

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**A Dual Constitutive Communication-based Model for
Managerial Practice Diffusion**

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the current research of managerial practice diffusion, discussions on how to understand and manage diffusion changes have been made primarily by drawing on institutional, rhetorical and systems theories for the reason that each of them seems to suggest a “mechanism” for diffusion. For instance, institutional theory suggests that diffusion is a changing process during which an organisation will continuously adapt itself to the outside environment in order to keep itself survival. Based on a rhetorical perspective, for which rhetoric plays an important role in diffusion, the achievement of a practice’s diffusion/adoption relies on a three-period rhetorical justification which follows a Pathos-Logos-Ethos sequence. In the domain of systems theories, if diffusion is taken as a social system’s reproduction, communication thus has a unique position in constituting such a system through *autopoiesis* (*self-creation*).

Through comparing the above diffusion “mechanisms” suggested by different theories, it is found that some understandings for diffusion are shared in common. For example, a practice has to be legitimised in order to be diffused; communications for diffusions involve a process of filtering and creating meanings. Moreover, through analysing these “mechanisms”, the advantages and inadequacies of each can be recognised. Based on the analysis, the most outstanding issue identified is that for understanding and managing diffusion changes, a constitutive ontology that enables explorations on both people and diffusion circumstances (i.e. an organisation and its environment) is required. In this thesis, such an ontology is believed to be a social-constructionist-based one.

A social-constructionist perspective assumes that the concepts of object and subject are connected in a “duality” rather than a “dualism”, and according to which, a practice is constituted during its diffusion, or in other words, it is constituted in people’s action of teaching and learning this practice. Furthermore, such a constitutive process is accomplished in people’s diffusion communications, which simultaneously construct a circumstance that either enables or constrains a diffusion change.

In the discussion of how a constitutive communication works for diffusion, “communication duality” is defined in the sense that communication is a

diffusion tool for justifying a practice which can be structured in a rhetorical way; it also selects and processes meanings of a practice relying on people's existing knowledgeabilities as a sensemaking-sensegiving (SM-SG) process.

Consequently, an incorporated practice diffusion model based on a social-constructionist perspective is built which aims to suggest how a diffusion change can be enacted as well as how it can be analysed in practical terms.

In the light of social constructionism, for which a researcher's ontology and epistemology jointly build each other, this thesis applies a self-ethnography strategy which follows a "SISI" (Survey-Immerse-Share-Integrate) methodology to analyse a real case of practice diffusion. The author's personal insights from this study suggest how a practice diffusion can be improved, as well as how a diffusion model can be enriched. In addition, the author's self-reflections on this research present how a communication research for practice diffusion could "constitute" a practice, and hence to help or inhibit its diffusion.

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To many individuals, globalisation is regarded as the integration of the world economy and an international economic co-operation. Although it rapidly became a phenomenon in 1990s, globalisation is still conceived of as a broad context for businesses and organisations nowadays. While more and more companies/organisations are becoming global, one of the big challenges is to merge or integrate different organisations or organisational divisions as a new organisation and make it perform effectively and successfully. However, globalisation or mergers are not only to “combine assets, share costs and enter new markets” (Wes, 1996, p3), they also involve issues regarding capital centralisation, labour markets, social & political conflicts, ideological & cultural structures, and human relations (Psimmenos, 1997; Wes, 1996; Walton, 1987; Poole, 1986; Abrahamson, 1977).

For example, Psimmenos (1997) emphasises that “employee participation” has now become a core value of human relations management in globalisation and thus in company mergers. He views this changing value as an integrated product which is derived from “both the internal mode of industrial organisation and from the external global organisation of industrial activity” (Psimmenos, 1997, p69). In fact, in the context of globalisation and business merging, almost all of the internal/external integrating activities will bring organisational changes. These changes which either have influenced or will influence organisational performance have led people to highlight change management as a crucial agenda for organisations (Kitchen & Daly, 2002).

This thesis aims to explore a particular type of change in a global context, where a *parent company* – a company who owns or controls subsidiary companies (Wallace, 2002) anticipates having its managerial practices introduced, implemented and institutionalised in its subsidiary companies which have been taken over. In this thesis, this kind of change, which is about diffusing managerial practices, is therefore called ***diffusion change***. This thesis proposes that in order to manage a diffusion change effectively, an appropriate diffusion model, which is built on a comprehensive understanding of the nature of organisational change, diffusion and communication is required.

1.1 Organisational change and organisational communication – a general review

According to Gilgeous (1997), internal factors (organisational structure, management, power relations and culture) and external factors (competitions, market, new technology, and social/political environment) are the initial demands which drive organisational changes. Literature on change management has shown the fact that the outside world of an organisation is hardly predictable. Original strengths of an organisation can also become obstacles that limit its later development (Murdoch, 1997). Therefore, the biggest challenge for change management is perhaps that there is less an organisation can plan for a change, and instead, an organisation needs to “learn to live with it, anticipate it, and where possible – capitalise on it” (Kitchen & Daly, 2002, p48). Change management is hence about continuous *understanding* and *learning* the internal and external dynamics and to operate within them (Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Pettigrew, 1985).

This thesis argues that organisational change and its management have to be understood and operated within a social constructionism paradigm. This is because a social-constructionist perspective abandons the object-subject “dualism” but reconceptualises it as a “duality” (Gergen, 1985; Giddens, 1984). In the domain of change management, this suggests that an organisation’s internal/external demands could trigger an organisational change initially, but they are simultaneously constituted during the operation of a change. This can be understood in two ways. First, when an initial change is being operated, it involves the interpretation and understanding of this change through communications, and based on which its meanings could be constituted. Secondly, the operation of a change could reproduce an organisation’s inside/outside environment which could therefore generate new demands for a change to be continued. By employing a social-constructionist perspective, one can expect to continuously understand and learn a change, which can thus be managed by “living” with it.

Existing change management studies also show that organisational change is depending on employees. How employees understand, interpret and act in change will determine the success or failure of a change (Kotter, 1996; Spike & Lesser, 1995; Kitchen, 1997; Gilsdorf, 1998). Kotter (1996) presents that it is

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important for employees to be communicated about the need for change and the way of how to change, as they are the people who are engaged in a change process. Spike & Lesser (1995) also regard communication as a key issue, because it is a tool for “announcing”, “explaining” and “preparing” people for both positive and negative consequences of change. Kitchen (1997) further adds, “employees can only work effectively if they can participate in the organisation and they can only participate if they are fully informed” (p80). Gilsdorf (1998) analyses mistakes in change management and claims that many failures can be caused by communication breakdowns.

According to the above discussions, communication plays an important role in organisations and especially in organisational changes. Furthermore, having said that a social-constructionist perspective is adopted in this thesis to highlight a “dual” relationship in change management, it is further argued that this “duality” can be demonstrated by communications for the following reasons. (1) When communication is taken to “announce” and “explain” a message, it also filters and creates “meanings” of this message, which is considered as continuous sensemaking-sensegiving activities (more on this in Chapter 3). (2) Apart from a message itself, the way it is communicated, and the meaning that is extracted also constitute a circumstance (for change), which consists of both an organisation’s internal and external environments. This circumstance is constituted by communications and will also influence communications.

So far, this chapter has discussed change management in a general sense. As mentioned before, the change that will be addressed particularly in this thesis is a ‘diffusion change’ which refers to the change of adopting and diffusing managerial practices in an organisation.

Practice diffusion could either happen in the context of a business merger, where a parent company intends to implement its best practices in its subsidiary companies; or it could happen in any situation where managers decide to adopt a new practice. In either case, to diffuse a practice involves a changing process of putting in place a practice that is unknown, and then becomes known, believed, accepted and used (Green, 2004). This process covers **teaching** and **learning** activities from both diffusers and potential adopters (Strang & Soule, 1998).

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For instance, a parent company not only introduces a managerial practice, but also expects to see it being accepted, implemented and adopted by subsidiary organisations. To adopt a new technology in an organisation is far more than just changing a facility or updating a software package, it is also concerned with how to get organisational members to use it.

Given the important role that communication plays in change management, this thesis argues that an effective diffusion change cannot be managed without an appropriate communication. This is not only because communication is crucial for any organisational changes as discussed above; in terms of a diffusion change, how far a practice can go depends on organisational participants. As said before, diffusion includes both *teaching* and *learning* processes. A good communication can provide people with an opportunity to discuss and share their perceptions and understandings about a practice, and hence to reach a collective decision about whether a practice should be accepted or rejected. Moreover, based on a social-constructionist perspective, a good communication could also foster a 'circumstance' (a 'diffusion environment' as will be argued later in this thesis) which is considered to be 'ideal' for a practice to be accepted and hence diffused. A social-constructionist perspective will now be discussed in the following section (a more detailed discussion can be found in Chapter 3).

1.2 A social-constructionist perspective in understanding a diffusion change and communications

In the discussion of how diffusion change is enacted, different theories (i.e. institutional theory, rhetorical theory and autopoietic systems theory) have provided different considerations and developed different 'mechanisms'. For example, institutional theories consider the achievement of diffusion change in a homogenous way. Therefore, the defined mechanism for diffusion is an organisation's continuous actions of seeking for "isomorphism" and adapting to its "institutional environment" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For rhetorical theories, a diffusion mechanism is a series of highly structured rhetoric. A practice can be diffused because it is rhetorically justified. For autopoietic systems theories, a diffusion change is enacted and operated within an organisation/system since an organisation/system is a self-produced mechanism (Luhmann, 1995). (A

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detailed discussion and comparison of these theories can be found in Chapter 2).

Among these discussions, the role of communication in enacting diffusion change has always been highlighted although it is approached differently. For instance, communication can be seen as a discourse and conversation which directly persuades a practice's adoption (Mintzberg, 1973; Abrahamson, 1996); or it is taken symbolically to present and create people's social realities through which a diffusion change can be managed (Tompkins, 1987; Billig, 1987; Eccles et al., 1992). Referring to an autopoietic system, communication has been perceived much more fundamentally, and particularly for Luhmann (1986), communication is the element that social systems use in their self-reproductions.

Although the above theories have all provided valuable inputs in understanding diffusion change and communication, their further applications in this thesis have been prohibited by the inadequacies that each of them may have, among which the most outstanding one is their inability of addressing the "duality" of "agents" and "structures" in diffusions (Giddens, 1984) and its derived "duality" of communication (more details in Chapter 2).

As an alternative way of looking at diffusion and communication, a social-constructionist perspective will be addressed now. While section 1.2.1 will challenge the object-subject dualism by having a philosophical focus which will later form a constitutive ontology (see also Chapter 3), section 1.2.2 will illustrate the structuration theory which has an explicit discussion on the "duality of structure" (more in Chapter 3).

1.2.1 Social constructionism

A social constructionism paradigm suggests that social reality is not "out there" which can be separated from human subjectivities; however, it is not solely constructed by human subjectivities either. Therefore, social reality is not pure objective or subjective; and moreover, it is not necessary to treat object and subject as the two extremes which are totally contradict to one another. Instead, for social constructionists, "social realities and ourselves are intimately interwoven as each shapes and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions"

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(Cunliffe, 2008, p124). The underlying assumptions of this perspective also impact the view of what is knowledge and how to create knowledge, which suggests that the process of “knowing” constitutes what is to be “known”. It is claimed that a social constructionist stance embeds both ontology and epistemology.

When applying social constructionist perspective in considering diffusion change and communication, the “knowledge” concerned here could be a managerial practice and the process of “knowing” a practice could be communicative actions for both teaching and learning purposes. Therefore, the “knowing” activities, or in other words, the communicative activities construct what is to be “known” of a practice. It simply means that in the eye of a social constructionist, communication for diffusing a practice also constitutes the meaning of a practice itself, and hence influences or determines the consequence of its diffusion (more on this in Chapter 3).

1.2.2 Structuration theory

By possessing a similar philosophical position which rejects the pure object-subject dualism, Giddens (1984) proposes the “duality of structure” in his structuration theory, by which he argues that “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practice they recursively organise” (p25). Therefore, the constitution of social “agents” and “structures” is not a “dualism”, but rather a “duality”.

For Giddens’ (1984), social “structure” only exists virtually. It cannot be seen but can be perceived as people’s knowledge to the society they are living in, and can be traced in their memories. People’s social activities, or in other words, their “social practices” are conducted according to the defined structures of their society which are expressed as “rules” and “resources”. Furthermore, people’s social practices also enrich the existing structures, and hence form new ones which will in turn define their future activities and practices. This is how a structure is a medium and an outcome of people’s social practices at the same time. In this sense, “medium” and “outcome” are not the two opposite ends of a casual relationship, but each of them continuously enables and constitutes the other, and thus forms a relationship of “duality”.

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Bearing the above in mind, this thesis thus argues that communication has a dual constitutive nature too. It suggests that communication is not only a symbolic *medium* to determine how to enact a practice diffusion change, it also determines what and to what extent is to be diffused, in other words, it determines the *outcome* of a diffusion change. This means that as a symbolic medium, communication conveys and constructs the meaning of a practice and the value of its adoption; the way of how it is communicated also conveys and constructs the recognition of a practice's diffuser. The so-generated results are integrated together as defining a diffusion environment which fosters a diffusion change and also affects its related consequences. Furthermore, a diffusion environment will also influence/determine the further conduct of communication, and in which sense, communication is also part of a change outcome.

1.3 Duality of communication

In the light of social constructionism and structuration theory, this thesis argues for the **duality of communication** which covers both objective and subjective dimensions. Most importantly, the two dimensions are linked dynamically, and each dimension enables (and also constraints) the other. This therefore also shows how a diffusion change can be managed within internal and external dynamics.

Referring to the majority of organisational communication literatures, communication is normally regarded as a tool or instrument (either language, symbolic or rhetoric) which could get the other things done. For example, through efficient and effective communications, people can share information, repair relationships, make collective decisions, improve democracy and public relations (Stohl & Redding, 1987; O'Reilly et al., 1987; Porter, 1985; Hargie & Tourish, 1993; Culnan & Markus, 1987). In this case, communication's objective dimension is often emphasised. Consequently, to understand communication is a "medium" for diffusion change is perhaps easier. For instance, communication conveys information of a managerial practice from its diffuser to potential adopters. It determines what is to be conveyed as well as how, and through communication, the reason of why a practice can be adopted could also be explained.

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In terms of the subjective dimension, communication can be described as a continuous sensemaking and sensegiving process (SM-SG). This is because communication is not only about a message (i.e. a practice) and its exchange, but also about its attached meanings. Meanings could be created differently from individuals to individuals depends on how they make sense and give sense to each message. Their sensemaking and sensegiving activities are deeply rooted in their personal cognitions. Furthermore, when different meanings are shared and interchanged by individuals through communication, more meanings (and sometimes collective ones) of a practice can be generated. In this way, a practice is rather constituted by communication and this is how communication can also be seen as an “outcome” (could be subtle or indirect) of a practice diffusion.

Communication’s objective and subjective dimensions, in other words, the understandings of “medium” and “outcome” are the two sides of its duality. It can be portrayed in the following figure, in which the objective side of “medium” is represented by **Tool**, and the subjective side of “outcome” is demonstrated as **SM-SG**.

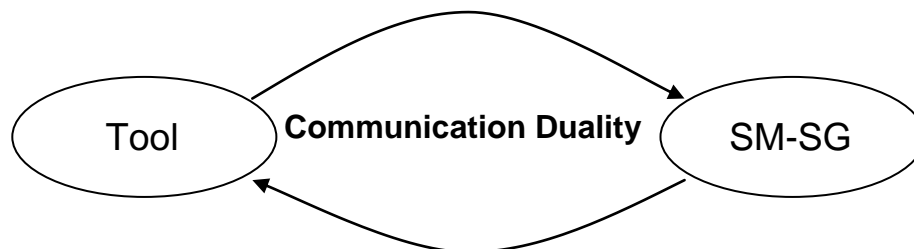


Figure 1-1: Communication Duality

In the above figure of Communication Duality, the **Tool** side gives the idea that communication is a medium/instrument for diffusing a managerial practice because it is a way of how diffusers could **teach** and how potential adopters could **learn** the practice, and it is also a way of how they could learn from one another. The **SM-SG** side shows that communication simultaneously constitutes a practice because what a managerial practice is will largely depend on what diffusers and potential adopters understand about it through their sensemaking and sensegiving activities rather than what a practice really is. This nature explains how communication for practice diffusion can constitute a wider

environment, and as a result, how this environment can enable and constrain the way people (diffusers and potential adopters) communicate.

In Figure 1-1, the arrow from **Tool** to **SM-SG** demonstrates that the tool nature of communication enables its meaning-creation nature to become available. Only when people are communicating, a meaning can be created and perceived. The arrow with the different direction thus illustrates that communication's tool nature is also an outcome constituted by the other nature. This is because the environment determines how communication will be carried out, in other words, how it will be further used as a tool. In short, the above Figure 1-1 also shows the relationship between the natures of communication: the nature of **Tool** and **SM-SG** continuously construct one another, but together they constitute communication's duality.

1.4 Theory of sensemaking and sensegiving

As discussed above, sensemaking and sensegiving activity, which is referred as "SM-SG", is one of the bubbles that comprise the proposed communication duality. Sensemaking, according to Weick (1995), is the means through which an organisation or an environment of significance is being constructed and defined. He argues that "to talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations" (Weick, 1995, p15). Communicative activity is a way which enables this ongoing process (Kreps, 1986).

Generally, sensemaking means the making of sense. However, it is not a simple interpreting or understanding process. "Sensemaking" involves a process of creating meanings, while "interpretation" and "understanding" may indicate the assumption that a certain meaning is already existing but waiting to be discovered. SM-SG activities and communications are intertwined, and this can be understood in the following way: when people are communicating to each other, they explicitly or implicitly involve a meaning-creating process through sensemaking and sensegiving.

Although the word "sensemaking" in Weick's (1995) discussion may also include the process of presenting a sense to other people, in this thesis, this

presenting process is typically described as “sensegiving”, which literally means the giving of sense. Therefore, sensemaking and sensegiving form a joint activity to demonstrate the process by which information and its attached created meaning(s) is transmitted between different communication parties. The meaning of the information that has been created will contribute to the changing and reconstructing of the realities of whoever is making sense of it.

1.5 Research questions and aims

Through a critical review on institutional theory, rhetorical theory and autopoietic systems theories (to be addressed in the next chapter), this thesis aims to address the question of how a diffusion change can be better understood and managed by taking a social constructionist stance. This thesis borrows some valuable parts of the above theories, for example, it agrees that a Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence could help to justify a practice’s legitimacy (although it will be developed as an iterative process); it also agrees with autopoiesis in some parts, especially the constitutive role that communication plays in a system; and it agrees with institutional theory in seeing the influence that an institutional environment (will be seen as the ‘diffusion environment’) could exert on an organisation/system (i.e. to promote or prohibit a change).

This thesis will also argue that a change needs to be continuously learned by drawing on an organisation/system’s internal and external dynamics in order to be better managed. Therefore, it is ideally to be managed in a constitutive way rather than a pre-designed way. This is where communication can contribute most because communication’s objective-subjective dual nature enables a system’s internal-external dynamics. Although communication is often understood to diffuse a practice rhetorically or symbolically, as perceived in this thesis, it also constitutes the practice which is to be diffused and more importantly, its wider diffusion environment.

Therefore, this thesis intends to find out: ***Will a dual constitutive communication-based diffusion model improve managerial practice diffusion?*** This main research question leads to several sub-questions as follows.

Chapter 1 Introduction

- A. Why a social constructionist approach in understanding and managing diffusion change is needed?
- B. Why communication has a “Tool & SM-SG” duality?
- C. How can the objective and subjective dimensions of communication duality help to address/enact a diffusion change?
- D. How will a social constructionist-based research strategy (known as self-ethnography later in this thesis) enable the constitutive communication research and practice?

As implied by the above research questions, this thesis aims to:

- 1. Argue for the importance of understanding diffusion change within social constructionism paradigm
- 2. Propose the duality of communication based on its constitutive nature
- 3. Use the objective dimension of communication by applying the Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence to justify a practice’s legitimacy
- 4. Use the subjective dimension of communication by involving sensemaking and sensegiving activities to address the achievement of a practice’s legitimacy
- 5. Provide a diffusion model which proposes how a practice’s legitimacy is obtained by communication duality
- 6. Chose an appropriate research strategy and methodology based on social constructionism paradigm
- 7. Demonstrate how a self-ethnography strategy and a ‘SISI’ methodology can be used in a practice diffusion research
- 8. Reflect on the appropriateness of the proposed diffusion model by using it to analyse practical diffusion cases and hence suggest improvements
- 9. Reflect on how the chosen strategy and methodology also “constitute” the research in terms of social constructionist perspective

1.6 Research strategy

In terms of the research questions and aims, it is considered that an appropriate research strategy for this thesis is ideally to be able (1) to provide an

opportunity to explore real communication activities, which is to know *what do people say* and *how do they talk to each other* in the diffusion of a practice? (2) To provide a space where both SM-SG activities and rhetorical persuasion modes can be examined, which is to find out *how a particular sense(s) is made or given* by people (diffusers and potential adopters) and *through which (persuasive) ways*? (3) More importantly, as informed by social constructionism, this strategy is also expected to explicitly include a position for the researcher. It is the researcher's participation to the real communication and SM-SG activities that could fulfil the research aims. Moreover, it is the researcher's self-reflections in conducting communication, SM-SG activities and the research itself that could demonstrate a constitutive social constructionist stance.

Considering the above, this research is therefore designed to be an ethnographic study which is featured by the researcher's real participation in the fieldwork. However, in order to highlight the "constitutive" perspective of social constructionism for which a researcher's ontology and epistemology are jointly developed at the same time (Cunliffe, 2008), the research strategy adopted here, namely **self-ethnography** thus emphasises explicitly the researcher's role and his/her reflexivity in diffusion, communication and research.

1.6.1 A constitutive perspective on social research

In the eye of a social constructionist, researchers' research activities are not only processes of "knowing" the social world/reality, but also part of the world/reality (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). The way they get to know the reality and the result of what they know about it constitute their realities, which therefore enable and constrain their future research interests, aims and methods (Cunliffe, 2008).

This perspective can also be demonstrated by drawing on Checkland and Scholes' (1990) figure shown as below.

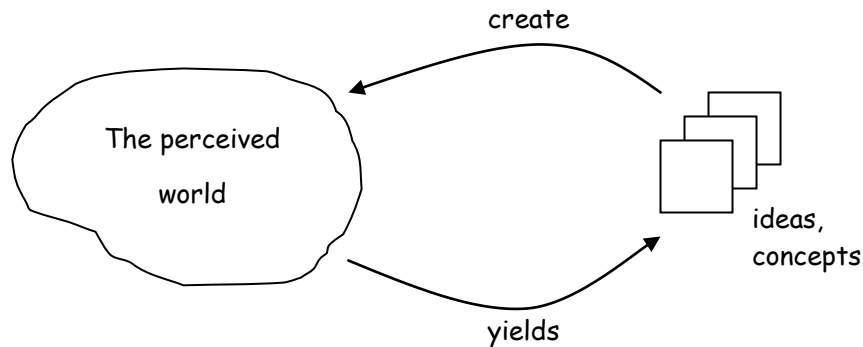


Figure 1-2: *The World Interpreted by Ideas whose Source is the World itself*
(Checkland & Scholes, 1990, p21)

In the above figure, Checkland and Scholes (1990) illustrate that people’s perceptions towards the social world in which they inhabit generate their “ideas” and “concepts” of this world, they then use these “ideas” and “concepts” to further “create” the world. This process is called a process of “mutual creation”¹ by them. However, it is also argued that “ideas” and “concepts” cannot build a world directly, and instead, they enrich people’s thinking process. In other words, based on these “ideas” and “concepts”, people structure a methodology through which they can think, understand, interpret and thus “create” the world. In also relation to the constitutive perspective on social research, the above figure (Figure 1-2) can then be expanded as the following.

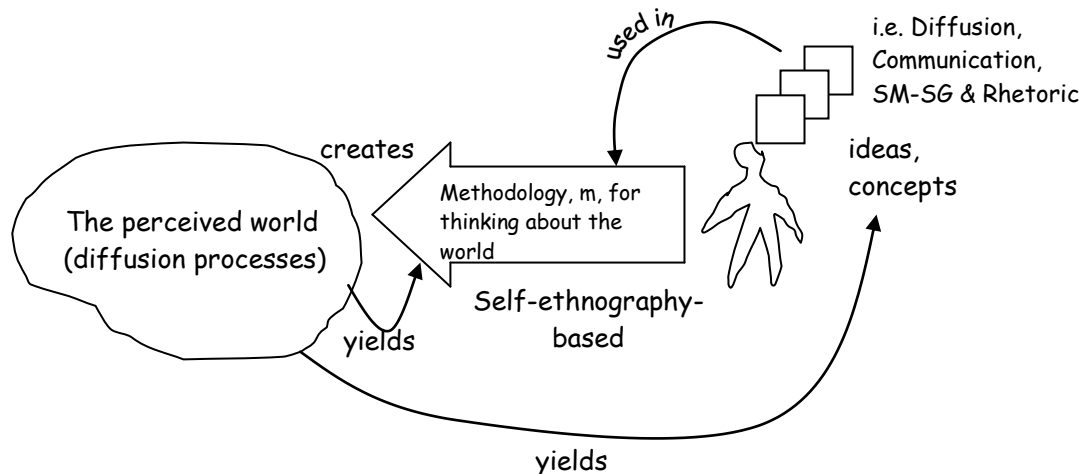


Figure 1-3: *Constitutive Perspective on Social Research* [Adapted from (Checkland & Scholes, 1990, p21)]

Figure 1-3 shows that a researcher’s perception or existing knowledge to his/her social world yields particular “ideas” and “concepts” which he/she believes or feels most interesting. For instance, in this thesis, these interested

¹ Similar to “structural coupling” in Autopoiesis.

“ideas” and “concepts” could be *managerial practice diffusion, communication, SM-SG, rhetorical justification* and so on. In the meanwhile, the world that a researcher perceives also informs the formation of his/her research methodology(ies) which he/she could use to think and explore his/her research questions in a structured way (shown as the arrow drawn from “the perceived world” to “methodology”). A researcher uses his/her interested “ideas” and “concepts” in methodologies and hence to define a specific and suitable methodology to conduct his/her research (a self-ethnography-based methodology in this thesis). Later, the generated research findings (i.e. how a practice can be diffused or well diffused) will become part of a researcher’s social world and thus constitute the social world.

1.6.2 Research strategy – self-ethnography

Self-ethnography is the research strategy applied in this thesis because it is the one which can meet the above mentioned criteria that this research requests for.

(1) According to Alvesson (2003), a self-ethnographer is an organisational participant as well as a researcher. This means that he/she will be able to take part in real organisational activities (i.e. communication activities) as the other participants, reflect on what is happening and also try to make sense of it because of the research task that he/she is committed to.

(2) To enable a deeper understanding of a communication, a researcher is ideally to take an “internal” rather than an “external” position to look at an organisation. Thus, self-ethnography is appropriate because a researcher can get involved in a real meaning-creating process and becomes part of it. He/she can then interpret the situation by offering the first-hand experience of how a particular meaning is created and in which ways.

(3) Based on social constructionism which challenges the object-subject “dualism” but rather argues for the “duality”, a “knower” and his/her “known” jointly construct each other since knowledge is reflexive. When comparing to alternative strategies, in self-ethnography, the picture of how will a researcher’s participation (i.e. how his/her activity in communication & sensemaking, his/her interactions with other participants, and his/her self-reflections of the

intervention) influence the “known” and the “knower” can be made clearer. As the name indicates, self-ethnography already includes a space for a researcher in his/her research.

A social-constructionist-based self-ethnography is slightly different from traditional ethnography, although they share most philosophical assumptions and principles. Self-ethnography includes a position for a researcher explicitly in his/her research, and thus has an emphasis on a ‘natural’ access to an organisation where the fieldwork is to be carried out. This means that a self-ethnographer is ideally to be treated first as an organisational “participant”, and then a researcher or “observer”. Some researchers also suggest to use a self-ethnographer’s “home base” as a research setting (Alvesson, 2003; Chumer, 2002), which is considered as helpful in achieving the natural access. More discussions on this can be found in Chapter 4.

As with many other kinds of social research, self-ethnography is also facing a credibility judgement in social science (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). However, instead of judging a research against the “reliability”, “validity” and “generalisability” criteria, this thesis argues that a self-ethnography will be assessed in terms of “consistency”, “convincing” and “critical distance”. To keep ‘consistency’, a research focus needs to stay in line with its underlying philosophical assumptions, and so do the research methodology and methods (Cunliffe, 2008). To make a self-ethnography ‘convincing’, a research should be able to show readers its “authenticity”, “plausibility” and ideally, the “criticality” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). To bear a ‘critical distance’ in mind is to prevent a researcher from being too close to a setting of study and thus losing his/her professional insights (Chumer, 2002). Discussions on this will be expanded in Chapter 4.

1.7 Research methodology and methods

According to the self-ethnographic research strategy, “I” (as a self-ethnographer) will join the real communication activities as every other organisational participant does. “I” will also reflect on what/how particular “meanings” are created through “our” (I and the other participants) SM-SG activities during communication. In addition, my self-reflections should be laid out on how the constructed meanings through “our” communication and SM-SG

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activities will influence the *meaning* of a particular practice, the *environment* of its diffusion as well as its diffusion *result*.

In terms of the self-ethnography strategy, a “**SISI**” (Survey-Immerse-Share-Integrate) methodology is proposed, which represents four phases of conducting a self-ethnographic research. This briefly means the following. **Survey** is to provide background information of a setting of study, which is also including a possibility of modifying the initial research question(s). **Immerse** is to being fully embedded in the research setting, to see, hear, think, experience and reflect on. **Share** is to share ideas and findings with other participants in order to not only validate observation data and so on, but also reflect on the researcher’s and the other participant’s actions. **Integrate** is to combine different types of data and analyse them in order to provide a consistent account of the research findings. This is also seen as constructing the social world by a research.

As informed by the research strategy and methodology, research methods will be used in this thesis are observation, interview, workshop organising, secondary data, and some *systems methods* of structuring problems. Research methodology and methods will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

1.8 Structure of this thesis

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter, which provides an overview of this thesis. It presents a context of how this research comes into being; the basic philosophical stance of considering communication, practice diffusion and social research in general; the related theories that back up this research; the research questions, aims, strategy, methodology & methods, and finally the thesis layout.

Chapter 2 is the first theory chapter which will introduce what is managerial practice diffusion, what can be referred as ideal diffusion consequences, and most importantly, what could be the way to achieve a good diffusion. Discussions will be conducted by illustrating and comparing institutional theory, rhetorical theory and autopoietic systems theory. The reason of why these theories will be partially employed as well as a critical view on the inadequacy of each of them will also be provided. The discussion will lead to the identification

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of the necessity to apply an alternative perspective in looking at practice diffusion.

Chapter 3 as another theory chapter will follow the argument of Chapter 2 to provide social constructionism as an alternative paradigm. Through illustrating the argument of social constructionism, the reasons of why it can be adopted will be addressed. Following the above, the concept of 'communication duality' will be discussed too. Its related objective and subjective dimensions will be presented by using communication's ideal features, and sensemaking & sensegiving theories. Through incorporating the ideas of communication duality as well as the practice legitimacy, an 'Integrated Practice Diffusion Model' will be built which is expected to facilitate practice diffusion and also to analyse real diffusion cases.

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter, in which the social constructionism will be addressed again, however, in terms of its methodological use. To choose social constructionism as the research paradigm will also lead to the use of self-ethnography as the research strategy. As being more explicit in highlighting researcher's role in research, this chapter will argue that self-ethnography is a type of ethnographic research but has its own features and credibility assessing criteria. According to the strategy, a 'SISI' methodology which consists of four phases will also be presented. A series of methods which can be used in this research will also be provided in this chapter.

Chapter 5 and 6 are known as the two chapters which will be reporting on the fieldwork in details. The fieldwork is presented in term of the four phases of 'SISI'. Chapter 5 covers the description of how the first three phases (Survey, Immerse and Share) have been conducted, and Chapter 6 will cover the last phase of 'Integrate' which provides a detailed analysis on the defined six diffusion cases. The integrated result will also show how the proposed diffusion model can be revisited and hence improved as accomplishing the social constructionist nature of this research.

Chapter 7 will provide a conclusion of this research/thesis to review how and how far the research questions have been addressed, as well as how and how far the research aims have been met. The research contributions, limitations and its related future research directions will be discussed in this chapter too.

1.9 Summary of this chapter

As a start, the first chapter generally overviewed the key ideas of this thesis. The discussion began with reviewing how organisational changes and organisational communications were considered within the globalisation context. It was then argued that as responding to organisational changes, and in particular the diffusion change, communication has to be dealt with appropriately.

By reviewing the social-constructionist perspective in understanding diffusion changes, this chapter argued to take a constitutive stance to understand communication. Implications had also been drawn from structuration theory, based on which the concept of 'communication duality' was therefore proposed and addressed. It suggested that communication is not only an organisational "tool" to facilitate other organisational activities, but is also conceived of as constituting the organisation. Moreover, in the purpose of enacting and improving organisational change and especially the diffusion change (as a particular interest of this thesis), communication should be used as a "tool" (a language or rhetoric tool perhaps) to produce diffusion change, and it should also be examined as a continuous SM-SG process so as to secure an appropriate meaning system to be built to enable practice diffusions.

This chapter also addressed the research questions and aims. In order to answer the questions and achieve the aims, this chapter introduced the research strategy briefly, known as the self-ethnography. The reason of why it was chosen as the appropriate strategy was also portrayed. In terms of this strategy, a 'SISI' methodology was presented too. Finally, the structure of the whole thesis was outlined in this chapter, which could be used to map the rest of this thesis.

Chapter 2 Managerial Practice Diffusion Change – Institutional, Rhetorical and Autopoietic Perspectives

This chapter aims to address how diffusion change could be conceived of and managed by drawing on the existing theories. For doing so, this chapter will illustrate the discussions based on institutional, rhetorical and systems (autopoietic) perspectives because the three explain ‘mechanisms’ for practice diffusion (adoption). From an institutional perspective, the mechanism refers to each organisation’s search for adaptation to its institutional environment; from a rhetorical perspective, it refers to the Pathos-Logos-Ethos three-period justification; and from an autopoietic perspective, it is the closed and self-producing process. Furthermore, by reviewing the type of ontology that lies behind each of the three perspectives in explaining diffusion, this chapter will argue that none of them is ideal to examine both the “agency” and the “structure” in diffusion change, and therefore alternatives must be considered.

As a special type of change that is relevant to organisations today and which has not been fully researched in the management literature, the definition of “managerial practice diffusion” will be explained first in this chapter. It will draw on institutional theory to present the two ideal consequences that practice diffusion can achieve. The discussion will then followed by introducing the concept of legitimacy and its three types because legitimacy is considered to be a key element for achieving ideal diffusion results.

In terms of the question of how to achieve a practice’s legitimacy, institutional perspective and rhetorical perspective have both provided sound discussions. When the former has a focus on “rational adaptation”, the latter emphasises on a Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence to justify a practice’s legitimacy and thus enable its diffusion. Through comparing the two perspectives, the advantages and problems of both will also be portrayed, which will then bring out the third perspective, an autopoietic system.

According to Luhmann, Maturana and Varela, autopoietic (social) system as a “self-producing” and “closed” system which is constituted by communication will be discussed. As providing a different ontological position that is distinguished from either institutional or rhetorical perspective, the constitutive element of

autopoiesis will be highlighted. However, by illustrating the problems which do not seem to be solved by autopoiesis, this chapter will suggest the adoption of an alternative perspective to understand diffusion change.

2.1 What is managerial practice diffusion?

Strang and Soule (1998) use the word “practice” to describe the items that are being diffused in organisations or societies, which “might be a behavior, strategy, belief, technology, or structure” (p267). In the management field, many ideas, techniques, processes, innovations, etc. have appeared which are regarded as the more efficient and effective ways to achieve particular outcomes. Because of their successful applications in some organisations, and especially some business organisations (Strang & Soule, 1998), they are considered as the “good ideas” and sometimes even the templates or standard ways of doing certain jobs, which have normally been called “best *practices*”. The reason that this thesis uses the term **managerial practice** rather than “best practice” is because the latter, as according to the current research can also be referred in policy, software engineering, health care, etc., while the former explicitly highlights the domain of management (i.e. business management) (Davies, 2005; Feuerstein, 2007; Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2005).

In this sense, the term of **managerial practice** therefore indicates those ideas, techniques and methods which can be used by managers to better manage their businesses and employees. However, as distinguished from other managerial practice researches, those practices which will cause changes in strategies or structures in a very large scale that often happen in the context of organisational re-engineering (i.e. BPI – Business Process Improvement, and EAP – Enterprise Architecture Planning) are not in the scope of this thesis. The managerial practices discussed here are thus limited to those methods which are relatively easy to be implemented but can bring certain improvements on management aspects, such as management tips and tactics.

Managerial practices are also the objects of diffusion in this thesis. Theoretically, the word “diffusion” means the spread of “something” (Strang & Soule, 1998). For example, it could refer to the process that a new product is accepted by the market (Bass, 1969); within a society, it could also refer to a

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process that a new idea, technology, fashion, etc. is applied by members of that society (Rogers, 1995). However, whatever the “something” is, “spread” is the key word. It implies a tendency that more and more people are doing it (a practice), using it and accepting it as valid.

It is also common that diffusion studies often emphasise the spreading process as happening between “users” and “adopters” (Bass, 1969; Rogers, 1995), which are also referred as “prior adopters” and “potential adopters” (Strang, 1991). This spreading process, on the one hand, includes an introduction of a practice, which a prior adopter “alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters” (Strang, 1991, p325); on the other hand, it also includes a potential adopter’s observation towards a practice as well as the outcomes of using and adopting it. This means that the better the outcomes a practice can bring, the more adopters it could have. Moreover, later adopters are often influenced by earlier adopters. For instance, Rogers (1995) defines a practice spreading process by dividing five categories of adopters: innovators, early adopters, early majority, later majority and laggards.

For the aims of this thesis, ***managerial practice diffusion*** is therefore defined as follows:

First, “diffusion” in this thesis certainly means the spread of managerial practices in organisations, but it also focuses on the process of “mimicry, social learning and organised dissemination” (Strang & Soule, 1998, p266). In other words, to study diffusion in this thesis will cover the investigation of a practice’s introduction (from the diffuser) as well as its adoption (between potential adopters).

Secondly, this thesis makes emphasis on the process by which a practice is diffused but not on the question of who introduces the practice. Therefore, the two sides of the diffusion activity will be referred as “diffusers” and “potential adopters”, rather than “users/prior adopters” and “adopters”. This is because anyone who diffuses a practice can be defined as a diffuser, and it is not necessary that he/she should be a prior user or adopter of this practice. Although a discourse from a user or a prior adopter may sound more faithful and convincing to potential adopters, as perceived in this thesis, for practice

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diffusions, it is the communication of how a practice is introduced and understood that matters, but not the question of who participates.

Finally, the effectiveness of practice diffusion can be indicated by an increase on the number of organisational members who adopt the practice. However, it is more important that the effectiveness is indicated by the practice's *taken-for-grantedness or institutionalisation* (to be explored in the next section). It is found that even if a practice is adopted or used at a certain period, if it is not taken-for-granted or institutionalised yet, it still has a high possibility to be abandoned or rejected later on.

2.2 Diffusion: An institutional perspective

In the domain of diffusion, several studies have been conducted by drawing on institutional theory and especially (neo)institutional theory because they contribute to provide an explanation of how rules, norms and routines have been established in the first place, or in other words, how they are built, diffused and accepted as social standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Zucker, 1987). In the eye of (neo)institutional theory, every organisation has to conform to its “institutional environment”, which is shared with the other organisations and existing as social accepted cognitive elements, such as belief systems, rules and standards (Scott, 2001; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Once the institutional environment changes, organisations have to change accordingly because if an organisation is considered as being consistent to its intuitional environment, it is usually considered as having “legitimacy” to be survival (Suchman, 1995; March & Simon, 1958; Scott, 1977).

In this study of diffusion changes, institutionalism as an entire theory will not be fully covered because the literature is vast and given the scope of this thesis, not many studies on institutionalisation focus on the same sort of diffusion which this thesis is looking at, but the institutional perspective in explaining diffusion will be employed to particularly address how a change is brought about and implemented in an organisation due to its inner demand to achieve institutional legitimacy.

2.2.1 The two ideal consequences of managerial practice diffusion

As mentioned before, the effectiveness of a managerial practice's diffusion is indicated by the number of its adopters, which is determined by a condition called the practice's "**taken-for-grantedness**" or "**institutionalisation**" – and according to (neo)institutional theory, these two are also regarded as the two *ideal* outcomes of organisational managerial practice diffusion. In this section, the discussion of what is "taken-for-grantedness" will follow Jepperson's (1991) interpretations.

Diffusion: taken-for-grantedness

In the domain of organisational studies, Jepperson (1991) argues that for people, "taken-for-granted objects are those that are treated as exterior and objective constraints" (p147) although they are still based on people's cognition. Therefore, taken-for-grantedness is distinguished from *comprehension*, *conscious awareness* and *evaluation*. He argues that taken-for-grantedness is distinct from comprehension because the pattern that is taken-for-granted is "well recognised". It means that no matter if people understand or not, those taken-for-granted exist as external constraints that are perceived as outside people's control. Taken-for-grantedness is also distinct from conscious awareness because it could be "less recognised". This means that people can take something for granted even without perceiving it or thinking about it. Finally, taken-for-grantedness is distinct from evaluation because a pattern could be considered as positive or negative or neither, but in each case, it is taken-for-granted (Jepperson, 1991).

Based on the above discussion, it is argued that the ultimate result of practice diffusion is a practice's taken-for-grantedness. If a practice is taken-for-granted, its adoption decision is derived from people's intuitions rather than from reasoned thinking. This means that people simply know they need to adopt and use the practice, and they do not even have to think about why they need to do so. In this sense, the question such as whether this practice is understandable or not, or whether it is positive or not will no longer matter. People can adopt the practice even without being aware of it.

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However, as being the ultimate result of diffusion which “reflects 100 percent diffusion of the practice, with no discursive justifications”, “taken-for-grantedness” could be very difficult to achieve (Green, 2004, p657). Thus, the concept of “institutionalisation” will be introduced. As another ideal result of practice diffusion, “institutionalisation” may not as perfect as taken-for-grantedness, but to some like Green (2004), it also indicates an ideal state of diffusion. Moreover, the highest degree of “institutionalisation” can be perceived as “taken-for-grantedness” (Green, 2004). Therefore, compared to “taken-for-grantedness”, “institutionalisation” is a more feasible state of affairs, and in the literature, there are more interests about it.

Diffusion: Institutionalisation

It has been said above that being *institutionalised* indicates a high degree of diffusion, and the highest level of institutionalisation is taken-for-grantedness. Therefore, institutionalisation can be conceived of as “a special type of taken-for-grantedness, where the value of a practice is presumed” (Green, 2004, p657).

As addressed in institutional theory, institutionalisation is often related to social and organisational *coercions* and their associated *changes* when compared to taken-for-grantedness. The following discussions will explain what institutionalisation is, and more importantly, they will also reveal the idea of what is regarded as the source of change in institutional theory.

According to Weber (1947; 1978), “bureaucracy”, a rationalised formal organisational structure is assumed to be the most efficient and powerful way to coordinate and control. In his notion of “bureaucracy”, market competition used to be the most outstanding type of coercion for organisations. This is because organisations had to compete in the marketplace for resources, customers and technologies in order to keep themselves survival. Competitions demand a rational system (bureaucracy) to provide organisations with controls and efficiencies. Therefore, the competitive marketplace among capitalist firms is the most important reason that causes “bureaucratisation” for most organisations.

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Institutional theory also suggests that the primary goal for organisations is to survive, and in order to do so, organisations must conform to models, rules, norms, and standards which are prevailing in the institutional environment (Scott, 2001; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1991). However, rather than focusing on market competition and bureaucratisation, in the eye of institutional theory, it is the “coercion of isomorphism” derived from social and organisational environment – which they refer to as the “institutional environment” that drives organisations’ changes and determines their fates of existence (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1991).

Institutional theory suggests that structural, procedural or cultural *similarity* will gain organisations legitimacy and hence keep organisations survival. This kind of similarity is called “isomorphism”, which means “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p66).

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that

Organizations are still becoming more homogeneous, and bureaucracy remains the common organizational form. Today, however, structural change in organizations seems less and less driven by competition or by the need for efficiency. Instead, we contend, bureaucratization and other forms of organizational change occur as the result of processes that make organizations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p63-64).

Organisations must conform to their “institutional environment”. Once the environment changes, organisations have to change accordingly so as to keep themselves to be consistent with it. When organisations are changed in order to match their changing environment, new social orders (patterns) or organisational structures take place, in other words, new “standardised interaction sequences” become existing (Jepperson, 1991, p145). According to Jepperson (1991), institutionalisation thus describes the process of attaining the standardisation of the new sequences, which is why it is often associated with the coercion of isomorphism. In order to survive, a social pattern needs to be

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repetitively self-activated, and through this routine, it gets maintained and reproduced. From this perspective, institutionalisation is often related to stability or survival because it represents this reproductive process. As referred to practice diffusion, institutionalisation describes the process of a practice becoming standardised. Accordingly, *institutionalised* indicates an ideal outcome of diffusion which refers to a stable status of a practice that is being repetitively maintained and reproduced.

However, compared to taken-for-grantedness, being institutionalised has a lower degree of diffusion is because this self-activated routine (institutionalisation) is sometimes interrupted by “environmental shocks” to which the structure that is highly institutionalised seems to be more vulnerable (Jepperson, 1991). Therefore, as seen by Scott (1991), institutionalisation is rather “an adaptive, unplanned, historical process” through which an organisational structure develops because “organisations come to mirror or replicate salient aspects of environmental differentiation in their own structures” (p179-180). It is further added that the reason that organisations have to keep being “isomorphic” with the other organisations which they depend on as well as the organisational environment which they subject to is also because they cannot conceive of other alternatives. According to Scott (2001), “compliance occurs in many circumstances because other types of behavior are inconceivable; routines are followed because they are taken for granted as ‘the way we do these things’ ” (p57).

2.2.2 Legitimacy and its three types

Based on the discussion above, being *institutionalised* and *taken-for-granted* could be respectively the ideal and the most ideal state that a process of practice diffusion can ever achieve. It has also been mentioned that for (neo)institutional theory, to obtain a managerial practice’s “legitimacy” is the key element to decide whether it could be institutionalised/taken-for-granted or not.

One of the widely used discussions on “legitimacy” in organisational studies has been provided by Suchman (1995), to whom, the concept of “legitimacy” has been defined as “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed

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system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p574). According to this definition, legitimacy has at least three features.

First, it is “generalised”, which means that it rests on a historical trend of events but is not rigid to any particular event. Therefore, even if an organisation occasionally reverses to social norms, it can still be considered as keeping its legitimacy because a few reverse cases are treated as **unique** and thus do **not** represent the historical stream of the organisation (Suchman, 1995). *Secondly*, legitimacy is a “perception or assumption” that people consider about their organisations. Because of this subjective nature, sometimes even if an organisation’s action is against social norms, it may not be perceived, and thus the organisation can still have legitimacy. *Thirdly*, legitimacy is within the “socially constructed” system, and hence, although it could be different from individuals’ values and interests, it still retains itself as appropriate, since the organisation is still considered in line with wider social interests. Suchman also declares that

“when one says that a certain pattern of behavior possesses legitimacy, one asserts that some group of observers, as a whole, accepts or supports what those observers perceive to be the behavioral pattern, as a whole - despite reservations that any single observer might have about any single behavior, and despite reservations that any or all observers might have, were they to observe more”. (Suchman, 1995, p574).

Legitimacy can be divided into three types: “pragmatic legitimacy”, “moral legitimacy” and “cognitive legitimacy” (Suchman, 1995). Each kind of legitimacy has different focuses and hence different ways of gaining it.

Pragmatic legitimacy “rests on the self-interested calculations of an organisation’s most immediate audiences” (Suchman, 1995, p578). This kind of self-interested calculation often appears to be exchanges of benefits, personal influence and organisations’ dispositions. For instance, audiences support a policy in exchange of the expected values and benefits that this policy will bring to them. Sometimes, a policy is supported by audiences is because they have been involved in this policy-making process, and therefore they believe that the

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construction of this policy is largely influenced and determined by themselves, and accordingly it can well represent their practical and social interests.

Follows from the above, a managerial practice's pragmatic legitimacy can be gained if this practice is in line with potential adopters' self-interests, i.e. if the adoption of this practice will bring them certain benefits and values; if the decision of adopting this practice is made collectively. Moreover, this kind of legitimacy can also be obtained if diffusers and/or the organisation involved are considered as having good characteristics. Human beings who have characters such as honesty and generosity are usually considered as good people, and therefore what they do is normally considered as right and appropriate. Because organisations are increasingly personified (Zucker, 1983; 1987), similar to human beings, organisations which have good dispositions, for example, shared values, collective interests, honesty, etc., are more easily considered as possessing (pragmatic) legitimacy.

Different from pragmatic legitimacy, Suchman argues that **moral legitimacy** is not likely to be achieved only because a certain pattern can meet the benefits of the evaluators (potential adopters). Instead, it is a judgement of whether or not this certain pattern is the "right thing" to be done, and this judgement should be consistent with the widely defined social value system. Although the "perceptions of 'rightness' often unconsciously fuse the good of evaluators with the good of society as a whole", the broad social value is still different from the narrow self-interest (Suchman, 1995, p579).

Following Suchman, it is asserted by the others that moral legitimacy can be evaluated through four aspects and therefore takes four forms (Scott, 1977; Scott & Meyer, 1991). (1) *Consequential legitimacy* is achieved through evaluating outcomes or consequences that an organisation will accomplish. The real accomplishment is compared to expectations, which are socially defined according to what kind of organisation one is. For example, consequences of hospitals are compared in terms of the mortality or cure rate; while for academic institutions, the consequences are compared in terms of academic achievements. (2) *Procedural legitimacy* is particularly important when an outcome or a consequence can hardly be measured. Therefore, an organisation

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is evaluated against whether it performs by following the socially accepted techniques and procedures (Scott, 1977; Suchman, 1995). (3) *Structural legitimacy* is achieved because the organisation's structure is morally accepted or favoured (March & Simon, 1958). Although procedural legitimacy and structural legitimacy "blend together", while the former pays more attention on the routines to accomplish a result, the latter focuses on a bigger picture of designing the organisation as a whole system which has a high quality (Suchman, 1995). (4) *Personal legitimacy* is related to the personal influence of a leader in the organisation. As it is perceived, personal legitimacy is often talked about in a relative sense, which means that the effect of personal legitimacy is typically presented while the old institution is interrupted and a new institution is initiated due to an individual personal influence (Weber, 1978; DiMaggio, 1988).

Different from pragmatic and moral legitimacy, **cognitive legitimacy** is not based on self-interest or consequence evaluation, but based on people's cognition (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). According to Suchman (1995), this kind of legitimacy drives from "comprehensibility", which covers both the belief system and the reality. It means that to achieve cognitive legitimacy, an account must be understood via existing cultural models, and its plausibility can also be proved by the real experience. Cognitive legitimacy also derives from "exteriority and objectivity" by drawing on Jepperson's (1991) discussion as mentioned before. However, the "exteriority and objectivity" discussed here only has a certain degree of "functional superiority" (Suchman, 1995; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Delbridge & Edwards, 2008), and it still means the "intersubjective givens" (Suchman, 1995, p583) which is a cognitive concept. Therefore, cognitive legitimacy may appear to be exterior and objective, but it is in fact a cognition that is generated by subjectivity. According to Suchman (1995), this kind of legitimacy is "the most subtle and the most powerful source" (p583).

So far, the discussion in this chapter has led to highlight legitimacy as the end of diffusion. As referring to how to achieve legitimacy, (neo)institutional theories have tried to provide answers, which however generate some issues to be dealt

with. These issues include the inability of explaining the de-institutionalisation phenomena, the inadequacy of addressing the non-isomorphic changes (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008), and so on. Later, these issues will be summarised in the criticisms to (neo)institutional theories.

2.2.3 Gaining legitimacy through institutional theory

As for the question of how to achieve a managerial practice's "legitimacy", different considerations have been provided in the literature. Institutional perspective emphasises the aspect that legitimacy can be achieved when a practice is "inherently adaptive", and therefore it focuses on the homogenisation of organisations by different means (Green, 2004, p653).

In terms of the strategies that can be used to gain the above three types of legitimacy (pragmatic, moral and cognitive), (neo)institutional theory focuses on the "conformity" of three types of relationships within an organisation: existing audiences with the current environment; existing audiences with a new environment²; new audiences with a new environment (Suchman, 1995). Generally, institutional theory suggests that legitimacy is gained only through conforming audiences to the environment by either manipulating the audiences or the environment.

For example, an organisation works to meet audiences' interests or to offer them opportunities for decision-making in order to gain pragmatic legitimacy by conforming to the audiences' pragmatic demands. To involve "good characteristics" (depending on the nature of the organisation) in setting up organisational procedures and structures so as to produce meritorious outcomes is to gain moral legitimacy by conforming to social expectations. An organisation can also gain cognitive legitimacy by conforming to the established or prior models and standards which have been applied either within the organisation or within its broader environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).

² This new environment may already exist but has now been selected as the dominant environment. It does not necessary to be newly constituted.

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However, as perceived in this thesis, to produce a practice's legitimacy only through confirming to or satisfying its institutional environment (based on institutional perspective) is a "passive" process (Oliver, 1991). It assumes that new activities must be conducted in line with prior adoptions (Zucker, 1983).

As said before, institutional and neoinstitutional theory have a significant credit in explaining institutionalisation as a process of standardisation of new social interaction sequences in social changes, which is caused by isomorphism. Isomorphic models, rules and so on are always those that have already been adopted and are prevailing in the current environment, which means that they are prior adoptions. If institutional perspective contends that legitimacy of a practice can only be gained in the process of seeking for isomorphism, it also argues that it is the isomorphism of prior adoptions that produces legitimacy, which is why Meyer and Rowan claim that

Organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society. Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures. (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p41).

Moreover, in the eye of (neo)institutional theory, isomorphism can gain legitimacy is also because there is always the possibility that the isomorphism can be reached – managers often lean to learn the appropriate practices and procedures from one another and in terms of which they will adjust theirs (Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

2.2.4 Critiques to institutional theory

As considered in this thesis, institutional perspective, which emphasises on achieving practice's legitimacy through isomorphism can also cause the following problems.

First, institutional theory treats practice diffusions as 'passive' activities. This means that because the environmental pressure for surviving forces organisations to be isomorphic, the decision of whether to adopt a practice or

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not does not depend on the value of the practice itself, but rather depends on the inherent demand of organisations of being homogeneous (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008; Green, 2004; Donaldson, 1995). In practical terms, this means that individuals do not play roles in making a practice adoption/rejection decision, but “isomorphism” does it.

Secondly, the consequence of whether a practice can be adopted or not depending on if it has been previously adopted elsewhere, is again, to ignore the value of the practice itself. When the above first point is based on the perspective of organisations’ inner demands for survival, this point focuses on the legitimacy of the practice. The more adopters a practice has (including elsewhere), the more legitimacy it gains, and as a consequence, the wider diffusion it will achieve. Therefore, to find if a practice has been adopted elsewhere before is in fact a way to increase its legitimacy rather than a way of seeking isomorphism (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999). However, to only determine the fate of a practice by its prior adoption can also prohibit innovations and the achievement of moral legitimacy in organisations (Green, 2004). In other words, in an organisation, a managerial practice is followed is not because it is used by everyone else, but rather the legitimacy produced by the reason of why it is used by everyone else.

Thirdly, to overemphasise the prior relationship of adoption lacks the ability of explaining the phenomenon of a practice being “deinstitutionalised”, which is an opposite process as being institutionalised (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). The rise and fall of innovations and practices happen all the time in the management field. Even a model or standard that has been applied for many years can still be proved that it is no longer appropriate. In which case, its legitimacy declines and this model or standard becomes deinstitutionalised. However, if the prior adoption were a central to diffusion, a deinstitutionalisation situation would have never happened (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999; Macy & Strang, 2001). In short, conventional theories of institutionalisation do not fully consider “environmental shocks” (Jepperson, 1991), or ‘rejections’ (we do not like this).

Fourthly, although institutional theory includes a role for discourse/communication, it is often referred to as ‘words’ or ‘phrases’ which

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are used directly to persuade the adoption for a practice (i.e. the content of a conversation that a manager persuades stakeholders to adopt a practice). However, to gain legitimacy merely through isomorphism overlooks the more active role of discourse/communication which is broader (Green, 2004; Abrahamson, 1997). When used in practice diffusion, discourse/communication can be a series of justifications, which also constitutes the rationality of the practice, for example, to arrange the text of a practice and makes it sounds more convincing. Therefore, discourse/communication helps a practice to achieve its legitimacy.

Finally, to shift a practice diffusion from the need of rational adaptation to the coercion of isomorphism limits the understanding for cognitive legitimacy (Green, 2004). Cognitive effects in diffusions include the assignment of meaning and the construction of individual identities and social realities, which are far more than the conformity to established models. As will be seen later, other theories are more appropriate to help us understand diffusion at individual level from a cognitive perspective that links meaning and identity.

By analysing the above problems of gaining practice legitimacy based on institutional perspective, an alternative – rhetorical perspective is reviewed to explore how a managerial practice can achieve its legitimacy and hence to be diffused.

2.3 Rhetorical theory on gaining a practice's legitimacy

In the discussion of practice diffusions, some diffusion models emphasise the role of *rhetoric* by saying that the adoption of practices is based on the assumption that those practices will be effective and beneficial for their adopters, and that by explaining and reassuring them, they will understand and adopt a practice. In other words, practices do not have to be real effective and beneficial as long as the potential adopters are rhetorically persuaded to believe so (King & Kugler, 2000; Krackhardt, 2001). This view, in a sense, highlights the importance of rhetoric in practice diffusion, and it is partly true because rhetoric often appeals to emotions, meanings and perhaps social construction (Billig, 1987; Quinn, 1996). However, this view also exaggerates the role of rhetoric in an inappropriate way: it overstates the effect of persuasiveness to shape the

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adopters, but ignores the rationality that the persuasiveness can achieve through logic & moral justifications.

In the eyes of most other modern rhetoricians, a practice is diffused because it is legitimised, and to achieve its “legitimacy” depends on whether a practice can be emotionally, logically and ethically justified through communication. These three aspects of justification (emotion, logic and ethic) were first presented by Aristotle as the “three means of persuasion”, known as the “ethos”, “pathos” and “logos” (350 BC-a).

As for Aristotle (350 BC-a), the function of rhetoric is “not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case” (p36). The general ideas of the three means as described by him are now presented. This will help to understand how rhetoric has been developed by later rhetoricians to do with practice diffusion.

2.3.1 Three means of persuasion

Ethos is the perception of a speaker’s character. In order to make persuasive expressions, speakers should not only look into the argument which has to be “demonstrative and persuasive” (Aristotle, 350 BC-a, p112). It is equally important for speakers to convey the message of what kind of person they are, which is to prepare themselves for the audiences’ judgements regarding their characters. The reason why a speaker’s character matters is because the audiences’ judgements towards the speaker make much difference in terms of the effectiveness of persuasion. For instance, if a speaker is judged as trustworthy by audiences, what he/she says will also be considered as trustful, and hence the better persuasiveness his/her speech has. On the contrary, the less trustworthy a speaker is, the less persuasive his/her speech will be.

Pathos is about emotions in audiences that are aroused by a speaker. Aristotle (350 BC-a) defines emotions as “those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgements and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, fear, and other such things and their opposite” (p113). In terms of this definition, emotions influence or even dominate people’s judgements. Judgements are always associated with

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emotions, either pain or pleasure. One of Aristotle's examples which is particularly relevant to practice diffusions is that "to a person feeling strong desire and being hopeful, if something in the future is a source of pleasure, it appears that it will come to pass and will be good, but to an unemotional person and one in a disagreeable state of mind, the opposite" (Aristotle, 350 BC-a, p112). Emotions can be changed all the time, and so could the related judgements. This thus offers speakers an opportunity to improve the persuasiveness through provoking a different emotion if the current one is not desirable at a given moment in time.

Logos is the logical argument when people show "the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case" (Aristotle, 350 BC-a, p39), which is to show the rationality of a speech that is inherently persuasive. Aristotle (350 BC-a) offers some basic tools for logical persuasion in his discussion of logos, such as the inductive and deductive logical arguments.

Generally, Aristotle (350 BC-a) suggests that rhetoric can provide persuasion through "speech" (communication/discourse) in three ways, "some are in the character of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, and some in the speech itself, by showing or seeming to show something" (p38). These three ways have been later developed in Green's (2004) terms as to "persuade audiences, reach reliable judgements or decisions, and coordinate social action" (p654) respectively.

Although Aristotle was the first one to present the concepts of "ethos, pathos and logos", his ideas, however, were discussed on a much general sense, which does not refer to organisations, nor does it link explicitly to the achievement of legitimacy and diffusion.

Following him, some modern rhetoricians argue for the three types of rhetorical justification, known as the "pathos justification" (emotion), "logos justification" (logic) and "ethos justification" (ethic) (Green, 2004; Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990; Herrick, 2001). They also suggest that a practice has to be justified emotionally (to achieve pragmatic legitimacy), logically (to achieve pragmatic legitimacy) and ethically (to achieve moral legitimacy) in order to be legitimised (to achieve cognitive legitimacy).

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To be specific, when taking a rhetorical perspective, a practice is legitimised if potential adopters like the practice (emotion), if the reason of the practice's adoption is demonstrated & persuasive (logic), and if it is also believed by the majority of potential adopters (ethic). Moreover, to let potential adopters like, use and have faith in a practice relies on how communications between diffusers and potential adopters are carried out. In other words, communication will determine a practice's taken-for-grantedness or institutionalisation. Furthermore, Green (2004) also argues that there is a sequence between the three justifications, which is to follow the order of **Pathos-Logos-Ethos**.

2.3.2 Modern rhetoricians' taken on practice diffusions

Green has linked the issue of practice diffusion to that of achieving legitimacy and taken-for-grantedness. Although there have been other studies on diffusion (Rogers, 1995; Krackhardt, 2001; Strang, 1991; Strang & Soule, 1998), this one is selected on the grounds that it helps us to see a process of diffusion. The process is linked to ideas on rhetoric.

As proposed by Green (2004), discursive justifications that are attached in a communication determine managerial practice diffusions for the reason that they can shape the degree of legitimacy of each practice, which ultimately leads to the acceptance of a practice (institutionalised or taken for granted). Different "types" of justification (pathos, logos, ethos) have different effects on a practice's legitimisation as well as its adoption and rejection "rates"³ (Green, 2004). Therefore, "each type of appeal has particular characteristics that resonate with specific periods in the life cycle of diffusion" (Green, 2004, p660).

Pathos justifications affect audience's emotions, which influence the views and especially the initial impressions of how they consider a practice. These different views will further influence or alter their judgements, for instance, people with positive emotions often make a positive judgement (Aristotle, 350 BC-a; 350 BC-b).

However, given the situation of practice diffusion, "pathos" appeals are more appropriate to meet the purpose of motivating the audience (the potential

³ A speed that a practice is adopted or rejected.

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adopters in this case) through a passionate speech. Therefore, different from Aristotle's full description of human emotions, for example, anger and calm, fear and confidence, friendly and hostile, emotions that are often useful in a pathos justification for practice diffusions are mainly those positive ones, such as passion, excitement, confidence, and hope. This is because these positive emotions are the ones that are most likely to elicit a positive judgement, and hence to enable the acceptance and adoption of a practice⁴.

However, since pathos impact on emotional appeals, which "have the ability to grab an actor's limited attention", but also have the "transient" and "fadlike" tendency, pathos justifications are "powerful yet unsustainable" (Green, 2004, p659). Because it is powerful, a practice which is being "persuaded" through pathos justifications can be adopted very quickly; and because it is unsustainable, this practice can also be rejected quickly if there is no further justification to follow it up.

Finally, by linking with the discussion of the three types of legitimacy (pragmatic, moral and cognitive), pathos justifications serve to attain pragmatic legitimacy because pathos can be connected with audiences' underlying self-interests. This implies that an adoption decision can be made through pathos justifications is because potential adopters have perceived that it is in line with their self-interests and hence is of pragmatic value to them.

Logos justifications aim to produce logical argument about a practice by forming a systematic discourse, either inductive or deductive. Logos appeals build logical connections between means and ends. Therefore, logos justification is to demonstrate the rationality in a logical way and to justify that "something is logically right". This type of justification is particularly powerful to those individuals who value methodical calculations.

Compared to Aristotle's logos, which is to justify that something is true and to demonstrate how the truth is represented, logos justifications in the context of

⁴ There may be some cases that by arousing a non-positive emotion can also lead to a positive judgement for adoption. For example, by invoking fear in the audience to show them the danger that if the practice is not adopted, problems and something bad will follow.

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managerial practice diffusion are more specific. As suggested by Green (2004), a logos justification has a special focus on justifying the efficiency and effectiveness of a practice. It builds a rational picture of the practice which allows audiences to make a better sense of it and hence accept it. It is considered in this thesis that logos justifications could take a positive effect on speakers (diffusers) as well as audiences. A logical argument which is formed persuasively and rationally can also demonstrate if speakers/diffusers are well-organised persons and with good knowledge. This will add credit to speakers' reliabilities (characters) and therefore strengthen the justification for practice diffusion.

Compared to pathos, practices through logos justifications have a slower rate of adoption, which means that it takes more time for people to adopt them. This is because unlike emotions, which take effect very quickly, the rationality of an argument has to be logically digested by audiences, which takes a longer time. However, since the practice has been logically justified, even when a certain passion which dominates the audience to accept the practice in the first place is fading, the rationality can stay in their minds to ensure a sustainable adoption of the practice. In other words, logos justification also has a slower rejection rate. The other reason that logos justifications have a slower adoption rate but have more sustained effects on diffusion is because to be adopted, managerial practices have to be "socially accepted and admired" (Green, 2004, p660).

Same as pathos, a logos justification also builds pragmatic legitimacy – both of them appeal to audiences' self-interests. However, while pathos have a focus on individual's benefit and value, logos appeal to "the desire for efficient/effective action" (Green, 2004, p660).

Ethos justification in Green's discussion has several implications. First, Green declares that ethos justifications "impact moral or ethical sensibilities", such as "honor, tradition, or justice". In order to maintain these moral and ethical standards, one may need to sacrifice one's self-interests and benefits (Green, 2004, p659). Secondly and following Aristotle's arguments, Green also admits that ethos justification is "elicited by the character or credibility of the speaker" (Green, 2004, p659). Thirdly, by drawing on Suchman's (1995) idea, Green

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(2004) expands the application domain of moral properties: from the judgement of the speaker's credibility to the judgement of a practice itself, which is to see whether it is a "right thing" to do. Moreover, this judgement is based on norms which are socially accepted. For instance, when ethos justification is used for practice diffusion, it appeals to justify whether a practice is in line with social moral standards and ethics. Based on this moral judgement, an adoption or rejection decision will be made.

However, there are two things need to be mentioned here: (1) since a practice is brought into audiences' attentions by a speaker, the character of the speaker plays a role in this process, which links back to Aristotle's notion of ethos. In addition, a speaker is the linkage of the three justifications, not only because he is the "conductor", but also because of the inner connections between the three justifications. For example, a speaker's ability of demonstrating the argument improves the demonstration of his/her character, which will in turn help to arouse audiences' emotions that are desired by the speaker. (2) The practice is judged in terms of socially accepted norms, however, in the middle of diffusion, socially accepted norms could also include those which have been newly developed by pathos and logos justifications. Therefore, ethos justification is not just to ask if a practice meets certain ethics or not, but should also involve the activity of clarifying what are socially accepted norms, especially those new ones.

After ethos justification, a practice will achieve its moral legitimacy. Because ethos act on moral and ethical levels, which need to be socially accepted, it takes a longer time for a practice to be adopted. Therefore, compared to pathos and logos, ethos justification has the slowest rate of adoption. However, also because it takes effects on moral and ethical levels, it becomes the most powerful justification, and with an enduring impact on taken-for-grantedness. This means that once a managerial practice is adopted through ethos justification, it can hardly be rejected or it is rejected until an environmental shock happens (i.e. changes that occur in the environment).

2.3.3 Green’s rhetorical sequence of Pathos-Logos-Ethos

Based on the different appeals of the three justifications, Green (2004) suggests that “pathos, logos, and ethos appeals may combine to shape the speed and extend of diffusion” (p660). Therefore, he further proposes that the three types of justification can be arranged in communications as to follow a rhetorical “sequence” – “starting with pathos, followed by logos, and ending with ethos” in order to achieve a better diffusion result (Green, 2004, p660).

There may be various sequences available, but the above one that Green proposes seems to be a prevalent and influential one which has been proved by preliminary evidences, i.e. a diffusion study in North America, and the diffusion of TQM – total quality management (Green, 2004). Since each type of justification has a special role in a practice’s diffusion, pathos, logos and ethos are equally important periods in the life cycle of a highly diffused practice. In terms of different appeals, and adoption & rejection rates, justifications for a practice’s diffusion are carried out to move forward from one period to another, in other words, from the period of pathos, to logos and ethos. This three-period sequence can be demonstrated as the following figure⁵.

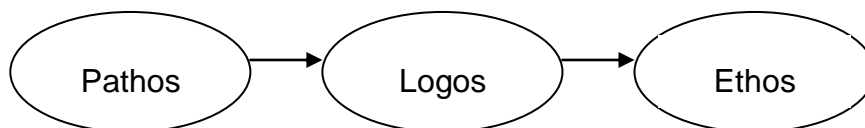


Figure 2-1: Green’s Rhetorical Justification Sequence

In the above figure, the three same size cycles which represent pathos, logos and ethos justifications illustrate that they are three equally important periods during a practice’s diffusion. The arrows connecting the three cycles show that justifications have to transfer between the three periods in order to fulfil different

⁵ It is found that through addressing the three means of persuasion, Aristotle also seems to suggest a different sequence. Although he does not clearly mention the order of the three means, his discussion often starts with the ethos and finishes with pathos. As it is perceived in this thesis, the reason of having different sequences is related to the different understandings and explanations for the meaning of pathos, logos and ethos. For Aristotle, ethos is more or less the character of the speaker, it is likely to start the sequence because character is one of the messages that are conveyed to audiences by a speaker, and based on which audiences’ emotions will be aroused. However, for Green, ethos is more about socially accepted norms. It has “long-lasting persuasive effects” but is founded on the other two types of justification, and therefore, it logically stays at the end of the sequence.

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pleas (emotional, logical and ethical) and finally to achieve combined effects on gaining a practice's legitimacy.

For example, it has been said that pathos affect audience's emotions, which are easily aroused but quickly to fade. Therefore, pathos justification has the quickest rate of adoption as well as rejection. Based on this nature, pathos can be used at the beginning of a practice's diffusion because emotions can help audiences to capture their attentions on a practice and also generate willingness of adoption, although the adoption is on a very initial stage. However, since emotion is fading quickly, in order to maintain its impact on diffusion and keep an enduring effectiveness, logos justifications are required to sustain the diffusion.

Logos appear to provide logical arguments. Instead of arousing a new passion, logos justifications try to demonstrate logical reasons of why a practice is worthy to be adopted based on the existing emotional impacts. At this stage, although a practice can be perceived as having legitimacy (pragmatic legitimacy), it justification is still operated at an individual level. Therefore, an ethos justification is needed to justify whether this practice has met social moral and ethical standards. It is only after the ethos justification when a practice will be considered to have its moral legitimacy, "over time, if these appeals are persuasively effective, they will produce cognitive legitimacy – taken-for-grantedness" (Green, 2004, p659).

Equal periods of pathos, logos and ethos

Although pathos, logos and ethos justifications are considered as **equal** periods in the life cycle of a practice's diffusion, they **cannot** be significantly separated in the terms that it is not possible to clearly define when does each period start and finish. In some cases, they may appear at the same time, for example, diffusers could start to provide logical evidence to persuade an adoption (logos) when continuously arousing people's passion of a practice (pathos).

However, it is also true that the three periods **can** be separated in the sense that "whereas pathos may initiate change, logos implement it, and ethos sustain it..." (Green, 2004, p661). This can be understood as *a pathos period begins*

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when attentions or interests of a practice is raised and it ends up when an initial (practice) adoption decision is made; logos period starts when potential adopters begin to implement a practice and finishes when its implementation is completed; ethos period starts when adopters begin to share their views of using a practice and ends when a collective view or a dominant consensus from the majority is reached.

Green's three-period rhetorical sequence also assumes that when entering later justification periods, the previous period has been conducted successfully. For instance, a successful pathos is a condition to start with logos because to implement a practice is usually after the adoption decision is made; ethos period begins on a good basis of logos as people have to experience and use a practice before they can come up with comments and conclusions. This assumption thus brings following discussions when examining a practice's diffusion process.

1. Although the meaning of pathos, logos and ethos has been defined earlier in this chapter, in real practice diffusion cases, what can be referred as pathos, logos and ethos justifications needs to be further identified. According to the different appeals that the three types of justification aim to fulfill, this thesis thus suggests that they can be identified by drawing on specific *expressive forms*. For instance, pathos often appear as emotional properties, such as *passions, excitements, motivations, encouragements* and so on. They are likely to be awakened by speakers/diffusers in their communications. Logos often appear to be *introductions, explanations, reasons, instructions*, etc. These are ingredients of logical arguments used to show the appropriateness and values of adopting a practice; how to implement a practice; problems that may happen during its implementation, and possible solutions. Ethos often appear in the form of *plausibility, agreements, norms, standards*, and *ethics*. There are two associated features: something being right and good; and something being widely or socially accepted⁶.

⁶ It is not always have to be accepted by the whole society, because any plausibility that is agreed in a group of people, i.e. organisations, could also take a form of ethos.

2. In real diffusion cases, what kind of pathos, logos and ethos justifications can be regarded as successful also needs to be described. The description is related to the consequences of justifications. For instance, a good pathos justification can generate the audience's willingness to adopt the practice, or at least an initial decision of adoption. A good logos justification can strengthen the decision of adopting the practice, and therefore, a good consequence of logos is that people can fully appreciate the adoption of the practice through their first-hand experience. A successful ethos should make the adoption of a practice far beyond question and make people believe that it is the thing they have to do with no doubt.

2.3.4 Critiques to modern rhetoricians' perspective on diffusion

Rhetorical theory conceives communication as producing practice's legitimacy, which is not only through direct communicative actions (i.e. what people say to one another) but also through meeting the audiences' emotional, logical and ethical expectations. Although it takes audiences' perceptions and reactions into consideration during diffusion, and thus has an extensive interest in exploring how communication can be arranged in a more convincing and understandable way, it is seen as not being adequate in the following aspects.

First, in the literature of rhetorical theory, there are some discussions on how rhetoric is used to adjust the environment to particular interests (Biesecker, 1998; Martin & Colburn, 1972), but not too much consideration has been given for the environmental effects during diffusion changes. Although institutional theory has been criticised for overemphasising organisations' inner demand for being isomorphic to its institutional environment, it cannot be ignored that environmental shock does happen from time to time to influence the diffusion even if the rhetorical justifications are regarded as successful at each diffusion period.

Secondly, as a consequence of lacking of attention on the effects of diffusion environment, some rhetoricians thus use communication more like a rhetorical instrument (Biesecker, 1998), for example, to fulfill the task of pathos, logos and ethos justifications step by step. Although it highlights that communication can

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shape the meaning of a practice (Green, 2004), but it does not go deeper and further to appreciate the fact as what the other perspectives (i.e. autopoietic, constructive) will suggest – it could be the communication that constitutes a practice, its diffusion environment, and eventually its diffusion result.

Last, following Green’s Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical justification sequence, a practice can be expected to be well diffused, however, this is again to see rhetoric as an instrument which informs a diffuser what he/she needs to do rather than an “investigation” (Struever, 2006). As it has been said before, to examine practice diffusion is to examine the process of how a practice is introduced by a diffuser as well as how it is learned by potential adopters, to only focus on the above justification sequence does not help to investigate potential adopter’s leaning process.

Rhetorical perspective addresses diffusion as a process that a practice to achieve its emotional, logical and ethical legitimacy through pathos, logos and ethos justifications. In comparison with institutional perspective, it highlights the effectiveness that communication has in producing a practice’s legitimacy. It also helps to provide a structural guidance in achieving diffusion step by step. However, it is criticised to merely focus “people” (especially ‘diffusers’) in diffusion but neglects the aspect that a diffusion environment (or the “institutional environment” for intuitionism) can do to diffusions. A detailed comparison will be dawn in the next section.

2.4 Institutional perspective VS rhetorical perspective

In terms of the diffusion change study, institutional and rhetorical perspectives have both highlighted the achievement of a managerial practice’s legitimacy as the key to its diffusion although the way of achieving it has been perceived differently. A comparison between the two perspectives has been illustrated in the following table.

	Driver of (diffusion) change	Role of communication in (diffusion) change
Institutional perspective	Isomorphism - inherently	Communication as

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	adapt to institutional environment	conversation, i.e. to communicate to the stakeholders of the adoption of a practice
Rhetorical perspective	Rhetoric and language	Communication not only delivers contents in conversations, but also shapes their meanings and influences actions.

Table 2-1: Comparison between Institutional and Rhetorical Perspective on Diffusion

The above table shows that the comparison between institutional and rhetorical perspectives has been done primarily by drawing on two aspects: ‘the driver of (diffusion) change’ and ‘the role of communication in (diffusion) change’. Because institutional perspective focuses on isomorphism, changes are generated by an organisation’s inner demand for adapting to its institutional environment. As it sees, the relations between an organisation and its environment is perhaps the latter determines the former. Although institutional perspective also respects communication as being important in diffusion changes, because of isomorphism, communication is not considered as a fundamental factor to change but is rather seen as what managers say in order to help stakeholders to adopt a practice.

Differently, rhetorical perspective considers language and rhetoric as a driver for change because what is diffused is not a managerial practice itself, but rather what is appeared in one’s language or rhetoric. Some researchers also argue that those what have been institutionalised are difficult to be changed, but people can rewrite them through rhetorical actions (Porter et al., 2000). According to this understanding, communication thus refers to what and how managers say about a practice, in other words, communication is concerned with the content as well as the format (rhetoric). More importantly, through designing what to say about a practice, how to say it (i.e. the arrangements of words and logic etc.) and in which way to say it (i.e. the strategy), communication will also shape the meaning of a practice.

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In this section, institutional perspective and rhetorical perspective have been compared: while the former assumes that diffusion is going to occur in a homogenous way which therefore considers communication as ‘what people say’, the latter treats communication as an essential factor in diffusion change which shapes the meaning of a practice. In the next section, autopoiesis – a system perspective will be addressed. Different from institutional and rhetorical perspective, it conceives communication as being **fundamental** to diffusion change – this is, however, based on a different type of “ontology” – the fundamental way that a person sees and understands the world and/or the social reality (more discussions in section 2.7 and Chapter 4).

2.5 Diffusion change as an autopoietic phenomenon?

The concept of “autopoiesis” was originally introduced as a biological concept. It describes that a biological system (i.e. a cell) and all the other living systems are “autopoietic” in the sense that their components will participate in a system’s operating processes which will continually produce its own consisting components (Maturana & Varela, 1980; 1987). The ideas of “self-producing” and “closure” system of autopoiesis have been applied widely in also describing social systems, and among which, Luhmann’s (1986) autopoietic social systems is perhaps one of the most well-knowns.

Having said that communication is essential in the eyes of rhetoricians, and this is because the content communication carries, the way communication is conducted, and the strategy that a communication discourse is arranged will shape what is going to be taken by its audience. This understanding is certainly agreed by Luhmann (1986; 1995), who describes communication consists of three elements: meaning, utterance and information.

Communication is a process of selection, however, it is not a two-part selection process that only matters “sending and receiving with selective attention on both sides”, and instead, it is a three-part selection, because “the selection that is actualised in communication constitutes its own horizon; communication constitutes what it chooses (e.g. information)”, or in other words, “the selectivity of the information is itself an aspect of the communication process” (Luhmann, 1995, p140). Generally, communication constitutes what is to be selected to

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communicate (the information), what is the selected way to communicate (the utterance) and what selective attentions will be drawn upon (the meaning) – communication is therefore a self-producing and hence a closed process.

Luhmann's consideration for the role of communication is more complex than what rhetoricians would suggest, for which he argues that a social system is ultimately composed of communication (1986; 1995). Social system and its sub-systems use communication in their self-productions. Each social sub-system differentiates itself from the others by defining what is or is not included in communications (selected information). This identity also defines the way through which each sub-system will operate (the utterance) and how it will be interpreted (the meaning). Communications of each sub-system will then constitute social system as a whole.

It has been discussed before that a practice's legitimacy is highlighted by both institutional and rhetorical perspectives. Although explicit discussions on legitimacy have rarely been seen in autopoiesis, but as a closed system, its legitimacy will be self-produced within the system. Based on this understanding, one can say that those which are included and existing in an autopoietic system are those which are taken-for-granted. In this sense, autopoiesis is similar to institutional perspective which argues that previous adoption generates legitimacy. Moreover, for Luhmann's social autopoiesis, those which have legitimacy are also those which have been selected by communication.

In autopoietic theory, the question of what drives change in living systems has been approached differently. For example, Luhmann (1995) use "interpenetration" to explain system and environment as having an intersystem relation, and as a consequence, changes are generated within systems. Maturana (1981) argues that interacting living systems constitute a system of interactions, which is respected as a media through which those living systems will realise their autopoiesis. Changes are produced in interactions is to say that they are produced in the so-called system of interactions. Brocklesby (2004), based on Maturana (1988), suggests three ways that a change is arose with a system: upon the flow of molecules through the system; from internal dynamics; and through the process of "structural coupling". In general, given the

characteristics of “closure” and “self-production” of an autopoietic system, a change (i.e. diffusion) is thus neither generated from nor operated in the environment but rather within the system.

This section included a discussion of how diffusion change can be perceived as an autopoietic phenomenon within which communication plays a fundamental role. However, in the literature of autopoiesis and its applications, there are some questions that are left unsolved or not completely solved by Maturana & Varela, Luhmann and others (Mingers, 1995; Kay, 2001; Zolo, 1990; Teubner, 1993), which therefore also limits the further application of autopoietic system in this thesis.

2.6 Problems with autopoiesis for diffusion

When explaining autopoiesis, some concepts that Maturana and Varela use have been considered as too abstract (Mingers, 1995). For example, “organisation” (Maturana & Varela, 1980) is used to describe relations that formed through the interactions of the unity’s components, however, it does not generate the components or their interactions. For Maturana and Varela, a social system produces itself only in the sense that the generated organisation will select a particular type of interaction which therefore causes a certain consequence as defined by the rules (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Maturana, 1988). This view is compared to Giddens’ structuration theory by Mingers (1995), who argues that the latter has provided a more detailed picture as “it specifies that the constituents are not just interactions and relations in general but, specifically, social practices in the system and rules and resources in the structure” (p139).

Following Maturana and Varela, Luhmann further develops autopoiesis by making it explicitly that the unity’s “components” are communications. It is very useful for Luhmann to argue communication as consisting of three elements because in this way communication as a self-producing process could be distinguished from either the functionalist or the cognitivist views – it is also conceived to be richer than either of them. However, autopoietic social theory has been built based on some “questionable premises” (Mingers, 1995, p152).

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First of all, the sense of communication in Luhmann's (1986) autopoietic social systems is much more fundamental than the meaning of "individual communicative actions" (Mingers, 1995). In fact, Luhmann (1995) differentiates communication from communicative actions although the two cannot be separated. He sees communicative actions as only referring to the utterance (one of the three elements) while communication includes more selective events. Therefore, for Luhmann, if one conceives communication as an action or "a chain of actions", he/she will lose the opportunity to fully grasp the process of communication (Luhmann, 1995, p164).

However, because this thesis aims to explore how a managerial practice can be well diffused through communication, communication is therefore discussed at two aspects: (a) how people communicate to one another to introduce and/or learn a practice, which is the "individual communicative actions"; and (b) how it affects diffusion change as a whole.

It is agreed that communicative actions can be described as the "utterance" (Luhmann, 1995), but because utterance (communicative action) comprises communication, it has to be examined explicitly in order to contribute to a full study of communication. Therefore, although the fundamental understanding of communication as forming social system is vital, it is also useful if the "individual communicative actions" can be equally focused and especially in the context of diffusion change (i.e. borrowing the "three-period" justifications from rhetorical perspective as discussed before). This is perhaps what an alternative stance could help - that emphasises understandings on both sides: individual communicative actions and constitutive (collective) communications.

Secondly, system and environment are the two central concepts discussed in systems theory including autopoiesis. If it is as what Luhmann (1986) claims that society is autopoietic and consists only in communication, as a closed system, communication thus produces communication itself. Consequently, people and their consciousnesses are part of the environment outside of an autopoietic system. However, this understanding causes the difficulty of explaining the phenomenon, that is, communication is indeed operated by people (Mingers, 1995; Teubner, 1993).

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Alternative perspectives to autopoiesis focus on describing communication as ‘constituting’, which is ‘enabling’ as well as ‘constraining’ rather than self-producing (although they have resonances). Moreover, communication is operated by people (Luhmann calls it “utterance”). Since meanings (the same as Luhmann’s term “meaning”) are simultaneously produced and selected during communication by people whose actions reflect the system and its environment, it can be said that people’s communications construct the information (same as Luhmann’s term “information”) of a system and its environment, which will in turn generate or prohibit further communications among them. In this sense, communication is not a system that is “closed” to its environment, but rather an interaction between people which bridges a system and its environment.

This leads to the **third** discussion of Luhmann (1989) that “society cannot communicate with but only about its environment” (p117). For him, society as a communication system is closed and self-produced; it is impossible and not necessary for this system to be ‘open’ to its environment. Unlike a general open system, for which a boundary between system and environment is drawn based on a subjective judgement about components interactions (Gregory, 2006), autopoiesis theory suggests that environment is “a presupposition for the system’s identity, because identity is possible only by difference” (Luhmann, 1995, p177). This means that environment is a “system-relative situation”, which differentiates a system from “everything else” within the environment (Luhmann, 1995, p181).

Despite the fact that Maturana (1981) and Varela (1981) do not themselves claim social systems are autopoietic, same as Luhmann, they both suggest that autopoietic living systems are closed to the outside world which is normally regarded as the environment in systems theory. This, “at first sight...presents serious difficulties in accounting for the manifest adaptability of living systems” (Brocklesby, 2004, p660) because conventionally, human beings are seen as having the ability to adapt to the manipulated environment, and the environment is usually seen as a driven force for change.

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Bearing the above in mind, to understand diffusion change using autopoiesis may encounter difficulties. For example, it is difficult to differentiate the system from environment in diffusion. A system could be a managerial practice, and in this case, the diffusion result will depend on the practice itself (system) but leaving all the other factors out as its environment (i.e. diffusers, potential adopters, communications, and cultures etc.). A system could also be the organisation which intends to undertake a diffusion change. However, in the case of business merger, the other organisation which introduces a practice initially will be excluded from the system and taken as an environment. Because it is external to the system, and according to autopoiesis, it has nothing to do with the system's diffusion change which is not true.

Moreover, autopoietic systems are presupposed to looking after their own interests in order to maintain their self-producing processes (Maturana, 1975; Beer, 1985; Gregory, 2006). As Gregory (2006) presents, "different sub-systems adopting their own exclusive medium of communication but this means that they cannot easily talk to one another or talk past one another" (p966). Referring to managerial practice diffusions, this means that for example, the organisation which plays a diffuser role and the organisation which acts as a potential adopter can be regarded as two different autopoietic systems, and because they both take care of their own interests and maintain themselves, it is not possible for them to break their boundaries and understand one another. Consequently, while one argues that a practice has its legitimacy, the other argues not, they are not even able to "talk" to each other and hence they will not be able to understand the argument between them.

Therefore, in bringing about change in an autopoietic (industrial) society, it requires the cross-referencing ability to be achieved at least in some people between sub-systems in order to see how the balance of interests between different sub-systems can be achieved and how the change for the whole system can be promoted. Again, in promoting diffusion change, this requires someone who could understand both organisations, and who also has the ability, the expertise and willingness to talk to both.

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This section reviewed the problems one may face when using autopoietic perspective to understand diffusion change. In the next section, autopoiesis will be compared to institutional and rhetorical perspectives by mainly drawing on the ontology that underlies each of them.

2.7 Autopoiesis VS Institutional perspective VS rhetorical perspective

Different from institutional or rhetorical perspective, Luhmann's autopoietic social theory argues that communication ultimately produces changes in social system (it in fact produces the system itself as discussed above). Although institutional and rhetorical perspectives have both included a role for communication in generating diffusion change, its role may or may not be fundamental.

As referring to the relations between organisations or systems and the environment, autopoietic society as a closure system is therefore closed to its environment, but in terms of institutional theory, organisations are open and conform to their environments.

It has been discussed before that the rhetorical view to understand communication as essential or fundamental to diffusion system is only because it sees communication producing legitimacy of a practice within the system, which is therefore different from what "fundamental" means in autopoiesis (producing the system itself). The latter has clearly defined communication as producing a closure system (self-production) while the former has not necessarily involved the discussion of how an organisation's outside environment will affect the change of a diffusion system.

The way a perspective considers communication and diffusion change also reflects the "ontology" that lies behind it. Ontology is concerned with the very basic view that one has on the nature of "being" and the nature of "reality" (Hollis, 1994). According to an ontology, the stance that one takes to explore the other issues, or to determine what is considered to be his/her interest is thus referred as one's ontological position (Mason, 1996). (More discussions on ontology will be seen in Chapter 4).

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In relation to the types of ontology that institutional and rhetorical perspectives may bear, it can be said that institutionalism does not assume an ontology based on people and their actions (or “agent” and “agency”, in Giddens’ terms, see also Chapter 3) because it argues that the ‘reality’ consists of those what have been institutionalised, and it also argues that to conform to the institutional environment is the way of remaining ‘being’ (Giddens describes it as part of the social “structure”) (Delbridge & Edwards, 2008). Rhetorical theory, on the contrary, assumes an ontology based on “agent” and “agency”, but leaving out the “structure”, which is why some rhetoricians argue that rhetoric or language shapes the social ‘reality’ (King & Kugler, 2000; Krackhardt, 2001).

Unlike the two, autopoiesis offers a different ontological position to understand communication and diffusion change. As it sees, a change is no longer a demand or pressure that derives from the outside of a system (society or organisation), and thus communication is no longer a tool which makes it happen. Instead, a system is comprised by various elements which are selected and interacted during the operation of a system, in this sense, a system is self-producing (or “constituting” as will be argued later in this thesis) – this is how changes happens and they happen through communication.

This type of ontological position is regarded as a *constitutive* one, which underlies autopoiesis and other paradigms and theories (i.e. constructivism or social constructionism, structuration theory, etc.). It can be distinguished from the functionalist paradigm which presents the existence of external truths. A constitutive ontology argues that during the operation of a system, the system itself is also produced or reproduced (Giddens, 1984; Maturana & Varela, 1980; Luhmann, 1995). Constitutive ontology does not divorce human being’s “thought and language from bodyhood” (Mingers, 1995, p137) or “emotion” (Maturana, 1988), and more importantly, it recognises that previous knowledge (“discursive” and “practical consciousness”, in Giddens’ terms) are involved in people’s interactions (Giddens, 1984). (Giddens’ structuration theory will be discussed in the next chapter).

Standing on the ontological position which autopoiesis assumes to understand managerial practice diffusion, it suggests that communication is not only a

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language or rhetoric tool (differs from rhetorical perspective) which enables a practice diffusion change to happen; as bearing a constitutive nature, it also constructs a practice. In other words, communication conveys the message of a practice and during this period, it also produces the practice (differs from institutionalism). Comparing to autopoietic ontology, social constructionism further suggests ‘communication also builds an environment which could foster or prohibit a diffusion change to happen’. This is to be added in the next chapter.

According to the above discussion of the ontology that autopoiesis assumes, the above Table 2-1 can be expanded to include the following.

	Driver of (diffusion) change	Role of communication in (diffusion) change
Institutional perspective	Isomorphism - inherently adapt to institutional environment	Communication as conversation, i.e. to communicate to the stakeholders of the adoption of a practice
Rhetorical perspective	Rhetoric and language	Communication not only delivers contents in conversations, but also shapes their meanings and influences actions.
Autopoiesis	Self-producing	Ontologically fundamental – producing (diffusion) change

Table 2-2: Expanded Comparison between Institutional Perspective, Rhetorical Perspective and Autopoiesis on Diffusion

Table 2-2 shows that because of the constitutive ontological position that autopoiesis assumes, it considers the driven force for diffusion change is to be generated by communication and within the system, which is different from what institutional and rhetorical perspectives have argued.

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Through addressing the different types of ontology that each perspective assumes, the difference between autopoiesis, institutional & rhetorical perspectives have also been compared. However, with any of these ontologies, it cannot help to examine the “agency” and the “structure” at the same time as what Giddens suggests. An alternative perspective is therefore required.

2.8 Conclusion of this chapter

Through reviewing institutional, rhetorical and autopoietic system perspectives for understanding diffusion, advantages and problems of each perspective have been discussed. By analysing the advantages, implications for diffusion change can be drawn on as the following. For instance, an institutional environment is vital to the success or failure of a diffusion change. It may not be the determining factor, but it cannot afford to be left out. A system is separated from its environment, but also interacts with it. Therefore, to enable the success of a diffusion change, a diffusion environment has to be taken into consideration. According to the constitutive ontology that autopoiesis assumes, communication plays a constitutive role in diffusion. It is not only a rhetoric tool – although to use it well in diffusion will increase the chance to be successful; it also constructs the meaning of a practice, in other words, the practice itself.

However, the discussions on problems of each perspective also bring out considerations of alternative perspective in looking at diffusion.

In general, an alternative perspective (which will be called ‘dual’) will have the following benefits: (1) it sees communication as a constituting process which presents a constitutive ontological position. It thus prevents considering communication as merely being a tool or instrument as what a functionalist perspective would suggest. (2) Constitutive communication perceives a (diffusion) system and its environment as constituting one another through interactions. Therefore, it is not necessary to claim a system itself to be closed as what autopoiesis suggests, which could otherwise add complexities as discussed before. This, however, is not for the purpose of seeking for simplicity or reductionism. (3) No single theory presents answers to the question of how to achieve a practice’s legitimacy effectively. However, the best of all theories can be incorporated. An incorporated model could then provide a scope of looking

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at “what to do next” in diffusion communication to aim at achieving practice legitimacy, and it could also achieve a rich understanding of how a practice is being diffused (or not) through examining how it is constituted by communication.

To address the alternative, social constructionism and structuration theory will be reviewed in the next chapter.

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It has been said in the previous chapter that an alternative perspective in understanding diffusion change is required. Considering the problematic issues that institutional, rhetorical and autopoietic perspectives may have, this alternative has to be distinguished from each of the above. However, given the contributions that the previous perspectives have also provided to diffusion studies, this alternative needs (a) to present a constitutive ontology as what the autopoiesis does, (b) to emphasise the effectiveness that an (institutional) “environment” has to an organisation/system as what the (neo)institutionalism does, and (c) to incorporate a communication strategy in legitimising a practice just as what the rhetorical theory suggests. According to the above, this chapter will address social constructionism as an alternative perspective for examining diffusion changes.

The discussion of social constructionism will be focused on their efforts in challenging the object-subject dualism and in promoting its duality. By drawing on this perspective and in particular the “duality of structure”, communication’s dual and constitutive nature will be illustrated, and for which, the theory of sensemaking and sensegiving will also be presented. At the end of this chapter, an incorporated managerial practice diffusion model will be built which is expected to facilitate as well as analyse diffusion changes in practical terms.

3.1 A social-constructionist perspective for diffusion

Having said that autopoiesis assumes a constitutive ontology, which considers communication as not only a tool or instrument for practice diffusion, but also a self-construction process that produces the practice itself. According to this, some researchers thus claim that autopoiesis is “constructivism” (Mingers, 1995), which is often mixed up with “social constructionism” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). However, others would argue that it is not because a “constructivist” would not eliminate the dichotomy between subject and object (Proulx, 2008). Given the argument that some researchers do not even consider “constructivism” and “social constructionism” as the same paradigm (Gergen, 1985) (more discussions on this in Chapter 4), this thesis suggests that

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autopoiesis may or may not be a constructivist view, but it is not seen as a social-constructionist perspective for the following reasons.

(1) Social constructionism not only discards the dualism of object and subject but also perceives them as forming a “dual” relationship (Gergen, 1985; Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1984). (2) Different from autopoietic systems ideas, social constructionism does not argue for a “closed” framework through self-producing, it rather suggests the idea of joint development, for example, the “knower” and the “known” jointly build one another (Cunliffe, 2008).

The paradigm of social constructionism and its “dual” relationship which is addressed most explicitly by Giddens will be discussed now.

3.1.1 Social constructionist paradigm

For Berger and Luckmann (1967), to understand social reality is a “dialectical” process, because the reality is produced through people’s ongoing social activities (Giddens refers to these as “agents” and “agency” which will be discussed in the next section), but simultaneously, it exists as objective routines which affect people’s lives as constantly providing them with social biases, which they have to learn about it as “knowledge”. As responding to the predominant idea in social science that social reality is “out there” and hence knowledge should represent its objectivity and facticity, a social-constructionist perspective proposes that social reality exists both objectively and subjectively (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Garfinkel, 1967; Schutz, 1962; Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Cunliffe, 2008).

When taking a careful look at how people carry out their social activities, it is found that their actions are based on the interpreted meanings of the reality by drawing on their own subjectivities. Different interpretations interact with one another, and thus one is socialised by the others and also socialises the others. In this sense, people are social products, and their social realities are created and maintained in their “conversations with others rather than in structures” (Cunliffe, 2008). As a consequence, knowledge is socially constructed too. Following this perspective, knowledge is not seen as “a reflection or map of the

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world”, but rather as “an artifact of communal interchange” (Gergen, 1985, p266).

However, this view as suggested by social constructionism is not a completely cognitive understanding. As mentioned above, social constructionism is sometimes referred as the term “constructivism”. To distinguish social constructionism from constructivism in its strongest form will first, make a conceptual clarity as not to confuse it with the significant art movement in the 20th century (Gergen, 1985); and more importantly, it will build boundaries between a “micro-social” ontology and a “wholly cognitive” one (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p94).

With a constructivism orientation, which assumes a “wholly cognitive” ontology, knowledge is “an internal representation of the state of nature”, and in this respect, the object–subject dichotomy still remains (Gergen, 1985, p271). However, social constructionism abandons the object–subject dualism. As it sees, knowledge is “not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together” (Gergen, 1985, p270). For many, to “do together” is to create through language (communication) in social interactions. Taking Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) discussion on “dialectical stance”, although social realities are produced in human actions and interactions, they are existing over some time as having a certain degree of objectivity (Cunliffe, 2008). This “objectivity” is described as the “structure” in Giddens’ term (see next section). Therefore, knowledge is not purely “objective”, nor is it entirely “subjective”, it is rather “constructive”, or “relationally responsive” (Cunliffe, 2008).

Therefore, from a social-constructionist perspective, it is impossible to completely separate “knower” from the “known (knowledge)” and the action of “knowing”, because the three are closely interwoven and jointly shape each other (Krippendorff, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 1991). A knower draws on knowledge in his/her action of knowing; the action of knowing also constitutes the knower and his/her knowledge. Due to this reason, one can also claim that a social-constructionist approach constitutes an ontology and epistemology at

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the same time, and it also implies that it is unnecessary to argue for the object-subject dualism as a tradition in social researches.

For example, in relation to managerial practice diffusion, if a practice is seen as knowledge, according to a social-constructionist perspective, this practice is neither objective, nor subjective for the reason that (1) this practice does **not** represent the unique nature of social reality which could otherwise declare that “the nature is like this or should be in this way” (Cunliffe, 2008); (2) this practice is **not** generated from human internal processes either, such as pure cognition or consciousness, instead, it is discursively produced and has a degree of social facticity.

To social constructionists, a practice is socially constructed because it exists as knowledge but is also re-produced in the actions of using this knowledge to know (this “dual” relationship will be further explained by drawing on Giddens’ theory in the next section). In other words, since an action of knowing is “implicitly knowledgeable”⁷ (Cunliffe, 2008), it becomes a means of creating further knowledge. In this way, when studying the issue of practice diffusion, it is not enough to only explore what/how diffusers “teach” a practice and what/how potential adopters “learn” it, for which the practice is still perceived as pure objective, this study also needs to focus on the interwoven process of how people’s “teaching” and “learning” construct the meaning of a practice as part of their knowledge.

Referring back to the rhetorical perspective in achieving practice diffusion as discussed in Chapter 2, if the Pathos-Logos-Ethos three-period justification is taken to legitimise a practice, it is also crucial to emphasise on maintaining an intelligibility (knowledgeable knowing) through social process, such as communication. In other words, when conducting the justification step by step in diffusion, the fact of how knowledge is built collectively through communication which takes effect in turn on justifications needs to be focused too. This is because the validity of a knowing activity is created and maintained in social interactions for the reason that “the degree to which a given form of

⁷ According to Cunliffe (2008), it means “a kind of knowing that is not typically theoretical” (p132).

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understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes” (Gergen, 1985, p268).

Furthermore, a social-constructionist perspective also implies the use of self-ethnography as the research strategy for this thesis. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4 when research strategy and methodology are presented.

3.1.2 The “duality of structure” in practice diffusion

In understanding diffusion change, a social-constructionist perspective challenges the object-subject dualism and its related concepts such as ‘objective knowledge’ and ‘subjective knower’. By employing Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory, this section will further develop the constitutive relations between “knowers” and “knowledge” to a ‘dual’ relationship between “agents” and “structures”. Furthermore, the use of the concept of “duality” will cast insights on forming the term of “communication duality” for diffusion in the following section.

Structuration theory as presented by Giddens (1984) has its focus on “the understanding of human agency and of social institutions” (xvii). Same as what a social constructionist suggests, Giddens also proposes the dichotomy of object and subject. Moreover, he further argues for the premise that the *dualism* of objectivism and subjectivism has to be reconceptualised as the “duality of structure”, which is “always the main grounding of continuities in social reproduction across time-space” (Giddens, 1984, p27). According to Giddens, there are a series of main concepts which will help to explain the duality.

Agent and Agency

In structuration theory, “agents” can be understood as human beings or social actors, who have reflexive capacities of knowing and understanding what they do. However, the reflexive capacities are only partly expressed as consciousness (discursive consciousness). Those “what agents know about what they do, and why they do it” – namely “knowledgeability”, is embedded in “practical consciousness” (Giddens, 1984, xxiii).

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Practical consciousness is distinguished from discursive consciousness and unconsciousness. It “consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression” (Giddens, 1984, xxiii). Therefore, there is no rigid barrier between discursive and practical consciousness, and the only difference is that the former “can be said” and the latter is “characteristically simply done” (Giddens, 1984, p7). Practical consciousness as the characteristic of human agents is fundamental to structuration theory.

Giddens (1984) emphasises that “all human beings are knowledgeable agents” (p281), and they “not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move” (p5). By this, Giddens means that human agents routinely rationalise their actions (they know what they do and why they do) to maintain the theoretical grounds of their activities, or in other words, to preserve *stocks of knowledge* about social practices. Human agents involve knowledgeability in a continuous day-to-day conduct, which forms the flow of their social life.

Social life is described as a flow of intentional actions, given the fact that some acts occur only if an agent intends to carry them out; the consequences of an action are sometimes unpredictable, which are explained by Giddens (1984) as “unintended consequences”. Therefore, human agency is not necessarily related to intention but “concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently” (Giddens, 1984, p9). There are motivations and intentions presented in the phenomena of agency, however, this needs to be complemented by an awareness of unintended consequences that could come with any social action. Thus, society as a whole goes beyond certainty, it “achieves a degree of integration and cohesion via human interaction; the degree of interaction can transcend different instances of time and space” (Córdoba, 2001, p45).

System and Structure

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By having the above ideas in mind, Giddens (1984) suggests that social systems are produced and reproduced in human interactions across time and space. These interactions are grounded in knowledgeability that human agents possess by drawing on the rules and resources in a social context. Furthermore, rules and resources are the two aspects which are conceptualised as a “structure”. By rules, Giddens (1984) means those “normative elements and codes of signification” (xxxix). However, for resources, they have been divided into two types: authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources refer to capacity, which can generate command over human agents or social actors; allocative resources refer to materials, and hence their acquisition is through the control of materials.

A structure is “rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984, p377). It is unlike a functionalist perspective, in which a structure is perceived as being external to human agents and their actions, and hence appears to be merely a source of constraint. In structuration theory, structure is a “virtual order of transformative relations”, which means that it is not appropriate to say that social systems have structures, but they rather exhibit themselves by having “structural properties” (Giddens, 1984, p17). Therefore, Giddens argues that “structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action” (Giddens, 1984, p377).

To understand “structure” in the above way can also explain how a society could achieve some kinds of patterns or orders of social relations and maintain them in a stable way, for example, a hierarchy. Giddens (1984) states that structural properties can be considered as hierarchical by drawing upon the memory of knowledgeable human agents. Therefore, as “recursively organised sets of rules and resources”, structures are coordinated as memory traces (Giddens, 1984, p25).

Duality of structure

Social systems are reproduced relationships, which are formed through agents’ regular social practices. Through social practices, agents interact with each other by drawing on their stocks of knowledge (knowledgeability), of which rules

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and resources (structural properties) are the main parts. This means that structural properties are the “medium” of social practices. However, recursive practices also reproduce social relations. They recursively construct social systems as exhibited in “rules and resources”, which are also known as the ‘structures’ (structural properties). The reproduced relations or the reconstructed social systems could also become different from previous ones because although social practices are based on agents’ knowledgeabilities, their actions (especially through interactions) can always generate unintended consequences, which could go beyond their intentions and motivations as discussed above. Giddens (1984) mentions that “unintended consequences may systematically feedback to be the unacknowledged conditions of further acts” (p8), and therefore, it can be said that a social practice can also produce structure as the “outcome”.

The “duality of structure” (medium and outcome) can be better understood by drawing on the figure below which is presented by Giddens (1984).

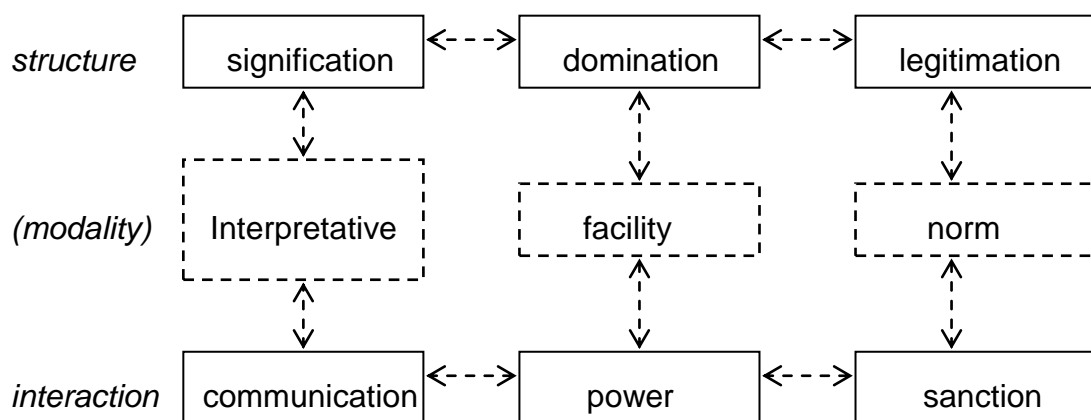


Figure 3-1: Duality of Structure [Adapted from (Giddens, 1984, P29)]

In the above figure, a “structure” has been divided into three dimensions: “signification”, “domination” and “legitimation” in terms of different modes of rules and resources. “Modality” is bracketed because it refers to agent’s stocks of knowledge, which means when it is traced in human mind. “A structure is ‘invoked’ by individuals (implicitly or explicitly) when they deal with each other” (Córdoba, 2001, p46). Thus, modality is a special mode of structure, which serves to describe a particular instant when a structure is being traced in mind.

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An “interaction” is considered as the most common and important type of social actions in structuration theory.

In order to explain the “duality of structure” more clearly, this thesis proposes that those terms such as “structure”, “modality” and “interaction” in Figure 3-1 can be replaced by *outcome*, *medium* and *social practice*. Therefore the above figure can be interpreted so as to demonstrate three different modes when human agents employ their stocks of knowledge as the medium (modality or the instant mode of structure) in their practices (interactions) to produce outcomes (structures). For example, by applying “interpretative schemes” in their “communications”, agents seek to produce “significations”. In this process, “significations” become the outcomes of communications; however, since “interpretative schemes” refer to the knowledgeable capacities when “significations” are traced in mind, to use “interpretative schemes” in the sustaining of communications can also be recognised as a process in which “significations” are applied reflexively as a medium.

“Virtual existence” – as traced in mind

In addition to the “duality of structure”, there are still two issues worth to be explored in structuration theory. (1) “Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity”. (2) “In reproducing structural properties to repeat a phrase used earlier, agents also reproduce the conditions that make such action possible” (Giddens, 1984, p26).

The above statements again emphasise the “virtual existence” of structure, which is distinguished from a functionalistic social perspective. In structuration theory, structure is not perceived as an external constraint to agents; instead, since its virtual existence is connected with individual memory – always appears as memory traces, it is rather an internal factor to human agents, which has the effects of both “constraining and enabling” (Giddens, 1984, p25).

Therefore, one can argue that agents produce and reproduce rules and resources as structural properties, and more importantly, they simultaneously regenerate the circumstances within which the structural properties are

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reproduced. This particular perspective also assumes a constitutive ontology, which conceptualises social actors as knowledgeable agents who not only monitor their day-to-day conduct, but also monitor this monitoring. Therefore, their daily normative actions, the monitoring of these actions, as well as the monitor of this monitoring will altogether constitute society as a whole through their interactions with one another.

To apply the “duality of structure” in managerial practice diffusion, it suggests that communication as a particular type of social activity conveys a practice, constructs a practice, and more importantly, it also builds an environment which could foster or prohibit a practice diffusion change to happen. Comparing to autopoiesis (see Chapter 2), it not only highlights the constitutive ontology, but also incorporates the interactions between a diffusion “system” and its diffusion “environment” – this is what an autopoietic system would not consider due to its nature of “closure”, and what the institutionalism would exaggerate because of the “isomorphism”. In the next section, the “duality of structure” in diffusion will be further conceptualised as the ‘duality of communication’ which is composed of an objective and a subjective dimension.

3.2 Reconceptualise the “dualism” in communication for practice diffusion

In the literature, communication has been considered and studied in many ways. For some researchers, communication is approached as information transmission and processing, which covers message sending and receiving activities. This information oriented process is also researched in the use of communication for other organisational purposes, for example, to improve information flow and decision-making, to predict an organisational environment, or to gather performance-based feedback (Stohl & Redding, 1987; O'Reilly et al., 1987; Goffman, 1969; Culnan & Markus, 1987; O'Reilly & Pondy, 1979; Beer, 1985; Cusella, 1987). The above understandings to communication is generally lean to connect with an objective paradigm for the reason that they more or less involve a mechanistic procedure addressing the question of “what to do” and “how to do” with communication.

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For some others, their understandings to communication lay more interests in challenging the inability of communication. According to them, communication is far beyond information processing. It is rather concerned with the question of how information is constructed in the first place and how it is re-constructed during the process of transmission and interaction. Compared to its original status, the reason that an information could be constructed and re-constructed through communication is because people's communicative activities is an important type of social interactions, in which social biases (i.e. the given social economy, politic, culture etc.), power, and individual interests have intervened explicitly and implicitly (Frost, 1987; Innis, 1964; Alvesson, 1996; Deetz, 1992a; 1992b; Forester, 1983). Generally, these views challenge communication's *neutral and objective usage* (it is presumed in objective understandings), and thus approach communication in a more subjective manner, for example, communication is considered to include a cognitive process which people make sense and interpret an information by drawing on their subjectivities.

No matter how strong the argument that each type of understanding supports, based on a social-constructionist perspective as discussed above, neither of them could be simply denied, nor is it necessary. This is because the object-subject 'dualism' in traditional social research has now been replaced by the 'duality' of object and subject. In this respect, if the above first type of understanding to communication is summarised as **information transmission for objective use**, and the other type is extracted as **information constructing through subjective interactions**, the "dualism" between the two can be demonstrated in the following Figure 3-2, which should then be reconceptualised as "duality", shown in Figure 3-3.

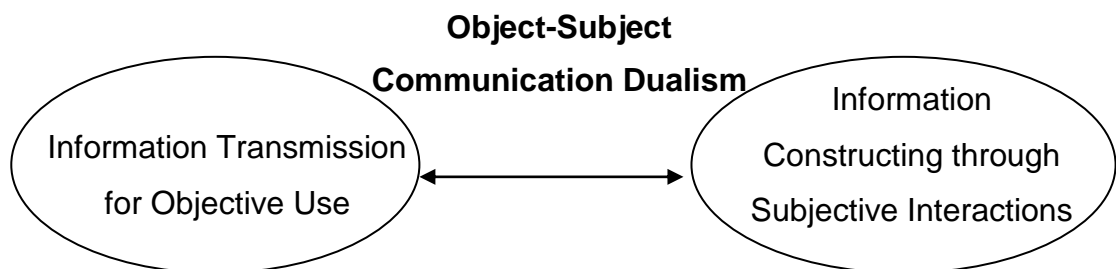


Figure 3-2: Object-Subject Dualism in Communication Studies

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Figure 3-2 shows that when taking the traditional object-subject dualism into consideration, communication studies can be split into two camps demonstrated as the two bubbles in the above figure. When one bubble focuses on the objective use of communication to convey information, the other highlights information's construction in people's subjective interactions. The double arrow line in between means that as being the opposite of one another, the two types of views are supposed to sit at the two sides of the dualism, therefore, an understanding to communication would be either objective or subjective.

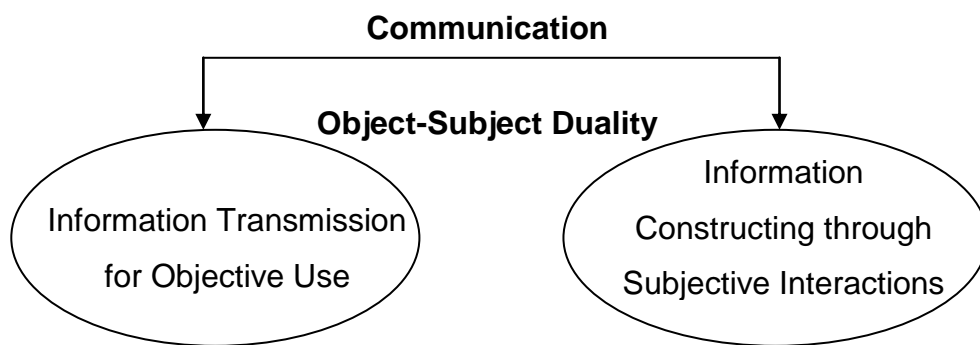


Figure 3-3: Object-Subject Duality in Communication Studies

In Figure 3-3, the dualism in communication has been reconsidered as a “duality”. This means that instead of choosing to be allocated in either bubble of the dualism (objective or subjective), communication is seen as covering both objective and subjective dimensions. The double arrow line connects between the two bubbles in Figure 3-2 has now been removed for the reason that they are not conceived to be conflict to one another anymore. The two arrows that are linked on top of the bubbles in Figure 3-3 illustrate that communication has two dimensions which will form a communication duality. Both dimensions are equally important to be examined, and to neglect either of them will cause the incomplete appreciation of communication.

Although Figure 3-3 has demonstrated the two dimensions of communication, it is not clear enough yet to show how the communication duality is built, in other words, how communication acts as a “medium” as well as an “outcome”. Therefore, two additional changes have been made to Figure 3-3.

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First, the two arrows linked above the two bubbles in Figure 3-3 are replaced by two half-cycle arrows. The whole figure is then formed as a bigger cycle with “communication duality” sitting in the middle, shown as the following Figure 3-4. This means that the two dimensions of communication are now considered in a dynamic process – one enables the other. It also illustrates that when communication is applied as a medium for information transmission and/or other objective uses, it enables people’s social interactions; and meanwhile, it is also one of the outcomes constructed through people’s social interactions – this therefore builds the communication duality.

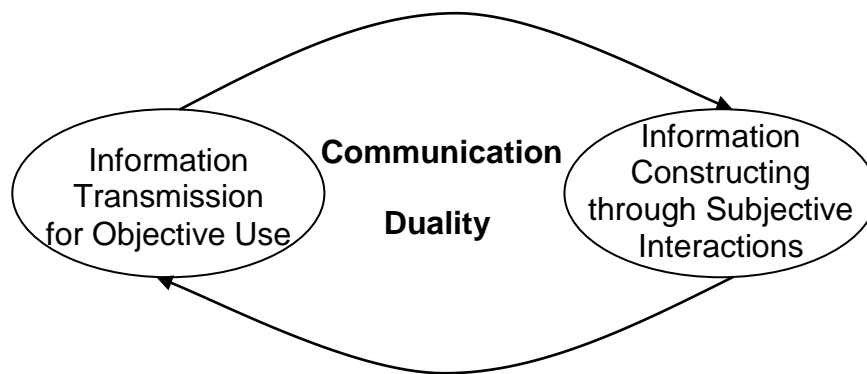


Figure 3-4: Communication Duality as formed with two Communication Dimensions

Secondly, the meaning of ‘*information transmission for objective use*’ and ‘*information constructing through subjective interactions*’ are further extracted, and they are demonstrated by the terms of **Tool** and **SM-SG** respectively. The reason is because in the first situation when communication is considered for objective use, it is usually perceived as a tool (i.e. a language or rhetoric tool etc.) – more discussions on this can be found in the next section. In the second situation, to construct information (new meanings) through subjective interactions is illustrated in this thesis as continuous sensemaking-sensegiving (represented as SM-SG) processes – this aspect will be expanded in section 3.4 and 3.5. Consequently, the two bubbles representing the two dimensions in Figure 3-4 will be further developed as shown in Figure 1-1 which has been briefly introduced in Chapter 1.

3.3 The objective dimension of communication – a diffusion tool

When communication is considered as an information-oriented activity, it is often researched as an information-related tool. It can be used to solve practical problems, such as to help transmit information/message, improve decision-making, understand environment and manage people. According to traditional communication models, most of which structure a linear and mechanistic communication process, for example, the “transmit–receive” model (see Figure 3-5 below) developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), the objective dimension of communication is usually studied in terms of some common communication “components” (i.e. message, sender, receiver, input, output, channel, feedback, meaning, effects, etc.).

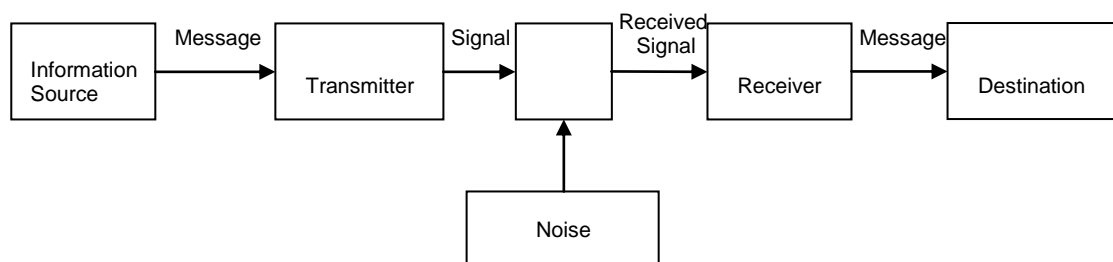


Figure 3-5: Shannon-Weaver's Model of Communication

Early researches on communication “channels” show that in different situations, some channels will be more suitable and efficient than the others, for example, a written channel and an oral channel (Davis, 1968). Later researches also suggest that in complex situations, the design of various channels and structural mechanisms can help communication to be more effective. To deal with communication in a hierarchical organisation, where messages cannot be transmitted directly but could be interrupted or even blocked at different layers, having a variety of channels is especially useful (Beer, 1985; Espejo & Harnden, 1989; Nystrom, 2006).

For some researchers, the component of “feedback” is considered as central to communication. In this kind of research, communication is seen as a two-way interaction rather than a linear and causal process. According to them, an appropriate communication should not only focus on the side of message-sending out, but should also allow feedbacks to come through (Cusella, 1987;

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Krone et al., 1987; Espejo & Harnden, 1989). Although efficient channels are regarded as important for a communication system, a two-way communication process remains as a pre-requirement for ensuring a system to be viable (Espejo & Gill, 2002).

There are a large amount of communication studies have shown the understanding of communication as a continuous information transmission process (O'Reilly et al., 1987; March & Sapiro, 1982). This understanding underlies the importance of keeping an information record. It can provide historical data which refers to previous communications, problems and decisions. To have an information record and to follow up on it will prevent communications being broken down. A record could exist in various physical forms, such as meeting minutes and reminders; and it could also be kept in virtual formats, such as e-mails and recorded voices.

Based on communication components researches, a communication that features of sufficient interacting opportunities, open environment, various channels, two-way process, and adequate information record is widely recognised as “good” and “appropriate” (Espejo & Harnden, 1989; Krone et al., 1987; Chaffey, 2003; Beer, 1985). These features are therefore regarded as the *ideal features* that an effective communication tool will try to possess.

3.4 The subjective dimension of communication – constructing meaning during diffusion

As said before, the subjective dimension of communication draws attention on how a piece of information is reconstructed during people’s social interactions (i.e. communication). Information can be reproduced because the meaning that is attached with the original information can be altered (either be added, reduced or differently interpreted). The reason that a meaning could be produced or re-produced is because when people communicate to each other, their “knowledgeabilities” will be referenced. “Knowledgeability” includes given social, economic, cultural conditions, people’s existing knowledge & understandings regarding their social realities, and their unique characteristics & personal experiences – these are always different from individual to individual (Giddens, 1984). Furthermore, when various “knowledgeabilities” are interacted

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with one another, “unintended consequences” are often generated – therefore, a so-derived meaning could go beyond anyone’s communicative “intent” (Giddens, 1984).

This subjective aspect cannot be captured by any mechanistic communication model (i.e. the Shannon-Weaver model) which excludes the consideration for people’s cognitive process but assumes communication as a physical information movement. It is argued that when bearing communication’s subjective dimension in mind, the input of a communication is not always the same as its output, and in fact, in most cases, they are not equal. The following Figure 3-6 shows that what a “transmitter” aims to convey might be different from what a “receiver” receives due to different individual cognitions.

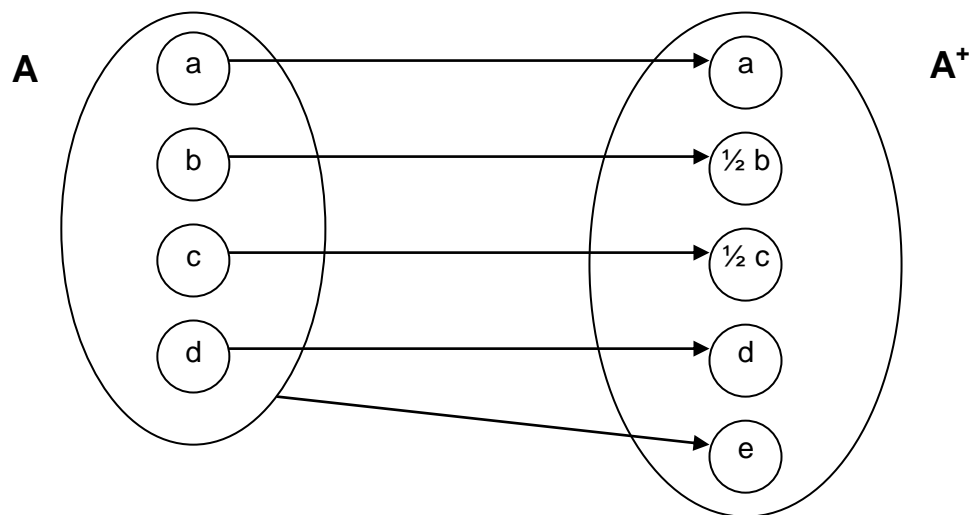


Figure 3-6: Meanings Missing/Adding in Communications

The above figure demonstrates that information **A** which is comprised of meaning elements **a**, **b**, **c** and **d** is being transmitted; however, during this process, part of elements **b** and **c** are missing while a new meaning element **e** is added. Thus, after communication, information **A** has been reconstructed as **A⁺**, and **A** certainly does not equal to **A⁺**.

Because a cognitive process (i.e. how people understand the information and what part of meaning has been digested by them) is taken into consideration, it is not appropriate to name different parties in a communication process as “transmitter” and “receiver”. The words themselves also imply a mechanistic view of explaining communication. Therefore, as suggested in this thesis, they

can be replaced by the words “sensemaker” and “sensegiver”, and accordingly, communication is more plausible to be described as continuous sensemaking-sensegiving (SM-SG) processes. In this way, the study of how to communicate effectively and efficiently by drawing on ideal features (objective dimension) also enables the study of the meaning-creating process that is accompanied with communication (subjective dimension) – this therefore also demonstrates the communication duality.

In this section, the subjective dimension of communication duality has been discussed. From the angle of how people carry on with their social interactions, it also argues that communication is ideally to be considered not as a transmitting-receiving process, but rather a sensemaking-sensegiving process, which will be further discussed in the next section.

3.5 Communication as continuous sensemaking-sensegiving processes

The reason that a communication is a sensemaking-sensegiving (SM-SG) process is because when people are interacting with one another, information is being transmitted. However, it is not physically moved from point A to point B, it has to be understood, interpreted and shared by people involved according to their own knowledgeabilities – this process is called sensemaking and sensegiving.

In this section, the idea of communication as a subjective SM-SG process will be enhanced, however, through a full appreciation of SM and SG. It will cover not only the interactive level, but also the below and beyond.

3.5.1 What is sensemaking (SM) and sensegiving (SG)

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking (SM) literally means the making of sense. He provides the understanding of SM in general by illustrating what it is about. For instance, SM is about placing relevant “stimuli” into cognitive frameworks (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Stimuli reflect how a framework is defined and which issues need to be considered when referring to the framework. In other words, SM helps people to understand and explain a cognitive framework (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). For example, strategy could be

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a framework, and it involves “procurement, production, synthesis, manipulation, and diffusion of information in such a way as to give meaning, purpose and direction to the organisation” (Westley, 1990, p337). In this example, “procurement”, “production” and “synthesis” etc. are stimuli, and to put these stimuli into the framework of strategy is called SM. Therefore, this kind of understanding for SM is about “selection” and “inclusion”.

SM is also about “readdressing surprise” (Weick, 1995, p6), which is to retrospectively review surprises that has occurred in cognition, and seek for explanation and comprehension. The reason of why this statement involves the word “surprise” is because SM is connected to the prediction of future events. It is argued that when a prediction is disconfirmed, a surprise happens, and hence the old routines and recipes which are already in place to define a cognitive framework will need to be made sense of by those who have followed them. In relating to the above point of view, the stimuli, which have been included in the framework, will be readdressed – some stimuli will be excluded while new ones could be added.

According to the definition of SM, sensegiving (SG) could therefore be defined as the giving of sense. If SM is about the question of “how can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (Weick, 1995), SG corresponds to the part of “saying” in the above question (Weick et al., 2005, p416). In this respect, SM and SG are intrinsically linked together to describe human agents’ social activities as they first make sense of what they have encountered in their social lives and then give the sense of what they have perceived through their actions and communications. Therefore, in the process of communication, there is no pure playing of either the role of sensemaker, or the role of sensegiver. Instead, a sensemaker is always a sensegiver and vice versa.

Although in Weick’s (1995) early discussion of SM, the term SG is not included explicitly, when examining his seven properties of SM carefully, it is found that the role of SG has been covered. According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), SM is incomplete unless it is cooperated with SG. This argument has also been supported by Weick et al. (2005) in their later research. Based on this understanding, this thesis further argues that SM always takes place first and

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SG always follows to enable a richer appreciation for human agents and agency.

SG affects sensemakers because when sensemakers hear what they have actually said, they will find by themselves of what is really crucial to them, or they can recognise if it is the thing that they had hoped to say. SG also affects what has been said, to which the content of SG is related. This is because whatever has been said may not be the thing as it is, instead, it could become something else that is defined in the action of SG.

3.5.2 The seven properties of SM and SG

Although SM is considered differently from different perspectives, for example, SM is about selective ideas and meanings, social processes, socially constructed rationalities, studies of subjective and intersubjective (James, 1950; Mead, 1934; Garfinkel, 1967; Putnam, 1983), it has some distinguishing characteristics which are considered as common. Weick (1995) summarises seven crucial characteristics as its “seven properties”. He also points out that none of these seven properties should be treated as independent; instead, they stand together to make SM a unique theory. These properties cannot be isolated from one another, because each of them more or less implies or is implied by the others. It is further argued in this thesis that the seven properties are also the features of SG.

Property 1: Grounded in identity construction

Identity construction is the core preoccupation in SM, because SM starts with a “self-conscious sensemaker” (Weick, 1995, p22). SM is to make sense of an event and to find out what it means. However, before coming to this question, a sensemaker should first answer the question of how a particular event becomes an issue for him/her. This question is highly related to self-identity, because whom a sensemaker identifies him/herself to be will determine what he/she does and thinks, and this will shape his/her image presented to the others. Therefore, when a sensemaker defines who he/she is, he/she also defines what is “in” and what is “out there”, and vice versa. In other words, whom a sensemaker defines him/herself to be will simultaneously define which events

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will become issues in his/her consideration. In this sense, SM is filtered through self-identity.

Property 2: Retrospective

To some people (including Weick), retrospective is the most distinguishing property of SM. To retrospect is not to focus on what it is at this moment, but to look back at what has already occurred. As informed by Schutz's (1967) discussion about "meaningful lived experience", Weick presents that the word "lived" is in the past tense which captures the reality that "people can know what they are doing only after they have done it" (Weick, 1995, p24).

However, the meaning is not "attached to" the lived experience. The creation of the meaning is rather an additional process, which is through the attention that is linked with the experience. The attention is given "in here" and "now", but it is directed backward to the past experience, therefore, whatever is happening currently will affect what will be made sense of when looked at retrospectively. As Weick describes, "an action can become an object of attention only after it has occurred. At the time it is noticed, several possible antecedents can be posited. The choice of 'the' stimulus affects the choice of what the action 'means'. And both choices are heavily influenced by the situational context" (1995, p26).

Property 3: Enactive of sensible environments

To understand this property, it is better to recall a constitutive ontology which has been explained in the previous chapters. Unlike functionalists, in the eyes of sensemakers, there is *no* "monolithic, singular, fixed" environment which completely stands outside of human agents (Weick, 1995, p31). "Enactment" implies that human agents produce their own environments through their day-to-day actions and hence become part of their environments; however, the created environments also enable and constrain their daily actions.

SM is a concept which contains both action and cognition part, and always bounds them together (Thomas et al., 1993). As implied by the "enactive" property, SM is first about action rather than building a cognitive picture of the world.

Property 4: Social

SM is a social process, because the sensemaker is first existing as a social individual, who has being socialised (Weick, 1995). By drawing on the previous properties, how a sensemaker has been socialised and by whom will influence a sensemaker's self-identity. The identity construction will in turn determine which stimuli will be chosen in SM and how the SM activity will enact the whole environment.

People identify themselves through interacting with other social members. Only as being social, interactions become possible and hence people can "imagine" their appearances in the eyes of others. It has also being argued that SM is constrained by the environment. However, the environment is enacted by the individual sensemaker's action as well as by the actions of other social actors. Therefore, SM is a socially constrained process.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, SM is about retrospectively looking at the events which have happened. In other words, the results are already known. However, results of the past events are not only the development of individual cognitive maps, but also of mutual agreements between all involved individuals according to their shared language and understandings. This means that retrospective SM is influenced by the result which has already been socially recognised, or established.

In short, the social property suggests "what I say and single out and conclude are determined by who socialised me and how I was socialised, as well as by the audience I anticipate will audit the conclusions I reach" (Weick, 1995, p62).

Property 5: Ongoing

"Sensemaking never starts. The reason it never starts is that pure duration never stops" (Weick, 1995, p43). People always find themselves in the middle of things. They always sit in the situation that is related to somewhere in the past (could be generated, caused or influenced by the past, or some other relationships) and also keeps changing at the present. Therefore, people have to continuously make sense of the situation which they confront.

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According to Winograd & Flores (1986), (a) the action of trying to make sense of what is happening will also affect the situation which is being understood. (b) Therefore, it is impossible to find a “stable representation of the situation” (p35), by which a pure duration can be separated from the continuous time flows and thus can be interpreted. (c) Language is a key action in SM, however, “whenever people say something, they create rather than describe a situation” (p35). Thus, a situation talked about is not the same situation that was made sense of; it has been altered to something else by language.

Property 6: Focused on and by extracted cues

“Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (Weick, 1995, p50). SM should be focused on and by extracted cues means that it is important to focus on the consequence of what sense has been made, and it is equally important to see the process of how a sense is being made. Weick’s addresses this as to “pay close attention to ways people notice, extract cues, and embellish that which they extract” (Weick, 1995, p49).

Extracted cues are those things that determine which information and elements will be singled out and how they will be tied together for SM. However, what and how the information and elements are extracted as cues and how their meanings will be interpreted depends on the “context and the personal dispositions” (Weick, 1995, p62). Both of them are important social products.

Property 7: Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

As the last property of SM, the discussion of plausibility rather than accuracy starts with addressing two different philosophical assumptions that the word “sense” or “meaning” may imply. For realists, meaning is something that is “out there to be sensed accurately”; however, for idealists, it is something that is “out there needs to be agreed and constructed plausibly” (Weick, 1995, p55).

In the dictionary, the word “accuracy” means exactness. To demand accuracy in SM is to ask for the exact description of an event, a sense or a meaning –this is not considered as being possible or necessary by drawing SM’s other properties. The word “plausibility”, however, means reasonableness, and in SM,

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it asks for a description which can help people make sense of a situation and be accepted as a reasonable explanation. Therefore, accuracy plays a secondary role in the discussion of SM; it is nice to have accuracy but not necessary.

3.5.3 The four levels of SM-SG

SM and SG are used in organisations to improve the entire organisation's performance (Thomas et al., 1993), to help managers deal with "changes" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), and to facilitate organisational members "reframing" of a picture based on their new expectations and experiences (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

Weick (1990) suggests that SM-SG generates meanings in both individual and social activities. On the individual level, SM-SG is a private activity. It is used to construct individual mental models and cognitive maps which will be drawn upon to produce meanings. When social interactions occur, individual meanings will be interpreted and shared among people, and therefore a mutual understanding will be reached as a social activity.

Compared to Weick's idea, Wiley's (1988) discussion on the four levels of SM: "intrasubjective", "intersubjective", "generic subjective", and "extrasubjective" seems to capture more details in explaining SM's transforming process.

According to Wiley (1988), "intrasubjectivity" is about self construction at individual level, which forms individual consciousness. "Intersubjectivity" is the interchange of two or more communicating selves. It is a process in which a single communicating self is transformed from individual "I" to a group concept "we". During this process, individual perceptions and feelings are synthesised into conversations; but as subjects, the selves of human beings are still concrete (when compared to the next SM level). SM as an intersubjective meaning construction may include social interactions through which a shared meaning is built, and thus "I think" becomes "we think". However, social interaction does not represent the entire intersubjectivity – it actually comes after the emergence of intersubjectivity for the reason that the latter is on a much higher level which indicates a form of social structure, for example, an organisation.

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When the idea of “we think” is formed, over time, it will become a general sense which is more and more stable. Accordingly, intersubjectivity will move on to “generic subjectivity” at the third level. On this level, concrete selves do not exist anymore. Instead, there are roles and functions that are defined by a social structure (i.e. an organisation) as generic selves. These roles and functions are interchangeable – it means that people could replace each other without caring which particular subject occupies or performs them. These roles and functions are thus understood as generic subjectivities, or in other words, as abstract selves on conceptual level. Furthermore, generic subjectivity could take various forms – apart from roles and functions, it could also be rules, standards, norms, and procedures etc.

The final level of SM transforming is “extrasubjective”. It refers to pure meanings without any specific subject involved. Even an abstract generic subjectivity is out of the consideration. For instance, culture and knowledge are typical examples of extrasubjectivity. They represent conceptualised meanings which are derived from artifacts of generic subjectivities, and therefore exist as “institutional realm” (Barley, 1986). It is perhaps easier to understand extrasubjectivity as the wider environment in which people inhabit. This environment represents those that have been taken-for-granted by people, and therefore it enables but also constrains people’s activities through providing them socially accepted rules, standards, norms, and procedures as mentioned above.

The above described transforming of SM between the four levels can also be demonstrated in the following figure.

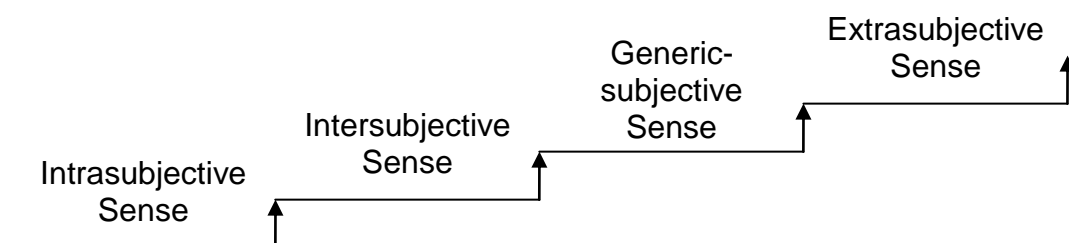


Figure 3-7: Four Levels of Sensemaking [According to the ideas of Wiley (1988)]

Because Wiley (1988) treats the four levels of SM transforming in an ascending order, the upward arrows in Figure 3-7 show that when SM fulfills itself at a

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lower level, it will be transferred upwards to a higher level. In this case, SM is transformed from intrasubjective to intersubjective to generic subjective and to extrasubjective level.

Having said that SM and SG are intrinsically linked together, therefore, when taking SG into consideration, it can be argued that each time when SM is transformed to an upper level, it involves the activity of SG. For instance, on the intrasubjective level, when one is trying making sense of the social, economic and cultural givens that are around him/her by drawing on his/her knowledgeability, he/she is also giving sense to him/herself; and as a consequence, an individual consciousness will be formed. On the intersubjective level, what “I think” has to be given to the others and shared with others before it could become what “we think”. On the generic subjective level, the previous agreed mutual understandings, known as “we think” will continuously give sense to people to inform them what they can/cannot do and how to do. In this way, it produces itself repeatedly, and thus its transforming to extrasubjectivity can be made possible. Similar to generic subjective level, on the extrasubjective level, what has been accepted as extrasubjectivity will also provide suggestions and constraints to people’s action – seen as a SG activity.

Based on this discussion, it is claimed that communication’s subjective dimension – the SM-SG process can be understood from the perspective of social interactions (see section 3.4), however, it only captures SM-SG process on its intersubjective level. In order to better illustrate how information as well as the wider environment surrounded is constituted by communication, all the four transforming levels of SM-SG have to be appreciated.

When applying the social-constructionist perspective in understanding diffusion change and communication duality, this chapter will also make a link with institutional and autopoietic perspective. Having said that the best of all theories can be incorporated in addressing the question of how to achieve a practice’s legitimacy effectively, this chapter will now build a diffusion model which incorporate communication duality with a justification strategy as suggested by rhetorical theory.

3.6 An incorporated managerial practice diffusion model based on social constructionism

So far this chapter has discussed the social constructionism stance and particularly the joint development of “knower”, “known” (or knowledge) and an action of “knowing”, which is also described by Giddens as the “duality of structure”. For Giddens, the above “known” is a “structure”, which can be drawn upon in agents’ (knowers’) action of “knowing” or their “interactions” – as a **medium**, but can also be reproduced during their actions/interactions – as an **outcome**.

Taking this perspective in exploring diffusion change, it is suggested that when the above aspect of **medium** is activated, an action of “knowing” refers to the action of getting to know a particular practice as well as the interactions between people that happen during this process. In this thesis, it specifically refers to the *teaching* and *learning* actions between diffusers and potential adopters as well as their communications that occur when doing so.

When the aspect of **outcome** is activated, it is suggested that during the period of “knowing”, the “structure” has been reproduced, which includes not only the reproduction of a practice itself, but also the reproduction of a circumstance (or environment) within which a diffusion change is taking place. For this purpose, the above discussed “communication duality” is required to explain how a practice (“structure”) is constituted by communication (“interaction”). In practical terms, this suggests that both diffuser and potential adopters have to be aware that how their *teaching & learning* actions and their communications reproduce the meaning of a practice as well as a diffusion environment which enable/prohibit a diffusion change to happen.

Bearing the above in mind, a social-constructionist-based incorporated managerial practice diffusion model is thus built. To be specific, this model has to be able to (1) structure a way of how diffusion communication can be operated step by step in practical terms; (2) demonstrate how different types of legitimacy can be achieved; and (3) conciliate a constitutive ontology which enables an exploration of the “agents” – diffusers and potential adopters, as

well as the “structure” – knowledge, organisations and their environment in diffusion changes.

In order to meet the above criteria, the question of how the institutional legitimacy, rhetorical justification and the four levels of SM-SG can be incorporated into one model will be addressed now.

3.6.1 As linked with pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy

The three types of legitimacy discussed before as well as the four levels of sense that SM-SG activities intend to achieve indicate a similar process of how a meaning formed at individual level is developed to be part of a social cognitive map. As considered in this thesis, an “intrasubjective” and an “intersubjective” sense will achieve a pragmatic legitimacy for the reason that they match sensemakers/givers’ self-interests (see section 2.2.2). When a sense is made at an intrasubjective level, it is always generated in terms of a sensemaker’s individual knowledgeability, for example, his/her individual interests, experience, personality etc., in other words, it is in line with his/her individual benefits and values. When an intersubjective sense is generated, it is always made collectively and mutually, which is again being consistent to people’s self-interests (a participative procedure, see section 2.2.2).

A generic subjective sense could gain moral legitimacy is because as being a pattern of *roles* and *functions* as “we think”, it is generally believed to be the “right thing” to do, and therefore it is within the defined social value system and even becomes part of it. As discussed above, an extrasubjectivity is an institutionalised account. It represents a social pattern which guilds people’s social actions, meanwhile, its plausibility is also proved in and reinforced by people’s real actions. This means that an extrasubjective sense has cognitive legitimacy, which has a certain degree of “exteriority and objectivity” (see section 2.2.2).

3.6.2 The operation of diffusion communication

In Chapter 2, the definition of what is pathos, logos and ethos justification as suggested by modern rhetoricians have been presented. It is claimed that pathos justification aims to arouse certain emotions (especially positive ones) in

Chapter 3 A Managerial Practice Diffusion Model based on a Social-Constructionist Perspective

potential adopters in order to encourage and motivate them to make an initial adoption decision of a managerial practice. Logos justification has a special focus in the process of implementing a practice. The purpose is to show potential adopters the efficiency and effectiveness of a practice and how it could be used to help improving organisational performance as a whole. As a consequence, a practice is waiting to be justified as “logically right”. Ethos justification has a commitment to demonstrate that to follow a particular managerial practice is the “right thing” to do. It goes beyond the self-interest scope, and has a wider vision of examining social morals and ethics (Green, 2004).

Therefore, in practice diffusions, communication has to be operated appropriately in order to fulfill the above justifications step by step. For example, to convey information, to generate emotions, to show logic, and to achieve socially accepted consensus. During its operation, communication’s ideal features can also be drawn on to legitimise a practice. For instance, to enable an open communication environment and sufficient interacting opportunities will gain an organisation “good characteristics”, which will add credit in achieving pragmatic and moral legitimacy (see Chapter 2). To involve various channels and two-way process in communications will allow a better layout for logical justification. It not only increases opportunities for exposing a practice’s logic, but also enhances a diffuser’s “credibility” as being a speaker (see Chapter 2) – which eventually links to the achievement of cognitive legitimacy.

3.6.3 The four levels of sense achieved in SM-SG activities for diffusion

The operation of communication also constitutes a practice’s meanings at intra-, inter-, generic and extra-subjective levels. To understand a practice at four levels through SM-SG activities can also be seen as a demonstration of the subjective dimension of communication’s duality.

As mentioned above, SM-SG activities are operated at four levels. In this sense, if the information that is being communicated refers to a managerial practice, the understanding to it also undergoes the four levels of transmission. Through individual SM-SG activities, a practice achieves an intrasubjective sense.

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Followed by the interchange of many intrasubjective senses, during which many SM-SG activities take place between diffusers and potential adopters, an intersubjective sense of a practice is built. Their continuous SM-SG activities will constitute a generic subjective sense of a practice later on, and eventually construct its extrasubjective sense – at this level, a practice becomes part of the “institutional realm”, or in other words, becomes legitimised and institutionalised.

3.6.4 An integrated practice diffusion model

By analysing how different aspects, for example, rhetorical justifications, three types of legitimacy, and communication duality are related to one another implies the possibility of integrating them all into one model. The following figure thus illustrates how a practice diffusion process can be described based on a social-constructionist perspective. This figure will be further developed as a diffusion model later on.

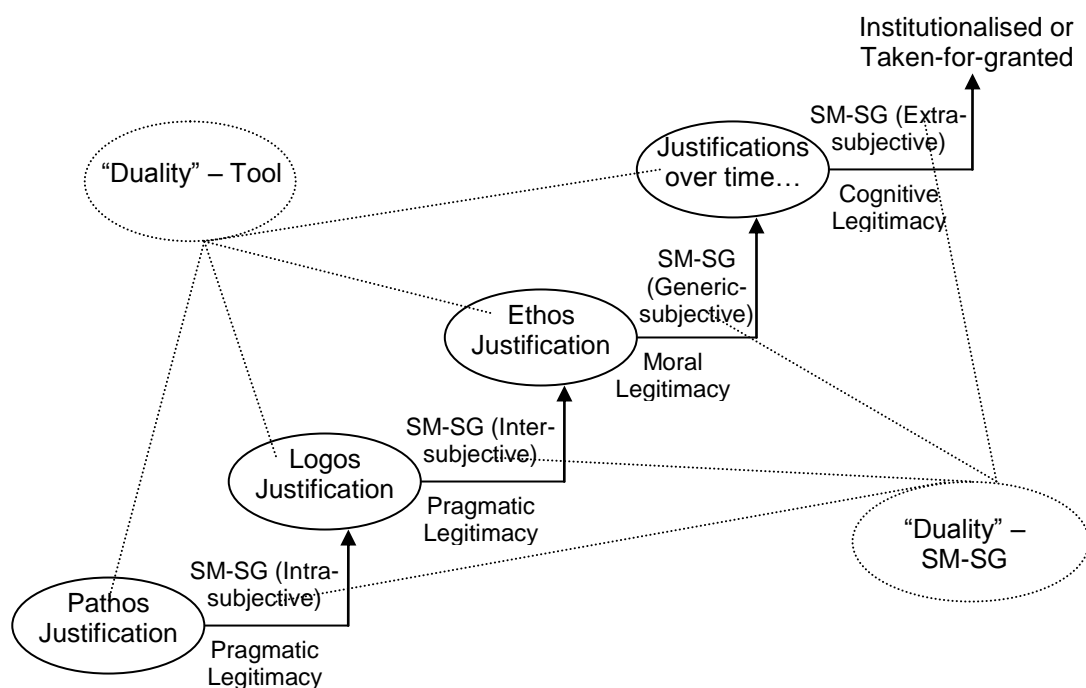


Figure 3-8: A Diffusion Process based on Social-Constructionist Perspective

The above figure is formed by primarily incorporating Green’s (2004) rhetorical justification sequence (Figure 2-1), Wiley’s (1988) four levels of sensemaking (Figure 3-7) as well as Suchman’s (1995) three types of legitimacy. Together,

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they indicate a process of how a managerial practice can be successfully diffused.

This figure shows that people (diffusers and potential adopters) communicate to operate “**pathos justification**” for a practice’s diffusion, through which “**intrasubjective senses**” in regards to a practice, diffusers, potential adopters, and organisational environment etc. are made. Accordingly, part of the “**pragmatic legitimacy**” of a practice can be achieved. As shown by the lowest upward arrow in Figure 3-8, communication will be carried on in order to justify a practice on the “**logos**” period. At this stage, people interact with one another to prove the logic that a practice implies and to build their collective understandings as “**intersubjective sense**”, through which a practice’s “**pragmatic legitimacy**” will be reinforced.

Following the rhetorical sequence, the ‘second’ upward arrow (starts counting from the lowest one) indicates that communication will be continued in order to bring forward an “**ethos justification**” for a practice. After a practice is proved to be in line with social morals and thus to be the “right thing” to do, or in other words, becoming a “**generic subjective sense**”, it gains “**moral legitimacy**”. The third upward arrow demonstrates that continuous communications and justifications can fix a practice as “**extrasubjectivity**” across “**time**” and space – it is now a pattern of social structure, or part of an institutional environment which has “**cognitive legitimacy**”. As related to the ideal consequence of diffusion, it can be claimed now as being “**institutionalised or taken-for-granted**”.

Although this figure does not explicitly include a space for illustrating the communication duality: Tool & SM-SG, as shown by the dashed lines, the “**Tool**” side of communication duality (the objective dimension) is implied in the conduct of pathos, logos and ethos justifications; and the “**SM-SG**” side of the duality (the subjective dimension) is operated throughout the entire communication process to continuously construct a practice’s meanings at different levels as well as its diffusion circumstance or environment.

However, when considering a diffusion process as the above, it is also necessary to include Weick’s (1995) argument for the transition between

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the earlier discussion on the phenomenon of a practice being “deinstitutionalised” (see institutional theory in Chapter 2) – this model also includes a possibility of a practice being re-diffused (shown as the dashed line in Figure 3-9).

More importantly, Figure 3-9 also proposes that the three rhetorical justification periods form a closed loop rather than a linear sequence. It means that an ethos justification may not always be the end of a practice’s diffusion, it could lead to a new pathos justification instead. In real diffusion practices, it could even involve a long-term reverting process.

3.7 Summary of this chapter

Following the discussion of institutional, rhetorical and autopoietic perspectives in understanding diffusion change, this chapter started by introducing the social-constructionist perspective which reconsiders the object-subject dualism as a duality. By illustrating Giddens’ “duality of structure” in his structuration theory, it suggested the duality of communication in diffusion which covers both objective and subjective dimensions.

When explaining the objective dimension, this chapter reviewed the ideal features of communication’s components, through which an efficient and effective mechanistic communication process is expected to be built. However, by also challenging this dimension’s inability of addressing the cognitive side of communication, this chapter proposed to use continuous SM-SG processes (the subjective dimension) to portray communication activities.

More importantly, this chapter also argued that the two dimensions of communication are formed in a dynamic process – one enables the other. It therefore described how communication can be used as an information-oriented tool but can simultaneously constitute the information (its meanings), and vice versa. As what a social constructionist will see, communication duality also explains how communication is operated as an action of knowing to convey knowledge (i.e. a managerial practice) but also constitutes the knowledge through SM-SG processes.

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Through discussing the four levels of SM-SG, this chapter further argued that the achievement of intra-, inter-, generic and extra-subjective sense of a practice via communication is also corresponding to the gain of pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy through rhetorical justifications. Therefore, an incorporated model was built to suggest how a managerial practice can be effectively and successfully diffused. By considering the occurrence of “surprises” or “environmental shocks”, this chapter suggested to reconceptualise the three rhetorical justification periods as forming a closed loop rather a linear sequence.

In the next chapter, the methodological part of social constructionism will be introduced and based on which the research strategy and methodology will be designed and justified. By referring to the practice diffusion model that has been built in this chapter, detailed research methods and approaches will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 Research Strategy, Methodology and Methods

In Chapter 3, a social-constructionist-based Integrated Diffusion Model which incorporates ‘communication duality’ has been proposed to improve and examine practice diffusion in real situations. In this chapter, the methodology and approach of how this model as well as the “duality” is going to be investigated will be discussed.

By doing this, Chapter 4 will first take a step back to look at general philosophical foundations of social research from where a discussion of ontology and epistemology normally takes place. Although the term “ontology” (and epistemology) has been mentioned in previous chapters to present a social-constructionist perspective which assumes that the “agency” and the “structure” in a diffusion change can be examined at the same time while the other perspectives (i.e. institutionalism, rhetorical perspective, and autopoiesis, etc.) may only focus on a single side; here it has to be discussed again within a broad philosophical background in order to see how a social constructionist ontology will be remained in its epistemological choice.

By portraying the philosophical assumptions of different paradigms, this chapter will show how different paradigms will impact the role of researcher as well as a research’s credibility check. The comparison between social constructionism and other philosophical paradigms (i.e. functionalism, interpretivism, and naturalism) will clarify the position of the researcher to use the model as proposed in Chapter 3, which is to be best developed by adopting a self-ethnographic approach.

As a chosen research strategy, self-ethnography highlights a researcher’s ability to reflect on his/her research as well as his/her intervention into a research. According to social constructionism, self-ethnography thus enables the observation and examinations of details that happen during ‘constitutive processes’, i.e. a process when a diffusion system and its environment constitute one another through communications, or a process when communication is constituted by a system and/or an environment, or a process when a researcher’s ontology and epistemology jointly build each other.

In terms of the features of self-ethnography, this chapter will also develop a 'SISI' (Survey-Immerse-Share-Integrate) methodology. It is also social-constructionist-based for the reason that the four phases of 'SISI' can offer plenty spaces for observing the above 'constitutive processes' in the Diffusion Model and in a more structured way. The related research methods which will be used to collect empirical data, for example, observations, interviews, workshops, and systems methods etc. will also be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Philosophical foundations of social research in general

In the last chapter, a social-constructionist-based diffusion model has been proposed. In order to investigate whether and how this model can improve and analyse real diffusion practices, a proper methodology and approach is required. It has to be social-constructionist-based, and thus it can research on the "agency" and the "structure" of diffusion at the same time through examining the 'Tool' and 'SM-SG' duality of communication. A social-constructionist perspective can do so is because it bears a constitutive ontology and epistemology which is distinguished from what most other perspectives will assume.

This chapter will now look at the fundamental philosophical paradigms that support different ontological and epistemological assumptions behind social research. A philosophical paradigm will determine what a research is, for example, is it a science, or what is the role of researcher in a research? These issues are essential as they are linked with the design of research strategy, methodology and methods for getting a research done.

Generally to say, to consider philosophical issues in social research is important because they construct fundamental ways in which human beings think and look at the social world. As it is claimed by Harrison-Barbet (1990), philosophy comes to be the study of "ultimate reality". As a result of social research, although "social theory" is *not* "primarily a philosophical endeavour", it "involves the analysis of issue which spill over into philosophy" (Giddens, 1984, xvii). John Hughes explains the reason for considering philosophical issues in social research as:

Chapter 4 Research Strategy, Methodology and Methods

The relevance of the philosophical issues discussed arises from the fact that every research tool or procedure is inextricably embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world and ways of knowing that world made by the researcher using them (Hughes, 1980, p13).

Therefore, as declared by Giddens (1984), “the social sciences are lost if they are not directly related to philosophical problems by those who practise them” (xvii).

Ontology and Epistemology

The most usual philosophical issues to be considered in social research are normally related to a researcher’s “ontology” and “epistemology” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Mason, 1996; Hollis, 1994; Hughes, 1980). For instance, Hollis (1994) provides a philosophical analysis of social theory under three headings – ontology, epistemology and methodology. According to him, “ontology” means “what there is” and it is a Greek word for “being”. An ontological question concerns the nature of reality. “Epistemology” is “the theory of knowledge”. An epistemological question deals with the problem of whether human beings can really know this world and if they can, how and to what extent they can recognise it (Hollis, 1994, pp8-9).

Mason (1996) also suggests that when doing social research, researchers need to first think about the ontological question of “what is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social ‘reality’, which I wish to investigate” before identifying a specific research topic because an ontological question “takes place earlier in the thinking process than the identification of a topic” (Mason, 1996, p11). She argues that based on different ontological perspectives, people will tell different stories about this world. For instance, some of them view the social reality as “bodies, subjects, objects”, some of them view it as “understandings, interpretations, motivations, ideas”, and there are also some people who view it as “attitudes, beliefs, views” etc. (Mason, 1996). These ontological components can help researchers to identify their ontological positions, which will determine what kind of issues is considered as “interesting” and perhaps “worthy” to be researched.

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Following an ontological question, epistemological perspective also needs to be considered in terms of “what might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities or social ‘reality’ which I wish to investigate” (p13). Epistemology is about the nature of knowledge, which is concerned with how knowledge can be gained and demonstrated. When involving epistemology in research, it helps researchers to generate knowledge and evidence to explain research questions and support research assumptions. Epistemological justifications can validate the effectiveness of different techniques or methods of investigation (Hughes, 1980).

In terms of the different attitudes towards the assumption of what is the nature of reality, ontology is usually divided into two camps – “objective” and “subjective” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). From an objective view, social reality exists external to human beings, and it cannot be influenced by individual consciousness. On the contrary, a subjective view perceives the world as a product of human mind and consciousness, and therefore it denies the objective nature of the social reality.

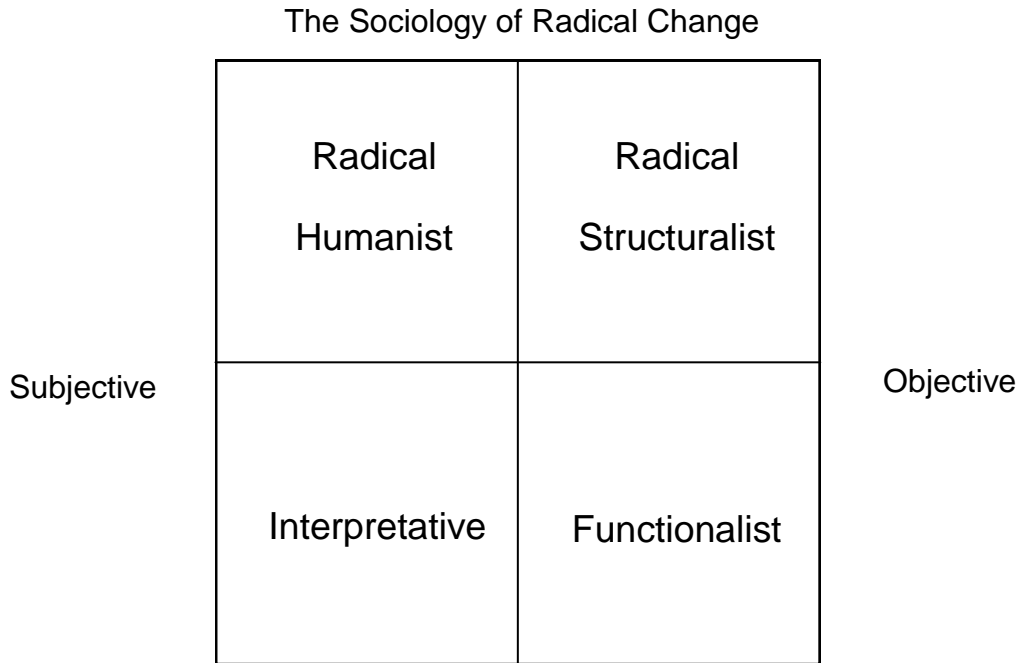
It is also recognised in social research that ontology and epistemology are always being consistent, which means that an objective ontology is always associated with a “positivist” epistemology which argues that reality can be known as knowledge and knowledge is “hard, real, and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form”; and a subjective ontology is always related to “anti-positivist” epistemology, which argues that the knowledge acquired by human beings is “soft, more subjective, spiritual, or even transcendental – based on experience, insight, and essentially of a personal nature” (Flood & Carson, 1993, p247).

4.1.1 The role of researcher in social research

Based on the various ontological and epistemological assumptions, philosophical paradigms will be built differently, and accordingly, the role of researcher is also considered differently.

According to the conventional object-subject division of philosophical paradigms, social research is usually considered as either being located into the subjective paradigm or the objective one. For instance, Burrell and Morgan

(1979) construct a two-dimension grid. In this grid, they form four categories. While the paradigm of “functionalist” and the “radical structuralist” categories belong to the “objective” side, the “interpretative” and “radical humanist” categories are located in the “subjective” side (see Figure 4-1 below).



The Sociology of Regulation

Figure 4-1: Four Paradigms for the Analysis of Social Theory (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p22)

This division also splits social research methods into qualitative and quantitative categories respectively because researchers with different paradigms often consider and explore the social world differently. Oakley presents it as:

While researchers in one camp think they are studying the real world, which consists of things it is feasible to try to find out about, those in the other dispute the idea that there is a single reality to be known, and regard the pursuit of ‘hard data’ as impractical and unachievable. What for one side is a set of ‘facts’ is for the other a complex and impenetrable kaleidoscope of heavily constructed social meanings (Oakley, 2000, p25).

In Burrell & Morgan’s grid, for example, functionalism is “problem-orientated in approach, concerned to provide practical solutions to practical problems”, and it

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applies “the models and methods of the natural sciences to the study of human affairs” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p26). For functionalists, knowledge takes an objective format to exist, which means that it “accurately and objectively captures and represents the processes, systems and laws underlying the way the world works” (Cunliffe, 2008).

Within this paradigm, social reality is generally explained by cause-effect laws, therefore, uncertainty can be eliminated, and predictions for emergent events are possible and could even become accurate. A functionalist paradigm is recognised to be very “hard” which is based on the “realist” ontology and “positivist” epistemology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). It provides a perfect residence for various quantitative research studies which ask for logically testing hypotheses with the help of precise quantitative data, experiments and statistics to deduce “axioms, theorems and interconnected causal laws” (Neuman, 2000, p73).

Therefore, under a functionalist paradigm, a researcher should not have any influence on a research because the world is already there as a “structure”. A researcher’s action of learning or explaining it should fully respect the world or the “structure” as it is and without changing anything of it.

On the contrary, interpretive paradigm “seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p28). In contrast to the functionalist, the interpretative paradigm adopts a “softer” way to consider the social world. Based on a “nominalistic” ontology and “anti-positivist” epistemology, it focuses on human beings’ subjectivity and the interactions between them. Therefore, many qualitative researches are considered as belonging to this category. Rather than perceiving the world as being “out there”, this paradigm views the social world as an emergent property originated from human consciousness (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

In this paradigm, the social world is explained by understanding the participants and their related social behaviours. It asks for achieving an in-depth interpretation of “how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Neuman, 2000, p71). In particular, interpretivism argues against the pure objective knowledge by highlighting the researchers’ positions in their studies:

researchers as human beings cannot stand outside of the reality. They need to get involved in contexts and the real situations in order to share their feelings and meanings with local people and also to reflect on them. To review social phenomena by referring back to their “natural settings” is probably a more reliable way of doing qualitative research (Neuman, 2000).

Different paradigms not only impact the role of researcher but also influence the use of criteria to judge whether a social research can be regarded as science or not. In the following section, the traditional criteria of “scientific judgement” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Neuman, 2000) for social research which are originated from a quantitative perspective will be discussed.

4.1.2 Criteria for judging social quantitative and qualitative research

In terms of different paradigms, criteria for judging social quantitative and qualitative research are also different. However, since quantitative research has taken a dominant position in both physical and social research for a long time, the criteria it normally adopts for its “scientific judgement” seem to be used more constantly.

Most quantitative researches employ a systematic analysis to provide discoveries of universal laws. They focus on rigorous measurements, precise figures and maintaining neutrality. Therefore, a quantitative research is normally judged against the criteria of *validity*, *reliability* and *generalisability*.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) suggest that “reliability” in quantitative research can be tested in three questions: (1) will the same results appear on other occasions? (2) Will similar results achieved by different researchers? (3) Is there transparency in interpreting data? A “validity” judgement deals with questions related to a causal relationship judgement, which is “whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about” (Saunders et al., 2003, p101). “Generalisability” is a type of external validity, which refers to “the extent to which the research results are generalisable”, and in other words, “whether the findings may be equally applicable to other research settings” (Saunders et al., 2003, p102).

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Different from quantitative research, a social qualitative research is perceived to be subjective and inductive, and it is often concerned with the ways in which people understand their social “reality” and its associated meanings (Neuman, 2000; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Mason, 1996). Qualitative research is frequently questioned and challenged by quantitative researchers as not being a “science” because it lacks the ability of proving “credibility” in terms of the quantitative criteria (reliability, validity and generalisability). For example, the settings of qualitative research cannot always be the same and therefore it is difficult to test if the research findings are repeatable. However, more and more social researchers argue that for a qualitative social research, “plausibility” is perhaps a more appropriate term for its scientific judgement because it brings credibility (Weick, 1995; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Hammersley, 1992).

Compared to reliability, validity and generalisability, ‘plausibility’, ‘coherence’ and ‘reasonableness’ are more relevant criteria for a qualitative research. Isenberg (1986) shows the importance of pursuing “plausible reasoning” in research as it “involves going beyond the directly observable or at least consensual information to form ideas or understandings that provide enough certainty” (p242). Hammersley (1992) talks about the sufficiency of evidence and presents that “first we must consider whether the claims made are sufficiently plausible, given our existing knowledge. If they are themselves beyond reasonable doubt we can simply accept them” (p70). Qualitative studies cannot provide precise quantitative data and they rather provide in-depth understandings, interpretations, and studies of social phenomena. For these studies, “a theory is true if it makes sense to those being studied and if it allows others to understand deeply or enter the reality of those being studied” (Neuman, 2000, p74). Therefore, for qualitative researches, plausibility is essential and it is also an expression of the scientific spirit.

Bearing the above in mind, this chapter will now compare social constructionism to the other paradigms. Based on the comparison, it will clarify the position of the researcher when using the proposed Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) in a social-constructionist-based research. It will also present how a research’s credibility can be justified through its “plausibility” and other criteria rather than

the usual scientific judgement. The comparison will also lead to the decision of adopting self-ethnography as the appropriate research strategy.

4.2 Comparisons between social constructionism and other paradigms

As Gergen & Gergen (1991) describe, a movement of social constructionist begins with challenging the “observer free” nature of social research, which is however regarded as an objective basis of conventional views to scientific knowledge. By challenging it, a social constructionism-based research employs different voices of social sciences. For example, it draws on anthropologists’ views to argue that research methods influence the description of a culture. It borrows historians’ question to argue that the writing and story-telling techniques impact people’s understandings of their history. Social constructionists also follow the critiques of critical theory and feminists which argue that theories and facts are not formed as “value free”. Finally, it agrees with sociologists’ view that people’s social relationships determine the construction of their social worlds.

If social constructionism believes that people (i.e. researchers), their knowledge, and their actions of knowing the knowledge jointly construct one another, a key suggestion for doing a social constructionist research is thus to treat a researcher as part of a research. When applying this idea in the methodological part, it is to say that the research strategy, methodology and methods which a social-constructionist-based research adopts will be able to demonstrate how a research, a researcher and related research activities build one another jointly. To achieve this, this thesis suggests starting from including researchers in their researches rather than leaving them out.

A series of comparison between social constructionism and the other paradigms, known as the “functionalism”, “interpretivism”, “naturalism” and “constructivism” will be provided now. The analysis will contribute to choose the appropriate research strategy (self-ethnography) and methodology.

4.2.1 Among social constructionism, functionalism and interpretivism

As said in section 4.1.1, “functionalism” considers knowledge as being objective. It can be obtained through scientific methods and without being

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influenced by the researcher who is using the methods to investigate the knowledge. Different from functionalist, both interpretivists and social constructionists challenge the “observer free” knowledge. As they see it, an observational process must happen as accompanied by human beings. However, although an interpretivism paradigm recognises a researcher’s role in his/her research, but because it also suggests that knowledge is formed solely based on individual subjectivity, it is limited in dealing with the social facticity to some degree.

Therefore, to agree but also to distinguish from “interpretivism”, social constructionism suggests that there is no way one can “separate what is ‘subject’ from ‘object’, ‘knower’ from ‘known’ ” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p77). It also suggests that knowledge is “self-reflexive”, which means that “knowers” can always force themselves to explicate the “known but unsaid” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p82), in other words, “knowers” construct the way of “knowing” through “knowledge” and finally construct “knowledge” itself. In a very strict sense, “knower” could become part of the knowledge.

An example of experimental research has been given by Gergen & Gergen to show that a reflexive stance can activate the “latent language potentials” in a situation in which experimentalists’ “favored language” (e.g. their most familiar words, phrases, procedures, methods etc. which are also used constantly) is of no use anymore (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p86). For instance, when an experiment is being rejected because of the lack of funds, investigators have to seek for alternative language which they are less familiar with in order to test their hypothesis or to find something new.

This example shows that experimentalists are usually considered to explain the world by “objective hypothesis testing”, and therefore an experimental procedure is the most “favored language” for them. However, when this language cannot be used due to some reasons, they reflexively activate a different ‘language’ in their potentials in order to produce a finding, which might be different from the hypothesis that they have assumed before. More importantly, this new finding and their potential of discovering this new finding could have never been noticed if they were limited in their “favored language”. This means that with the “favored language”, knowledge is formed in an

objective way, and thus the tested hypothesis becomes the knowledge; but with another 'language', knowledge could contain something else which is beyond the hypothesis. In other words, the experimentalist him/herself is a constitutive part of the knowledge being generated. In this sense, the object-subject dualism does not seem to be helpful in social constructionist paradigm, and it could even be misleading.

In a practice diffusion study, social constructionism suggests approaching it by drawing on the object-subject "duality". This is to suggest that a diffusion research should focus on (a) the "structure" – under which circumstance that a practice is to be diffused, (b) the "agency" – how people's subjectivities play in promoting/prohibiting practice diffusion, and (c) the research activity itself – how it affects the "structure" and the "agency" and thus becomes part of the "structure".

A study conducted by Cunliffe (2008) shows that within the big umbrella of "social constructionism", there are still many different orientations existing which drive social constructionism-based studies into different directions. However, they commonly reject "essentialist explanations of the world" (p124). In this sense, instead of asking a social researcher to remain "neutral" and thus to generate repeatable, valid, general and accurate explanations, it is more important for him/her to keep "consistency" in terms of (1) the underlying assumptions of the social reality, (2) the view to the knowledge, and (3) the related research and learning approach. This kind of "consistency" has become an vital aspect of the "credibility" of social constructionist-bases studies (Cunliffe, 2008).

4.2.2 Between social constructionism and naturalism

Naturalism, together with objectivism and functionalism are the three "ism" which are described as "the orthodox consensus" (Giddens, 1984, Introduction xx). As often having natural science as a model, naturalism argues that to capture the nature of social phenomena in their "natural settings" is a core commitment (Matza, 1969). A naturalist paradigm suggests that social researchers should get access to the settings of research as participant observers, so they can learn the local culture, and the ways in which local people act and interpret their actions in their most natural states (Hammersley,

1992). However, it also argues that when it comes to appreciate/describe a natural setting, a research should not be “disturbed” by a researcher (Lofland, 1967). In other words, as considered in naturalism, researchers need to access and appreciate the social world in order to gain understandings of social phenomena; however their interventions should not influence research settings and findings.

Although the conceptions and methods of naturalism are different to those of positivism, to which quantitative measurement, universal laws and neutral observation are essential elements, the above claim of completely eliminating a researcher’s influence in a research thus suggests that both naturalism and positivism share the same understanding – that is social phenomena can be interpreted in an objective/unique way.

As discussed before, social constructionism denies that social research could be “observer free”. Instead, it argues that a researcher constructs a research process of “knowing” and hence constructs knowledge (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Both social constructionism and naturalism are concerned with a subjective interpretation of how people come to know the world, but a constructionist inquiry links to an ethno-methodological⁸ work in order to render the world sensible (Garfinkel, 1967; Gergen, 1985), whereas a naturalist-based one focuses on examining the world in its most natural state (Blumer, 1969). Moreover, the way in which the world is interpreted is very different. For naturalists, researchers need to try their best to interpret the world as it is – which is therefore considered as having an objective foundation; however, for social constructionists, researchers’ interpretations are also part of the world because they could change the world.

If a naturalism paradigm is adopted in doing a social research (i.e. practice diffusion), on the one hand, a researcher has to stay ‘in’ a research to get first-hand materials through his/her eyes and ears; but on the other hand, he/she has to stay ‘out’ and to present his/her findings in an ‘objective’ way. This kind of confusion or even contradiction somehow makes a social research vulnerable when facing a quantitative scientific judgement.

⁸ According to Garfinkel, ethnomethodology is a study which aims to explore the way in which people live and make sense of their social world.

Different from naturalism, social constructionism makes a researcher's role rather explicit. Since the action of 'knowing' constitutes the 'known', a researcher's activity is thus part of the research which also needs to be observed and reflected. If a research methodology will include the position of a researcher in a research and will also reflect on it, it can be considered as enhancing the 'credibility' of a research (i.e. to keep the underlying philosophical assumptions and the research methodologies consistent) to a certain extent.

4.2.3 Between social constructionism and constructivism

Having talking about the theoretical difference between social constructionism and constructivism (see Chapter 3), here, they are compared in terms of the methodological use. It is impossible for a constructivist to know the truth of the world because the world is constructed by the action of coming to know it. However, this action is within a self-experiential world, which is only in a pure cognitive sense. This means that an individual person will experience an object and absorb it as an internal process such as cognition and intention, through which an individual will construct the sense of "self" and experience those as external to the "self" (von Glasersfeld, 1991). In this regard, constructivism is concerned with cognition on a subjective level, or in other words, an individual mind.

However, from a social constructionist point of view, the action of knowing the world happens in the "shared systems of intelligibility" (a kind of knowledgeable knowing). According to Gergen & Gergen (1991), this is represented by language. Language is not seen as an external expression of one's internal cognition, but rather "an expression of relationships among persons" (p78). Language is produced and maintained through social interactions, and thus "knowledge is part of the coordinated activities of individuals" (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p78). In other words, knowledge is constructed in social interactions through language. Therefore, rather than focusing on a single individual's cognition, social constructionism is concerned with the collectively generated meanings, which also include a researcher's interactions with others.

A summary.

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Through comparing social constructionist paradigm to the paradigm of functionalism & interpretivism, naturalism and constructivism, the following suggestions can be made respectively.

1. Different from functionalism & interpretivism, a social constructionist-based research should move beyond the object–subject dualism for the reasons that (a) social research is always conducted by human beings, thus it is not possible to separate the subject from object. (b) Since knowledge is self-reflexive, people who is getting to know the knowledge is always constructing the knowledge through constructing the process of acquiring it – they report on the same process (Midgley, 2000). This attempt responds to the ‘dual constitutive’ nature of communication, which also enables the study on “agency” and “structure” simultaneously as suggested in the structuration theory (see Chapter 3). Therefore, a strategy and methodology adopted in a social-constructionist-based diffusion study (like this thesis) should re-conceptualise the object–subject “dualism” as a “duality”, and hence the subject and object could jointly construct rather than mutually exclude one another.
2. Considering the common argument of naturalism and social constructionism, this thesis suggests that a social constructionist-based inquiry should try to get very close to a research setting in order to produce detailed interpretations of human actions while taking the whole research environment into consideration. However, by considering also the associated problems of naturalism, it is suggested that the role of the researcher has to be included more explicitly because a researcher’s intervention, interpretation, and reflection are part of the socially constructed picture. This thus remains consistent to its ontological claim because “epistemological priorities” of a research and the “ontological commitments” that lie behind it are “relationally responsive” to and jointly constitute one another (Chia, 1996; Cunliffe, 2008).
3. A social-constructionist-based research will not only focus on individual subjectivity as what a constructivist will do. It has more interests in exploring the production of collective meanings through social interactions (i.e. communication) which are then represented in language

and communication as knowledge. “The process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship” (Gergen, 1985, p267). This attempt is conceived of as responding to the sensemaking–sensegiving activity as discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Communication, which builds socially shared “generic” meanings through continuous sensemaking–sensegiving activities is therefore considered to construct people’s ‘social realities’, ‘organisations’, ‘environments’ and practice diffusion. In this thesis, the methodology adopted should therefore offer enough space for people to see the ‘constructing’ process through communication and sensemaking–sensegiving.

4.3 An ethnographic research

Being within the domain of social research, this thesis also aims to complete the task of “providing conceptions of the nature of human social activity and of the human agent which can be placed in the service of empirical work” (Giddens, 1984, xvii). Given also the research interest of this thesis that it takes a social-constructionist perspective to look at practice diffusion changes, it thus needs a research strategy which will allow the exploration of the “agency” and the “structure” at the same time. More importantly, the strategy itself can also demonstrate the joint development of a researcher’s ontology and epistemology.

Bearing the above in mind, this thesis is designed to be an ethnographic research rather than a survey or experiment-based one because an ethnographic research will be able to provide a “natural” account of human social life (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995); moreover, an ethnographer not only studies about but also studies *in* the field setting, which is to some, the “best” way of achieving the “understanding of others” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988).

Ethnographers respect and appreciate social world as a large research setting, and based on which they will be able to describe what event is happening and in which context, what activities the local people do in order to make the event happen, how they consider their activities, and what kind of underlying meanings support their activities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Golden-Biddle

& Locke, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988). These issues cannot be understood by applying causal relationships or universal laws as suggested by functionalism or positivism because human actions are based upon “social meanings”, for example, beliefs and values.

However, as mentioned in section 4.2, this ethnographic research strategy also needs to be explicit about how a researcher is involved in order to complete the joint development of the “structure” and the “agency”. In this regards, a conventional ethnography may not be adequate – it can provide a rich description of either or both of the “structure” and the “agency”, it could also show part of the joint development between the two, but it is not clear enough in terms of how a researcher also contributes to the construction of both. Therefore, a more ‘constructive’ and ‘reflexive’ type of (ethnographic) approach could be chosen. Following the discussion of the development of ethnographic research and its underlying philosophical foundations, this section will address the features of self-ethnography (as different from conventional ones) as well as the associated criteria for its credibility judgement.

4.3.1 The development of ethnography and its related philosophical discussions

Ethnography as a research strategy ties “fieldwork” and “culture” together when the former is considered as its method and the latter as its subject (Van Maanen, 1988). The history of ethnography fieldwork originated from the anthropology and later in sociology. The modern version of ethnography fieldwork only emerged in the 19th century. In anthropology, fieldwork was considered at the beginning as a traveler’s writing, therefore, the early fieldworkers were once upon concerned about how their writings could be too similar to one another when they saw and heard the same thing. Other popular fieldworks at that time are cultural investigation or survey for a particular region.

However, by that time, ethnography was “either a speculative form of social history carried out by anthropologists who for the most part remained seated in their writing workshops, or it was carried out as a canonical count-and-classify social science based on a stiff form of interviewing”, and both forms are grounded on what did people say (Van Maanen, 1988, p16). In this sense, neither the question of what people did nor the pattern of their day-to-day life

was important. This situation of relying on the second-hand reports to analyse culture has been changed around World War I when two researchers' fieldworks encouraged all the anthropologists to go to the life world to collect their own first-hand data, which thus brought the "open-air" to ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988).

In sociology, the history of fieldwork begins with the social reform movement in the late 19th century, and most of its developments were driven by the Chicago School. The two popular forms are the "community studies" – a domestic expedition or survey-based work, and the "down-and-out" fashion – an intensive or serial-based interview. The latter is a type of fieldwork which asks to "get into the city on one's own and see what was happening", which is often "accomplished in natural settings, and usually accompanied by close observation, if not participation in the settings" (Van Maanen, 1988, p19). A typical example is like the "Street Corner Society" by William F. Whyte (1955), whose "inhabit and reportorial" style has been adopted in many later works.

Ethnography has now become widely used in social qualitative researches. Having talked about philosophical foundations for social research in general (see section 4.1), this section will now illustrate the philosophical claims that particularly underlie ethnographic researches including conventional ethnography and self-ethnography.

In an ethnographic type of research, there is a strong "anti-philosophical" stream which considers that "philosophical discussion and debate can easily become a distraction; a swapping of one self of problems for another, probably even less tractable" (Hammersley, 1992, p43). It is not quite clear that if this idea derives from the intention of avoiding critiques from quantitative researchers or positivists. However, as perceived in this thesis, philosophical discussions play a fundamental role in not only ethnography, but in all kinds of research. Hammersley (1992) admits that "there is no escape from philosophical assumptions for researchers. Whether we like it or not, and whether we are aware of them or not, we cannot avoid such assumptions" (p43). This thesis also argues that it is only by clarifying a researcher's philosophical position, the validity of a research and especially a social qualitative research can be justified because a validity judgement is usually

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along with a research's philosophical assumptions. This also helps to put in practice a communication model for diffusion.

By drawing on the conflicts between quantitative and qualitative methods of social research, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) use the terms "positivism" and "naturalism" to describe the philosophical positions behind each type of method. They argue that "the former privileging quantitative methods, the latter promoting ethnography as the central, if not the only legitimate, social research method" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p3).

As discussed before, qualitative research is often criticised as lacking of scientific rigour and producing subjective findings by positivists, for whom the precise measurements, cause-effect laws and neutral observations are considered as essential. However, ethnographers developed an alternative voice in reacting to this critique. As greatly informed by naturalism which suggests that social phenomena should be researched in its "natural" settings, an ethnographic research aims to enact the understandings of how people live and how they make sense of their local environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988). According to naturalism, the value of ethnography is to show the various cultural patterns that exist in the societies, and the way each of the patterns understands social process (Wolcott, 1995).

However, since naturalism argues for respecting research settings but simultaneously declares research as "observer free" (which a social constructionist will disagree), many ethnographers question it by arguing that people constitute their social world through their interpretations to this world and their actions based upon them. According to people's different interpretations, their defined social worlds could also be different (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Blumer, 1969). As human beings, ethnographers themselves also construct the social world through their interpretations; and as researchers, their interpretations are most probably presented in their research findings – because there is no way in which people can study the social world while standing outside of it.

When referring to this discussion, social constructionism, as mentioned before, provides a different perspective, which is very similar to what a constructivist would also argue – "While the objectivist researcher of yesteryear could ignore

the value implications of her research activities, the constructivist is forced to acknowledge her influence on the research situation and her role in co-constructing the reality of her research hosts” (Ravn, 1991, p97). A social-constructionist-based ethnography, known as self-ethnography is thus adopted. This will be discussed in the next section.

4.3.2 Self-ethnography: a social-constructionist-based ethnography

Generally, as being ethnographic researches, self-ethnography and traditional ethnography share much in common. For example, they share the same philosophical paradigm which is distinct from functionalism or positivism, and they both can be used as social qualitative research strategy; both of them highlight that researchers should access to social settings in order to produce a deep understanding of social phenomena; and they both ask for a long-term fieldwork as a distinctive feature. However, when compared to traditional ethnography, a social-constructionist-based self-ethnography argues to include a researcher’s own activities (either his/her organisational activities as what the other local people do, or his/her research activities in a research setting, or both) explicitly as part of a research. This offers a social-constructionist-base self-ethnography at least two special features: staying ‘reflexive’ and being ‘an observing participant’.

Feature 1: Reflexivity

Reflexivity indicates that researchers as part of the social world are shaped by social relationships and the widely shared social values and interests, and therefore they cannot escape from “common-sense knowledge”, which “we have no external, absolutely conclusive standard by which to judge it, but we can work with what ‘knowledge’ we have, while recognising that it may be erroneous and engaging in systematic inquiry where doubt seems justified; and in so doing we can still make the reasonable assumption that we are trying to describe phenomena as they are...” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p17-18).

As suggested by social constructionism, in order to overcome the underlying “object–subject dualism” that naturalism and many other paradigms bear, self-ethnography needs to include “reflexivity” as a significant feature. “Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of

meanings throughout the research process”, therefore, instead of trying to completely eliminate a researcher’s bias, the validity of self-ethnography can be achieved by “exploring the ways in which a researcher’s involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p228). In addition, when conducting an ethnographic research, a self-ethnographer can also actively take a “critical distance” in a technical sense, and this will be addressed later in this chapter.

As argued by Cunliffe (2008), according to the intersubjective orientation (compared to the subjective one) of social constructionism, social constructionist-based researches could use two approaches. For example, from the perspective that social realities are humanly produced but have a degree of objectivity, the first approach can be used to focus on exploring the “products of construction”, i.e. what a practice (technological or managerial) is based on discursively shaped meanings. The “products of construction” can also be referred as the “outcome” or the “structure” as in Giddens’ terms. The second approach is to focus on the “process of construction” (Cunliffe, 2008), which Giddens’ presents it as “media” or “agency”, i.e. how the meaning of a practice is being shaped and how it produces further meanings.

As being reflexive, a self-ethnographer thus can use the above two approaches together, which is to explore the “products” and the “process”, or the “structure” and the “agency” at the same time. This is because a self-ethnographer will not only explore a ‘new’ knowledge, he/she will also explore how his/her existing knowledge is applied implicitly in his/her action of knowing and hence construct a ‘new’ knowledge. This is beyond a conventional ethnographer’s objective to study a natural setting by living within it. It can be said that in self-ethnography, a researcher’s own taken up and interventions are part of a research. It is very important to include them rather than eliminating them.

Feature 2: An observing participant

In self-ethnography, a researcher (self-ethnographer) expects to be first recognised as a participant in the social setting of study (i.e. a company in this thesis) rather than a professional researcher because he/she could then *not* be seen as a stranger who comes from the outside, but a member who is living in the same social setting, or a colleague who is working for the same

organisation. However, apart from the role he/she plays in a research setting/company, a self-ethnographer is still indeed a professional researcher. He/she draws on his/her experience and knowledge to generate insights/theories which the other participants are otherwise unaware of, or accept it as taken-for-granted. Therefore, a self-ethnographer has two roles: a social member/organisational participant, as well as a researcher (observer).

Although a traditional ethnographer could also play the above two roles in a research, by drawing on the following discussions on “observing participant” and “participatory observer”, it could be argued that differences between self-ethnography and traditional ethnography can still be identified.

A self-ethnographer attempts to be an “observing participant” in self-ethnography while a traditional ethnographer works as a “participant observer” (Chumer, 2002). Different orders of the two words indicate different focuses: the role of researcher in traditional ethnography is more about an “observer”, while in self-ethnography, it is more about an organisational “participant”. Alvesson explains the difference as:

“While conventional ethnography is basically a matter of the stranger entering a setting and ‘breaking in’, trying to create knowledge through understanding the natives from their point of view or their reading of acts, words and material used, self-ethnography is more of a struggle of ‘breaking out’ from the taken-for-grantedness of a particular framework and of creating knowledge through trying to interpret the acts, words, and material used by oneself and one’s fellow organisational members from a certain distance” (Alvesson, 2003, p176).

Based on this feature, Chumer (2002) further highlights that while traditional ethnography asks for getting involved in a long-period fieldwork, a self-ethnographer is already there in the setting, which means an even longer period. While a traditional ethnographer is expected to get close to the setting of investigation, a self-ethnographer already became part of the setting, and he/she is “more or less on equal terms with other participants” (Alvesson, 2003, p174).

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Furthermore, Alvesson (2003) use the term “home base” to describe the relationship between a self-ethnographer and his/her setting of research. Alvesson did his self-ethnography research in higher education; but it is important to also note that he is working in higher education (university) too. For him, the setting that is being studied is his “home base”. However, for most traditional ethnographers, their “home-bases” are different from the settings of study. This means that a traditional ethnographer will need to take a temporary role as becoming a participant of a setting (e.g. company, community, other associations) just for doing research, but he/she may have a home base somewhere else, for instance, university, research institution etc. Chumer (2002) did a self-ethnography research in a library where he had worked for three years before his research started, therefore he treated it as his “home base”. The same library was also the setting where his research was conducted. Thus, again, the home base is also the setting of study.

Based on the above, it is therefore argued by both Alvesson (2003) and Chumer (2002) that self-ethnography is perhaps not common for most researches because not every researcher will be researching his/her “home base”, and most of them will “get out of their office” to find a setting which they do not belong to, live in or work at.

However, a “home base” research setting is not the only reason to choose self-ethnography as a research strategy even though it could be an advantage when using self-ethnography. This thesis argues that the key feature of self-ethnography is still to have a researcher acting as an “observing participant”; but technically, to have a “home base” research setting offers a better chance for a researcher to become an “observing participant”. In terms of social constructionism, being a “participant” means to get involved in an activity which thus enables a self-ethnographer to experience the construction of a “product” or a “structure”; and keep “observing” on it is to offer a space where a reflexive self-ethnographer can reflect on the construction “process” in which he/she also takes part in.

Therefore, the “home base” is considered in this thesis as more to highlight the importance for a researcher to get a “natural access” to a research setting and to live or work as equally as the other social members or organisational

participants (Alvesson, 2003) rather than a feasible requisite for initiating a self-ethnography research.

The discussion of “home base” could also affect the procedure of conducting a self-ethnography research as compared to a traditional one. This will be addressed later when the “SISI” methodology is presented.

4.3.3 The use of self-ethnography in this research

Taking a social-constructionist perspective, this thesis considers communication as having a “duality” – it is an “outcome” but also a “medium” for organisational changes. This thesis aims to explore how a (managerial practice) diffusion change can be managed and improved through involving a dual communication. However, a practice is not solely objective because its meaning is constituted through people’s communications, nor it is pure subjective because it has a certain degree of facticity – people can still tell what a practice is. This therefore implies a difficulty of doing a practice diffusion study as it cannot be approached either objectively or subjectively, and above all, its objectivity is constructed subjectively if taking the traditional object-subject dichotomy into consideration. However, a self-ethnography research strategy seems to offer a solution which could make the above exploration possible.

As regarding to the scientific judgement for social qualitative research (see section 4.1.2), the two features of self-ethnography can fulfill the conditions of the ‘plausibility’, ‘coherence’ and ‘reasonableness’ judgement. The feature of reflexivity suggests that researchers cannot escape from their existing knowledge in doing a new research, however, by recognising what the knowledge is and reflecting on how it takes effects in a new research can still gain a research the reasonableness.

The feature of being an observing participant provides a researcher the opportunity as being there in the setting and working with the other local people. The so-achieved first-hand material will help a researcher to make a plausible and credible account of the setting of study.

Furthermore, the two features integrated in self-ethnography also keeps the “ontological assumptions” and “epistemological proprieties” coherent. This means that if the ontology assumes that the “knowing” action constitutes the

“known”, a researcher who also constitutes a research needs to be included explicitly as being a reflexive observing participant.

As will be seen later in this chapter (section 4.3.5), the credibility judgement of self-ethnography which is derived from the scientific judgement will be further summarised into three accounts: ‘consistency’, ‘convincing’ and ‘critical distance’.

In general, a self-ethnography research strategy can be used in this thesis as the followings.

First of all, self-ethnography allows a researcher (me) to ‘do’ things with the other participants, which is to allow ‘me’ to join real communication activities and to ‘talk about’, ‘discuss’ and ‘make sense’ of the practice that is being diffused. In other words, ‘I’ will personally know the “product” of diffusion. Meanwhile, self-ethnography also allows ‘me’ to ‘experience and witness’ the real moment of ‘talking’, ‘discussing’ and ‘sense-making’ during communications, in other words, to know the “process” of diffusion too. Most importantly, because self-ethnography is reflexive, it allows ‘me’ to ‘reflect on’ both the diffusion product and the process, which is to reflect on how ‘our’ (me and the other participants) communication activities as well as ‘my’ research activities can change, re-shape and create the meanings of a practice, and thus influence its diffusion. In social constructionism terms, ‘I’ also become part of practice diffusion while trying to research on it because the action of ‘knowing’ a phenomenon (i.e. a practice diffusion) constitutes a phenomenon, and the “knower” and the “known” jointly construct each other (Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Ravn, 1991; von Glasersfeld, 1991).

Secondly, the above use of self-ethnography also helps a self-ethnographer (me) to become an “observing participant”. ‘I’ am a participant in the sense that ‘I’ will join the other company staff members in various organisational activities, i.e. to do a specific job, to communicate about a work or a practice that is being diffused, and even to ‘gossip’ with them. ‘I’ am also an observer because ‘I’ will reflect on whatever happens in the organisation and try to make sense of it which is including ‘my’ own research impact upon the company and its practice diffusion.

As discussed before, Alvesson (2003) and Chumer (2002) suggest that a self-ethnographer's research setting should also be his/her "home base". Although an earlier discussion in this thesis has argued that it is the feature of being an "observing participant" and staying "reflexive" that determines the use of self-ethnography in a social-constructionist-based research, it also agrees that a "home base" research setting will largely help to conduct a self-ethnography research.

In my research, self-ethnography was carried out at company U, where I was working for before my research started. In other words, my research setting was also my "home base". This opportunity offered me a better chance to be an "observing participant" because most of the staff members at company U knew me as a 'colleague' rather than an observer.

In the meanwhile (and it will also be seen in the discussion of the 'SISI' methodology), I do not have to follow the full procedure of a traditional ethnography, i.e. to look for an organisation for fieldwork and get access to it for collecting data. Instead, I did not need to have another "access" to company U since I was already there and my initial research question was partly formed by the problem/question/phenomenon that 'I' spotted out while I was working there. 'I' continuously worked as a participant as what 'I' did before, but in addition, 'I' also collected data through 'my observation' and expected to create knowledge upon the routine and daily life at company U, as well as "the most predictable patterns of human thought and behavior" (Fetterman, 1989, p11).

4.3.4 The reporting of (self) ethnography

An ethnographic research starts with the selection of a problem or a topic of a researcher's interest. A researcher then needs to spend considerable time to immerse in a research setting where a research fieldwork will be taken. He/she will carry out a participatory observation in order to give a rich account and thick description of 'what is going on' in that particular situation. As referring to different literatures, fieldwork is generally considered as the most highlighted element of ethnographic researches, and a traditional ethnography will usually take six months to two years in doing a fieldwork (Alvesson, 2003; Saunders et al., 2003; Geertz, 1973).

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After a fieldwork, all the data (notes, memoranda etc.), including those which have already been drafted during the fieldwork period (i.e. reports and papers) should be integrated and finally analysed to reach an overall conclusion. At the final step, a researcher has to write up an ethnography (or self-ethnography in this thesis) to show the others his/her research findings, for which Fetterman (1989) suggests that a “clear and easy-to-read” style will help to make sense to non-academics and other readers.

The style and presentation of an ethnographic research is important as it will convey what the writer intends to take to the “outside” world (Van Maanen, 1988). Today’s ethnographic fieldwork is developed as a “distinctive, inquisitive, intimate form of inquiry” which has three basic types (Van Maanen, 1988, p24).

Realist Tales are the “real” portraits of the studied culture. They aim to describe “what it is” rather than to explore how and why they are described in this way. This means that only the culture of the members of study – what they do, say and think are able to be seen in the writings, the researcher simply “vanished” after collecting data. **Confessional Tales** are “highly personalised styles and self-absorbed mandates” (Van Maanen, 1988, p73). They explicitly represent the fieldworker’s point of view and thus intend to show how a particular work was given rise to. In this sense, rather than the culture which is being studied, it is the fieldwork itself becomes the focus of these tales. **Impressionist Tales** are considered to include the features of both realist and confessional writings. They rely on personalised accounts, which are, however, in a “realist” style. “Their materials are words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery, and most critically, the expansive recall of fieldwork experience. When these are put together and told in the first person as a tightly focused, vibrant, exact, but necessarily imaginative rendering of fieldwork, an impressionist tale of the field results” (Van Maanen, 1988, p102).

According to the above three styles for writing up an ethnography, a social-constructionist-based self-ethnography could borrow the “impressionist tales” as its reporting style for the following reasons.

First, a realist style has a consideration for the object-subject dualism, which is inconsistent with a social constructionist paradigm as discussed before.

Secondly, a confessional style (being different from realist style) bears a subjective perspective which assumes that “reality is negotiated by individuals within social settings” and thus focuses on discovering “how individuals make sense of their surroundings” (Cunliffe, 2008, p127). However, an intersubjective focus which proposes realities as “always emerging in-the-moment” is more appropriate for a self-ethnography as it is concerned with the product and/or the process of construction (Cunliffe, 2008, p127).

Thirdly, taking self-ethnography’s feature of ‘reflexive’, a self-ethnographic presentation (i.e. a paper, a thesis or a report) could be seen as the product of a fieldwork, or the process of constructing a fieldwork through an impressionist way of writing. This is because an impressionist type provides striking stories, but does not give “luminous paintings”. It brings audiences and a self-ethnographer back into the story world, and allow them to see, hear and feel to a great extent (just as how a self-ethnographer had saw, heard and felt before) – to construct their own “fieldworks” and “realities”.

According to the impressionist style of presentation, the acquired materials in this self-ethnography will be put together and organised in an “easy-to-read” and “lively” way in order to display the real “words”, “metaphors”, “discussions”, “judgements”, “emotions”, and even “jokes”. Through showing readers the “sections” and “pieces” which ‘I’ (the self-ethnographer) observed or personally experienced during the practice diffusion change at company U, it helps them to picture what has really happened there. It will also help me to reflect on ‘my’ own interventions in company U’s practice diffusion.

4.3.5 The credibility of self-ethnography

The credibility of ethnography or self-ethnography is sometimes questioned when referring to the conventional judging criteria as discussed before. However, to judge the credibility of a research in terms of its “reliability”, “validity” and “generalisability” is another tradition which is deeply rooted in functionalism or positivism and their related quantitative researches. In this social constructionist-based research, credibility is judged in terms of three different aspects: ‘consistency’, ‘convincing’ and ‘critical distance’.

Consistency

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As linked to social constructionist paradigm, it is important to keep consistency “between our assumptions, and how these assumptions affect our focus of study, our research methods and ways of theorizing” (Cunliffe, 2008, p126).

This research takes a social constructionist stance to assume that a knower, his/her knowledge, and his/her action of knowing are intimately interwoven and hence jointly construct one another. This assumption also lies under the idea of “dual constitutive” communication. Thus it implies the research focus which is to explore how a practice is discursively produced by and producing the organisation through communication and SM-SG, and hence gets (not) diffused in the organisation.

This research also employs self-ethnography as the research strategy because it has “reflexivity” as a feature. This will allow an adequate space for examining the knowledge (i.e. a practice) which is also being ‘reflexive’. In this sense, a self-ethnography is not only a product of the fieldwork, but also a process of constructing the fieldwork. In doing so, a self-ethnographer takes an impressionist style of writing, which provides striking stories of the setting of study. Through providing real “words”, “metaphors”, “discussions” etc. that happened during a fieldwork, a setting/fieldwork is reproduced by a self-ethnographer and readers.

A social constructionist perspective thus informs the entire research and its influence can be found throughout the whole thesis. In other words, this thesis keeps a consistency in terms of the underlying assumptions, research focus, research methods and the way of presenting the knowledge.

Convincing

As it is argued before that for a social qualitative research, its credibility is more appropriate to be judged in terms of its “plausibility” (Weick, 1995; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Hammersley, 1992). The reasons for this are (1) social occasions cannot present to be exactly the same and therefore a research result can rarely be repeated as exactly the same; (2) social phenomena are studied and interpreted by researchers based on their individual perceptions, knowledge, interests, backgrounds, experiences and abilities, and this is how a rich understanding can be achieved; (3) a simple causal-effect relationship can

make sense in positivist researches, however, it could also lead to “reductionism”⁹ in social science.

Plausibility as understood by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) is an ability of a written text to connect two worlds together – a world that is “depicted descriptively and conceptually in the text” and another one which “comprises the reader’s personal and professional experience” (p600). They suggest that plausibility can be addressed in the question of “does the story make sense to me as a reader... given where I am coming from?” (p600). However, in order to make sense, the work must first link to the audience’s personal background and experience, which means to talk about something that is a “common concern” for him/her. It also needs to be “distinctive”, so it can contribute to the disciplinary area where the audience comes from. In fact, plausibility is one of the three dimensions of “convincing” which are considered as the most important appeal of an ethnographic research.

For Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), the other two dimensions of convincing are “authenticity” and “criticality”. An ethnographic research can be considered as having credibility if it can display a researcher’s authenticity. In other words, it has to convince audiences that the author (researcher) has been in the field and has “been genuine to the field experience” (p604). In achieving so, a (self-)ethnographer has to show the familiarity with the setting and the members of study. For example, to convey the familiarity of the member’s language (the “colloquial words and phrases” they normally use), actions (“what they do everyday”) and how they think (how they consider “their lives in the particular organisations”) (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, pp601-602). In addition, it is also important for a (self-)ethnographer to demonstrate how he/she collects and analyses field data.

According to Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), “criticality” is concerned with a chance for audiences to reflect on research findings, or in other words, to “activate readers to re-examine assumptions underlying” the work (p610). However, criticality is a higher level of convincing, it does not influence the

⁹ A perspective which simply sees a complex system as nothing but a sum of its parts.

credibility of an ethnographic research as much as what “plausibility” and “authenticity” will do.

Critical distance

It has been mentioned that both traditional ethnography and self-ethnography require a long period fieldwork to enable a researcher to get very “close” to the organisation which is being studied, it can be said that an ethnographic research (in comparison to survey, questionnaire etc.) depends less on respondents’ accounts than on researcher’s “eyes”, “ears” and experience. Although an ethnographic research is considered as being time-consuming, tiresome, ineffective and so on (Hammersley, 1992; Alvesson, 2003; Chumer, 2002), it provides richer descriptions and deeper understandings of a problematic situation. However, there is also a common critique which perhaps not only presents with ethnography or self-ethnography, but accompanies all social qualitative researches – that is a researcher’s “distance” or “subjectivity”.

Generally to say, critiques to (self-)ethnography of “being too close” to the objects of investigation could be derived from two aspects. (a) If researchers stay too close, they could become “native” and hence losing the ability of capturing the insights and controlling the “big picture”¹⁰. (b) Researchers’ presence and intervention will influence the research setting as being “natural” (Chumer, 2002; Alvesson, 2003).

To respond to the above concerns, this thesis argues that first, to keep very “close” to the research setting is one of the most important features of an ethnographic research. In considering the nature of social science, an ethnographic research provides rich descriptions and even a researcher’s real experience to get deeper understandings of a setting being studied. These understandings could be richer than the results generated by any other research strategies. Secondly, a researcher to fully immerse into a research setting is the way to examine a research “object” in its most natural situation. Most importantly, a social-constructionist-based research takes a researcher’s involvement as part of a research as it declares that ‘subject’ and ‘object’ forms a duality rather than a dualism. A researcher and his/her knowledge towards an

¹⁰ A whole picture of conducting the entire research, of which fieldwork is only part of it.

object of investigation (including other people) construct each other, and therefore the “closeness” to an object is important, but keeping “pure objectivity” is neither possible nor necessary.

However, when conducting a social-constructionist-based research, a so-called “critical distance” can be adopted because technically, it can help a self-ethnographer to switch his/her role between a participant and a researcher.

According to Mingers (2000) and Chumer (2002), a “critical distance” illustrates the **awareness** of preventing researchers being too close to a research setting and hence losing their professional perspectives. Being critical, a researcher needs to be aware of: “skepticism toward taken for granted assumptions; wariness toward ultimate authorities; sensitivity to the impact or effect of phenomena; and concern over the relationships between knowledge, power and interests” (Chumer, 2002, p18). Based on the descriptions, it is argued in this thesis that “critical distance” is a kind of awareness rather than an ideal status to be achieved. It reminds a researcher to always keep a reflective mode during the research which is like a “self-check”, and be critical about what happens. For example, a researcher could ask him/herself a question of “am I still being a researcher when acting as an employee?” in order to preventing him/herself becoming fully “native”.

4.3.6 Use of methods in self-ethnography

In terms of the two features of self-ethnography as well as the achievement of a self-ethnography’s credibility, methods that could be employed in a self-ethnographic type of research are expected to (a) enrich an ethnographic narratives, (b) validate the understandings, (c) generate plausible and mutually agreed argument, and (4) help researcher to gain some “critical distance” etc.

In this regards, the methods such as observation, interview, document collection, group activity organising (i.e. workshop), and possibly some systems methods can be used. The reasons are as the followings.

1. Observation is going be the main method used since a self-ethnographer will be acting as an “observing participant”. Through providing the first-hand materials which are rich and more vivid, the narratives could be

well enriched. Meanwhile, it also shows the self-ethnographer's "authenticity" which will enhance the research's credibility.

2. Interview as a good method to understand the other participants can be used to validate a self-ethnographer's own interpretations of the setting of research. Furthermore, it helps a self-ethnographer to highlight his/her role as a researcher which keeps him/her a critical distance from the "natives".
3. To collect relevant documents can complement or validate the observation and interview data. It helps a research to achieve plausible and consistent argument.
4. To organise group activities such as workshops can be useful in terms of involving a self-ethnographer into a discussion/action with the other participants. It is where a researcher could be included explicitly in a self-ethnographic research and stay reflexive. This is because a researcher will be able to see whether his/her understandings are shared with the other participants. If the views appear to be different, what could be the underlying assumptions for both? Since workshops could also allow people to interact more with one another, a mutual understanding could be achieved at a certain stage. As the researcher normally takes the role of facilitator in such a workshop, it also emphasises his/her critical distance.
5. Systems methods as a special category can be used in many ways. For example, it could be used as a method to present the findings through the other methods; or it could be used to address a specific question especially those which may 'pop up' during a research as "emergent properties" (in the 'language' of system science).

A summary.

In section 4.3, self-ethnography as a research strategy has been discussed in terms of its features, reporting style, credibility and the use of methods. The following table will now have all the described items summarised, which will make it clear for the rest of this thesis.

Self-ethnography							
Key Features:	Reflexivity				Observing Participant		
Reporting Style:	Impressionist						
Criteria to assess Credibility	Consistency			Convincing			Critical Distance
	Assumptions	Focus of study	Research methods	Plausibility	Authenticity	Criticality	
Use of Methods	Observation	Interview	Secondary data	Group activity	Systems methods		

Table 4-1: Summary of Self-ethnography

4.4 A self-ethnographic methodology: “SISI”

It is argued that if a social world works as what an ontological assumption describes, and its knowledge can be obtained as what a related epistemology proposes, a “scientific” (proper) method is needed which can identify the reality of it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hollis, 1994). A methodology is the “study of the principles of methods use’ (Jackson, 2000) and it always keeps consistence with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that a research bears. For example, with a realist ontology and a positivist epistemology, a nomothetic methodology which aims to search for universal laws that govern the reality is likely to be adopted (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

It has been argued that this thesis takes a social constructionist paradigm and according to which, a self-ethnography research strategy is adopted. Now it will argue to use a self-ethnographic methodology which will offer guidance to a researcher in terms of what kind of methods or approaches he/she can use in a research and how.

This methodology, namely “SISI” (Survey-Immerse-Share-Integrate) is self-ethnography-based is because it is formed according to the procedure by which an ethnographic research is usually conducted. Meanwhile, given the features of self-ethnography, considerations of how a researcher’s self-reflection constructs knowledge is also taken into account.

4.4.1 Procedure of conducting ethnography and self-ethnography

As recognised by traditional ethnographers (Van Maanen, 1988; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Monaghan, 2007; Wolcott, 1995), an ethnographic research usually consists of several key steps:

(1) Venue selection. In most of the research designs, to choose an appropriate venue for fieldwork and to get access to it is always a topic to be discussed. Selecting a venue will influence the chance of finding the most relevant data for a research question; therefore it needs to be carefully chosen.

(2) Entry. Sometimes, although an ideal venue is selected, it is not always accessible. Thus, to get the “entry ticket” could be another serious problem for a researcher (Fetterman, 1989).

(3) Modify the original research question. After an ethnographer gets access to a research setting of study, usually a general information survey will be conducted, for example, to know a research setting’s history, kinship ties, basic culture environment, shared value system, and native language etc. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). This survey period is described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) as a “pre-fieldwork” phase, and after which, an original research question could be modified or adjusted for the purpose of turning it into a much clearer and proper question which can be answered by carrying on the research (Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). There is also a possibility that an original research question could be replaced completely by a one which is emerged during an ethnography but is identified as more “significant” or more interesting and “urgent” to be answered (Fetterman, 1989).

(4) Sample and/or case selection. This selection is about the decision of “how many” people should be closely involved in the research, “who” and “how”? Alternatively, it could be a decision of which “cases” or situations among all those happened should be singled out to represent the whole situation, and describe its richness. Selection needs to be justifiable according to a researcher’s questions and values.

(5) Data collection. This step plans how relevant data is going to be collected and organised, thus, to decide what kind of methods should be used. This could

also involve a decision of the style of narrative to be adopted (Van Maanen, 1988).

(6) Exit. To make a decision of when an ethnographer should take a leave of a setting usually depends on, for example, (a) a research funding sets a limited period; (b) a deadline to meet; (c) data is enough (the “best” reason); (d) when a same behavior pattern appears over and over again, which is called the “law of diminishing returns” (Fetterman, 1989, p20).

(7) Analysis. Fieldwork finishes but ethnography continuous. This step will clarify the strategy of how the acquired research data will be analysed/presented in order to answer a research question. Decisions are also part of the reflective process undertaken by a researcher and/or validated with participants.

It can be seen that when a self-ethnography is used and especially when a self-ethnographer’s research setting is also his/her “home base” (it is in this thesis), the above step 1 to 3 could have already been covered in the ‘feature’ of being an “observing participant”. Since a self-ethnographer is already ‘there’ in the setting, a self-ethnography can actually start from refining a research question when necessary. In other words, for self-ethnography, the research procedure could be (1) to refine the research question according to the survey information and a researcher’s own experience of participating; (2) to select “samples” and/or representative “cases” which can describe the whole situation; (3) to collect data by various means; (4) to exit the research setting as “a researcher” although he/she could still be living there as a member or working there as an employee; (5) to have a data strategy to analyse and integrate various data, and thus make a conclusion which should be able to support the core argument of a research.

4.4.2 The ‘SISI’ methodology

In terms of the above five steps of doing a self-ethnographic research, this thesis develops a methodology of Survey-Immerse-Share-Integrate, which is called “SISI”. The two features of self-ethnography (“reflexive” and “observing participant”) will be accommodated into the four phases of the ‘SISI’ methodology. As considering also the credibility judgement of a self-

ethnography, for instance, to keep consistence between ontological assumptions and research methods, to convince the audience, and to take a “critical distance” during a research, this methodology aims to provide a ‘valid’, ‘coherent’ and ‘reasonable’ description and discussion of a research question based on a social-constructionist perspective.

Phase 1: Survey. A self-ethnographer could be the one who has already spent some time within a setting of study, thus he/she as an organisational participant can know the setting well (i.e. its culture, kinship, language etc.) even before a research starts. After he/she becomes officially an “observer” when a research starts, he/she can then review, expand or deepen the knowledge towards the setting based on the original research question. This phase is considered as conducting a broad information **Survey** (Chumer, 2002).

The purpose of having this **Survey** is to first, justify/modify an original research question or interest as a *learning* process. To stay close to a research setting and get to know it better offers a self-ethnographer an opportunity to monitor the value of his/her original research question. This means that the survey could help a self-ethnographer to refine his/her question as either being something that the “native” people are really concerned about, or something that is important but to which most of them are not yet aware of. In this thesis, the main research question was refined from the initial research interest according to the changes that happened in company U, which are then considered as crucial to all the staff¹¹. Secondly, to have an information survey also helps a self-ethnographer to generate an insight or inspiration of how a problem (if there is any) in the setting of study could be possibly solved, or how a problem came into being in the first place.

Most importantly, this phase can also be seen as a *construction* process which takes “reflexivity” into consideration (Cunliffe, 2008). When a research is conducted based on research questions (main or initial ones), according to a social constructionist perspective, it also involves a process as constructing the

¹¹ The initial research was to study communication in organisation and organisational changes. The refined research question is to explore how communication will help/prohibit practice diffusions in business merging (a typical type of organisational change).

research question and/or a research setting through a researcher's self-reflection and reflections with others.

In doing **Survey**, a self-ethnographer could use different methods. The most common one is observation (including fieldnotes taken). He/she could also interview the other members/participants formally or simply talk to them to have an informal chat at different time. It is important to be "upfront" about the research (Cunliffe, 2008), and share with people the aims and intentions of the research, as well as the findings (this is being contemplated in the steps of the "SISI" methodology as will be later explained).

Phase 2: Immerse. To immerse in a research setting is the essence of a self-ethnography. This is how a rich description of a setting of study can be reached. During the period of immersing, the real events that happened in a setting will be observed and documented by a self-ethnographer. To observe, a self-ethnographer's attention could be paid to the following questions such as 'what has happened in the setting (company)'; 'what did people in the company (including the self-ethnographer and other participants) say or do or think', and 'why' they did it; 'what are the consequences of their actions'. To document, a large amount of fieldnotes, research diaries, memorandums will be taken in terms of what have been seen, heard, and experienced.

At this phase, the above mentioned sample or case selection could also be completed. In this thesis, it is considered as not possible or necessary to present everyday or every single event in a self-ethnography (although it might be recorded in an observation diary). Even it can be done, it may lose the "nature" of being a research, but rather a life-style diary. During a self-ethnographer's day-to-day life of being immersed in a research setting, there will be some people or some cases appearing to be more important or more able to represent the whole situation than the others. Therefore, they can be selected as 'samples' or 'cases' to show readers as well as a self-ethnographer him/herself a 'better' picture of a research setting because a picture like this could be equally rich but relatively focused than a one presented through a day-to-day life record. The selection of sample or cases will help to make a clearer account of a research's core argument while providing a rich description of the situation that occurs.

Phase 3: Share. The ‘sharing’ part of this methodology is often **not** usual for ethnography. However, since this is a social constructionist-based self-ethnography for which it is important to see the ‘construction’ process and the reflexivity, this phase will give a self-ethnographer more opportunities to interact with the other organisational members and to see how meanings are constructed through the interaction.

The purposes of ‘**Sharing**’ are two: *first*, a self-ethnographer could use this phase (i.e. to talk to the ‘native’ people in a setting) to verify if his/her perceptions or understandings as achieved so far in a self-ethnography are correct or reasonable. If there is any different voices occur (from the other ‘native’ people), a suggestion could be that a self-ethnographer needs to look at the situation again in order to either stay on his/her views or catch another insight and revise the old views accordingly. However, either way needs a proper justification. *Secondly*, through ‘**Sharing**’, if a self-ethnographer’s perceptions and understandings are found to be agreed or shared by all or most of the other ‘native’ people, a consensus or “social meaning” is thus constructed. In this way, a self-ethnography’s “authenticity” and “plausibility” can also be demonstrated (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993), and through both, a self-ethnographer’s credibility could then be justified.

To share a self-ethnographer’s research findings (as achieved so far) with the other ‘native’ people also ‘pushes’ a self-ethnographer to keep a “critical distance” from what is being studied. This is because the most possible ways of “sharing” findings are formal interviews, presentations or group discussions (the latter two ways are referred as “workshops” in this thesis)¹², and in each way, a self-ethnographer is more likely to be treated as ‘a professional researcher’ or ‘observer’ rather than one of the natives.

Moreover, this phase is important is also in the sense that it offers a self-ethnographer and the other participants an explicit period which they could reflect on the fieldwork and their participation. Thus, it is not only about sharing things with one another, but also about constructing the understanding of the

¹² The work of “sharing” can also be done through informal ways, such as a chat between members/colleagues, but maybe not usual. In that way, the role of self-ethnographer as a researcher is not likely to be identified easily.

selected cases with one another. Through '**Sharing**', a chance of "criticality" can be offered too as it offers a chance to re-exam research assumptions (Cunliffe, 2008; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). In this respect, the "consistency" of a self-ethnography gets maintained because a social-constructionist-based self-ethnography is constructive both theoretically and methodologically. Therefore, this phase will enhance the 'credibility' of a self-ethnography.

Phase 4: Integrate. At this phase, all those collected data resources will be analysed in terms of a data analysis method (it will be explained in Chapter 6). Different types of data, for instance, observation diary, fieldwork notes, organisation's documentations, interview transcriptions etc. will need to be integrated to provide a consistent conclusion. Since this part of the work is normally carried out after a fieldwork finishes, in other words, when a self-ethnographer has left the research setting as an official 'observer', the integration should also include the work of cross-checking if the derived conclusion will support the core argument of a research.

Moreover, at this phase, different types of data will need to be presented in an appropriate style in order to convey the research to the "outside" world. As said before, an impressionist reporting style will be adopted in this thesis, and according to which, various materials (data) will be put together and told in a "vibrant" and "exact" way, which also leaves readers to construct "stories" and their meanings (Van Maanen, 1988).

According to social constructionism, the integrated ethnographic account which will be presented in Chapters 6 will also aim to provide an interpretation of practice diffusion, i.e. how & why the diffusion of a practice happened or not happened, and what can be learned from it. Although this type of interpretation is constituted by the research which has been done so far (i.e. it is based on the findings derived from the Survey, Immerse and Share phases), and hence it can be seen as being constituted mainly by the researcher (me) but also by the other participants (because it has been shared); it is another purpose of the phase to also integrate those views which the participants have presented but maybe irrelevant to communication. This is because with the Diffusion Model which has been proposed by the researcher ('me'), 'I' may not able to observe everything that happens in the setting, for instance, the model was built based

on a focus of communication, which could have excluded the possibility of seeing the other elements for practice diffusion. By integrating the points of view with the other participants, a more credible account can be produced. This is also considered as staying ‘reflexive’ in self-ethnography.

As the last phase of a social-constructionist-based methodology, when the understanding of practice diffusion is (re)constructed (compared to the initial understandings which form the theoretical argument and the model of this thesis), an improved diffusion model can also be expected – this could be seen as a knowledge constructed by the research. As forming a ‘closed cycle’, the derived knowledge will also influence the social world which has generated the research interest or question in the first place.

4.4.3 Diagram for ‘SISI’ methodology

By summarising the above, a “SISI” methodology for self-ethnography can be illustrated in the following diagram.

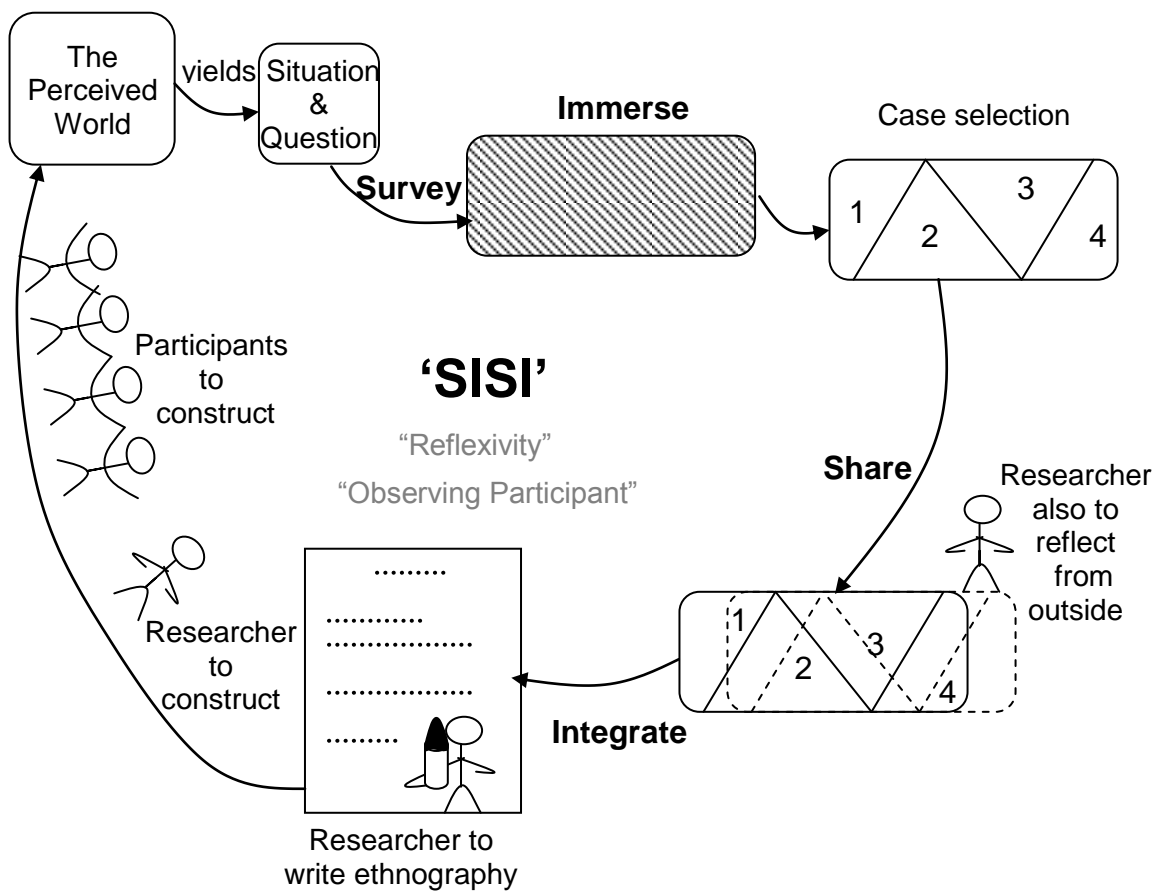


Figure 4-2: ‘SISI’ Methodology Diagram

Chapter 4 Research Strategy, Methodology and Methods

By relating to the figures that Checkland and Scholes (1990) have produced to describe social research (see Figure 1-2 & 1-3), a self-ethnography research also starts from the 'situation and question' that is 'yield' from 'the perceived world' which will be researched through the 'SISI' methodology.

In the above figure, it shows that a 'SISI' methodology consists of four phases. The current situation and problems that an organisation may have (as being a 'participant', a self-ethnographer and especially a "home based" one should have already known the situation and problems to a certain degree) will lead to the first phase of 'SISI' which is represented by the arrow line with the word '**Survey**' written above it. The output of this phase is a defined research question which will be brought by a self-ethnographer into a fieldwork. The shadow box of **Immerse** means that a self-ethnographer will be immersed in a research setting for quite a while to 'observe', and through which a large amount of materials can be produced to constitute understandings of the research question. Out of these materials, various 'cases' will be selected during this stage but will be used as resources for the analysis and discussion at the next phase which is represented by the arrow line with the word '**Share**' written next to it.

The figure stands outside of the 'case selection' box shows the concern of keeping "critical distance" during self-ethnography. Through the analysis of each single case, the '**Share**' phase aims to (1) verify a self-ethnographer's opinions through the interactions with other participants, (2) enable a self-ethnographer's reflection on his/her research through offering him/her the opportunity of listening to what the other people say, and (3) construct a consensus or socially accepted meaning of a particular phenomenon or question. The partially overlapped 'case selection' boxes (one is drawn in solid line and one in dotted line) represent different views of self-ethnographer and other participants. Through the **Share** phase, one could then find out whether the two boxes are overlapped or not (meaning whether views are mutually accepted or not).

The arrow line with word '**Integrate**' written under it shows that collected data and shared understandings will now be integrated into a written ethnographic account (represented by the figure with a big pencil) which is to be presented to

readers. Because 'SISI' is a social-constructionist-based methodology, the final phase also implicates the fact that a completed self-ethnography research will also allow participants and a self-ethnographer to re-construct the understandings of the researched object. For example, as mentioned in the last section, a diffusion model can be reconstructed based on the one proposed originally. In addition, the reconstructed knowledge could also include 'the perceived world' which generates the research interest in the first place (shown as the arrow line links back to the 'The perceived world' box on top). Although this implication may not connect to real research activities, it completes the world as described by social constructionism.

“Reflexivity” and “Observing participant” features in ‘SISI’

In this diagram, the two features of self-ethnography have also been accommodated. This is seen as the two features sitting in the middle of the 'SISI' diagram as indicating that they are actually applied throughout the whole methodology.

Reflexivity could appear to be two types: “personal reflexivity” and “epistemological reflexivity” (Willig, 2001). The former type involves thinking of whether our (people and researchers) own values, experiences, interests, beliefs... have shaped the research; the latter “encourages us to reflect upon the assumption (about the world and knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings” (Willig, 2001, p10).

It could be said that in 'SISI', “personal reflexivity” can be met because through spending time observing, researcher could have plenty opportunities to reflect on how the research may have been affected by his/her personal taken. The “epistemological reflexivity” can also be achieved in 'SISI' by looking into the question of 'how has the research questions defined and limited what can be found', or 'how the methods of the study construct the findings' (Willig, 2001, p10).

The feature of being “observing participant” can be completed during the methodology is because in the phase of 'Survey' and 'Immerse', observation can be made available. Thus, a self-ethnography's plausibility and authenticity

(the 'convincing' criterion) can be largely achieved. The phase of 'Share' and 'Integrate' will enable a researcher to take part in his/her research more explicitly (i.e. through workshop discussion, debate and interaction etc.), to take a critical attitude in validating various views and data (i.e. observation, interview and so on), and also to generate mutual understandings. Therefore, the criteria of 'consistency' and 'critical distance' of self-ethnography can be mostly met.

4.4.4 'SISI' in the Diffusion Model

By relating the above 'SISI' methodology diagram to the earlier discussed social-constructionist-based Diffusion Process (see Figure 3-8), it can be found that the reason 'SISI' is used as the methodology to investigate the real application of Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) is not only because it is designed based on social constructionism or self-ethnography, but also because it fulfils (theoretically) the communication duality.

For example, at the phase of **Survey** and **Immerse** when communication is going on, the achieved observations and produced documents will serve as resources which can be used by a self-ethnographer to analyse the 'Tool' and 'SM-SG' aspects as illustrated in the Integrated Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9). This is to say that how communication is operated as a 'tool' to complete the pathos, logos and ethos justifications for practice diffusions can be observed and documented. For instance, what does the diffuser say in order to justify a practice's usefulness; and what is the taken on it. Based on this type of information, how a practice's meaning is constituted via SM-SG activities (intra-, inter-, generic and extra-subjective levels) can be analysed and demonstrated.

Again, the 'Tool' and 'SM-SG' duality as described above can be observed at the phase of **Share** too. In particular, through exploring, for example, how a sense of a practice is shared and constituted in/through communication, a practice's legitimacy (pragmatic legitimacy, according to the Model) can be gained. Later on, when data are being **integrated** and shared through time, more legitimacy, and especially the "cognitive legitimacy" in the Model can be gained.

Generally, through completing the four phases of 'SISI', communication duality can be fulfilled, and the Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) can be followed step by step too. This is how 'SISI' can fit into the Diffusion Model virtually.

4.5 Research methods

According to the 'SISI' methodology, the following research methods which have also been mentioned in section 4.3.6 are chosen as the most appropriate data collection methods for this thesis.

Observation is the first and the most important method that will be used. It has been mentioned in the methodology Phase 2 'Immerse' that observation needs to be made in terms of the description of 'events' happened in the research setting (company U), the process of 'how' and the reason of 'why'.

For example, to observe 'what has happened' is to draw a general picture of practice diffusion in company U, i.e. what practice(s) are to be diffused, and how many of them are (un)successfully diffused.

To observe 'what did people say about a practice' is to pay attention to the content of 'our' (self-ethnographer and other participants') communication and how "we" communicate. This is, as related to the Integrated Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9), to find out how the pathos, logos and ethos justifications for practice diffusion are operated from both the diffuser's and the potential adopters' sides; or in the other words, the 'tool' dimension of communication duality.

The observation of 'what did people think, say and do' is to figure out how "we" make sense of ourselves as potential adopters and of the 'outsider' as diffuser (in this research, it refers to people from company Q who bought company U). This type of observation will response to the subjective dimension of communication duality in the Diffusion Model. It may also provide opportunities to explore of the transit of four-level sense through continuous SM-SG activities.

Through different kinds of observations as mentioned above, people's attitudes towards practice diffusion (i.e. is a managerial practice useful/adopted or not) can also be summarised. This will help to demonstrate the legitimisation of a practice's (anti-)diffusion at the pragmatic, moral and cognitive levels (see Figure 3-9 Integrated Diffusion Model).

The result of ethnographic observation is usually a narrative, and sometimes it could also be fieldwork notes, and researcher's diary etc. In terms of a self-ethnographer's dual role – an “observing participant”, a self-ethnographic observation report will describe the events that happen in the company, and will also cover a self-ethnographer's reflections upon the events, including his/her action of using communication as a research tool.

This method is used almost throughout the whole ‘SISI’ methodology, and especially the ‘Survey’ and ‘Immerse’ phases.

Interview is selected as another primary method for collecting data in this thesis. As it is widely recognised, interview is one of the most important data gathering techniques for ethnographic research, which “explains and puts into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences” (Fetterman, 1989, p47).

In this thesis, interview is first designed as *face-to-face and semi-structured on the individual basis*. It is face-to-face and individual, so ‘I’ (the self-ethnographer) can get answers directly from each participant (including their emotions, gestures etc. which are those non-verbal ‘messages’). It is semi-structured thus ‘I’ can get direct responses for the questions which ‘I’ am interested and can also inspire participants for more contributions.

In this respect, part of the interview questions is formed based on ‘my’ knowledge of company U and ‘my’ perceptions of its most significant problems, and part of them concerns with new issues which could be raised during interviews. Questions are designed to be mixtures of both “close-ended” questions (seek for targeted answers), and “open-ended” ones (allow the participants to come across new ideas and problems). Each of the interviews is planned to be 30-60 minutes.

At a later stage of the research, interviews are designed as *email-based*. Although a face-to-face interview offers the opportunity of observing the interviewees at the same time, it is also considered as giving “pressure” to the interviewees which could influence the answers they give. An email-based interview could help those people who are naturally “shy” of talking to the others or having a problem of organising speaking language, and give them a chance

to contribute. As linking to the face-to-face interview, an email-based interview will also help to (1) obtain participants' views regarding the usefulness of the face-to-face interview in general; (2) give a self-ethnographer another chance to ask questions which may be missed previously; and (3) allow participants to justify or clarify their responses to the face-to-face interview.

This research method is going to be used at the Phases of 'Survey' and 'Share' of 'SISI'.

Documentary (secondary) data will also be used in this self-ethnography, however, as a complementary data collection method. It includes written documents, such as company U's meeting minutes, memoranda, documents, notes, letters and email correspondence; and also includes non-written documents (if there is any), for instance, tape/video recordings, pictures etc.

This method is primarily going to be used at the 'Survey' and the 'Immerse' Phases of 'SISI'.

Workshops (two have been planned) will be organised which consist of formal presentations, group discussions, and some communication games (if possible). Different from observations and interviews, workshop as a particular type of group activity, enables more "sharing" and "interactions". 'I', as a self-ethnographer will be the workshop presenter and the discussion/game facilitator. The purpose of having workshops is to collect new data as well as validate interview and observation data. In order to overcome interviewer's and interviewee's biases, it could help to check the validity of 'my' understanding of the collected data by presenting it back to the interviewees and constructing new meanings. It could also help to reduce any individual bias by interacting to a group of people¹³. Each workshop is expected to be approximately 60 minutes.

This research method will mainly be used for the 'Share' phase of 'SISI' methodology.

¹³ It also shows how to use communication as a research tool. Based on the social constructionist perspective, if a research itself is going to make some changes to a research setting (an organisation), this is also to show the use of communication as a tool for organisational change.

Use of systems methods (SSM & VSM) for problem structuring. As it has been seen before, systems theories and ideas have been applied in this thesis to form a theoretical foundation for understanding and exploring practice diffusion, for example, the use of autopoiesis (see Chapter 2). In terms of the methodological part, systems methods such as SSM and VSM will also be used in this self-ethnography.

- **SSM** (Soft Systems Methodology) is one of the most successful techniques that are used to define the perceived problematical situation (Checkland, 1981). It consists of seven stages, and out of which the drawing of “rich picture” is how SSM is partially applied in this research. Rich picture is a method used to represent root definitions in the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). A rich picture usually “expresses relationships and value judgements, finds symbols to convey the correct ‘feel’ of the situations; indicates that the many relevant relationships preclude instant solutions” (Checkland & Scholes, 1990, p45). It aims to creatively illustrate the interrelationships between different elements of a situation. Although a rich picture is an individual expression, it can allow people to easily *share* their individual ideas with other participants.

In the planned workshop(s), a rich picture technique is going to be used to present research findings, interview feedbacks and other problems as perceived by “me” (the self-ethnographer). In the meanwhile, by judging ‘my’ rich picture, participants will also be invited to draw their own rich pictures based on their understandings and knowledge. This will help in the validation of research insights.

Self-ethnography is a “planned-systematic study” but also an “emergent-spontaneous study”, in which “the researcher waits for something interesting/generative to pop up” (Alvesson, 2003, p181). This means that apart from SSM (rich picture), other system methods (i.e. VSM) could be used when necessary.

- **VSM** (Viable System Model) is developed from the ideas of cybernetics, which treats human body and nervous system as the richest and most flexible viable system. VSM borrows the five-level system hierarchy to design a model with five sub-systems, which aims to provide a more

usable model for dealing with complexities in the real life (Beer, 1979; 1981). According to cybernetics, VSM is especially useful in terms of enabling “control” and “communication” in a system, which therefore allows this system to be open to “feedback” and “variety” (Espejo & Harnden, 1989; Jackson, 2003).

As related to the focus of communication in this research, if a structure or channel problem which leads to a less efficient communication is ever identified, VSM could then be used to re-design a structure or channel in order to enable a better communication.

4.6 Summary of this chapter

Following the discussion of social constructionism in previous chapters, this chapter expanded it further on its methodological use, and according to which, the related research paradigm, methodology and methods applied in this thesis were also discussed. The discussion began with addressing philosophical foundations of social research in general. It argued that the division of objective and subjective ontology and its associated camp of quantitative and qualitative research had always been a paradigm concern for social theories. Through comparing to different philosophical paradigms, for instance, functionalism, interpretivism, naturalism and constructivism, a social constructionist research paradigm was argued to be the most appropriate paradigm for this thesis.

It abandons the object-subject dualism but suggests the “jointly constructed” duality. This is considered to be suitable for a diffusion study as diffusion is a process which cannot be researched either objectively or subjectively, but rather jointly. Social constructionist paradigm also focuses on collective meanings which are generated socially. This thus allows people to see how meanings are constituted through communication and sensemaking & sensegiving activities.

In terms of this research paradigm, this chapter then argued for employing self-ethnography as the appropriate research strategy for the reasons that it is a special type of ethnographic research which aims to provide a detailed account for a setting of study; it is “reflexive”, and therefore a researcher’s intervention into a setting as well as the impact of a research to a setting will be taken as

part of a 'construction' process. The epistemological use of self-ethnography is also considered as keeping consistence with the ontological assumptions that a social constructionist bears.

Different from conventional ethnography which a researcher attempts to "break in" to a setting of study, a self-ethnographer is trying to "break out". This is because a self-ethnographer is an "observing participant" – he or she is first to be known as a participant and then a researcher/observer. Self-ethnographer's "home base" was also discussed in this chapter. It is seen as a useful starting point for doing a self-ethnography research (i.e. in this thesis) but not a 'must have'. In order to respond to the traditional scientific judgement (i.e. validity, reliability etc.), this chapter argued for using "consistency", "convincing" and "critical distance" as the main aspects of judging the credibility of an ethnographic research.

According to the traditional procedure of conducting an ethnographic research, a social-constructionist-based 'SISI' methodology was designed which consists of 'Survey', 'Immerse', 'Share' and 'Integrate' phases. As related to the Diffusion Model as proposed in Chapter 3, each phase of 'SISI' enables observations on the 'Tool' and the 'SM-SG' aspects of communication duality in different ways. For example, through 'Immerse', 'Share' and 'Integrate', the operation of communication for pathos, logos and ethos justifications can be studied; the SM-SG activities (as transmitted from intra-, inter-, generic, and extra-subjective level) can be explored; and the achievement of pragmatic, moral & cognitive legitimacy can also be demonstrated. In addition, since 'SISI' explicitly includes a position for a self-ethnographer in his/her research, it shows how research activities will constitute a research. Moreover, as described by social constructionism, research activities will also construct a research setting, this is to say that self-ethnography as a strategy for studying practice diffusion will also constitute the diffusion.

According to 'SISI', relevant research methods for gathering data were also introduced, such as observation, interviews, secondary data, workshops, and systems methods (i.e. SSM, VSM). In the next chapter, a detailed account of the self-ethnographic fieldwork which has been conducted at company U will be described.

Chapter 5 A Self-ethnographic Account of the Managerial Practice Diffusion at Company U

A self-ethnographic research of managerial practice diffusion was conducted at company U, through which the use of the social-constructionist-based Integrated Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) in the real practice diffusion could be explored. The whole piece of research covers approximately 58 months. However, according to the four phases of 'SISI' methodology, it can be divided into three periods. From January 2005 to March 2006, it can be seen as the period of gathering 'Survey' information. March 2006 till 30 December 2007 is the most important period and during which the 'Immerse', 'Share' and part of the 'Integrate' phases of 'SISI' have been completed. This period can also be seen as the fieldwork period as it is normally called. The last period from 30 December 2007 to 30 November 2009 is the period for writing-up the thesis. In the light of social constructionism, it is also where the 'Integrate' phase of 'SISI' has been completed because the presentation of the research also constitutes the research.

In this chapter, a detailed self-ethnographic account of how the research has been conducted initially and how practice diffusion has happened at company U will be provided. According to 'SISI', the first three research phases ('Survey', 'Immerse', 'Share') will be included in this chapter; and in terms of the time scale of this research, this chapter will cover the period from January 2005 till 30 December 2007.

As a chosen reporting style, an "impressionist" narrative in which this chapter will be presented aims to be vibrant whilst descriptive, motivating (for readers) whilst clear (Van Maanen, 1988). It will describe company U from many aspects (i.e. structure, culture, daily work etc.). The information it conveys will lead to the analysis and discussion of company U's practice diffusion in the next chapter with referencing to the proposed Diffusion Model. In addition, through providing a 'picture' of company U, this chapter will also try to motivate readers to reach their own understandings of what has happened at company U.

5.1 The conduction of phase 1 'Survey': an overview of company U

According to the 'SIS' methodology as described in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.2), the phase of 'Survey' aims to develop/modify a research question based on an original research interest as being a common interest of the local people and/or to generate an initial insight of the problems or solutions. My initial interest in this research (as also seen in Chapter 1) was to explore whether communication is important for organisation and organisational change and if so, how the latter could be improved through the better conduction of communication (this as later reflected was more about a 'tool' perspective).

Having this initial research intention in mind, this section will now present how the 'Survey' phase has been conducted as well as what kind of information has been gathered during this stage. The discussion will focus on company U's history, main business, structure, culture, native language and communication problem etc. which have been observed by the researcher (me). It will also cover a brief introduction of the significant change that has happened at company U, which has later offered a better opportunity of understanding communication.

Company U is a small events company that is based in the UK. I first worked there part time, and then changed to full time. My initial role at company U was a database maintenance/development staff which was less important. Not after long, my position was moved to the marketing & sales department which was much more important for the company. In addition, I was also involved in some of the events management work. Company U was not only the place I was working for, meantime, it was also the place where this self-ethnographic research was conducted. Therefore, it could be taken as my "research setting" as well as my "home base".

Before the research started, I had already spent some time at company U working as a part-time staff (3 days a week) on maintaining database (i.e. to clear old data and enter new data). Therefore, when my research started, company U was not 'new' to me – I knew the manager, the other staff members, and the business. For the other people at company U, I was not a 'stranger'

Chapter 5 A Self-ethnographic Account of the Managerial Practice Diffusion at Company U

either. They knew me as their colleague and they also knew that I was a university student who was studying for my PhD degree. Although I had some understandings to this company, when I officially became a self-ethnographer for doing my research, all my knowledge about company U (i.e. the organisational structure, the working procedure, the culture etc.) were formally structured during the phase of 'Survey'.

At the beginning of my research, I approached the chairman of company U, by whom a formal document was signed out, which agreed that I could conduct my communication research at company U through various means (i.e. interviewing employees, collecting company documentations etc.). Copies of interviewees' consent forms were also prepared, which could be filled in and signed by each interviewee prior to an interview. According to the consent form, I need to introduce my research aims, methods, anticipated benefits and possible risks to each participant before he/she agrees to be interviewed. Later on, when my research question and aims were re-defined, they also need to be updated.

At this stage, I did a large amount of observations on the above aspects as well as the new development at company U. I also collected and stored secondary data, for example, the document of "company chart" and the "U working procedure". In terms of my research interest in communication, a couple of face-to-face staff interviews were conducted in order to find their general views about communication at company U and their feelings of working at U. More importantly, because I was myself a "participant", I had many opportunities to 'chat' with the other staff members informally (as colleagues). For example, we used to spend the whole "lunch time" together, and that was when most conversations happened. Because I was also "observing" them, those conversations which were related to their work at company U largely enriched my 'Survey' data. The 'Survey' information will now be presented as the followings.

5.1.1 A general description of "U"

Company U was originally founded in 1984. As one of the earliest events companies that provide accredited training in the UK, company U has produced significant profits for its owner and shareholders during the past decades. The

Chapter 5 A Self-ethnographic Account of the Managerial Practice Diffusion at Company U

main business for company U is to sell training and other events (i.e. workshops, forums, and conferences etc.) on business-related topics. The basic business model at U is to outsource a course tutor(s) or workshop presenter(s) to deliver events, and in addition, sell events to its database customers in order to make a profit. As to my understanding, U's products can be divided into three types: accredited course training, non-accredited business workshop training, and conferences/forums.

Accredited courses refer to those courses which will be recognised or acknowledged by the British government or a special institution as meeting professional standards or criteria. This type of courses is normally associated with an examination, and a certificate will be granted to participants if the examination is passed, for example, 'ISEB' (the Information Systems Examinations Board) in PPSO(Programme & Project Support Office)/Software Testing/IT Service Management, and 'PRINCE2' (Projects in Controlled Environments), etc.

Non-accredited business workshops refer to those which are not accredited by any professional body but are widely acknowledged to be useful for people's everyday work. For example, the workshop of 'Balanced Scorecard' and 'Six Sigma'. Company U also constantly organises conferences and forums on important issues or interesting topics that appear in the business world.

Based on my observation, among the three types of products, accredited courses and non-accredited workshops are frequently repeated over a certain period (the gap is normally 1 or 2 months according to the market requirements). Conferences and forums could sometimes be repeated – but it depends on the training market and the general interest of the people in the business world.

5.1.2 U's organisation structure and working procedure

Company U is a small size business. It had a variable number of employees at different periods of the year. However, including all the full time and part time staff, the number was never more than 15 during the time I was working there. On the first day of starting my job at U, I was given an introduction to the

Chapter 5 A Self-ethnographic Account of the Managerial Practice Diffusion at Company U

company by a manager according to the company's 'induction programme' –this was a simple programme which company U used to train its new staff. It was introduced that the chairman of company U, who is also the founder, is on the top of the company structure chart. Below him, there are three senior managers who have worked with U for a long time – over or around 20 years (as I later found). Among the three, two of them are with the job title of “Events Commissioner”. They are in charge of initialing an event and inviting related tutor(s) or speaker(s). The other senior manager is the Marketing & Sales manager. Along with them, there is the finance unit who reports to the chairman directly.

The third layer of company U consists of different function units, for example, events management, sales executives, and web/database staff. In theory, events management team should report to the events commissioners, while sales and web/database staff should report to the marketing & sales manager. However, given the fact that U is a small company and the training business has its special features, staff members in each unit work very closely with one another, and generally, they are under the management of the three senior managers. For instance, in order to better sell events, sales staff members need to be briefed by the events commissioners of the events outlines, programmes and presenters. Events management staff also needs to be informed of the updated delegate numbers by the sales manager in order to book an appropriate venue and arrange the catering. During the Survey phase of my research, the 'company chart' has been collected which is shown as the following Figure 5-1.

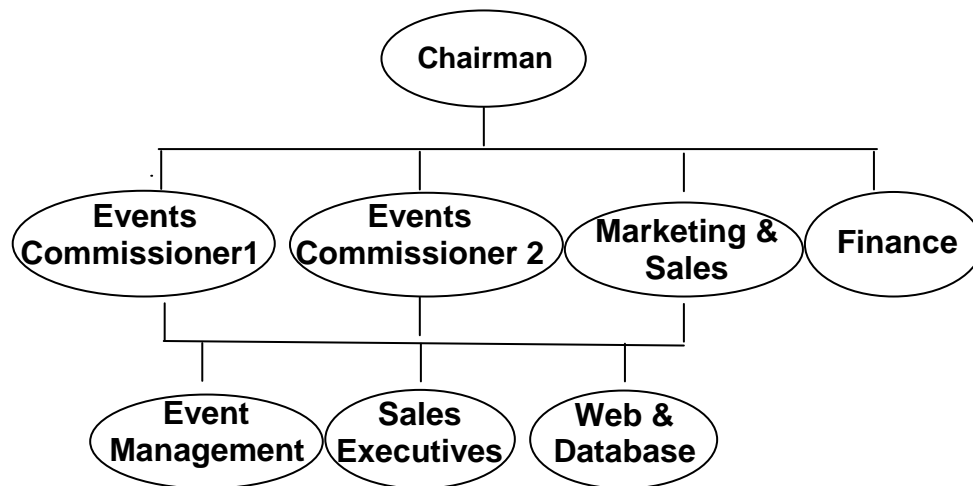


Figure 5-1: Company Chart

As I recall, I was told on my first day's induction programme of how should I work at company U. "After an event is commissioned, you and the other database staff need to research on relevant potential customer lists in order to find their contact details, so the sales staff could contact them and sell them the events later" (my working notes on 15th January 2005 which is used as part of the observation diary). However, I was not given any other training in terms of what did the other staff do, or in other words, the whole working procedure at U. Based on my later working experiences as sales (it was mentioned that my role was changed to sales afterwards), the selling of events at company U is operated in terms of a specific procedure or practice which can be described as the followings.

(1) Events commissioners will first issue a new event (workshop/conference) based on their research of topics which generate wide interest in the business world. According to their findings, they will decide the event title, date and type (whether it is a workshop or a conference), and also invite relevant speaker(s) who are ideally to be experienced and well-known individuals in that particular area. By working with the speaker(s), an event description and/or a programme will be produced.

(2) This established event will then be passed on to the marketing & sales unit, who will then design a promotional brochure, research and extract a name list from the company database, plan a promotional email campaign and/or a hard

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copy mailing campaign, sell the event to the listed people, and confirm the delegate place to whoever make the registration.

(3) Delegates will need to pay the event fee through the finance unit, and in addition, (4) their personal details will be inputted or updated in the database by the events management team.

(5) The events management staff will provisionally book an event venue. When approaching the event date, they have to confirm the venue and make a catering arrangement according to the number of total delegates. They will also need to send “joining instruction” letters (a letter with detailed venue information and it is normally attached with a map) to delegates, and to prepare delegate list & name badges etc.

(6) On the event day, the staff who takes the duty of on-site management (normally each event needs two or more people to manage depending on the event scale) have to be at the venue before 8 o'clock in the morning. They have to ensure that everything is ready for the event, for example, delegate coffee/tea is made available, registration desk is set up, and electronic facilities (computer/projector) are prepared etc.

However, to my knowledge, the working procedure for accredited courses at the first stage is slightly different from the other types of events. As explained, accredited course are recognised by either the government or a professional institution, the course content and examination date are also decided when the course was originally set up. In this case, U's events commissioners only need to find an authorised tutor and to schedule the training dates which will be frequently repeated afterwards. Therefore, for accredited courses, the tutor and training dates are relatively stable compared to the other workshops or conferences.

After my research started, the above described working procedure which had been perceived by 'me' (as a participant) was reviewed during the 'Survey' phase when various company documents were collected. 'I' (as a researcher) managed to find a written “working procedure” for company U. Although it was

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formatted in bullet points, the main idea of it was found more or less the same as the above description.

According to the written document of “working procedure”, a particular item for marketing & sales staff was separated. This was because as many other companies, the performance of marketing & sales department almost determined the income that a company could receive. It has been said on the document that at company U, the main sales method is “tele-sales”, which is to sell events by calling people over the phone. Sales staff members also need to use email to send information and/or to build contact when telephone is not available.

Based on what I heard at the company, it seemed like most people at U (including non-sales staff) recognised that the “best” calling time was in the morning because it had a higher possibility of getting people on the phone. However, as one of the tele-sales staff members, I was not convinced. As I found that people (our potential customers) were usually busy in the morning, for example, to attend the department meeting, to plan the work for the day, to clear up their emails etc.; a sales call with no expectations could be the last thing that people would ever wish to receive in the morning. Sometimes, it could be more than a timing problem – sales calls (especially those which were not expected) were seldom welcomed by people based on my tele-sales experience (which was also proved later by the other sales staff).

During my research, when I was also reflecting on the question of why I was not trained for the working procedure when I first started the job, certain reasons were raised. It might relate to my initial role at company U. Since I merely worked on the database by that time, it might not be considered as necessary for me to understand the entire working procedure. Instead, I only had to know those which were highly relevant to my work. The other reason as I thought could be, for example, staff training at company U was not very well organised in terms of the content of the ‘induction programme’ which limited the internal communication between managers and new staff (I have always had a personal interest in communication issues).

5.1.3 Company culture

Being working at company U, I observed that U's chairman only decided significant matters, such as the company's development, financial issues, new business models, and employee recruitment etc., but left the three senior managers (two events commissioners and one marketing & sales manager) to make most of the decisions on the day-to-day basis. U's management team tried to manage the company in a "flat" style (this was found the word that U's managers used to describe themselves in my later research), which means less management hierarchies, but more opening to employees' opinions and being based on employees' co-operations.

At the company, all the employees share an open space working environment (except the chairman, who has a separate office). There are no physical barriers in between, so people can see each other all the time, and they can also hear each other when talking loudly. In fact, during the work, people like to share their stories or jokes occasionally by talking loudly, so everyone can hear and have a laugh.

However, within this open space, the three senior managers still try to seek for a way of keeping things under their control. For example, their seats were somehow at the back of the office, which gave them better positions of overseeing the other employees. When I first joined company U, I did not notice how seats were arranged. Instead, this open working area made me feel like we were working in an open environment – we were talking to one another, sharing problems and jokes. However, by chatting to the other staff members, the first "tip" I got from them was that to work at company U was not as "free" as it looked like. One girl (who chatted with me at lunch time) actually told me that "Don't be silly! They are watching us. I know they are hiding themselves behind us and watching, (and) I can feel that" (my observation diary transcripts).

It would also be interesting to note that out of the two events commissioners, one is company U's chairman's wife. Although she has tried to keep her role as the same as the other two senior managers, this fact has more or less brought company U some features of a family business. For the other two managers, she is not only the third senior person who has an equal status as them, but

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also a family member of their boss. As I can see, they often consult her for opinions when making a decision. For the other employees, she is perceived to be more powerful than the other managers, and therefore she can make decisions on any issue, no matter if it is her responsibility or not, and no matter if she wants to intervene or not in the first place. For example, a junior operations manager at U was appointed to look after the staff holiday/leave arrangements, but instead of asking him, almost every employee asked her (the boss' wife) for permission to take holidays. Therefore, as far as I can see, the management at company U may have a "flat-style" tendency, but it cannot avoid the management power or perhaps the power from kinship.

Company U has also been considered to be a multicultural environment which consists of employees who have come from different countries. For example, by the time the research was conducting at U, there were less than 15 employees but they were from 9 countries: India, Nepal, Nigeria, United Kingdom, Mexico, Dominica, Sri Lanka, China, and Jamaica. Although they had different backgrounds, since most of them had lived in the UK for more than 10 years, they were quite familiar with the culture of this country. As it was considered by me as well as by the other staff at U, we could understand one another very well, and had not yet identified any obvious cultural conflicts or misunderstandings because of the different cultural backgrounds.

Based on my observation, the same as any other organisations, company U also has its special "language system" – use common or unique words/phrases but with particular meanings within the company. For instance, "events", "delegates", "speaker", "booking", "registration", "venue", "brochure", "PDF", "email campaign", "e-shot", "download", "enquiry", "joining instruction", "proceeding", "database", "lists" are those words that are used almost every day at the company. Most of them can be understood by people from the outside of the company, but some of them cannot. For example, the word "download" particularly refers to the action that when the outside people browsing company U's website, they can download the brochure for an event of interest. Since people have to fill in a form with their contact details on-line when downloading a brochure, they can be followed up by the sales team afterwards with the

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purpose of selling them more events. In this sense, the word “download” not only indicates a particular action, but also refers to those people who have a visible “interest” and a possible lead of registering for an event. Relating to “download”, “PDF” is another word with particular meanings at company U. It sometimes refers to an event brochure’s format (it is the one we use most frequently), but most of the time, it is the substitute name for “event brochure”.

There are also some other words which have special meanings when used at company U, such as “conference” and “forum”. To people outside of the company, these are the two types of meetings; however, at company U, they also indicate different kinds of business models. Both “conference” and “forum” involve several speakers, but delegates need to pay a registration fee to attend the “conference” while “forum” is free for everyone. The way for making profit by organising “forums” is through the sponsorship but not delegation fee. At U, perhaps the most “unhappy” word is “cancellation”, which either means a delegate will cancel his/her existing registration, or a scheduled event at U will need to be cancelled because the delegate numbers are very low. A cancellation of an event is certainly related to the registration fee refund, in other words, a loss at company U.

5.1.4 Strength and weakness at company U – at my first glance

“Teamwork” is one of the advantages that almost every organisation will expect their employees to have. Being part of the company, I found that ‘we’ (all U’s employees) were very proud of ourselves to have “teamwork” as an important company culture. The spirit of “teamwork” is particularly highlighted as each of us at company U will offer help to our colleagues whoever is overloaded or shorthanded. For instance, at company U, the events management team constantly gets help from staff in the other units to make delegate name badges, event proceedings, and to send ‘joining instructions’ including maps.

Because we always help with one another, and over time, everybody becomes familiar with the other people’s job. For example, a non-sales staff (i.e. a finance unit staff) could provide some course information when it is required by a customer. Some tele-sales staff (i.e. me and another one) can design and produce PDF brochures for promotions. One of the events commissioners

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(senior manager J) can also help to update the content on the company website (a particular technical work).

Having “teamwork” as one of the strengths at company U also implies the feasibility, that is, because U is a small size company, each staff member will be able to learn and know the other employees’ work, including some simple technical activities. This is perhaps not considered to be possible in a big company where each employee has a very specific responsibility. It was true that staff at company U had the possibility of helping one another; but more importantly, they were willing to do so. To help with others was a completely voluntary action in most of the cases at U.

Poor time management skills for communication at company U

It was said earlier in section 5.1 that when this research started, communication issue was my research interest, and initially it was concerned with communication in dealing with organisational change in general terms. To be more specific, I was interested in finding out how ‘good’ (i.e. effective and efficient) communication could make employees the “happy workers” who could then become more positive to cope with organisational change. This research interest informed my observation throughout the ‘Survey’ phase, and it also helped me to initially identify the communication problem at company U.

As one of the ordinary employees at company U, I have an academic background specialised in communication. As I see it, communication is very important for any organisation because it can generate and share all kinds of information, and through which people will be able to work in a harmonious environment and efficient way. The importance of communication was also recognised by company U’s staff. In one of the interviews I did at the ‘Survey’ stage, the interviewee answered my general question of “how do you consider communication in organisation” as “both within and outside an organisation, you need to communicate. Information needs to be communicated in order to function... A good communication means that you are able to work better; a bad communication means those things are left behind. While (having) a good communication, everybody knows what’s happening at a particular time and are able to act on that information.” (interview transcription).

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During the 'Survey' phase as I observed, the usual formal communications between the staff at company U were daily sales meeting, weekly and monthly staff meeting. As showed by the name, *daily sales meeting* was between the members of the sales & marketing team only, and it was supposed to be the first thing for the whole team every morning, although it rarely happened on time. At this type of meeting, each sales staff member was expected to brief the rest of the team about his/her working status and the working plan for the day. *Weekly meeting* was planned to be held once a week and involves most employees at the company. It was a time to summarise every staff member's performance during the week, especially the sales team's financial performance. It was also the time to re-arrange personnel resources if there would be any event take place in the following week (as it was mentioned in U's working procedure, people at U take turns to do the on-site management work on the event day). *Monthly meeting* was organised once a month for the whole company, including the chairman himself. It aimed to review the company overall performance for the month and to discuss specific problems that need to be solved. It could also be the time for the chairman to announce any important decisions. Monthly meeting was normally associated with a company buffet lunch which encouraged informal interactions between staff members.

However, people at company U including myself were not very satisfied with our meetings as we constantly said that our meetings and especially sales meetings need to be improved. To me, it looked like the most outstanding problem with communication was poor time management. For instance, at one time, company U's weekly meeting was set to be held every Monday afternoon, but only few staff members could get ready for the meeting on time; most of them did not take it seriously – the meeting could then be changed to any day at any time whenever they feel they must have it. The situation of having to postpone the meeting to another day always happened. Sometimes, it could be changed for a few times. Even when the meeting finally took place on a new date, it never happened on time but always 30 – 40 minutes late. In addition, daily sales meetings hardly happened at the scheduled time, and instead, it could be called at any time during the day whenever the senior managers thought was a good time, which means no pre-notice to the rest of the sales team. Sometimes,

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it could happen by taking staff's lunch time (one hour) or extra time in the evening.

I (as one of the sales) thought that if the daily sales meeting could happen on time in the morning, I could then have my lunch on time, and come back to work in a good condition. This would give me enough time for the afternoon to finish what I was supposed to do rather than finishing the day in a rush.

Apart from me, the other U staff had also noticed this problem. This could be proved by the joke we often made – “we are always half an hour late” for the meetings! However, we had never solved the problem. One of the conversations that happened one day between me and a few other staff in the kitchen was recorded in my diary (Observation Diary, 25 April 2005).

Me: We should be quick, the meeting is at 3(pm).

G (a junior manager): U's meeting is always late! Jeje, never on time. This is typical U.

G (a sales staff): But it doesn't make any sense. I mean, for a small size company like us, our meetings, like you said (he looked at me), the 'communication' should be good. It's only the few of us.

In addition to the problem, I also observed that when managers were repeating the above joke of late for meetings, they were more likely to find an excuse of holding up the other staff's time – because in this way, they could then say that “oh, maybe we can do this meeting at lunch time/in the evening” (my observation diary transcripts).

Therefore, as I noticed, poor time management in communication also generated some other problems instead of communication itself. People complained that their personal time was not respected. For example, most other ordinary employees (especially tele-sales staff) had made the impression that managers managed time badly in purpose. One day, when I and the other two tele-sales staff were going out for our lunch break (after we turned down the manager's proposal of having meeting 'now' – just about lunch time), we chatted on our way. One of them said that “Why they have to take our lunch time? They can always have the sales meeting in the morning. You know, they want to have the meeting now, so we don't go out for 1 hour.” The other one

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said that “I’ll go out after the meeting; it is my lunch time anyway. If we have the meeting now, I’ll have my lunch break later.” (Observation Diary, 17 May 2005).

This communication problem as observed by me during Survey was also responded in the later stage interviews. One tele-sales staff member said that “structure in time when is convenient for everyone does matter in getting the most in a meeting. There is no point to put a meeting when someone probably has an appointment with a hospital or something like that, because obviously ‘they’ (people who have appointment) are not thinking of the meeting, (for example,) the objective of the meeting, (or) the purpose of the meeting. They are thinking of things outside that, so it does help to have an agreed time. So sometimes (having a meeting) in the evening maybe not the best. People have other things, commitments, engagements in the evening (which) they are going back to.” (interview transcription).

As a consequence of the poor time management in communication, I noticed that staff at company U started coming to work late in the morning or taking late lunch break to make compensation to themselves.

5.1.5 Constructing the research by the significant changes at company U – the end of ‘Survey’

As it was mentioned, company U is one of the earliest successful events companies in the UK. It well represents the UK training market, especially in the past 20 years. Between 2004 and 2005, and because of the declining of the whole training market in the UK, U made a loss for the first time. At the end of 2005, the owner decided to sell the company to a “global” company, **Q**, which is a big consultancy and training company. Q has its headquarter based in India and has branches in US, China, Malaysia, Singapore etc. In India, Q has offices in New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai, and has over 150 staff in total. The main product of Q is IT and business management consultancy, but training also takes a small part of its business.

As a self-ethnographer, I experienced and witnessed the significant changes that happened at U. They were significant because in my view and that of other people at company U, nothing like this had happened before. In my diary of 13 March 2006, it said that:

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After I came back to the office from a trip to China, I was told by some colleagues that the company has being sold to Q (an Indian consultancy company). They came to tell me this news at different times during the day, but they all seemed to be quite serious and acted in a way that they were going to tell me a “big” thing. I had a shock after I heard this, although I knew that the company was not doing well, I did not expect anything like this to happen and to happen this quick.

They also told me that while I was away on holidays, they had a monthly meeting (in February), the chairman had announced this to all of them. They were told that although Q had not paid any money to buy the company yet, they should be informed of the change. In the meeting, the chairman also asked them to think about if there were any questions they would like to ask regarding the future of the company as well as themselves. They planned to talk about this again in March’s monthly meeting on 15th March (which is in two days).

On 15 March 2006, we had the monthly meeting as planned, in which U’s chairman told us more information about company Q – their background and business etc. We were also told that by a pre-approaching meeting with Q in 2005, the decision of merging the two companies was actually made in January 2006. However, by participating in the real merger process later on, I could say that Q’s formal launch at U was not ready until May 2006.

As I experienced it, the merging process of company Q and U consisted of several parts, for example, financial, managerial and cultural. By the time this thesis was being written, the financial merger had already completed, but as far as I could see, the managerial and cultural parts were still going on.

While the significant changes happened at company U, the ‘Survey’ phase was also approaching its end. This was because the ‘objectives’ of the ‘Survey’ phase as defined in section 4.4.2 (see also section 5.1) were already met.

1) Through the ‘Survey’ phase, I had already achieved some understandings for company U (i.e. its history, structure, culture, kinship, advantage and problems etc.) and even company Q (i.e. its size and business). Thus, I had a good basis for taking my research forward. By the time company U was being merged with Q, the research I had done already showed the fact that apart from myself, communication was also agreed by the 'native' people at U as being an ‘issue’ at company U.

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2) Following my initial research interest in communication, the communication problems that I have detected so far at U (see 5.1.4) seemed to be not only relevant to the question of better communication (the 'tool' dimension), but also indicated something else (the implications and influences derived from communication and its problems, known as the 'SM-SG' as described later). By this I mean that communication problems as a situation could also urge people to produce various "senses" or "scenarios". People's attention could be taken beyond the fact of how communication has been conducted or how it could be better conducted, but rather on understanding the reason lying behind the situation, for example, some staff members at U have been making sense of the 'deep reason' behind the communication problem as the managers want to take more of the employees' personal time to work. (In fact, at that time, people at U already use the other communication dimension of 'SM-SG' – but they were not aware of it by themselves.)

This finding generated the insight that I should not only focus on the better use of communication (the 'tool' dimension) in future research, but also to make the 'underlying reason' of bad/good communication (the 'SM-SG' dimension) more explicit. The business merging that happened at U was a typical type of organisational change which was also what the future communication would be related to. It would give me the chance to broaden and deepen my understandings of communication (the 'duality', as addressed later), and in order to investigate it, I had to 'immerse' into the business merging myself.

3) The 'Survey' phase was the first stage of the conduction of this research based on the initial research question. However, during its conduction, because the significant changes that happened at company U was observed, the research was constructed to focus on Q and U's business merging rather than any other type of organisational changes. Accordingly, the initial research interest of exploring the improvement of organisational change through better communication was refined to investigate communication in dealing with issues of business merging (although this was not yet the final question). According to social constructionist perspective and being 'reflexive', it could be said that it

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was the construction of this research (through 'Survey') that constituted the research question.

4) Furthermore, the construction of the research so far as well as the re-constructed research question also constructed the research setting. In terms of the "personal reflexivity" and the "epistemological reflexivity" (Willig, 2001) as discussed in the last chapter (section 4.4.3), the communication-related question defined and limited the research setting as being a communication-oriented one. Was communication the only or the most important issue for company U and its merging? Had communication blocked 'my' (as a researcher) eyes to see the other issues which could be even more worthy to be noticed in the setting?

Based on the reconstructed research question and research setting at the 'Survey' phase, this research was then continued by me as being fully 'immersed' into company U's change. From the next section, the narratives will show how the second phase of 'SISI' methodology has been carried on, and what findings have been generated.

5.2 Phase 2 'Immerse': the interactions between company U and Q during their merging

Based on the output from the 'Survey' phase which the research question was constructed to explore communication (its better use and its underlying implications & influences) in business merging, from this section onwards, this self-ethnography went to the second phase of 'SISI' methodology, 'Immerse'. The information gathered through 'Survey' was relatively broad and general – it described company U from many aspects, but the information to be collected through 'Immerse' had a focus in business merging, therefore it was going to present merging-oriented issues.

Being embedded in the research setting, the reporting of this phase will first provide a general overview of how Q and U's merging process is like; through which, managerial practice diffusion as the main content of this merging will be highlighted. As one of the outputs of this phase, six diffusion cases will be identified and described. The interactions that happened between the two companies at each case will also be provided.

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As appeared to me, the early stage of Q and U's merging began with Q's president's visiting to U. During his first visit, there were some meetings organised between Q and U staff, which was an introduction for both companies. The merging was then followed by some of Q's staff coming from India to work at U for short terms in hoping of getting U's staff members to work in Q's way. This can be seen as the most important part of this particular merging case. In the later stage of merging, issues that company U had met in work were primarily discussed with Q through frequent email contacts and weekly telephone meeting (also referred as "conference call" or "tele-meeting"). This way of managing merging (it was also a way of communication) had lasted for a year and then it became less frequent. (It was stopped completely by the time this thesis was being written). It was also recognised that the period from May 2006 until the end of July 2006 was very important in the sense that most of Q and U's crucial interactions of their merging happened during this time.

5.2.1 Early merging - the president of Q's first visit to U

Q's president and one VP (vice president) came to visit company U in May 2006. They stayed for three days and had several meetings with U staff. This was written in my diary as follows.

Thursday, 11 May 2006

The president of Q is coming to the UK and will make his first visit to company U today. He will have some meetings with all the senior managers and employees of U in the next few days. The agenda which included both team meetings and individual meetings was emailed by one Q staff to everybody at U beforehand. One thing in Q's email which was found interesting by me and the others (especially the senior managers) was that Q called people at company U as "team U" instead of "U team". After received the email, one of the events commissioners (the chairman's wife) was asking the other that "did you notice they call us team U"? "Oh, yes," the other one said; and then they looked at each other and smiled. I noticed this conversation was because I could probably understand what the two managers were thinking about: as for me, on the one hand, "team U" was a very emotional expression which showed the gesture of "we are a family"; on the other hand, it also emphasised the ownership - company U is now becoming one of Q's teams, like "team USA", "team China" etc. This was somehow perceived by me as setting up the basic tone for future communications between Q and U.

Q's president arrived U after lunch. As soon as he arrived, the whole team (including myself) sat on a round-table meeting which was then lasted for two hours. At the beginning, all the people

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were asked to introduce themselves in turn: the name, original country, and the job title at company U. I noticed that during the meeting, the president always had a warm smile on his face. While he was listening to people, he tried to find any related topic that could make a person feel relaxed and comfortable. After knowing everyone, he gave a presentation for introducing himself and company Q. He started from his academic background which offered him the original idea of building Q. This was then followed by the story of (1) what is Q's image for today – one of the most successful IT and Business consultancy companies in India; (2) how Q has been developed – it first started in India, then the US and other Asian countries (i.e. China, Malaysia and Singapore), and now it began to open the European market; and (3) how Q will be headed to in the future – to become the world's most successful IT and Business consultancy company.

He also told us about some of Q's "best practices" of doing business or managing their daily work, which Q feels very proud of. For example, they design different versions of brochures for the same event but with different promotional focuses; they issue "call for paper" to invite people to contribute, in which way they can easily put a conference together; they always set up business plans; their sales staff builds personal contacts with customers, so they change a business relationship to friendship which makes their work easier. To me, his presentation was very exciting and I had never felt the same way before in any of company U's meetings. After this meeting, most people said that they like the president's talk and ideas as it made them feel enthusiastic and being motivated.

Another impression I had about the president was that he is a very strict time-committed person and has good time management skill. For example, the meeting started and finished at exactly the time as it was planned. More importantly, he covered all the contents that he said he was going to cover. This was a new experience for me and the others at U because we all knew that time management was poor at company U.

Friday, 12 May 2006

Most people came to work early this morning, so did Q's president. The first meeting scheduled for today was between Q's president, the vice president and U's chairman, which they called it a "pre-meeting". From 10 am onwards, employee meetings started. These meetings aimed to talk to each person separately. I thought it was another introductory session for both companies but on the individual basis. For example, in my meeting, I was asked again to do a self-introduction: Who am I? What do I do at company U? And so on. However, different from yesterday's introduction which was more about personal information, this self-introduction was more specific and job-focused. For example, yesterday when I was introducing myself as also being a research student, the president asked me questions such as what is the subject, which university I am with, and he even recommended a book which he thinks I may like to read. Today, when I mentioned the same thing again, he asked me how many days I come to work every week, and what kind of work I do etc.

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When the individual meeting was carrying on, one of U's senior managers (following the requirement of Q's president) sent out an email to us which asked everybody to respond to some questions. Those questions were related to a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis for company U and we were asked to send back our responses before lunchtime.

As suggested by U's chairman, all the U staff and Q's visitors had a company lunch together. During the lunch, the president chatted with all of us. He asked questions about which area each of us live in, how do we get to work everyday etc, which were some casual topics. Lunch lasted about 40 minutes and after that, we started to prepare documents which were needed for the afternoon's team meeting. At about 3.30pm, the marketing & sales staff members as well as the senior managers were called up for a "clinic meeting". The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the problems that U had and to brainstorm the possible solutions.

To my mind, company U never had any brainstorming meeting before which could bring all the team together to discuss strategic problems. Although in the company, people had weekly and monthly meetings, those meetings only focused on, what I consider, operational level or surface level issues. There was no chance for the whole team to seriously "dig in" problems and therefore to find "what's going on here". Instead, strategic decision-makings at company U were done in a "secret box" by senior management, and perhaps the only issue that they would like to talk to the other employees was "how to do it", which was again on a very specific and operational context. In this "clinic meeting", there were many good ideas raised by the employees, which had not been shared before. This kind of meeting seemed to be pretty "new" to me and to most of the marketing & sales people. I liked to see something different but was good that happened at the company, and I could easily read from the other people's face that they felt happy about the new stuff and the change too.

This meeting was stopped at 5:30pm by the president himself although the discussion was not finished yet. However, 5:30pm was the time that had been agreed to finish the meeting. We were cordially invited to come to the office the next day, which was a Saturday. Although only a few of us (especially the marketing manager) would like to come to work on Saturday (but only from 9:30 to 12:30), we gave our best understandings to the situation that it took the president 13 hours on the flight to come to the UK, and he could only stay for a couple of days. At last, we all agreed to come to the office on Saturday to have a half-day meeting.

Saturday, 13 May 2006

The meeting began on time again, which was a very good start for the day. Today's meeting was supposed to discuss some issues on the very detailed level. This could be a complementary meeting to the one we had yesterday which was to build up a "big picture" for the company. However, it failed to do so since we were still interested in discussing things on the strategic level, which was basically following what we had been talking about yesterday. The meeting was also finished on time as it was planned.

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However, apart from the meetings that we had during the three days, I also noticed one phenomenon which appeared to be interesting to me. I found that although Q's president always had a nice smile in the last few days, his politeness seemed only applied to us but not to the one (Q's VP) who came from India with him. As I noticed, the VP was also in the meetings but barely had any chance to talk. He could only talk while the president asked him to and could easily be interrupted or stopped by the president without saying "sorry". This happened quite a lot during the three-day's meeting but the VP did not seem to be any upset. For me, his attitude could suggest that this was something very common or usual for him; or it could suggest that he had tried not to be upset because that man was his boss.

Being immersed at company U and observing, I could say that communication at the early stage of U and Q's merging was *effective* and *efficient* which also made the merging itself looking very positive. The communication was effective because through showing us good communication skills, for example, managing time by 'sticking to' the agenda, and organising different types of meeting (i.e. group meeting, individual meeting, "clinic meeting" etc.), Q's president created a good impression for himself as well as his company. Because of the good impressions I had in my mind, I was kind of looking forward to the changes that the president and the rest of Q would bring to us. Company U was not doing well at that time – the market was declining and the competition was bad. However, the "clinic meeting" we had with Q's president made me surprise that how many ideas we could generate by ourselves to solve problems. To me, when the communication is different, things could be done differently, and hence our situation could be different too. The communication with Q brought me (and the others, as will be seen in the later interviews at the 'Share' phase) the hope for the future that we could do much better than before.

Communication at the early merging stage was considered by me as efficient was because for only three days (two and half in fact), we had covered a large amount of contents. For example, we got to know each other as individuals; we talked about each company's history, structure, business and especially Q's "best practices"; we also discussed each company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; we particularly analysed company U's potential problems of not doing well; and we also produced possible solutions to problems.

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Communications for U and Q's business merging became more intensive later on. This was because two of Q's representatives were appointed to work at U for some time in order to look after the merging details (mainly on the management aspect but not the financial part as the latter was being conducted by Q's chief financial officer only). Communication was thus observed on the daily basis.

5.2.2 Middle merging - two Q staff members' stay at U

After Q's president visited company U, two members of Q were sent by the president to work at U for a short term. They were known as the two of Q's best sales people, who were believed to be very skillful and experienced in sales and marketing. They came to show U's staff, in particular, the sales team how they do their jobs; and most importantly, they shared Q's "best practices" (which will be called the managerial practices later) with U and hoped that U could use them as the other Q's branches or offices did. The two representatives (one man referred as "A", and one woman referred as "R") first planned to stay at U for two months, but "R" actually returned to India after one month and "A" left U just after two months.

During their stay, it was observed by me that both of them put a great effort in introducing Q's managerial practices (including their personal sales tactics and tips), which they considered to be very successful and useful in India and branches in other countries. Among those practices, some of them had already been mentioned by the president while he was at U, such as to use "different versions of event brochures" and to issue "call for papers" for events. Some practices which were based on their sales and management experiences sounded 'new' to us, for instance, to make a record of "voice of customer", to keep a "sales report", to constantly set up "business plan" etc. They also worked with staff at U on some projects, for example, they helped U to build a business plan (although it was considered by U's staff as being very "unrealistic").

Because both of them had spent so much time and energy in introducing and building Q's managerial practices at U (while so litter in the other work), it seemed like the managerial practice diffusion was the 'only' task for them to do in Q and U's merging. Accordingly, my research intension of exploring

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communication in dealing with issues in business merging was finally modified to explore communication in practice diffusion. However, based on my observation and my own experience, managerial practice diffusion as the focus of Q and U's business merging was not successful in general (in the sense that none of Q's practice survived at U), neither was the communication.

It was found that when "A" and "R" were working at U, things were developing dramatically. At the beginning, "A" and "R"'s introduction to their managerial practices sounded so 'fresh' to me. Because things at company U were not going well and people at U were eagerly seeking for solutions to problems, as one of them, I was largely encouraged and motivated to use Q's practices. However, I soon found that "A" and "R" enjoyed too much on teaching us the theories of the practices and repeating their old successful stories. Later, when me and the other staff were trying to apply the practices at U, most of them turned out to be not useful for us; in other words, when we were really counting on "A" & "R" and their managerial practices, they were helpless in the sense that they could not figure out by themselves why their practices did not work in the UK and how to get them to work. After this situation happened, "A" & "R" ignored the problems that emerged already but rather decided to tell us more theories and stories of their practices. As it was written in my diary (13 July 2007):

A and R both did a very good job in India and other Asian branches (according to Q's president) and there was no doubt that they knew some "best practices". However, they were so fancy having meetings with us and to show us how good they were, what kind of excellent jobs they had done before. In terms of their instructions, we tried to use their "best practices", however they were never worked out for U. At the same time, more and more "best practices" were introduced or talked by either A and R or the rest of Q in India. After being a while like this, we felt that we had enough of Q's practices, ideas and plans, which seemed to be unrealistic and had no consideration of the UK market. We started to make jokes of A and R between ourselves by calling them "brilliant people" and their best practices as "brilliant ideas", because every time when A and R described something was good, they used the word "brilliant" or "awesome". We ask each other almost everyday "What did the brilliant people tell you today?" or "Any brilliant ideas did you get today?"

From my observation, I (and others, as will be seen in the later interviews) thought that "A" and "R" were not able to show us how to do a good sales job.

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Since both of them were known as good sales people, it could be more useful if they could share their real sales experience rather than just talking about those stories and practice theories. However, the fact was that neither “A” nor “R” did any sales work at U. From the work what they did at company U, I could hardly figure out or learn any skills or methods. It was also written in my diary (13 July 2007) that:

A's desk is in the middle of the office, therefore, everybody in the company can hear him clearly. While talking over the phone, the word that he used all the time was "wonderful". He said "wonderful" when he heard good news or positive feedback, but he also said it when he had nothing to say and kept on repeating it. Perhaps the only thing we could learn from him was to keep ourselves enthusiastic when talking on the phone; but in that way, we also needed to make sure that people on the other side of the phone would have enough time to listen to it.

My immersion at the middle stage of Q and U's merging suggested that communication at this stage especially for practice diffusion was rather 'weak' and inefficient. The most outstanding problem was perhaps the unbalanced communication of different contents. For example, we had quite enough information in terms of what those practices were and how useful they were for their adopters particularly in India. However, communication in terms of how to use the practices properly in the UK, or how to get them work for company U was rarely identified.

As for me, the unbalance and lack of communication also showed that “A” and “R” did not realise that they had to understand their ‘audience’ – U staff in order to continue the communication. Furthermore, inappropriate communication could even generate ‘negative feelings’ in people, for instance, the above “joke” we made about “A” & “R” could be an indicator of our feelings. The ‘negative’ feelings we had also affected our attitudes to what “A” & “R” said and did. This was again about the implications and influences (the ‘SM-SG’ as will be seen) which were caused by communication. As mentioned before, similar findings were identified during the ‘Survey’ phase.

Therefore, if my research question during the middle merging stage was already defined to explore the role of communication in practice diffusion (rather in business merging or organisational change in general), at the end of the middle merging stage, it appeared to me that the investigation of communication

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should at least had two focuses or two 'dimensions' – the first was the better use of communication, and the second was the meanings and influences that a good/bad communication could generate.

5.2.3 Later merging – managing through weekly conference call

After “A” and “R” left company U, there were a couple of other Q people came to U for very short visit but only for dealing with issues on the financial side. Therefore, at the later stage of Q and U’s merging, the main issues that happened between the two companies’ staff were managed through weekly conference call (“tele-meeting”).

“Conference call” was one of the methods that Q used to manage branches in other countries, which according to them, worked very well. Q’s president appointed a staff member (referred as “S”) in the headquarters at India to look after all the communications between the two companies, and thus “S” became the main contact of Q for U’s daily work. The president of Q also planned to recruit new staff to do tele-sales for U but based in India.

Weekly conference call was agreed to be at 11am every Tuesday, considering the time difference between the UK and India (4.5 hour ahead of the UK time). Before the meeting, one of U’s senior managers needed to send a report to Q (it was supposed to be sent the day before the call, but sometimes it happened to be the early morning of Tuesday), which was basically an excel spreadsheet that showed what events were taking place at U and how many delegates were registered. In the tele-meeting, the most important item in the agenda was for people at both sides to go through this sheet and based on the current situation to generate a marketing plan. People would also discuss if there was any problem that needed to be solved or if there was anything that U needed Q to help with (i.e. to design new event brochure, or to research on new name lists etc.). At the first few meetings, Q’s president and U’s chairman both presented at the meeting, but later on, the meetings were mainly between a couple of Q staff and U’s sales team.

According to my experiences, tele-meeting was barely any use for me and for the rest of us at U (as proved in the interviews in the next phase). It was more

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or less repeating things which we had already knew. For example, we were repeating ourselves about the delegate number which was already written in the spreadsheet sent in the email. Tele-meeting was supposed to answer questions or generate actions, but in terms of our problems which were to be solved, no/only little discussion would happen and therefore no leads produced for further actions. Communication at this stage was rather a 'waste of time' for me.

5.2.4 Re-constructing the research – the diffusion of managerial practices at U

From the early to the late stage of Q and U's merging, I personally witnessed and experienced the whole process; and I also observed and participated in their communication at different merging stages. This offered me the opportunity to say that Q and U' merging was somehow different from the other merging processes as we normally see. To my knowledge (from what I have heard or read), usually the most difficult or sensitive parts of business merging are to do with the financial part or a company's restructure, which brings problems such as staff re-allocation. Some of the staff may be made redundant, and some new staff could be recruited. However, in the case of U and Q's merging, none of the above issues seemed to happen. On the surface, it looked like nothing was changed, for instance, no staff redundancies, no new recruitments, no change of the company name and individual's job titles, and almost no change of salaries (only a very little increase of £12.5 per person/per month average). Apart from the change of the company owner, most staff at U was still doing the same work as they used to do and under the same management. However, people in the finance unit might feel some differences; for example, the company cheques had to be sent to the India HQ to be signed.

Because the financial merger or the company restructure did not seem to be the most significant issue in U and Q's merging, and meanwhile, what Q had tried very hard to do in this merging was to get U staff work in their ways and use their methods, in other words, their managerial practices (as described in section 5.2.2), the diffusion of managerial practices was thus an unavoidable focus during the whole merging process. At this point, the research was re-constructed as being about the issue of practice diffusion in business merging

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rather than any other issues. This re-construction happened based on the observations achieved in 'Immerse', and in this sense, when this research which had been constituted by 'Survey' was continuously carried out in 'Immerse', it was shaped to be something else. When it was talked in a social constructionist way, the research methods (Survey and Immerse) and the research itself were developed jointly.

As I observed, Q introduced at least 10 of their managerial practices to us at U. For some of the practices, Q staff (including the president) had clearly said to us that we "should/could/have to use"; and for some other practices, although they did not say it directly, their gesture of telling us what did they do in the other countries and how successful they were clearly showed me their intention of encouraging us to do the same thing at U.

As I thought, the reasons that Q was so passionate in diffusing their practices explicitly and implicitly were because first, they were very confident of their managerial practices and thus believed that U's business performance could be improved by applying them. For instance, Q's president kept saying to us that "we use our best practice in India, US, China, Singapore, and Malaysia, it works very well; and now let's do this with U, let's make this happen. I am sure it can help U to improve sales, so let's make it 'fly' " (transcripts in diary of 11 May 2006). Other Q staff was also proud of their methods which they said that "our sales people make their customers as friends, so when we need some nominations (delegates), they just call their contacts and say, 'hi, I need some people (delegates) for this course, can you send someone (to attend)?' and then we have nominations." (diary, 12 July 2006).

Secondly, as for Q, the diffusion of their practices of sales and management could also be seen as diffusing Q's culture and thus unify the ways in which employees at different branches will work. To my mind, this could be a good way of managing the culture aspect in business merging; but based on my observations in this case, because Q overlooked the role of communication in practice diffusion, the result of diffusion was in general very disappointing. Furthermore, this undesirable diffusion result was associated with some other

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problems, for example, problems of trust, confidence and collaboration, which also had negative effects on the further diffusion/merging.

However, despite the general disappointing diffusion result, my impression for Q's best practice diffusion at U was that the diffusion was not always unsuccessful. Especially at the initial stage, people at U (as the potential adopters) were rather having a hope in those practices, and thus their diffusion was looking good at the beginning. However, when those practices were being diffused, or in other words, when they were being implemented into real work, many problems occurred and without being solved, which largely hurt the diffusion effectiveness. Through time, the majority of the practices were rejected in the end.

In the light of rhetorical theory which has also contributed to explain the process of diffusion, my impression could be interpreted by drawing on the discussion of pathos, logos and ethos justification. Being hopeful at the initial stage can be referred as the pathos; the later unsolved problems might need a logos justification; and the ethos achieved through time thus appeared to be the rejection of Q's best practices. Therefore if the rhetorical theory has suggested that the better fulfilment of pathos, logos and ethos justification could enable a successful diffusion, the disappointing diffusion result of Q's practices at U could also be explained. In addition, by drawing on the concept of 'communication duality' which was discussed in the previous chapters, when Q was diffusing their practices, they seemed to only focus on 'teaching' U's staff, but not on understanding how U's staff were 'learning' about it. In this sense, they did not do well in achieving a better communication through pathos, logos and ethos periods; neither did they do well in making sense of the diffusion.

Case selections.

It was mentioned in the 'SISI' methodology (see Chapter 4) that during the 'Immerse' phase, samples or cases could be chosen to provide rich but relatively simple narratives of the whole situation. A rich account could be produced is because the chosen samples or cases can represent the whole story through varieties, and thus by reading it, people from the outside could know what has happened in the organisation. Meanwhile, showing the whole

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story through chosen samples or cases could be less complicated because potentially duplicated stories will be condensed, reduced or removed.

As resulting from my “immersion” at U, a set of managerial practice diffusion cases were selected. They were selected in terms of the following criteria.

1. Through the description of the chosen cases, it should be able to show the focus and values of this research. For instance, because by that time this thesis was concerned with practice diffusion in the change of business merging, the cases were thus chosen from all of Q’s managerial practices which were being diffused at company U.
2. Through the analysis of the chosen cases, it should also have the ability to address the defined research question. Since the purpose of this research was to explore the role of communication (i.e. improve or prohibit) in practice diffusion through its better use as well as its underlying implications & influences for diffusion (known as the Tool & SM-SG “duality”), the chosen cases should have sufficient spaces which would allow readers to see and to analyse communication (and SM-SG) activities in diffusion change. In addition, through communication analysis, the above mentioned pathos, logos and ethos justification can also be identified and analysed.
3. As respecting to the real status, the chosen cases should be able to represent the development of the whole situation. This means that the chosen cases could be either those normal ones or “distinctive” ones, but whichever they are, they should more or less reflect the tendency of how things are being developed as a whole. For example, in this thesis, if most practices are **not** diffused well, the “normal” cases refer to those which are **not** diffused well, and the “distinctive” ones are those which are diffused well. Chosen cases could be either of them, thus the analysis upon them could generate suggestions of why it is (not) diffused well. However, chosen cases should not be those “exemptions” which have no implications for diffusion but rather focus on something else.

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In this self-ethnography, six diffusion cases which happened at different times during the merging period were selected. According to the above criteria, the six chosen cases were the six managerial practices (out of ten) that Q aimed to diffuse at U. The six cases were also those through which plenty communication (and SM-SG) activities could be found and analysed. Through analysing the six chosen cases, if similar problems are identified, it helps to generate common issues of relevance in relation to diffusion change.

Although the other four practices¹⁴ which were not chosen also met the first and the third criterion, for example, they were also the practices that Q wanted to diffuse, and the result of not being diffused also showed that they represented the general development of the diffusion situation at U; they did not fit for the second criterion. The diffusion life of the four practices were relatively short or incomplete, in other words, it did not allow the exploration of a full diffusion process. For example, to use different versions of promotional brochure for each event was one of the ten practices that Q wanted to diffuse but was not selected as a diffusion case. This was because as a practice to be used at U, it was simply mentioned at the early stage of merging but with no real efforts of diffusing it, thus it could not offer any analysis for communication (and SM-SG) in diffusion.

In terms of the different merging stages, the six cases were summarised in Table 5-1 below.

Stage of Merger	Case
Early	1. Clinic Meeting
Middle	2. Call for Papers 3. Business Plan 4. Voice of Customer 5. Sales Report
Late	6. Conference Call

Table 5-1: Case Selections

In the above table, it showed that Case 1 “Clinic Meeting” was selected as happened at the early merging stage. Case 2 to 5 (Call for Papers”, “Business

¹⁴ The four practices were 1) use different versions of brochure for each event; 2) prepare event calendar every quarter; 3) to have “fun” element and “awards” in conference; 4) to use ‘webinar’ as complementary to an event.

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Plan”, “Voice of Customer”, and “Sales Report”) were selected during the middle stage of merging, which covered the period when Q’s representatives worked at U and the first few months after they returned back to India. Case 6 “Conference Call” was selected at a later stage of the merging.

Given the situation that U was a small company with less than 15 staff, it was ideal and also possible for me to involve every of them in my research, and to explore the effect of diffusion on both the group and the individual basis. In the following section, the six chosen diffusion cases will be reported.

5.3 Descriptions of the six chosen diffusion cases

At the ‘Immerse’ phase of the ‘SIS’ methodology, six cases were selected to report on the situation of how Q’s managerial practices were diffused at company U. In this section, the above six cases will be described in details in terms of what each case (practice) is about, what is its value to be diffused, how it has been diffused and what have been the results of its diffusion. The description of the six cases was achieved based on my observations and my own experience, and therefore the narratives in this section will be presented in the first person.

As also informed by the impressionist style of ethnography, the narratives will aim to “braid the knower with the known” (Van Maanen, 1988, p102). Readers, as based on their own reflections could then try to understand the practice diffusion at U as well as my way of knowing it, which is also to construct the diffusion from the perspective of a social constructionist.

Moreover, as within the ‘Immerse’ phase of ‘SIS’, this section will simply describe the six diffusion cases as being observed or experienced, but not to analyse them. A detailed analysis with supporting evidence, such as the observation diary and transcripts, interview transcriptions, secondary data, workshop notes etc. will be provided and ‘integrated’ at the last phase of ‘SIS’, which will be reported in the next chapter (Chapter 6).

5.3.1 Case 1: Clinic Meeting

“Clinic Meeting” was one of Q’s best practices for communication, which was planned to be diffused at U. It was brought in at the early stage of Q and U’s

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merging. According to what Q's president said, Q's staff had this type of meetings quite often, and they always found it to be very useful for their work.

Q's president said, "People at Q use Clinic Meeting to brainstorm strategic issues, such as Q's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, company objectives, and business plans. They use this meeting to build a big picture of Q and they just love it. To always brainstorm problems, people can get information and ideas from the whole company, from senior managers to the new staff". (Observation transcripts 13 May 2006).

According to the president, Clinic Meeting was also a good way to communicate. It not only enabled solution seeking, but also allowed interactions within the entire organisation. This practice was raised at company U when our meetings were not considered to be 'good', which provided an ideal circumstance to foster a good 'pathos' justification.

For example, at U's sales meeting, each sales staff member was only asked to report on what had been done by him/her, and the manager then decided what each of us should do afterwards. We seldom diagnosed any problems or shared any ideas of how things could be done differently. Even in a weekly or monthly meeting, which we could have more time to carefully think about some issues for the company, we hardly did anything. As usually, it still consisted of each person reporting on what he/she was working on but no other discussions. For example, in a weekly or monthly meeting, one staff in the finance unit would normally announce the sales figure that we achieved for that week/month. To me, this figure did not make much sense, as the only thing I could do was to compare it to the previous figure and to see whether we did better or worse for this week/month. What usually happened followed by the sales figure was that the managers normally said "oh, this is not good", or "this is too bad" – but that was it! We seldom 'dig in' the problems to see what was wrong.

When Q's president's introduced the "Clinic Meeting" to us and after a short break, he also organised one with us. In this Clinic Meeting, my colleagues and I did a lot of 'brainstorming' and participated in many discussions. We built consensus in relation to U's market position, business objectives, current achievements, challenges and future developments. Compared to the meetings we usually had at company U, in this Clinic Meeting as I recall, our discussions were creative, informative and unlimited. There were no standard answers

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which we did not need to worry about whether what we said were “right” or “wrong”. We experienced an open and interactive communication environment, in which we shared and generated many good ideas. I could also say that Q’s president did a successful logos justification for this practice because he showed us how this practice was used and how helpful it could be.

After this meeting, Q’s president encouraged us to always do some brainstorming in our work and always have Clinic Meetings. He believed that company U would benefit from it in the future. Because my experience of the Clinic Meeting was very good which was also very different from my old experience, I was motivated to use it again in the future work. As I found, most of my colleagues at U felt more or less the same way (as proved in the Share and Integrate Phases) and we also made a decision of having the Clinic Meeting regularly. Because event management was considered by most of us as a relatively “weak” aspect at the company, we planned that in our next Clinic Meeting we were going to do a session of brainstorming on our event management procedure. We hoped that through Clinic Meeting, we could bring innovations, new ideas and methods to it.

This planned event management Clinic Meeting did happened as scheduled. At the end, we generated agreement in terms of the new procedure, and according to which, a new regulation-like event management document was drafted. Although this Clinic Meeting was also considered to be successful and useful, and a future meeting to share the knowledge for dealing with “sales enquiries” was also planned (which partly proved that the ethos justification for this practice succeeded at that time), this was so far the only Clinic Meeting that we had ever organised by ourselves at company U.

5.3.2 Case 2: Call for Papers

As it was mentioned in U’s working procedure (see section 5.1.3), in order to organise a conference, U’s events commissioners need to research and confirm a conference theme, seek for potential speakers, and then invite them to participate. It could be said that at company U, the work of putting a conference together was mainly done to the two events commissioners. However, In India, the way of organising a conference was different. Rather than looking for and

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inviting speakers by themselves, Q's manager used to use the practice of "call for papers".

"Call for papers" is normally regarded as a method used mainly in academic contexts for collecting articles or conference presentations. It is usually a written document that describes a broad theme, an occasion, and its formalities (e.g. abstract format, submitting deadline and method etc). However, Q's managers used this method in their business work. They issued calls for papers on a particular topic and whoever was interested in the topic would respond to the call. Those who responded also had to submit a paper and based on which they could be selected as speakers. According to the responses received for each call, Q's managers chose speakers and presentations, and then organised a conference.

According to Q, the approximate number of papers they could receive from each call that they issued was 80. By issuing "call for papers", Q's managers felt that they could save massive time and resources in looking for relevant speakers and suitable presentations.

As a managerial practice, people at U started to know this practice from Q's president at the beginning of the merging. However, in terms of its diffusion, no real actions were followed until Q's two representatives came to work at U which was during the middle stage of merging. Q's president and the two representatives confidently asked U's events commissioners to use this practice for organising conferences. When the two representatives were working at U, they constantly said that this practice had been a great success in India, and thus U's managers should definitely use it here.

This practice was not completely new to us. As having an academic background, I was familiar with "call for papers". Personally, I used to help some research groups to issue call for papers to students. However, I had never thought about using this method in business. When I first heard about this practice from Q, I was kind of expecting to see how it would work in the business world although I had some concerns about the difference between business people and academics. Generally, I was positive about applying this practice at U.

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Different from me, one of our events commissioners was not convinced of using it. She told me that U had tried this method before, and it did not work at all. Although she admitted that it happened a long time ago, and things could be changed by now, she still consulted external experts in relation to her concern. Their suggestions (in the emails she showed me) were very similar to what she had thought: “call for papers” did not seem to work in a non-academic area in the UK which might due to its different culture and market.

When this concern was communicated to Q’s representatives, it was completely neglected by them as if they had never heard about it. In addition, their attitudes “implied” to us that we should still use it. Although the events commissioner was not happy at all about being neglected, she agreed to use this practice for her next conference. Because to commission event was not within my job specification, I and the other sales staff did not care too much about whether or not to use this practice; however, I had to say that the representatives’ attitudes was not “polite” which made us upset (although I personally agreed that we could give this “call for papers” practice a try and hoped it could work this time.)

As requested by the events commissioner, I agreed to help her to issue one “call for papers” for her later conference in the knowledge-management area¹⁵. This call was not only sent to our own database customers, but was also widely posted to public resources by me (i.e. some knowledge-management related newsgroups¹⁶, electronic mailing lists etc.). However, the fact was very disappointing. Within a month after the call was issued, we did not receive any response. I was very disappointed about this result, so did the events commissioner, but it proved that her initial intuitions as well as the external experts’ thoughts were accurate. Apart from the disappointment, I was also curious about the question of why it did not work out here (at U)? Under this circumstance, Q’s representatives did not make any comments. When we looked back, it seemed like they had not done any research in the first place of

¹⁵ I was asked for help because she was aware that I had experience of using “call for paper”; she also thought that I understood a bit about knowledge management.

¹⁶ A group of people who are interested in the same topic and are organised to share news or discuss problems by posting articles or conversations to WebPages or sending emails.

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why “call for papers” was so successful in India, neither did they analyse if it could be an appropriate practice to be diffused in the UK market.

Despite of this, the knowledge management conference was still organised in our usual way, which meant that the events commissioner still needed to research and look for speakers by herself. We did not use “call for papers” for any other events at company U after that.

5.3.3 Case 3: Business Plan

Managers at company U used to have a planning meeting every three months between themselves (sometimes with the chairman) which was to discuss the current status of the ongoing events. Based on the current and previous business performance, and especially the financial figures, a marketing plan was normally produced following their meeting to (1) decide which events to be repeated and what new ones to be launched; (2) plan the marketing budget for mailing campaigns and advertisements etc.; (3) estimate how much profit could be made for the next three months. (Information in this paragraph was gained afterwards in the interview with one manager).

As an ordinary employee at company U, I and the other staff members were aware when the managers were having their planning meetings because we were told so. However, we had no idea of what the planning meeting was about and what did they talk in their meetings. Even after a plan was made, we were not informed of all the details (or maybe we should not know it considering it could be a kind of business intelligence), however, as sales staff, we were informed of the resource arrangements in relation to “who will sell what event”.

Same as company U, Q also did their plan regularly which was called a business plan. It was introduced to us by Q’s representatives “A” and “R” (while working at U) in one of our sales meetings. We were also told that to make a more detailed and ambitious business plan was one of Q’s best practices. In Q’s business plan, we found that all the targets were quantified. For example, they set up exact figures for the number of events, the number of delegates of each event, their income, expense, profit etc. Compared to the real company performance, those figures were made much higher. For instance, if the real

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delegate number for an event was 10, in this business plan, the targeted delegate number for the same event would be set up as 20.

The reason for doing this was because Q thought that a high target in the business plan was considered to be encouraging and inspiring. Therefore, in their minds, to have a big & high target in advance could always help to achieve a better performance later. Although it sounded very exciting, as I noticed, “A” and “R” did not mention whether those ambitious targets were met or not based on their experiences, or in other words, whether or not Q’s employee were motivated by the ambitious plan to achieve better performance.

In order to diffuse this “best practice” at company U, “A” and “R” decided to actually help us to make a new business plan which had higher targets to be aimed at. Although our senior managers were involved in providing U’s historical data, especially those financial figures, the targets in the plan were mainly made by “A”, who had limited experience with the UK training market.

As I found later, in this business plan, some events which based on our experience had already been proved difficult to get participants in were included (according to the later interview with one manager, “A” insisted to have these events in the plan although him was told that those event were cancelled by us before). This plan also set up targeted number of delegate for each event. For instance, it allocated a number of 12 delegates for a small workshop, 80-100 for a conference. However, the real situation by that time was we (sales staff) were struggling to get 5 delegates for a small workshop and 25 for a conference (given the situation of the declining market). According to the targeted event numbers and delegate numbers, the estimated revenue was also calculated, which looked very “exciting”.

When this business plan was completed, it was shown to each of us at U. The figures in that plan made me feel “ridiculous”, and I asked myself how could we possibility achieve them? As a sales staff, I had tried very hard to call people, to send email and to promote events wherever possible. I put so much pressure on myself in order to get enough delegates for a workshop. By that time, even I had 4 delegates for a workshop I would feel a bit “release” and I could then work on the others which only had 1 or 2 delegates. As for me, a high target

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plan could be encouraging, as long as it could be associated with a real strategy of how it was going to be achieved.

In fact, apart from one U's marketing & sales manager who believed in Q that to have a higher target to be aimed to could motivate the staff, most other people at U (including the other two senior managers) considered this plan as overly optimistic. We felt that this business plan was unrealistic and unachievable rather than encouraging and exciting. Although this plan existed physically, for most of us, it was not a real plan that we could follow, work on, and hence hit its targets. We would rather treat it as something else (a "wish list", as will be seen in later interviews).

5.3.4 Case 4: Voice of Customer

It was mentioned that the primary sales method at company U was tele-sales, which was to sell the events by making phone calls. Based on my tele-sales experience, through talking to the potential customers directly (especially talk to those who had already made an enquiry to an event), we (the sales staff) could provide them with detailed information, for instance, the event's content, features, time, programme, venue, price, etc. Sometimes we could also help potential customers to make a straight decision to attend an event. Even if a decision could not be made immediately, we could always remind them through a phone call of the event or build a contact with them.

At U, the most appropriate working method for sales was believed to be making phone calls in the morning, and sending following-up emails in the afternoon unless it was urgent (i.e. sometimes we could be asked by customers to email them some detailed information). This was because U's managers believed that morning time should only be used to make phone calls as most people would be available at their offices in the morning and therefore could be reached by phone.

I also noticed that when I and the other sales staff were making phone calls, our sales calls were very much event-oriented, therefore most of our conversations focused on introducing an event, or checking people's potential interest and availability to attend it. Sometimes, I could also offer potential customers a

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discount in order to sign them in quickly, but I seldom asked people questions of what did they do at work, and why they were interested in attending an event.

During the middle stage of merging, which was also when Q's two representatives "A" and "R" were working at U, "Voice of customer" was brought in company U as a best practice for sales staff to make phone calls. It required sales staff to get as much information as possible through talking to customers. Compared to the telephone conversation we normally had with our potential customers, this practice had a different focus. According to what "A" & "R" said, first, this kind of sales conversation emphasised on the customer's side, which was to highlight the importance of listening to the customer rather than solely providing information by the sales staff. Secondly, it was an information-oriented conversation. Therefore it was not only about selling a particular event, but also about getting wide business information from the customer, for instance, information about the customer's organisation, new business opportunities, or new interests of the market, etc.

As "A" and "R" said, the benefit of getting customers' voices was to boost sales, and to bring to the company new events, new consultancy projects and other "business intelligence" (as "A" and "R" called it). They also asked each of us as sales staff members to prepare an electronic spreadsheet in order to document the "customer voice" that we acquired on the day. The documented customer voices would then be shared at the sales meeting with the whole team for generating more action plans. In order to encourage us to find out more information, "A" even declared that to obtain customer voice was more important than to get a sales figure.

At the beginning, I and most of my sales colleagues were happy to apply this practice in our daily job because we understood the potential value of getting customer voices as what "A" and "R" had conveyed. Personally, I would like to try any sales method if I could sell more and thus be less "desperate" about getting more delegates. However, after a short period of using this practice, we found that the information we could acquire by talking to customers was usually in the form of very direct answers. For example, by talking to someone who could not attend an event, I found that the reason could be either the time was

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not right, or there was no financial budget etc. When I documented this in my sales spreadsheet and communicated at our sales meeting, I was told by “A” that this type of information was “sales feedback” (as called by Q) rather than the “voice of customer”.

“A” and “R” soon realised that it was not only me, most of the “voice of customer” that the other sales staff wrote in their spreadsheets were sales feedbacks too. Therefore, they further explained to us the difference between the two. As we understood, the customer voices which “A” and “R” expected to see was when a potential customer said something like ‘the knowledge on the event is/not very useful for him/her because his/her organisation is implementing a new system’. Based on this kind of information, they could then use this “new system” as business intelligence to create or seek for new business opportunities. In this sense, a sales feedback would be more straightforward and had less use for generating new businesses.

However, as I thought, “A” and “R” should not expect everyone we talk to would provide “exciting” information which could then be put into the customer voice sheet as intelligence, because not everyone we talked to would do that (in fact, the customers I talked to seldom provided information like that). Even if “A” and “R” could get intelligence information from most of the customers they talked to, they really should train us or at least teach us some techniques of how to do it.

However, during the time they stayed at U, “A” used about 10 minutes in one of the sales meetings to talk to us about how we should call customers. In the discussion, he only asked me and another staff member to show him how we made our sales calls rather than teaching us how he made calls. For instance, I said that at the beginning of my call, I normally asked if the customer was free to talk, and I also thanked the customer for the time to talk to me at the end of the call. I did so because in that way I could show them my attitude of valuing their time. Following on me, the other sales member said that he agreed with me and he thought we should also ask customers what their interests were. After hearing what we said, “A” said “yes, that is very good”. I was expecting him to contribute with more skills and techniques that he had, but that was the

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end of the discussion. As I found that apart from this meeting, we had no other discussions of how to make a “good” sales call.

As for me, the reason that Q diffused this best practice for sales, which was also the motivation for us to use this best practice was to improve our sales. However, by focusing on the intelligence-like information, I could not see how the sales figures of our events could be increased; neither could the other sales staff. If the sales figures were not increased, it meant that our sales performance was not improved, which thus linked directly to our salary.

5.3.5 Case 5: Sales Report

When the “voice of customer” practice was diffused at company U, almost at the same time, Q’s representative “R” also introduced another related practice, the Sales Report. This best practice was originated from company M, another successful conference company which was very strong at sales. Q imported this format of report for their sales staff to fill in at the end of each working day (see Table 5-2 below). They found that this Sales Report was a useful information sharing device to help them take further sales action. In addition, it could also be used for managers to track sales staff’s work and to observe their performance.

1. Number of calls made:	
2. No. of companies spoken to:	
3. No. of people spoken to /good conversations:	
4. VOC (Voice of customer):	
5. Leads generated:	
6. No. of contacts amended / contacts added to the Data base:	
7. Companies Include:	
8. Events worked on:	

Table 5-2: Sales Report

Working at company U as sales, we had our own sales report to be handed in individually at the end of each day. Within our report, we had to tell the manager what event(s) we were working on each day, how many registrations for each event we received already, how many “good enquires” (meaning those people who had a high possibility to become a delegate) we had, how many calls we made for the day, and what kind of sales actions we were going to take.

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However, when it was compared to Q's Sales Report, U's managers seemed to like the latter a lot. As I saw it, Q's best practice offered our managers a better chance to "monitor" our work.

For example, when we were doing our old report, we had to calculate the number of calls we made, but that was also including those situations such as "no answer" on the phone, or getting into the voice message system etc. This Sales Report not only asked for the "number of calls" being made by us every day, but also asked for the "number of people" being contacted and their "companies". Through this information, managers would then know how many people each sales member actually talked to. I admitted that knowing the number of people we talked to each day was more important than knowing the number of calls being made because the former could better indicate the real effort of each person's sales work (especially calling). Between ourselves (the sales staff), we also admitted that to look at "the number of people spoken to" was a more sensible thing to do to monitor our own sales performance.

Not long after we were told to use this practice, I found that in this Sales Report, only the number of telephone conversations mattered for our sales. The use of email or other sales methods (to search for news-groups, or social networking groups and to broadcast events information on them) was completely ignored. Base on our sales experience, the fact that was found by my sales colleagues as well as myself was that only few customers would like to be contacted through telephone, and some of them even got annoyed by receiving unexpected sales calls, but most of them would not mind to be kept informed by email. Although Q and U's managers recognised the importance of email, because they only cared about the calls we made as written in the Sales Report. This made us feel like if we did not made phone calls, we did not do any sales work on the day.

Personally, I also thought that both U and Q's managers ignored the email-selling could due to the reason that they had no way to control our work in that case. They could ask us to put the number of calls and the number of people spoken to in the Sales Report, but it was difficult for us to put the number of emails sent out. Even we did, they could hardly know the content of the email.

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However, I also thought that to judge whether a sales person performed well or not depended on the increase of the sales figures, but not how many calls were made. As long as we could find the most effective way to sell (could be different from individuals), the decision of “how” to sell should be remained to ourselves.

Because the practices of “voice of customer” and “Sales Report” were diffused at the same time at company U, the “overlap” in between was also identified. In this Sales Report, there was a “VOC” (voice of customer) section (see Table 5-2 above). When we were filling this in, we also needed to complete the customer voice spreadsheet separately. Therefore, at the end of the day, we had to ‘copy and paste’ the same content to different kinds of report, which was therefore regarded by us as a waste of our time.

5.3.6 Case 6: Conference Call

For almost all the global companies, geographical distance and time difference could be an issue for management. As a global company, Q had to manage different offices in India as well as different branches in other countries. Therefore, a “conference call” was used by Q’s headquarters as the main communication and management method.

At the later stage of Q and U’s merging, because there were no managers of Q who were physically based at company U, Q wanted to also use this method to oversee our everyday work at U. However, instead of being launched as an administrative procedure, “conference call” was diffused at U as a practice in terms of communication and management.

This practice was diffused when Q’s representatives “A” was still working at U. According to him, the purpose of the conference call between U and Q was to share information on sales, to analyse problems and situations, to discuss solutions, and also to seek for support from each other when it was required. As we thought, if we could manage to achieve all the objectives in a conference call, it would be very useful for the work of both sides, and therefore this practice was in principle accepted by us. It was discussed between us and “A” that a good time for staff at U and Q to have this conference call could be 11

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O'clock of the UK time every Friday morning (but later on, it was changed to Tuesday morning).

It was also agreed between us and "A" that before each conference call, some documents needed to be prepared beforehand by U (one of U's managers), which was including the "meeting agenda" for the conference call and an "event chart" with detailed information of every event's title, date, and the number of delegates. These prepared documents were required to be sent to Q by email one day before the call to allow enough time for Q's staff to read. It was also said that the "meeting agenda" could initially be proposed by U but it could also be amended by Q during the meeting.

When conference call was actually being implemented in our daily work afterwards, we found ourselves sat around the telephone and talked one by one according to the agenda. However, while we were talking, Q's staff on the other side of the phone often asked for information which was already written in the "event chart" or we had just talked about. It seemed to us that they did not read the event chart in advance although it was sent to them before the call; neither did they seem to listen to us carefully.

Later on, some other problems of the conference call were also identified by us. For example, the conference call was expected by us (and also as it was initially introduced by "A") to not only report on our situation, but also to discuss issues and provide support for each other when necessary. However, the fact was Q wanted to do nothing but only asked us to report the sales figures over the phone. However, the figures had already been provided to them by email in our daily report, as well as been repeated in the "events chart" which was sent to them before the call.

We also found that Q only focused on discussing the event called "CMMI" which was initially created by them. Because our marketing & sales manager was looking after this particular event, most conversations (over 95%, I would say) in the conference call was only between Q's staff and him, and the rest of us were just sitting there and listening to them.

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During the conference call, we normally took some notes (and we used to take notes in our other meetings too), and one of our managers was also in charge of making a memorandum or minutes after the meeting. We found that in this way, all of us could be reminded of what we were expected to do after the meeting, what support that Q had promised to give to us, and what was the deadline that both sides (U & Q) had to catch up with, etc. However, Q did not seem to have such a record because their staff kept on forgetting what had been discussed in the previous call, what they had to do, and what we had required from them. Quite often, our work at U got delayed because of them.

To my mind, what Q concerned in the conference call was nothing but to hear our report. When the call finished, their work finished accordingly. There were no support or following-up actions after the call, and therefore problems were still there and we still had to manage them in our own way and by ourselves just as if there was no Q.

Not long after being in this situation, we (U staff) all came to the conclusion that this conference call was useless for us. However, in order to keep it as a reporting procedure for Q (after all, Q was still the mother company for U), U's senior managers had to continuously organise it until one of them finally said in front of us that it was a waste of time. We (including managers) were then using different excuses to postpone the conference call with a hope to at least not having it every week.

5.3.7 Re-constructing the research through 'Immersing' in it

The conduction of my research, for example, being immersed at company U as an "observing participant" constituted my research finding: Q and U's business merging was not a usual case in the sense that it was not about organisational re-structure, or staff re-allocation, but rather about the diffusion of managerial practices. This research finding further constructed my research as being exploring diffusion change rather than something else.

The re-constructed research defined its following conduction as selecting six diffusion cases out of the ten managerial practices that Q intended to diffuse at U. The cases were selected by 'me' (the researcher) who had an explicit

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interest in communication, and who was also trying to approach communication from two aspects (known as the Tool and SM-SG dimensions). In answering the question of how to suggest a better way of communication for practice diffusion, my proposed answers were also largely informed by the pathos, logos, ethos rhetorical justification. In other words, if the cases were chosen by a researcher who had a different interest, the selection could be different, and later the associated analysis as well as the research findings could be different too. In this sense, it could be said that the researcher constructed the way of researching as well as the knowledge to be generated.

Because the six chosen diffusion cases reported in the 'Immerse' phase were primarily based on my experiences and observations, it could be said that the findings as achieved so far were mainly constructed by my personal understandings, feelings and perceptions. Considering the credibility assessing criteria of self-ethnography, although the report has showed the 'plausibility' and 'authenticity', or in other words, the 'convincing' to a certain degree, the 'reflexivity' and 'critical distance' are to be further achieved. This is why (and also according to 'SIS') the next "Share" phase is required to see how the other participants in the research setting have contributed to the construction of understanding the diffusion cases.

5.4 Phase 3: 'Sharing' findings

After being embedded in the six diffusion cases during the 'Immerse' phase, several impressions and preliminary findings had been achieved but some of them were to be shared and validated.

First of all, company Q and U's business merging was primarily the process of Q's diffusion of managerial practices at U. Therefore, to research the role of communication in dealing with Q and U's merging change was to research the role of communication in their practice diffusion, which was represented in the six chosen diffusion cases.

Secondly, based on the findings as achieved so far, the reason that communication played a part in practice diffusion was perhaps not only because it could be conducted well or badly and hence to affect the information

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exchange in diffusion, it seemed like the conduction of communication also generated implications and influences which were often to do with people's feelings, perceptions, and the senses that they made. Therefore, the research of communication in the diffusion change should at least focus on the two aspects. Referring to the 'communication duality' as addressed in the theory, it is the objective and subjective dimensions that should be focused.

Thirdly, in terms of the diffusion cases, the impressions I made were 1) the early stage diffusion case (i.e. case 1) were better and more successful than the ones at the middle and later stages. 2) A practice diffusion's success seemed to be linked to the communication involved, for example, when communication was found effective and efficient in case 1 Clinic Meeting, its diffusion was good too; when communication was found weak and insufficient in case 2 to 6, their diffusions were not ideal either. 3) The assessment of whether a communication was effective & efficient or weak & insufficient would involve the judgement on the two 'dimensions' as mentioned above.

Bearing the above outputs from the 'Immerse' phase in mind, this research was then taken to the next stage which was to 'Share' my findings with the other participants and to invite them to contribute. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the purpose of doing this is to validate and develop the findings by checking on 'my' (researcher's) opinions with others participated in the actual situation.

This phase was also an important step from where my 'critical distance' could be expected because the methods to be used, for example, interviews and workshops would offer me the position as only being a researcher but not one of the company members. This also enabled me to reflect on my own understandings as being an employee just as I reflected on the other people's understandings.

During the 'Share' phase, a great amount of efforts were taken to validate the above preliminary findings and impressions. At the first stage, a series of face-to-face interviews was conducted which aimed to collect the other participants' responses on how they considered Q's practice diffusion at U (i.e. success or not), and how they considered the communication for the practice diffusion. In terms of the two dimensions of communication, interview questions were

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designed to cover the operation of communication itself, as well as participants' feelings, emotions, and impressions generated in/by communication.

Stage 2 was to organise a workshop with the purpose of showing the participants the possible communication problems which had appeared in Q's practice diffusion (as recognised by me), and thus highlighting the importance of having a 'good' communication. This was to emphasise on the aspect of communication's better conduction (known as the 'tool' dimension).

Following the previous two stages, stage 3 was the email interviews. Several questions were emailed to the interviewees of stage 1 and participants of stage 2. The purpose of having email interviews was to complement the shared findings as achieved in face-to-face interviews and also to reflect on the usefulness of organising workshop as a communication research method.

Stage 4 was to organise the second workshop with a focus on the subjective aspect of communication (known as the SM-SG dimension). By presenting my findings on how communication could produce implicit implications and influences, a collective understanding on the affect of communication from the subjective perspective was expected to be achieved with the other participants.

It could be said that the 'Share' phase consisted of four stages, and when it was compared to the 'Survey' and 'Immerse' phases, research methods used in this phase were also different. Observation was not going to be used as a main method, but it was still carried on to offer insights of understanding the situation as well as the other participants. Systems methods as a special category of research methods could be used too. The most possible one was the 'rich picture' in SSM because it could meet my purpose of presenting my idea while inviting the other contributions.

5.4.1 Stage 1: face-to-face interviews

Between October and November 2006, a series of individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with U's full-time staff (there were 8 of them by that time). Questions designed in the interviews included both "close-ended" questions which intended to collect interviewee's direct answers, and

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“open-ended” ones which allowed interviewees to contribute their own opinions or raise some other issues which were overlooked by me.

In the interviews, people were first told that my research focus was the communication between Q and U’s business merging and of which practice diffusion seemed to be the most important content. Interview questions were concerned about, for instance, “how communication was like in the first few meetings with Q’s president and what did you feel afterwards?”; “how did you consider the ‘call for papers’ practice?”; “did the failure of using the best practice cause any disappointment (in you and others)?”; “what will be your attitude to Q’s future best practices?”; etc.

Through these interviews (details to be provided in Chapter 6), we (me and the other participants) agreed that most of Q’s practice diffusion were not successful at U in the sense that we did not use them anymore. We also shared our opinions of what kind of communications problems between U and Q had appeared in the process of practice diffusion. For instance, the same as me, all the participants liked the Clinic Meeting (as a managerial practice and also as a real communication) with Q’s president which they felt it was very “interactive”, “motivating” and “encouraging”. However, while most other Q’s practices were being diffused at U, communications for the diffusion were not ‘good’, for example, (a) communication opportunities for the ordinary staff to give their opinions were not enough (i.e. most of us were not invited to discuss the “business plan”); (b) sometimes when people were communicating, they did not focus on the same issue and thus miscommunication often occurred (i.e. in one of the sales meetings, we talked about how to increase our sales figures but Q’s staff “A” talked about how to get business intelligence); (c) there was a large amount of delayed and duplicated information during communications (i.e. our work always got delayed by Q’s staff as they often missed “deadlines” of doing their part of work).

Implications and influences associated with the communication problems were found to be, for instance, (a) Q staff did not understand the UK market and the way people at company U worked; (b) therefore, they did not understand how to communicate to U staff and how to diffuse their practice in the appropriate way;

(c) in general, we had less confidence and trust for Q and its managerial practices.

After the face-to-face interviews, I also noticed that some of U staff started to look at communication problems by themselves which was not usual before the research started. For instance, when we (only between U staff) were talking about things which we thought Q did not do well, some of us (in addition to myself) began to use “communication” as an example to explain why Q did not do well. This was however rarely happened before the interviews. People started to take communication as a real issue for Q’s practice diffusion, although they might realise the issue before, they made it more explicitly now.

5.4.2 Stage 2: workshop I

On 18 December 2006, I organised a workshop (workshop I) for two hours (10-12am) with all the U staff at U’s meeting room. The purpose was to summarise my research findings (till 18th December 2006) in different ways (presentations and a game) and also to get feedback from the participants. In addition (although it was not the focus of this research), as a special communication method/practice itself, I was also interested to see if organising workshop could be a good way of improving organisational communications.

About five months after starting my observations (May-July 2006) of Q and U’s business merging, I drew a “rich picture” (see section 4.5, Systems Methods) of my perceived situation of Q and U (see appendix A). My rich picture described how U and Q staff was doing their jobs and more importantly, how the two companies were communicating. This “rich picture” was used in the first part of my workshop in order to illustrate my understandings of Q and U’s merging. However, before it was shown to the workshop participants, the question of what a “rich picture” was had been explained first; and after showing them the picture, participants were invited to draw their own pictures by making comments on mine.

In terms of the communication problems in diffusion that had been identified by me and also verified through interviews, several communication stories were prepared and a communication game was also designed. Therefore, in the

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second and third part of this workshop, instead of talking about many communication theories to the participants, I decided to use the stories and the communication game to demonstrate the problems in a more visible and vivid way.

All the three parts of the workshop were conducted very well, and this was recorded in my diary as follows.

I showed them (the workshop participants) the rich picture that I drew for the whole situation as perceived by me. I also explained the meaning of each part of the picture which formed the story of “what is happening” at company U (based on my understandings). When people looked at the picture, they all laughed! I felt that they were quite enjoying it, and one of the staff actually said that “I really like your picture”. While looking at it, each of them tried to figure out “who (in the picture) is who”. At the end, they not only found themselves in the picture but also recognised their colleagues. I was very pleased, because if they could find themselves in the picture, it meant that my rich picture could more or less reflect the real situation.

I also told them the difference between rich pictures and formal models. The former helped to model the way in which we were looking at or thinking about a situation. It was an individual expression, which meant that different people could have their own style of rich pictures and therefore, there was no 'right' or 'wrong' pictures. When I asked them to draw their own pictures, they seemed to be quite interested too, but some of them said that they did not have the ability of drawing. I suggested instead of drawing a real picture, they could judge on mine. One of them said that on my picture, the guy who with a big trumpet (I intended to use this image to refer to Q’s staff “S” who was appointed to look after Q and U’s communication) was an announcer rather than a decision-maker, because behind him, there was the president, who decided everything (the face of the president was then added in my rich picture after the workshop by myself but considered as the participants’ rich picture, see appendix B). This reminded me one of the issues that had been found during the interviews: one of the senior managers had actually said that Q’s president rather than “S” was the communication bottle neck.

In the second and third part of my workshop, I talked about four communication problems that had happened to company U during its merging with Q. The first two problems were addressed in the second part by using a flip chart to demonstrate. I told them a short story about two women making food – two women were discussing what ingredients they needed to make a cake. They always agreed with each other until they came to problem of “sugar”, a divergence occurred. The problem was not because they had different ways of making a cake, but rather they were not aware that one of them was going to make a birthday cake (which needed sugar) while the other was thinking of a pan-cake which did need sugar at all.

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I used this story to demonstrate the problem of different communication focuses. I had found that in some communications, U and Q people were talking about the same issue but with different focuses, which generated misunderstandings and many other problems. This was like the story that the two women were talking about the same issue which was to make a cake, however, on the different focuses – a birthday cake and a pan-cake.

The other problem that had been addressed in the second part was the open and free communicative environment. By using the same story again, I explained that if one of the two women could point out the question straight away, "why do we need sugar?" They could easily figure out what the problem was between them and therefore could get this problem sorted out quickly. However, if there was no open and free environment due to some reasons, (i.e. the hierarchy, power etc.), the problem could be hind deeply which could then cause millions of other problems.

The other two communication problems – the lack of smooth communication channels and the information storage were illustrated by playing a communication game with all the participants. This game was called "Chinese Whisper". In this game, people needed to sit around a circle. The first person was given a short message in paper, he/she then needed to "whisper" this message to his/her neighbour who sat next to him/her. The message was passed till the last person who then spoke out what he/she had received. The entertainment of this game came from comparing the original and the final message.

There were seven participants playing this game. The original message given to them was "A man and a woman sit side-by-side in a New York cafe, drinking beer, sharing food, and not saying a word. Instead of chatting, they are typing on a laptop about the music played through a shared iPod". After passing around, the message finally arrived as: "A woman sits in a cafe in New York without talking to anyone. She is listening to the music played on the iPod."

When I read the final message to the participants, they started to laugh. They said, "oh, the man is missing." "There is no drink and food!" One of them was making a joke that "when there is no man, there is no drink or food!" They also tried to find out from whom the message was changed. Since there were only seven of them, it was relatively easy to compare the message between each other. Eventually, one of them was found most "guilty" by missing most of the message. This game was drawn on explaining the problem that the more people got involved in transferring a message, the higher the possibilities that the message would be changed. Therefore, in organisations, especially in big organisations (such as Q), the communication hierarchy or indirect communication was always a reason for generating information delay, misunderstandings and even twisted information. This thus required different communication ways and channels, such as direct or indirect way, written or oral communication, and group or individual communication.

The insight was also raised regarding the information storage. I suggested that if we could keep an information storage or information record, it could be more convenient to find out what

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the previous message was, what the agreed action plan was, and how the following-up action was messed... People felt that this was the problem that company U currently had. However, it was not the problem from U itself, it occurred when U was communicating with Q.

In this workshop, the communication problems that were diagnosed and presented by me were: communication was not sufficient at most of the time, which meant that information was not well shared by both sides; new information/meaning “emerged” during communication, and thus people were not always talking about the same problem in the same discussion; the main communication method between the company U and Q was through the conference call, however, the information that was gained through the call had not be further used, thus communication was broken down. In terms of what I presented, U staff showed their agreement and also added some new ideas. Their responses were written in my diary (18 December 2006) as follows.

After my presentation, people gave me many feedbacks and ideas...They contributed to the following points:

- 1. They all agreed that discussions and debates were important in a communication, however, they must “encourage a good environment for sharing information” (transcripts).*
- 2. They recognised the problem which I indicated in my presentation that sometimes, the communication between Q and U was not on the same “platform”, which means that they and Q people did not talk about the same problem within the same communication, because “the information they perceived from the same message could be different” (transcripts). For example, although Q and U both talked about the importance of talking to customers, U’s intention was to sell more events while Q’s intention was to gain business intelligence in order to develop consultancy business.*
- 3. They also thought that to get feedback in terms of a communication was not the purpose, but rather a necessary process in the communication loop. The feedback would then request to be followed up in order to continue the communication, and most importantly, to “accomplish objectives of the organisation” (transcripts).*
- 4. They also added the importance of the efficiency regarding to the following-up of the feedback information, based on which to “set up a deadline” of a certain following-up action was considered as essential (transcripts).*

In relation to the one-way communication problem which was also related to Q’s practice diffusion at U, participants thought that interactions should be enabled

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between both communication parties to involve a “teaching” as well as a “learning” process in diffusion (see diary on 18 December 2006 below).

5. *They suggested that people (U and Q) should learn from each other while working together. Since the company was currently merging with Q, to learn from each other appeared to be more crucial. However, most of the cases that had happened were Q taught them how to work and they learned from Q, but Q never took them seriously when they tried to show Q how they were working.*

In this workshop, participants also expressed their communication requirements: when they were told to do something by Q, they needed to also understand the reasons behind. To their mind, this was to on the one hand, share information within organisations; on the other, when they understood why they needed to do it, perhaps they could know how to do it better. They believed that this would be much better than doing something blindly (see diary on 18 December 2006 below).

6. *They said “ we also think that when we are learning from Q or working with Q, it could be helpful if Q could let us know why we have to do things in this way, because it could not only share the knowledge, but also help us understand the work, so we could do it better” (transcripts).*

The workshop participants also thought that as for a global company, different time zones in the UK and in the other countries could interrupt or even block communications. In addition, the difference in cultures could be a factor to determine different management styles, (i.e. “flat-management” as U or strict management hierarchy as Q), and hence the different ways of communication.

In my workshop notes I recorded this as *“People also thought that as being global, different cultures, time zones, and management styles (‘flat’ or ‘hierarchical’) will all be the factors to determine the way of communication or the way in which one understands information. I also agreed to this by drawing on my own experience. For instance, at U, we used to call our chairman by his first name, and Q staff addressed their president as “boss” or “sir”; when we were talking to the chairman, we respected one another and thus we were more or less on an “equal” status, but Q’s president could interrupt the employees’ talk whenever he wanted.”* (workshop notes 18 December 2006).

To me, another important issue that was discovered in the workshop (also from interviews) was regarding the problem of “U’s work gets holding up by Q because Q sends their information too late” (interview transcription). Some U

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people (including myself) thought that the communication bottle neck was one of Q's staff "S", who was appointed and thus responsible for U and Q's communication. However, others (especially one senior manager of U, the chairman's wife) provided useful information to prove that it could be Q's president who was responsible for the information delay. The reason was that through talking to "S", the manager found that every Q's decision (no matter if it was very important or less important) had to be made by Q's president. He could not decide everything quickly and thus the other staff had to wait for his decisions. They were not able to give U any response until they were informed by the president (see interview transcriptions in Chapter 6).

Based on this finding, I perceived that there could be a "structural" problem in Q which thus caused the communication problems between Q and U. By this I meant that Q's management structure needed to be looked at in order to ensure that the company had a "clear" channel for communication and feedback, and thus could act in an efficient and effective way. In terms of this emergent finding, a system method called "Viable System Model" (VSM) was considered to be used (see section 4.5 systems methods) to solve the problem.

A Viable System Model (it was not shown to the U staff until the second workshop) was produced by me with the purpose of improving Q and U's information transmission, decision-making and the reaction to 'environmental' (a system science terminology) changes by restructuring Q and U's communication channel. One of the most important parts in this model was to authorise more power for "S" (Q's staff) and U's senior managers, so they could make decisions of issues on the operational levels. (Since this VSM was not the main focus in this thesis, it would not be detailed here. However, the model and some explanations can be found in appendix C and D).

In addition, the above shared communication and diffusion problems in workshop I also constructed U staff's understandings to Q's practice diffusion. For them, the main issue between the two companies could be considered before as the "market and culture difference", but since I brought "communication" into their consideration, which they also agreed to, it was now becoming one of the primary issues between Q and U. In the workshop notes &

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transcripts (18 December 2006), I wrote that “now U staff all think that if they can ‘communicate better’, they can ‘perform/function better””.

After the workshop, the word “communication” was used more and more frequently in our conversations, discussions, or complains. When we were later criticising Q’s practice diffusion, we did not criticise the practice itself at most of the time, but rather the way Q communicated themselves in practice diffusion. For example, one U’s manager said at one time that “their (Q’s) practices are good, maybe not all of them are useful for the UK market, but the problem is communication, they don’t seem to know how to communicate with us”. One sales staff said that “the practices are good and maybe useful, but they (Q) don’t tell us how to implement (them), in that sense they don’t communicate to us” (observation transcripts). It also seemed to me that the way how Q was communicating to us became part of the practice diffusion, and it was also one of the factors which influenced our attitudes towards Q’s practices.

5.4.3 Stage 3: email interviews

Between April and May 2007, I did a series of email interviews with all the interview and workshop participants. In the email, I attached each individual’s interview transcription for him/her to see if it was correct or not. For example, I said generally in each email as “Please have a look of the attached transcription and kindly let me know if you are happy with it. I’d also like to ask you further questions based on your answers in the interview to clarify the things that you were trying to say.”

The questions I asked in each email were also different because they were aimed to verify my understandings for the answers and/or feedback that each individual provided in the interviews and/or workshop. For instance, I asked one participant in his email interview as “If you thought you were get involved in setting up the business plan, did you think this kind of involvement was enough? I am asking this question is because according to the thing you have said in the interview “*That’s the only part I have opinion or have something to say in that, [...] maybe the number of delegates, that’s the only thing I have to say for the business plan and that’s it.*”, and I think what you are trying to say is

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you can contribute to more things if they can involve you more in the business plan, not only ask that question, is my understanding correct at this point?”

The answer I obtained from this participant was “They (managers) asked me because they were doing the business plan, but they didn’t tell me precisely why they were asking me that. I supposed that was for the business plan. Yes, you have the point. I think if they involve us (sales staff) in the business plan, we can contribute more, and also be more realistic.”

As a result, email interviews showed that my previous taken on each participant’s opinion and view were not found incorrect. The email interview also intended to find out participants’ opinions about the usefulness of the first workshop I organised with them. It showed that to organise workshops between organisational members could be a good way of communicating. It helped to generate questions and enable discussions. It also helped to build “share understandings” between organisational members, which were important for them to take collective actions later on. After I confirmed that most participants felt very positive of the first workshop, I decided to organise a second one.

After checking the plausibility of my understandings to the data achieved in face-to-face interviews and workshop I, I also noticed that part of the data was repeated at both stages. For example, in both the interview and the workshop, people were highlighting problems such as insufficient communication opportunities, the lack of feedback given (in terms of two-way communication), keep communication records, the ability of giving reasons in communication (especially in practice diffusion), and the influence of culture in management, etc. It was particular interesting when some of them mentioned the importance of “picking up the right information”, because for me, this was where the sensemaking (SM) – sensegiving (SG) processes would be involved (the idea of SM-SG has been discussed in Chapter 3).

In my mind, one of the reasons (the most important one) that people cannot pick up the right information was because they were making and giving different senses in terms the same message. Furthermore, what can be defined as the ‘right’ information could also be different from individual to individual. In fact, for me, the words ‘pick up’ which the participants had used in the interviews and

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the workshop feedbacks also described the SM-SG process. A message itself could contain many meanings, but different people will “pick up” different things which appeared to be more sensible or ‘right’ for them.

By drawing on the idea of sensemaking (SM) and sensegiving (SG), the previous finding on the two aspects of communication (i.e. people’s communication often generated ‘meanings’, ‘feelings’, ‘senses’ etc. which went beyond the communication message itself but largely influenced communication and its ‘context’) which was derived from the observation at the ‘Survey’ and the ‘Immerse’ phases could be better explained.

For example, observed from ‘Survey’, U’s sales staff members generated a meaning that the managers did not respect their personal time and perhaps wanted them to work overtime. This meaning was not being communicated directly (between the manager and the staff), but it was produced associated with the managers’ communication. By using the idea of SM and SG, I could explain this situation as when managers were saying “maybe we can do this meeting at lunch time/in the evening” (see section 5.1.4), the sense made out of it by the other staff was that the manager wanted to take their person time for work (a sensemaking process). This may or may not be the sense the managers wanted to say in the first place, but it was produced because of the actual words that the managers had said (a sensegiving process).

The understanding of the two dimensions of communication was continuously reflected in the following of my research.

5.4.4 Stage 4: workshop II

The second workshop was organised on 7th August 2007 with all the U staff (including U’s chairman). It still took place at U’s meeting room and lasted for two hours (11:00-13:00). At this stage, I had become more familiar with the SM & SG as well as the rhetorical theory. The former theory was used to describe the SM-SG dimension of communication, and the latter was found useful in understanding the tool dimension of communication, especially in the terms of how communication in practice diffusion can be better conducted. As for me, rhetorical theory offered a communication strategy, following which the

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communication for practice diffusion can be done in a more structured and efficient way.

Although I had used some ideas of these theories before to reflect on what was happening at company U, I decided to present these theories explicitly in the second workshop and also to provide some suggestions on improving communication using these theories. Regarding one of the findings in workshop I which suggested that there might be a restructure problem concerned with the management system and the channel in Q and U's communication, a Viable Systems Model which had been designed by me was also put across.

This workshop included one presentation which was given by me and one "questions & discussion" session between all the participants. In my presentation, the use of the theory of the three rhetorical diffusion stages (Pathos, Logos, Ethos) as well as my findings on the sensemaking-sensegiving problems in Q's best practice diffusion at U were made explicitly. I also demonstrated and explained the Viable System Model that I designed in order to enable a better communication between Q and U. The question & discussion session was in a relatively free format as I did not prepare any specific questions to ask the participants. Instead, I asked them to comment on what I had presented or whatever the question/issue they had in their mind.

When the workshop participants commented on my presentation, I found that they were agreed on the importance of the three-stage rhetorical justification for diffusion. They thought that Q did very well at the pathos stage because they were motivated by Q and hoped that things could be improved at U by using the best practices. They also agreed that Q did not do well at the logos stage, because Q people repeatedly said how good their practices were but did not give enough support on how to implement them. When things did not develop as they were supposed to, communication between Q and U was particularly poor, which was shown as "no discussion at all" – this made U people felt like they "only have problems but no solutions" (workshop transcriptions). The following conversation was recorded in my workshop transcriptions.

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"I think we have problems, but we don't have solutions. About communication, I am just thinking about the PDF (brochure), we use 'publishers' (a software for editing PDF file), they use the others (software), so we can't work on the same file. Then the communication is 'OK, we don't have it (software)', and that's it." A (one of U's sales) said.

"Yes, there is no time to find any solutions", the chairman's wife said.

"There is no solution, so if you can't, you can't" A continued.

"Exactly. That's absolutely true", the chairman's wife said.

"I think you (he looked at me) have mentioned it, there is never Plan B", said G (another sales staff).

"That's true", the other manager confirmed with him.

"If it (a practice) doesn't work, it doesn't", G said.

"Yes, they (Q) take it and leave it", the chairman's wife followed.

"Yes, we've done what you (Q) said, but the results haven't much realised, so how do we move forward from that?" G further added.

"Maybe right now we need to reevaluate (Q's managerial practices), if it hasn't been working what else can we do", the chairman's wife concluded.

In terms of the issue of why Q did well in the pathos stage but not the logos and ethos stages, U's chairman (originally from India) made an important point as "passion' is perhaps one of the most important cultural traits in India, which also dominates their business and communication activities" (workshop notes and transcriptions).

U's chairman said "in fact, I quite like what you (he meant me) have said about the three stages, the pathos, logos and ethos. The problem of Q is that there is a lot of pathos. Actually I think that is because of their culture, they are getting so excited..."

The chairman's words were continued by his wife, who was adding that "the words 'awesome' is always there."

"Awesome?" the chairman did not quite follow her.

"Yes, awesome. When they (Q) say something, they always say 'oh, awesome!'" the other manager explained to the chairman.

"Ha..." everybody was laughing at the workshop.

The rest of the workshop participants also thought that since Q was aiming to become the world's leading IT and business management consultancy

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company, or in other words, becoming international (although they already were), they needed to be aware that they had to deal with cultural issues in different countries rather than solely promoting the culture of their own.

My use of SM-SG in analysing the communication problems in Q's practice diffusion was another part which the participants commented to be "very true" in my presentation. Before the workshop, when they were talking about communication, they were only concerned about "picking up the right information which is really needed" (workshop transcripts). But now they seem to have a new understanding of what a "right information" means. They said "that (SM&SG) is very true, because sometimes we understand something from them (Q), but that is not what they meant to say, and the same to us. So although we talk to each other, we have to make sure that we actually understand each other rightly. We have to ask ourselves are we really giving our sense and to make sure that what we are saying is what they (Q) understand and vice versa". (workshop transcriptions).

In the discussion session of workshop II, when the participants were talking about the communication problems, below the conversation happened between U's chairman (he did not attend the first workshop) and a finance staff (workshop transcriptions, 7 August 2007).

"What is interesting is I think they (Q) also have to have commitment with communication. In a level, like Ra (Q's finance director, one of whom U's chairman has most conversations with, the other one is Q's president), on the finance, although this (finance) is not a best practice, but he communicates very well. What do you think?" (U's chairman was asking one of the finance staff).

"No", she said it definitely.

"No? Not so well?" the chairman sounded unconvinced (maybe his experience with Ra was good). "But I think you get communication with him."

"No. I had to ask him so many times for one thing", she sounded very sure.

"They didn't answer you?"

"Eventually! But when he answers normally because he has to ask me some questions".

"But the finance is straight forward, this is the money that coming, this is the money that going, isn't it? It's following the pattern." The chairman's wife, one of the managers added.

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“I know there is a problem; I am just saying the other parts could be like the finance...” (the chairman thought the finance part was good, so the communication happens in other parts, e.g. best practice, could follow it, but now he could not continue his words).

As to the questions that the participants asked in this workshop, most of them were found to be related to the VSM which I designed, for example, they asked me what did the model mean and how to implement it, etc.

After explaining the model, I was a bit surprised that although the participants showed their interests in VSM, they felt that it could only be useful when “system restructure” became a key issue which thus had something to do with the senior management. They did not mean that the management system and its related communication channel was not an issue in Q and U’s case, but they rather felt that since Q was the new company owner, it would be more useful for them if I could present this model to Q rather than to them. This could be true as I thought – when I was considering their opinions. Because even U people felt VSM was good, they did not have the authority to put it into practice, and hence it could not have been of much use to solve the current communication problems between U and Q. U’s staff’s concern of using VSM also showed me that management power or authority could be an issue here to influence communication and practice diffusion.

At the end of this workshop, the mutual understandings achieved between me and the other participants were that for a good communication, first we should always inform with one another about what was happening; secondly, when communicating, we should always check on that whether the others understood what we were trying to say and vice versa; thirdly, in terms of a specific task, when we found something was not working, we should not just leave it as it was, but needed to continue our communication in order to find out what we could do next; fourthly, culture was an important issue for communication, especially when a communication was taking place between different companies and/or countries, therefore we had to try to understand the other’s culture and adjust ourselves to it to make sure a better understanding.

If the first workshop had helped U staff to focus on communication, I felt that the second one drew their attentions to the word “pathos” (or “passion”). People at

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U seemed to understand from the rhetorical perspective of why Q people always used “exciting” words in their talks, for example, “wonderful”, “fly”, “awesome” and “huge success” etc. When compared to the real work that Q people did and the way they did it, U people thought that there was a big difference between what they said and what they did. After workshop II, for whatever Q asked U staff to do, they made jokes on it, “oh, you have to do that, remember, that is awesome!” (Observation transcripts).

5.4.5 Insights produced from ‘sharing’ the findings

My personal opinions and views of considering Q’s practice diffusion at U were shared with the other participants at this phase through interviews and workshops. The above presented ‘sharing’ process and results showed that most of my opinions were agreed by the others, for example, 1) Q’s practice diffusion was found to be problematic; 2) ‘bad’ communication was recognised as an important factor which caused the unsuccessful diffusion; 3) the pathos, logos, ethos justification were useful in addressing Q’s communication because they did well in pathos but badly in the others; 4) SM-SG were useful and it was very true in describing Q and U’s communication problems. Therefore, it could be said that my research findings on Q’s practice diffusion were validated through this research phase. These validated findings also suggested that the Integrated Practice Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) which was built based on ‘communication duality’ (as presented in Chapter 3) could also be used in improving/analysing real diffusion practices.

Through ‘sharing’ the views with one another, my personal understandings as well as the other participants’ understandings of practice diffusion were both validated, enriched and enhanced. However, in the eyes of social constructionists, the outputs of this phase also constructed the research because practice diffusion as a knowledge was thus ‘found’ or ‘constituted’ by us as what we understood.

5.5 Summary of this chapter

This chapter described how the first three phases of the ‘SISI’ methodology were conducted at company U, and in terms of the social constructionist

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perspective, it also demonstrated how this research was feeding through and also constituted by the conduction of the three phases.

Based on the self-ethnographer's own observations and real experience at the 'Survey' phase, company U was generally introduced in terms of its history, business, structure, working procedure, culture, language, strength and weakness. As the significant change that happened at company U, its business merging with company Q was also observed. This finding thus completed the Survey phase since it fulfilled the objectives of this phase as well as constructed this research to focus on business merging rather than an organisational change in general.

This self-ethnography was then followed by the 'Immerse' phase, in which period I (the self-ethnographer) was fully involved in the company as an employee. Being immerse at U, I witnessed and experienced Q and U's merging process, and based on which, I found that the most outstanding issue in their merging was Q's practice diffusion at U. This finding therefore re-constructed this research to explore communication in practice diffusion. In doing so, six diffusion cases were selected at different merging stages and each of them was then portrayed in terms of my observation and own experience. It was believed that these cases could offer appropriate contexts for the analysis of communication activities (will be detailed in the next chapter). Through describing the six cases, the "authenticity" of this self-ethnography was also demonstrated.

In order to meet the other criteria for assessing self-ethnography's credibility, 'Share' phase was described, in which, interviews, workshops were used as the main methods. Through sharing research findings at different stages with the other participants, the findings based on my personal perspective were validated and enriched. As a particular stage in which the researcher can make an explicit self-reflection on the research, this step also showed how the sharing of findings constructed my understanding as well as the others participants' understandings of the practice diffusion (i.e. the tool and SM-SG dimensions of communication, and the proposed pathos, logos, ethos rhetorical way of improving & analysing diffusion communication).

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In the next chapter, the last phase of the 'SISI' methodology, 'Integrate' will be described while various data sources (observation diary, interviews, workshops, and second-hand documents) will be analysed.

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model

In order to keep 'reflexivity' (and especially the "epistemological reflexivity", see section 4.4.3) in this self-ethnographic research, the assumption that has been made during the research, and in this case, the proposed Diffusion Model (see Figure 3-9) has to be reflected in the real practice diffusion in order to see how such an assumption has implicated the research and its findings. In a social constructionist's eye, this is also seen as the process of constructing the knowledge of practice diffusion which is consisted by the Diffusion Model.

Therefore, in this chapter, the six diffusion cases as observed, experienced and shared through the 'Survey', 'Immerse' and 'Share' phases will be analysed against the Model. As being the last stage of the 'SISI' methodology, various research data will also be 'integrated' in this chapter to contribute to the above analysis. Different types of data as providing different resources of "evidence" will demonstrate the "authenticity", and "plausibility" and perhaps some "criticality", and therefore enhance the credibility of this self-ethnography.

Through an overall analysis summary following the detailed analyses, a finding of why the diffusion happened or not happened and a critical review of using the Diffusion Model will be provided. As mentioned in Chapter 4, in order to meet the other purpose of 'Integrate', the Diffusion Model which has been proposed in Chapter 3 will be revisited as being constituted by this diffusion research.

6.1 Data variety

According to the 'SISI' methodology, in this self-ethnography, data is collected by using different methods. For instance, observation as the main method used throughout the whole thesis; different types of interviews and workshops are organised for verifying observation findings as well as gathering data of those "collective views"; secondary documentation is also collected as an important complement. It is said that a technique "for gaining critical distance from our own material is to gather different types of data about the situation we are studying" (Monaghan, 2007, p33). Therefore, the use of various types of data will help to keep a critical distance which will thus enhance the credibility of the self-ethnography.

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model

In terms of the above different methods, the collected data is kept in different forms accordingly. For instance, data obtained from observation is written as fieldwork diary/fieldnotes; interviews and workshops are recorded and transcribed as texts. According to Monaghan's (2007) four types of ethnographic data known as "jottings", "fieldnotes", "transcripts" and "ethnography", the collected data in this thesis can also be divided into four categories: fieldnotes, transcripts, interview/workshop transcriptions or notes, and secondary data. A benefit of separating different types of data is to provide a consistent and coherent narrative which can help to make sense to most of the readers.

6.1.1 Fieldnotes/Observation diary

Fieldnotes or observation diary in this thesis include two types of Monaghan's (2007) ethnographic writings, "jottings" and "fieldnotes". Jottings refer to those quick notes which are taken when something is happening or just happened. Jottings often appear to be very brief. They aim to capture the most outstanding elements which will be considered as very important to retrieve the memory and to make sense of what has happened in the real moment. As Monaghan (2007) mentioned, jottings could exist in various formats, i.e. written notes, key words, sketches and charts. Based on jottings, fieldnotes could then be developed which provide a systemic, rich and detailed description of what has been seen, heard and experienced.

6.1.2 Transcripts

Transcripts in this thesis have a special meaning which is different from those transcriptions of tape-recorded information. They are the words which are actually said by people who are observed. The reasons of distinguishing this type of data from the others are first, although transcripts are not tape-recorded, they are still the 'words' which people have said, and therefore they are different from the diary which is written by using a researcher's own words and based on his/her own interpretations.

Secondly, this type of data is often obtained within an informal environment or a situation which people are less aware that they are being observed. Therefore, the information acquired could be more personal which reveals their real

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model

emotions. For example, in social qualitative research, whether the interviewees will be influenced by a formal interview environment and hence become hesitate to give out their information is always an issue. However, in an informal conversation or “chat”, they could provide very useful message without being asked any questions. Based on my experience of doing this research, I found that sometimes transcripts obtained in a non-interview setting (i.e. a chat in the office corridor and kitchen, in a pub, or even on the tube or the way going home) could be unexpected but very inspiring and useful.

6.1.3 Transcriptions from interviews and workshops

Texts that are transcribed from tape-recorded interviews and workshops are referred as “transcriptions” in this thesis in order to differentiate them from “transcripts” as discussed above. Compared to transcripts, transcriptions not only display people’s “real words”, but also demonstrate a comprehensive account of questions, answers, the way of giving answers (i.e. fluent, pause, delay, repeat etc.), and some background information (i.e. laugh, noise etc). However, transcriptions are still considered as “raw data”, which need to be further developed by categorising, tagging and organising them. In this thesis, transcriptions are analysed by the following five steps.

1. The asked (interview) questions in the transcriptions are capitalised and numbered as Qa, Qb, Qc and so on.
2. After the given answers for each question are carefully read, any perceived interesting or important points are then highlighted and marked with an appropriate tag next to it.
3. The above two steps are repeated for each (interview) transcription, and in addition, all the interviewees are numbered with capital A, B, C, etc.
4. The marked tags under each (interview) question in different transcriptions are categorised and organised by using a form shown in Table 6-1 below. In this form, “sentences” and “paragraphs” which are directly quoted from transcriptions are located into relevant boxes. Therefore, this step will be able to provide a “qualitative” account.

Question a: (the question which was asked in the interview)	Tag 1 (...)	Tag 2 (...)	Tag 3 (...)	Tag 4 (...)	Tag X ...
Interviewee					
A					
B					
C					

Table 6-1: Qualitative Transcriptions Analysis Form

- Based on Table 6-1, another form which focuses on the quantitative side is used with the purpose of seeing how many interviewees respond to the same tag. This form uses the same format as Table 6-1; however, instead of putting the detailed contents (words, sentences & paragraphs) in each box, a symbol of “star” is used to represent the quantity of the response to the same tag. The more “stars” a tag has, the more responses it gets. In a way, it is thus indicated as an important issue. This form is referred as the “quantitative analysis form”.

6.1.4 Secondary data

The collected secondary data in this thesis includes “meeting minutes” and “company documents”, such as the “structure chart”, “employee allocation”, “business plan”, and “event management procedure”. Most of these files are kept as ‘soft’ copy in a shared drive (it is called “S drive” at company U) which is built in company U’s intranet. Every employee can access and save files on the S drive and this makes it very convenient for my data collection work. Apart from these documents, I also keep emails which will show the interactions between the company staff. All these secondary data are printed and marked with different tags, so it could be easily connected with the other data which I have obtained.

6.1.5 Data integration

As Monaghan (2007) says that, “if we see the same pattern in fieldnotes, transcripts, interviews, a survey, a statistical study, and in historical records from an archive, then we can consider it robust and have confidence that we can explain our findings to others” (p33). Therefore, when analysing the six practice diffusion cases in this thesis, narratives for each case are expected to integrate the four types of data (fieldnotes, transcripts, transcriptions and

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secondary documents) in order to justify and support one another and hence to provide a comprehensive description and understanding.

6.2 Review of “authenticity”, “plausibility” and “criticality”

In Chapter 4, the criteria to assess credibility in self-ethnography has been summarised (see Table 4-1 Summary of Self-ethnography at the end of section 4.3.6). This table shows that while one of self-ethnography’s features of ‘reflexivity’ will help to achieve the ‘consistency’ and the ‘critical distance’ criteria, the other feature of ‘observing participant’ can help more in making a self-ethnography research ‘convincing’. It has also been discussed that according to Golden-Biddle & Locke (1993), the convincingness depends on the achievement of “authenticity”, “plausibility” and “criticality”.

In the descriptions of the six practice diffusion cases in Chapter 5, narratives focus on demonstrating the self-ethnographer’s “authenticity”, which is to show ‘my’ familiarity with people’s day-to-day actions, the words & phases which they use in their work, and even their thoughts towards their work and life. In this chapter, narratives provided will aim to further enhance on the three aspects to convince readers. For example, by drawing on a large amount of collected data in the narratives, it will demonstrate my ‘authenticity’. The provided data and analysis of the six cases will help readers to make sense of the whole practice diffusion status within Q and U which thus build ‘plausibility’ in this research.

Golden-Biddle & Locke (1993) suggest that “plausibility is accomplished by strategies that normalize unorthodox methodologies, recruit the reader, legitimate atypical situations, smooth contestable assertions, build dramatic anticipation, and differentiate the findings” (p595). Therefore, by achieving plausibility in this self-ethnography, the method(s) for analysing data will be addressed before interpreting the data. This order of presence, which is seen as “merely following convention” can “invoke a sense of familiarity in readers” itself (p605). When also referring back to the beginning of this chapter, to provide a relatively “lengthy and detailed description” of how different types of raw data are structured and organised is expected to create an image of how findings will be *dug out* and thus to build “a sense of dramatic anticipation into the text”, which fits the other plausibility criteria of offering something distinctive within an area of common interest (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p610).

To achieve “criticality” in this self-ethnography (it is considered as “ideal” but not “essential” by Golden-Biddle & Locke), narratives for data analysis will also try to be *tentative* while trying to convince readers. However, to do so is not because the discussion and analysis lack of reasonableness, but rather leaves space for readers to reflect on the narratives or “imaging new possibilities” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p611).

6.3 Method for diffusion case analysis

In this chapter, the data will be integrated and analysed in terms of the proposed Integrated Diffusion Model (see Figure 3-8 and 3-9). In order to do so, a data analysis method will first be developed out of the model.

According to the findings achieved gradually through ‘Survey’, ‘Immerse’ and ‘Share’, the ideas of the two dimensions of communication have become clearer. This idea is referred in the Diffusion Model as the ‘Tool’ and the ‘SM-SG’ communication duality. To be specific, when the ‘tool’ dimension is focused, the Diffusion Model suggests that a practice should be diffused step by step as following the Pathos-Logos-Ethos justifications; and when the ‘SM-SG’ dimension is focused, the Model suggests that the achievement of a practice’s legitimacy (pragmatic, moral and cognitive) can be done through SM-SG activities which are attached with communication activities.

In terms of the above, the analysis for each diffusion case will be following two parallel aspects. First, to analyse how communication has been conducted in each case, or in other words, how the pathos, logos and ethos justification has been carried out. In real diffusions, communication activities will not tag themselves to be either pathos, logos or ethos ones. However, according to the definition and the purpose of pathos, logos and ethos justifications (see Chapter 2), the different effectiveness that communication activities can achieve can still be categorised. For example, among an entire piece of communication, those which affect (or at least intend to affect) people’s emotions and feelings are the pathos communication; those which aim to provide logic explanations, reasons and instructions are the logos ones; and those which present the mutual understandings as widely accepted ethics are the ethos ones.

Secondly, diffusion cases should also be analysed in order to see how different types of legitimacy have (not) been obtained at different stages of diffusion and most probably through people's sensemaking and sensegiving processes. The sense made or given refers to not only the understanding of a practice itself but also includes the wider sense that is built in general which could affect the diffusion of a practice.

Therefore, as developed from the Diffusion Model, the case analysis method is to first analyse how communication is operated during the diffusion of a practice, and ideally the analysis could be separated between the pathos, logos and ethos period (although sometimes the gap between the three periods could be less clear). Each of the analysis will then be continued by finding out whether or not a type of practice legitimacy is obtained and how it is (not) achieved through sensemaking and sensegiving activities.

After the detailed analysis for each diffusion case, the result of whether a case is diffused or not, or in other words, whether a practice is institutionalised (taken-for-granted) or not will be summarised. Furthermore, an overall analysis for the six cases as a whole will be provided 'vertically', and in terms of which, reasons of why a practice has been well/badly diffused will also be assessed by drawing on the 'Tool' and the 'SM-SG' dimension of communication. The overall analysis will also include a reflection on the strengths & weaknesses of using the Diffusion Model in real practices.

According to the Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9), the diffusion process for each practice case is supposed to be a generally straightforward 'journey' except when "environmental shocks" or "surprises" happen (the journey may become iterative). However, in terms of the purpose of 'Integrating' (section 4.4.2 & 4.4.3), researcher and participants will be allowed to re-construct the understandings of the object of research based on the analysis of the six real practice diffusion cases. Therefore, a reconstructed diffusion model can be expected as part of it.

6.4 Phase 4 'Integrate': the analysis of practice diffusion cases via collected data

In this section, the last phase of 'SISI' methodology 'Integrate' will be conducted. Although the six chosen diffusion cases have been briefly described in

Chapter 5, the discussion presented here will be involving and integrating different types of data, and base on which, a detailed analysis on each case will be provided.

6.4.1 Analysis for Case 1 Clinic Meeting (CM)

As described in section 5.3.1, Clinic Meeting (short for CM) was diffused at the early stage of company Q and U’s merging. It is Q’s best practice for company’s internal communication, and thus it is also a particular type of communication.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
1 CM	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Diffused
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy obtained	

Table 6-2: Analysis for Case 1 Clinic Meeting (CM)

The above table showed that Case 1 Clinic Meeting (CM) was diffused successfully because it achieved the legitimacy at the pathos, logos and ethos stage. As it will be seen in the following analysis, benefits of the CM have been justified at the pathos stage. The good characteristics of the diffusers (Q’s president) as presented in his communication have also gained the practice more legitimacy. The usefulness of CM has been further justified at the logos stage which has enhanced its pragmatic legitimacy. The achievement of moral legitimacy at the ethos stage has eventually led to the decision of adopting CM at company U.

(1) *Pathos justification.* As seen in section 5.3.1, the one who diffused the practice of CM was Q’s president. The pathos justification of this practice was started by telling us the ‘successful’ stories of Q. We were told that, “Q has grown from Orlando, Florida and has now become a global company with successful operations in China, Singapore, Malaysia... they have been established for ten years and have been profitable and grown every year” (extracted from Meeting Minutes 12 & 13 May 2006). As being the best communication practice of such a successful company, we were further told that CM was loved by every staff member at Q because with CM, they felt that they could “make their knowledge fly”. Q’s president thus encouraged us to use CM

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model to “always share knowledge with each other and always do some brainstorming” because he was sure that U would benefit from CM just as Q did (Transcripts). Pathos communication had motivated and inspired people at U who felt that “it (CM) was very inspirational”; “I felt the motivation”; “I was looking forward to actually apply the things (Q’s practices, including CM) that being discussed” (interview transcriptions)

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. According to the discussion of legitimacy in Chapter 2 (see section 2.2.2), the above pathos justification gained the CM practice some pragmatic legitimacy because the potential adopters (members of staff at U) found that this practice fitted their self-interests which were to bring the company some benefits in the future. This sense was made out of Q’s very exciting experience of using CM which suggested that since CM brought success at company Q, there was a possibility of bringing the same success at company U. The president’s explicit persuasion of applying CM at U further gave the sense that the possibility of being success at U could be very high. People at U thought that “Q in India is a very successful company and they have talked about their experience”...“they bring in new ideas at U, (if) their ideas work in India, so there is a chance that it could work here...maybe this could increase our number of delegates” (interview transcriptions). Moreover, because the president always talked to us and smiled to us, we made an impression that he was friendly to us. His ‘good characteristics’ also added some legitimacy to the practice which he was trying to diffuse (see section 2.2.2).

(2) *Logos justification.* Since CM was also a best practice of communication, the real clinic meeting which we had with Q’s president on 12 May 2006 was then taken as the logos justification period because through this real experience, we understood what a CM really was and how it could be organised.

By looking at the objective dimension of communication in the Diffusion Model and in particularly, the ideal features, it was found that communication methods in CM were various. As I recall, prior to this meeting, we were asked to participate in an email survey which we were asked to list three strengths/weaknesses of our company, three best/worst events we organised, three difficulties we were facing, and three aspects we thought the company

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model should change. The answers were collected from each individual and summarised by one of our senior managers. What we found our strengths were “good team work”, “good database”, “good at researching new topics and speakers”, “willingness to be flexible & innovative”, “knowledge of business & marketplace”, and “client service” (documentations collected on 12 May 2006).

The email survey result was reported to Q’s president by one of our managers, he then analysed and pointed out that “those strengths are very good, but for me, most of them are inward looking. Do our customers know these strengths? If they don’t, we have to let them know, and we have to make our strengths more outward looking” (fieldwork notes 12 May 2006). Following his comments, one of us contributed that “the internal quality of our company is high, but of little importance to clients”. The rest of us all agreed that “it is true” (fieldworks notes 12 May 2006). According to the above, logos communication was found to be two-way interactions because the two communication parties did not only give information away, but also listened to each other. One interviewee said to me that “he (Q’s president) really heard us, he made a lot of notes about that” (interview transcription).

During the logos period, we also learned that because CM was about knowledge sharing and brainstorming, it was essential for the participants to have plenty opportunities to make individual ideas and to communicate within a free and open environment in the sense that they could say anything they wanted and ask any questions they had. For instance, when we were discussing the future goals of company U and the strategies of how to achieve them in this CM, every employee at U was encouraged by the president to contribute freely with no rules and no limitations. Q’s president said that “you talk whatever you want...these are your ideas, and there is no right or wrong (answer)” (fieldnotes and transcripts 12 May 2006). Based on our inputs, three goals for U were set up and the reasons for not achieving them so far were also identified. In terms of these reasons, Q’s president introduced several other best practices (i.e. to have an “event catalogue”, to design promotional “emailers”¹⁷ for each event with different focuses etc.) to us, and he also

¹⁷ A designed HTML-format text with pictures and/or diagrams to introduce or promote an event. It is often used as the body for promotional emails.

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promised that some of the practices samples should be sent to us from India very soon (i.e. Q's event catalogue and emailers).

This kind of free and open communication was considered to be very different from the meeting we used to have at company U. "It was very encouraging...everyone was motivated, that was the difference from the other meetings we had at U"; "It would definitely change from how U's meeting (was conducted). We were all given questions of what was going on well and what wasn't. We all had our view thought out before our meeting. But before in U, the key driver people who always talk, you know, put their views across, and then we just agreed or disagreed. While in this Q's meeting, everyone was given a chance to add their views"; "... you could express your feelings and express how we were working and what we should work better"; "everybody was invited to give their input, their thoughts on how the company could be improved, and what the organisation needs to do to improve that". (interview transcriptions).

"When things were going really bad, everyone came back the feeling deflated, almost blamed...but this one (meeting) with Q, everyone did feel optimistic, like (Q was saying) hi, I know things were not going that well, but you know it's not your fault, it's the way that decisions we've made, so we should take the ownership of that and change that...that wasn't blaming". (interview transcriptions).

Through this practice, it was also important for us to learn that at the end of a CM, an action plan should be generated as a result of the meeting. For example, one of U's senior managers was appointed to produce a meeting minute document; the discussed practice samples should be arranged to send from India; and U staff should plan to organise a CM by themselves, etc (fieldnotes and transcripts 12 May 2006, extracted from Meeting Minutes 12 & 13 May 2006).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. By having a real CM, Q's president successfully justified the methodical use of this practice, and through which, we understood clearly what a CM should be, how to organise it, and what good consequences it could bring to us. Because of the good conduction of communication, for instance, people obtained information efficiently, discussed issues effectively, and achieved good understandings between one another

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model etc., we achieved some senses which were positive for diffusion. For example, 1) CM as a communication practice was useful and the benefits of applying this practice were recognised collectively; and 2) as a good communication experience, we recognised the importance of having a good communication which thus enacted an ideal “environment” for practice diffusion. The logos justification period also gained the CM practice some pragmatic legitimacy.

Furthermore, from the way the diffuser (Q’s president) communicated to us, he was considered as having good characters. “He (Q’s president) is good at motivating people, he is good at saying, yes, this is the thing we are doing bad, but there is a chance to change and we can do it very well...”; “We had a good communication with Q, at that stage, I liked the interaction with Q’s boss...in the terms that he was very good to convey the confidence with the people...he had really good communication (skills), he transmitted all the things he wanted”; “it (his communication) made what Q wanted to do clearer”. (interview transcriptions). This sense that was made by us also gained the practice a certain degree of legitimacy (see section 2.2.2). The obtained pragmatic legitimacy helped the diffusion of Q’s CM practice (and perhaps other practices) at U because we thought that “we should follow and adopt Q’s best practices” (interview transcriptions).

(3) *Ethos justification*. After another half-day meeting with Q’ president on the 13 May 2006 (which was the next day after the CM), staff at company U reached the consensus that we should have the CM quite often in order to brainstorm our work at different aspects. Q’s president further added that it could be better if we could have CM on a very regular basis. Below the conversation happened at U’s office after we had the meeting with Q’s president (fieldnotes, 12 May 2006).

“I think the knowledge sharing meeting (clinic meeting) is good, I mean we have our sales meeting, weekly meeting and monthly meeting, but we haven’t really talked about anything on the strategic level, like Q said, to brainstorm”, one manager (U’s chairman’s wife) said.

“Yes, we could use the meeting to brainstorm the problems we have in our work”, the other manager responded.

“What can we use it for then? Shall we discuss our event management procedure? I think that needs to be looked at”, the chairman’s wife proposed.

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“Oh, yes, that’s a good idea. We can need to brainstorm that”, the third manager said.

“So shall we say we do it on the 28th (28 May 2006)?” one manager suggested.

“OK.” We all agreed and some people just nodded their heads as showing agreement.

At the end, it was also agreed between us that that we should have CM “once a week.” (Meeting Minutes, 12-13 May 2006).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. At the ethos justification period in diffusing CM, communication was not found as much as it was at the pathos and logos stages. Perhaps this was because when people were generally agreed on something, it would not take too much trouble for them to make a collective decision. Based on the logos justification, a mutual understanding of CM was built which suggested that CM was not only a communication practice but also a practice which could be “useful” for company U – help U to solve practical problems. Therefore, the sense made out of this understanding thus suggested that to adopt CM was the ‘right thing’ to do which was in consistent with the socially defined value system.

Once this sense was made, we did not need to think again who diffused this practice, or whether it was useful or not for us. As a collectively accepted practice, we simply knew that it was going to be used regularly. Maybe at this stage, this practice was not institutionalised or taken-for-granted yet, but according to the three types of legitimacy discussed in section 2.2.2, it could be said that the CM practice achieved its moral legitimacy at this stage.

In analysing this case, the Diffusion Model was found particularly useful for the reasons that 1) communication in this case could be analysed by following the pathos, logos and ethos justification, and the ideal features were also useful in arguing why the communication was considered as ‘good’; 2) the SM-SG activities in the Model were helpful when explaining how the communication enabled the achievement of legitimacy; 3) the achievement of pragmatic and moral legitimacy in the Model thus helped to address why the diffusion of this case was considered as successful. By demonstrating the usefulness of the Diffusion Model in analysing the CM case, the ideas of ‘communication duality’ (Tool & SM-SG dimension), ‘rhetorical justification’ and legitimacy obtaining were also enhanced accordingly.

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Although the rest part in the Diffusion Model was not used in the analysis of this case, after the six diffusion cases were analysed, it could be used to address the reason of why the CM practice was not institutionalised in the end (this discussion will be found at the end of section 6.4).

6.4.2 Analysis for Case 2 Call for Papers (CFP)

Call for Papers (short for CFP) as one of Q's best practices was first introduced in the meeting with Q's president during his visit at U (he introduced 10 Q's best practices at that meeting).

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
2 CFP	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

Table 6-3: Analysis for Case 2 Call for Papers (CFP)

Table 6-3 showed that Case 2 'Call for papers' (CFP) was not a successful diffusion case but it achieved some pragmatic legitimacy at the pathos stage. As will be seen later, the reason CFP has obtained legitimacy at pathos is because its benefits have been partially justified (i.e. it is 'harmless' to try CFP), and in addition, the initial diffuser's (Q's president's) good characteristics and hence his 'credibility' has also been demonstrated in his communication. At the logos stage, because the new diffuser (Q's representatives "A" and "R") has not done enough in communication, the previously achieved legitimacy has been largely weakened. Moreover, they are unable to continuously gain new legitimacy at both the logos and the ethos stages, which has caused the rejection of the CFP practice – it was never used again.

(1) *Pathos justification*. Because this practice was initially introduced in the Clinic Meeting (CM) exercise, by taking the advantage of the good communication in CM, we also had good opportunities to communicate what a CFP was, how to do it, and what was the result of using it in India and so on (Observation diary, 12 May 2006).

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The president said that “at Q, we use call for paper to organise a conference. We don’t look for speakers ourselves, and instead we send out call for paper to a particular community¹⁸, people who want to become a speaker will write to us. They need to submit a paper of their knowledge which they want to present at the conference. Our staff, like J and D (U’s two events commissioners) here, will chose the best papers and invite them as speakers.”

“How many responses can you receive for each call?” J asked him.

“The numbers are different depending on different topics, but ...”, the president thought for a few seconds, “let’s say about 80 average”.

“Oh, about that many, that’s very good then.” J said.

“It is very good”, D also said.

“Wow”, the rest of us looked at each other and share the feelings of a bit surprise but cheerful.

“It is wonderful and we don’t have to do anything. You can image what a massive save of time!” the president continued.

He also said that by doing CFP, people at Q did not have to worry about the number of delegates either, since CFP could also raise the awareness for the conference in a community, people could register themselves for attending the conference even they were not interested in being speakers. In that case, Q staff could easily “make the event fly” (fieldwork notes transcripts & Meeting Minutes 12-13 May 2006). To hear how easily Q could receive 80 responses from issuing a CFP sounded very cheerful for us because the low number of delegates was the biggest problem we were encountering by that time.

During the pathos communication, different voices were allowed which helped to build an open communication environment. While most of us were excited in thinking about the number of 80 responses, one of our events commissioners, J, talked about her concern which was not positive – based on her experience and the opinions from the outside experts, she doubted that if the CFP practice could really work out in the business context in the UK.

Her concern raised Q’s president’s attention on the difference between the Indian and the UK market although he was not convinced that this would affect the use of CFP. The president thought about her question and then said to us, “well, let’s just try it at U now, do an experiment in the UK and we will see. In fact, we need to do a lot of experiments in the UK, not only CFP, but also others

¹⁸ People who have similar interests are organised together as a group.

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model (other practices)” and “it is no harm to try these (practice)”. “Yes”, most of us (including myself) agreed as we did not see it would be any harm to give CFP a “go”. (fieldwork notes transcripts).

During pathos justification, the president did not just give away his information, he also listened to the manager when she was talking about her concerns of CFP, and made a feedback on her view by suggesting giving CFP a trial. Meanwhile, the rest of us in the communication also gave our feedback towards his suggestion, which was to agree to try CFP in our work. It could be said that communication at this stage could be considered as a two-way process too.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. Through the pathos justification, a certain degree of pragmatic legitimacy was achieved. Although the benefits that CFP could bring to company U was not completely justified, CFP’s ‘no harm’ and the possibility of being success indicated its potential benefits which was expected by staff members at company U. This was because through the SM-SG processes, the “80 responses” was not only an exciting number, it generated good feelings in us as well as conveyed the sense that the benefits of CFP could also be achieved at U.

It was fair to also mention that at the pathos stage, communication which generated positive emotions in people was not the only reason that the adoption of CFP was decided. To give it a try was an idea suggested by Q’s president, the fact that he was the new company owner could not avoid affecting the acceptance of CFP initially. However, because he did not use his power to force people to do it, and instead he provided good reasons in his communication that to use CFP would be harmless for the company and it could even be a chance to success (to get speakers and delegates), the sense made out of this fact helped us to shape his image. He was not considered as a person who was strict to hierarchy although he was on top of it; he did not use much of his ‘power’, but rather tried to persuade us. This image added him credibility as being a trustful diffuser, and thus obtained the CFP practice the pragmatic legitimacy which appeared to be more convincing.

(2) *Logos justification.* This practice was not being fully diffused by Q until it was ‘pushed’ by Q’s representatives “A” & “R” when they came to work with us at U. The U’s manager J, who had previously pointed out the potential lack of

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interests for CFP in the UK to Q's president again expressed her view to "A" and "R". Different from the communication that the president did when he first heard her idea, "A" and "R" completely ignored what she said, and acted in a way which suggested that they did not want to hear this. It was written in my diary as "we all knew that they must hear the manager, but they were looking at somewhere else (their notes or laps), try to avoid eye contacts with any of us. This lasted for a few seconds, and as a compromise or maybe to avoid the awkward situation, the manager herself finally said that 'oh, well, we'll see what (events) we can use CFP for ... maybe the knowledge management conference I am researching now" (Observation diary 2 June 2006).

As mentioned in Chapter 5, although this CFP was announced to a wide area, the result of issuing this CFP was very disappointing as we did not receive any response from it. Even we were suggested to have a try of this practice, we still expected it could be useful for us. In the interview, U's sales manager said, "I've been a little disappointed about the response because I thought to try a different engine at sales we should get a better response than we did. The thing I would say I was really hoping we get input, new ideas from Q ..."

The other manager J, who had always concerned about the use of CFP in the UK said to me, "You know, I always worry about this Call for Paper, since one of the KM (knowledge management) experts told me that this thing won't work in the UK, people just won't be interested. Obviously, he was right. Now, I have to look for my speakers like what we use to do." (fieldnotes and transcripts).

When this undesirable result happened, we hoped that Q could say or do something to help us in either clarifying the reason why the trial of CFP at U was not successful or discussing what could be done next to get things right. However, we found that communication regarding 'what was going wrong' was completely missed. "A" & "R" simply let the whole thing happen with no suggestions or discussions (we did not hear from Q's president either, however, we were not sure if he was informed of this result or not). Their attitudes were very different from before when they appeared to always have so many things to teach us. Nobody from Q tried to find out the reason of why CFP worked well in Indian and other branches but not in the UK; neither did anyone ask us to do research on this.

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One staff member said in the interviews that, “expectation was raised...a thing was failed, expectations dropped with it. There was no Plan B (to) further keep expectations up there.” Another one said that Q was “very eager and optimistic, which was always good; but they needed to have a Plan B... and they didn’t really have anything (plan B) suggest to us”.

One staff who had felt that “when they (Q) were saying the Call for Paper, I thought this was a good idea...” also made a suggestion that “maybe we didn’t have the correct target...we have to dig deeper to see what happened...” (interview transcriptions). Another sales girl suggested in a more realistic way, “I didn’t expect like whatever works there works here, but that’s why I think we need someone here to just, you know, give the voice of reason. They (Q) are suggesting (in a way in which) it definitely guarantees to work here. We need people here on the management team to check out whether what they are saying is valuable here... if they point it out from our perspective, instead of just from the Indian perspective.” (interview transcriptions).

In looking at the reason of why the use of CFP at U was not successful, people at U thought that it could be the difference of markets that influenced the result. “In India, it’s a growing market, whereas Europe is really quite steady”; “it’s two different markets, need two different approaches”; “it (CFP) has to be adapted and modified to suit the local market condition” (interview transcriptions). However, the above sense was not conveyed to Q. It might have left a possibility that if Q communicated with us on analysing the reason of failure and to continuously justify it, we might give CFP another opportunity to be adopted.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? At the logos justification period of the CFP practice, unfortunately, no pragmatic (or other type of) legitimacy was obtained. The reason was because *first*, the very disappointing trying of CFP at U conveyed the sense that this practice was no use for U in getting speakers and delegates. Although CFP’s potential benefits was assumed at the pathos stage which gained itself some degree of legitimacy, the unsuccessful result of its adoption could not support on continuously justifying the legitimacy, and it could even cause to lose the legitimacy which was already achieved. *Secondly*, the lack of communication and interests in exploring the reason of not being success did not show good characteristics or build good images of both “A” and

“R”. This could also affect their credibility as being diffusers. On this aspect, they also lost the opportunity of gaining CFP the pragmatic legitimacy. In addition, they chose to ignore what had happened rather than to understand it showed that they had put too much faith in their practices, but when things went wrong, they were vulnerable in terms of the failure.

(3) *Ethos justification*. In the diffusion of CFP, ethos justification from Q was not found. However, people at U generated a consensus suggested that “Q did show their lack of understanding of the UK market”. Moreover, Q’s way of diffusing the practices was also considered to be problematic by us: “Q people came here to say: I am correct, I am correct in all the terms, and this is the tool, this is the truth, this is the best practice for all the world; so if they work for me, they work for everyone”; “they believe too much in – the way works in India will definitely work here, which is a wrong assumption to make, as people here are with different attitudes, different countries and different cultures.” (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Because of the previous unsuccessful logos justification and its related inability of achieving pragmatic legitimacy, ethos stage lacked the basis of pursuing further (moral) legitimacy.

Q’s effort put in emphasising the usefulness of CFP initially and the lack of communication in justifying it in real applications (especially when it did not work out) suggested that 1) Q’s managerial practices could always sound good, but their usefulness was subject to many factors, i.e. culture, market. Therefore, its adoption should depend more on its real use for company U but less on what Q had said. 2) Whichever Q’s practice we decided to adopt, we had to take full responsibility of it because Q would only tell us how good it was, but would not (and perhaps could not) offer any help when problems occurred.

The Diffusion Model was helpful in analysing this case too because through demonstrating how the ‘objective dimension’ (pathos, logos and ethos justification period and some ideal features) and the ‘subjective dimension’ (SM-SG processes) of communication contributed to achieve or lose the legitimacy, the reason of why the practice diffusion was rejected could be explained. However, by drawing on the Model, there were still some issues which could not be fully addressed, for instance, 1) when the legitimacy was not obtained at

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model pathos and logos stage (especially the latter), the diffusion could be rejected immediately without going through the next ethos stage; 2) when legitimacy was not achieved at a period, how potential adopters' views would influence the further diffusion (which built part of the 'diffusion environment') was not reflected in this Model.

6.4.3 Analysis for Case 3 Business Plan (BP)

Although almost every company has its own business plan, Q considers that a very encouraging Business Plan (BP) with high targets to motivate their employees is one of their managerial practices.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
3 BP	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

Table 6-4: Analysis for Case 3 Business Plan (BP)

In the above table, Case 3 Business Plan (BP) was a completely failed diffusion case in the sense that it did not achieve any type of legitimacy at any of the diffusion stage at all, which unsurprisingly determined the rejection of this practice. The following analysis will show that in its diffusion, neither the benefits of the practice nor the credibility of the diffuser has been justified at the pathos stage; at the logos stage, the usefulness of BP has not been justified because it has rather presented to be "unrealistic and unachievable". A consensus of terminating BP has been achieved in the end.

(1) *Pathos justification.* Having mentioned in Chapter 5 that BP was suggested by Q's representatives "A" and "R" during the time when they were working at U. This case was similar to Case 1 CM because both of them involved a "hands-on" experience of applying the practice. In this case, Q's representatives "A" and "R" set up a business plan for company U which was supposed to be an example to show us how BP as a practice should be used. However, compared to the pathos justification of Case1 which was "inspiring and motivating", it was hardly to define that there was a pathos stage to initially encourage the diffusion

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model of BP. In one of our sales meetings in which “A” & “R” also participated, BP was talked about as the following (observation diary, 5 June 2006).

Sales meeting started at 9.45 this morning when all the sales staff got into the office. Same as yesterday, A and R also attended the meeting. We moved our chairs around and sat close to one another in a circle. When we just about to report on our daily work as usual, A suddenly asked, “does U have a business plan?” He asked this question as if this issue suddenly came into his mind.”Oh, yes, we have”, the sales & marketing manager answered. He looked like had no idea how did this conversation happen.

“We need to have a business plan. Q usually has a business plan which we put higher targets in it. It is Q’s best practice. Maybe U should have a new business plan, which I and R will help you guys to build one”, A said and he also looked at R.

“Yes, yes, yes...” R constantly nodded her head and repeated, “we can help”.

“OK, sounds great!” the sales & marketing manager said and he looked like happy.

The rest of us sat quietly.

As for me, what they said did not raise any particular feeling in me. I did not feel excited about having a new plan (which could motivate me to achieve a better sales performance as I later heard); neither did I feel unhappy. I wrote in my diary as “A & R want to set up a new business plan for us, but none of us seems to be interested – we do not even talk about it between ourselves. Maybe a plan is always an issue for the managers only as we are not really involved in the setting up” (observation diary, 5 June 2006).

This sales meeting could not be described as a pathos diffusion stage because it was solely a one-way message given by which we were informed of having a new plan but with no interactions and no discussions. Even within this one-way communication, information given was very limited. By that time, we did not understand why BP was Q’s best practice apart from the fact we knew that it set up higher targets. We did not understand either why we already had a business plan but still needed a new one. What was the benefit? Of course, we did not know how the BP was going to be built.

Legitimacy obtained? At this time, no legitimacy was achieved because of the inadequate communication. Since we knew almost nothing about it, we were not aware of the benefits of using it, and hence we were unable to see whether or not it fitted our company’ interests. Accordingly, the decision of setting up a new business plan was not made collectively as we could not say yes or no.

Other SM-SG. The decision of using BP practice was made with very limited communication suggested that this was not a practice we would feel excited about. Instead, it was the thing that Q (through their representatives) wanted us to do. Therefore, the sense conveyed to us was that the initial adoption of BP was not because it was diffused at U but rather because of something else, i.e. the power – we had to do what the owner company expected us to do.

(2) Logos justification. At the logos stage which was the time when BP was being set up, there was no instruction of how to develop a BP, and no discussion either regarding why/how an ‘ambitious’ BP could motivate employees. I used the word ‘ambitious’ to describe BP was because according to the later interview with our marketing manager, it seems that only him had been told by “A” that “part of Q’s strategy is (to have) the business plan (which is) to put objectives slightly more than you are going to achieve...you aim higher rather than to sell real target” (interview transcriptions).

To set up this BP was mainly done by “A” and “R”, however, the three senior managers at U were also involved. In addition, one finance staff was asked to “put together the actual figures as well as estimate the predict figures for the future month” (interview transcriptions), and another one was only asked to put these data into a spreadsheet, so it could be convenient for “A” and “R” to look at (It was after interviewing the above mentioned people I got to know the above information). For most of the other employees (including myself), we did not know how the new business plan was produced which just suddenly became existing.

In setting up this plan, most of us were not involved or fully involved. In the interviews, one sales person said that she was not involved in at all. Another one thought that he was partially involved because in the sales meeting, “A” & “R” told us that we need to have a business plan, in which sense, he thought he was informed that the company would have a new business plan (as clarified in the email interview, this was the only reason he considered himself as “partially involved”). Another sales member told me that U’s managers had asked him “what do you think about the events you are selling”, but he was not sure why he was asked. He assumed that it was for the business plan. So he could not really tell whether he was partially involved or not at all.

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When the business plan was finally made and was shown to us, we were asked to read it through and give our opinions. It was written in my diary (Observation diary 9 June 2006) as the following:

... J (one of our manager) told us that a business plan was saved in S drive (our intranet), and A & R wanted us all to have a look and then to give our thoughts on it. I looked at it, the first impression was that it was not realistic and couldn't be done! As I can see, the target listed in the plan is far more than what we can reach. Based on our current situation, if we can have 5 delegates for a workshop, we would not consider it is still a problematic event, and actually we say it is alright. The fact is we are trying to get even 4 people to run a workshop, but in most of the cases we only have 2 or 3. However, the target delegate number for each workshop is 12! It is almost the number that U has for a workshop at its good time I think. If we can still get that number for each workshop, and 80-100 for a conference, what is the point the owner has to sell the company! As for me, a number like 8 could be reasonable, however, even with this number they should teach us some of their best selling techniques, otherwise, the number won't just go up by itself.

The others also said in the interviews, "it was a business plan more for show... rather than a business plan that was going to be used effectively...not what a real business plan should be. They wanted the business plan done up with no methodology and plan, with no instructions on who should get involved. If the sales team were consulted, I would definitely from the sales side to see how the events were changed ..."; "my impression of this business plan was they tried to increase the sales without increasing the resources, which was impossible...this was only talking about sales, I thought business plan should cover more dimensions of organisations... (this was) just a spreadsheet which comparing last year's figures with their forecaster figures." (interview transcription).

Although we made it very clear and explicitly that these sales targets were too high to be considered as "realistic", none of the items in this plan was ever changed. Most importantly, in terms of the different voices that we presented, nothing was ever discussed. In other words, "A" and "R" did not justify themselves of why we needed the high targets. Perhaps they could tell us a bit more of how the high target had motivated staff at Q to sell more. The worst situation was that they did not even consider that they had to justify.

As it could be seen, at the logos stage, it lacked communication opportunities, channels and free environment. It was not a two-way process either given the fact that our voices were ignored. Even one of the managers who was involved

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in setting up the BP said to me, “I was asking him (A), how could you put things like these in a business plan? Because there is no proof, no justifications of how these figures came out and how we are going to do it... but he said, don’t worry, just put that in... Well, it is not a business plan, I would say, it is a wish list – we wish we could do this and we could do that.” (observation diary 14 June 2006).

Apart from one U’s senior manager (the wife of U’s chairman) who did not think that everybody should be involved in setting up a business plan, which she said that “I think you can’t involve everybody. It takes their time of work... it was mainly the three of us (three senior managers of U)... I think it is the thing I found, if you have too many people involved, it’s getting difficult to come to a decision” (interview transcription); the most of us (especially sales staff) thought that the plan could be made better if we were included in the communication. “I think perhaps a better way of doing it would be to get input from more parties, for example, the commissioning people would have an idea where the markets go...also it’s very important individual sales people involved, because we would know from talking to the customers what the waves are in the market place... ”; “The sales people who have to do the target have to also be involved in it...in order to determine that these targets can be achieved.” ; “If they involve us in the business planning, we can contribute more and (the business plan) can also be more realistic.” (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Because of the poor communication at the logos stage, the real experience of setting up a BP was not able to justify the practice itself (like what Case 1 CM achieved); instead, the sense we made retrospectively on our experience suggested that this business plan could be unrealistic and unachievable, which did not gain BP any type of legitimacy.

In addition, based on what had happened, we made the sense that it did not matter if we agreed or disagreed with the plan. At the end, “they said that OK, this is the business plan, this is the thing you have to do” (interview transcriptions). This showed that BP was used but not diffused at U could be caused by power issues.

(3) *Ethos justification.* Because of the broken communication at the logos stage, the ethos justification was not able to continue. However, some individual communications happened between us shared the understanding that Q’s BP

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model was not a practice to motivate employees' performance, but rather something to make the business look nice. "They (Q's representatives) came here only to say what we have to do but not to hear any more about our work, about our market... they came to say this is the business plan, and I don't want to hear if it is correct or not". "It wasn't a business plan that we could take it seriously...it just to keep them happy." (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Because of the absence of ethos communication, no moral legitimacy in terms of the BP's diffusion was obtained. However, the lack of communication again conveyed a sense to us at U as some of Q's staff members (at least the two representatives "A" and "R") did not seem to understand the real meaning of a practice's diffusion. When they could use other sources (i.e. power) to get us (potential adopters) use a practice (even temporarily), they would not care if the practice was really accepted or not. The analysis of the BP's diffusion also constructed the meaning of Q's practices diffusion as only meeting "their (Q's) objectives, but not according to our (U's) objectives" (interview transcriptions).

In analysing Case 3, the use of the Diffusion Model contributed to show the situation of what would happen if 'communication duality' (pathos, logos & ethos and SM-SG) and the achievement of legitimacy as described in the Model was not followed. This was considered as showing the usefulness of the Model in a different way. However, by using this Model, it could be difficult to explain why the diffusion was started from the logos period but not the pathos (considering the initial adoption of BP was suggested by 'power' rather than by the pathos justification). Although it partly demonstrated why the diffusion was not successful, an implication for reconsidering the starting point of the Model could be made.

6.4.4 Analysis for Case 4 Voice of Customer (VoC)

Voice of Customer (VoC for short) as a sales practice was first mentioned by Q's president in his visit to U but its diffusion was considered as happening during A and R's stay at U.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
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4 VoC	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

Table 6-5: Analysis for Case 4 Voice of Customer (VoC)

The above table showed that VoC obtained legitimacy at its pathos stage but not the logos and ethos stage. As will be seen later, this is because at pathos, the benefits of the VoC have been communicated. A relatively ideal communication conducted by the diffuser (“A” and “R”) has also gained themselves some credibility which has therefore reinforced the legitimacy. On the contrary, the lack of communication at the logos stage has eliminated the achieved pragmatic legitimacy. New legitimacy has not been obtained since the VoC has appeared to be less useful. As a consequence, the moral legitimacy is not able to be achieved at the ethos stage which has finally contributed to the rejection of VoC.

(1) Pathos justification. At one of our sales meetings, A and R explained the practice of Voice of Customer (VoC) to us which was written in my diary (Observation diary, 12 June 2006) as the following.

Today, all the sales staff came to work a bit earlier than usual (I don't know why but it just happened), therefore, our sales meeting started a bit earlier too. At 9.35, the marketing & sales manager summoned the meeting. We pushed our chairs and gathered together in the middle of the office. A and R were in the meeting, and one of our events commissioners (the chairman's wife) also attended.

As usual, each of us reported on the current status of the event(s) we were selling. When all of us finished reporting (including the marketing manager himself), A then asked us “I want to know how your guys usually talk to the customers? Do you usually provide them information or you get information from them?” The marketing & sales manager said, “usually we call the customer because they've downloaded an event brochure. We call them to make sure that they've got all the information they need. We also ask if they want to attend or not. I would say we normally provide them the information, but sometimes when chatting with people, we get their information too.”

“Well, here is the thing”, A said, “you've been sending out information but did not get enough information back. Sales people at Q are very good at talking to the customers and getting useful information. We call it the voice of customer and that's very important for us.”

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R further added, "voice of customer was something we learned from M (a big company who is very good at sales), we use it in Q India, China, Singapore, and Malaysia. It is very useful."

"In India, sales staff has to talk to as many customers as possible. By talking to the customers, they find more information about them, which could be about themselves, their company and their business, all kind of information."

"OK." The marketing & sales manager said, and sounded very interested. The rest of us sat quietly, but we listened.

A kept on saying, "the information is very useful, it helps us to improve our sales, a big improvement, because when you know the customer better you can sell them better. Not only this, it also helps us to develop new business, and to do all kinds of things." A sounded particularly excited, he was keeping on talking without stopping.

I took a look around while he was talking. Most people seemed to listen to him carefully. I thought the voice of customer was a good idea if it could help with the sales. In the meantime, I heard A said "at U, you guys have to use voice of customer too. I am sure it is going to be very good for U."

"Excellent, that sounds like a very good idea. We should do it." Our marketing manager said.

"Good, good." A said, "so each of the sales should have an excel sheet to write down the voice of customer and then we can talk."

"Sounds good to me! We could talk about the voice of customer in our sales meeting." The marketing manager suggested.

"Yes, that's good. We always get information from our customer but we never thought to document them and to use them better". The events commissioner complemented.

Later on the day, R also showed us an example of a VoC sheet which a sales member at Q generated. Based on the written information on the sheet we found that the customer's company (the one that Q's sales member talked to) was implementing a new software, they would need a training for their employees to learn how to use the new software and manage their data afterwards. This was what A & R called the new business opportunity because Q could then sell them the training service and perhaps the consultancy service too.

Same as me, the other sales members also felt that VoC was not a bad idea. They thought that (as I found later in the interviews), "it (VoC) could help us understand a lot more about our customer and more importantly, we can act on that information"; "We get the VoC so we can get back to them (customers) in the future date and sell them what they want" (interview transcriptions). However, from what they said as well as what I thought myself, the key reason that we decided to use VoC in our daily work was because we hoped it would improve our sales performance.

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Generally, at the beginning of diffusing VoC, the communication could be seen as sufficient. For instance, Q staff introduced the background of VoC, which was derived from a “very successful” conference company and was proved by Q itself which was also a profitable company. They further explained what VoC was, and how useful it could be. Moreover, a VoC sheet was also presented to us as a sample of showing how it worked.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. Through the pathos communication, we understood that VoC could help to boost sales and seek for new business opportunities. Therefore, it was going to bring benefits for us. The pragmatic legitimacy for VoC practice was thus achieved at the pathos stage. Meanwhile, by introducing the VoC practice as something used by the two successful and profitable companies M and Q, it also conveyed the sense of the diffuser’s (the two organisations’) credibility, which thus gained the pragmatic legitimacy too.

(2) Logos justification. It was found that when VoC was being put into practice, many problems occurred. For instance, we found that people in the UK were less willing to answer a sales call. Even they did, what they said could be very simple and brief – they would (not) attend an event, but they were not likely to give the reason themselves of why. In one of my previous diaries (26 April 2006), I found the records of two conversations (only part of them) when I was making sales calls.

Conversation 1

“Mr Holden, as agreed, I am still holding the delegate place for you to attend the balanced scorecard workshop, I just wanted to know when you would be able to confirm your registration.”

“Thank you but no, I am no longer available to attend it now.”

There was a few seconds silence because I did not expect this answer. He was one of my contacts who were very likely to book the workshop.

“Oh, so do you mind if I ask what the reason is.”

“Em, it’s just the time is not right.”

In fact, based on my experience, this type of answer is always a quick and effective answer. Even if the real reason was about the workshop content, the high price or something else, to blame the time will not make anyone unhappy, not to mention that it is the quickest way to finish the conversation.

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Conversation 2

Hi Ms Jones, I noticed that you had downloaded some workshop information from our website, I just wanted to make a quick call to check if you managed to get the brochure.

Yes. Thanks.

Is there any other information you would like to know?

Not for now, if I need I will contact you. Thank you, bye.

... The line went dead. I even did not have the chance to say good-bye to her.

When we told “A” & “R” our tele-selling problems, I had also personally hoped that they could demonstrate how to talk to a customer in this situation. The rest of the sales team also expected that “A” & “R” could teach us some skills and techniques given the fact that they were two of Q’s best sales. “I think we expect guidelines from them, achieving those (practices), leaning those processes and applying them, and I don’t think we got all the necessary guidelines... they told us how (very generally), but obviously it’s a case as we are leaning and they are teaching, they’ve not educated us, they’ve not showed us the roads, they’ve not actually followed us step by step; they’ve mentioned it and they just didn’t help us to implement it.” (interview transcription).

Because we could seldom get any useful information from our customers, we just wrote whatever the customer had said in our VoC sheet. When we were sharing the VoC information at our sales meeting, “A” noticed the problem. He stopped us and told us that “when customers say they will or will not attend an event, that is a ‘sales feedback’ but not a VoC. VoC should include more intelligence which we can use to develop our business” (fieldnotes transcripts). At this stage, “A” and “R” were still happy to clarify the difference between VoC and the sales feedback. Their communication was helpful because it made the thing Q expected sales members to actually work on clearer.

However, when we pointed out the problem that we could hardly get any business intelligence, “A” said that “you just talk to them, and make them feel excited.” (fieldnotes transcripts). In terms of the question of ‘how’, how to talk, how to make them excited, and how to get VoC out of them, neither “A” nor “R” had provided any useful instructions or suggestions. One of the sales said that “they (A & R) say you have to do that, so definitely I say OK, (because) I am

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working here and I have to do, but how... you know, they ask you to do but nobody tell me how to do". (interview transcription).

It could be said that, at the Logos stage, the communication between Q and us was only limited to differentiate VoC to sales feedback and to share the VoC that each individual sales member documented (if there was any). However, for those more important questions which we tried to show, for instance, our customers were less willing to talk, "A" & "R" did not communicate to us.

One sales staff also made a more general comment in terms of the practices (not only VoC) that Q tried to diffuse at U, "initially it looked great that when all those best practices were coming, but when we came into delivering, the communication was really bad" (interview transcriptions). In my diary (14 June 2006) I said:

We are trying to increase our sales and we are also trying to get VoC, it looks like there should not be any conflict in between because both require talking to customers. However, in the situation when we only have limited time to talk to our customer (they would finish the call or even hang up the phone if the conversation gets too long), this could be a problem. The reason is because when trying to get a customer to register for a workshop, the conversation is normally very targeted, i.e. to explain what a particular event could bring to the customer etc.; however, when trying to get the VoC, a sales might need to talk very generally and ask broad questions, such as 'what are the topics you and your colleagues are interested'? Based on my sales experience, the two things could hardly be done in the same sales call, or at least in the UK.

When I checked my point of view with the other sales member in the interviews, one of them said, "it is (a question) that which is the way that you have to follow, which one is the main thing that you have to do" (interview transcriptions). When we asked "A" and "R" "which is the thing we have to focus?" "A" quickly helped us make a choice by saying that "getting VoC is important than getting a single sales figure" (fieldnotes transcripts), but he did not mention any reason.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Based on the communication that happened in our sales meeting, Q staff made a sense that we were confused by the two concepts: VoC and sales feedback, which they then further clarified. This helped us to understand better the VoC practice. In this sense, "A" and "R" were trying to continuously justify the legitimacy of VoC.

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By drawing on the sense made on A & R's communication during the pathos period, one of the most outstanding benefits of VoC was to increase the sales figures at U. However, at the logos stage, no evidence had ever shown that it could really help (at least for a short term). As for sales members, the increase in sales was vital because our sales performance (which also links to our financial income) was judged by the sales figures we could achieve every month rather than the number of VoC items we could document. Furthermore, the lack of communication on discussing the 'conflict' between focusing on getting sales and getting VoC also weakened or even eliminated its pragmatic legitimacy as achieved so far.

(3) Ethos justification. Without addressing or discussing the problems which we really had, instead, "A" repeated in our sales meeting by saying that "you guys should keep on getting customers' voices, this is really important. It will help us to build new business in the UK and maybe in Europe, to develop more consultancy projects." (fieldnotes transcript). At this time, he did not mention how important this was going to help with our sales; neither did he mention 'how' we could get more customers' voices.

Our marketing & sales manager said in the interview as "A was in the UK to generate consulting business, where the big box of Q is... and what's very important for A when he was here was to be able to understand what was going on in those organisations... he didn't entirely work out, I mean he was really meant to be here to help us, maybe to do some sales himself based on the hints and tips he learned from Indian, the same to R when she was here...he didn't really work out as it should be done in terms of he is helping give ideas to actually create sales, I mean increase numbers. I think to certain extent, we need to look for the answers by ourselves, it's down to us to find ways by talking to customers, finding out what we can do then." (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Ethos justification failed to achieve moral legitimacy for the VoC practice. This was again because the pragmatic legitimacy was not obtained at the previous logos period. When the benefit of using VoC could not be justified, it was difficult and almost impossible to continuously justify that whether the practice could be socially accepted.

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A very likely ‘cue’ to be extracted from representative “A” and “R”’s action of merely focusing on the importance of building Q’s new business was that they only cared about what was important for them (and Q), but did not care what could VoC do for the staff at U. This sense was also retrospectively connected to the one which was conveyed in the analysis of the first few cases, i.e. CFP – whether or not we adopted Q’s practice depended on whether it would be useful for us at U. As a consequence, this type of sense further suggested that although Q often said that their practices were going to help U (maybe they really thought so), what Q tried to let U do was based on the consideration of their own benefits rather than U’s.

In analysing the case of VoC, the Diffusion Model was helpful because by drawing on ‘communication duality’, for example, how the pathos, logos and ethos communication were conducted and how senses were made & given through communication, the achievement or loss of legitimacy was explained. This therefore offered the reason of why VoC had different diffusion results at different stages as well as why the diffusion was not successful in the end.

In addressing the situation when an ethos justification was carried out but based on an unsuccessful logos stage, the analysis suggested that at the ethos stage (but not the other two), the achievement of moral legitimacy was mostly constrained by the previous achievement of pragmatic legitimacy rather than the ethos communication. It seems like only when the logos stage gained a practice its pragmatic legitimacy, the diffusion could be continued to achieve the next level of legitimacy. Otherwise, it could lead to the rejection directly. This, however, was not demonstrated in the Model.

6.4.5 Analysis for Case 5 Sales Report (SR)

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Sales Report (short for SR) as another practice was introduced by “A” and “R” just after the VoC practice was brought in company U.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
5 SR	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained for managers but NOT obtained for sales staff	Used but not diffused

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	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained for managers but NOT obtained for sales staff	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained in general	

Table 6-6: Analysis for Case 5 Sales Report (SR)

Case 5 Sales Report (SR) was a slightly complicated case because its analysis will be divided into two aspects. As it will be seen, for the managers, the legitimacy of SR has been achieved at both the pathos and the logos stage because they have found that it could be used by them as a very useful management tool (i.e. to monitor sales staff's working performance). However, for most ordinary sales staff, the pathos and logos justification of SR has not obtained any legitimacy because they could see neither the benefits for them to use SR nor a 'decent' reason of why managers had favors in using SR (i.e. to control them but not to trust or motivate them). SR was used at company U as requested by the managers, but it was not successfully diffused as most of the people did not wish to use it. In general, the moral legitimacy of SR has not been achieved due to the conflict of interests.

(1) *Pathos justification.* Similar to the diffusion of VoC, the pathos communication for diffusing SR was also happened in the sales meeting which we had with "A" and "R". It was recorded in my diary (Observation diary, 13 June 2006) as the following.

Yesterday, A told us to take a note of what the customer said when we were talking to them, and also to document the information into a VoC excel sheet. Today's sales meeting we shared the VoC that each of us had prepared.

When we were going through our VoC sheets, A noticed that what we wrote down and shared was not the type of information he had expected. According to his explanation, what we have had was sales feedback, for example, someone could not register for our event because the time was clapped with his other engagements. It was not a VoC because it could not indicate any business opportunities as Q wished.

A then thought about another question and he asked us "by average, how many people do you call every day?" We looked around at one another and then G (one of the sales member) said "I would say roughly 15-20 per day." "What about the others?" A asked again.

"About the same", T (a sales member) said. "Yes", I agreed.

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“Em, that is not enough.” A said, “What about you, AI?” He asked the marketing & sales manager.

“Normally I call 35-40 people every day, but some of them could be very good conversations.” The marketing manager said.

“OK, that’s alright. That’s a reasonable number.” A said. “You guys have to call more people; at least 30 phone calls should be made for each day. The more people you call, the more information you can get. In fact, R has a sales report which she can share with all of you.”

“Yes, this sales report is company M’s (a very successful conference company) best practice and we got it for some reason.” R smiled to us, she looked very proud of having M’s sales report. “We’ve been using it in Q and it has been very good. Our sales team has to fill it in everyday and submit it to their supervisor before they go home. I will email it to all of you after this meeting.” R said to us.

After the sales meeting, R forwarded us the format of the sales report. It was not a complicated form to be filled in, but it asked detailed information including a list of companies which were called for the day. Another thing I noticed was that in this report, there was also a section of “VOC” voice of customer. In terms of R’s email, we should start to use this report immediately.

The senior managers at U seemed like this sales report very much, especially the chairman’s wife D and the marketing manager. When D was sitting on her chair and looking at the sales report, she said to herself but all of us can hear, “we have our own sales report, but this is better. It asks for how many people you spoke to not only how many calls you made. This is good. Our sales people should use this format for their daily report.”

“Oh, yes, definitely.” The marketing manager followed her.

At the end of the day, I filled the form as 20 calls made in total; spoke to 5 companies and 5 people; no VOC; no leads generated (meaning actions); 2 contacts updated in the database. I emailed this form to the marketing & sales manager at 5.40, and left the office at 5.45 with the other girl (sales too) who gave me a lift to home every night.

When reviewing the process of how the communication was conducted to diffuse the SR practice, I found that it was basically a one-way information given process. In fact, I would rather describe the adoption of SR as a management decision. The reason was because on the one hand, what “R” had said about this practice raised U’s senior managers’ interests. Manager D (chairman’s wife) said, “I actually think they do their sales procedures well (meaning to fill in SR daily) and the way they say you (sales staff members) have to call, it is true and it is right”. (interview transcription). U’s managers liked SR because they could have a better way to know how the sales members were doing their job (especially calling). Therefore, as a managerial practice of monitoring and

pushing sales performance, SR was adopted not only because “R” told us to, but also because it was supported by U’s senior managers.

However, on the other hand, what the other sales members thought about SR was different. I had to first admit that to my knowledge, sales members at U including myself did not enjoy making phone calls very much which could be due to the lack of motivation, the fear of being treated rudely on the phone by the customer, or even the English language problem (particularly for me). When I was chatting with another two sales staff (who were also good friends of mine in private), one said that “for that small amount of money (his salary), I really can’t be bothered.” “I know”, the other one said, “and sometimes people could be so rude, they hand up the phone on me.” (fieldnotes transcripts).

We found that instead of making a lot of ‘cold’ phone calls (a sales terminology, meaning calling someone who is not expecting the conversation), emails could do much better in most of the cases. “You know some people never answer the phones, but if you send them an email, they will try it back straight away. So I think we need to instead of just saying phone calls is our best way to contact people, just to train your staff to be cleverer than that, to use their judgements...” (interview transcriptions).

Therefore, to the most of us (sales staff) who thought that to use email was an important way to sell, when the SR only asked for the number of phone calls made but gave no consideration for emails or any other sales effort, we felt like it could not be a good practice as claimed by “R” and the other managers. In the end, what really mattered sales was the increase of sales figures rather than the number of customers we talked to or the calls we made.

One girl said in the interview that “I can call one number maybe in days. So I try again and again to get them (customer) back. Does that mean I am not being effective because I am chasing the same person?” (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Based on the sense which U’s senior managers made out of the SR, the benefits were recognised – to monitor and push sales staff to make more phone calls; it could be said that the pragmatic legitimacy was obtained. However, based on the sense made by most of the sales staff, the pragmatic legitimacy of SR was not achieved because SR’s

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benefits as perceived were *not* in line with theirs: it could not help them increase sales, but only asked them to make more sales calls which they did not want to.

(2) *Logos justification*. By using SR and submitting the information daily, "A" and the other managers were particularly interested in knowing why the members of sales staff were still making less phone calls. In one of the sales meetings, a conversation happened like this (Observation diary 20 June 2006):

"A" asked T (the sales girl who is also my friend), "why did you only call 18 people yesterday?"

"That was all I could do for yesterday". T replied and she quickly looked at D, U's manager (the chairman's wife).

"So you called 18 people and only spoke to 5 of them?" A looked at the printed sales report in his hand and asked again, "Why can't you get more time to call people?"

"I was not only calling, but also sending emails. You know when you talk to someone and they need information, I have to email them...and not only these, when you can't get people on the phone, I have to follow them by email too." T said.

"I don't know how many emails you send every day, but 18 calls a day is just so... you have to call much more than that, at least 30 a day." A said to T and also to the rest of us.

"Yes, at least 30", D agreed with A.

After the sales meeting, T called me on my direct line saying that, "did you hear what A said to me earlier, I knew I didn't make that many calls as they want, but I have been working, I sent many emails to follow up." She sounded a bit agitated.

I said to her that "don't worry about him (A); you just do whatever you should do for your job. About the 30 calls a day, I think we just have to try our best to do it, but be honest, I don't know if I can manage that or not. I just wanted to get bookings, it shouldn't matter if we call or we email."

"Exactly", she said.

Later that day, I got a call from another sales staff who was asking me in a low voice, "How many calls did you put in the report"?

"30" I said.

"Did you really make 30 calls?" he asked me.

"Sort of", I said, "but that was not the number of people I talked with today. I only talked to 8."

"OK." He stopped for a little while and then suggested to me, "You know, I think 30 is just too many. We can't really do that. I also talked to T (the sales girl), we got to have a similar number I think."

"So how many calls did you put then?" I asked him.

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"Well, I would put 20 to 25." He said.

"But we were asked to make at least 30 calls", I said, "I will probably do above 25".

"But...", he were trying to say something but eventually said that "alright then, I will do 25."

On that day, the number showed in my SR for the total number of phone calls made was 28.

From this conversation, several things could be found. First, the SR practice was well diffused between U's senior managers because it helped them managing the staff. Secondly, it was not diffused between sales staff because they could not see how SR would help them in sales but rather pushed them in making more 'cold' callings which they did not like at all. Thirdly, there was no communication in terms of why calling people was better than sending emails and vice versa, and hence both sides kept on thinking in their own ways. Fourthly, the communication happened also revealed the lack of trust of management team (including "A") on their staff members. The management team did not completely believe staff members when they were doing their sales job. If they did not make sales calls, the managers would lose the control of what they were really working on. As a consequence, managers started to push on the number of calls to be made, and this caused the implicit resistance from staff member which they then made up the numbers.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? For the reasons as discussed above, the pragmatic legitimacy of the SR practice was maintained when it was diffused in managers; however, it was not achieved when it was diffused in the sales staff members. This can be proved by the fact that we (sales members) tried to stop using SR for several times, i.e. we made an agreement between ourselves for not submitting the SR in the evening. However, our managers (not "A" himself) kept on reminding us to use it, because it was very important for them to know what each person was doing at work for the day. At the end, the numbers of calls in SR were made up, and we actually did most selling by emails.

SR was still used by sales staff because it was a management decision rather than it was well diffused. However, it became a decision from U's managers was because SR was adopted by the managers.

(3) *Ethos justification.* Following the logos communication, there was not much communication happened at the ethos stage. "A" & "R" did not talk about SR because they saw it was adopted at U. U's managers did not talk too much

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about SR because they seemed to be happy by seeing the number of calls we made in the report. We (the sales members) did not talk to either the managers or “A” & “R” about how we thought of SR because we kept them happy and we could still do selling in our ways.

When using SR, we also found that we spent too much time on the paperwork, and some of them even overlapped. For example, we have to do a VoC excel sheet every day and in the meantime, we also need to fill in the scion of VoC in the SR too. “They are putting the emphasis on the metrics (SR), noting down the records, but they are not making it clear to us why we should be doing that.” (interview transcriptions).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? The exclusion of “email” in the SR practice itself conveyed a sense that “A” & “R” did not fully respect the way sales staff worked at U, neither did U’s senior managers. The inability or the unwillingness of them to understand why we (sales) preferred to use emails rather than phone calls to sell also sent a message that there was a possibility that the management power might have blocked the communication – if SR could be pushed to use by involving ‘power’, it was not necessary for them to communicate.

Based on U’s managers’ strong interests in using SR, a sense that could be generated was to monitor sales members’ work was an important thing for them. Because of the over-emphasis on making sales calls and ignoring the other selling methods (i.e. email), it conveyed a sense that the action of selling was more important than the actual result of selling. Managers did not seem to care whether or not we could increase sales as long as we were making phone calls.

In terms of the above SM-SG activities, it could be seen that the moral legitimacy of SR was not obtained in general. Although from the surface, SR was being diffused at U, but without sales staff’s real effort in making phone calls and hence inputting real numbers in it, SR actually lost its initial reason of being implemented at U.

When using the Diffusion Model in analysing this case, it was particular useful in enhancing the following idea: the benefits demonstrated in pathos and logos

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model communication and its related SM-SG activities will gain a practice pragmatic legitimacy, but on the contrary, if the benefits failed to be seen or perceived, the legitimacy was not likely to be obtained. However, in term of explaining why SR was still used but without obtaining moral legitimacy, the Model was not complete in the sense that it did not show where the other factors (i.e. management power) would influence the diffusion and how. This was considered as part of the ‘diffusion environment’ which should be added in the Model.

6.4.6 Analysis for Case 6 Conference Call (CC)

Very similar to case 1 Clinic Meeting, Conference Call (short for CC) was considered to be another Q’s practice for communication and management.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
6 CC	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy partially obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

Table 6-7: Analysis for Case 6 Conference Call (CC)

According to the above table, the last case Conference Call (CC) was a rejected practice too. The following analysis will show that at the pathos stage, pragmatic legitimacy has been partially achieved because the benefits of using CC have been demonstrated through communication. However, the real application of CC has not maintained the legitimacy; instead, it has proved CC to be a “waste of time” which lost its legitimacy. The inability of demonstrating diffuser’s credibility at the pathos stage as well as the unjustified usefulness of CC have thus led to the failure in gaining moral legitimacy at the ethos stage.

(1) *Pathos justification.* CC was first suggested by Q’s president while he was in the UK. According to him, the CC practice was used by Q’s HQ in India to connect with the offices in other cities and countries, and therefore it could also be used as a communication channel between Q and U, which we could “share sales information, discuss problems, and seek for support from each other”

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model (fieldnotes transcripts). This idea was agreed by U's chairman who responded as "yes, I like the idea, and I think we can do this" (fieldnotes transcripts).

During "A"'s later stay at company U (by that time the other Q's representative "R" had already left for Indian), he further suggested that we should start to use the CC practice. It was written in my diary as the following (Observation diary 5 July 2006).

Today, at U's weekly meeting, A told us, "in India, we do weekly conference call with offices in Bangalore, Mumbai, China, Malaysia and Singapore, we constantly share information with each other and get support from each other. I think we should do the same for U. Staff at Q and U could talk over the phone every week to discuss sales problems if there is any, to share knowledge, and basically to help each other."

"That's a good idea", the events commission J said. "Would it be possible for Q to do some brochure typesetting for us?" J asked A.

"Absolutely", A said with no doubts. "We have a very good designing team, I am sure they can do some work for U."

"Oh, this is going to be very helpful. Here we have to send it to someone to do. They are good but they are very expensive. If Q could do this for us it will save us a lot of trouble." J sounded happy.

"Yes, let's talk about this in the conference call. We can have a conference call this Friday between team U and team; and J, you can tell them what you want, and I am sure they will do it for you." A came out with the idea of conference call.

"Sounds good, we can do 9.30 Friday morning", the marketing & sales manager suggested.

"I think 9.30 is a bit earlier, shall we do 10.30 instead?" the other events commissioner D said.

"Oh, yes, 10.30 is actually better, when everyone is here." The marketing manager agreed with D.

"Let me call the India office and see what time they will be available, but for sure we will do it on Friday". A said.

"Yes, that's true. We should find what is the right time for them because they are a few hours earlier than us. By the time we start our work here they could have gone home." D said.

On our weekly meeting the next day, "A" told us that the Indian office was going to call us at 11am on Friday morning to have a conference call.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG. As I was reflecting on it, communication at this stage was not very impressive. However, to some extent, "A" managed to communicate with us the benefits of CC although it was very briefly. From the

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discussion between “A” and “J” regarding J’s request for typesetting, we could also see how we were going to get help from Q in the future through CC. Therefore, the two-way communication allowed SM-SG activities to take place which suggested the achievement of the pragmatic legitimacy in some degree.

(2) *Logos justification.* As mentioned, because CC was a communication practice too, its legitimacy could also be justified during its real application. When CC was actually being put into practice, it was found that communication at this stage was rather one-way and inadequate. In most of the conference calls, people at company U found that “we reported straight to them (Q) and they were not helping us deal with our problems” (interview transcriptions).

Sales people said in the interviews that: “with this meeting, I was just repeating what we said in our sales meeting and it doesn’t seem like they listen to us... it is not useful to me at all”; “they were like talking to everyone what you have done and what you have been doing...at the end of the day, sales people are doing the report, so by reading the report, they should be able to catch that.” (interview transcriptions).

“They had no feedback and no response to what sales people had said”. U’s events commissioner D (the chairman’s wife) said that “it’s more for them rather than for us, because they got to know what we were working on and whatever we were doing... it was really us reporting to them” (interview transcriptions).

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Q seemed to be only interested in particular events and clients, for example, CMMI, an event that was developed by Q rather than by U. Because U’s sales manager was in charging of selling this event, most of the conversation in the CC happened was between Q and the manager, who therefore felt that the communication was “very useful” for him. However, for the rest of us, CC was useless. People said that “sometimes they (Q) say you can do this and you can do that, but they only participate in the events they are expecting on, you know, the CMMI...it is a one to one conversation and they only talk about the topic they want to talk”; “I don’t feel anything useful, I mean for me, it is useless”. One of the finance staff said in the interview that, “I don’t attend the meeting (CC), but most people think it’s a waste of time I think”. (interview transcriptions).

Q did not seem to keep any information for the call, which caused many communications delays. For instance, Q agreed at the conference call to produce an 'emailer' (or we call brochure at company U) for us to use in our promotional email campaign, however, most of the time they missed our deadlines. By the time they sent it to us, the scheduled email campaign had finished already. The worst situation was that staff at Q always repeatedly asked us for the same information which had already been provided to them. It was either asked by the same person or by several people.

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? Because we generally repeated the content of our sales report to Q, and Q did not give feedback to us, we made a sense that although Q introduced us the SR and CC, they did not seem to read it or listen to us. One of the managers who prepared the agenda and report before the CC said "I really don't think they have actually read it (the report). They never seem to know anything about our sales which was all written there." (fieldnotes transcripts).

Q's action of repeatedly asked for the same information also conveyed us an information regarding their internal communication. For example, if the same information was repeatedly asked by the same person, it showed that they might lack the ability of storing information (i.e. take a record etc.); if the same information was asked by several people, we could also make a sense of that – within Q, they did not communicate to or share information with one another, or at least they did not do it well.

Because the manager S in Q was appointed to take charge of all the communications between Q and U, when communication was not carried out smoothly (i.e. we could not get information/feedback from Q promptly), most of us at U thought that S should be responsible for it although this might due to the reason that he was overloaded at work. "Everyone wants one thing and everyone has to go to S, but he can only do one thing at a time. He can't do the business plan as well as to get in touch with the speaker, try to get some answers back as well as changing the PDF (event brochure)... so he is the bottle neck here in the communication" (interview transcription).

However, by sharing this idea in my research interviews & workshops, we managed to see that Q in fact had a very strict hierarchy in their management

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model systems. U's event commissioner D told me that "S transfers things to various people and he reports to the president, and the president decides. Here (at U), we are more efficient, because we (managers) can decide. We wouldn't bother asking G (U's chairman) for everything. Everything over there (at Q) has to be decided by the president. I think it's a big bottle neck, because he has to say yes to it and then it can go" (interview transcription).

Since this practice was itself a way of communication, the more unsuccessful conference calls we had, the less useful the practice was considered to be. By this I mean, theoretically, to have CC (as a way of communication) every week could logically justify the usefulness of itself (as a practice); but because most of the calls that we had with Q were considered as problematic, this fact actually proved the uselessness of this practice and thus prohibited its diffusion at U. Therefore, the pragmatic legitimacy for CC was not obtained through the SM-SG because of the insufficient communication. Moreover, since we realised that Q as the practice diffuser had communication problems itself, the communication practice came from it sounded less convincing. It thus made the achievement of pragmatic legitimacy more difficult.

(3) *Ethos justification*. Although the legitimacy of CC was not fully obtained during the previous justification stages, we had used CC for a relatively long time compared to most other practices. This was because as a management procedure, U's managers had to continuously organise CC to report to Q (although it was said to be a report for both sides). We had always wished to either cancel or move the call of the week. The following conversation happened between us was recorded by me. "Could we move it (CC) to the next week since I really do not have too much to say?" "I hope so. By reading our sales report they should be able to know what is happening, and I really think we do not need to repeat that on the phone" (fieldnotes transcripts).

Conversations like this happened almost every week before the CC. The events commissioner J often joined our conversations as above, and sometimes she proposed to the other managers to postpone a CC although it rarely happened. This situation lasted until the other events commissioner D (the wife of U's chairman) said that "it is just a waste of time for us, and perhaps for them too" (fieldnotes transcripts). Not after long, the CC was cut to once every two weeks,

or even longer. At the end, it was completely discarded which we all felt a bit release.

The discussions happened between us at U also showed that Q's communication problem might have related to their management hierarchy. One finance staff told me based on his experience that "it is a bureaucracy. There are too many layers in the company (Q). I mean they can send me an email (directly) but they sent to two or three people and then sent it to me. There were a lot of miscommunications in between." (interview transcription).

Legitimacy obtained through SM-SG? As we saw it, too many management layers of Q became the biggest obstacle for the appropriate SM-SG activities within Q as well as between the two companies. During communication, a sensemaker could not make an appropriate sense because the information based on which he/she was making sense of could have been changed already due to the other people's SM-SG activities.

Since Q had its own communication problems, as a diffuser, Q's image became less trustful. In addition, Q people always forgot about what they should do or what they had promised us to do, this sent a message that they did not always listen to us, which we made a further sense suggesting "they do not have the commitment with us" (workshop transcripts).

Consequently, moral legitimacy of CC was not obtained. However, based on the communication and the SM-SG activities that had happened, it suggested that Q only cared about their events (i.e. CMMI event) or their benefits (as also linked to the sense we made in previous cases) but not ours. In relating to practice diffusion, this suggested that Q diffused whatever they need to, but we should only adopt whatever would be useful for us. In a way, we had to trust ourselves rather than listening to Q like one of us said "I've seen the way they (Q) work, and the inconsistency of what they say and what they deliver. Now I just think we have to see for ourselves." (interview transcriptions).

When analysing this case, the objective dimension of communication as proposed in the Diffusion Model was very much highlighted. In particular, the inability of achieving communication's ideal features became the primary reason which caused the failed logos justification of CC. The subjective dimension of

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model communication in the Model also seemed to be important in addressing the question of why the legitimacy was not obtained at the logos and the ethos stage. However, because the Model only showed how a practice could be continually diffused based on the achievement of moral legitimacy, it was not able to show what a diffusion was like if the legitimacy was not obtained (this was also found in the other case analyses).

After using the proposed Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) in analysing the six cases, it could also be said that the left side of this Model (until 'moral legitimacy') contributed to most of the analyses. However, by looking at the later status of Q's practice diffusion in general, it was found that although Case 1 CM was once diffused at U, it was rejected eventually after the other five cases were rejected. Therefore, the right side of the Diffusion Model could be used to explain that when a practice's moral legitimacy was not able to be sustained overtime, it would not achieve cognitive legitimacy and hence to be institutionalised or taken-for-granted. While looking at the reason of why it cannot be sustained, the influence of 'diffusion environment' which has been built by the diffusion of all the practices will need to be taken into consideration. This has not yet been included in the Diffusion Model.

6.5 Constructing practice diffusion by the self-ethnographer and the other participants

By drawing on the above detailed analysis for the six diffusion cases, an overall diffusion status can be summarised in the following table.

Case	Rhetorical Stage	Legitimacy Obtained	Diffusion Result
1 CM	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Diffused
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy obtained	
2 CFP	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

3 BP	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	
4 VoC	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	
5 SR	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained for managers but NOT obtained for sales staff	Used but not diffused
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy obtained for managers but NOT obtained for sales staff	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained in general	
6 CC	Pathos	Pragmatic legitimacy partially obtained	Rejected
	Logos	Pragmatic legitimacy NOT obtained	
	Ethos	Moral legitimacy NOT obtained	

Table 6-8: Overall Diffusion Status

In terms of the above Table 6-8, the six cases will now be analysed ‘vertically’. This means that the pathos, logos and ethos justification period will be analysed separately and each analysis will cover the six cases. For example, by comparing the pathos period of six cases, the reason of why a pathos justification is (not) successful can be identified; and similarly to logos and ethos period. In addition, by drawing on the Diffusion Model, the entire analysis will also lead to the discussion of what is the (most) ideal way of diffusing a practice. The use of the Model will also be critically reviewed.

As part of the ‘Integrating’ process which aims to keep a researcher’s ‘reflexivity’, different points of view from both the self-ethnographer and the other participants will be summarised to construct the understanding of practice diffusion as well as the Diffusion Model. According to a social constructionist perspective, this is how the way of ‘knowing’ will construct the ‘known’.

6.5.1 A 'vertical' analysis of the diffusion cases

(1) Analysis on pathos period.

By looking at the pathos justification period, it was found that the pragmatic legitimacy was more or less achieved in most of the cases apart from Case 3 BP. In the rest five cases, the practices obtained their legitimacy was either because the benefits of the practice were presented through communication & SM-SG, or the diffuser's 'good characteristics' (and hence the credibility) was demonstrated which was again through communication activities, or most ideally, the two aspects were both justified by communication.

According to the pragmatic legitimacy achievement which had been discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.2.), the justification of a practice's benefits could show the potential adopters that the adoption of a practice is in line with their self-interests. For instance, Case 5 SR could be a good example. The legitimacy of SR achieved in managers was because they understood the benefits they could obtain by using the practice; however, since the other sales staff could not expect any benefits or values from using SR, its legitimacy was not gained for them. In addition, a diffuser's (or an organisation's) good characteristics could also add legitimacy in him/herself which will then affect his/her diffusion activities in a positive way. For example, in Case 1 CM, the potential adopters (U's staff members) considered the diffuser (Q's president) as being friendly to his employees; in Case 2 CFP, Q's president was considered as being open-minded as he communicated rather than using his power; in Case 4 VoC, the 'diffuser' – company Q and M were both recognised as "successful and profitable" companies.

On the contrary, Case 3 BP did not achieve its pragmatic legitimacy at the pathos stage was also because the benefits of BP was not communicated. Moreover, the lack of communication of the diffuser or his/her unwillingness to communicate to the potential adopters failed to show his/her good characteristics which therefore prohibited the other way of gaining legitimacy of BP.

By looking into the 'successful' pathos stage in the five cases, it was also found that communication in these five pathos stages had at least one or more 'ideal' features: (1) Communication regarding what a practice was and how it would

help with a company was found sufficient and passionate, or at least the key point was covered. (2) Communication was found to be 'open' and 'free' and therefore different views were allowed to be presented and discussed. (3) Various communication methods (i.e. face-to-face communication, telephone, and email) were also found to be useful. (4) A very important feature of communication as identified in most of the five cases was the two-way interactions. (5) To keep an information record was also proved to be helpful in enabling continuous communication between different parties.

Furthermore, the more ideal features a pathos communication can achieve, the more likely it could obtain pragmatic legitimacy. For example, Case 1 CM had the most successful pathos diffusion out of the six cases was because its communication had achieved all the features as mentioned above. Case 4 VoC's pathos justification was ideal too because its communication had achieved the feature 1 to 4. Case 2 CFP's pathos justification was in generally good because its communication had the feature 1, 2 and 4. As an unsuccessful example, Case 3 BP did not obtain legitimacy was because its communication did not fit for any of the ideal features.

Apart from discussing the 'Tool' dimension of communication (i.e. the five ideal communication features), the other reason that a good communication could enable the achievement of pragmatic legitimacy at the pathos stage was because it fostered the continuous 'SM-SG' activities, known as the subjective dimension of communication.

The above discussed benefits of a practice or the good dispositions of a diffuser (or an organisation) were justified through communication; however, they were not (completely) achieved through communication, or in the other words, through language. Most of them were obtained through people's SM-SG activities which were attached with their communications. For example, in Case 1 CM, the benefits which CM could bring for company U was achieved not only because the diffuser, Q's president said so (in his language), the meaning was also generated by the potential adopters through their sensemaking activities which suggested that if CM brought Q benefits, it could probably bring U the same. Similarly, in Case 2 CFP, Q's president's good character was showed not because he said he was a good person, but because we made our sense

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based on his actions – he talked to us rather than using his management power.

The above findings also justified the ‘Tool & SM-SG’ communication duality as addressed in Chapter 3. In pathos communication, the achievement of communication’s ideal tool features were important in terms of gaining the pragmatic legitimacy of a practice; however, it was equally important to pay attention to the SM-SG activities which were made possible by the communication activities because they also enabled or prohibited the achievement of a practice’s legitimacy.

(2) Analysis on logos period.

Same as pathos, logos period also aimed to achieve a practice’s pragmatic legitimacy. However, by looking at logos justification in the six diffusion cases, legitimacy was only achieved in Case 1 CM and partially achieved in Case 5 SR (for the managers). For the other four cases, legitimacy was not obtained and moreover, the previously gained legitimacy was either weakened or eliminated at this stage.

The reason that legitimacy could be achieved in logos justification was similar to pathos. In Case 1 CM, the pragmatic legitimacy was gained because the expected benefits of CM was achieved at the logos stage. Through the potential adopters’ real experience, the benefits of CM which were presumed at the pathos stage were now justified. Moreover, the diffuser, Q’s president’s good characteristics (i.e. a good communicator, good at motivating staff etc.) further helped the gain of legitimacy. Similarly in Case 5, when SR’s benefits became clearer for the managers, for example, by using SR, the managers found they could monitor how many sales calls each sales staff member made, and then to control their work, SR thus obtained its pragmatic legitimacy (for managers) at the logos stage.

The reason that legitimacy was not achieved in logos justification was mainly because of the inability in justifying the usefulness or the expected benefits of a practice. For example, by applying CFP, BP, VoC and CC in company U’s real work, none of the above was found useful. Because the expected benefits in

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exchange of supporting of these practices at the pathos stage (apart from BP) did not happen at the logos stage, the legitimacy was lost accordingly.

When exploring successful logos cases, it was found that good logos communications were those which could show clearly the operation of a practice. For instance, the hands-on experience of CM provided full instructions of how to organise a CM: it was to share knowledge or brainstorm issues which were usually on the strategic level; it involved as many as possible discussions and interactions; and it did not define the 'right' or 'wrong' ideas, etc. Meanwhile, a good logos communication was again containing the ideal features as summarised before.

However, when examining the unsuccessful logos cases, it was also found that the inability of gaining practice legitimacy was not only because of the failure of applying a practice – which was an important reason; it was also because the failed application was usually followed by a lack of or a less ideal communication. For example, the use of Case 2 CFP was failed, but the diffuser ("A" & "R") did not manage to communicate the reason of the failure; neither did they discuss the alternative solutions with anybody at U. Case 3 BP was not proved to be useful either; when it was questioned by the potential adopters as how it was actually set up, no communication from the diffuser had ever addressed the question.

In the successful Case 1 CM, the SM-SG activities particularly suggested the good characteristics that the diffuser (Q's president) had which therefore enhanced the pragmatic legitimacy it had already achieved. However, in Case 2 CFP, based on the diffuser's ("A" & "R") communication activities (including the lack of communication), the sense generated (i.e. Q believed too much in their practice but without justifying it) contributed to the loss of CFP's pragmatic legitimacy. In Case 6 CC, the sense that conveyed by the discovery of Q's communication problems suggested that as a communication practice diffuser, Q was no longer considered as 'credible'. As a consequence, the practice CC which was being diffused by Q also lost its legitimacy. In Case 3 BP, the SM-SG activities even implicated power issues as intervening BP's diffusion. It largely hurt its gaining of legitimacy because instead of justifying BP was something

that company U should adopt, it implied that BP was adopted because the new company owner wanted U to.

The above analysis suggested that both the achievement and the loss of a practice's legitimacy at logos stage were connected to the SM-SG activities. However, to determine whether SM-SG activities would contribute to gain or lose the legitimacy was largely depending on how communication was performed in logos justification, on in other words, the 'Tool' dimension of communication.

(3) Analysis on ethos period.

As found in Table 6-8, out of the six diffusion cases, only Case 1 CM achieved its moral legitimacy which finally linked to the result of being diffused at company U. By comparing Case 1 CM to the other five cases, it was found that whether the moral legitimacy could be achieved or not primarily depended on whether the pragmatic legitimacy was obtained at the pathos and the logos stage and especially the latter. For example, because the pragmatic legitimacy was achieved at logos stage in Case 1 CM, its moral legitimacy was also achieved (however, it might not be the only reason); and because the pragmatic legitimacy was not obtained at logos stage in CFP, BP, VoC and CC, accordingly, their moral legitimacy was not gained. Case 5 SR was a complicated case, because the legitimacy was half gained (for managers) and half lost (for staff) at the logos stage, its moral legitimacy was not achieved in general because it was not accepted by most staff member, however, it was still adopted because of the managers' support.

However, none of the six diffusion cases could address the situation of whether moral legitimacy could still be achieved because of a good conduction of communication and SM-SG although it was based on a logos stage which failed to achieve its pragmatic legitimacy. As a possibility, this question is to be discovered in future research.

Compared to the previous two periods, at the ethos period, SM-SG activities had a direct influence in affecting a diffusion decision. For example, Case 2 CFP and Case 4 VoC were rejected because SM-SG activities at ethos stage suggested that a practice which could be diffused at company U should be the

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one which was considered as “useful for U”. The rejection decisions of Case 3 BP, Case 4 VoC and Case 6 CC were suggested by the ethos sense: Q decided to diffuse the three practices at U was because they met Q’s business merging objectives rather than bring benefits for U although it was said so. Management power was identified based on the ethos sensemaking in Case 3 BP, Case 5 SR and Case 6 CC, which suggested that the three practices were adopted because of the power rather than the achievement of legitimacy.

6.5.2 My critical review of using the Diffusion Model

In section 6.4, the strengths and weaknesses of using the Diffusion Model have already been provided in each case analysis, which can be briefly summarised as the following.

Strengths: (1) by using the Diffusion Model, the reason of why practice diffusion happened or not happened can be addressed by drawing on a) communication’s objective dimension: how pathos, logos and ethos justification can be conducted; b) the subjective dimension: what/how senses are made and given during communication; c) whether a (pragmatic or moral) legitimacy has been achieved.

(2) By following the Diffusion Model, it proved that the ideal tool features of communication’s conduction as well as the SM-SG activities that interviewed with it enable one another. The better the conduction of communication, the more likely a positive sense will be made. Both of them will be helping in gaining a practice’s legitimacy. In short, the communication ‘duality’ which is formed by the two dimensions is thus vital for practice diffusion.

(3) By justifying the relevance and importance of the three factors in determining practice diffusion, the Diffusion Model has enhanced the theoretical understanding of diffusion, ‘communication duality’, rhetorical justification, and legitimacy.

Weaknesses: (1) According to the Diffusion Model, when the pragmatic legitimacy has not been achieved at the logos stage, the diffusion of a practice will continuously be developed to the ethos period. However, the real diffusion case has showed that an alternative path is that it could be rejected immediately.

(2) The Diffusion Model is not able to show how practice diffusion will be influenced by 'diffusion environment', which could include potential adopters' ongoing sensemaking in terms of a practice's usefulness and a diffuser's credibility, the ongoing achievement of a practice's legitimacy, and many other issues, such as power, culture and market (as contributed by the other participants).

(3) Although a practice diffusion can be communicated according to the Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence as suggested in the literature as well as proved in the cases; and it is also aware that the division among the three in the real situation could be less clear than it is supposed to be, the pathos and logos justifications could be taken as consisting one period which aims to gain pragmatic legitimacy. This can also solve the problem in explaining why Case 3 BP's diffusion started from logos but not pathos.

(4) The Diffusion Model demonstrates an ideal status of how a practice will be diffused, but it is not complete in demonstrating what should be done to continue the diffusion based on an unsuccessful achievement in (pragmatic) legitimacy.

(5) One of the findings through the case analysis – *Q's practice diffusion is based on the consideration of their own benefits rather than U's and the practice which U accepts should bring U benefits* has let (me) to identify that in the real world, Q and U could be seen as two 'closed' systems. Moreover, the suggestion made in case analysis, i.e. *Case 2 CFP – when CFP was not successful at the logos period, communication of 'why it did not work' should take place between the two companies to keep on justifying the practice* has also taken me back to have another look at the theories of diffusion, in particular those explaining the 'mechanism' by which individuals communicate, for example, the autopoiesis. The focus on the 'closed' nature of conversations could help to explain how individuals could be better engaged in discussing diffusion (e.g. why it did not work).

6.5.3 Constructing practice diffusion by revisiting the Practice Diffusion Model (from the researcher's perspective)

In order to keep a researcher's 'reflexivity' which is also to complete the 'Integrating' process, the Diffusion Model as proposed in Chapter 3 will now be

Chapter 6 Constructing Practice Diffusion through the Practice Diffusion Model revisited based on the case analyses as well as the review of using the Model in real practice. Because the Model has been built by the researcher and the analyses have also been done by the researcher, this section is also considered as constructing understandings of practice diffusion based on the researcher's perspective.

In terms of the above analyses and discussions, the pre-proposed Diffusion Model could now be revisited as the following.

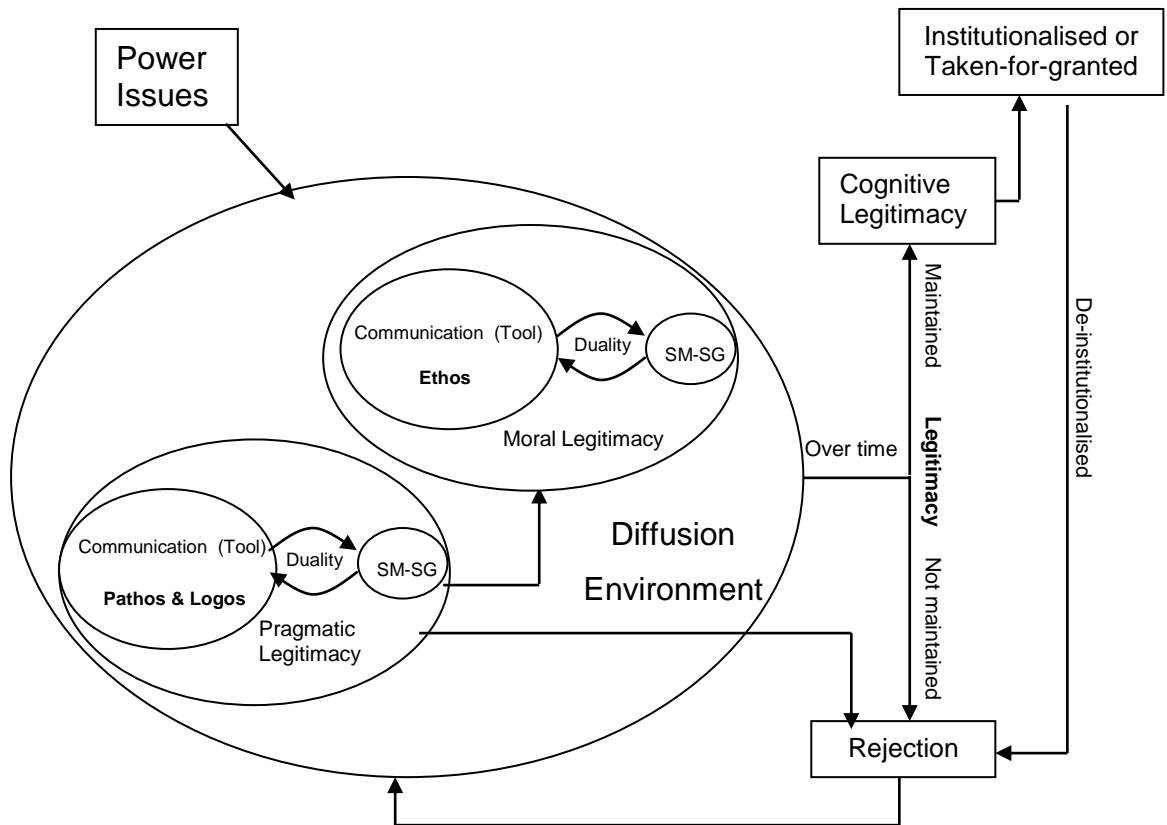


Figure 6-1: Revisited Practice Diffusion Model

In the above figure, the two bubbles of achieving 'Pragmatic Legitimacy' and 'Moral Legitimacy' were amended from the previous Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9). As also respecting to the above analyses findings, communication duality (Tool & SM-SG dimensions) has been taken into the consideration more explicitly. In addition, the pathos and logos justification periods as discussed in the rhetorical theory have now been integrated into one process of achieving a practice's pragmatic legitimacy.

The upward arrows that links between the two bubbles means that as following the rhetorical sequence, the gain of pragmatic legitimacy through pathos and

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logos communication will lead to the gain of moral legitimacy at the ethos period, during which the communication duality still plays a role. However, the downward arrow which directly connects the 'Pragmatic Legitimacy' bubble to the practice 'Rejection' shows that if a practice fails to obtain its pragmatic legitimacy, it could cause the rejection of a practice immediately.

The bigger bubble 'Diffusion Environment' which sits outside of the practice's legitimacy bubbles shows that during the diffusion of a practice, a diffusion environment is also constituted. It could be constituted by the diffuser and potential adopter's communication activities – how they talk, or their SM-SG activities – how they understand, or both; it could also be constituted by the events which emerge during the diffusion communication and SM-SG activities (i.e. in this research, the discovery of Q's internal management and communication problems were the emergent events which were not expected). Furthermore, it could be constituted by general 'Power Issues' too which are not within the scope of practice's legitimacy. The construction of the diffusion environment is not within the diffusion process as following the rhetorical justification, however, it will affect the diffusion as either facilitating the diffusion or prohibiting it.

The achievement of moral legitimacy could be directed to two futures over time. If its obtained legitimacy could be maintained for some time, the cognitive legitimacy can be expected which finally lead to a practice's institutionalisation or taken-for-granted. On the contrary, if its obtained legitimacy fails to be maintained over time, a practice will be 'rejected'.

In a case when many practices are to be diffused, the rejection of one or more practices will also become part of the 'diffusion environment'. The constructed diffusion environment will then influence the diffusion of future practices. This is seen as the arrow which links from the 'Rejection' box to the 'Diffusion Environment' bubble.

As discussed in Chapter 2 which is also demonstrated in the previous Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9), even an institutionalised or taken-for-granted practice could be 'de-institutionalised' at a certain time when it is proved to be no longer appropriate. In the revisited Diffusion Model (Figure 6-1), the arrow directs from the 'Institutionalisation or Taken-for-granted' box to the box of practice's

'Rejection' thus addresses the same situation which is however not able to be proved in this research.

By conducting this social-constructionist-based self-ethnographic research, the understanding for managerial practice diffusion has been constructed as illustrated in the Revisited Diffusion Model (Figure 6-1). However, the practice diffusion knowledge is constructed based on the self-ethnographer's perspective, or in other words, it is constructed based on the predetermined interest in communication and sensemaking; a pre-approached knowledge on the pathos, logos and ethos rhetorical theory as well as the discussion of legitimacy in (neo)institutional theory.

In order to keep the self-ethnographer's 'reflexivity' in this research which is also to complete the 'SIS' methodology (see Figure 4-2, "participants to construct"), this chapter will now briefly review how the other research participants (the other employees at company U apart from 'myself') have considered the managerial practice diffusion issue.

6.5.4 Constructing practice diffusion by involving different views (from the other participants' perspectives)

For most of the research participants (U's employees), the success or failure of practice diffusion links closely to the real result of applying a practice. In this research, the participants will not consider Q's practice diffusion at U is successful because none of Q's practices has ever worked out at U. From this perspective, the practice diffusion could then be understood as the pragmatic usage of a practice.

Based on the collected research data, it is found that the question of why Q's practices do not work for company U or why they are not diffused could be addressed by the participants when drawing on the following reasons.

First, Q and its managerial practices are successful in India while company U is a UK-based company. To apply Q's practices at U thus depends on the Indian and UK training markets which are different from one another. As they see it, the UK market is pretty mature when the Indian market is still being developed. A practice which does not work in the UK may have plenty space to be developed in India. On the contrary, a well-used practice in the developing

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market may have already lost its chance in a matured market even before it is applied.

Secondly, the culture difference between the UK and India is an important factor. For the participants, sometimes a practice itself could be useful, but if the surrounding culture does not allow it to work, it may not work out at all; or in other words, the practice does not fit for a specific culture.

Thirdly, after the ideas of communication and the pathos, logos, ethos justification have been provided to the participants by 'me' (the self-ethnographer), they started to address the above questions by also using communication. They find that Q is very strong at pathos but very weak in the logos, which therefore makes them feel like all the practices could sound very good initially, but when they are putting into practice, problems always occur which Q does not seem to be able to solve. Q's strength and weakness is again considered as a cultural problem by the participants.

Last but not the least, the power issue has also been perceived by the participants as a factor (part of the 'diffusion environment') in influencing Q's practice diffusion. This is not only seen as they have found Q's structural hierarchy which blocks Q's internal communication, but also seen as the feedback they have made to the VSM I proposed which they think that Q makes the decision for any structural change.

Based on the research participants' understandings for managerial practice diffusion, the above Revisited Diffusion Model can be further constructed as the following figure.

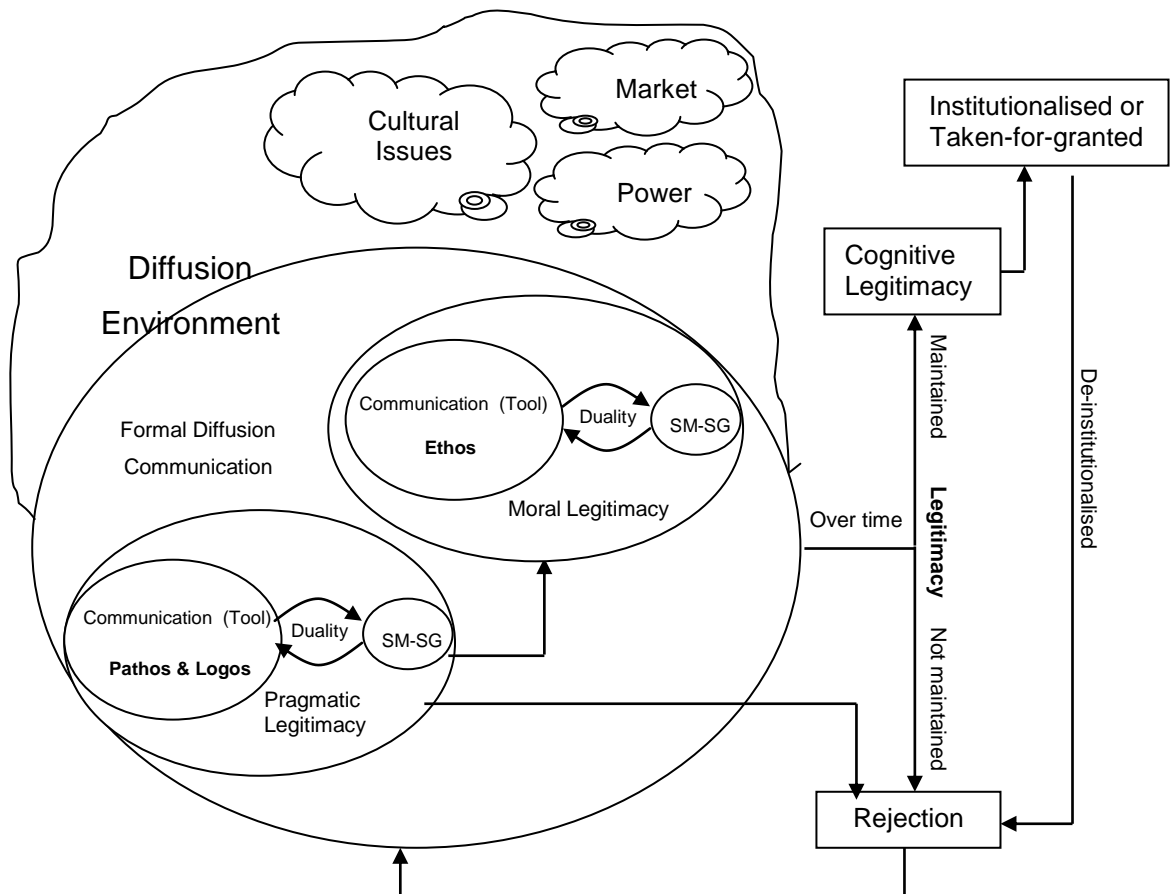


Figure 6-2: Reconstructed Practice Diffusion Model

Comparing to Figure 6-1, this Reconstructed Practice Diffusion Model (Figure 6-2) has expanded the bubble of ‘Diffusion Environment’ which is also constructed by the ‘Market’ and ‘Cultural Issues’. The two legitimacy bubbles have now been included as part of the ‘Formal Diffusion Communication’ (which is based on the researcher’s perspective), see as the bigger bubble. The two factors as contributed by the research participants, together with the formal conduction of diffusion communication will build a wider ‘environment’ within which a practice is being diffused to affect the diffusion of a practice.

6.6 Summary of this chapter

This chapter first reviewed different types of data which were collected from different resources and kept in various formats. This was considered to be a technique of keeping a “critical distance” from the research. If a similar phenomenon could be found within different types of data, plausibility could be added to the research.

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According to the three criteria for assessing the credibility of an ethnographic research, this chapter also reviewed the method of convincing readers, which was to demonstrate a research's "authenticity", "plausibility" and "criticality". The data analysis method was then addressed which showed how the analysis was going to be conducted. Following the method, a detailed analysis for the six diffusion cases was provided individually and for each one, the analysis covered how communication was operated at the pathos, logos and ethos periods; what kind of practice legitimacy was obtained at different stages, and through what kind of SM-SG activities. At the end of each case analyse, how the Diffusion model was used was also summarised. The detailed analysis was also considered to be the last phase of the 'SISI' methodology, 'Integrate'.

An overall analysis for the six cases was then summarised in a table, which showed the overall status of Q's practice diffusion at U. According to this table, the six cases were then again analysed 'vertically' – this was a cross analysis to the six cases in terms of each communication stage. It aimed to provide insights of how practice could be well/badly diffused by drawing on the 'Tool & SM-SG' communication duality. The overall analysis was followed by a critical review of the strengths and weaknesses of the Diffusion Model.

According to findings generated from the analyses, the previously designed Integrated Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9) was revisited. A new Revisited Diffusion Model (Figure 6-1) was then proposed to constitute practice diffusion by the researcher. As also completing the last part of the 'SISI' methodology diagram, the other research participants' taken on understanding practice diffusion was also summarised and based on which, the diffusion model was further developed as the Reconstructed Practice Diffusion Model (Figure 6-2). According to the social-constructionist perspective, this was also to keep a researcher's 'reflexivity'. In the next chapter, conclusions of the thesis (including those of the analysis) will be provided.

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According to the research questions and the research aims as discussed in Chapter 1 (see section 1.5), this chapter will now review the thesis in order to see how and how far the questions and aims have been answered and achieved.

7.1 In terms of research questions and aims

In order to address the main research question of 'will a dual constitutive communication-based diffusion model improve managerial practice diffusion', four sub-questions (see section 1.5) have to be answered first and in terms of which, this thesis has to achieve nine aims.

1. Argue for the importance of understanding diffusion change within social constructionism paradigm. This aim has been achieved mainly in Chapter 2 when the ideas of institutional theory, rhetorical theory and autopoietic systems theory are presented and compared. Through comparing how these ideas could be used to address diffusion change and communication, it is found that a social constructionist perspective is ideally to be adopted because it contains the benefits of the three while avoiding their potential problems.

For instance, autopoiesis and social constructionism both bear a constitutive ontological position, but the emphasis of autopoiesis on a system's 'self-producing' addresses changes as an internally produced process which thus cuts the interaction between a system and its outside 'environment'. Differently, social constructionism suggests the interwoven constitution of a diffusion system and a diffusion environment. Although the role of environment is highlighted, it is not addressed as what the institutional theory says about the institutional environment. The latter as discussed before assumes that all changes happen because of the coercion of organisational or system isomorphism which is considered to be an overemphasis on environmental pressure of adaption.

Rhetorical theory emphasises but also exaggerates the role of rhetoric in shaping a practice in diffusion or even a diffusion environment but it again overlooks the effectiveness that a diffusion environment may have to

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diffusion. Accordingly, the Pathos-Logos-Ethos practice justification sequence as suggested by modern rhetoricians is able to provide instructions for diffusers on how to 'teach' a practice step by step, but it is not able to also show them the importance of understanding their potential adopters by investigating what have been learned by them.

On the contrary, following social constructionism, diffusion is to be focused on both the teaching and learning aspects because what a diffuser has taught constitutes what potential adopters could learn; and what potential adopters have learned also constitutes what a diffuser could continuously teach; the two jointly construct one another. It is therefore argued that by understanding the social constructionist perspective, an improvement of practice diffusion change can then be expected.

2. Propose the duality of communication based on its constitutive nature.

Following the achievement of the first research aim which argues for adopting the social constructionist perspective to consider and understand practice diffusion change, this research aim has been met primarily in Chapter 3. By portraying one of the key arguments in social constructionism which suggests that the activities of 'knowing' and what is to be 'known' jointly build one another, the traditional object-subject dualism has been challenged. The discussion of communication's constitutive nature thus becomes possible which argues that communication is not only to transmit but also to construct information.

By further drawing on Giddens' structuration theory which explicitly argues for the concept of a social structure's 'duality' (it is a "medium" as well as an "outcome"), the concept of 'communication duality' (Tool and SM-SG) has also been proposed. It is used to address the practice diffusion change by arguing that communication as an action of 'knowing' conveys the message of a practice, and as a constitutive medium, it also constructs the meaning of a practice as well as its outside diffusion environment (including the recognition of a practice diffuser) which will affect the result of how a practice will be diffused.

In order to make the concept of 'communication duality' clearer, its objective and subjective dimensions have been addressed separately. While the

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objective dimension is discussed to consider communication as a practice diffusion tool (i.e. focuses on convey the message), the subjective dimension is presented as constructing 'meanings' which is typically through the sensemaking and sensegiving activities. More importantly, because the subjective dimension (SM-SG activities) is attached with the communication activity, in other words, it cannot be separated from communication's objective dimension, the 'dualism' between object and subject has again been challenged which thus supports its reconceptualisation to 'duality'.

3. Use the objective dimension of communication by applying the Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence to justify a practice's legitimacy. According to the proposed 'communication duality', this research aim intends to further address the objective dimension of communication. By drawing on communication literatures, it is found that many researches of communication have a objective focus which is to explore how communication can be better used (as a tool). For example, a brief discussion in Chapter 3 shows that communication has been researched in terms of its 'ideal features', such as to involve a variety of communication channels, to enable feedback information and hence promote the two-way communication etc.

Based on the discussion of rhetorical theory and especially the rhetorical justification sequence which is suggested by modern rhetoricians in Chapter 2, this thesis also adds that to apply this Pathos-Logos-Ethos rhetorical sequence in justifying a practice's legitimacy in its diffusion is also part of the objective use of communication. This is because as seen in the discussion in Chapter 3 (section 3.6.2), to follow this sequence is to use communication to generate emotions in potential adopters, to show them the logic of a practice, and to invoke socially accepted meanings from them. It therefore shows how communication can be operated step by step to legitimise a practice and hence facilitate its diffusion.

The later fieldwork of this research and its analysis also shows that by focusing on the pathos, logos and ethos pleas (emotion, logic and ethic), communication activities could be organised in a more structured way, which helps to address which type of legitimacy can be expected at a practice's

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early, middle and later diffusion. However, the later research finding also shows that the transfer between the three periods could sometimes be less clear and suggests that the pathos and logos justifications could even be done in one stage.

4. Use the subjective dimension of communication by involving sensemaking and sensegiving activities to address the achievement of a practice's legitimacy. In order to complete the discussion of 'communication duality', this research aim thus intends to address how the subjective dimension of communication can be used in practice diffusion. By doing this, the discussion of why communication has a subjective dimension and how it works has been presented first in Chapter 3 (section 3.4). The discussion has then been followed by arguing communication as a continuous sensemaking and sensegiving activities rather than the transmitting – receiving process (section 3.5).

In the former way, the cognitive aspect of human beings and the interactions between different communication parties are taken into consideration. It thus enables the explanation of how people first make sense of the environment with which the communication is undertaken, and then convey their individual senses to the others. When the other people receive the information, they will also make sense of it but in terms of their own "personal dispositions". This involves the possibility of what the other people understand from the information could be different from the one which has been transmitted.

In order to make the above SM-SG activities clearer as well as address the question of how they can help to achieve a practice's legitimacy in diffusion, the four levels of SM-SG, known as the intra-subjective, inter-subjective, generic subjective and extra-subjective have also been discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.5.3).

However, although the later fieldwork of this research has demonstrated how SM-SG activities help to achieve practice legitimacy, and in generally, the making of the four levels of sense can be seen – for example, when a practice is justified emotionally, it is normally happens within an individual person's cognitive process and hence generates an intrasubjective sense;

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when a practice is justified logically which people use it together, a collective intersubjective sense is usually built; and later at the ethos period when a socially accepted sense of a practice is produced, it could be seen as a generic subjective sense; this research lacks of the detailed activities to check explicitly which level of sense has been generated at different justification stages.

5. Provide a diffusion model which proposes how a practice's legitimacy is obtained by communication duality. This research aim has been first met at the end of Chapter 3 when the Integrated Diffusion Model is proposed. It is a model based on Tool and SM-SG 'communication duality' because the objective and subjective dimensions of communication as well as how they both contribute to achieve a practice's legitimacy have been included in this model.

In this model, communication's objective dimension is illustrated in the step-by-step operation of the pathos, logos and ethos justifications. Although this model does not show communication's 'ideal features' explicitly, because it is part of communication's objective dimension, it is also need to be focused in order to enable the ideal pathos, logos and ethos justifications. The subjective dimension of SM-SG is also demonstrated to show what sense has been made and given during each diffusion period. In addition, after each justification period, this model also explores what type of legitimacy has been obtained through the communication and its related SM-SG activities. For example, the achievement of pragmatic legitimacy after the pathos and logos justifications; the gain of moral legitimacy after the ethos justification. In this model, it also shows that a continuous justification after gaining the moral legitimacy will lead to the achievement of cognitive legitimacy. This is also how a practice will be institutionalised or taken-for-granted.

After the conduction of the fieldwork and its analysis, the proposed diffusion model has been revisited based on the research findings and suggestions. It has also been complemented by taking the other research participants' views on looking at practice diffusion. The proposed Diffusion Model has

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then been reconstructed to particularly include the 'diffusion environment' which also affects the gain of a practice's legitimacy.

6. Chose an appropriate research strategy and methodology based on social constructionism paradigm. This research aim has been achieved in Chapter 4 through addressing the philosophical issues and comparing the ontological and epistemological assumptions that different philosophical paradigms bear. It is argued that since the social constructionism paradigm is adopted to explore managerial practice diffusion which assumes that the 'knower', the actions of 'knowing' and what is to be 'known' construct one another, a social-constructionist-based self-ethnography is thus chosen to be used. The reasons are for example, this research strategy argues for a researcher to be an 'observing participant', which is to argue for the explicit inclusion of the 'knower' in his/her research; it also argues for a researcher to stay 'reflexive' in a research, which therefore offers him/her the opportunity to see the above joint constructing process.

Based on the chosen research strategy of self-ethnography, a 'SISI' methodology is also designed in Chapter 4 according to the general procedure of conducting an ethnographic research. Since it is also a social-constructionist-based methodology, the focus of exploring how a research is being constituted by the researcher and how it constitutes the research findings needs to be followed up throughout the entire thesis. This is the reason when the fieldwork is presented in Chapter 5 and 6, it is able to see how the research is constructed after each phase of the 'SISI' methodology.

7. Demonstrate how a self-ethnography strategy and a 'SISI' methodology can be used in a practice diffusion research. The use of 'SISI' methodology and the self-ethnography strategy has been demonstrated in Chapter 5 and 6, which are also known as the fieldwork reporting chapters. Phase 1 Survey of 'SISI' has been demonstrated at the beginning of Chapter 5 when the overview of company U (the fieldwork company) including its history, business, culture, structure, strength & weakness and its significant change is presented. Because the researcher is acting as an 'observing participant' in self-ethnography, the achievement of Survey is mainly based on the researcher's own observation. At the end of this phase, a research question

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has been raised up to study communication in organisational change which is seen as constituted by the conduction of this self-ethnographic research.

Phase 2 Immerse has been shown in Chapter 5 after phase 1, during which the interactions of company U and Q's business merging have been summarised, the managerial practice diffusion issue has been highlighted as well as the six diffusion cases have been chosen and described. The achieved research findings at this phase are still based on the researcher's observations and her own interpretations which are to be checked and shared in the later 'SISI' phases. During Immerse, this research has been constructed again and accordingly, its research question has also been constructed to explore communication in practice diffusion change which has happened within Q and U's business merging.

Phase 3 Share is presented at the end of Chapter 5. This is also where the effort of checking on the validity of the derived research data through Survey and Immerse has been demonstrated. For example, face-to-face and email interviews haven been conducted to see what do the other research participants think about communication and diffusion issues; two workshops have been organised to present and share the researcher's findings as well as the other participants views to achieve collective understandings of practice diffusion. In order to follow the SISI methodology, some of the workshop data has been presented at this phase while most interview data have been saved for the next phase to 'integrate'.

Phase 4 Integrate is the last step of 'SISI' which has been shown in Chapter 6. It aims to integrate various types of research data in the analysis of the six diffusion cases to make a coherent account of how managerial practices have been diffused at company U. It also aims to construct the understanding of practice diffusion by drawing on both the researcher's and the other participants' points of view.

8. Reflect on the appropriateness of the proposed diffusion model by using it to analyse practical diffusion cases and hence suggest improvements. This research aim has been met in Chapter 6 when the six diffusion cases have been analysed and suggestions have been made. The analysis has been conducted according to the proposed Diffusion Model, for example, each

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case has been analysed in terms of the 'Tool' dimension of communication, or in other words how the pathos, logos and ethos justifications have been carried out and what ideal communication features that each period has had. It has also been analysed in terms of the 'SM-SG' dimension of communication in order to see what kind of sense has been made. Based on the two parallel analyses, the gain of different types of practice legitimacy has also been analysed.

However, difficulties or problems in using the proposed model to analyse diffusion cases have been identified which thus suggests the improvement of the model. For instance, the pathos and logos could be joined together as they both aim to justify a practice's pragmatic legitimacy. Diffusion environment has to be taken into the consideration explicitly for diffusion. The inability of achieving pragmatic legitimacy at the logos stage could lead to the rejection decision of a practice immediately.

The reflections of the proposed Diffusion Model contribute to the improvement of the model which has been presented at the end of Chapter 6 as the 'Reconstructed Practice Diffusion Model'.

9. Reflect on how the chosen strategy and methodology also "constitute" the research in terms of social constructionist perspective. The effort of trying to meet this research aim has been put throughout the thesis. For example, because self-ethnography is adopted as the research strategy, to include explicitly the role of researcher in his/her research has been highlighted. It constitutes this research as being mainly based on the researcher's (self-ethnographer's) observations, understandings and interpretations. This research could be otherwise different if another research strategy is used, i.e. a survey-based or an experiment-based, through which the knowledge is built in a more objective way.

The chosen strategy also constitutes the research by designing the 'SISI' methodology. By following the methodology step by step, various research data has been collected (i.e. observation diary, interview and workshop transcriptions & transcripts, secondary data etc.) which has contributed to generate the research findings. Based on the social constructionist perspective, if a different methodology has been used, the research could

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be done differently and hence the derived findings could be different too. For instance, if the researcher in this thesis did not get involved in the fieldwork company U first and did not immerse herself in the research setting before interviewing the other participants, the research question of managerial practice diffusion may not be raised up; or if the researcher choose to gather some survey questions from the research participants before her own observation, the interpretations to the research question could be formed differently too.

At the end of Chapter 6 when both the researcher's findings and the other participants' taken on this research have been presented to produce the knowledge of practice diffusion, it is also considered as constituting the research by the chosen strategy and methodology. This is because 'reflexivity' is a focus of both the strategy and the methodology. The awareness of critically review on how knowledge is produced (i.e. whether it is produced with validity) thus requires the consideration for various views from those who have been involved in the research.

By meeting the above nine research aims, the four sub-questions (see section 1.5) of this thesis have also been addressed. For instance, the achievement of the first aim helps to answer question A 'why a social constructionist approach in understanding and managing diffusion change is needed?'; to achieve the second research aim helps to address question B of 'why communication has a Too & SM-SG duality?'; to meet research aims 3 to 5 thus addresses question C 'how can the objective and subjective dimensions of communication duality help to address/enact a diffusion change?'; the achievement of the rest research aims answers the question D 'how will a self-ethnography research strategy enable the constitutive communication research and practice?'.

To answer the four sub-questions intends to address the main research question of 'Will a dual constitutive communication-based diffusion model improve managerial practice diffusion?' In this thesis, the concept of communication duality which is base on its constitutive nature has been justified, and according to which, a Practice Diffusion Model has also been built. Through the research, it has been proved that by not following the

diffusion model, practice diffusion could not be of successful. However, the revised model needs future applications in real diffusion practices in order to see whether by following it, a practice's diffusion will have a better chance to be successful.

7.2 Limitations and future research directions

Through conducting this self-ethnographic research on practice diffusion as well as reflecting on the whole thesis at the end, several limitations have been identified which could be improved in my future communication and diffusion studies.

1. In this thesis, although the four levels of SM-SG activities have been addressed in the diffusion theory, which has also been complemented to form the Integrated Diffusion Model (Figure 3-9), they have not been fully demonstrated in the analysis of the six chosen diffusion cases. The main reason is because when designing this research, the use of research methods to examine the transmitting between the four levels of sense could have been better planned. For example, if interviews can be conducted after each period of justification to check 'what do you think personally' (the intrasubjective sense) and later 'what do you think collectively' (the intersubjective sense), rather than being conducted after the three justification periods, different levels of sense can be separated and recognised. Consequently, the incorporation of the four levels of SM-SG in the Diffusion Model can be better justified. In future research, more efforts need to be undertaken to talk to people and to ensure which sense is intra-subjective and which is inter-subjective, so on and so forth.
2. In the conduction of this research, the interviews and workshops are solely organised between company U's staff. Although what Q's staff said and did have been observed and noted down, it lacks the direct interactions with them, i.e. to interview them and to involve them in group discussions about practice diffusion. Part of the practical reason for not being able to do this is because they are not based in the UK. Although one interview with Q's representative 'A' has been proposed when he was working at U which has also been agreed by him, but it did not take place due to some urgent business issues that happened and 'A' left for India immediately after that.

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According to the feedback which participants have given in the second Workshop when the Visual Systems Model was presented to them, they were kind of expecting 'me' (as a researcher) to report my research findings on those recognised communication problems to Q. They were looking for improving communications, but they were also aware that it was not something that could be improved by themselves, but rather something needed to be done by both U and Q. As a researcher, I was not able to find such an opportunity to present my findings to Q because technically I was not appointed by Q to do research on this. Therefore, the 'boundary' of doing this research (within company U but not between Q and U) could have also limited the research findings.

3. As also linking to the participants' concerns of using VSM as well as my case analysis by using the Model, I have found that 'power' could be an issue for communication and practice diffusion. Although this thesis does not intend to focus on the "power" initially, during the research, it seems that it could be a problem for blocking Q's internal communication (their management hierarchy), U's internal communication (the disagreement of sales methods between staff members and managers), and communication between Q and U (use a practice or not). Although it has been included later as part of the 'diffusion environment' in the Reconstructed Diffusion Model, it could be worthy researched in the future to find out how it affects practice diffusion.
4. Through applying the proposed diffusion model to analyse the six diffusion cases, it has only been found that by not following the model, the practice diffusion could not be of success. However, the cases were not able to show whether the diffusion success can be secured if the model is followed up by a practice diffuser. This thesis does not allow exploration of the situation: based on a failed logos justification, whether moral legitimacy can be gained through good communication. In addition, in the case analysis, the gain and loss of pragmatic and moral legitimacy has been demonstrated, but the cognitive legitimacy are not able to be fully illustrated through the six cases. Furthermore, the reconstructed diffusion model (Figure 6-2) has not been

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applied in real diffusion practice yet, and hence its usefulness is to be reviewed.

According to the above discussed limitations of this research, some future research directions can also be indicated as the followings.

- a) The research on SM-SG activities needs to be strengthened in terms of how they can be improved. For example, by linking to the achievement of ideal communication feature, and especially the two-way communication, it could prevent SM-SG activities being broken down. On the other direction, by keeping continuous SM-SG activities (i.e. to keep SM and SG 'joint' – wherever a SM takes places, SG follows and vice versa; and 'balanced' – keep similar amount of SM and SG activities rather than overemphasising on a single side), it also completes ideal communications. If the future research can be focused on this direction, it helps to enhance the understanding and the achievement of 'communication duality'.
- b) The research on SM-SG activities also needs to be strengthened in terms of how their four-level transmitting can be fulfilled. Because the proved transmitted intra-, inter-, generic and extra-subjective senses can also contribute to justify the gain of pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy, a further research on the four levels of SM-SG could help to find out how legitimacy can be better achieved and hence a practice gets diffused. On the methodological part, next time I am engaged in a diffusion study, I should myself spend more time talking to people at different stages of diffusion.
- c) In terms of the research method design, 'boundaries' can be expanded to include both companies (Q and U in this case), therefore, equal efforts can to be put on examining both the diffuser and the potential adopter in future research. Through enable dialogs between both sides in looking into practice diffusion issues and problems, it also helps to generate insights in how to conduct a communication study while improving communication practices.

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- d) Power, as well as culture and market issues seem to be a possible direction of continuously studying the question of practice diffusion. It may break out the frame of exploring practice diffusion through communication, but it can implicate the research of how power, culture and perhaps market factors will influence communication and hence produce different diffusion results. It thus prevents a research solely focusing on communication itself.
- e) Look into opportunities to apply the 'Reconstructed Practice Diffusion Model' (Figure 6-2) in real practice is also an important direction for future research. It is argued in this model that 'formal communication' and a constituted 'diffusion environment' both contribute to the success of a practice diffusion, however, it is to be proved.

7.3 Contributions of this research

Generally, this thesis has provided the following contributions to knowledge:

- A concept of 'communication duality' based on the constituted nature of communication has been argued. According to the social constructionist perspective, communication duality suggests that in a practice diffusion change, communication is a tool which can be used by a diffuser to 'teach' the potential adopters about a practice (i.e. its content, value and application); it also enables a cognitive process which produces meanings and facilitates potential adopters' leaning and understandings of a practice; and furthermore, the produced meanings as well as the other factors (both implicit or explicit) could also build a 'diffusion environment' which affects practice diffusion.

Therefore, the suggested 'communication duality' contributes to explain and analyse how a practice can be diffused on both the objective and subjective dimensions and how the two work together to influence a diffusion – either of those could be otherwise overlooked. For example, even communication is conducted ideally by a diffuser to teach a practice, if he/she fails to make sense of the potential adopters' leaning status and real requirements, the practice cannot be fully understood and hence diffused. On the contrary, if a diffuser understands what is

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expected from him/her to teach a practice, but lacks the ideal communication skills or a strategy of suggesting how he/she could better teach, a practice cannot be understood or diffused either. In additions, if a 'diffusion environment' is not appreciated, as shown in this thesis (Case 1 CM), even the objective and subjective dimensions have been both looked after, a practice can still fail its diffusion.

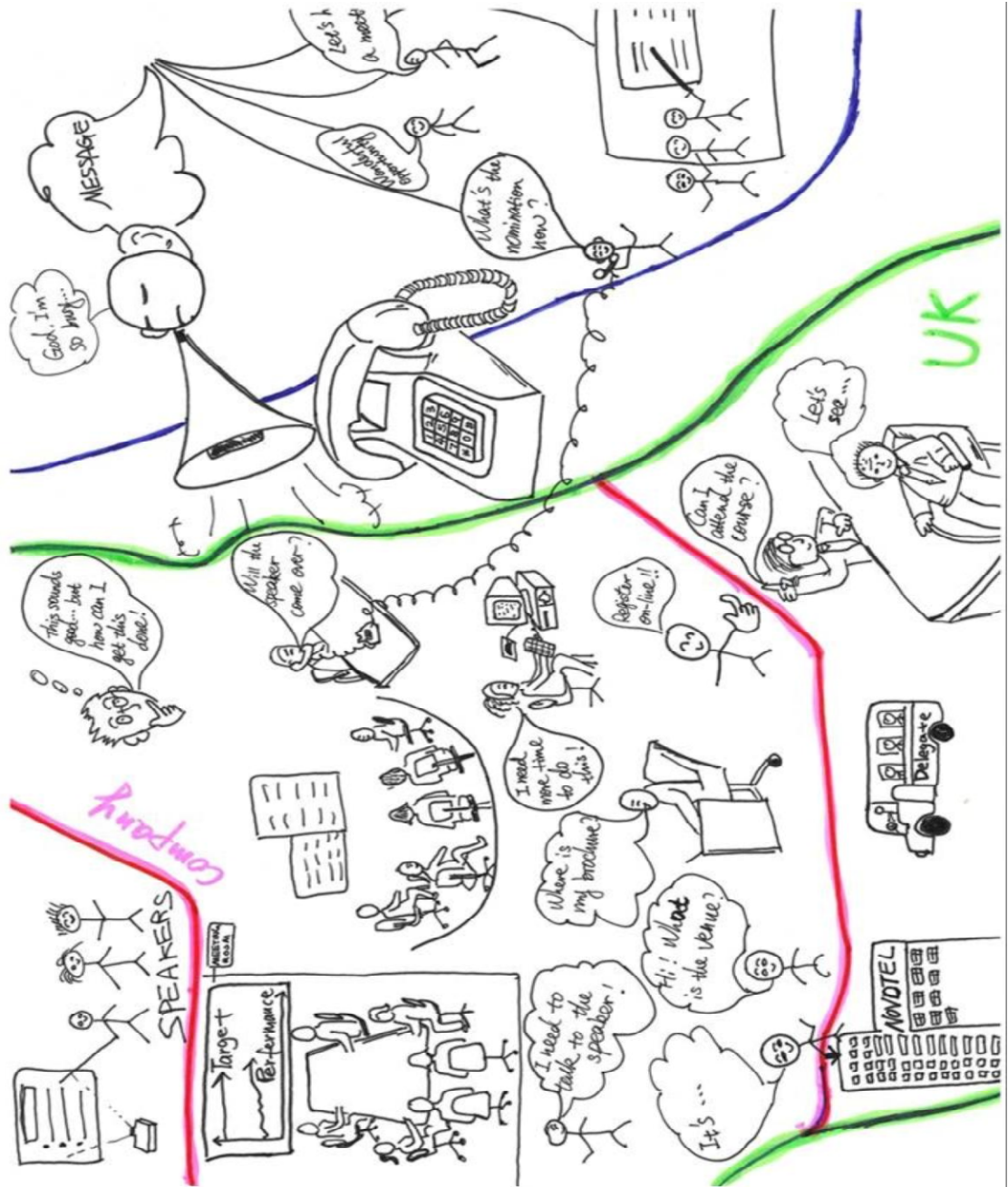
- The three rhetorical justification periods (pathos, logos and ethos) as suggested by modern rhetoricians and the three types of practice legitimacy (pragmatic, moral and cognitive) have been incorporated in this thesis to examine practice diffusion. The corporate use of both contributes to explain and analyse how the conduction of communication can be aimed to achieve different pleas at different periods of practice diffusion; and how different types of legitimacy can be obtained at each period in order to lead to the later success of diffusion.
- The SM-SG activities as also demonstrated in this thesis helps to explain the subjective dimension of 'communication duality'. The connected use of SM and SG as a joint activity offers new understandings of SM and SG theories which have been approached before as rather separately. The use of SM-SG as illustrating communication's subjective dimension contributes to display how a communication activity can produce 'senses' of considering a practice which is therefore linked to the gain of practice legitimacy.
- This thesis has also built a Practice Diffusion Model based on communication duality, rhetorical justifications and practice legitimacy which can be used to enact and analyse real practice diffusion. Although various models have been presented before in the area of diffusion research, it is considered as the one which is based on the social-constructionist paradigm. By following this model, a critical view on how a practice is constructed through its diffusion process (i.e. its communication, SM-SG, and 'diffusion environment' as including power, culture and market factors) can be provided.
- By doing this communication research for practice diffusion, suggestions on the methodological level can also be made which could be useful for

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future communication and/or diffusion studies. For example, communication as a research method should be enhanced in the sense that a researcher should him/herself spend more time (and at different research periods) talking to people who are involved. This also offers the opportunity to do a more in-depth analysis of SM-SG (in particular the four-level transition).

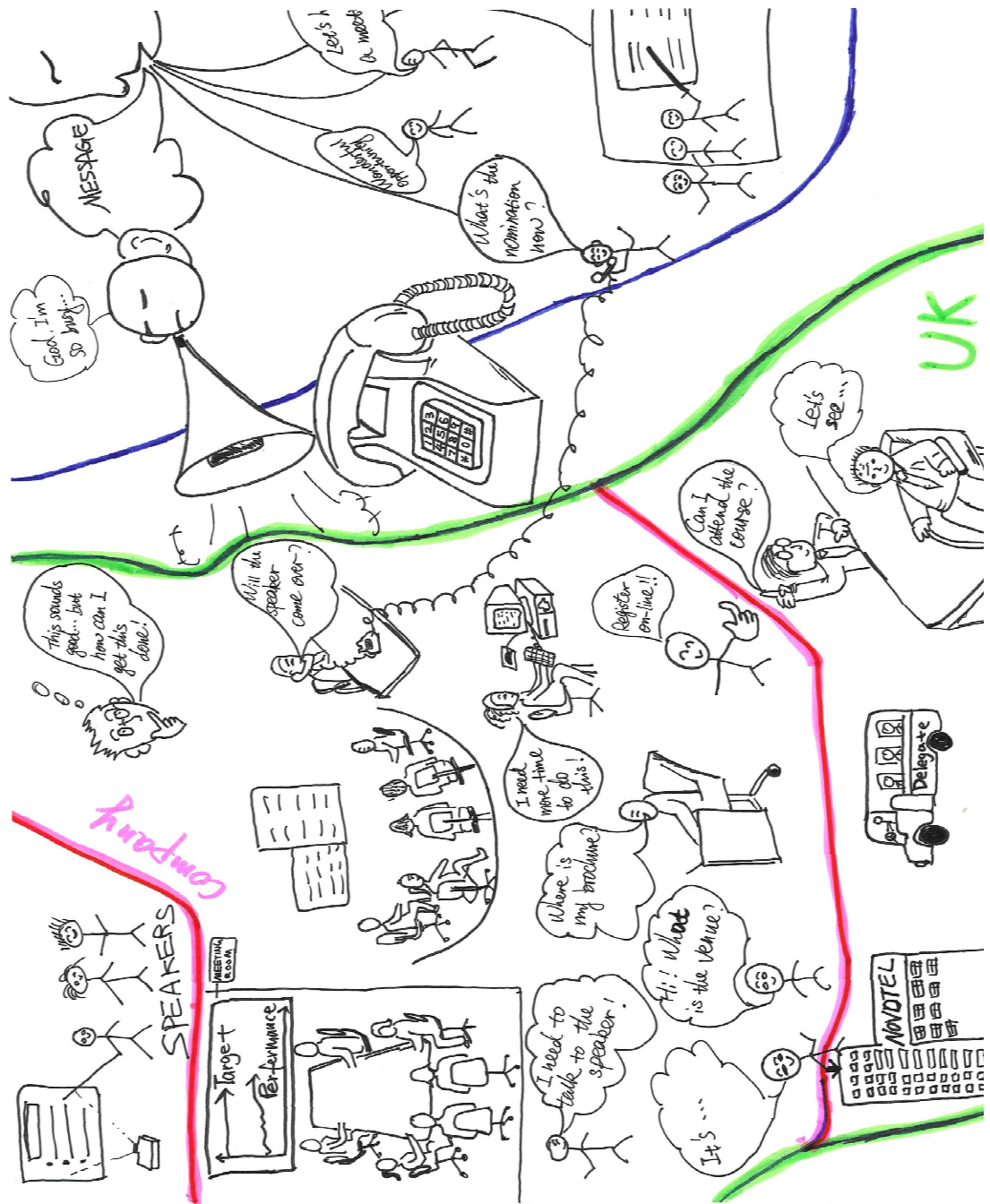
Appendix A

My Rich Picture



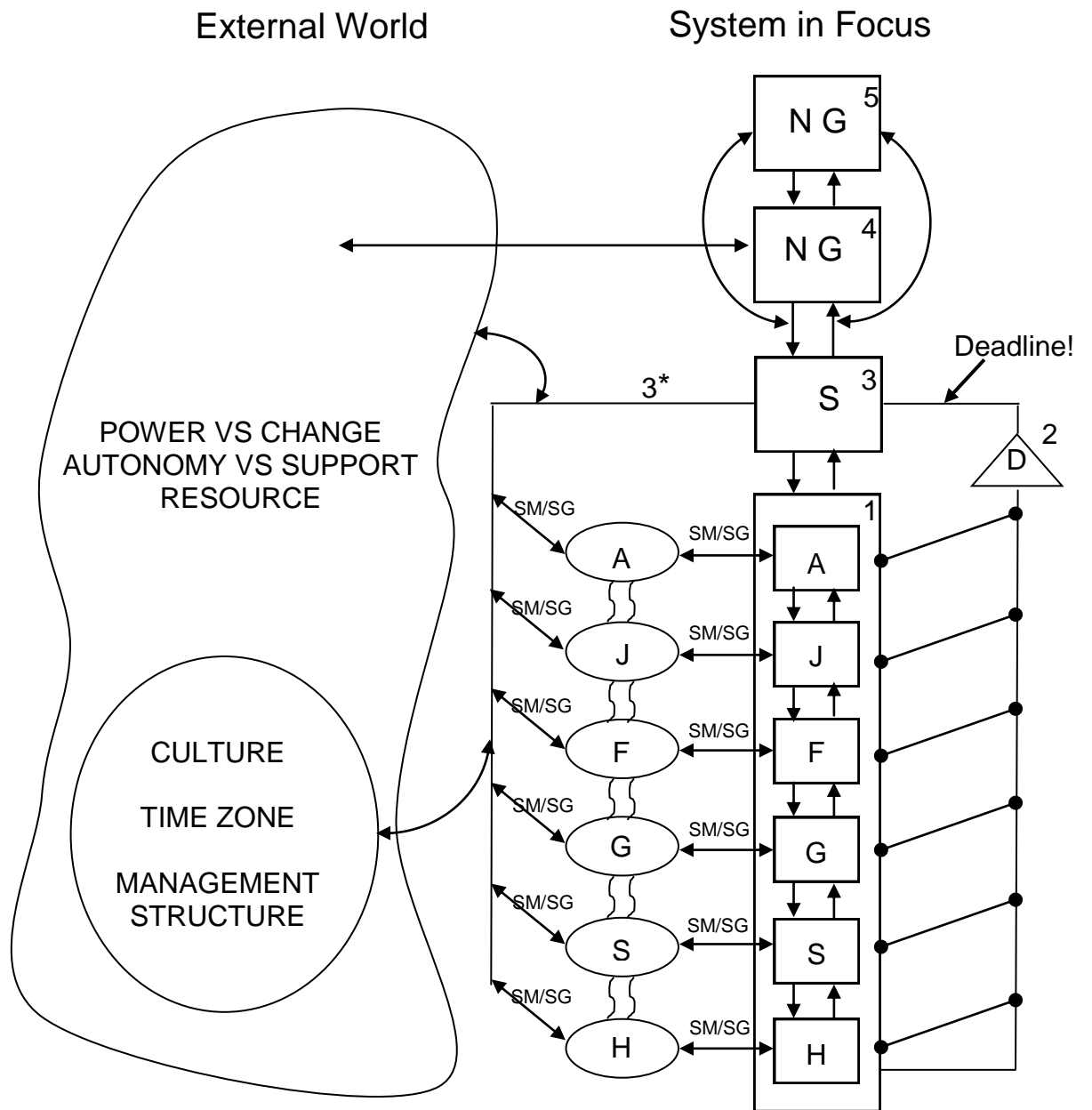
Appendix B

Constructed Rich Picture



Appendix C

Viable System Model



Key	1...5	Beer's Systems
	A, J, F etc.	Individuals or the company
	●—●	Connection
	⇌	Information
	SM/SG	Sensemaking/Sensegiving

Appendix D

Notes to Viable System Model

1, Staff in company U and Q. A: Sales/Marketing Manager in U, he is one of the key contacts between the two companies. D: Events commissioner, one of the senior managers in U; J: Events commissioner, one of the senior managers in U; F: 2 financial department staff; G, Z & H: normal sales staff; S: A manager in Q, based in India, the key contact between Q and U; G: U's chairman. N: Q's president.

2, As U is a small business, I did not design any sub-team under each person. By this I mean, I could have A in the right hand column (system 1) only, and put G, Z & H in the 'cycle' that is related to A; instead, I put each of them as a single part in system 1. The other reason for doing so is because this VSM is particularly dealing with communication problems, which will involve organisational structure issues, but most importantly it should highlight sensemaking-sensegiving process on an individual level. Therefore I put 'SM/SG' between each square and cycle. SM is the way in which every person is connected to each other and to the whole system. The main activity for SM at this stage is to make sense of the 'reason' why each action is asked to be taken. This is one of the issues that are mentioned in the workshops.

3, D as one of U's decision-makers will look after the balance of the whole company, and to make sure that staff in U is acting in a harmonious way.

4, S is the information exchange centre for company U and Q. The efficiency of communication largely depends on how he is transferring the information upwards and downwards, how he will keep information records and make sure that everything is being followed up. A key point here is that he should not be made overloaded, therefore it is really necessary to get him out of other works that he is doing at Q.

5, N and G are the main decision-makers, in addition, they are also the persons who are sensitive to the environment changes. Although the function of System 4 is to filter information, at a small company like U, G and N will need to do this by themselves on a certain point. However, a discussion between them may be

Appendix

helpful. This situation also shows that the information N and G get from S will be very important.

6, In the “outside world” (the environment), there are some issues that affect people's behaviours. For example, different cultural, time zones between the UK and India, and different management styles of the two companies. A is influenced by the possible future of U – being autonomy or supporting Q. J is influenced by getting the extra resource from Q. Apart from all the above, the whole system is being affected by power, which will determine whether changes for improvement (including communication itself) can be implemented.

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