

Iipo Koskinen • Valt.Lis. (väit.) • Taideteollinen korkeakoulu/teollisen muotoilun osasto

## Managerial Evaluations in Interaction in Formal Meetings

Background. In studies of management, it has been customary to assume that management aims to control workers at the workplace. In those studies that have tried to conceptualize the means of how managers achieve this control, evaluation has been consistently defined as one necessary part of social control at work. Similar results have been got in empirical studies that have mapped managers' activities. The current view on evaluation then states the status of this activity in following terms: To control employees at work, managers have to define standards for them, evaluate them against these standards, and then, after evaluating workers, take corrective action, if such action is needed.

However, when managerial evaluations have been studied specifically, researchers have attended to such means of evaluations as human relations techniques, Human Resource Management techniques, or "evaluation research," rather than to the how evaluations are done in the first place. As a result of this technical focus, there is a gap in existing research of evaluations. There are no studies about evaluations as they are done in interaction in various managerial activities at the workplace.

Questions and aims of the paper. In this paper, I am focusing on how managers do their evaluations in their meetings in the absence of more formalized personnel and human resource management techniques. I am using transcripts made of natural managerial conversations at one workplace in Helsinki, Finland. I will describe some of the ways in which managers at this workplace monitor and study work they are supposed to achieve. The analysis method is inductive, and aims at description. The framework for studying interaction is based on conversation analysis.

Data. As a part of a larger on-going study, I collected ethnographic data from one research institute located outside the downtown of Helsinki. This workplace, called "the House" in this paper, has less than 40 workers. It is largely a government-financed research institute set up to study housing. The data used in this paper consists of audiotapes and transcripts made of them. During my fieldwork, I audiotaped approximately 70 hours of meetings, seminars, cafeteria conversations, discussions between various workers in the privacy of their rooms, and so forth. I transcribed these data partially. These transcripts consist of approximately 10 hours of discussions, out of which about 5 hours are from formal meetings. These five hours of data comprise the data used in this paper.

Results. It is found that although the management in the House does not use formal research techniques in doing evaluations, they evaluate various aspects of the workplace constantly. Among these aspects are various projects, budget (or the use of money), people, and the House as a whole. The criteria used in evaluations vary similarly: for example, most projects are assessed against the yardstick provided by plans, schedules, or simply by the stage of the project.

The most important contexts in which managers make evaluations is progress review discussions. It was found that when managers in these discussions find that some target is in trouble, they explicate the reasons for these troubles before deciding whether some further action should be made. In the absence of such explications, the target can be inferred to be doing fine, and no accountability issues are raised. Evaluations that follow this logic were done using three partly overlapping procedures: in budget reviews, evaluations were partly based on information from the House's accounting system. In addition, evaluations of research were based on comparing each project either to the House's plans, or to an imaginary "normal course" any research project is supposed to take.

Discussion. This paper identifies and describes initially a layer of evaluation that is in all likelihood at work at every workplace, regardless of whether some formal method of evaluation is used. The analysis of these evaluations in interaction shows that existing research has neglected most of the interpretive work involved in making evaluations. The implications of this neglect are discussed.