of workgroups is as follows: (1) the “bureauprofessional” type, which organizes access to the authority argument so that actors adopt a dominantly strategic relationship toward authority; here, most members can oppose, for instance, a professional authority to a hierarchical one, and (2) the “bureaucratic” type, which organizes access to the institutional authority ar-

gument so that actors adopt a dominantly tactical relationship toward authority; here, most members do not have access to any authority argument. In each of these two types of workgroup, members react toward authority in different ways (Dingwall, 1982; Sainsaulieu, 1972, 1977).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Field and Procedure*

An exploratory empirical research was undertaken in 1985/86 (in Geneva, Switzerland) to observe the possible variations in each main step of the appropriateness judgment. This study was based on the observation of workgroups belonging to the public administration, where the complexity of authority relationships is particularly noticeable. One workgroup is an administrative unit, representing the “bureaucratic” type, and the other a semi-private social service unit, representing the “bureauprofessional” type.

The social service unit is a workgroup comprising 13 members responsible for managing a semi-private institution which houses about 150 asylum seekers and their families when they arrive in Switzerland. The institution accommodates them, tries to help them adapt to their new context, and to become financially as well as psychologically independent as quickly as possible. The asylum seekers can stay in this institution as long as it takes for an official answer to be made to their asylum request, which can take several years. The team comprises a director, who is a social worker, his deputy, who is an administrative manager, and a team working under their supervision. The director has under his responsibility the professional team of seven social workers; the deputy manages the administration and has under his responsibility a secretary and three maintenance persons. A description of the tasks, interdependence, and accountability of the various members would be too long here. It must be stressed, however, that the composition of this workgroup shows a dominant proportion of professionals (or “semi-professionals,” in Etzioni’s (1969) classification of social workers) who are in a strategic relationship toward authority (Sainsaulieu & Périnel, 1979; Trouillot, 1982).

The administrative service unit is a workgroup comprising 11 members, all of whom are civil servants. As a fiscal department, this is one of the official units responsible for taxation and tax collection in the city of Geneva. Briefly stated, this department’s objective is to bring in as much money as possible for the administration within the limits imposed by the law. Here, again, a description of the members’ tasks, interdependence, and accountability, would be too long. The composition of this workgroup shows a majori-

ty of nonprofessional employees and the dominant relationship toward authority is a tactical one (Knights & Roberts, 1982; Rothman, 1979; Sainsaulieu, 1977).

### *Data and Analysis*

Our empirical research was qualitative, based on the approach described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the discovery of grounded theory. The author spent 2–3 months observing each workgroup. The first phase was a case study observation which was meant to adjust the research technique presented below to the characteristics of each group. The data used here were collected during the second phase, a more systematic inquiry conducted within each group. The methodology was inspired by the “subjective solidarity networks” technique developed in Kellerhals, Coenen-Huther, Lazega, Modak, Trouot, and Valente (1986). All the members had to solve problems of communication individually. These problems consisted in the acquisition of information and the quotation of the other members’ position concerning an ongoing debate inside the workgroup.<sup>3</sup> Solving these problems presupposed choices of inclusion and exclusion of co-members listed on the objective chart of the workgroup. We focused on these choices and their justification because they contained indications about how members consider an information to be socially appropriate, sufficient, and satisfactory. We inferred from these data the modalities of variation of each parameter considered by the theory as a major component in the negotiation of the appropriateness of the message.

*The Acquisition of Information.* Among the many ways of gathering information in organizations, our research focused on “interactive” strategies (Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, & Miller, 1976) of information acquisition. Given the general approach mentioned previously, the data were collected in the following way. Each workgroup member was presented individually with the chart of his workgroup and confronted with a problem whereby he needed information from others. Members were asked, first, to simulate the choice of information sources from among their workgroup colleagues, and second, to justify the inclusion or the exclusion of each potential source. This technique thus involved asking each member to build a network of information sources whom he would address to help solve the problem; each of his colleagues had to be either included or excluded from this network.

<sup>3</sup>This technique assumes that the observation of each individual member completing the required tasks is sufficient to observe the main components of our interactive process. This assumption is legitimate since our definition of interaction is not a probabilistic or a conditional one, but a symbolic interactionist one; it is based on the way an actor incorporates social control in the orientation of his behavior.



The following examples are taken from the corpus of arguments:

I go speak to the secretary because she has loads of information—I know that she knows things, even if I have to be a bit selective and careful.

I would not ask X because I am the Head of this department and I don't want to weaken my Deputy's position, out of respect to him. You've got to decide what you want: either you appoint a Deputy and you respect this delegation in front of all the other clerks; or, if you want to go and ask questions directly you don't appoint a Deputy and so you don't bypass anybody. I don't like people interfering in my business, so I wouldn't interfere in his.

I would go chat with X, I can take my questions even further because we're on good terms, and we have similar points of view on this institution.

I'd go to X because he is the person I get on with best. He is a friend, I trust him the most. If something happened, for instance, which could endanger my position, I know he would warn me even if he'd been asked not to tell me about it.

The arguments used by the members to justify the selection or disqualification of potential sources are not purely circumstantial; the reasons which lay behind each choice contain indications of more general value, namely two of the criteria used by the actor to evaluate the appropriateness of a message. The content analysis of these data was conducted so as to constitute a typology of these arguments. Each argument contained two types of indications concerning the variation of the first and second parameters (modes of recognition and modes of legitimation). For the first parameter, we identified a difference between *institutional* and *non-institutional* modes of mutual recognition. For the second parameter, the difference between *substantive* and *procedural* arguments of legitimation was the most powerful conceptual discriminant. When the choice of information sources was justified in substantive terms, the actors focused on the message transmitted, its content, and the quality of the information transmitted or ignored (completeness of the reported facts, expected accuracy of the reported facts, and proximity to the point of view reporting the facts). When the justification was procedural, members focused on pre-established rules organizing communication and exchange of information within the group. The actor invoked procedural arguments which concentrated on the act of acquisition itself and its authorization. These dealt with the essentially relational or formal constraints on transmission of information. In our corpus, procedural arguments invoked (1) formal rules requiring or preventing acquisition of information from potential sources, (2) the existence or absence of personal relationships with the potential source, and (3) the loyalty or absence of loyalty to subgroups and more impersonal coalitions.

The typology of these arguments was reconstituted as a result of the cross-classification of the first two parameters. Four types of arguments were distinguished: (1) institutional and substantive arguments, (2) institutional and procedural arguments, (3) non-institutional and substantive arguments,



and (4) non-institutional and procedural arguments. Each workgroup shows a specific distribution of these different types. The distribution and its interpretation can be found elsewhere (Lazega, 1988). This typology provides a first subset of criteria used to formulate an appropriateness judgment. Our purpose here is to identify these types; we then use them at a theoretical level to look at how they can be combined with another subset of criteria described in the following section.

*The Quotation of Other Members' Position.* In this case, the data were collected in the following way. Identifying the variations of the third parameter (modes of extending actor's accountability) was made possible by confronting each member of the workgroup with the task of quoting the other members' position concerning an ongoing debate in the workgroup. The debate concerned a problem common to all the members: a major delay in the administrative service unit and a reorganization in the social service unit. The actor had thus to differentiate between those co-members whose position was known and could be repeated, and those whose position was unknown and therefore unquotable. The ability to describe a colleague's position on a common problem can be seen as resulting from "co-orientation" work (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972; Newcomb, 1953); it can be considered as indicative of two facts: first, that this position had been somehow perceived, and second, that this perception had been transformed or elaborated into a piece of information. Members designated those colleagues whose opinions they knew, and then described this position, how they knew about it, and where they had heard about it.

The following examples are taken from the corpus of quotations:

We spoke about this between us, and he is quite disappointed because he worked really hard and now it almost looks like it could be held against him. What's more, he's quite worried because if, for example, you give the person in charge of the Home a budget, he'd have to do his own accounting and he doesn't know how. This is a problem because restructuring is supposed to rationalize the work, but in fact it's going to complicate things even more.

He thinks just like the junior social workers, that we forget about them, "That's it, we're being thrown out." They think they are being excluded, they are a bit suspicious. They think that's going to work against them when in fact it's going to give them specific functions. But I recognize that they are not taking it very well; they worry about it a lot. I saw this clearly when they questioned me this morning during the meeting.

I know his position, because there are some people who prefer to stick to paperwork and who are in fact very good at it. He's a bit like that. We talk about it often at lunch. He thinks that the changes are good, but for the moment there is only words; all the good talkers and those who like paperwork are for it.

I know her position on this because we talked about it at the meeting and by no small coincidence all the women had the same opinion on this question, that is, they don't see that all this restructuring is necessary.

In both workgroups, each member was always able to quote at least two or three of his colleagues, and to reconstitute the way he learned about these positions concerning the common problem. When a member was able to quote his colleagues' opinions, he was always able to provide the expected indications about the third parameter of the process. The content analysis of these quotations was conducted so as to provide a classification. The quotations were analyzed as propositions containing two sorts of indications: the first concerns modes of recognition, i.e., institutional or non-institutional, as for the preceding task, and the second concerns the way the actor represented the extension of his accountability. For this variable, the difference between *private* (or "closed") and *public* (or "open") extension was the best conceptual discriminant. Public extension of accountability refers to the fact that all the members of the group can have access to the same information and can therefore be supposed to know it and guarantee its value; private extension refers to the fact that only some of the members have access to the same information.

A typology of these quotations was reconstituted as a result of the covariation of these parameters. Four types of quotations could be distinguished: (1) institutional and private quotations, (2) institutional and public quotations, (3) non-institutional and private quotations, and (4) non-institutional and public quotations. Each workgroup shows a specific distribution of these different types (Lazega, 1988). This typology provides the second subset of criteria used to formulate an appropriateness judgment. Combined with the first subset, it provides the following typology of appropriateness judgments.

## TYPES OF APPROPRIATENESS JUDGMENTS

This study of the main "steps" of an appropriateness judgment enables us to identify the different modes of interactive elaboration of information. These modes are classified according to the way they incorporate a form of social control in the appropriateness judgment, essentially by "playing" with the internal boundaries of the group. When a member of a workgroup systematically refers to one mode, the result is a specific type of knowledge which is produced from within the group; it can be called "endogenous knowledge" and be considered as one of the actors' bases for making decisions.

The articulation of these subsets of criteria described above can theoretically produce four types of homogeneous and discriminant modes of interactive elaboration of information. Each mode represents a specific transformation of a message into "information" which can be used as an argument in the decision-making process. Our three parameters were observed two by two, in a nonsequential way. Each couple of parameters has in com-

mon the mode of recognition. This common component allowed us to combine the couples of parameters and therefore to reconstitute a final typology of modes of interactive elaboration of information. Strictly speaking, by cross-classifying the two typologies considered previously with the arguments and quotations, we obtain 16 types. However, the mode of identification has a special function in the process, i.e., ensuring the praxeological continuity in the actor's behavior by recognizing him as the permanent origin for separate acts; this means that only the "homogeneous" cases, i.e., those where the mode of identification is the same in both couples of parameters, can be considered as indicating properties of a single mode of appropriateness judgment. This reduces the number of types which can be considered as valid down to eight. Furthermore, a second reduction is necessary, as the difference between institutional and noninstitutional recognition does not discriminate directly between types of appropriateness judgment: it does not give in itself any indication about the way actors play on the divisions within the group, as do the two other subsets of criteria. Therefore, the eight remaining types can be reduced to four ideal types of appropriateness judgment. Each type answers the "generic questions" asked by the theory of the definition of the situation in a specific way.

The first type, which will be called *realistic*, articulates a substantive legitimation and a public validation. On one hand, it naturalizes "what is to be known," removing the traces of an appropriateness judgment; on the other hand, it involves all the members of the group in the elaboration of this definition. In that sense, it assumes the existence of a reality common to all the members, and their adhesion to a good description of this reality, whatever their status. By asserting a proposition in this realistic way, members elaborate its informative value by trying to ignore the divisions within the group and to consider themselves as interchangeable. Having the authority to know depends only on the closeness of one's propositions to reality.

The second type, the *expert* mode of information elaboration, articulates a substantive legitimation and a private validation. Like the preceding type, it naturalizes "what is to be known," but it does not involve all the members of the group in the elaboration of this definition. In that sense, although it assumes the existence of a common reality, it does not consider this reality as accessible to everyone. The required description of reality (appropriate propositions) is guaranteed only by those members considered as most competent or responsible. Members are not interchangeable anymore. On one hand, this type of appropriateness judgment ignores the divisions within the group, but on the other, it restores these divisions by restricting the members who may represent the social control. Therefore, asserting a proposition in this expert mode and elaborating its informative value needs the creation of a relativist regime of certainty. Having the authority to know depends on the closeness of one's propositions to reality, but the ability or right to such a proximity is a matter of cooptation and authentication.

The third type, the *polemical* mode of information elaboration, articulates a procedural legitimation and a public validation. Unlike the preceding types, this mode does not assume the existence of a common reality; it ritualizes a statement concerning “what is to be known” by referring the members to the existence of rules, authorized methods, specific distribution of rights or duties, and internal boundaries. However, it potentially involves all the members of the group in the validation of an asserted proposition. In this sense, this mode is as paradoxical as the preceding one, it divides the group from the point of view of legitimation, while ignoring the divisions from the point of view of the extension of accountability. Theoretically, all the members of the group are involved as representatives of the social control, but in fact they only count as such if their allegiance conforms to that of the actor asserting the proposition. Therefore, to assert a proposition in this polemical mode means elaborating its informative value in a way which tries to paralyze in advance any opposition. Having the authority to know depends on the side one stands for in a divided group, but the right to stand on the right side is recognized to all.

The fourth type, the *initiated* mode of information elaboration, articulates a procedural legitimation and a private validation. Like the preceding type, this mode is based on an appropriateness judgment which ritualizes the statement of “what is to be known” or taken into consideration; however, it tries to obtain the guarantee of some members only, who claim to be different from the others and share an exclusive identity. This mode assumes the existence of several realities, but only one of them is to be considered as relevant; this reality is only accessible to “initiated” members, and becomes a “mystery” to the others. In that sense, this mode relies entirely on the division of the group from the point of view of legitimation as well as extension of accountability. Therefore, to assert a proposition in this initiated mode means elaborating its informative value in an exclusive way. Having the authority to know depends on one’s specific identity in a heterogeneous group, and the right to be converted to this identity is not granted to all the members.

These types are presented in an order which shows how the actors can progressively avoid the participation and influence of others in their respective decision making. The realistic mode invites or allows participation, and the initiated mode excludes and dismisses it.

### **HYPOTHESES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKGROUP STRUCTURE AND INTERACTIVE ELABORATION OF INFORMATION**

The individual acts presented in the empirical section of this article break the appropriateness judgments down into components which are observed separately. These static data were collected to develop the theory of the interactive elaboration of information. No attempt was made during the data col-

lection to study empirical and conflictual discussions, and to gain a dynamic perspective on this process, only to define its different outcomes. With that perspective, we coupled the observed individual acts in the following way. We assembled the three components of the appropriateness judgment by associating, for each member, the most frequent type of legitimation argument with the most frequent type of extension of accountability, while keeping in mind the necessary homogeneity in the mode of identification. This method provides some of the necessary indications for the formulation of hypotheses. It should be pointed out, however, that this selective association of separately observed acts produces what may be called “opportunities” of appropriateness judgment formulation. We do not know whether actors do in fact take up these opportunities or not.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of this procedure, we may hypothesize that different modes of information elaboration are dominant in different interactive contexts, i.e., different types of workgroups. The analysis of the indications contained in the data shows that the greater the proportion of members with a strategic relationship toward authority, the more these members will judge the appropriateness of a message by playing on the internal boundaries and compartmentalizations of the group, albeit in a predictable (for the other members) and stable manner; uncertainty is controlled by restricting and homogenizing the modalities of asserting “what has to be known.” In this context, the most frequent modes of interactive elaboration of information are the “institutional initiated” and the “institutional expert.” Whereas the greater the proportion of members with a tactical relationship toward authority, the more these members will judge the appropriateness of a message by playing on the internal boundaries and compartmentalizations of the group in an unstable, differentiated, and unpredictable manner; here, uncertainty is controlled by being able to diversify the modalities of assertion of “what has to be known.” In this context, all the modes of interactive elaboration of information are found with almost even frequency.

In both types of groups, members constantly renegotiate the criteria they use for the appropriateness judgment. In the bureauprofessional group, this is done in a stable and restrictive way; whereas in the bureaucratic group

<sup>4</sup>Under these conditions, some members have no opportunity of formulating an appropriateness judgment “consistent” with our theory, whereas some others have more than one opportunity (when their use of two types of argument or quotation is equally frequent). This procedure simplifies the description of the link between structure and process. Members are assigned, by the researcher, only to the identities in which they can produce appropriateness judgments which are compatible with the theory of the “definition of the situation.” Presented as such, members’ behavior may seem too uniform and may lose some of its basic ambiguity. Individual variations deserve a closer look in further research, especially considering the fact that individual perceptions of social control may change in different situations and be constrained by other structural dimensions than those taken into consideration here.

these criteria are negotiated in more diverse ways. The structure of the workgroup seems therefore to have at least an indirect influence on how members make these judgments.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the interactive elaboration of information in workgroups contributes to the understanding of internal politics in organizations. It does so by showing how members can influence each other's decisions by "playing" with the internal boundaries of their group. They have different strategies enabling them to create contexts which frame appropriateness judgments and assertions of "what is to be known," and "what has to be considered as a fact." Our results suggest that actors' strategies of indirect control are linked to the structure of the workgroup they belong to. They can stabilize and restrict the types of contexts where messages take an informative value, or diversify and change them. This link becomes apparent when the manner in which the members involve themselves in their workgroup's internal politics is sustained by a consistent relationship toward authority. Actors refer to a form of social control in order to elaborate information; their definition of appropriate information therefore depends on the type of workgroup to which they belong, based on the way this control is organized and institutional authority distributed.

As well as controlling uncertainty or manipulating given pieces of information, internal politics regulate how to gain the authority to know about decisions, alternatives, or relations between decision makers (March & Olsen, 1976). Means of putting oneself in control of appropriateness judgments are linked to the actors' relationships toward authority and social control, and therefore to the structure of the workgroup. Describing these socially-constructed appropriateness judgments shows how members can indirectly influence each other's decisions at the level of everyday-life communication. The categories proposed improve our understanding of a relatively unexplored dimension of internal politics in organizations.

Further research on the relationships between interactive elaboration of information and internal politics in workgroups can make use of the categories developed here, at least in observing how members discuss their rights and duties concerning information management. This should provide more understanding with regard to at least three issues: decision making based on the "endogenous knowledge" described by each way of elaborating information, how these different information elaboration processes coexist in different types of autonomous or semiautonomous workgroups, and how information elaboration processes interfere with self-regulation and self-reorganization in workgroups.



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